

Marriage and the Man in the Mirror

The Role of a Husband

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning men. It's a joy to be here today, excited about being with you and having the opportunity to talk about marriage and The Man in the Mirror. Of course 2 of the first people I said hello to this morning are the guys that have been married 62 and 66 years, over here with Al and Jim. Anybody else married 60 years or more in the room? Look at this, this is great. Yeah, I've got a lot to say to you guys, this is perfect. Talk about a crowd ... You all can go to sleep, you my permission, okay? I won't throw anything at you if you're sleeping during the message, you have a pass on this one. But we're so grateful for you guys leading the way for us and pointing us in the right direction.

If you want to go ahead and turn in your Bibles, we're going to be looking at Genesis chapter 3 first, and then we'll also be looking at Ephesians chapter 5. Genesis chapter 3 will be the first scripture that we're going to. We're going to be talking this morning about the role of a husband. Marriage is tough, those of you that are married know that, and by the way much of what we're going to share today are truths that are applicable to many different places of your life. If you're not married here today it's not like this message is going to be meaningless to you, you can apply these truths in the context of friendships, parenting, relationships with siblings, co-workers, lots of different situations.

We're just going to be focusing on how they apply in the context of marriage. Marriage is difficult, you've got 2 people, you're both sinners, you're dealing with all kinds of different stressors in your lives. It's tough. We see guys all across the country struggling in the area of marriage. You've heard us say this before but if we took all of the marriage problems and put them on a scale on this side, and took every other problem that men are dealing with and put them on a scale on this side, what we see is the scale would go like this. Because marriage tends to dominate the issues that men struggle with.

I know for me, I've been married 28 years this summer and still there are things that we have to work on. The way that we fit together is not exactly right. I remember just probably 4 or 5 months ago Ruthie and I had a discussion, you may have had some of those in your marriage. At some point she started, she's done this, this is a pattern. She started talking to me using language and an aggressiveness and this kind of stuff in a way that I would never talk to her. Anybody ever felt like that in your marriage?

Okay we have some people like that. You're honest enough to say that. You know what I did? I'm so mature, I'm so above it, I did not respond in kind, I did not rise to that bait. I just said, "You know if she's going to talk to me that way then this conversation's over." I just checked out, because I'm so mature and I've got it all together and I'm willing to do what she's willing to do. Think about it, think about how dysfunctional that is. She's not acting the way I want so I'm just going to take my ball and go home.

It's crazy, marriage is tough. Sometimes we wonder, "Why is it so difficult?" We're going to look at that. The first thing that I want to talk about though is that the essential character of men and women. Today

there's a lot of debates, some of them are kind of silly when you see some of the extreme people acting as if there's no differences between men and women. Do you have 2 eyes? There's differences. We know there are physical differences but are there emotional, psychological differences? We know hormones are different and we know hormones affect the brain.

There's a lot of research going on now on exactly how men and women are different and what kinds of motivations and drives and all those kinds of things. But when you go back to the scriptures you can see a couple of things. The first thing that we see is that Adam of course was created in the garden from the dust, and then woman is formed from Adam. The word that's used for the women is an ezer, E-Z-E-R, in the Hebrew.

Sometimes some of the translations talk about a helper suitable for him, and that's an okay translation but I think it misses some of the key there because one of the things that that word connotes, it's actually a military term often. 16 times in the old testament it refers to God and the way he relates to His people. It really implies and it really carries the weight as someone who comes alongside and lends their strength, an essential counterpart, a complement who makes this person stronger or better. That's the idea that's conveyed by that term.

When you think about then the nature of a woman and you compare that to Adam, Adam's primary task, Adam's primary calling, think about some of the things God asked him to do. He asked him to cultivate the garden, He asked him to subdue the Earth, He asked him to procreate and fill the Earth. These are all very active kinds of tasks that God has given. Adam has this active energy that he is supposed to use to shape and impact the world.

