

Ben Derrick: Heart Not Habits - What the Bible Says About Divorce

Matt: Welcome to season three of the Robertson and Easterling podcast I'm Matt Easterling.

Craig: And I'm Craig Robertson, Matt and I are board certified family law attorneys with decades of combined experience serving Mississippians throughout our fine state.

Matt: In 2019, we began wondering if the struggles our firm deals with on a daily basis could be used to help the general public and from there through that the Robertson and Easterling podcast was born.

Craig: during the first two seasons. We had open and honest discussions with everyday people about their individual relationship journeys, some ending in heartbreak and others in redemption, but all with powerful stories to tell.

Matt: In season three, you will hear more of the same stories from other marriage and divorce survivors, as well as from our new co-hosts. Eva and Roane Hunter from LifeWorks counseling, Eva and Roane are both licensed professional counselors and we're excited to partner with them and hear the different perspective they're going to have for all of our listeners.

Craig: Speaking of listening, if you're new to our podcast, and haven't heard seasons one and two, be sure to check them out on iTunes, Spotify, or your favorite podcast player. Now sit back, relax and enjoy today's show. What you're about to hear is going to help.

Eva: Hi this is Eva Hunter with life works counseling. This is a reading from Matthew 19 "Jesus replied, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard, but it is not this way from the beginning."

Craig: So thanks for tuning in again to another episode of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm here with my law partner, Matt Easterling.

Matt: Hello everybody.

Craig: And we have Rhone Hunter with us as well.

Roane: I am here. Thank you. Yeah.

Craig: And so the Robertson and Easterling podcast is sponsored by a life works counseling. You can check out our friends online at LifeWorks.ms. So what do you get when you put two divorce lawyers, a marriage counselor, and a pastor in one room together while you get today's episode of the Robertson and Easterling pod. Okay. As we're here with Ben Derrick, who is a pastor at the vertical church, and Ben is going to walk with us as we talk through what the Bible says about divorce, and we're going to be talking through some common misconceptions. It's a conversation that I've really been wanting to have for a long time now. So Ben, thanks for joining us.

Ben: I would say I'm glad to be here, but that'd be a lie. No, I'm kidding. I'm glad to be here around before he asked me to be here was a good friend we're working through that now but I'm happy to oblige to have this conversation. I think that word that you use is actually why I'm sitting here being a southerner, being a long-term Christian. The fact that you guys were inviting me into a conversation and treat me a dialogue. That's what I'm interested in having. So I'm a pastor, I'm an interpreter of the Bible, but in this may be the most controversial thing I'll say today. I did not write the Bible. So it is my job to read it, to think about it and to follow what it says as best as I can understand and help other people do that. So I'm excited to have this conversation around man, a difficult as you guys well know a difficult topic.

Craig: Listen, I'm at peace with it because I see myself and I see my job is not a decision maker for an individual. I'm a resourcer. And so the direction that a person decides to take their life in is quite frankly, none of my business. And so if a person comes into my office, And they are wanting to restore their marriage I'm for them. If a person comes into my office and feel like it's time to end it, then I help resource them through that. And you know, it's just not my business to tell someone whether or not divorce is right for them, because I have seen people with stories that you would think there would be no way that they could redeem their circumstances, go on to live incredible happy lives and have great fulfilling marriages. And I've seen people who, you know, one wouldn't think their problems were that severe who were absolutely miserable.

Ben: Yeah. That's humanity, I guess.

Roane: Oh yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, I have a, kind of a pretty good perspective on this because I am divorced and remarried, Eva and I are divorced, did not work out. And we remarried and now. You know, the Baptist don't know what to do with me because, you know, I'm the husband of one wife twice. So I don't, I don't know. Yeah. That just blows their mind. I can't be a deacon.

Craig: I had this thought and it's, you know, it's something that's always been in the back of my mind, but I grew up in a little Baptist church in South Jackson, Oak forest Baptist church, great little place. And I can remember all the men had these leadership roles and they would pass the offering plate and do different service projects. But my dad never could. And anybody who is listening, who knows my story, both of my parents were married to other people before they married each other. And so I'm actually the youngest of six children, but my father had been divorced and it was almost like as a man, he was treated just a little differently in the church because he was not allowed to be in some of those roles that other men who had not been divorced were and I always knew about it and didn't fully understand it. And as I sit here today, you know, an adult having lost my father several years ago, I wonder how he must have felt walking into that church day in and day out or you know, weekend and week out and there being that cloud, if you will, of divorce that followed him. So anyway, this is a little personal to me because my dad was divorced my whole life from his first wife.

Roane: Well, and the same for me, my parents divorced when I was eight years old. And that was like around 1969 in small town, Mississippi, and, and I just recently had a client that was

kind of talking about the, this same thing. And I had never thought about the fact that none of the friends that I had, nobody that I was around, their parents had been divorced. And I remember feeling like, man, that was kind of odd man out in, not that any of their, my friends, their parents had these wonderful marriages far from it, but they weren't divorced. And boy, I remember, I don't remember. Feeling that

Craig: So, Ben, tell our listeners a little bit about your background and your ministry.

