

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY

The Marriage Prayer:

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Good Morning, Men!

Has anybody had one of those weeks this week? Well I had one of those weeks. Lots going on at work, with my kids, people going everywhere, my wife and I are going in different directions with our stuff; it was just a tough week.

Wednesday night my wife and I were driving somewhere and had a few minutes to talk and had one of those discussions. Discussions where there are two or three things said and then long moments of silence. The thought in my mind is that I am going on Friday morning to teach on marriage! This is working really well.

That is the kind of week I had, but fortunately God's grace is real.

This series on the Marriage Prayer is not just for married people. The principles we discuss apply in many different context and relationships in our lives. Marriage is certainly a very intimate relationship, the most intimate relationship we can have, but our marriage is a representation of the relational character of who we are as men made in the image of God. The principles that apply in our marriage relationship, will apply in our friendships, coworkers and acquaintances.

That is a good thing, because our culture is becoming more and more an unmarried culture. For the first time in 2006 more than 50% of the adults in America were unmarried. In 1970 it was only 36%, so more and more people are choosing to marry later, or are finding their selves unmarried. Cohabitation is becoming a more popular option in the culture.

Marriage doesn't have the same place as it did before. I wanted you to know, if you are here today and are not married there are three reasons why you need to listen particularly to the message today:

1. These principles will absolutely apply to every relationship in your life. When we talk about an attitude that demonstrates an 'others' focused life that will apply in your work situation, friendships, and all other relationships in your life.
2. We want to be equipped to help our friends and others we know that are married. One thing I find in our culture, especially as men, is we tend to have a private perspective on our life. Often what we miss, when we keep those things in, is the opportunity to learn and grow from what others have experienced. When you have a chance to enter into somebody's life and walk with them, we need to be equipped to really help them and give them Biblical feedback on the things they are going through.

3. Those of you that are not married right now, God may have it in your future an opportunity where He wants you to pursue marriage. This would be an opportunity to prepare for that as well.

Today we are going to talk about attitude. Attitude is such a key component to the way we approach situations in our life. One of the things we have been talking about in our series is praying the marriage prayer. I want us to have a chance to remember the marriage prayer.

Say it with me:

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 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. AMEN.

Today we are going to focus in on the idea of wanting to hear her, cherish her and serve her. Those three phrases capture a Biblical perspective on marriage. The key idea behind all three of these things is the shift from a self focus to an ‘others’ focus.

For those of you that have been praying the marriage prayer each day, I hope one thing that has happened is all of the sudden I see episodes while interacting with my life in a different light. In other words it opens my eyes to see if I am listening to her, or am I really hearing what she has to say. Am I really being the kind of partner I need to be for my wife? Every interaction I am able to see with new eyes, because I have been praying and asking God to change my heart and help me be more open to how I can help my wife.

I want us to look at these three aspects of ‘others’ centered attitude. The first one is the idea of hearing our spouse. This is in I Peter 3:7

7. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Be considerate and treat them with respect. Another version says “live with them in an understanding way”. How can you be considerate of someone? You have to listen to them in order for that to happen.

When you think about hearing, cherishing and serving we are talking about our head, our heart and our hands. To hear someone is to focus on them with our head. You have been around people before when you are talking with them and they are kind of looking around and doing this...it is pretty distracting isn't it? They are distracted and their focus is not on you. Sometimes we allow ourselves to get that way in marriage. We can get to the point where we are not really listening or focusing on our spouse.

In all our relationships we are going to be more effective as the men God wants us to be when we actually focus and listen to the person with which we are talking.

In my own life this is a huge issue, because I like to read. One time I like to read is before I go to sleep; I can at least get 10-15 pages in and it's enough to keep me going. The problem is that is some of the time my wife and I are going to talk.

On one hand I have a great book I want to read, and on the other hand my wife who wants to talk to me. It takes an act of discipline to take that book, shut it, put it down and talk with my wife.

Focus on her and really hear her and when I don't do that for a few nights in a row you can tell the difference. You can tell that she doesn't feel that I am listening to her.

The second one is to cherish. Proverbs 18:22, talks about the gift a wife is:

22. He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.

Your wife is a gift from God, someone to be cherished. That is what your wife wants to feel. She wants to feel honored and respected. Everyone desires that in their life. In all our relationships, if you show that person that you cherish them that relationship is going to be better. It takes an act of the heart, a commitment to say I am going to value this person more than I value myself – to be 'other' focused in that relationship.

A third thing we see is the idea of serving her. In Ephesians 5:28

28. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Love your wife like your own body. Serve you wife and be willing to lay down your life for you wife. That, of course, is something we do with our hands.

When we listen to our wives, and really hear them, it is something we do with our head.

When we cherish our wives it is something we do with our heart; committing to them, being passionate about our relationship and showing that we value them.

