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HCC Sermon: *Marriage and Divorce*
Mark 10:1-12
Preached on 5/31/2026

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I thought my parent's marriage was the norm, but I learned later that it was the exception.
2. Need: (There are three reasons why we're talking about marriage and divorce.)
3. Subject: How does God want us to look at marriage and divorce?
4. Text: Mark 10:1-12
5. Preview: In this morning's text, we'll see three things: a deviation, a correction, and an application.

BODY

- I. Deviation: Divorce is the norm while marriage is the exception (10:1-4).
 - A. The Pharisees tested Jesus to see if he would challenge the norm of divorce (10:1-2)
 1. The Pharisees tested Jesus to trap Him.
 - a. Mark depicts two characters within his gospel as testing Jesus: Satan and the Pharisees.
 - b. If Jesus forbid divorce, then Herod might execute him like John the Baptist.
 2. The Jews adopted two views concerning divorce.
 - a. Shammai allowed divorce only in the case of adultery.
 - b. Hillel allowed divorce for any reason.
 - B. The Pharisees believed that Moses justified the norm of divorce (10:3-4)
 - C. Divorce becomes normative when we treat marriage as a transactional relationship.
- II. Correction: Marriage is the norm while divorce is the exception (10:5-12).
 - A. Jesus explains that Moses allowed divorce as an exception.
 - B. Jesus explains God's will for marriage (10:6-9)
 1. God created marriage to depict equality and diversity (10:6).
 2. God created marriage to be valued above all other human relationships (10:7-8)
 3. God created marriage to be a permanent relationship (10:9)
 - C. Jesus forbids divorce to enable adultery (10:10-12)

- D. Marriage becomes normative when we view it as a divine union.
- III. Application: Look for ways to stay in a marriage rather than ways to get out of it.
 - A. Look for ways to stay in a marriage by beginning to pray.
 - B. Let me share with you some ways to stay in a marriage from a recent Family Life article that I received.
 - C. Look for ways to stay in a marriage by involving your community.
 - 1. Children ask your parents what you can do to help them find time to spend in their marriage.
 - 2. Help at a Parent's Night Out so that couples can devote time to their marriages.
 - 3. Involve friends in your marriage so that you can ask for their help.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Divorce is the norm while marriage is the exception. Marriage is the norm while divorce is the exception. Look for ways to stay in a marriage rather than ways to get out of it.
2. Closing Image: Let me share with you a visual that helped me to see the permanence of marriage.

MANUSCRIPT

Growing up, **I thought my parent's marriage was the norm.** My mom immigrated to the United States at the age of 25. Two years later, she met my dad. They got married. A year later, my mom gave birth to me. Another year later, she gave birth to my brother. Mom and dad worked hard. Dad worked the night shift at an automotive plant manufacturing Toyota Corollas, Geo Prisms, and Toyota Tacoma. My mom worked day shifts at a local tech company soldering chips onto mother boards. My mom and dad fought like any couple. Most of the time they swept issues under the rug and moved on. My mom and dad remained married until my dad died from cancer while I was in college. My mom lived as a widow until she died from cancer this past year. Nothing I have shared sounds anything remotely unique or unusual. It's normal to have parents married for the entirety of their lives.

But I learned later in life that **my parent's marriage was an exception.** Our family hung out regularly with two families while I attended High School. These two families came over for dinner often. My brother and I would play with the kids. Our families traveled together. I remember going with one of the families to New York and China. Our families hiked local Bay Area trails and visit Yosemite.

Again, we spent a lot of time together and I'd like to consider them close family friends. But I discovered later in college that the parents of one family had divorced. The news surprised me. I learned that the parents of the other family wanted to get divorced. But when the wife wanted half of everything if they divorced, the financial cost caused the husband to relent. Instead, they decided to live separately. It made me think that my parent's marriage though it had its challenges was not as commonplace as I thought.