Ben: Yeah, well, I think probably the most pertinent information for this podcast is my family history. Because we're all either victims or victors because of that. I mean, you get to determine which way but my grandfather, my father's side was a recovered addict had an experience with Christ in isolation that completely changed his approach to life. My father is the youngest of multiple kids, so in that family, there were basically two different fathers and my father got the best version of my granddad but his response, as far as I could tell, I didn't grow up in his home, but I grew up in the home of a person who did, and those things kind of have a little bit of after effects, but I think his response to that was to be very legalistic with his faith and with his biblical interpretation and it worked for him and it worked for their family. When, what I say by legalistic, what I mean by that is when I would visit on Sundays to his home in Wesson he had a pond, but we were not allowed to fish because I was considered work and it was the Sabbath. So that was my initial understanding before I've started to kind of peel back the layers. So then, you know, I'm raised by a father who has Leslie legalistic. Vietnam had a lot to do with that and his experience. So my father taught me to respect scripture, to read scripture and engage my mind as much as possible. I've just come to different conclusions then, as you say, the small Baptist church, and I've been in even smaller Baptist churches than that one. The way that we interpret the Bible is largely. Affected by our culture, the culture we're living in and the family culture that we grew up in. And that's very difficult for conservative Christians to acknowledge because they want to have this external hard and fast biblical truth. But my family history has taught me that you can go that way and make some mistakes and tragically, miss relationship, both with God and with other people. So, this isn't to berate my family it's to celebrate my family, that we started in a place and over three generations, I believe we've come to a place that's a little bit more accurate in what God desires as we interact with this Bible. This is what keeps me in the fight every day, because I believe especially in the American South people are just bound by old views and old interpretations that were affected primarily by the approach, the American approach to the fifties, and then the Reagan eighties. Which, you know, those things have passed. I think we need to remind people that history is history for a reason we have to live in the now. So what I do each day my passion is to show up in a church and to try to convince, especially men that the church is relevant, that what God has to say as relevant, and if they were to pay attention to it, it will improve their lives. So I'm excited to have this conversation about divorce because unfortunately, as you guys well know, divorce affects a lot of people and, I think it's. It is the human condition to want to bring simple solutions to very complex problems. So, if you look at an election cycle in the United States, or you look at even the way that we market things that we're looking to sell, this is how people are using their selling pitch. We have a very simple solution to a very complex problem, unfortunately, because we are drenched in that sort of society. Then we take that to our faith as well. And we're looking for very simple solutions. Well, when you

start talking about divorce, right? You guys can confirm this. And here's the thing that binds all of us together behind these microphones. We sit with people in their pain and we understand the difference between what is ideal and what is real. So, to be able to stand aside and say, well, here's the ideal position on divorce. And let me go to Malakai Ezra, Matthew, or Genesis. Let me pause that. And let me talk to you about the idea. Well, that works as long as we're showing up at church with mask on, and we're all pretending that everything is ideal. That's just not the case. We exist in the real, you sit with them at the end of a process. I don't know if that's how you speak about it, but I sit with them at the beginning of a process. And Roane sits with them in the middle, we know about the real, right. So, if we're going to talk about divorce today, I think we should discuss what the Bible says, ideally as the case. And then we're going to look into what is really the case and see how God, Moses and Jesus, the three of them wrestled with this.

Matt: So when you talk about the real or simplistic, you know, solutions, I feel like what you're, you know, sort of what you're talking about is the idea of things being black and white, and then the understanding that really ensure that there's a whole lot that's, it's actually gray. And you know, I encounter a lot of tragic stuff on a, on a daily basis, but one of the things that saddens me the most is when I see somebody that is in a terrible situation, sometimes even a violent situation and they are wrapped in this guilt of, if I go through this process, it is black and white, and I am just deliberately disobeying God and the shame and problems that they bring or that they add, you know, to their shoulders is just really difficult to watch. And at least me personally, I just don't agree with that. I don't think that God wants us to stay in a violent, you know, situation or anything like that. So I'm really excited to hear your take on things and the way maybe we can better interpret the word of God.

Craig: And what we see is often we see one party or the other weaponize their faith. When it comes to the marital relationship and weaponized in such a way that in an attempt to excuse whatever the offending behavior is. And so not withstanding whatever it is, is going wrong in that dynamic of the relationship, because the Bible only gives two specific reasons for divorce and maybe those two reasons don't exist. And then even the non-offending spouse is guilted into staying in a relationship or persisting with a relationship, the way that it is due to the guilt that Matt was just talking about.

Ben: I think this would be a completely different podcast we have to make time for, but guilt or shame connected with religion. I mean, you know, I don't know. They're not even cousins their siblings, you know, in a lot of us, I think inside of the church. And I'll just have to give a brief aside here. I'm going to speak about the church, very candidly, because I'm on the inside and I think I get that privilege. I work with it every single day. So many Christians get frustrated with me because in these public forums, I don't promote the system. You know, well, I don't want to promote a bad system I want to reform a system. And especially if that system is departing from the one that God set up originally, and that's, that's kind of what's happened here when you talk about weaponizing your faith. I mean, a sword is a great weapon, depending on which end you grab. Right? So if I'm on this side, it's great. If I'm on that side, I grab the other end. All it's going to do is cause damage. But unfortunately many of us is out of the church. Because of our conservative beliefs have been handed just enough so that we could live an appropriate. And by that I usually mean good American life.