These are the 2 types of people that are coming together, men are supposed to initiate and act, a woman comes alongside, she adds her strength. She's a complement to the man. That's how it's supposed to look, but let's look at Genesis chapter 3. Genesis chapter 3, we're going to start there, verses 1 through 6.

It says, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate."

We know of course that this tragic story is where the brokenness and the fallenness of the world came from. It all entered in to here because of Eve's decision to listen to the serpent and to eat. And you know, think about Adam, he's probably what? Slaving away in the garden, working hard for a living. He's probably defending the garden from whatever threats are available to it, working hard and over here behind his back Eve is talking to the serpent. He has no idea what's going on.

Then he finds out what's happened and he's devastated, "I can't believe that you did this." Is that what happened? What's the next phrase in that verse? "she also gave some to her husband who was with her." "Who was with her," Adam was there the whole time. Adam was there the whole time. It makes

you wonder, there's a lot of questions that come from this. A lot of questions, because what was Adam thinking? Honestly.

First of all, who did God give this command to about the tree? Genesis chapter 2 verse 18, it's before Eve is even made. Verse 16, "You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." No He didn't say anything about not touching it, did He? He said to Adam.

Here the serpent is talking to Eve, Eve misquotes God to the serpent, Adam is standing there and Adam doesn't step in and say, "Let me help out here a second. First of all that's not what God said, and second of all we aren't listening to you because we trust God more than we trust you. Forget it, this isn't happening." I have no idea, was he thinking, "God you made me one, if she dies when she eats it you will make me another one."

He said you're going to die, and he's letting Eve just eat it. It doesn't make any sense, and yet let's think about our lives. How often is there something going on in our relationship with our wife that we know is not right, that we know is not that way that God would want it to be, but it feels easier to step back and let sleeping dogs lie, than it does to step into that situation and try to deal with it? We all do this.

Adam steps back in passivity at the very moment that he should have stepped up to be an active initiator to try to solve the problem, instead he steps back in passivity. We don't know what he was thinking, hoping things would just work themselves out. That of course led to where we are today. You know I can identify with this, with Adam, because I know situations in my marriage when there are things going on and there's so much emotions flying around and there's so much stress and there's so much anger, maybe between the kids and mom and whatever else, and all I wanted to do is go away.

I just want peace again. I'm not necessarily looking for the right solution, I'm not necessarily looking to try be a positive force in that situation to get us to the right place, I just want everybody to calm down. We've all been there as men, we're fallen men relating to fallen women in a fallen world, and yet let's look at Ephesians chapter 5 together.

Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 through 33, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Paul gives us this incredibly high standard for what a husband is supposed to be and do. A redeemed husband, a transformed husband is supposed to love his wife the way Christ loves the church. As a matter of fact he says explicitly that the marriage union is meant to reflect the greater and deeper reality of the union between Christ and the church. That's what we have an opportunity to present to the world, as husbands we can model a Christ-like love in our marriage relationship, the cause of the power of Christ within us.

That's our mandate, that we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church. How do we do that? I'm going to give you 3 ideas about the role of a man, not just in marriage, again this is in I think every aspect of our lives. How do we channel this masculine energy? This is not original with me, a number of different folks have come up with these terms and expanded on them. You can find a lot of things on the internet. I'm going to give 3 words and those are to pursue, to protect and to provide. The role of a husband, to pursue, to protect and to provide.

The first one is to pursue. How does Adam react when he sees Eve? Anybody remember? Yeah, this is, wow. You've made something incredible, this is bone of my bone, this is flesh of my flesh. This intimacy, this gathering in of Eve. He pursues her and draws her to himself. Then we think about, how did Christ love the church? Lots of examples of this but one of the most simple one would be Luke 19:10, Jesus says he "came to seek and to save the lost." He's pursuing his bride the church. He's pursuing you and I, it's even called the hound of heaven, because he's out going after those that he intends to save.

