

Marriage and the Man in the Mirror

I Married a Woman I Couldn't Change

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Ephesians, Chapter 5, if you would open there. We would like to welcome the guests from the FUEL Conference which is Man in the Mirror's annual meeting which started last night, training actually started Sunday night. A number of those men are joining us here today so I wonder if you would join in welcoming the men from FUEL, an honor to have you with us.

I saw our new annual report. We'll get you guys a copy of it here eventually. Just saw it, I was pretty excited. I didn't run the math until this morning. I just saw it on the screen last night at the meeting. We just hit, for this Bible study, 6000 downloads per week. 6000 others are joining us each week. As you know, many of those are doing small groups. We really don't know how many people are in the Bible study, but anyway it's a lot. We do a shout-out each week to a group. Today, the group is to the Enterprise Baptist Men's Group, 6 guys. They've been meeting for a year at church on Sundays at 5:30pm. James Taylor is their leader. They belong to the Enterprise Baptist Church in Enterprise, Mississippi, which I guess is near Meridian. I wonder if you would join me in giving a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Enterprise Baptist Men's Group. One, two, three, hurrah. Welcome, guys. We're glad to have you with us.

The series that we're doing here is Marriage and the Man in the Mirror. You should know that I timed this series to happen when FUEL would be taking place so that those people who chose to come to the Bible study from FUEL would be able to be in on this marriage deal. The reason for that is if we were to take all of the problems that we deal with as men, and this is something that we have learned at Man in the Mirror over the years, if you take all of the problems with which we deal and we put the marriage prayer over here by itself in one silo. Then we take all of the other problems with which men struggle and put them over here in a second silo, the marriage silo by itself is bigger than all of the other problems that men face combined. Easily the number one problem that men face in a general way is that their marriages don't work the way that God intended them to work.

We're going to be looking at Ephesians Chapter 5 as I said earlier. I've been teaching on marriage and writing on marriage for 30 years so I've covered a lot of waterfront. I wanted to show you a little bit of a different angle this morning. We did a little series, guys, for you who are not normally here, on Sex and the Man in the Mirror, which, of course, is a huge piece of the marital relationship. One of the guys that sits at this table right here, he's not here this morning, he's a little bit of an older gentleman. I was leaving the parking lot and he was driving out. He pulled up. He rolled down his window and he said, "I just want you to know, even at my age, it's not like eating and sleeping anymore but it's still good."

The angle that I want us to take a look at this morning is I married a woman I couldn't change. You probably married the same woman. Some of you are not married. Of course, the principles that we're talking about in here apply to relationships in a very general way but also if you have a woman or a

companion or a friend that you're not married to, some of these principles would apply there as well. When I say that I married a woman I couldn't change, what I'm really talking about is the first thing, irreconcilable differences, all those irreconcilable differences. I'm going to share with you a piece from Dave Barry. Some of you are familiar with, he's a columnist and a humorist. I'm going to read this because it's so long:

Let's say a guy named Roger is attracted to a woman named Elaine. He asks her out to a movie. She accepts. They have a pretty good time. A few nights later, he asks her out to dinner again and they enjoy themselves. They continue to see each other regularly. After a while, neither one of them is seeing anyone else. Then one evening, when they're driving home, a thought occurs to Elaine. Without really thinking she says it out loud. "Do you realize that as of tonight, we have been seeing each other for exactly 6 months?" Then there is silence in the car. To Elaine, it seems like a loud silence. She thinks to herself, "Gee, I wonder if it bothers him that I said that. Maybe he's feeling confined by our relationship. Maybe he thinks I'm trying to push him into some kind of obligation that he doesn't want or isn't sure of."

Roger is thinking, "Gosh, 6 months."

Elaine is thinking, "Hey, I'm not so sure I want this kind of relationship either. Sometimes I wish I had a little more space so I'd have time to think about whether I really want to keep going the way we are, moving steadily. Where are we going? Are we just going to keep seeing each other at this level of intimacy? Are we headed toward marriage, toward children, toward a lifetime together? Am I really ready for that level of commitment? Do I really know this person?"

Roger is thinking, "That means it was, let's see, February. It was February when we started going out, which was right after I had the car at the dealer's, which means ... Let me check the odometer. Whoa! I am way overdue for an oil change here."

Elaine is thinking, "He's upset. I can see it on his face. Maybe I'm reading this completely wrong. Maybe he wants more from a relationship, more intimacy, more commitment. Maybe he sensed even before I sensed it, that I was feeling some reservations. Yes, I bet that's it. That's why he's so reluctant to say anything about his feelings. He's afraid of being rejected."