Americans love things that are black and white. Don't we? I mean, it's just kind of part of our DNA. I just want to maybe blitz through something that, because I know as people are consuming content that may be on a three- or four-minute drive. I just want to kind of blitz through what we've inherited when it, before we get to maybe the stuff that you say, the two permissible reasons for divorce to occur, if that's all right. So marriage is not an American idea not a Roman idea, it was God's idea. You know, which eventually became the Jewish people. And if you want to talk about people who exist in the gray, it's the Jewish people, every idea has so much depth, which is why it's so dangerous for us to Americanized Jesus Christ, because he has so much depth. His teachings are, he's just accomplishing so many things with one paragraph. If you look at the story of the prodigal son, so many layers to that story, right? The American would say, well, you should respect your father, right? But that's not the Jewish story that you story has so much more color than that. So if you look back originally, you've got Genesis 2. Most people are familiar with this because I've had to attend a wedding where they hear these things but it's not good for man to be alone. I'll create a helper for him. What we could say, even if you're outside of the faith is that men and women are linked together from the Christian worldview, from the biblical worldview. And there's a reason why this happens. They're going to leave mother and father. All right. I just stole like \$50,000 a month from Roane's practice. If people would just start doing that. You know what I mean? Am I right about this? Leave your father and your mother, right? That deals with a lot of wounding that goes on, but this all way back in Genesis two, look how smart God was. You leave your father and mother, and you unite with the one that you're forming a new covenant with a new agreement with once you do that, you become one, one flesh even so we're getting to sexual union now, but we've distorted that as well to think. Well, sex and intimacy are the same thing well, that's not exactly how it works. We have sex between a man and woman inside the marital relationship. It's going to be a symbol and it's also going to be a symptom of that union if they're working correctly together. Now here's the crazy thing, and this is not, you're not going to hear this in a Baptist church on a Sunday morning. By Genesis 4, everything's messed up, everything. There's a guy that decides to marry two women at the same time. Let's think about that decision for a moment, right? I'm going to have two spouses at the same time. This is within seven generations of creation when everything was perfect.

Craig: So what do you do with that Ben?

Ben: Well, exactly. That's what the question was what do we do with this? So this original thing, which we will call the ideal, we're going to see Jesus call back on this Matthew 19. This is the original ideal things have become messed up. So now we have to talk about how does God treat his kids when his kids mess things up. Boy, you want to talk about stepping in a pile? We just did it. Okay. Let me make a proposal. As I read the Bible, this is what happens. God has an ideal. He enters into a relationship with his kids based on that ideal, his kids mess up that ideal and he knows that's going to happen because we're not God. That's how the relationship is set up. Then God develops an adjustment strategy to handle that messing up because he cares for his kids. He doesn't constantly force them to go back to measure against the ideal, without providing a way for them to live a life that allows them to live in light of that ideal or in a sorority you mentioned earlier redeem or restore them back to that ideal. Okay. So I'm blitzing through this, right? So we get to Moses and this shows up in

Matthew 19, Jesus goes back to it. Moses says, okay, I'm going to, I'm going to allow you to give certificates of divorce. Okay. So we're going to make a provision for this to work in the certificate.

Craig: Yeah were in the certificate of divorce business.

Ben: That's right. Yeah. So we're all in business you're in, right?

Roane: Yeah. We're talking business.

Craig: People carry them around.

Matt: I didn't know I traced back to Moses.

Ben: Essentially you guys are both Moses.

Craig: Matt's got the beard kicking.

Ben: So we get to Moses, I'm going to go a lot faster through the rest of this that was all set up. Moses says, yes, you can give, I'll give you certificates of divorce. People asked Jesus later, why did that happen? Jesus, his explanation for that is your hearts were hardened. And you mentioned it earlier. There are certain circumstances and you know, Roane is a therapist you can tell after X number of sessions I know where this is headed. I know where it should head. And I know what you want to do. Moses was saying, I can tell that these relationships, all of them are not going to work. So you need to be able to get out of that. Right? The nice thing that comes though is don't manipulate the system. Don't divorce someone, and they get married to someone else it was all about money. This is something else you're not going to hear talked because churches want your money. These guys were manipulating the system for the money, divorcing, letting that person remarry. Then if they were widowed, they would marry that person again to get the dowery again a second time. Okay. So you get all the way, the new Testament, the religious leaders, which are called the Pharisees, the religious leaders have two different views on this one is I can divorce my spouse if they don't cook my supper correctly. That's okay. All right. The other is no, there are only a few reasons why you can get divorced. They asked Jesus this question and the Bible says very clearly, they're trying to trap him.

