

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
THE HUSBAND IN THE MIRROR: DARK DAYS
Patrick Morley
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2nd Corinthians Chapter 4. If you don't have a Bible with you and you're a visitor; that's fine. If you would just look on with someone who does have a Bible, that would be great, and if you're a regular, and you don't have a Bible, well, I'd like to talk to you about that some time.

We are doing a marriage series entitled, The Husband in the Mirror. This is the ninth week of the series. This morning I want to talk to you about what happens in a marriage during dark days. I want to talk to you about pulling together when life is pulling us apart. The issue I want us to deal with this morning is the question of, "Why do we lose heart, and how has God provided for us through, and in other ways, so we don't lose heart?" The first thing is to figure out what is the problem. You should have an outline you can use for note taking.

This series is dedicated to my son and new son-in-law, John and Jay. John and Jay over the course of married life you will have many tests that will tend to pull you apart. Each week when I prepare these messages, I am looking for a grave problem that needs to be solved. The great symbol of all our problems, the place that reveals a person's truest character, that thing which really pulls us apart the most in marriage is the bathroom.

I want to give you a few examples. This is our hairdryer, our shared hairdryer. I am not making this up. This is exactly how I pulled it out of the wall this morning. I just want to know how is it in three day's time a hairdryer can get 12 twists? How does that happen, and why am I the only one that ever has to, why am I the only one who cares that this is a twisted cord? Why am I the only one who ever bothers to untwist this cord? It really does cause me to lose heart. It really does pull us apart. It's a terrible problem so that's one thing that is going on in our bathroom.

I'll tell you another thing that's going on in our bathroom and that is these toenail clippers. You see these toenail clippers that are kind of like a bronze or gold colored? My grandmother gave me these toenail clippers when I was in the sixth grade. These are very important to me. What I want to know is why are these never where I put them? Why do I always have to spend five minutes looking for these? I can understand why someone might put them back in their place, but why a different place every time? That's what I don't understand. Then there are the finger nail clippers. These are the finger nail clippers I carry in my pocket every day. Why is it that every fourth or fifth day I go looking for them where I put them the night before, and I can't find them. Why is that? The things that go on in the bathroom pull us apart. They are terrible things not to mention the lipstick on the lid of the Scope mouthwash. My wife pours it into the lid, drinks the mouthwash, and there is lipstick on the Scope. Well, we solved that. We have two Scope bottles now.

I do back exercises every morning on the rug in the bathroom. Why do the dogs have to lie and shed their hair right where I lie, and I walk around all day long with dog hair on me? Why does that have to be that way? That's not to mention anything about dirty clothes in the hamper or the toilet seat. You can put the toilet seat down just as easily as you pick it up, you know? Yes? Duh!

Then there's the counter. I have always used the counters in the bathroom for storage. That way if you ever need it, you know right where it is, you can go to it quickly. My wife wants me to put things away. I like them fine right there because then I can see them and don't forget that I own them, you see?

Cereal bowls in the morning – I am a time-management nut. So I usually have a bowl of Cheerios in the morning. I carry that into the shower with me and eat. That sounds a little weird, but the problem is I honestly forget and leave the cereal bowl in the shower. Patsy says, “Why can’t you pick up the cereal bowl and carry it downstairs?” Then I say to her, “Well, after the house is clean and the rugs have been put on top of the commode so you can clean the floor, when you put the rugs down, why do you put them in a pile? Why don’t you just go ahead and put them up? It takes twice as much effort to take the rugs and pile them on the floor, then later come back and spread them out. Why don’t you just take them off and spread them out?” She said, “Why don’t you do the cereal bowl?” I said, “Well, I’ll do the cereal bowl if you do the rugs.” That’s to say nothing like toothbrushes and toothpaste and all of these things. So, John and Jay, just remember, there are going to be many tests and trials and struggles in life.

What I’m trying to do here, of course, is a caricature for you that we really do in marriage lose perspective, don’t we? We let little things get blown so far out of proportion to their actual significance. Yes, we do this, right?

I would like to look at the reasons we really do lose heart here, and see if we can’t see what God has to say, what Jesus Christ has to say, about the challenges we face, and how He’s made provision for us particularly through our wives.

2 Corinthians Chapter 4. Be thinking here about why we don’t lose heart. “Therefore since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” There are a number of Scriptures here that are very precious. I encourage you to read them. I am going to ask you to drop down to Verse 6. “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness. May His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.’” God made his light shine in our hearts.

Verse 7, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay.” Isn’t that interesting? We’re clay pots, men; we’re clay pots. We have this incredible treasure “of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We have the Lord, Jesus Christ, Himself, present in us, but we’re clay pots. You’re a clay pot, and you’re wife is a clay pot. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” We’re not talking here about twisted cords and toenail clippers. The things that Paul was talking about were beatings, being shipwrecked, being persecuted by other Christians.

