



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Keep My Heart From Being Hard—For I Am Broken" - Hope Restored

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**T**oday I'm going to talk about marriage, but also to those who WERE married but are now single, those who are single NOW but will one day be married, and those who CHOOSE to be single.

And since we are all called to be in community, it's helpful to know about marriage so we can provide support to married people because truth be told, marriage is really hard. Our hearts can easily get hardened. And we all have the challenge that men and women are so different. And if you think they are the same, (and live on another planet) well let me share some observations from a man who says, "Men are just happier people!"

He says men are happier because: "Men can wear a white t-shirt to a water park, or men can wear NO shirt to a water park. For men the world is your urinal...you never have to drive to another gas station restroom because this one is just too icky. Your phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat. A five-day vacation requires only one suitcase. Men's underwear is \$8.95 for a three-pack. Men can have the same hairstyle last for years, maybe decades. Men play with toys all their lives. Men can wear shorts no matter how their legs look. They can "do" their nails with a pocket knife. And men can do Christmas

shopping for 25 relatives on December 24 in 25 minutes."

No wonder men are happier!

Even though that was light-hearted, today's sermon deals with a difficult topic. It's about when marriages really go south...so far down that they can end in divorce. There is no way I can cover all the different facets of divorce. My hope is that in the midst of God's Word that each of us will hear the grace of Jesus, which still applies to us today 20 centuries later.

We recognize there may be many divorced people here today. We want you to know that we believe in grace and God's love for all of us. Pastor Dan said it would be okay for me to remind us again that he himself was divorced over 30 years ago from his first wife...so this is a church who understands how hard life can be. We are deeply empathetic for divorced people.

Before we read today's passage I want to share with you that I too know the pain of divorce. My dad and mom had moved our family from Indiana to Hawaii when I was 14 years old and put us four kids in public school. My sister and I went to Kaimuki High School, my brother went to Jarret Middle School, and my baby brother went to Palolo Elementary.

Each of us were experiencing a huge culture shock moving from the midwest to Hawaii. And then the unimaginable happened to our family. Our dad, who was such a good dad, changed and decided to leave his family in exchange for another family.

My dad broke the sacred covenant. It was a devastating time for me and for my family. It really shaped my view of marriage and myself, but we'll come back to that.

Today we are going to look at a passage in the Gospel of Mark that deals with marriage and divorce. Just my luck—I decided to switch Sundays with Pastor Dan to preach today...not knowing what my passage would be!

But, I am the Family Life Director of the church, overseeing our ministry to parents and families and children and youth. So, in God's providence this is a good opportunity to talk about this as another example of God's guidance and His best "yes" for us.

Today we will be looking at the Gospel of Mark 10:1-12 which says, *'Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.*

**S**ome Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

<sup>3</sup>“What did Moses command you?” Jesus replied. <sup>4</sup>They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” <sup>5</sup>“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.

<sup>6</sup>“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ <sup>7</sup>‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, <sup>8</sup>and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup>Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

<sup>10</sup>When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. <sup>11</sup>He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup>And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

Over the past several months we have been in our Hope Restored sermon series following Jesus’ ministry in the book of Mark. We have hung out on the shores of Galilee witnessing the miracles Jesus performed and have heard the teaching about the “Good News” of salvation. As a result, large crowds were intrigued about this man named Jesus.

Our passage today begins with Jesus geographically moving His ministry from the shores of Galilee to the region of Judea. The bustling city of Jerusalem is located in Judea.

Jesus continues to teach the people about the Kingdom of God and the heart of His heavenly Father before He makes His final journey to the cross.

Mark 10:2 - “Some Pharisees came and tested him (Jesus) by asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’”

The Pharisees were religious leaders of a Jewish political party who held a strict interpretation of the Mosaic Law. This group was known to have religious form without truly knowing the heart of their Creator. The Pharisees didn’t ask the question wanting to learn from Jesus, nor did they want to find out the will of God. These guys (the Pharisees) were relentless in trying to trap Jesus. The topic of divorce was a hot one!

Jesus’ response could really incriminate Him. Would Jesus speak against the Mosaic Law or would He agree with the Pharisee’s procedures of accepting divorce?

