

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY  
HUSBAND IN THE MIRROR – LIVING WITH A DIFFICULT WIFE  
Patrick Morley  
January 31, 2003

Good Morning, Men.

Some of you have been here through my series of messages about the “cut through” house, and I have another installment in the series. I really think we’ve had a break through. As it turns out, I had come home from a motorcycle ride on Sunday, and I was out front cleaning it, along with Patsy who had brought out the two dogs. We were both out in the front yard, and low and behold, here comes a teenager on a bicycle right down the driveway. He said, “Hi there!” I said, “Hi there!” I was so stunned the way he said, “Hi there!” He was about to drive away when I said, “Wait, wait, come back, I want to talk to you. What’s your name?” I was so stunned because he said, “Hi there,” like you’re supposed to be here, and I’m supposed to be here. He told me his name, and I said, “You live in that house on the right up the street, don’t you?” He said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “What grade are you in?” He said he told me he was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and what school he attended, and he said he was on the varsity soccer team, too. I said, “That’s great, but do you know this is not a public driveway, that this is a private drive?” He had this honest look of astonishment. Now, you and I both know, because we have this ability to manipulate. I mean he was good. This guy should be in Hollywood – utter astonishment. He could not believe that this was a private driveway. “Hi there!”

God is good, and God had me write a book called, *The Young Man in the Mirror*.” I said, “Let me ask you a question? Are you a leader?” He said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “Well, I write books and I just finished a book for young men in high school. If I give you a copy of that book, would you be interested in reading it?” He said, “Oh, yes,” and maybe that’s Hollywood. Anyway, he said, “Oh, yes, I really would.” I went and got the book and gave it to him and said, “Here’s the deal. For every chapter you tell me you’ve read you get one free ‘cut through’ in my yard.” Is that it, is that is? That’s the answer to the “cut through” problem. That has nothing to do with today’s message, but I just thought you’d want to know.

This morning we’re going to talk about a difficult topic – the difficult marriage. Specifically, how to live with a difficult wife; however, I’m just calling to call it difficult marriage. The reason I am is that this message can certainly apply to your spouse, but it can also apply to you if you are a difficult man to live with. Also, some of you have difficult children. Some of you have difficult relationships with peers or bosses, so some of the principles in here you will be able to pull out for them, too.

I want to be kind of sensitive this morning to those of you who are in difficult marriages. I have been the difficult one in our marriage. My wife has never been difficult. In our marriage, I was the difficult one, so I have a great sensitivity for those of you who are married to a difficult wife; however, I also realize that I have never really been in your shoes. So, I am not going to try to pretend that I know what it is like to live in the kind of intangible pain of a man married to a difficult wife.

I would also like to mention that some of you have been divorced, and God is a redeemer. He can redeem the broken things and restore what the locusts have eaten. I also know that some of you have experienced a lot of agony in going through a divorce either because you’ve been difficult or a woman has been difficult. Some of the things I am going to say this morning may be hard for you. I just want to say on the front end that I do have great sympathy as well as empathy for you.

The first thing I want us to look at is what is difficult and what isn’t. 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? I would like to suggest to you that it is a line we cross because all marriages have difficult days, yes? Every person is from time to time difficult, yes? So when does a normal person who’s occasionally difficult become a difficult person? How would you classify them as a difficult person to live with? I would

suggest to you two littenace tests. One would be is it chronic? Secondly, is it daily? If you have a wife, or if you, on a daily basis are chronically difficult to get along with, then this is not normal behavior.

I don't want to spend a lot of time on this next thing. I wrote a book called *Understanding Your Man in the Mirror*. It was originally titled, *What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men*." I have a chapter in here on "How to Live with a Difficult Husband." Part of this message I am going to take from this book. If you want to go further on this, you can look in that book but, basically, here is the idea. A difficult person is difficult because they are either an angry person or a withdrawing person. Those are the two responses that are dysfunctional in a relationship. The first dysfunctional response is anger – to lose temper, and the second is to withdraw. You've heard this before, I'm sure. This resonates if you haven't heard it. Now anger is aggressive behavior, and to withdraw is passive behavior, right? So in a difficult relationship you might have a mate who is very aggressive with you or very passive with you, and it makes the relationship difficult. But, she would also be either a verbal person or a non-verbal person, right? These are the four combinations. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but I want to give it to you so you can have a woman who is verbal and aggressive, people who I would call brow beaters. You can never do anything right, they're always on your case, they're angry people, anger makes them aggressive, they have verbal skills and they're very good with words, and they use it like a knife. And they use it often. Some of you are married to a woman like that, and some of your wives are married to a husband like that.

Secondly, is the wife who is aggressive and non-verbal. I would say that would be the aggressor. This is the person who is very angry, but they don't have the ability to put that into words, so they tend to combine a little bit of this anger. One man told me, "I would get so frustrated with my wife, and I would get very angry, but I just couldn't find the words to tell her what was really going on. So I would withdraw, and I would get even with her by not doing chores, by not picking up things on the way home that I promised her I would. So I got even with her in non-verbal ways by neglecting her." Some of you have wives who are difficult because they are angry with you, and don't know how to express themselves, so they are letting you down consistently. They're supposed to manage the checkbook, and they intentionally will let you down with finances.