Why are we talking about this topic of marriage and divorce? **There are three reasons why we're talking about marriage and divorce.** First, it's the topic of this morning's text. As Pastor Jason often explains that as a church we preach passage by passage through books of the Bible. This results in us having to talk about topics we may not prefer. If I had my choice, then I would have reserved this passage for a Sunday school about marriage. But Jason assigned this passage to me. Second, some of us have first-hand experience with divorce. When you hear the word: "divorce", it transports your mind to a memory of you sitting with your parents at the family dining table. You hear one of your parents say: "Mom and dad are choosing to get a divorce." It causes you to feel anger, frustration, and possibly sadness. Some of you have gone through a divorce.

You know the pain associated with separating from a spouse and its implications. Third, some of us have a second-hand experience with divorce. We have friends whose parents have chosen to pursue a divorce. We counsel friends contemplating divorce.

Some people might think that this would never happen to me, or I don't know anyone has pursued a divorce or contemplated a divorce. But divorce occurs more often than we may think. We often hear of the statistic 50% of marriages end in divorce. It's not quite true. It was true in the 1980's. But now the divorce rate of marriages hovers around 40%. Now before you celebrate, that is still a high number of marriages ending in divorce. But the lower percentage of divorces may also be due to fewer people getting married. One more statistic, the median length of a marriage that ends in a divorce is about 12 years. This means that couples have been married for 12 years before choosing to divorce. Some marriages may not dissolve via divorce but some couples may choose to live separately.

I share all these things with you because I think it's important for us to consider what the Bible say about marriage and divorce.

How does God want us to look at marriage and divorce? What viewpoint or perspective does God want us to adopt when it comes to the topic of marriage and divorce?

To answer this question, we'll turn our attention now to the passage that John Ma read for us from **Mark, chapter 10**. If you haven't turned there already, then please get out your personal Bible and turn there. **Mark, chapter 10**.

For those of you who have been attending our church services regularly, you'll know that we're preaching through the gospel of Mark. A recurring theme within this gospel is discipleship. How does one be a disciple of Jesus Christ? How do we follow Jesus on the way? Mark answers this question with his gospel. This is the Way. This passage specifically shows us what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus in marriage.

In this morning's text, we'll see three things. First, we'll look at a **deviation**. An error. A problem. Thinking that has gone off track. Second, we'll look at a **correction**. A fix. A solution. A way to get back on track. Third, we'll look at **an application**. A way to put this fix into action. A practice. A next step. Again, three things. A deviation. A correction. An application.

Let's look first at the deviation. **Divorce is the norm while marriage is the exception.** It is normal for a couple to dissolve their marriage while it is rare for them to stay married. It's common for a couple to separate. But it's uncommon for a couple to stay together. **Divorce is the norm while marriage is the exception.**

We see this in the text. **The Pharisees tested Jesus to see if he would challenge the norm of divorce.** Would Jesus undermine the norm of couples being able to dissolve their marriage?

Let's consider two ideas. First, we'll consider the purpose of the test. Second, we'll consider the Jewish view on marriage.

First, the purpose of the test. **The Pharisees tested Jesus to trap him.** They tested Jesus to see if he would get himself into trouble. Look at verse 2. *And the Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"*

Note the word: test. **Mark depicts two characters within his gospel as testing Jesus. Satan and the Pharisees.** By using the word test, Mark says the Pharisees are working for team Satan to oppose the work of God.

Now why of all the questions that the Pharisees could have asked did they decide to ask a question about divorce? How can a question about divorce trap Jesus? Think about where this discussion occurs. Look at verse one. *And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.*

Why does location matter? The area of Judea beyond the Jordan river goes by a few other names. The Transjordan. The Wilderness. Peraea. Herod Antipas ruled over this region. Herod divorced his wife to marry Herodias, wife of his brother Herod Philip. Who rebuked Herod for divorcing his wife? John the Baptist. Where did John the Baptist minister? In Peraea. Mark records how Herod Antipas arrested John the Baptist for denouncing his marriage to Herodias and eventually had him executed. **If Jesus forbid divorce, then Herod might execute him like John the Baptist.**

The Pharisees tested Jesus to purposefully trap him. Let's turn our attention to the Jewish view on marriage. **The Jews adopted two views concerning divorce.** Put another way, the Jews had two schools of thoughts on why a person could divorce their spouse.