In our relationship with our wives we need to pursue her. Women were created to invite delight, that's one of the characteristics of a woman, she invites delight from others. For example when you got up this morning and you were putting on your clothes, probably in a fairly dark room, my guess nobody took the time to look in the mirror and do all this and then look at themselves and do this and give it one of these. Do I look delightful today?

Probably none of us did that. Some of us are lucky that we have the same kind of socks on, or that we ended with 2 shoes that matched, or whatever. But your wife's not like that. She is going to take the time to invite delight. It's a part of who she is. Sometimes it can distort into vanity that's inappropriate, but that in itself is a characteristic of God to invite delight. God wants us to delight in Him. He wants us to see how majestic and beautiful and amazing he is, that's a good thing, and it's a good thing that women reflect that image.

We were made to pursue her, to cherish her, to love her and to take delight in her in a way that complements this essential character of who she is. When we pursue her then it allows her to experience that appreciation, someone delighting in her, that connects with her at the very core of who she is made, in the image of God. Each of you on your tables has a marriage prayer card. We're going to be talking about this prayer over the next 3 weeks and coming at this from a little bit different angle.

I want you to look at a couple of the phrases here. One of them on the side where the men are to pray it says, "Help me love you more than her and her more than anyone or anything else," to value her. Then it says, "I want to hear her cherish her and serve her." I want to hear her cherish her and server her, to pursue her. Again this applies in lots of different relationships. If you have employees or co-workers, if you have friends, everyone wants to be pursued to some extent. Everyone wants to know that somebody else takes an interest in them.

If you're like me and you're an introvert and you have to meet people, the easiest thing to do is to come up with 4 or 5 questions about them. "Tell me about your kids. Tell me about your grandkids." You won't have to say a word because everybody loves to talk about themselves. They want someone to take an interest in them. People want to be pursued, and our wives are the same way. Now why is that difficult? It's difficult because we're fallen people in a fallen world.

Let me give you an example from my marriage. Ruthie over the years would get angry with me, usually justified, over something that was going on. She would get emotional and she would leave me, maybe she'd go back to the bedroom, maybe she'd even leave the house and take a walk. Now if I'm in a room with somebody, they get angry and they leave and go to another room, what does that mean? They want to be alone, right?

I am, out of courtesy and concern for her, saying, "Hey, she wants to be alone. I'd rather work this out, but she wants to be alone, I'm going to leave her alone." Right? Wrong. Wrong answer. When there's emotions involved, let me give you a hint, when there's emotions involved whatever you think you should do, seriously consider doing the opposite because she may just very well be right. Because what Ruthie wants me to do is follow her and sit with her and let her be angry, let her cry, let her vent, let her do whatever she wants to do, but she wants me to actually pursue her.

This is incredibly uncomfortable, right? This woman is telling you how terrible you are and how much she dislikes you and all this stuff and she wants you to come and get abused more by them, and just take it on the chin. This is why it's hard to pursue her, but we do that because that's what God calls us to do. Some of you are not pursuing your wife because you've taken her for granted. She's always been there, she's very good at doing the kind of things that you want her to do, everything is going along fine. You've taken her for granted.

Some of you are ready to give up because you try to pursue and you're not getting what you want. The results aren't there, year after year after year, you've been working at it, you've been trying, you've been serving, you've been loving, you've been listening. You've been trying to do all these different things and it's not working and so you're ready to throw in the towel. But the reality is that we are not pursuing our wives because of the results that we want to get for us, we are pursuing our wives because that's what God calls us to do. That's what God calls us to do.

This passage in Ephesians tell us that the goal is to present her holy and blameless, to help her become everything that God wants her to be. That may be an incredibly slow process. It's never going to be perfect in this life, but we're still called to have perseverance, to stick with it, to continue to pursue, even in a fallen world.