Then we have the person who is verbal and passive. We would call that person a whiner. This is the person who is withdrawn. She's not going to be aggressive with you and maturate you like this, but she's always complaining – she's a whiner. Nothing is ever right, you can never do enough to please this person.

The other kind of person here would be the one who pouts – the non-verbal person who is also passive. They don't know how to put it into words, so they sulk in a little cloud.

These are the four broad categories. This is not Bible teaching, by the way, but some things I am not sure are right in all situations. But I do think these are some useful categories for you to try to figure what is and isn't difficult. If you have somebody who is occasionally like this, everyone has an occasion like one of these, right? The point is if you have somebody who this is how they always are, then, maybe, you are married to a difficult wife. If you are like this everyday, chronically, you may be a difficult man to live with. If you are a man, you probably are a difficult man to live with.

What is the problem that we would like to solve this morning? When you're married to a woman like this, it just feels easier to quit and start over. It feels like it would just be so much easier to quit and start over with somebody who's different. To exacerbate that thought is the idea that sometimes you realize you made the decision to marry this person in haste. You did not use wisdom in making the decision. You find yourself with a woman that "if I would have just been a little smarter, and taken a little more time, I wouldn't of married her in the first place." When the thought goes through your mind that it would be so much easier to start over, that's compounded because you feel like you made a bad decision to begin with. Beyond that the world today is telling you that if it doesn't work out, that's okay. You can start over. There are very few barriers, social mores if you will, that say, "Don't do that." Then, sometimes, compounding this is that maybe you have lived a sinful life, and you do have some guilt so a lot of times men will feel like they're being punished. That being married to this woman, "I'm being punished. God, what did I do wrong to deserve this woman?" How many men have had that thought? So, often we have the thought that it would be so much easier to quit and start over, because "I don't deserve to be punished

this way. I've been punished long enough. It's time to move on. The world doesn't seem to have any problem if I were to do this. I made a bad decision. I didn't think it through. Why should I have to be punished any longer?" That's the problem we have here.

For some of you this is right on the money, yes? For others of you, you have friends and relationships. If you don't know somebody like this, you don't know many people. If you don't know somebody like this, you have very shallow relationships, because if you had real relationships with people at any level of depth, you will know some people who feel like they ought to quit and start over.

What is the real problem? The real problem is what could I possibly say to you this morning that would be so compelling to you that you would be willing to lay down your life for your wife? It's tough. That's the real problem. The surface problem is that it would just be easier to quit and start over. The real problem is what could I possibly say to you if you gone that far? What could I possibly say to you that would be so compelling that you would be willing to lay down your life to your wife? That's the big idea this morning.

The big idea – I will lay down my life for my difficult wife. You may not have a difficult wife, and that would be one reason you would want to dismiss this, or you might have one and say, "Ain't no way. I've been there, done that." What could I possibly say, Lord? Lord, help me here? What can I possibly say to a man who is married to a difficult woman and been in it for a long time? What can I possibly offer here this morning that would be so compelling that he would want to change his mind, and he would be willing to, by faith, say, "I will sacrifice. I will lay down my life for my difficult wife." That's a tough one. Any ideas? Help me here. The only thing I know to do, the only thing I can offer, is to read some Bible passages and see what they say, then you can make up your own mind.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians: Chapter 7. In order to solve this real problem, there are some things you need to know. There needs to be some things you believe. Knowing something and believing is different, yes? It would have to be, on your part, a willing to submit to the authority of those things. You also have to have some faith that your marriage is not a mistake, that a sovereign God has sovereignly orchestrating all of the difficult circumstances in your relationship. Then you would have to be able to say you would be willing to persevere; that there would be something to give you enough hope to persevere. What I am about to say would only be compelling to you to be willing to say, "I will lay down my life for my difficult wife." You probably can't get there unless you would know what the Bible says about marriage, believe what the Bible says about marriage, be willing to submit to the authority of what the Bible says, have faith that God is sovereignly orchestrating all things for good. All things work together for good. Then that you would be willing to say because of this, "I will persevere because I have hope that God is actually going to do something good through this marriage."

Verse 10. This is regarding separation. "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." There is a passage in your questions this morning from Matthew: 19 where Jesus talks about prohibition against divorce except in the case of adultery.

There are different views, by the way, of Biblical divorce. One view says, under no circumstances can you divorce. A second view says, under some circumstances you can divorce, then the third view would be to say there are several circumstances under which you divorce. In other words, the two reasons given in the Bible are meant as examples, not as the full expression. Personally, each of you comes from a different tradition, there are 50 different churches and at least 13 different denominations, and a lot of non-denominations represented here, so the bottom line is that you need to check your own tradition's beliefs are on this. I am just telling you what the Bible says. What the Bible says is that you should not divorce your wife.

