Leader’s Notes: In studying this week’s passage, we had a difficult time finding appropriate questions and answers. One way to think about this passage is to put it into context with the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. How can we be the community which is different from the world – and live closer to the way that Jesus calls us to live? We can reach out to those who are poor in spirit, who are meek, who are persecuted – and treat them the way Jesus would. This includes when we struggle with keeping promises, dealing with divorce, or dealing with lust or resentment, or working on being salt and light. It is in that context that we discuss marriage, divorce, and keeping our vows.

[Question 1] Some have seen the church deal with marriage in a very healthy way – upholding the values of it, doing good premarital counseling, and teaching and supporting marriage. Other churches may be ambivalent about marriage or very black and white on marriage issues.

[Question 2] Different churches deal differently with divorce. Some very conservative churches say that it is sinful for most of those who are divorced to remarry, using this passage as evidence. Some churches don’t want to say much at all – because it is too uncomfortable or painful. Other churches offer support groups or talk openly about divorce and work to help those who have experienced divorce.

[Question 3] We believe Jesus addresses divorce because marriage is so important. Verse 31 alludes to the fact that in Jesus’ day, some Jewish leaders were very lax on divorce (easy to get a certificate of divorce), while other Jews were more rigorous in their grounds for divorce. It seems Jesus takes a more rigorous view of divorce – that he didn't want it to be easy to get a certificate of divorce because marriage is so important. While Jesus takes a stand on the issue of divorce, he also calls all followers to be compassionate, loving, and gracious.

[Question 4] Our integrity and keeping our word is very important. Instead of swearing to do something, Jesus cautions us to let our yes be yes, and no be no - to keep it simple and straightforward. You might discuss how you have seen how broken promises hurt community and what are some positive ways communities or families have dealt with broken promises or vows.

[Question 5] It may be hard to remember a promise you have made recently. It could be something you promised to try and change for your spouse or a close family member. For those who are divorced, it could be something you promised to your children. For those who are married, it could be how you are carrying out a marriage vow even today. How are you doing on that promise?

[Question 6] Marriages fail and succeed for many reasons. Take your list and see how they relate to what Jesus teaches. For example, if a marriage fails because of anger and bitterness, what would Jesus say about dealing with anger or bitterness? If a marriage succeeds because of selfless love and actions, what would Jesus say about that? You might discuss what Jesus would say about marriages that are lukewarm or stuck.