Mark 10:3-4 - <sup>3</sup>“What did Moses command you?” Jesus replied. <sup>4</sup>The Pharisees said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

Jesus uses His authority here as the Son of God to teach the gracious will of His Father. But is there more here in this verse than the Pharisees just wanting to prove to the world and themselves that Jesus is not the Messiah?

It’s interesting that in the male-dominant society of ancient Israel, where women were only valued for their sex appeal and outer beauty, these religious men seem to be asking, “When I’m done with my woman, when she no longer excites me, may I move on and find myself another?” Wait, was this written in 65 AD or today??

The Pharisees saw divorce as a legal issue like buying and selling property. Some of the religious

men interrupted the law to say that a man could divorce a woman for any kind of dissatisfaction—even if she burned the bread.

You see, the Pharisees were looking for a way out. They did not see divorce as a spiritual issue, for how could they? They didn’t know the heart of their Creator. But listen to Jesus’ response. He uncovers their sinful hearts.

Mark 10:5 - “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.

Jesus makes it a spiritual issue. And then He goes on to say that divorce or separation is not the true intent that God has for our relationships.

Moses gave permission for divorce because of their sin:

- their stubbornness towards one another,
- their unteachable spirit, and
- their unwillingness to accept God’s will for faithfulness in marriage.

**Did you know that infidelity or (unfaithfulness) is the #1 cause for divorce?**

When my dad left our family it rocked each of us to our core. It was as if someone amputated one of our limbs. The foundation of our family had experienced a huge blow. Each of us kids and my mom did our own thing to cope with the loss. Our coping strategies were all dysfunctional. At the time our little tiny church in Palolo Valley did not have the wisdom to know how to help us. As a result, I chose to get pregnant and married to escape the horror of my home. The plan was to marry my handsome prince and together we would live happily ever after, just like a Disney Princess.

**Y**es, you heard right. I chose to get pregnant at the age of 15. I thought that marriage was going to be great and solve all of my problems. I did not understand what a covenant relationship was when we married 42 years ago. It wasn't a wise choice but it was the only way I could see out of the pain I was experiencing at the time.

Everyone, please hear me, and teenagers in particular: Getting pregnant as a teenager was not a good choice and I am not recommending it. I soon realized that marriage was so hard and discovered this thing called deep incompatibility that ALL marriages experience.

My husband, Kimo, is nothing like me and I am nothing like him. (By the way, I do have Kimo's permission to share with you about our lives).

We should have read Pastor Dan's book on, *"How to Pick a Spouse."* We would have discovered: at least one of his principles: to take at least a year before getting married; to check with friends to see if this is a good idea to get married; and yes, to not have sex before marriage. Too bad for us, Pastor Dan hadn't written the book yet.

Thank God that God specializes in redeeming ALL broken and severed relationships: marriages that are cold, siblings who have jealousy for one another, and those who have hatred towards others. Our God is a God of peace, harmony, and restoration.

Therefore, if we look at today's passage we discover that divorce is not God's will for marriage. Divorce stems from the hardness of hearts. God hates divorce. Divorced people hate divorce.

But hear this, God LOVES divorced people and He wants to heal that pain.

Our church reflects that love. In fact, we have 16 people right now in our DivorceCare class where people get to experience God's healing. It is never too late to join.

If you are divorced please know that this sermon is not an attack on you and the decision you made or a decision that was forced upon you in a no-fault way...as it was for Pastor Dan. I know that getting a divorce is a huge individualized decision and sometimes it is the best decision, especially if you are experiencing abuse. If you are in an abusive relationship, we encourage you to take steps to keep yourself safe.

I have a girlfriend who recently divorced her husband after praying for 18 years that he would stop doing drugs and sleeping around. For her, she felt like she made a commitment to her husband, to her family, and to God and God didn't release her from him for all that time.

Finally, after 18 years she now feels a release from her commitment and has complete peace about her decision to divorce due to his constant adulteries. For some, they would have divorced much earlier on.

Now, Jesus answers the Pharisee's question by sharing God's heart for marriage. He takes the Pharisees back to the beginning—to the origin of man.