Roger is thinking, "I'm going to have them look at that transmission again. I don't care what those morons say, it's still not shifting right. They better not try to blame it on cold weather this time. What cold weather, it's 87 degrees and this thing is shifting like a garbage truck. I paid those incompetent thieves \$600."

Elaine is thinking, "He's angry. I don't blame him. I'd be angry, too. I feel so guilty putting him through this but I can't help the way I feel. I'm just not sure."

Roger is thinking, "They'll probably say it was a 90-day warranty. Scumbags."

Elaine is thinking, "Maybe I'm too idealistic waiting for a knight to come riding in on a white horse when I'm sitting right next to a perfectly good person, a person I enjoy, a person I truly do care about, a person who seems to truly care about me, a person who is in pain because of my self-centered schoolgirl romantic fantasy."

Roger is thinking, "Warranty, they want a warranty. I'll give them a warranty. I'll take their warranty and stick it in their ear."

"Roger", Elaine says aloud.

"What?" says Roger startled.

"Please don't torture yourself like this," she says, her eyes beginning to brim with tears. "Maybe I should never have ... Oh, I feel so ..." and she breaks down sobbing.

"What?" says Roger.

"I'm such a fool," Elaine sobs. "I mean, I know there's no knight. I really know that. It's silly. There's no knight and there is no horse. You think I'm a fool, don't you?" Elaine said.

"No," says Roger, glad to finally know the correct answer.

Then Elaine says, "It's just that I need some time."

There's a 15-second pause while Roger, thinking as fast as he can, tries to come up with a safe response. Finally, he comes up with one that he thinks might work. "Yes," he says.

Elaine, deeply moved touched his hand. "Oh, Roger, do you really feel that way?" she says.

"What way?" says Roger.

"That way about time," she says.

"Oh, yes," says Roger.

Elaine turns to face him and gazes deeply into his eyes, causing him to become very nervous about what she might say next, especially if it involves a horse. Then she speaks. "Thank you, Roger," she said.

"Thank you," says Roger. Then he takes her home. She lies on her bed, a conflicted tortured soul and weeps until dawn.

When Roger gets back to his place, he opens a bag of Doritos, turns on the TV, and immediately becomes deeply involved in a rematch of a Czechoslovakian tennis match of players he's never heard of. A tiny voice in the far recess of his mind tells him that something major was going on back there in the car but he's pretty sure there's no way he would ever understand what, so he figures it's better if he doesn't spend time thinking about it.

The next day, Elaine calls her close friend, actually 2 of them. They talk about the situation for 6 straight hours. In painstaking detail they will analyze everything she said and everything he said, going over it time and time again, exploring every word, expression, and gesture for the nuance and meaning, considering every possible ramification. They will continue to discuss the subject on and off for weeks, maybe months, never reaching any definite conclusions but never getting bored of it either.

Meanwhile, Roger while playing racquetball one day with a mutual friend of his and Elaine's, will pause just before serving, frown and say, 'Norm, did Elaine ever own a horse?'

The most obvious difference between men and women and the most obvious source of irreconcilable differences is male/female. It's just the whole gender thing but there are lots of other things that cause what we consider to be at least "irreconcilable differences". You'll notice I have it in quotes. What are some of the other things, just maybe something that occurs to you off the top of your mind, something that is an irreconcilable difference, generally thought of that way? What are a few ideas?

Audience: I like a table. She likes a booth.

Patrick Morley: What's that?

Audience: I like a table. She likes a booth.

Patrick Morley: Table/booth, okay.

Audience: I like it cooler and she likes it hotter.

Patrick Morley: Cooler and hotter, okay. Got it. What else?

Audience: She likes to make a decision right now and I like to think about it.

Patrick Morley: Okay, decision-making, differences in decision-making.

Audience: Raising kids.

Patrick Morley: Parenting values and raising kids, these are good. What else?

Audience: How to spend money.

Patrick Morley: How to spend money. Yeah, what's important financially.

Audience: Hallmark Channel.

Patrick Morley: I didn't know that you like the Hallmark Channel. That's good to know.

Audience: Vacations.

Patrick Morley: Yeah, where to go on vacations. She's neat. He's a slob. Differences in sexual appetites, a huge, huge issue. Trust me, talking with men like I do all day, that's a huge issue. What else?