The first school of thought was the school of Shammai. For those who are taking notes, Shammai is spelled S-H-A-M-M-A-I. The school of Shammai believed that one could only pursue divorce if there was an act of indecency. You can only pursue a divorce if your spouse has committed an act of adultery. This is the conservative school and minority view. The more progressive school or the majority view was the school of Hillel. Hillel is spelled H-I-L-L-E-L. This school believed that you could divorce for any reason. For example, if a wife served a husband spoiled food, then a husband could divorce his wife. Can you imagine man going to a judge for divorce? The judge asks: why do you want to divorce your wife? The man replies: She burnt my toast. Wild. A husband could also divorce his wife if he found someone more attractive. These two views made divorce a normal practice among Jews in the first century.

Divorce was not only commonplace in the first century, but it also had biblical justification. **The Pharisees believed that Moses justified the norm of divorce.** Look at verse 3. *But he answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.*

What passage from Torah or the Pentateuch are the Pharisees referencing? The passage that they have in mind is found in Deuteronomy, chapter 24. Verses 1 thru 4. Let me read to you what Moses writes. *When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD.*

Long sentence. But I think it's helpful for us to hear it. Per Moses, a husband could divorce his wife for some act of indecency. If she has committed adultery, then husband could divorce her. But also think the purpose of marriage. Nowadays, we think about the purpose of marriage is our happiness. But to the Jews, the purpose of marriage was to establish a family and have children. If a wife didn't produce children, then a husband could also divorce her.

Instead of limiting divorce, the Pharisees believed that this passage gave couples the license to divorce at will. They considered it a pretext for divorce. Hence, they expanded the category of indecency to include anything that would displease the husband.

I'm afraid that things have not changed much since the first century. Divorce as I shared earlier continues to be normative. Why? Why do people choose to divorce after either a short or long marriage?

There are many reasons why people undergo a divorce. I can't cover all the reasons. That would be better reserved for a Sunday School class. In fact, I believe that the Christian Ethics class covered this topic in detail. Let me put a reason forward.

Divorce becomes normative when we treat marriage as a transactional relationship. I will stay in the marriage as long as it is convenient for me. I will stay in the marriage as long as it serves me. I will stay in the marriage as long as it pleases me. If you do the chores. If you buy me nice gifts. If you stay attractive. If you refrain from confronting me. If you allow me to be me. We can stay married. But the moment you stop helping out around the house. The moment you stop giving me nice gifts.

The moment your face begins to sag. The moment you confront me. The moment you insist on your way. I'm out of here. Marriage is about serving my interest. It's about me, myself, and I.

Society also feeds the idea of marriage being transactional. The advent of a no-fault divorces allows a couple to dissolve their marriage without any party committing any wrongdoing. I recall an international student from China share that he had simply divorced his wife by going to a government office and simply signing some paperwork. They entered the building married. They left the building divorced. It's no surprise that many couples think: If things don't work out, then I can always get a divorce.

We've talked about the deviation. Divorce is the norm and marriage is the exception. Let's consider the correction.

Marriage is the norm while divorce is the exception. Marriage ought to be commonplace while divorce ought to be rare. More people should remain married rather than pursue divorce. Preserving a marriage should be the first option rather than dissolving a marriage. **Marriage is the norm while divorce is the exception.**

We see this correction in Jesus's response to the Pharisees. First, **Jesus explains that Moses allowed divorce as an exception.** Look at verse 5. *And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.*

Note the phrase: hardness of heart. Earlier in the gospel, Mark describes the disciples as having their hearts hardened. The word hardened used to describe the disciples means a difficulty to comprehend. But the word hardness used to describe the Pharisees means an unyielding frame of mind. In other words, they are hardheaded.

Why do the Pharisees have an unyielding frame of mind? Why are they hardheaded? It's due to their sin. They refuse to submit their lives to God's will. They resemble the wilderness generation of Israel to whom Moses wrote the instructions concerning divorce. Moses instructed Israel how to treat a divorce because he knew that sin would cause marriages to dissolve. Hence, he gave instructions on how to regulate a divorce.

Let's think again about the certificate of divorce. The certificate provided a divorcee protection. First, it protected them from the accusation of immoral behavior.