Craig: Those darn lawyers.

Ben: Yes. Yes. Hey, come on in to court. Jesus. So they asked the son of God into this trap, which is completely comical to me because they do it over and over

Roane: They fall for it all the time

Ben: People are so dense. Yeah like, well, we didn't trap Jesus at that time. Let's try again, you know? And in fact, a lot of that hasn't changed. We're going to have time for that either.

Craig: I don't know why but wiley coyote and the Roadrunner pops into my head.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah add a few robes and a four stanza you got church. Okay. So they asked Jesus, what do you say about this? What do you say about divorce then? Jesus does what

Jesus does. He calls back to the ideal. He says you're missing it. I want to talk about the ideal. The ideal is, and he goes back and he quotes Genesis 2 what frustrates them. And then they say, well, wait a minute Moses said that we could do that. He said, it's because your hearts were hardened. God made an accommodation to adjust the system out of care for his kids. Still calling them back to the ideal. So when you have someone inside of a church that says, well, God hates divorce. And then it's interpreted by the divorce. See God hates you.

Roane: God hates me.

Ben: Well, no, I don't mean that. Okay, great. So I can be part of a community I mean, kind of, unless you're going to pass the plate or you're going to make decisions for, because you've been divorced. So here we separate from our view of what God actually says about covenant relationship. I agree with you, you broke the covenant. I will pull you back into the covenant with a sacrifice my son, Jesus Christ in churches though, we say, if you've broken the covenant. We're going to limit the things that you can do and they call back on other new Testament things I don't know this is a short podcast, but they weaponized the Bible. So we've inherited, as we're talking about this discussion, a complex matter that doesn't bring simple solutions and that the Bible itself shows that people were trying to work this out based on the real based on the fact that every relationship doesn't work out, whether they were entered into, because someone hired a minister because Mississippi requires that you sign a sheet of paper as a minister, right. Whether that happened or not.

Craig: I'm looking at Roane because I know that Roane's got one of those certificates and marries people. I still wonder about the validity of that.

Roane: They're very official there I wouldn't have a bottle head in my pastor role.

Matt: and, you know, part of what you just said, might've gone totally over my head, but that happens whenever that happens to me in most conversation that

Ben: Maybe I didn't say well.

Matt: But oftentimes I run into people that they feel like they can't get divorced because you know, the Bible says that they can't, or that they shouldn't and was on understanding you correctly, that at least it's, you know, it's your feeling that what's your, what you were just expressing that, you know, sometimes it was maybe that God didn't want you to be with this person in the first place, or it was a mistake that she got married or whatever, you know, happened during the marriage that made it unable to work. And you're just banging your head up against a wall that you're supposed to, he wants you to go ahead and get around.

Ben: Yeah. So let's call back. Maybe the blitz was, was an incorrect thing way to go about it, but let's go back people necessarily want to find a simple solution to a complex problem. And I'll reference the American South because I haven't spent a lot of time outside out of it.

Craig: What I'm hearing you say is there's. I mean, when I, when I hear a simple solution, I can take that both ways. The simple solution. Only get a divorce if there's adultery only get a divorce, if you're married to an unbeliever or on the other hand, simple solution, just go ahead and get a divorce and move on with your life.

Ben: That's right. Yes. So, but backing up my proposal, having I'm on the front end of this process, often I think that people are trying to use marriage as a simple solution to a complex problem. I don't want to face what's actually inside of me. I don't want to face the fact that I'm different than the culture around me. I don't want to face the fact that I'm going in a different direction than the X town X college town back living in X town. I don't want to run that loop, you know, but it's the thing to do to get married. And if I get married, it will fix my father wound. If I get married, it will fix my porn addiction. If I get me, that's the simple solution, but it's a complex problem that you're only delaying facing that complex problem. Now you've only complicates because you have a spouse

Matt: And I'll add to that talking about yeah. The making it the simple solution to a complex problem. You've got people that get married because they want to be able to have sex, or they want to be able to do things that the Bible says,

Craig: Or they want to have children.

Matt: Sometimes people that are entirely too young or aren't don't either well enough or whatever, they make a decision to get married because they see that as the simple solution to do the things that they want to do at that moment.

Craig: Listen, I've been a divorce lawyer for 20 years and, and you're right. Our jobs are not that different. I mean, same facts, circumstances that we deal with, you know, week in and week out. But, and we've heard Matt and I've heard lots of bad things that, that people do. But I think one of the, one of the saddest things I've heard in a very recent meeting with a young lady was that, you know, the guy that she married was just who she was with when the music stopped, when college was over and everybody around her was getting married and, okay, this is the guy I'm dating? So this is a guy I'll marry, like you said, a simple solution to a complex problem.

