

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
The Marriage Prayer
What Is God's Will for This Marriage?
Patrick Morley & David Delk
November 21, 2008

Pat: Good Morning, Men!

Turn to Matthew 19 and face the front. We have two speakers this morning, Pat Morley and David Delk.

The foundation of a good message is to find a significant problem that is screaming for an immediate solution.

Today we are going to talk about marriage. I have been married 35 years and have discovered that, basically, she thinks it is not love unless I know what she is thinking. Honey can you give me a hint? Well, if I have to tell you then it is not really love.

Marriage presents a lot of unique challenges. We are going to begin a six week series today that is based on the book, *The Marriage Prayer*. The foundational question for the series: What is God's will for marriage? And how do I pull that off in my own marriage?

We are going to be looking at six aspects of God's will. The problem that I think is significant really has to do with the consequences of divorce. It is devastating, there is a 25 year longitudinal study that has been completed and they looked at marriages that went through divorce and what happened to the children and marriages that remained in tact and what happened to the children. Of the marriages that remained in tact 16% of those children never married. In homes that divorced 40% of the children in those homes never married. That is a difference of 24%, when you overlay that on the general population is something on the order of like 65 million people that decided they would not marry because of what they saw happen in their own families.

I would like to have David come up now. David why would you say we are here today?

David: Tell me some of the reasons you think people get married today? What are some things that folks are looking for in marriage? We had the obvious come out: sex! What else? Companionship, children/family and romance, so we start out in marriage with this kind of perspective of what it will be like.

If we are honest all of us end up at some point feeling like that, and wondering how we go there. What happened, I think, is that our assumptions about what is marriage are simply too low. We are looking for a happy life, for a nice family, kids that do well and if we get that it is kind of the expectation level we have.

The reality is that marriage is much more than that. When we have those assumptions about marriage, it works okay when everything is going well but when we hit rough times it doesn't work as well. And what has happened is we have a lot of get along marriages in America. What happens is we set our sights too low and we suffer the curse of reduced expectations. We don't really have a biblical view of marriage. That is why we wanted to do this series and come up with the concept of the Marriage Prayer.

Pat, what is the marriage prayer?

Pat: David I am glad you asked. The Marriage Prayer is something that we put together, 68 words that capture the essence of what the Bible has to say about marriage. You each have a Marriage Prayer card on your table, grab one now. The main idea here is that your relationship with you wife can improve dramatically if you would pray a prayer everyday that captures the hopes you have for your marriage.

Let's review the prayer:

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. Make us one like you are three in one, I want to hear her, cherish her, and serve her so she can love you more and we can bring you glory.

David, what else is the marriage prayer?

David: One of the things we are praying for in our ministry is revival in America. We believe we need to see a spiritual awakening.

One of the questions at the forefront of our thoughts is what might God do if every married person in America prayed for their spouse everyday. We believe that God would bring transformation. That is why we created this prayer and this book. To have a strategy that individuals and churches could use to see their marriages transform.

You might ask: why a prayer? The reality is that we are convinced that belief determines behavior. Has anyone here ever quit smoking? A few have quit. I know how that happened you were opening up your cigarettes, tapping one out, looked at the box and saw the warning on the side. No? That's not what happened? You already knew all that; what happened is that something in your belief system changed, something got to the place where it is more important to quit smoking than to keep smoking.

Belief determines behavior. When we pray, we are opening ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit that God could bring a transformation in our hearts.

Pat: Belief does determine behavior, but in order for that to happen you have to have the right information. That is why we look to the word of God. Let's look at Matthew 19:4. This is Jesus speaking about part of God's will for prayer.

We are going to be looking at six aspects of God's will for marriage, over this series.

Let's read the word of God together:

4. *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'*

5. *and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?*

6. *So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

You have to have the right information; you need to know what it says on the side of the package. I think a lot of times we do have the right information, the problem then could be the application of that in a practical way to our own circumstances.

I will give you an example, I am praying this Marriage Prayer everyday, almost, I was getting ready to come to the Bible study a couple of weeks ago, got out of the shower, toweled off...probably too much information, but I am telling why I don't have my glasses on.... Over in the corner of the bathroom I see a brown or black spot. I thought it might be a dead roach or something but I am already in a hurry so I don't pick it up. I couldn't stop thinking about the roach and how I had said til death do us part. I am going back and forth on needing to get ready to leave and needing to pick up the roach. I put my glasses on and peek around the corner; sure enough it is a dead roach. Halfway out the room I am saying I had that prayer, and I grab a tissue and flush it down the toilet.

Wow that prayer really is powerful. Belief really does determine behavior. But in order for that to happen in the correct way you have to have the right information, and then you have to have some internal motivation for that belief to transform into behavior. That is why having something like the Marriage Prayer to pray can be such a powerful tool for you.

