

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
The Marriage Prayer
Handling Conflict / Kindling Romance
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...priorities. But before we do that I want to read to you a true story that we did as case studies for the book. I am going to read a small section of it, but I think it sets up, pretty well, what we are going to talk about today.

Kevin finished placing his few groceries on the conveyor belt waiting for the woman in front of him to finish paying. After she put her receipt in her purse and pushed her cart away Kevin stepped up to the cash register.

Curtis the check out clerk looked up with a smile. Hey Mr. Sanders, light load today. Where is Mrs. Sanders? She is at home; I just ran in to pick up a few things.

As Kevin left the store, holding his two plastic bags, he couldn't help but smile at what just occurred.

Kevin and Laura had come a long way in the last ten years. Theirs was an all too familiar story, married 22 years, at the time, kids just left for college. He had been working and traveling too much for years. She was so focused on the children that she ignored him. They didn't spend time together and had allowed themselves to drift apart.

One telling day, Kevin gave Laura grief for reading too many romance novels. Her response: reading these books is the only way I can get romance in my life.

Some of us have been in situations like that. We have felt the sting of words like that. That is why we are focusing, for six weeks, on what God's will is for marriage.

Last week we talked about how many Christian couples have set their sights too low. We talked about some expectations we have when we get married. That we will have a friend for life, having sex, someone to grow old with, someone to help us build a family or career and these are common expectations that we as Christians bring into marriage. Yet those expectations are too low, because God has given us a vision so much greater than that, that we would bring glory and honor to Him through our marriage. In our hearts we know that we were made for more than just a happy life.

We know that God wants something better than that for us as men. He wants us to be engaged in this great enterprise of seeing the Kingdom become a reality, seeing culture transformed, seeing lives changed and a new generation of leaders raised up.

That is what we want to be a part of, but there are so many forces out there trying to press us into the mold of settling into the mold of mediocrity.

One of the goals of the Marriage Prayer is to change our minds. To help us on a daily basis be renewed in this perspective, this vision, of what marriage really can be and what God can do through that marriage.

What is exactly is The Marriage Prayer?

We went over it last week, but let's go over it again and hopefully you have memorized it by now. I believe this prayer encapsulates much of what the Bible teaches us about marriage and it helps give us a new perspective on a daily basis.

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.

This morning we are going to be focusing in on the second phrase of that prayer – *Help me love you more than her and her more than anyone or anything else*. This phrase really gets to the issue of priorities. Where are we looking in our lives for meaning, value, purpose and happiness? What are our dreams and expectations?

Priorities are so important, because priorities reveal our values. We were talking about this last night as a family. We can say what we want about what is important in life; it is easy to say things are important, but if you start looking at your time, your interest level, excitement, and your checkbook you realize what you really think is important in life.

Priorities reveal the things we value, the things we are looking to that we believe will provide the things we need in our lives. The reality is that all of us are facing tremendous pressures. All of us have so many things competing for our time and attention.

Here is just a little list of where our attention is drawn: work, friends, children, hobbies, church, entertainment, rest, investment, sports and we could probably add a lot more other stuff to this list. We are busier than we have ever been and we have more options that we have ever had.

I don't know if you have stopped to think about it, but imagine the difference in your life today over the opportunities and options that someone had 150 years ago. It is absolutely astounding. The ability to call anyone at any time on a telephone, going into a store with 30,000 things you can buy, video games, internet, travel, none of which was a part of anyone's life back then. Our lives are so complex. There are so many forces out there, choices we have to make that I believe it is very difficult as men to keep our priorities straight.

What is happening when we don't keep our priorities straight is that our outlook gets fuzzy. We no longer see the world the way we were meant to see it. We no longer value things correctly. So, we start to make choices based on this skewed perspective and we begin to justify things and it is amazing the kinds of things men can justify.

I know of a man that is dealing with a tragedy that is probably ruining his career, possibly costing him his family and he has made some choices that, I am sure, to him have made sense over the last 8-10 years. It made sense; oh it's not that big of a deal. This is not as bad as some things that other people do.

Slowly but surely because you are looking at the world through these fuzzy lenses, we begin to make poor decisions. All of us go down that path as men; the question is how far are you willing to go down it before you get brought back.

Sometimes we go down the path for 5-10 minutes and we become self oriented, and we get pulled back from that. Sometimes guys get caught up and start down a path with no grace or friendships and before they know it – could be years – they find themselves in a place they never dreamed of.