Ben: Yeah. So when we want to try to go to the Bible and find that simple solution, where's the soundbite. Where's the thing that Jesus said that solves all of this, man. If you take that to Jesus, you're going to frustrate yourself over and over and over again. That's exactly what the religious leaders were doing in the story in Matthew 19, Jesus in his teaching was complex. Jesus is complex. He's the son of God is the most complex thing the human mind could ever try to comprehend yet, not comprehend, but we want to take this very difficult life situation where relationships are breaking up and want to thin it out. We want to get the soundbite that says, well, God hates divorce. Yes, God does hate divorce. God hates breaking a covenant. He hates relationships being out on the out and he's going to do everything he can to bring those relationships back together. I think the bigger thing we should be talking about is not is divorce, biblical or not biblical, obviously inside of the Bible. And I will use that word. Obviously, divorce is represented inside the Bible. God talks about it in Genesis Moses, one of his primary leaders that we're still talking about had to deal with it. Jesus had to deal with it. Let's talk about Joseph. What was Joseph's response when he found out that Mary has slept around on him? Which was his understanding at the time briefly, I will divorce her quietly to protect her honor. Now Joseph has held up. It's like, man, this is the guy. Right. And that was his plan. And he's not talked poorly of because that was his plan. In fact, he celebrated, I will dissolve this relationship quietly and maintain. In fact,

this would be a great verse for you guys to be able to use in your practice. I'm going to resolve this relationship quietly. And my main goal is going to be to protect the honor of the other person. That's what the Bible is telling me to do based on the Christmas story. You're not going to hear that in December, either the Bible clearly talks about divorce, right? And clearly says that it happens and clearly says that the people of God have to wrestle with how it happens when it should happen, when it's appropriate. And we have to trust community. Yeah. Our community has broken down and we've been left with Twitter, a few characters to make really big decisions.

Matt: You know, we keep talking about the, you know, the easier, the simple solution as wanting to make things, you know, black and white. Let's why don't we spend some time debunking some of those black and white or simple solutions that people think they know about the Bible or what the Bible says about this topic.

Ben: Okay. Yeah. Where do we start?

Craig: So from your perspective, what are some of the common misconceptions within the church about marriage and divorce?

Ben: Okay it is better for me to stay unhealthy and be at this address and let the kids turn 18. And then we'll divorce. That's the honorable thing, you know, or I will just stay with this person and we'll be caught in this cycle of this trap of a lack of health. And we'll just get into some sort of system that works for the both of us. Because that way I can still pass the plate and cast the vote at church and my public perception, my reputation will be intact. Although behind closed doors, the front door, everything's a wreck.

Craig: What do you do with that?

Roane: We'll just be miserable.

Ben: Yes. That, because that's what God wants us to be.

Craig: Roane you hit the nail on the head that I think that's my overarching problem is that I don't know and I like to think that Jesus came to set the captives free.

Roane: That's what he said

Craig: Live in a life of misery and captivity and in authenticity.

Roane: Well, and it's like and you know, I've actually read Fox's book of martyrs, right? The martyrs of our faith. And there's not one marriage martyr in Fox's book of martyr. God has done, God did not call us to be marriage martyrs.

Craig: What do you mean by that Roane expand on that a marriage martyr or someone who is suffering through a marriage because

Roane: Yeah. You know, there's so much as I loved what Ben, how you said, just, you know, it is so complex. And, you know, I often cite the Matthew 19 passage that, you know, where Jesus takes us back to the ideal, you know, those guys fall for it every time and it's like, well,

adultery is the reason for divorce. Right? And then Jesus goes, well, not really. You know, he said it's because of the hardness of your heart. And that speaks to the unwillingness. And we have seen in my own marriage and many, many others, like literally thousands over the years where adultery was sometimes the wake-up call oftentimes it is. And those marriages, because both people become willing to do a lot of work in order to change in order to heal. There's a lot involved in that, but if they do their marriage, not only can survive it, but the marriage can actually thrive.

Craig: Roane you hit the nail on the head because I've been saying this for years, that adultery is usually a symptom of something that is already diseased, but adultery is one of the supposedly two reasons that the Bible allows a person to divorce, but yet as you've pointed out, sometimes that's just the very, very, very tip of the iceberg.

Roane: Well, and you know, so often. When this stuff gets discovered when all hell breaks loose and the fair discovered the porn addiction, the whatever. Thanks people start talking to friends and friends that do not have wisdom. They're just sit, looking at it from the outside, oftentimes are going to encourage them. You know, you need to get divorced. And I always tell me, well, I don't ever like. Tell people what to do, unless if until you've been there, cause you don't know what you're going to do until you're in it. And, and the decision to divorce when, especially with, I mean, kids involved without kids involved, it is a hard, hard, complex decision. And there's so much that goes into that and I've seen. You know, so many people like listen to friends and, and like, they will not go seek wise counsel. They won't get help. They won't get the expertise. And yet they typically will wind up divorcing

Craig: Well it is a double edged sword because they might've married because it was the thing to do at the time. But then when faced with the complexity of life and the complexity of a marriage and the complexity of two human beings doing life together. Because society says, all right, well, you need to divorce then, you know, there's an affair or there's a problem. And then that is the immediate solution to the problems.

Roane: I'll just use the quick solution.

Matt: Well, and get the flip side of everything that you just said are the same friends, not the same friends, some different friends who would just as simply say, you cannot get divorced.