When we serve our wives we do that with our hands; making an effort to actually demonstrate that we love them, value them and that they are a priority in our lives. We are becoming 'other' centered.

You can see how this applies in every relationship that you have either with a co-worker, neighbor, child or church member. If you will demonstrate this attitude toward other people God will use that to help bring transformation into those relationships.

I told you before that I teach the middle school boys at church. One thing I often do with them is help them with learning theory ideas – motions.

We are going back to middle school this morning; three things I want you to think about for having an 'others' centered vs. self centered focus on relationships is to:

1. Hear – we are going to hear what others are saying not just with their lips but their body language.
2. Cherish – everybody give a hug. We are going to find a way to demonstrate to our wives that they are really special and we believe they are a gift. Find someday today to say an extra thank you to somebody, to give an extra smile or let someone know how much they are appreciated. Everyone needs to hear that it is okay, that they are doing a good job and that somebody appreciates them.

3. Serve – like a waiter. We are going to find a way in the next few days to do something unexpected for our spouse. Maybe it's washing the dishes, preparing some hot tea and setting her down by the fire. Maybe it's folding the laundry or taking them out to dinner; whatever it is we are going to find a way to serve our spouse in the next few days to show them how important they are to us.

Of course you can do this in your daily life. You can find someone in your workplace and do something for them that you normally wouldn't do to say that they are valued. Before next Friday I want to hear how you implemented hearing, cherishing and serving into your daily lives.

I want to look at two key aspects where we can demonstrate this kind of attitude. The first one is in communication and the second is in money.

Sometimes we hear how men don't communicate well. The truth is everyone is good at communicating about what is interesting to them. I mentioned reading and I read a book recently that is just fascinating. It is a science fiction novel, the way the author executed the plot is amazing. What do you want to do when you read something like that? You want to tell someone, right?

The things you are passionate about are not complete unless you have the opportunity to share it with someone else. The reality is many men allow the marriage relationship to become a blasé mundane habit, we forget how special it really is. When that happens, men become really poor communicators. Everyone is good at talking about what is interesting to them, but I have very little patience to talk about what is not interesting to me.

We had a couple in our house recently that said the heart of all their problems was that they just don't communicate. Why? For a lot of us as men, if we face the truth that we are not communicating well in our marriage, maybe we aren't working hard enough to find our wife interesting. Maybe you have taken her for granted and checked out. Maybe you have allowed yourself to be seduced by the newspaper, internet, TV or book and have forgotten how special and wonderful this person is.

This applies in so many of our relationships. When that co-worker comes to talk and your eyes are wandering around the room, you have to stop and look at the person and hear what they have to say. Communication is a key to showing someone that we have an 'others' focused attitude.

A second thing where this comes up in marriage is in the idea of money. The truth is, today, that most people live like money will do what it promises and God won't do what He promises. Especially right now, money is a huge topic. With the economy the way it is and all the uncertainty; people losing their jobs, or not knowing if they will have their job a month from now. One of the benefits is it is causing a lot of men to reconsider their view of money.

We know that finance is the number one source that people say causes divorce. We are not talking about what may really cause the divorce, but when you ask somebody what led to their

divorce, the number one issue people will pick is disagreement over money. This is a huge issue for us to get right in our marriage.

If this is a time of re-evaluation for you, maybe you are being forced into re-evaluations; maybe this is an opportunity that God is giving for you to get it right.

I hear all the time from couples is a man saying 'I want to make do with less. I want to save more and give more, but my wife loves to spend money.' Or I hear the opposite, the wife will say 'I pay the bills, I see what is going on and transferring money, paying one bill and not the other, and he just keeps buying.' It is a huge issue in marriages to get this right.

One of the things we have talked about is the four ways we can live with money.

1. We can live below our means. This is where a person spends less than they make, they are saving and investing in God's kingdom.
2. We can live within our means. This person is saving and giving to the kingdom, but is very measured in their approach to money.
3. Many people, though, are living at their means. Basically all money that comes in is going right back out. There is not an opportunity to save or invest in the kingdom. This is where most people are in our culture today.
4. There are also people living above their means. A lot of people in our culture today are living here; this is why we are suffering so much financially right now as a country.

My question for you is where are you right now? Where are you on this cycle? And, is it working, is it where you want to be? I would suggest getting with your spouse and talking about why you are where you are and what needs to be different.

And do that from this 'others' centered perspective; it is my role in this relationship to help us be the couple that God wants us to be, to use money the way God wants us to do it. Sometimes that means me sacrificing and re-evaluating my perspective of what we need and have. Sometimes it means me stepping up to my wife and saying we really need to pray about this and see if it is what we need to do to get to the place God wants us to be.

