

“What Is So Difficult About Relationships?”

Scripture: Mark 10:1-16

Graphics: building blocks

Big Truth: The people of the PUMC are called to build relationships with others that last, from whatever places of brokenness we find ourselves. Relationships are hard because they involve sinful people, lack full transparency, and we must use words and actions to build them. Divorce and other broken relationships are not God’s ideal. Jesus calls us to start where we are build relationships that are based on love, trust, and the Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: God wants me to build relationships that last and point to the hopeful future.

1. Introduction

A. Let’s PRAY!

- B. Over the next few weeks, we’ll be camped out in Mark chapter 10. Mark 10 is the final chapter in this gospel before Jesus begins his final journey to the cross. I encourage you to read over Mark 10 this month a few times, maybe before and after Sunday mornings.
- C. In Mark 10, we encounter Jesus continuing to teach the disciples, the crowds, and anyone who would listen. So many times, Jesus was responding to a challenge from the Pharisees - the religious leaders of the day who were attempting to trap Jesus in order to arrest him and get him out of the way.
- D. Each week for the next few weeks, we will be asking a focus question that will help us zero in on the point of Jesus’ teaching.
- E. To begin, our question for today is: **What is so difficult about relationships?** (repeat)
- F. Other questions are: So you want to be rich? So you want to be the best? and So you want to see?
- G. These questions get at the heart of some of the barriers we experience to being fully-devoted, humble, confident disciples of Jesus. Relationship challenges get in the way. Money and resources gets in the way. Power and pride get in the way. Lack of vision gets in the way.
- H. This morning, we begin with one of the most challenging passages of scripture for our modern ears...and frankly, it’s one that I did my best to tell God we **weren’t** going to read. As you can tell, that didn’t work out so well. It’s about relationships...specifically a question from the Pharisees about **divorce**...and about our relationships with spouses and children.
- I. Yet the point of this teaching from Jesus - and the red letters that indicate His words (thank you for reminding us of that Pastor Tim) - is not to condemn people who have gone through the pain of divorce. The point is for all of us to live today and every day from this day forward into the grace and mercy of

God through Jesus...and to build relationships by the power of the Holy Spirit that last and point to a hopeful future.

J. If you're taking notes, write this down...here's where we're headed today:
God wants me to build relationships that last and point to the hopeful future.

K. In your bible, turn with me to Mark chapter 10. In Mark chapter 10, Jesus is once again on the move, and we read these words...

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 10:1-16

B. Relationships. Husband and wife. Adults and children. I would add: siblings, friends, neighbors, even strangers.

C. While the Pharisees were attempting to once again trap Jesus into teaching something that was against the Jewish Law so that they could arrest Him, Jesus used it ALL as a teaching moment.

D. Let's break this down a little bit. What were the Pharisees getting at with this question about divorce?

i. Well, first it's about **geography**.

a. What? Yep! The opening verse said that Jesus and disciples went to the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. It was in that very region that in Mark 6 we read what happened to John the Baptist: "For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him." (Mark 6:17-19)

b. John the Baptist had a certain view of divorce and remarriage based on his theological upbringing. In John's view, divorce was not allowed by God.

c. Because they were in the region where John was beheaded, the Pharisees had this fresh in their minds...and so did the people.

ii. The second thing they were getting at was the **legality of divorce**.

a. The Pharisees, because of the Jewish Law, did make provisions for divorce and knew what the Law said about it. What THEY wanted to know was: What do YOU say, Jesus? "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? John didn't think so!"

b. The Pharisees knew the answer to that question. Jesus knew that the Pharisees knew the answer to their question. Jesus also knew the answer from the LAW. So, Jesus asked, "What did Moses command you?"

