

“How to Survive a Shark Attack”

Mark 10: 2-16

2 Some Pharisees came and tried to trap Him with this question: “Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?” 3 Jesus answered them with a question: “What did Moses say in the law about divorce?” 4 Well, he permitted it,” they replied. “He said a man can give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away.”

5 But Jesus responded, “He wrote this commandment only as a concession to your hard hearts. 6 But ‘God made them male and female’ from the beginning of creation. 7 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, 8 and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, 9 let no one split apart what God has joined together.”

10 Later, when He was alone with His disciples in the house, they brought up the subject again. 11 HE told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her. 12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries someone else, she commits adultery.”

13 One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so He could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering Him. 14 When Jesus saw what was happening, He was angry with His disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” 16 Then he took the children in His arms and placed His hands on their heads and blessed them.

How many of you have heard the phrase “Reno Divorce”? Reno divorce is culture-speak for a quick and easy dissolution of marriage since the laws of Nevada are legendary for accepting trivial grounds and short residence periods. Like you can be a Nevada resident for a few days and get divorced because you argue too much. No surprise then, that Nevada has the highest divorce rate in the country. Scratch Nevada and what states do you guess would have the most active divorce courts? Not New York, not California! You might be surprised to know that the states with the highest divorce rate after Nevada are Arkansas, Alabama and Oklahoma. Three states in the heart of the Bible Belt. Why do you think that is? A recent study asserts that divorce is more common among evangelical Christians than other religious groups. Why is that? (Part of it is that they are not asking are you a devoted Christ-Follower? They are asking do you believe in Jesus Christ and do you believe in the Bible) But why do you think that people who know the words of Mark 10:9 “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” separate and divorce? Why?

Some say that life is harder for people in the poorer states of the Bible Belt; poverty can be a principal contributor to marital problems. But that can't be the only reason, because Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico are just as poor. Others believe that pressure is put on the devoutly religious to marry young, so that they won't fall into temptation and fall into fornication or sex outside of marriage. Unfortunately, many premature marriages are immature marriages and they end in divorce. [NOTE 1]

But perhaps there's something else causing marital meltdowns. Perhaps these disastrous divorce dramas are due to the fact that Christians aren't prepared for worst case scenarios. They aren't able to see that things could be worse, only that things could be better. Does that make sense? People tend to see and focus on what could be better and complain rather than being grateful for what they have. They totally forget what they didn't like about being single, they totally forget to look at how things could be much worse and they don't think about the pain they will cause to one another, the children, and to the families around them.

Fortunately, for those who are drifting, struggling, falling, or choking in their marriages, *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*, offers a handful of matter-of-fact instructions for those in "worst possible situations". You could be rocking in an earthquake, adrift at sea in shark or jellyfish infested waters, you could be lost in the desert, or trapped in the line of gunfire in a war. Life would be much worse if you were struggling to survive in an avalanche, or on top of a moving train, or in an airplane with a disabled pilot. Perhaps your parachute doesn't open, or your scuba tank is out of air, or someone is choking and the Heimlich maneuver fails. These are TRUE worst-case scenarios—ones that make most marital problems seem rather small or paltry in comparison.

For example: What would you do if you were attacked by a shark? Here's what you do: you hit back—with a camera, probe, harpoon gun, your fist, whatever. Try to strike the shark in the teeth, just kidding. Strike the shark in the eyes or gills, which are the areas most sensitive to pain. Make quick, sharp, repeated jabs in these areas, because sharks are predators and will usually only follow through on an attack if they have the advantage. Bonking the shark on the nose is not the area to attack unless you can't reach the eyes or gills. Hitting back lets the shark know that you are not easy prey or defenseless and may give up.