Audience: Paint on the wall.

Patrick Morley: What is it?

Audience: Paint on the wall.

Patrick Morley: Paint on the wall, what's that mean?

Audience: She wants different colors.

Patrick Morley: Different colors, okay.

Audience: versus pastels versus wallpaper ...

Patrick Morley: I didn't know that you were into pastels, that's good to know. What else? Yeah.

Audience: She wants my opinion about things I don't care about.

Patrick Morley: She wants your opinion about things you don't care about and doesn't want your opinion about things you do care about, by the way. Yeah. There are other things like hobbies, communication methods, you talk too much, don't talk enough, religion. The list goes on and on, doesn't it? On and on, doesn't it?

There is a family systems scholar, Edwin Friedman. In his book, *Generation to Generation*, he draws a conclusion. It's not actually science but it's his measured hypothesis, I suppose. He says that in reality no marriage scores higher than 70%. When I first read that, I ran it by my wife because I think we have a great marriage, but it rang true to me. It rang true when I read that. We talked it over and we pretty much came to an agreement that just as a concept, whether it's 80/20 or 70/30 or 60/40, who knows, but anyway this idea of a score of 70%, that's about right because when you put 2 sinful, self-centered human beings who are trying to not be sinful and self-centered. You put them together and they're rubbing against each other all day long, there's going to be some friction. There are these irreconcilable differences.

There's another book. It's not a Christian book but I would highly recommend it. It's called *The Science of Happily Ever After*. Tashiro is the author. To summarize the book, his basic thesis is that, number one, these are my words but I think it's a fair assessment, number one, people don't change. People don't change. He makes the point in the book, with a lot of labor, I might add, and science and illustrations, that engagements don't change people. Marriage doesn't change people. Babies don't change people. Basically, who you marry today is who you're going to be married to for the rest of your life.

That doesn't mean that you can't make improvements but the basic die is cast. People go into marriage thinking they're going to change their spouse when in reality most don't. This is the reason that a lot of marriages really are not happy because people thought that they were going to go in and they were going to change their spouse. Then they find they're unable to do so and that there are these differences. Florence Littauer, an author, she wrote "We are attracted to each other's strengths and then go home to live with each other's weaknesses." Kind of an interesting way of looking at it.

The other thing though is that, Tashiro in his book, *The Science of Happily Ever After*, he points out that yes, people don't change but the number one predictor of marital happiness is compatibility. Again, that's a paraphrase of what he said but the primary determiner of marital happiness is compatibility, just being able to get along. It's figuring out how to leverage the 70%, you see, and then how to manage the 30% or do a work-around, if you will, on the 30%. I have discovered the secret of compatibility, and it's not divorce. I have discovered the secret of compatibility and I'm going to share it with you right now

because this is the work-around, this is the work-around on the 30% when you're married to a woman that you cannot control or you're involved with a woman that you cannot control, you cannot change, she will not change, and you will not change either. This is the secret. This is the Big Idea for the day. The Big Idea for the day is this: **I let you be you and you let me be me.**

When I finally figured this out after 30 years of marriage, this concept completely revolutionized my marriage. I'm not saying it's still not a 70/30 marriage. It is. It's still a 70/30 deal but this has allowed me to develop a work-around for those 30% of things. Let me just give you one example. We're opening up an office in Asia. We've appointed ... A pilot test, an international pilot test. We've appointed a continent director for Asia, headquartered out of Singapore.

He flew into Orlando. The only time that he could meet was on Sunday, Sunday afternoon at 4:00. We also have a man that we're bringing on board part-time at the headquarters to sort of oversee all of this, and he could meet at 4:00. Brett Clemmer who's our vice-president, he's kind of like in charge of all this, he could meet, so we're meeting at 4:00. We decided to meet at my home office at 4:00. I have one hour for the meeting because at 5:00 we're going to leave. We're going to take my wife's parents to dinner because taking my wife's parents to dinner is more important to me than being successful in Asia, reaching men. That's where I am, okay? That's my priority. It's my priority because they're my wife's parents and I love her and that's her priority.

My wife says to me an hour before the meeting which has been scheduled now for a long time, "We need to leave 10 minutes early today." I've got a guy coming all the way from Singapore for a one hour meeting that's already so tight I can barely stand it and she said, "Oh, we need to leave 10 minutes early." I say, "Aaaagh! Why can't I control this woman better?" No, I didn't say that. I said, "Yes, dear, whatever you say. It's my fault. I won't let it happen again." I tell everybody that I need to leave 10 minutes early and I push this meeting. It was awkward, okay? I'm just telling you, man. It was awkward leaving this meeting. I found out later they actually met in my home office. We weren't even there. They met there for another 2 hours so there was a lot of stuff ... I really blew it on the meeting.