Verse 12, “To the rest I say this, (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer...” In other words, one reason you might have a difficult wife is because she’s an unbelieving woman, right? That doesn’t mean that believing women can’t be difficult, because we know they can be, because you’re a believing man, and you can be difficult. But, this is about an unbelieving wife. “If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.”

This is 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7: The Marriage chapter. This is the Bible on the Bible. Verse 14. “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but, as it is, they are holy.”

About desertion - Jesus does say that if your spouse commits adultery, that is grounds for divorce. It does not make divorce necessary, but it is grounds for divorce. Also, desertion as we see in Verse 15, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” Now this does say, if the unbeliever leaves. There really is nothing about a believer leaving, but let’s talk about desertion here.

Verse 16, “How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” If you drew a little box and that’s marriage and outside this marriage is divorce, the grounds for divorce would be adultery and desertion. It’s according to the Bible. You need to check in your own tradition to see how this all the details of this play out. Adultery and desertion – those are the only grounds mentioned in the Bible for divorce. Some traditions would even discount these.

On marriage, separation is allowed under certain circumstances, but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled, and the husband must not divorce his wife. So separation can take place, but not divorce. If you have an unbelieving spouse, that’s why the person is difficult because they’re an unbelieving spouse, the Bible says as long as that person is willing to remain in the marriage then you must allow them to remain. If the unbeliever deserts, fine. You let them go, that’s okay, but you don’t initiate that. These are very difficult teachings in a culture like we live in. In a legalistic culture, the Jewish legalistic culture of the day, this would have also been a difficult teaching because Moses was allowing people to dismiss their wives for all kinds of different reasons. Jesus has made it a much more sanctified relationship. Jesus has raised the bar on marriage.

Well now, why should you hang in there? Should you stay in a difficult marriage? Here are a few reasons, and I am going to tell you these are based upon Biblical principles. If they’re troubling to you, you can check with me some other time, and I’ll try to work with you on that.

Your marriage is not an accident. Even if you got married on the Love Boat or a chapel in Las Vegas to a call-girl dancer that you met, your marriage is not an accident. It is a calling. Your marriage is a calling. Third, no marriage is beyond God’s reach. Fourth, there is a purpose for every marriage. God has a purpose for every marriage.

Do you remember the Joseph? In Genesis: 45, the culmination of the story of Joseph is that Joseph was a young man who was sold into slavery by his brothers. They treated him like an animal, put him in a pit, and sold him for money. Joseph went down to Egypt and was imprisoned when falsely accused of raping a woman, but eventually, like 13 years later at the age of 30, he became the Governor of the land; number two in the entire nation of Egypt. Seven years of flooding then two years of famine. Two years into the famine, his brothers are coming to him to buy grain and Joseph decides to reveal his identity to his brothers. These were difficult men.

The Scripture in Genesis: 45 records an emotional explosion, and his brothers were terrified when they found out that this was the brother they thought they had killed because they had sent him off. You know the story, Joseph said, “Look, I know that you meant it for harm, but God meant for good for the saving of many lives.”

When I read that this week, I realized in my marriage that my wife is a Joseph to me. For the first 13 years of our marriage, we've been married almost 30, but for the first 13 years of our marriage, I was that difficult husband. That same 13 years that Joseph was leading a difficult life because of his brothers, for 13 years I made my wife lead a very difficult life. I'll go beyond that. I was destroying my wife. Brown beater, verbal, good with words, watch out buddy. Restless, heart charger, mean as a snake. She'd never know it, not in a business deal, because all of the frustration that I had with you because you wouldn't give me what I want, I've never going to let you know that because I want to close the deal. But I'm storing it up for Patsy. You know what I mean. I thank God Patsy understood that she needed to lay down her life for a difficult husband. She saved my life. My wife saved my life. If you are married to a difficult woman, I can assure you that in the sovereignty of a good God, she will turn evil to good. All things will work together for good. He will restore the locusts of Eden, and He has sent you there to save her, to save her very life. So that's why you persevere. That's why you don't lose hope, that's why you keep faith, that's why you put yourself under the authority of the Bible, that's why you believe, that's why you make sure you know what you're supposed to do. Because the Bible calls us to say, "I will lay down my life for my difficult wife."

Let's pray:

Father, there are, no doubt, some men in this room who are in incredible pain because they are married to a difficult wife, and everything inside of them screams out that they should quit and start over. I pray that You, by Your spirit, would say something to their hearts that is so compelling that they would be willing to sacrifice their life for their wife, as You have sacrificed Your life for our life. And that you would be our example and our model and our spirit and our power for this. Lord, for those of us who are feeling a little convicted this morning because we are the difficult one in the marriage, Lord, I pray that you would somehow superintend these words to the heart of the husband as well. Lord, for a man who knows somebody who is in this difficult marriage, I pray that somehow you would use them as an agent of reconciliation and redemption and you would send out the message from this room that you are in the business of saving lives through spouses. In Christ's name I pray. Amen

CJB- 5/15/03