Secondly, we're called to protect our spouse. Again, we provide protection in a lot of areas of our lives. We should be doing that with our friends, we should be doing that with our co-workers, with our children, with our extended family. But with our spouses, Adam was told to subdue the Earth. There obviously are some dangers there. We know one danger is to disobey God. If you eat of the tree you're going to die, there was a danger that Adam was supposed to protect Eve from, and his family from. We know there was a serpent that lied and deceived and Adam should have been protecting from this serpent.

Adam had a role of protecting. We need to be willing to suffer for our families, to be on the lookout for dangers. We need to be taking our spouses back. She needs to know that we take her side, that we have her back. Sometimes it means to challenge our wives to provide protection. "Hey if we make this decision, if we continue to go this way, if this continues to define our relationship we're going to end up in a place that I don't think we want to be. We need to find a different way of dealing with this."

Or maybe she doesn't want to go to church because people have said some things, or hurt her feelings, she had an idea or she was doing a ministry and people said something bad and now there's all those broken relationships, it's just too painful, I don't want to anymore. What are you going to do? You've got to figure out how to wade into that. It's a tough situation, right? It's fraught with all kinds of landmines, but the reality is we know we're supposed to be in church with one another, we know we're supposed to have authentic relationships with one another. You've got to have to have a tough conversation.

You have to say, "Look, we're going to have to work through this. I know it hurts, I know it's painful. I don't have any easy answer for you. I don't know if it means working it out at our church. I don't know if it means resolving that and getting in another church, or whatever, but you need to know we're not going to go this direction forever, because we need to be in church and we need to have those kind of relationships."

Think about the way that Jesus provides for his people. He provided forgiveness for us. He provides the way for us to have a relationship with God. He gives us the power, his resurrection power, through his holy spirit. Jesus is giving us everything we need the scripture says for a life in salvation. We need to be a life giving force with our wives. Jesus says that no one can snatch them out of my hands in John 28. Romans 8, nothing can separate us from the love of God, he protects his people.

We need to make sure that we save some emotional energy to invest in protecting our wives, and then finally we need to provide for them. Adam was told to cultivate the garden. Not just materially provide for our family but also emotionally and spiritually provide for our spouse. We should be creating that environment like Jesus does for us. Jesus creates that environment for us, where we grow, through the church, through friends, through the word of God, through the preaching of the word, through the sacraments. All these things allow us to grow. They feed our souls. We should be doing the same thing in our marriage. We need to figure out what our wives need and how we can provide that to help them become everything that God wants them to be.

Now how does this get off track? You guys have all seen these crime shows where they recreate a crime scene because of the evidence that's there. They'll maybe take a look at the body and where it's laying. They'll look at the type of injuries that it has, and then they'll look at the blood spatters. They'll say the impact came from this direction and there was this much force involved in it, so it had to be a big man. Whatever, these kind of things. How do they do that?

They're looking at the results of the forces that were involved in the crime. Because of the results of those forces that were used in the commission of the crime, they can then backtrack and say, "Okay, this type of force must have been applied because it got this result." Sometimes we can do the same things in our marriage when we diagnose what's going on with our marriage. For example, if our marriage is distorted and we have an overly aggressive husband, an authoritarian person, my way or the highway kind of guy, then you're going to see the results of that force in the wife.

Sometimes what happens with a woman in that situation is you'll have a woman that will become a defiant wife. She will, the more that he tries to control and command and dictate, the more that she bows up and says, "No I'm not going to this anymore. I don't like the way you treat me. Why are you acting like this?" She becomes more and more defiant. Some of us may see some of those characteristics in our wives. If we see the result of the force we ought to look and say, "What kind of force am I applying in this situation? Have I become an overly aggressive, a dictating kind of husband, that's not really listening to my wife, that's not really engaging with her?"

A second that will happen is we'll have a defeated wife, you'll have a wife that just gives up. Feels like she can't have a voice, she can't play a role, she's not important and she becomes a doormat. Sometimes we see this when a guy is becoming overly aggressive, that his wife is not flourishing, she's shrinking. She's becoming less and less, rather than becoming more and more. Another type of way that this gets distorted, you have the guy that steps up in his own strength, that's the overly aggressive guy. He's like, "I'm going to handle this. I'm going to do this. I can make this happen." He's doing it all on his own effort, with his own agenda.