- c. Their answer was simply to quote the Torah - the Jewish Law. Which, of course was correct, but missed the Jesus' point.
 - d. Jesus reminded them that the Law was put in place because humanity was sinful and without the Law, humans would be an even greater mess...would make a mess of the world, of worship, of every aspect of life, including - and maybe most importantly - make a mess of relationships like marriage and raising children. But the LAW couldn't FIX humanity and put it back to its design.
 - e. He went on to take them ALL the way back to Creation, when **God** created. He created male and female for each other. For procreation. For raising of children. For love and hope and mutual support. And what God puts together, He doesn't want anything - especially the ways humans try to mess things up - to tear those relationships apart.
 - f. Back in a private area, Jesus taught the disciples even more when he said that if we wanted to get legalistic about it all, then those who remarry after divorce are adulterers.
- iii. This is point where we need to step back and get a reality check for what Jesus is teaching us.
- a. We in the church (and in the world to some extent) get tripped up here and are tempted to become legalists. If you've experienced divorce and read those red letters from Jesus, then it brings shame and guilt all over again. Those who haven't experience divorce, have been known to use this to point fingers or shake heads. It's a mess!
 - b. Jesus acknowledged that God created human relationships to be ideal... to stay together...to thrive. Man and woman. Parent and child. Yet, he also knows that sinful humanity will always find ways to mess those relationships up. It's a sad reality of our fallen humanity.
 - c. And, that, church, is the reason Jesus came to live as God with us, and then die and rise again to be our Savior and Lord.
 - d. See, Jesus was answering the specific question from the Pharisees about divorce, in an attempt to trap Him. But Jesus was pointing to a greater reality...a reality of why God desires relationships to thrive and not divide.
 - e. That's why Mark went on to talk about the disciples not preventing children to come to Jesus. These two sections are connected. We ALL need to come to Jesus. And not only was Jesus telling the crowds and the Pharisees and the disciples that they needed to get a new view of relationships, he was pointing to the children and saying, "These little

ones can help us as we help them grow to love each other, as we love them, and build relationships that will last.”

- f. Jesus was pointing to the future with hope! That’s what we need to hear today. Jesus points our relationships to the future and not what has been.

3. Application

- A. Let’s get some practical application today to this difficult word about the difficulty of relationships. First we need to spend time talking about WHAT is so hard about relationships and then WHAT to do about it.
 - i. So...what IS so hard about relationships?
 - a. Well, first, relationships are hard because **I’m in them**. You are in them.
 - i) That sounds weird but because you and I are part of relationships, and you and I are part of fallen sinful humanity, then there’s no wonder that relationships are hard. Jesus called it hardness of heart to the Pharisees and at times we resemble that statement.
 - ii) When it comes to the intimacy and proximity of marriage and raising children, things become even more intense and our sin nature can make a mess of things.
 - iii) Sometimes, with God’s help and grace and humility, we can work out the challenges in our relationships. Other times, we can’t.
 - iv) Relationships are hard because you and I are IN them.
 - b. The second reason relationships are hard is because **we have to use human words and actions to express something that God created to be perfect**.
 - i) Jesus made it clear that God designed us and our relationships to be perfect and to reflect HIM...to show His glory to the world.
 - ii) The farther we get from the Creator and His design, the harder we find it to reflect His perfect will.
 - iii) In relationships, we’re forced to primarily use human words and actions to express our love and commitment to each other. Those words and actions are rarely 100% other-focused, but tend to want to have the other person meet MY needs and create MY version of reality.
 - iv) Relationships are hard because we find communication lacking.
 - c. Finally, relationships are hard because of **all the noise in our lives**.
 - i) Jesus boiled it down to inviting you and me to be child-like. He **didn’t say childish** - that’s the thing that makes relationships harder still...and is all too prevalent in our world.