Roane: Oh yeah. There's always there.

Matt: You can't do that. Yeah. So now we're taking all these options off the table. It's the simple solution to what is a very complicated and potentially dangerous you know, situation.

Ben: If you look at it this way, too, what we're kind of dancing around here is that is, is this permissible, of course, it's permissible, according to the pages of the Bible it's permissible and those reasons that we've narrowed down to two, the language actually opens up for a lot of other things.

Craig: Yeah talk about that Ben.

Ben: Yeah. So basically it's a lack of faithfulness sexually is what the Bible is trying to get across, which is way more complex now. Than it was then. Right. So if you're looking at reasons, like I need a list of reasons that make this permissible, well, you have to get outside of adultery in the sense that in the Jewish sense, right? Like you went to someone else's location and you slept with them and now you're back. Right that's a different thing. Now, getting outside of the marriage sexually looks a lot different. I mean, a lot different in ways. Most people probably don't talk about, but if you're looking for a list of permissible things. Okay. These things make this permissible. Does it make it required? And the answer is no, it doesn't make it required,

Craig: But it doesn't ever make it required.

Ben: That's right. We have some people that would say, Oh, well, in this instance, then divorce is required or those are the people who are important in the terminology, but these are the simpletons. I want to approach this very simply because it gets me out of this very uncomfortable situation. Right. But if you look at let's talk about options, you mentioned the word options. I love this, that you look at the options that God chooses and covenant relationships. There are times where people break the covenant relationship and they're committed to breaking that relationship. And the Bible says very clearly, God gives them over to those desires. And usually it talks about it at a heart level. The heart is hardened, and I'm going to give you over to the consequences of that decision at other times, God fights for that relationship. The other person in the covenant relationship responds and God restores them. So my preference as a pastor, if I had someone who was in my church that visited your practice, it was on the verge of divorce. And you were going to bring up God in this conversation. My preference has a pastor having not been in, had the privilege to be in that room is that we start talking about God, is God punitive or is he restorative in this situation? I believe when it comes to covenant relationships, God's ideal and first choice is always. Always restoration. That's what he's out for. How can we restore this relationship? Now, if someone has walked away and this is what Paul was actually dealing with in the places in Corinthians where he's talking about, someone's walked away and they're not remorseful about that. They've hardened their heart and they've walked away. Well, we're going to have to deal with that. We're not turning that. We're not changing that you see that and you're in your office room and you guys see that in your office. We're talking about God in not reducing him to a yes, no answer. God doesn't operate that way. God's going to take the situation. He's going to get involved relationally in the situation, and he's going to seek restoration, whatever that may look like. And I could imagine in your practice sometime that looks like the relationship, the marriage to solving, but the two people still caring for each other because they have kids. And they're going to care for this family dynamic, this new family dynamic. So honor caring, restoration. I think those are the bigger conversations, but they're much more messy and religious people a lot of times back away from that table.

Matt: So that's, you know, for lack of a better way of saying it, God wanting us to be healthy. And maybe sometimes that marriage is just not going to be healthy and it's going to take getting divorced for that relationship to heal in some sense. And it may not look exactly how you thought it was going to look, and it may not be that your husband and wife anymore, but it may be what the healthy form of that relationship is going to have to be

Ben: Yes, yes.

Roane: Which is rare when people get divorced. But certainly Craig and I know of an example of the ex-husband's in law that, spent time together and, they helped raise the son of the husband that was married to the ex-wife.

Craig: Yeah. I tell people that talk about complexity. The reason that, you know, most first marriages actually work out, but it's second and third and fourth marriages that have a much higher percentage of failing. And just to simplify that, because there's way more people involved. Cause you've got stepchildren and new spouses and the more people that are involved in anything creates more complicated dynamics. I like to draw this little picture. And so when I'm counseling, someone who I think should stay married and that's not that uncommon that I would sit with somebody who's like, hey, okay, look, roll up your sleeves. You'll need to figure this out. You're in the wrong office. And, so, but I'll draw a little picture on the whiteboard and I'll draw, you know, I'll draw them. And then I'll draw their children. And I said, all right, let's complicate things. Let's say now your wife is married to someone else and that person has a child and maybe they have a child together. And let's say that you marry somebody and they have three children, and then you have a child together. Now, what do we have? We have way more people involved in the equation and way more complexity you do have, in my opinion, the best chance of being married to your first spouse, if you can figure it out. And I agree completely when you said God is in the restoration business. I mean, that's been, that's the whole of the Bible.

Ben: Yes, it is

Craig: God being in the restoration business. And I agree with you completely that if. Two people can restore their relationship, not maybe based on what they thought it was going to be the ideal that they had when they're walking arm and arm with her dad down the aisle. But with something new, something creative at the mosaic that God puts together from the broken pieces. That can be our lives. That's when you have something spectacular.

Matt: And you Roane a second ago you said it's rare and, in your right, by the way, it's, it's rare that when people get divorced, that they are able to find that healthy relationship and

Craig: It was like a unicorn thing.