This required a husband to write down specifically why he divorced his wife. For example, if she was unable to have children. This then allowed a woman to remarry. Otherwise, she would commit adultery by remarrying. Second, the certificate provided financial protection. When a woman married, her family received a dowry. But if she divorces, her family will not receive a dowry in the second marriage. Instead, she would receive a dowry. If her second husband died or divorced her, then her first husband could not remarry her to take the dowry. Not only did the certificate protect the divorcee, but it also made it more difficult for someone to divorce their spouse.

Instead of seeing Deuteronomy 24 to regulate divorce, the Pharisees saw it as permitting divorce whenever someone wanted to dissolve a marriage. Someone has compared this way of thinking of learning how to crash land a plane to learn how to fly a plane or learning to organize a retreat to learn how to win a war. Or put another way learning how to break up with someone so that you can learn how to date someone. You would not learn how to remain married if you learned how to first get a divorce.

First, Jesus corrects the Pharisee's understanding of Deuteronomy 24.

Next, he provides a correction to the Pharisees by **explaining to them God's will for marriage**. Jesus uses the creation account to teach about God's will for marriage. Let's see what Jesus teaches about God's will concerning marriage.

First, God created marriage to depict equality and diversity. Look verse 6. *But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'.* Jesus quotes Moses from Genesis, chapter 1, verse 27. From this quotation we see that male and female are equal in value before God. But it represents diversity because men and women are different. Why did God create marriage this way? One might consider the trinitarian nature of God. All three persons of God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal but different in their roles. Men and women need one another to reflect the image of God. If God is a creator of life, then human beings mimic Him by creating life. But a man cannot create life on his own. Neither can woman create life on her own. Both male and female need one another to create life and represent the creative nature of God.

First lesson. **God created marriage to depict equality and diversity.**

Second lesson.

God created marriage to be valued above all other human relationships.

To teach this lesson, Jesus quotes from Genesis chapter 2, verse 24. Look at verse 7. *Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.*

To hold fast to one's wife refers to a faithful devotion. That means a man and woman shifts their faithful devotion to their parents to their spouses. If a married person were to rank their relationships according to value, then it should be first God, then spouse. It reminds me of something that Josephine shared with me about her dad. She once asked her dad: If the house burnt down, who would he save first? I think she expected to hear: "You of course!" But he responded: "Your mom!" My father-in-law is thinking biblically. Following his example, if our house burnt down I would save Josephine first before Hudson. But hopefully I can save both.

Let me share with another reason why you should value your spouse. When it comes to following Jesus, Mark says you ought to forsake certain relationships. Look a little bit later in chapter 10 at verse 29. *Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will*

not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. Jesus mentions leaving behind brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, and lands. But he didn't cite leaving behind spouses. He didn't say leave behind your wife or husband. It shows that following Jesus doesn't disrupt the bond of a marriage.

First lesson. God created marriage to depict equality and diversity. Second lesson. God created marriage to be valued above all other human relationships. Last lesson. **God created marriage to be a permanent relationship.** Look at verse 8. *And the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.* Jesus continues to the quotation from Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24. But he adds a phrase: *What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.* The unity created by marriage cannot be undone. Husband and wife are fused into one new unit.

When we think of the two becoming one flesh, we often think about sexual intimacy. While this is true, I think the unity between couples goes beyond physical intimacy.

For those you have been married, you'll probably understand this. After many years, you begin to think or see things as your spouse sees them. Let me give you some examples from my own marriage. Josephine is a lighting designer by profession. This means I hear about her talking about down lights, up lights, and fixtures. Before marrying my wife, I would simply point to a light and say: "light". But now I might be able to tell you: "Up light" "Down light". Lest you think only my wife affects my thinking. But I have also affected her as well. She can share with you how she can imagine my reaction dramas she watches or even Instagram posts she sees. Before marrying me, no exposure to Star Wars. Whenever she saw a ship from Star Wars, she would probably describe it as "starship". But now she can point and say: "Tie Fighter" "Tie Bomber" "Razorcrest".

Now even if you divorce, I suggest that your former marriage lingers. Think about the photos of your family photos with your kids and your former spouse. You might eat at a restaurant and remember how you used to go there for your anniversaries. Or you might travel to someplace and remember when you visited there with your ex-spouse. Even if you have been divorced, you continue to take a part of your former marriage with you wherever you go.