We are looking at the first aspect of the Marriage Prayer today; this is the big idea for the day: FATHER I SAID TIL DEATH DO US PART; I WANT TO MEAN IT.

I was talking to Patsy about this last night, she says: what do you mean you *want* to mean it?!

So David, what does this mean, how is it Biblical and how can we apply it?

David: This part of the prayer shows us that it is all about faithfulness. That scripture we read talks about the union that God has made. When I talked about lifting our eyes and seeing marriage for what it really is, it is more than a companion, best friend, or family; marriage is an opportunity to live out the unity that God has created between us; He has made us one flesh, but the way that happens is through faithfulness.

Faithfulness does a couple of things for us. First of all, faithfulness is the foundation for security. Everyone wants to know they are loved, accepted and appreciated; everyone has a need to feel that way. One of the things God has given us is the relationship of marriage that is meant to contribute to that security that we feel before Him. Our security first of all comes because of

what he has done for us, as we understand Christ's love and are absolutely convinced of that. Then security can come from our relationship with our spouse.

The problem is that if we don't have security first in our relationship with God, second with some authentic relationships with people, then whenever we go out into the world, whenever we interact with somebody we will come to them from a position of need. I need you to validate me, to make me feel like I am ok.

You have met people like this, they need you to show a lot of appreciation, they need a tremendous amount of encouragement, the extreme of this is almost pathological and we have all seen some people like that. All of us need that sense of security. When we find our security first of all in that relationship with God through Jesus Christ then demonstrate love, service and sacrifice in our marriage, we can create this security for our spouse.

When we really believe that God has done for us what He has said He has done (forgiven us, accepted us as sons, and called us to greatness) and we bring that into our marriage, then we have an opportunity to create security for our wives.

How does that look, Pat, and what is the strategy?

Pat: The strategy is this idea, after God but before all others that you would make your wife your top priority.

The reason for this is simple, there is no other relationship given under heaven which is even a close second. The only relationship that is meant to last for an entire lifetime is that of husband and wife.

I realize a lot of you have been divorced, there is a lot of pain that goes with that and it is okay. God is a redeemer, healer, and reconciler but you have to have the right information, to have the right belief, to have the right behavior. Yeah it might hurt to be listening to this right now, but hopefully God will use this strategically to help you the next time you want to develop a relationship.

After God but before all others, make her your top priority.

How do we apply this? How do you make your wife safe?

Let me tell you a story. A couple of weeks ago I was out to dinner with my wife. I don't remember exactly what we were talking about, but Patsy said: that is okay you'll just have Daphne (my assistant) take care of it anyway.

This is something that gets brought up every month or two. The concept is that Patsy thinks I am not willing to do menial tasks, that in the marriage if there is anything significant I will do it, but if there are menial things I pass them off to her. She lets me know that this is a problem with her, when I say about something I am going to do at work. She says yeah you will just get Daphne to do that right? I was so angry I wanted to throw her through the plate glass window.

There is a time when I would have thrown a hissy fit right there. But because I have been praying the prayer I just said, okay. Lord I said til death do us part I want to mean it. Help me to love you more than her and her more than anyone else.

How should I be responding here? It is refreshing to be thinking that instead of immediately responding. So I didn't say anything. The next day I said Patsy we need to talk. I was able to say to her, yesterday when you made that comment about me having Daphne take care of things; you need to understand that made me very angry, and I am still angry about it. The idea is that you don't think I am willing to do menial tasks, but Patsy, I work hard all day long. I write every word of my books – accept the co-authored ones – if I want coffee I make it, if I need a copy I make my own. It's not like I sit at my desk with my feet propped up barking out orders.

I think you have missed is the big picture that all I am doing is creating a meaningful division of labor so that two can do more than one can alone. We talked some more and I think she actually understood, possibly for the first time. Instead of me blowing up and driving the wedge between us, I was able to hopefully create reconciliation.

I am not just making things better, but I am resolving conflicts meaningfully as well.

Then the big idea again for this session is this: this is the first aspect of God's will for your marriage: FATHER, I SAID TIL DEATH DO US PART I WANT TO MEAN IT. Our code word here is faithfulness.

We have talked about helping your spouse feel secure. Faithfulness also enables you to survive difficult days.

What is the problem? This is the book The Marriage Prayer and I want to read a passage that helps understand what the problem is. Every marriage has difficult days, but some of you are married to a difficult spouse. And, some of your spouses are married to a difficult man.

My wife said to me – now she has two sisters, twins – as her sisters and I are sitting around having a nice lunch. Out of the blue Patsy said: you know Pat, you are high maintenance. That is the meaningful division of labor.