Matt: That one of the reasons that that is as rare as it is, is because a lot of people that get divorced held on way too long and they allowed something that was unhealthy, continued to become more and more toxic. And then by the time that they finally, you know, do actually get divorced, there is, it is so decayed and rotten. There's absolutely no way that those people could ever, ever relationship again. And I'm not, that makes it sound almost like I'm saying, oh, we'll get divorced early. That's not what I mean. Well, I mean is early in exactly. For whatever reason. People tend to procrastinate and delay and not address issues or problems that they have. So they don't work on their marriage as problems come up and help that actual marriage stay healthy. And then it reaches this tipping point where it's really going downhill and then for some reason, they continue to hang on for longer and longer.

And then by the time some of them end up in this office, there's just no hope that they're ever going to be able to sit in the same room with the other positions

Roane: And, you know, just being a child of divorce. I mean, my parents needed to get divorced. I'm thankful they got divorced because I probably would have witnessed an ax murder. And we've said it before on this podcast, you know, healthy, we'll stay with healthy, sick we'll stay with sick. Because there's just a three-ring circus. And, but healthy will never stay with sick. And so often, you know, this idea of like, we gotta stay together because the kids, well, it's interesting. There's a book written around a research study y'all might be familiar with it. Dr. Judith Wallerstein the unexpected legacy of divorce. 25 year landmark study on children of divorce. She followed somewhere around 130 kids for 25 years. They were children. She followed them into adulthood, studying the effects of divorce. And I mean, you go read the book. It's great. But one of the takeaways in that book is where she says that the research around those kids, the kids who had one, just one parent that got healthy, where the kids that they were okay. And they actually fared better than the kids where the, like, where it was like two people that hated each other, but lived on the same roof, they fared better because neither of those parents that stayed together got healthy. And so the key that in all of this, I think is beginning to grow and moving towards wholeness, whether you're divorced or whether you're married, that's the call. And as far as kids go and again, research study, it is a fact that those kids will be okay. It just one parent out of the two gets healthy divorce or no divorce.

Matt: Right? I think one of the biggest effects on. Children, how they develop. And the people they turn into is when you're talking about from the, from the parental perspective, is how they learn to treat people by watching their parents. And so I tell people all the time is your relationship the way your marriage is right now, you're going to stay together for your children. Is this the example that you want to set for your child of what marriage is supposed to look like? You know, is this what you want your daughter to think? Is it supposed to be okay for her, for her husband to treat her this way or it's okay for my son to be treated that way by his wife. No that's terribly unhealthy. And that's an awful example of what their idea of love marriage and relationship is.

Roane: And chances are, they are just. Then to repeat it because we're more like baby ducks than we realize and what we see modeled in that family system when we get married and create our new family system, we will do what we saw modeled.

Ben: And what'd you get her saying, just from a pastor's point of view, listening. From that place, individuals, faith are taking them to those two terrible things. And we need to fix that. We need to change the conversation in a way that allows people to face reality in light of the ideal and do the hard work necessary to try to get reality as close to the ideal as possible. That what we're trying to figure out.

Matt: Ironically, we've I feel like we've been talking about the majority of this episode. We've been talking about us trying to make complex situations, create simple solutions to them. And the irony is I think that if you come back to some of the easiest or the most simple solution, which is asking yourself, is this really what God is going to want? Does it

make sense to me that God would want me to stay in this situation? I'm not talking about creating an easy excuse to get out of something.

Ben: I don't hear you saying that

Matt: but we, instead of, you know, knowing inside of us, what we feel like God is to us, how do we reconcile that he would want me to stay in the situation or to be trapped in this situation?

Ben: Yes. Can I answer that very briefly?

Matt: Sure.

Ben: I'll give them a brief is not my strong suit. If you look at Matthew 19, which Roane, you said he referenced a lot. Jesus says this phrase, that's a tale and he does this frequently. He says in the beginning, It wasn't this way as a Jewish person, hearing that phrase in the beginning, even as a Southern American, what do you think about Genesis in the beginning? God, in the beginning, it wasn't this way. So I try to encourage people that are in the throws of this decision to separate things. I need you to think about the beginning when this all started and what was there. What was it like what was not there? Let's not get caught and where we are right now. Let's, let's go back to the start in the beginning. Okay. And then I try to take them to that ideal. I try to take them to what God was building in the first place. And if they separated out from that, the second thing I try to teach them is what part of being away from the ideal. Are you responsible for, and man, I use it on, don't have a second appoint, right but the first appointment it's worth it. It's worth saying that. Listen, Mac, listen, Sarah, you know, or whoever, what part did you play in separating from the ideal? Because this is what it does. It pulls us to God, not as, like, we need to quick decision here. Can we serve papers or not? That's what I want to know today. I'm not having that conversation with you as a pastor, the conversation I'm going to have is what personal responsibility you have in separating from the ideal. Then when they start to own that guess what we can do, we can bring the entire biblical narrative, not just Matthew 19 or Genesis two to bear on the situation, to see how God handles people who have separated from the ideal, you know what God does he sacrifices for them. Now we have a situation where both partners can pursue health in different ways at different paces. But if they're both pursuing, I think Roane can confirm this for me. If they're both pursuing health, we've got a solid chance of this same work.