I go downstairs after I leave this meeting so we can leave 10 minutes early and I say, "Okay, let's go, let's go," because I cut it to the second. I say, "Okay, let's go. Let's go. Let's go." She said, "Oh, I just called them and said we'd be 15 minutes later." I let you be you, whatever you want to do baby, and you let me be me. These things happen, okay? They just are there. They're there in every marriage.

Let's talk a little bit then about the second thing here which is God's plan for compatibility. David Delk took you last time through the Ephesians chapter as well as the Genesis material. I want us to look at verse 33 in Ephesians, Chapter 5. This is God's plan for compatibility. "However, each of you must also love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband." There it is. This is how you get to the 70%. This is how you get to the 70%, love and respect. It's loving her just like you would love yourself. When somebody does you wrong, anybody, and you can get to the place where you can put yourself in their shoes and see the situation from their perspective, you know, you know that that changes everything about it. It's called preferring others. It's called sacrifice. It's called ... Yeah, it's all those things.

We get her to that 70% by bringing her into the presence of the Lord. We bring her into the presence of the Lord by loving her just like we love ourselves, and likewise for her. Guys, we need to feel like we're respected. The Lord knows that and so his instruction to the women is to respect their husbands. This is how we get to the 70%. In the marriage prayer when we say, "Father, I said til death do us part. I want

to mean it. Help me love you more than her and her more than anyone or anything else. Help me to bring her into your presence today. Make us one like you are three in one. I want to hear her, cherish her, and serve her so she would love you more and we can bring you glory. These 68 words that capture the essence of what the Bible teaches about prayer.

How does that happen? How do you do this compatibility thing? How do you get to this 70% so that you can ... We're going to talk about the 30% but how do you get to the 70%? How do you love a woman like that? I'm not going to do a 3-day weekend to the nice hotel and resort and stuff like that but it's many small kindnesses just continually done day after day.

My wife, Patsy, shows respect for me. This may not seem like much to you. I'm watching way too much TV these days. We have a TV room. She likes to read so I'll go off and watch some TV. I'm coming back in through the house and it's dark. She turns the light on so that I won't have to walk through the room in the dark. I know that doesn't seem like much but it is so precious to me. You know what else she does? I cook eggs in the morning before she's up. Every morning when I get up, she has put out an egg pan and a spatula on the stove-top for me. It just amazes me how thoughtful she is. It just shows how much she cares about me.

I do a few things, too. I don't talk to her before she has her coffee. I also make the coffee for her and I take it to her while she's in bed. I bring her coffee in bed most mornings or many mornings.

Then she has chores for me to do. You have a spouse maybe that has chores for you. Maybe you have a spouse that you have chores for her to do. I don't know how it is in your house. Patsy leaves me little lists. I used to procrastinate but you know what I figured out is that acts of service is her love language. She's always doing little kind things for me. The reason she's doing kind things is because that's how she loves. That's how she wants to be loved. When I finally figured that out I said, "You know what? I'm going to end up doing this stupid chore anyway. Why not just go ahead and do it as soon as I hear about it", except last week it was changing light bulbs and it took 2 weeks to do that. We have flood lights in the ceiling. We got up to 4 of them were out. Again, that goes over to the 30%.

The big idea for today is this plan for compatibility, biblically, it's just love and respect. I love her by letting her be her and she respects me by letting me be me. You see how it works? That's the Big Idea. **I let you be you and you let me be me.**

We're going to wrap it up with one more item here. That is this idea that compatibility can be learned. This is huge. This is huge. Compatibility can be learned. You can learn to love your wife. She can learn to respect you. The first part of it is to talk about how you can learn compatibility in the 70%, how you can maybe even make the 70% 72% or something like that. The answer for that is prioritizing your marriage, prioritizing your marriage. If you've been around me at all, you know that my number one big idea about marriage is this: After God but before all others, make your wife your top priority. After God but before all others, make your wife your top priority. You're the only 2 people who are in this thing together. Everyone else, and I mean everyone else, is going to phase in and out of your lives, even your children if you're lucky.