How do you know whether you have a difficult marriage or you just have a marriage that is occasionally difficult? Let me read: What is the difference between a normal person who is from time to time difficult and a difficult person who is from time to time normal? When does a normal person who is occasionally difficult become a difficult person?

Here are the two litmus tests. Is it chronic and is it daily? If you and your spouse are chronically difficult to get along with on a daily basis, this is not normal behavior. That is the problem, some of us are married to difficult spouses, or we are or maybe both of you are.

What is the solution? The solution is that belief determines behavior. What you believe about your marriage will determine how you behave in the marriage.

Another text we are going to look at is I Corinthians 7:10. As you turn there I am going to read from Matthew 18:21

21. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22. Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

That is hyperbole, how ever many times someone would ask for forgiveness you need to forgive them. That is the belief that a Christian has, no matter how often my wife sins against me I will forgive her. She hopefully has that same belief.

Now, I Corinthians 7:10

10. To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.

11. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

That is it guys. That is the word of God, the truth. You can exchange the word of God for a lie, if you want to, bottom line is you have no authority to get a divorce except in the matters of unfaithfulness and desertion. Beyond desertion and infidelity, no man has any grounds for divorce.

If you make the decision that I am in this marriage, the belief is that I can't get a divorce. If you have been divorce before make this your belief now. You are a growing transforming person. My belief is that divorce is not an option. If you believe that divorce is not an option for you then you will figure this out. You will be willing to pay the dues, the price to figure all this out.

With that said, David what is the strategy for this difficult marriage piece?

David: It comes down to this belief: it is God's will for this marriage to work. I know that sometimes it is hard to believe that. Don't take what Pat and I are saying lightly. I cannot imagine what it is like to be sitting there 10, 20, 30 years into a marriage having very little hope that it will be anything like what you wanted it to be. I know that is devastating. I know it is difficult to have someone that is constantly criticizing, ignoring you or treating you with disrespect.

We are not saying that this is easy, but we are saying that it is God's will for this marriage to work.

One very practical thing that you can do, if you are in a difficult marriage or a difficult time in your marriage, is to think about the small steps.

I love the illustration about the leaning tower of pizza and how far it was leaning. In the 1990's they had to close it down. They tried for a century different ideas of how to straighten it out or stabilize it. Nothing would work, finally a guy thought about taking a gallon of dirt every two days from the high side of the tower. Over a period of about four months they stabilized the tower back to where it was two hundred years ago. Small steps.

What is a small step you could take today to demonstrate your faithfulness, to remain faithful? We have seen people that have been faithful for 30 to 40 years in a marriage, amazing demonstrations of faithfulness, but those folks weren't faithful for 50 years. The way they were faithful is they were faithful in the next moment.

The choice you have today is to be faithful now, and if we are faithful in whatever next moment God's gives us, then we have a chance to demonstrate faithfulness for the long term.

This whole relationship, in terms of how we serve our wives, is a lot like a vacuum cleaner. A lot of us live in relationships where we need something. So we go into our relationship with our wife (friends or co-workers) and are trying to get that validation from them. It is a little like this vacuum cleaner, when I turn it on it sucks the air in. If you are in a relationship like that you are feeling this person sucking the life out of you. Their need is so great, that with every interaction they have to figure out how to get something.

If we are honest I think some of us would have to admit we are interacting with our spouse right now. There is another option and that is to live like a hair dryer. When I turn this hair dryer on it will blow air out. When we find that security, we get the belief system correct and we have our security in Jesus Christ and are filled up with the knowledge that He forgives us and loves us, then when I interact with someone or my spouse I have the opportunity to give to them instead of take from them and demonstrate that faithfulness.

That is where it starts. I use illustrations like this because most of you have these appliances at home, and when you see the hair dryer or use the vacuum, I want you to think about: How am I living out my faithfulness in this marriage? Have I been living more like a vacuum cleaner, or have I been living more like a hair dryer.

Pat: Think about a time in your life when you have not felt safe. Maybe you had parents that didn't protect you when you were a child. Or maybe you have felt physically threatened. Or, maybe a time when you realized that you had just been scammed. That is a feeling of a lack of safety.

When we don't act with faithfulness to our spouses, then there is a good chance that your spouse would not feel safe with you, in the same way that you may not have felt safe.

One way to address this, one small, but large, step is to pray this Marriage Prayer.

David and I would like to challenge you to pray this prayer every day during this six week series. How many of you would be willing to give that a try? Awesome that is wonderful. Let's begin right now and pray our part of the Marriage Prayer together and that is how we will close.

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 will love you more and we can bring you glory. Amen.