Roane: Absolutely.

Craig: And I think that's the key though is because look, you can only control one person and it takes a toll.

Roane: You cannot do it on your own for sure.

Craig: We're almost out of time in this episode, but I do want to hear Roane from you just some practical advice for someone who has been listening to our voices who is wrestling with these questions. What practical advice would you give to them? And Ben, I'm going to ask the same question to you too.

Roane: I would say Craig, certainly as we've just said, you know, it takes two willing people to open people. To begin to get this, whatever, get the marriage out of the ditch because it took two people to drive it there and it didn't happen overnight. And the change process do beginning to do it different, relate differently, communicate differently, learn how to resolve conflict, learn how to have adult conversations. That is a process that's really the process of sanctification, but that's an individual process. Even I often say there's no such thing as marriage counseling, you got two individuals that are sitting in front of you on the couch and it's dependent on what each individual is willing to do and is it doable? I certainly, I am. Obviously I tell people all the time, you won't find anybody that's going to fight harder for your marriage and I'm going to work hard and we're going to dig in however, if there's resistance and if somebody's kind of wanting to half-ass their way, I'm going to be hard pressed to continue working with them because it's just not going to work. They've got to go all in and if they do no matter if it's adultery, no, I mean, things that we've seen people deal with and overcome. You can only explain it by the miracle of God, but they also, they rebuilt from the old ruins. They rebuilt from the rubble, as it says, in Isaiah 61, you know, they will rebuild, you know, God provides in God resources and then they have to do the work. And the practical piece is like, it takes a lot of work intentionality effort, but it it's very doable.

Craig: Ben, how about you boil this down a little bit for our listeners? Just some, just some practical first steps. Someone who has been listening to this they're wrestling with these questions. What would you give a person as some practical first steps?

Ben: Just putting myself in the situation where the husbands in the livery with the whiskey, the wives on the patio with the wine. What do we do? Right. I think the first thing each person has to convince themselves of is there's a difference between a conversation slash argument about habit modification and heart transformation. Okay. So usually, people in a situation like this they're living together, but isolated. So in that isolation, I would suggest that you start to think less about your habits, less about your partner's habits and all those that piss you off. Right? Cause that's what anger builds. And you start to think about heart transformation. You take a look, not externally, and Jesus calls us this a lot. You take a look internally. And once you start taking a look internally, it's been my experience, my own life, and I'm not talking about parishioners in my own life. When I start to take a look internally, then healthy things start to grow. I find a place of gratitude that I can't find when I'm focusing on my partner's habits. They're like sandpaper. I look internally, I focus not on first. Now this is just to get me to the therapist office, which we need to debunk that as well, visiting a therapist or an attorney. They're not you probably should be doing those things. Right. But until you can get to that point,

Craig: Wait, can you say that again?

Ben: So you get to that point, right? If you have to go into the cover of darkness to the attorney's office, you do that. And my brother's an attorney some of my friends, former friends, including our own are therapists and so you can get to that conversation. You need to start thinking more about heart than you do about habits, because that's also what the Bible teaches. So clearly if we're focused on habits, we're never really ever going to change, but if we're focused on our heart on our own, then we'll be able to see our partner's heart.

More clearly even through the arguments and especially when we get to those appointments.

Roane: Well, you know, the church fathers throughout history, from Saint Augustan to John Calvin, to Martin Luther, you can go down the list. Every one of them at some point, somewhere along the way said that the journey to God is an inward journey. I've got to begin to self-assess I've got to begin to look at my part in order to change. That's where we start.

Craig: Wow. Guys, what a rich discussion that we've been having Ben thank you so much for being here. I'm going to have to listen back to this thing. Two or three times. There's just so much just, just meat and the content that we've been discussing today. But I do want you to talk a little bit about your church and tell our listeners a little bit about your church.

Ben: Well its Vertical church the way that we talk about it to people is we believe most people are living lonely or in isolation. And we're trying to solve them. Questioning their purpose by providing a place of acceptance. We want more people to live confident and connected, and we believe following the teachings of Jesus Christ is the fastest and best way to get there,

Craig: man. Great

Roane: so let me just, I've got a quote this was actually in the wall street journal today. It's an article about a rabbi Jonathan sacks being brought it up about Rabbis and Jewish culture. And he was a brilliant thinker and he died recently and this is an article attribute to his life. And so just a quote, I think too, you know, it's, I believe this is God's view of the ideal and I think this is available. Here's what he said at a conference. Sachs concluded that when husband and wife turn in faithfulness to one another, we come as close as we will ever get to God himself bringing new life into being turning the pros of biology into the poetry of the human spirit, redeeming the darkness of the world by the radiance of law it is attractive,

Craig: Great word and a great way to end today's show. So Roane, as usual, thanks for spending time with us.

Roane: Always fun.

Matt: And Ben, thanks for joining us today.

Roane: Thank you bro.