Sharks usually will not follow through on an attack if you behave like an unappetizing dinner. This is good advice for anyone in such a "worst case scenario." Okay Pastor Rick, what in the world does "how to survive a shark attack" have to do with marriage and divorce? Everything it turns out, especially the part about jabbing the eyes. "How to survive an attack on your marriage takes as much knowledge and courage as "how to survive a shark attack." [NOTE 2]

Many Christians find themselves woefully unprepared when caught in the jaws of a struggling marriage. You see, too many of us Christians hold this “fairytale concept of marriage” that renders us incapable of dealing with marital problems. We have this black and white idea about the right and wrong about marriage and we lose our ability to deal with a less than perfect marriage. With such high expectations of marriage, the perfect becomes the enemy of the good. And if we don’t begin to take care of business, we’re soon going to have a marriage that’s a balloon looking for a pin. **[NOTE 3]**

Do you have a fairy-tale conception of marriage? If you do you can expect a crash when reality doesn’t match your fantasy. Are we marriage partners unprepared for the worst-case scenario, or at least the less-than-I-bargained-for scenario? Conflict is certain to visit any marriage that is at all close. It’s entirely possible that we don’t know what to do to survive a shark attack when the shark is our mate or another man or another woman. We are unprepared to peer into the gaping jaws of a loss of a job, the loss of a child, or the evaporation of a dream.

Jesus is pretty emphatic about divorce. Jesus wants us to make marital stability a priority and to develop the specific skills we need to stay together so that the two shall remain “one flesh” (Mark 10:8). We can argue all we want about just when divorce is permissible and when it is not, but the bottom line is this: Jesus wanted marriages to last. In Micah 2:16 we read, “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the Lord of Heaven’s armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.” In the Bible times when Jesus lived on earth, divorce did not have anything to do with judges or court. It was a common part of life. Either spouse could divorce simply by leaving home with that intention; no justification was needed. The wife might keep her dowry, but the children remained with the father under his authority. The result was that most families were blended with children born from different mothers. In other words society was much like today’s but divorce was even easier back then. **[NOTE 4]**

There was a time that I believed that I did not dare preach on this passage of Scripture. I believed that there would be people who would think to themselves, “Who is he, to give advice on marriage.” Back in May of 1996 my divorce was final. I married Amy in July of 1997 28 years ago. But when God led me to this passage and the Shark Attack analogy, I realized that it isn’t from me, it is from God and I am simply the vessel carrying the message, cracked though I may be. How can anyone of us who are divorced in this church deal with Jesus words, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” Those are hard words! To understand and correctly interpret this passage we need to realize that Jesus is responding to hostile questioners, who are thrying

to trap him and to His disciples who are part of this society that thinks of divorce as an every day occurrence. I mean the writings of the day indicate that a woman could burn the food and her husband could write her a certificate of divorce and send her away. In this context we should not expect to find instructions for the pastoral care of divorced persons. Right? You get my point? Jesus is not addressing those contemplating divorce and seeking His counsel or those struggling in broken relationships. He directs His answer to those who have been mishandling the Scripture and distorting God's will. His reply presents God's perfect will for marriage, which challenges those who want to impose their own will on the marriage relationship. Make no mistake, God hates divorce. We read in a minute ago. God's intent for marriage is that it is a permanent covenant between a man and a woman, a permanent relationship! Matthew records Jesus as including, "Except, in the case of adultery." Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians other legitimate grounds for divorce. Taking the whole Bible into account, we have to believe that Jesus is wanting to restore the sacredness of marriage. Jesus is try to make them see that God's Will is that marriage be a permanent relationship. The bottom line is that we cannot and should never give up. Jesus wasn't discussing when divorce was permissible but the Mosaic law and when is it LAWFUL. He is saying basically that compared to how lightly you take the marriage commitment, never is much closer to the absolute truth. Divorce happens but it is the result of the hardening of the heart and **disobedience to God!** Jesus presents for the Pharisees and His disciples, God's ideal for marriage! [NOTE 5]

Does Jesus' insistence that marriage is indissoluble mean that once a person is divorced, one should never remarry? Some say yes. Some say no. there are may Pastors, theologians, and quote experts on either side. In answering this question we need to recognize that Jesus was not speaking here to those who had experienced the brokenness of a marriage failure; rather, He was responding to a "TEST" question from the Pharisees. What Jesus might have said to people caught in the throes of divorce we can only guess from what He said to the woman caught in adultery in John chapters 7 and 8 or to the Samaritan woman who had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband in the 4th chapter. Here is a hint. Jesus' reaction to these people was not condemnation. Peter received more than one chance to start anew after denying his Lord with curses. You can also infer that others who commit different kinds of ins also get second chances. The principle that Jesus used regarding the Sabbath rules may also apply. The disciples harvested on the Sabbath. When the Pharisees complained Jesus told them that the Sabbath was created for man not man for the Sabbath. If marriage was made for the blessing of humankind, and not humankind for marriage, then it would seem that one who has failed in marriage should have another opportunity to

remarry. One can never dismiss the failure of the past, but, it need not rule over us or prevent us from beginning anew in the grace of God.