Then you have the passive husband, who does what Adam did in Genesis 3, who steps back and says, "Whatever happens happens." This is very easy to do in some subtle ways. I don't know about you guys but my work has often a lot of decisions. A lot of things going on, a lot of things up in the air, sorting through things, making decisions. I can remember when I would come home and Ruthie would say something to me like, "Sarah's thinking about taking music instead of art history for her elective, what do you think?" I'm like, "Seriously? After everything I did today you think I want to talk about music versus art history? I could absolutely care less which elective she takes." This is what I'm thinking.

But of course there could be lots of reasons why this is important, it could change schedules, it could be different friends that she's going to be with. It could make a difference in the way that she's going to be able to do her course load. All kinds of things, maybe she has to miss another class because she's doing this. None of which I know, and none of which I care about in the moment because I'm tired. It's easy for me to step back and take the easy road, "Whatever you think dear. Whatever you want."

If you start doing that, then what's going to happen? She's going to start just deciding. "I know he's going to say, 'I don't care,' he doesn't care." Then you're going to get home and you're going to find out that such and such decision was made. At first you may say, "That's great. I'm so glad I didn't have to talk about that. I'm so glad that she handled that, that's fantastic." But as that gets to be a bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger piece of the pie, what we realize is that we are no longer providing that masculine active energy in our family, that we have stepped out of that role, we have become a passive husband.

What happens with a vacuum? Nature abhors a vacuum. When there's a vacuum something rushes in to fill it. If a man steps back in his marriage relationship and is no longer providing that active masculine energy into the family context, guess what? His wife is going to fill that role. Often what we see is we see a woman who becomes a demanding wife. She's taking control, she's dealing with things, she is making things happen and she gets used to it, and she likes it. One of the curses on Eve, one of the ways to interpret the curse on Eve, your desire will be for your husband. The idea there is that it's a passion, it's almost a delusional kind of passion. It's an incredibly strong passion to dominate.

A man who steps back and allows his wife to take over everything, that's going to touch some of the very most fleshly parts of her. You can get into a very dysfunctional relationship. It might work great, she pays all the bills, she makes all the scheduling decisions, she deals with all the homework for the kids, she does everything related to the yard and the service that cuts the grass, on and on and on. All of that's hers, I go to work. The problem is you're probably not helping her flourish to become everything that God wants her to be.

In many cases you end up with a woman who's become more and more and more controlling in that relationship, but there's another thing that happens. That is that a woman can become a deflated wife. A woman who really wants her husband to be engaged, that doesn't just want to take control of everything, that wants to become a Godly woman, Godly relationship, and he's just passive and passive,

"Whatever you think dear, whatever you want dear. I've got to work late tonight. I'm sorry I'm not going to be there." Stepping back, stepping back, stepping back, "Yeah, the kids are in trouble. Hey do you mind going to the meeting with the principal? I've got something at work." Stepping back, stepping back.

Eventually she wants to give up. She's so discouraged that her husband ... I see this quite a bit. I see this quite a bit. I saw both of these last 2 in the last week. We had an interaction with a vendor, it was a husband and wife team, although it was hard to call it a husband and wife team, because it was a wife that was 100% in control and taking the bull by the horns. It was the husband who wanted to do as little as possible and get out of there as quickly as he could.

Literally in about 30 seconds you could see this dynamic. The guy had totally checked out, he was done. It was so discouraging. I had to interact with these people over 10, 15 hours over a period of about a week. It was so toxic to see what was going on. I had another situation with some acquaintances where a guy has checked out of his relationship, focused on his work, doesn't really involve himself. Now there's all kinds of chaos in the family, with the kids and the woman is so deflated and so dejected and so depressed, because what can she do? Her husband won't step up, and he hasn't stepped up for years.