Verse 10, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we, who are alive, are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then death is a work in us, but life is a work in you.” So why is life so hard? Life is so difficult, life is so challenging, because we live in a jungle, not a garden. Adam and Eve lived in a garden. Ever since then we’ve lived in a jungle. We must do our work while feeling the prick of thorns.

In the same book, 2 Corinthians Chapter 12, Paul said, “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh. Three times I asked God to remove it, and He didn’t.” Think about the crown of thorns that was pressed down onto the head of Jesus.

When I was in Israel, just outside Lazarus’ tomb, there was a vendor selling crowns of thorns, and I bought one. They’re prickly. The thorns are an inch and a half long – very sharp. We have to do our work while feeling the prick of thorns. Your wife, as we’ve said previously in this series, has a desire because of the fall. She has a desire for you that borders on disease. She’s fragile and vulnerable. You have to do your work while feeling the prick of thorns. Everyday when you go out in the world, it is coming against you. Everyday when you go out, the devil is coming against you. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. Everyday you go out, you’re going against yourself, your flesh. The flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit.

Yet, we see here we're clay pots. There's a reason why we don't lose heart. Let's look at the text again. It says, Verse 7, "We have this treasure in clay pots." There are four purposes here given in this text. Number 1 is to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. Isn't it odd that we would tend to rail against being clay pots? I don't want to be a clay pot. God made you a clay pot for His purposes so He could show that this all-surpassing power of this treasure that is in us is not our own. It's from God. He wants the world to see, He wants you to see, He wants your wife to see, and He wants to see, and your wife, that Christians have a treasure in a clay pot. Why? So that people will know that this all-surpassing power is from God. We're not generating, we're not self-generating this power.

In Verse 10, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus." Why? Why don't we lose heart? So that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. Look again at Verse 11, "So that his life may be revealed in our mortal bodies." Why do we lose heart? Because the life of Jesus is being revealed in our mortal bodies as we work through all of these challenges and all these tests, John, all of these trials, Jay.

Now move with me over to Verse 15. I encourage you to read the rest, but we'll go to Verse 15. "All of this..." In other words, all of these perplexities, all of these persecutions, all of these hardships, "All of this is for your benefit." Wow. This is so upside down. The Gospel of Jesus is so upside down that all of these things that happen to us are for our benefit. Why?

Here's the third purpose. The first purpose is to show that the all-surpassing power is from God, not from us. The second one says that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our bodies, and the third purpose, "So that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." Upside down, men, I'm telling you. This is really, really upside down.

Oprah had a special on men, so I videotaped it. She made a comment that was totally insulinary to the program, but it was very interesting. Oprah said, "People will say to me, 'Oprah, your life is so glamorous.'" She said, "Well, you know, 20% of it is glamorous, but 80% of it is just hard." That's Oprah. If Oprah's got 80%, how much harder do you think you're going to have? That's the way it is. Hey, men, it's grace. A gracious God has made it abundant life, but not without troubles. The presence of Jesus in our immortal bodies, this all-surpassing power of God, this grace that causes thanksgiving to overflow, that's abundant life. Clay pots – many troubles. If you understand this, explain it to me later, okay?

Let's take a look now at what God has done for us. One thing that He's done is that He's given us two helpers. Helper No. 1: God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone so He made a helper for him, a wife. Not every man will marry, but for the man who does marry, a wife is a wonderful helper, and God has given us a second helper, too. The second helper is the Holy Spirit. God has given the married man two helpers - a temporal one and an eternal one. God has done a great thing for us, men, if He's given you a wife because, yeh, she's a clay pot, don't forget you're a clay pot, too. Yeh, she's a clay pot, but God has given her to you to help you so you don't have to lose heart. So that she can help you overcome the challenges, the trials, the temptations, Jay and John. Yes, a wife is the greatest, but not if you're arguing about twisted hairdryer cords. Get over the cord. I saw you laughing, and I know what that means. You have a cord problem. You have a tougher issue. You have issues, man, issues! We lose perspective, don't we? God has given us an incredible gift in our wives, and we ruin it over a pair of fingernail clippers. Come on, get real! Get serious! There are dark days out there. Those are just dim days. Bathroom problems are dim problems; they're not dark problems.

What else has God done for us? He has given three institutions. He's given us governments, He's given us the church, and He's given us the family. Men, don't miss this. He's given us a wife, He's given us the Holy Spirit, He's given us government, He's given us the church, and He's given us the family. Why do we lose heart? Because we don't take advantage of what the government, the church and the family have to offer.