God calls us to keep on keeping on choosing to love one another even when we don't feel like it. In a media-hyped, sex-crazed, consumerist culture, we know that our marriages are diving in shark-infested territory. That's why we've got to keep jabbing, poking, and kicking away. We can't think of ourselves as defenseless against the threats to our marriages or easy prey for our culture. **[NOTE 6]**

Whatever is happening in our marriages is not the worst case scenario. We thought we married the IDEAL person, but, as it turns out we really married a flawed REAL person. When conflict crashes our party we have to resist the temptation to go into panic mode. We know that terminator sharks are trolling for fresh meat. Jesus says that in a culture that has given itself up to the sharks, God calls us to be relentlessly attacking, jabbing, poking, and defending God's gift to us—MARRIAGE. Don't give up. Don't let society talk you into thinking you deserve something out there that has to be more perfect than what you've got. That's the lie of society. Everybody thinks there is an ideal person out there that will live you, never argue with you, gladly meet every need, and constantly tell you how wonderful you are. I'm sorry, it ain't out there! At least not for long. The only person ever to live a perfect life was Jesus Christ the Son of God and He's not available! We, as a society, have these unrealistic high expectations at a time when there are fewer and fewer external forces to help hold marriages together.

It's really simple. God hates divorce. God hates the sin, but NOT the sinner. While God hates divorce, we must remember that God does not hate the person who is divorced! The church must direct sinners to God's offer of forgiveness and provide a place for them to experience God's healing! There is no unforgiveable sin save for blaspheming the Holy Spirit which is giving credit to the evil one what was accomplished by God the Holy Spirit.

[NOTE 7] What are you going to do about it? Pray for strength and diligence to communicate well with your spouse. Maintain a realistic attitude. Spend quality time alone with your spouse. Choose to focus on the positive ...catch one another doing things right! Don't give up trying to love God and love people!

If you are married and if you want to make the best of your life, then start with yourself and keep on keeping on choosing to love the one that God gave you as your spouse. Do not harden your heart but open up and start sharing. Talk, communicate, get some good Christian or Bible-based counseling, and make your relationship the highest priority outside of your relationship to God and it will work. It's God's Will. In any situation, God's first best for you is for your marriage to last. So don't just give in to the sharks. Fight them! Fight for your marriage, for God's best for you, and for Jesus' sake! Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “How to Survive a Shark Attack”
based on Mark 10: 2-16 given October 19, 2025 in Doster Church

- I. Christians in general are not ready or prepared for worst-case scenarios. They focus on what could be better instead of even considering how good it is compared to the worst-case scenario.
- II. How to survive an attack on your marriage takes as much knowledge and courage as how to survive a shark attack.
- III. The perfect can become the enemy of good. We have to have realistic expectations. Couples need to understand that conflict will happen!
- IV. It is very clear in the Bible that God hates sin and that God hates divorce. Jesus’ words in Mark 10 are hard to read. I almost left the ministry because of them. To interpret we have to understand who Jesus is talking to, what He wants to accomplish, and discern how we live in light of it.
- V. We can never dismiss the failures of our past but they need not rule over us or prevent us from beginning anew in the grace of God.
- VI. There is not one perfect person in the world specifically made for you. All “ideal” persons are flawed and sinful people. God hates divorce. He hates the sin, not the sinner. There is no unforgivable sin, except blaspheming the Holy Spirit, attributing God’s work to satan (evil).
- VII. What are you going to do about it? Pray for strength and diligence to communicate well, maintain a realistic attitude, spend quality time alone with your spouse, and choose to focus on the positive ...catch one another doing things right! (Write down an “I will ...” statement)