After Jesus gives three lessons about marriage from Genesis, he returns to the topic of divorce. **Jesus forbids the use of divorce to enable adultery.**

One should not divorce so that they can pursue an adulterous relationship.

Look at verse 10. *And in the house, the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*

To summarize, Jesus teaches that the marriage bond should not be easily dissolved. Instead, it ought to be preserved and protected. Why? God created marriage to be a permanent union. Hence, marriage should be the norm rather than divorce.

Now someone might argue does this mean that divorce should not occur at all? I don't have time to delve into this topic because Mark doesn't explicitly lay out reasons for divorce in the text. But I would say Mark implies a reason a reason for divorce. If you look again at the question in verse 2. *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?* Most of his hearers would recognize that adultery or sexually immoral behavior would be justifiable reasons for a person to divorce their spouse.

The crowd would have heard the question in this way: *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason except adultery?* Matthew, who also recalls this conversation in his gospel, records Jesus permitting divorce on the grounds of adultery and sexual immorality (Matt 19). Paul adds another reason for a valid divorce in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:15). If an unbelieving spouse divorces his believing spouse, then that is permitted. To discuss valid reasons for divorce would take away from the main point of this passage in Mark: Marriage should be the norm.

Let's now move to the application. If marriage should be the norm, then what should we do? **Look for ways to stay in a marriage rather than ways to get out of it.** Instead of looking for the exit, stay in your marriage. Search for ways to preserve your marital union. Seek out help to remain committed to your marriage vows rather than look for a way to dissolve it. **Look for ways to stay in a marriage rather than ways to get out of it.**

Let me offer you some suggestions. This list of ideas is no means by exhaustive. But these are things that I thought about.

Look for ways to stay in a marriage by beginning to pray. As believers, we believe that we have a God who will help us.

But how often do we ask for his help? Consider this. If we truly believe that God knows all things and that he can bring about change, then why not try praying to him?

My former pastor gave some counsel concerning marriage that I have always remembered. He told me that conflict will occur between Josephine and I where we cannot solve the problem. In those moments, we need to go to God in prayer and ask for his help. He alone can soften the hard heart of a spouse. He alone can open the ears of a spouse who doesn't listen. He alone can provide a person to speak counsel to your spouse when your words fall on deaf ears. Why do we not have a flourishing and unified marriage? It's because we do not ask.

Second, **let me share with you some ways to stay in your marriage from a recent Family Life article that I received.** Family Life is a ministry of Cru. Its mission is to create families that follow Jesus and reflect Jesus to others. They put on a marriage conference that Josephine and I have attended in the past called: "Weekend to Remember" Before I share some points from this article, I want you to know that I'll post these to the sermon notes on our website, so that you don't have write them down.

Let me read you some of these ideas of how to stay married from this article titled: Keeping Your Marriage a Priority.

Pray together daily. This is a helpful practice. I think to pray together daily also requires couples to ask each other question: “How can I pray for you?” Reflecting on this, I found myself thinking I used to ask Josephine this question frequently while dating. But now, I find myself asking her less frequently. Praying together daily.

Grow Together Spiritually. Read the Bible together before bed. Join a couples Bible study. Read a couples devotional.

Have meaningful conversations. By meaningful conversations, I don’t mean: How are you doing? Consider these conversation starters:

1. My funniest memory of our dating days is when...
2. My greatest need right now is...
3. I feel you love me the most when you...

This morning, we discussed the topic of marriage and divorce by look at three ideas from this morning’s passage. A deviation. Divorce is the norm while marriage is the exception. A correction. Marriage is the norm while

divorce is the exception. An application. Look for ways to stay in a marriage rather than ways to get out of it.

Years ago, when Josephine and I attended a marriage conference, the speakers used a visual that I have never forgotten. **Let me share with you a visual that helped me to see the permanence of marriage.** The speaker says when the world views marriage as transactional, it resembles two post-it notes. They come together easily and separate easily. But God views marriage as a permanent union. It resembles a duct tape. When these two pieces come together, it's difficult to separate. May the Lord help us all to preserve the union of marriages within our church so that marriages would be more commonplace.