Mark 10:6-8 - <sup>6</sup>*"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'* <sup>7</sup>*'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,* <sup>8</sup> *and the two will become*

*one flesh.'* So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

God's design is for male and female to live together in marriage showing value and unconditional love to one another. When God does math it is: 1 + 1 = 1.

Women were not to be viewed as property to be disposed of. God's design is for women to be full partners in a marriage relationship. Therefore, Jesus set a standard of conduct for men to be united with their wives and to become one. Jesus brought dignity and value to all women during all phases of life.

In the book of Genesis we see how God created the first man, Adam, and how God fashioned a wife for Adam, named Eve. Let's look at the actual verses that Jesus is quoting in Genesis 2:7.

Genesis 2:7 - *Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.*

Genesis 2:18 - *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Genesis 2:21-22 - <sup>21</sup>*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.* <sup>22</sup>*Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man.*

Eve was taken from Adam's side as an equal; not below him from his foot, nor above him from his head. Together they were commanded to care for each other and for the earth.

**G**enesis 2:23 - *The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

A woman was not a piece of property but bone of man's bone and flesh of man's flesh. Eve was part of man. Therefore, women are to be treated equally in a marriage.

Just a side bar here. If you are single you might be saying, "Oh, great. What about me? If it is not good for Adam to be alone how can it be good for me to be alone?"

The Apostle Paul addresses being single in 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, *7 I wish that all of you were as I am (single). But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried[a] and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.*

The only way that you can remain unmarried and have wholeness without loneliness is to accept your singleness as your calling and to trust that the power of the Holy Spirit will meet all your needs. This power of your calling can keep you from being lonely.

Your calling of singleness might be temporary or permanent. There may be some single people here today who think the same way I did—that getting married is the magic answer to happiness. That if I just got married, that would solve my problems.

I want to tell you, getting married is not the magic solution. Jesus is the answer.

Back to the Genesis passage. Genesis 2:24 - *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Jesus showed the heart of God and His design for families. Husbands and wives are to make each other a priority, even over their own parents and their own children. For the greatest gift that you can give your children is to love your spouse. This love creates a firm foundation that is difficult to shake when life seems overwhelming.

Marriage sets the tone and shapes our entire households. The warning though is to keep our hearts from being hard for true character is built in our homes.

Continuing on in the Genesis passage: Genesis 2:25 - *Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

There is something sacred about being completely naked, baring all of yourself to your spouse in a marriage where each share the deepest parts of who they are with each other. We say this is who I really am in my most vulnerable state. It requires complete trust and a lifelong commitment to be so vulnerable.

This is why God designed sex to happen within a marriage. It goes way beyond the lust of the eyes. This sacredness happens when your spouse says I see you. I see your hurts, your imperfections and your weakness—and you are beautiful. I love you just as you are. This is the intimacy that Christ desires for our marriages. Our hearts are not hard.

And when I think about it, isn't this how Jesus sees us? He sees all our issues and our stuff. He says, "I love you. Let me have all your hurts, scars and weakness. I will redeem them, for you are beautiful." For the Bible says we are to love our spouse as Christ loves His people.

Timothy Keller says: "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ that we ever dared hope."

Going back to my story: It was very evident from the beginning of our marriage that we were definitely NOT living in paradise and we have truly lost our innocence. We quickly discovered that to marry means to merge. To bring together two broken, selfish, sinful people who are completely opposite and have them unite as one and become intimate? Are you kidding?

I have asked God several times what He was thinking when He designed marriage. I can see how it worked really well in the Garden of Eden, but in my home it didn't and doesn't seem so easy.

Every home since the Garden of Eden has to deal with the reality of sin. Lord, keep our hearts from being hard, for we are broken.

Maybe you have a great marriage where you have candlelight dinners every night and afterward walk hand in hand along a moonlit beach? But for many of us that is unrealistic.

Christian author Ann Voskamp says, "How we receive each other's reach—eventually determines if we ever get to hold each other's heart."

How do we react when our spouse reaches out for us? Do we get to hold the sacredness of their heart?

A hard heart is one who does not receive or connect with others. Those with a hard heart keep their distance.