The reality is when we talk about being 'others' centered; we are talking about mimicking the attitude of Jesus Christ. In Philippians 2:5, we have a description:

5. *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

It goes on to talk about Jesus' sacrificial servant love when he became a man and died on the cross for our sins, so we could have a relationship with God. That attitude ought to be the same attitude we have. If you think about what Jesus does for us, one thing is he hears us. In the scriptures you read of Jesus listening to all kinds of people. Many of them people that other Jewish men wouldn't listen to such as tax collectors, Samaritan women, prostitutes – Jesus heard them.

The scriptures talk about how even today he ever lives to pray for us and make intercession for us. He hears us and lifts us up before God.

In Romans 8, the Spirit prays with groaning things that we cannot express. He knows us so well he is expressing our inmost desires to God.

A second thing the scriptures talk about is that Jesus cherishes us. He is the shepherd and we are the sheep, and if one of them is off he will go after it. He weeps over Jerusalem, saying I long to take you under my wings. He cherishes us.

We see that Jesus serves us. When he was here on earth he said, I will do all that God gave me to do and I have come to seek and save the lost. I am on a mission and I will make that mission a success – and that is what he did.

Anybody that the Father gives him, there is no way anyone will snatch them from his hands. He serves us and he serves you. The reality is Jesus loves you!

I know as men it is not that comfortable to talk about other guys loving us, it is a little weird. The truth is all of us want to know that we are accepted and are okay, that we are valuable and good. No one wants to be a failure or a loser. We want to believe that we are valuable and that is what Jesus is offering us through the gospel, a transformation to get back to the understanding of who we are before God. We can leave the shame behind, leave the need for validation from other people behind and instead we can accept the validation of Christ; not based on our own effort but on what he does for us. It is based on that he hears us, loves us, cherishes us and serves us.

When you think about loving your spouse, and loving others I want you to hear that it is not going to happen by your own will power. You can leave today remembering my hand motions, copying them, but if it based in your will power you are going to fail.

It is not about you trying to do your best; it is about the gospel transforming us from the inside out so that we have the attitude of Christ. Have the same attitude in yourselves that Jesus Christ had. That happens when we experience his love for us, when we worship him and walk with him by faith. He allows us to move from a self focus to realizing that Jesus is taking care of me and I am good and can now go and focus on other people.

The Bible says God has chosen to glorify himself by sacrificially loving us. He didn't have to do that; he could have said I will glorify myself by smiting all people and sending them to hell. I will judge them for rebelling against me; I will show them all how perfect I am. He would have been perfectly justified in doing that, but he didn't. He said I will get glory because I am going to take these despicable wretches, these broken rebellious people and I will transform them into the beautiful creations I have always wanted through the power of my gospel and my son. He chose to glorify himself by sacrificially loving us and he asks us to glorify him by sacrificially loving others, especially our wives.

We receive that gospel of grace from Jesus Christ and then we give that grace and love to others.

Here is what I want to ask: Who can you hear today? Who is in your life that really needs to be heard? Who is in your life that needs to be cherished? Who in your life needs to be served? How can you do that? How can you serve your spouse? How can you hear her, cherish her and serve her today?

I will always remember Dave. When I was in college Dave worked in a ministry in another university, but he would come up a couple times a year to help the students who were doing bible studies on our campus. I remembered when I was with Dave that there was something different. The first couple of times I interacted with him, I enjoyed it, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was about him. About the third or fourth time he met with us, I realized what was going on and that was when you were with him you felt like you were the most important person in the world. His eyes were on you, he was fascinated by what you were saying. It was amazing how much he was able to communicate the love of Jesus Christ just by listening to you, focusing on you. That had such a transformative impact in my life, and I probably only spent 20 or 30 hours with this guy in four years. Yet, that is the kind of memory 20 years later that he had because he was 'other' focused. He had gotten the gospel and because Jesus Christ had transformed his life he was able to give away that love into the life of others.

My prayer for us today is that we would hear your spouse, cherish them, and serve them. Who does God want you to love today?

Let's Pray:

Father we thank you for your word that speaks to us about these real life issues that we all deal with. I know many of the men in this room come here with a lot on their plate. So God, we come here not as men who have everything together but as men who are desperately aware of how much we need your grace. Lord I pray that you would make me a man like Dave. I want to be the man that loves the people you bring into my life. I want to love Ruthie, I want to hear her, cherish her, and serve her so she would love you more and we can bring you glory.

God would you do that in my life; I pray for every man in this room that they would see the people you bring in their lives as divine appointments.

That they would see their spouses, if they are married, as a gift from you that you have given so they might be that love of Christ in their life.

We pray that you would do this, not just so that we would be happy but we want to see you glorified and see Jesus Christ exalted. We would love to have people say God has worked in this situation. That is our prayer in Jesus name, Amen.