She has no way to figure out how to change that. She's completely depressed. It's very difficult if you're an overly aggressive husband that's trying to do it in your own strength, that's trying to mandate everything. It's very difficult for your wife. It's almost impossible for your wife to react and act in a Godly way. In other words instead of you making- She can, and there are lots of women who are doing a great job trying to do this, but you're making it incredibly hard for her to do that.

If you're a passive husband who has stepped back, then you're making it very, very difficult for your wife to respond and react in a Godly way. The Big Idea for today is, **If you don't step up, she can't come alongside. If you don't step up she can't come alongside.** The goal is that we would help our wives flourish, that we would love her the way Christ loves the church. How do we step up?

The first thing we do is we look to Christ. Christ is the one who gives us the strength. We see the love that he has for us. We see the way that he loves the church. We believe what he's done for us. We believe that the spirit give us power to enter into those difficult situations. Guys don't like to step into places where they don't know the answer. I don't know about you but I hate working on things where I really don't believe I can accomplish it. If I have to try to fix the carburetor on a lawnmower, I won't get into that story today but it was a joke. I felt so inadequate because I'd never done anything like this before.

I'm trying to follow this YouTube video, the guys hands are in front of the camera. I'm like, "Seriously? You can't move the camera?" He's like, "Take this thing off and move it over here and then grab this piece to come out and then you can put it down here." He moves his hands and the thing looks totally different. I'm like, "Okay, rewind. What just happened?" How hard is it to move the camera so you can see what you're doing? Not hard.

Men hate to step into situations where we don't feel like we're adequate, where we can really handle it. But we have to in marriage. God calls us to step up, just wade into it. How do we have that? You can't just make yourself do that with willpower, you can't just say, "I'm going to cowboy up and do this." You might be able to do that for a little while but when you start getting beat down, it's going to be easy to say, "Oh well, that wasn't worth it."

No, we do it because we know that's the calling of Christ, we know that there's more joy and more hope and more blessing and more righteousness and more power on the other side of going through that difficult situation than there would be if we stepped back. We have to believe that in our hearts, we have to look to Christ. I would encourage you today to evaluate your marriage. How are you doing in pursuing, protecting, providing? How are you doing in helping your wife become everything God wants her to be? How brave are you? Are you brave?

It's okay to answer, are you brave? Some of you are like, "Not so much," some of you are like, "Yeah, I'm brave!" Here you go, here's the test to see how brave you are. This weekend take the challenge, ask her these questions from the marriage prayer. Honey, do you feel loved and cherished? Let her answer you. Do you feel pursued? Do you feel like I actively show you my love? Do you feel protected? Do you feel provided for? Am I doing a good job of helping you become everything God wants you to be? Then just listen.

Let your wife respond however she would. Some of them won't be honest because they're not used to being honest with you. You may have to stop them and say, "Look, I just want the unvarnished truth here. Tell me exactly what you really feel." Take the challenge, step up. Look to Christ, believe what he said is true, that when we love our wives we really are loving ourselves. Let's pray.

Father we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for how it speaks to us as men and Lord we pray that you would help us to be men who step forward, who use that masculine energy in every area of our lives for productive things, to make a difference, to bring transformation, to bring change, to bring redemption. Not that we would step back and become passive and allow life to happen to us. Not that we would be overly aggressive and try to take everything into our hands and try to make sure that we get things our way.

But we would be men would model the love of Christ, who look for the best in others, and particularly in our wives who try to help them become everything that you would have them to be. I pray that you would allow us to pursue, to protect them, to provide for them Lord, so that they could flourish. Lord when it's tough, when we are facing difficult marriage and difficult relationships and wondering how we can keep pushing forward, or hitting dead end after dead end after dead end, Lord I pray for those men.

I pray that you'd give them faith to believe, believe in your power in them and your power in their wives, that you really can bring transformation. Lord we pray that you would do it in us first of all, and then in our marriages. For your glory we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.