The key is to get our priorities and values right, so we see the world the way it really is. All of the sudden the things that once looked good to us, we recognize how dangerous and poisonous they are and God can bring us back.

Priorities are so important; one of the reasons they are so important is they are exposed in conflict. Priorities are exposed in conflict. I don't know about you, but I don't like conflict. That is a stereo typical thing you hear about men is that they don't like conflict.

My wife and I were talking with a couple and she was sharing the difficulties they have gone through in their marriage, some of the devastating things that have happened. She said, basically I know that as soon as I start to cry, the conversation is over. All that is going to happen is he wants me to stop crying and he wants to get out of there.

Can anyone identify with that? I hate when my wife cries, when she is angry or upset and when there is conflict. I think one reason many men feel that way is that it feels like a personal failure on our part. Can you see what I am saying? It feels like I should be fixing my wife so that she doesn't feel this way. If she is angry or upset then I am not doing my job and all the sudden my focus is turned to doing what it takes to get her to feel okay. I don't want to feel uncomfortable; I don't want to have to deal with my wife who is upset.

That is such a self oriented perspective to bring into a relationship. Often times a conflict arises because of that self orientation. In other words I start to think about what I deserve. I shouldn't have to put up with this, you scheduled this, I don't enjoy that – and out of that self orientation conflict can arise.

What the scriptures want to say to us is that if we switch that self orientation for a God and spouse focus, then we can resolve conflict well. The reality is that until we do that we will not fully resolve conflict.

Look at 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.*

29. *After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--*

30. *for we are members of his body.*

31. *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."*

32. *This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

33. *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

This famous passage is defining for us that the love of a husband is like the love of Christ - the sacrificial love that seeks the good of the other person. That is why we pray in this prayer: help me love you more than her (God first) and her more than anyone or anything else (her second). When we bring that attitude into our marriage all the sudden conflicts become an opportunity to demonstrate that sacrificial love. I am not saying that you always roll over, that is unhealthy as well. However, when you see this God focus and spouse focus and it is one of your primary perspectives, as you enter into conflict it is no longer how do I win? Instead I am thinking about what this conflict says about our relationship and how can I help us move to the next level.

Is there something here that really needs to be dealt with so that we can have the kind of marriage that God wants us to have? That is what can happen if we have this God and spouse focus.

The reality is many people are in conflict type marriages. Some of you in this room have very difficult situations. You have marriages that seem every week or month there is conflict. How do you endure in that kind of marriage? How do you make it when it always seems hard?

There are no easy answers for that. I can tell you, if you get your priorities and values right on a daily basis you can make it better today over all than it was yesterday; by doing the right next thing, by loving God more than her and loving her more than anyone or anything else. It may not get a lot better quickly, but you can be the man God wants you to be in the midst of that situation.

That is why our big idea for this morning is to: **HELP ME LOVE YOU MORE THAN HER AND HER MORE THAN ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE.**

The second area: Romance. Anyone in here have all the romance you can handle in your marriage? We have a couple; we are going to be signing up for some slots to meet with him and hear his secrets.

How does romance happen in a relationship? After dinner you are cleaning up and walk over to your wife, put your hand on her should or kiss her on the cheek. She looks at you with a look that says 'what are you thinking about?' Anybody ever have that happen? What do you mean what am I thinking about, I was just being nice. It is interesting because the same kinds of ways we

relate to one another, in one environment of a marriage seem loving and gentle and those same actions in a different environment seem manipulative, forced, and interpreted wrong.

Romance is like dew in the atmosphere. When you walk out in the morning and see dew on the grass, where does that dew come from? It comes from the air, when there is enough water vapor in the air and the temperature gets cold enough the water condenses out of the air and on to the plants. If the air is dry you don't have dew.

If you have an atmosphere in your marriage where the air is dry, those times when you show your wife some attention or affection are going to come off as forced or manipulative, because they are not a part of the atmosphere of your marriage.

If we want to have romance, to really demonstrate this God and spouse focus, then we have to create an atmosphere where our wife feels cherished.

The secret to romance: romance blooms when I cherish my spouse the way that God cherishes me. When I reflect to my spouse the kind of daily love and concern that God shows for me, it creates the atmosphere that is saturated and romance can bloom.

What we see in this passage in Ephesians is this God focus.

Go to Ephesians 5; the context for this command (that Paul is giving to husbands about their wives) is seen earlier in the chapter where it talks about the salvation that God has brought. It shows a layout for growth in the church, for us to understand the depth, height and width of Christ's love. This whole book is grounded in a sense of what God has done for us as believers.