Prioritize your marriage. A friend of mine I was talking to a couple of weeks ago, he said that when they got married he was going to work at 5:30 in the morning and coming home at 10:00 at night. On their fifth anniversary, his wife said, "You know, you don't need a wife. You need a housekeeper." He wasn't

prioritizing his marriage. He made the adjustment. That's part of the early years of marriage, it's making the adjustments as you ... It made all the difference in the world.

We had a man, I don't know if he's here today or not, but we had a man at FUEL a few years ago, I know he's here this year, I don't know if he's here this morning, but a few years ago he came and he was jacked up, ramped up, amped up, ready to go on men's discipleship. He caught the vision about men reaching other men and he was ready to go but as we got to know each other at FUEL, his marriage was in tatters. It was in shambles. He had so neglected his wife. He had so disabused her. He did that ... It was almost, he didn't say this but it seemed to me it was almost like he was excited about ministry because it was a way for him not to deal with his marriage. You see what I'm saying?

I told him, I said, "Look, you've come to FUEL to learn about men's discipleship. I'm sending you home. I don't want you in men's discipleship. Your ministry needs to be your marriage right now. You go make it right with your wife and then when ... In a few years when God has healed your marriage, then we can talk about men's discipleship." To his credit, he did that. She's here with him. It's beautiful. I've talked to them more than just this week. God has done an incredible work in them. That's what we all need to do. Prioritize your marriage because no amount of success at the office or on the ministry is ever going to compensate for failure there.

Then as to the 30%, just have an intentional plan for the 30%. Have an intentional plan for the 30%. Now I'm doing 6 chores, okay? I'm hot. I'm sweaty. I'm not handy but I'm working through that. I'm on chore #5. I'm getting ready to do chore #5. I have the screwdriver in my hand. I'm walking. I'm within 10 feet of where I'm supposed to be and my wife says, "Don't forget to do that." She has a way of reminding me to do the chore that I'm getting ready to do right as I'm getting ready to do it. You know what, it's part of the 30% in my life, okay? Here's the principle: Let the little ones go. Let the little ones go. Work in your heart to have increasingly bigger and bigger ones become more little and little. You see what I'm saying? Let the little ones go. We could talk about all kinds of other ideas like figure out what her buttons are and then don't push them. These are the kinds of things that will work in the 30%.

The Big Idea today: **I let you be you and you let me be me.** Don't forget, give it some time. Give it some time. I have told this story here, I'll close with this. I noticed that my wife's body was changing. She picked up 20 pounds. I started putting pressure on her to try and control her, to get her to change, to lose weight, do whatever it takes and so forth. That went on for probably a couple of years and I just watched her shut down over a period of a couple of years. Then I realized what I had done and I started to ... I'm a social scientist by nature so I began to just think and study this problem. I finally came to this conclusion, 2 questions. If my wife lost 20 pounds, would I love her any more? If my wife lost 20 pounds, would it make me more happy? I realized that the answer to those 2 questions was no. I wouldn't love her any more than I already did. It wouldn't make me any more happy than I am right now. I decided to move it over into the category of the little ones.

I'm a guy, so I told her what my decision was and I figured, "Bam, okay, we solved that problem. Okay, it's on to the next thing." You know what? It was another 2 years until she could trust me again. If I had been putting in 100 units of labor to have a normal ... I was putting in 200 units of labor in the same amount of time in order to get less of a result. The bottom line is I had broken trust with her, you see. I kept at it. I kept at it. One day, she was just sitting on the couch. Out of the blue she said, "You know, I feel safe with you again." You cannot imagine what that did for my heart because I'd come to the conclusion I need to let you be you and you, of course, are going to let me be me. That's the big idea for the day. If you want to have a great marriage, just think about this 70/30 thing, prioritize your marriage,

and then figure out how to have an intentional plan for that other 30%. This is not a bad plan. There are other plans but this is not a bad one: **I let you be you and you let me be me.**

Let's pray. Our dearest Father, Lord, we thank you for women, all the ladies in the world and their friends that are sitting around talking about who knows what. Wow, what a mystery. We love them. It's exciting to be able to have women. As Chesterton said, sticking to one woman is a small price to pay for having so much as even seen a woman. Lord, for those of us who have spouses, Lord, I pray that you would just help us glean a lesson here today that might help us in a practical way. For those who are not married, in the male/female relationship something that would help them or perhaps a more universal principle just in relationships in general. We lay this at the foot of the cross, Jesus, and ask you to give us back the wisdom from on high that we need for our own lives. We pray it in your name. Amen.