**T**hose with a hard heart have marriages and relationships that end up cold and without love.

Mark 10:9 says, *Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.*"

Because of this vulnerability God's intent is for marriage to be a sacred covenant relationship and should therefore not be entered into lightly. It is the second greatest decision that a person will ever make in this life because it is a lifelong commitment.

By the way, the first greatest decision is to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and friend. Or as Pastor Dan says, the three most important decisions are: Who is your Master? Who is your Mate? What is your Mission in life? And that applies to all the singles and to the marrieds.

I did not understand what a covenant relationship was when I got married to Kimo 42 years ago at the age of 16. When I said my marriage vow, I didn't realize how much of it would be a promise for the future and not so much for our wedding day. It all seemed so doable at the time I made the vow but to live out that promise is tough as it is with many of you today.

God though, has miraculously showed up over and over again in my marriage. God is a God of love and of God of grace. In God's divine providence He moved Kimo and me to this church 12 years ago knowing that we need support in our marriage.

First Prez recognizes that marriage is tough and that our hearts are prone to getting hard. When Kimo and I were struggling with our finances and I felt like there was no hope, there came the Financial Peace Course by Dave

Ramsey offered as a Life Training class on Sunday morning. Our debt was crippling our marriage.

### **Debt is the #2 killer of all marriages.**

Finances touch everything in our life so to be able to have a plan to pay off our debt and to live within our means was and is vital to the health of our marriage.

A few years ago, Kimo and I took the Alpha Marriage course when the church offered it. The course gave us several weeks of date nights where we came together just as a couple and looked at setting goals to work towards ensuring the infrastructure of our marriage was solid.

We looked at things like: understanding and APPRECIATING our differences, learning the art of communication, how to resolve conflict, how to be intentional with our time together, recognizing the influence that our family background has on us, and how to develop a good sexual relationship.

It was tough in the beginning. We were in those Mauka classrooms, and the first week, I wanted to move our table out to the lanai so that others couldn't hear us argue or so I could throw Kimo over the railing. I'm sure that Kimo had thoughts of throwing me over, too.

You see we had four decades of built up issues that needed to be addressed and effective communication was not our strength.

### **A lack of communication is the #3 killer of all marriages.**

As a result, the Alpha Marriage Course taught us how to set goals, values and dreams. The teaching

and community here at First Prez have given us a thirst to be in His Word, to hear His voice, and to know His heart and His will and give us practical steps to get healthier.

God doesn't just leave us a book called the Bible with practical tips. He goes one step further. God gives His followers the Holy Spirit, who in the Bible is called the Counselor and the Comforter.

The Spirit encourages us when we are discouraged. The Spirit empowers us when we feel we have no power. The Spirit gives us strength when we feel we have no strength. The Spirit give us the capacity to forgive when we don't feel like it.

And this I do know: that my human failure does not alter God's will—His grand design for His people. I can love well at times but mostly it is too hard for me.

God knows this and that is why He sent His one and only Son to die on the cross for my failures. I need Jesus for His grace covers all my sin, all my shortcomings.

As a result, God sees me as righteous, a person who loves well. The only way to keep my heart from being hard is to BELIEVE in His amazing love for me—this beautiful gift of grace. When I believe I see His love.

And here is the Good news. Again, I would like to share this quote from Timothy Keller who says, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

**T**here is now hope in failure. It's called grace. This is the gift! This is Hope Restored! Amen!!!!

Please pray with me: Lord, how do we keep our hearts from being hard, for we are Your broken people? We need all the help we can get. The pain can be so great. We are often weak. We look to Your Word and hear Your heart and see the design and standards that that You have for us, Your chosen people.

Your will is so unattainable without Your power and strength within us. God, in our humanness we want a checklist of do's and don'ts for healthy relationships. But as You know Lord, none of us meet the criteria. We are incapable of loving well and forgiving others without your spirit living within us. We recognize that our relationship with You is the only way to keep our hearts from hardening. Holy Spirit, come and take up house within our heart.

We claim Your authority over us to live out God's perfect will by your perfect Son's grace that has covered us. In Your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

Blessings: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May you know down deep in your heart how much your Maker truly loves you.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by contacting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)