- ii) But you and I try to create lives for ourselves and we often hold on to baggage that makes everything noisy. Hurtful words and circumstances, unmet needs, selfish ambitions, and the external barrage of shoulds and coulds and woulds make for very crowded hearts and minds. So often, those creates stresses and tears in our relationships.
- d. Relationships are difficult because our lives are so noisy, because of the human words and actions...and because you and I are in them.
- ii. So...What do we DO about it? How do we move forward?
 - a. Well, let me first speak to those who have been hurt by divorce, going through divorce, or are thinking about divorce. And this isn't just for married people or formerly married people. This is the parents of adult children who have divorced, kids of parents who have divorced, siblings of those who have experienced the pain and loss of divorce. In fact, this is most of us at one level or another. But for those who are pained and grieving that loss, hear this: You are loved. Certainly you don't need me to tell you how painful and gut-wrenching your experience was or is. Through it all, God loves you with a love that cannot be broken. God loves your spouse. God loves your kids. His grace is sufficient. His mercy never fails. His invitation is always open. His love is complete. And His pathway to the future is before you. You are loved and we will walk with you to the foot of the cross and lay down ALL our burdens there with you. You are loved.
 - b. For ALL of us, we have heard why relationships are difficult, so for each of those barriers, we are called to follow Jesus into the future. These aren't platitudes or white-wash. It's all about Jesus in your life today.
 - i) First, because you and I are part of the problem simply because we exist in relationships, we're called by Jesus to **own our part in the relationship**. When we do that, we can work towards reconciliation from this day on for every relationship in our lives. It may not end in full restoration, but will lead to a release of forgiveness and grace. The Apostle Paul encouraged people who experienced divorce to remain single because he knew that if there was even the smallest chance of reconciliation, Jesus could fan that spark into a flame again. Own your part of every relationship.
 - ii) Second, in every relationship you have, **use your words and actions to build that relationship for today and tomorrow**. What was said and done in the past cannot be unsaid or undone. Learn from those things, asking the Holy Spirit to teach and grow you, and then keep pressing into the Holy Spirit to give you words to say, show you ac-

tions to do, and let God love others through you, even when you can't.

iii) Then, **become child-like and de-noise your life**. I love watching the Buffalo Bills - did you know that? I also enjoy going to the stadium to watch them live. Every time 3rd down comes and the opponent is on offense ready to snap the ball, there is SO MUCH SHOUTING from the stands that the players on the field can't hear anything but noise. I think our lives are a lot like that. The key, according to Jesus, is to simplify our lives to be more child-like...find spaces of quiet and peace to hear God speaking into your life. When relationships become messy, our lives fill with noise, anxiety, fear, anger, and stress. Children haven't yet learned those things fully. They play with Matchbox cars in the driveway. They sing songs about silly things. And they get along with complete strangers because the noise level is low. Jesus calls us to be like children and walk confidently into the kingdom He is creating for us. That starts today, no matter what the past has been for you.

iii. Own your part in every relationship with God's help. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you words and actions that will reconcile and create peace. And de-noise your life by listening more to the Holy Spirit as you become child-like in wonder of God and His mercy and future.

4. Conclusion

- A. God knows that relationships - and especially marriage and raising children - are vulnerable to the broken ways of this sin-filled world. Satan will use every tactic and tool to keep breaking relationships apart.
- B. Jesus doesn't guarantee us a trouble-free life or relationships that stand the test of time while on this earth before He returns.
- C. What Jesus **does do** is offer us a way to give him every part of our lives - so He can use US from this day forward for HIS glory and OUR good.
- D. See, God loves you and cares for you deeply with a love that is sacrificial and intimate. But even more than that, He loves the world and is building a kingdom for us to live in for eternity.
- E. Jesus is the Way. Jesus is the Truth. Jesus is the Life.
- F. And as we offer our lives to God, God offered Jesus' life for us on the cross. Satan wants nothing more than to tear every relationship we have to pieces. Jesus died so that every torn piece of us is rebuilt for His holy purposes.
- G. At this table, Satan is defeated. Jesus is victorious. And we're made whole for today and every day to come, in His name!
- H. Let's PRAY!