Did you know that 59% of the children in America, today, will go home to an empty house after school? Maybe there is something wrong with me. Maybe I just don't get it. Maybe I'm just culturally out of tune, but I'm telling you, there is something wrong with that. You make up your own mind. It certainly doesn't say in the Bible that there is anything wrong with a child going home to an empty house, but I don't think it's very wise. Men need to provide the leadership so that these three institutions – governments, the church and the families work like God intended them to work. When we don't see those institutions, and we don't see those two helpers, and we don't utilize them the way God has designed them to be used, we lose heart. Have you lost heart? Take a look at these things that God has given us; that God has done for us, make them priorities.

Then there is a fourth purpose. Verse 16, "When we get it then, therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly, because we are clay pots, we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day." If you use your two helpers, if you order your life so that you properly administer these three institutions, what happens? Outwardly the clay pot continues to waste away, but inwardly, we get renewed day by day. Watch this, all of those persecutions, that problem you have today with payroll, that deal that's blowing up in your face, that teenager that's driving you crazy, that stinkin' old car that wouldn't start this morning because it was so cold, and you had to take your wife's car - all of those problems cause us to lose heart. Verse 17, "For our light and momentary troubles." Yeh, man, but you never had a cord twisted as many times as my cord is twisted. "For our light and momentary troubles." Yeh, but you just don't know what it's like to live with a woman like this. "For our light and momentary troubles." But you just don't know how frustrating it is to want to do something with your life and be frustrated all the time.

I would like my life to count, but every time I try it seems like something goes wrong, and I've never gotten a promotion. "For our light and momentary troubles." Why do we lose heart? Because we don't have an eternal perspective, we have a temporal perspective. We're looking at our problems, our troubles, our trials, our tests, John and Jay, the way that men look at them, not the way God looks at them. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." God uses trials, uses troubles, uses disease, uses divorce, uses all of the clay pot things. They are "light and momentary troubles that are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Verse 18, "So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

So, why do we lose heart? Is it because we're clay pots? No, because there are other clay pots that do not lose heart. You do not lose heart because you're a clay pot, men. That's not the reason. If that was the reason, then all clay pots would lose heart, and there are lots of Christians who are clay pots who have not lost heart because they have an eternal and not a temporal perspective. They have their eyes fixed not on what is seen but on what is unseen.

Now, let's see if we can bring that home in a couple of minutes, and just talk a little bit about different ways you could respond. Did you know that one mule can pull two tons? Two mules can pull eight tons. Let the wise hear! What has God done for us? He's given us a way to double up our lives with a wife. So how should you respond? Number 1 is have an eternal perspective, not a temporal perspective. That's what this text is saying here. We will not lose heart if we have an eternal perspective.

The big idea this morning, you will not lose heart if you keep an eternal perspective. I don't care if you're a clay pot. It doesn't make any difference. You will not lose heart if you keep an eternal perspective. That does not mean you will not have troubles if you keep an eternal perspective. You will have troubles because you're a clay pot. But, God is using that. Paul said at the end of his book, "Three times I prayed to take away this thorn, the thing that's making me miserable." God said, "My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness." Paul's response, "...eternal perspective. Therefore, I will go about more gladly about my weakness so that Christ's power may rest on me for when I am weak, then I am strong." But, you don't know my wife. When you're weak, you're strong. Christ's power will rest on you when you rest in Him.

So, here's what I want you to do. Get in an eternal perspective, get ready, sanction your marriage now for the inevitable tests and trials that are about to come. Make deposits in your emotional bank account. After God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority. When you see her, what do you see, clay pot, yes? When she looks at you, what does she see? She sees me – clay pot.

The Lord, Jesus Christ, takes delight in you. Did you know this? Now, it depends upon your parenting whether or not that really resonates with you. If you didn't have a good daddy or mommy, but for some of you it's just a choice. When I say to you, "The Lord, Jesus, delights in you," it really, really resonates. It's true, whether you believe that or not. But it really resonates with some of you.

What would it be like if your wife felt that way about you? Both ways – that you really felt like she delighted in you, and she really felt like you delighted in her. What would that be like? Clay pots! Get out there. You know what to do. You know what God has done for you. You know what to do. Will you? Will you? Will you?

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we are a little confused about why you would do it this way. We do thank you that even though You have done it this way, you have not left us in a fog, that you have given us the very knowledge of Christ about the things that tend to make us lose heart and you've shown us how not to lose heart. Lord, I pray for each of these men and their marriages, for those who are married and for those who will be, that you would challenge them and not just to believe these things, but to let these things change their lives. Just take a moment and tell the Lord how you would like to respond to this morning's message. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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