To take Paul's commands at the end of the chapter out of that context is really to do violence to what he is talking about.

Look at Ephesians 5:1, 2

- 1. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children*
- 2. and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Paul is saying to be imitators of God. In other words, what you are experiencing from God in his love for you, you need to reflect to others. That is the context, then, for our love for our wives. If you aren't experiencing the love of God in your life, if God is not a reality to you on a daily basis, if you don't have a deep faith in God's transformational love for you and his call on you to be an imitator of that in your sphere of influence, then the idea that somehow you will be a sacrificial husband is not going to happen. It has to be in that context.

Look at Ephesians 5:8-10

- 8. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light*
- 9. (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)*
- 10. and find out what pleases the Lord.*

Live as children of light. It is in the context of living as a person in the light that we have the opportunity to have the kind of marriage that God wants us to have. To get our priorities and values straight, so we can show our spouse the sacrificial love.

I want to give an example of where I think a lot of men are. I need some volunteers, some guys that play basketball. Here is what I want you to do, the basket is over there and I want you to trap me.

These are two big guys and they already stole the ball from me. Okay, these guys set a trap on me and I want you to see what happens. With their hands up and on defense, I'm under pressure. If you have seen a basketball game you know what happens when guys get under pressure. What starts to happen? They start to panic and all the sudden something they would never do normally, become the choice they start to make.

Some of you guys are under pressure today, at work, in relationships, financially and you need to watch out; because men under pressure make mistakes.

Some of you guys might say 'I am not under that much pressure'. The danger for you is you may think you can do this on your own. You think it will be business as usual; that you can pray a prayer, relate to your wife, be a nice guy and everything will be fine. I want you to know that thinking will lead you to death. You were never meant to be able to do this on your own. That is what Ephesians is telling us, we are meant to be grounded in God's grace.

Whether you are out here, feeling no pressure or are right in the middle of it all, I want you to see what happens when God's grace comes into your life.

Go ahead guys trap me; God's grace lifts us up above the pressure, it is the thing that allows us to see, again, the world the way it was meant to be. We have to rely and depend on God's grace.

My prayer for you, as a man, today is whether you are in the midst of this pressure or you are feeling like everything is fine, is that you will allow – moment by moment – God to be your foundation and strength. It is not your strength, it is God's strength. That is why we pray the marriage prayer everyday. We pray it everyday because we need that new perspective, we need to say every moment: 'God I know I can't do this on my own, I know I can't handle this today, I don't know how to love my wife today, and I need you to show me because I want to be your man and I want to see you work with power in my life. I need you to be my strength.' That is what we are praying when we pray the Marriage Prayer every day.

The reality is if you don't love God first, you will never be able to love your wife well.

I would ask you today, how are you doing with your priorities? Are you seeing your marriage the way it really is? How can you grow in your love for God, so that you can love your wife better? That is why I am asking you to take the Marriage Prayer challenge, everyday to pray this prayer.

Here is what I want you to do; because as men we learn better physically, the chair represents standing on the grace of God and that is our strength, if you can stand up take your hand and pat the chair – this is my foundation. Now, sit down and when you sit down today I want you to think about putting yourself in the strength and grace of Jesus Christ. I am going to rest in Him today and allow Him to be my strength.

Help me love you more than her, and her more than anyone or anything else.

Use that as a reminder today, when you see a chair that we don't want to do this in our own strength. When we try to do it on our own, we are going to get under pressure and will make mistakes and those mistakes have devastating consequences. God I want to have my priorities and values straight and I know that comes when I worship you first, when I love you more than her and her more than anyone or anything else.

Let's Pray:

God we are so grateful for your word. I thank you for these men and their willingness to come here and hear what your word has to say. God all of us, as men, are easily tempted, distracted and get our priorities out of whack and start to see things in ways we can justify our own perspective/beliefs. God would you bring us back to the truth of your word; root out from us things that are not in line with who you have made us to be as men and what you have called us to do.

God we want to be men who love you, believe in you, who are passionate about you; men that don't just go through the motions of being nice, but we want to be men that truly represent you to this world by faith.

I pray for every guy here that is under pressure today, help them to know the way out of that pressure is through it by your strength. Lord, for the guys here that feel okay, I pray that you would keep them from the error of thinking they can make it on their own.

Lord would you absolutely convince us that we are desperate without you. I pray that we would demonstrate that to our wives, by loving you more than them and them more than anyone or anything else. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.