

Man in the Mirror Bible Study  
The Husband in the Mirror: Restoring a Broken Marriage 2-7-2003  
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We are in our series, The Husband in the Mirror. This morning we are going to talk about restoring a broken marriage. The big idea for the whole series is: **After God, but before all others, I will make my wife my top priority.** I'm dedicating this series, as I have said several times before, to my son and my new son-in-law, John and Jay. I'm hoping that they will never have to apply the principles at a deep level that we are going to talk about today, but that this will be a word of encouragement to them and to you. The principles that we are talking about today for restoring a broken relationship are also the same principles that can keep a relationship from being broken in the first place. So pay attention even if you have a great marriage, or think you have a great marriage. You may find out that it's not all you think it is.

The big idea this morning is: **It is God's will for this marriage to work.** I realize that if you are in a broken or difficult marriage that thought may not exactly resonate with you. I don't want you to walk out of here this morning believing that this is biblically true, I want you to walk out of here this morning being a true believer- that this is exactly what God wants for your life and exactly what you want for your life. Only God's Spirit can do this in your heart. I will ask you, as we begin, if you have any doubt about the idea that it is God's will for this marriage to work. I would like to ask you right now if you would be willing to invite the Holy Spirit to change your heart this morning. Right now, supernaturally, in ways that you can't even imagine to be possible, that you would allow God to do a work in you that you could actually walk out of here believing this. Only God can do that.

The first thing that we will look at this morning is why the marriage is broken? Before you can fix something, you need to know where the break is and you need to know why. In 1995 Willie Davis checked into a hospital in Tampa, Florida with a severe case of gangrene in one of his feet. They had to amputate his foot. Fortunately, the surgery was successful. Unfortunately, it was the wrong foot. Since 1996 there have been 150 cases of wrong site surgery.

Before you can fix a broken marriage you have to know why it's broken in the first place and where the break is. Just a couple of thoughts: it could be him, her, or both, right? The other thing to look at is that it could be a moral problem. The problem could be you or your wife or both of you. I know a married couple, both professing Christians, in which the man committed adultery. To get back at her husband the wife committed adultery. When he found out that she was committing adultery he committed more adultery to get back at her, and so on... They obviously have a serious problem. They are still married, both being on medication for depression. Both are unwilling to repent. He was on a suicide watch last year.

It could be a moral problem, but usually it is a priority problem. There are two kinds of problems and there are two kinds of decisions we make. The biggest priority problem is neglect. It's the emotional bank account: taking more withdrawals than you are making deposits. I used this illustration years ago, to explain how divorce happens. In almost every case this would be true: Young couples adoring each other get together and they date, and they share their hopes, dreams, and ambitions. They talk about how many children that they want to have. They get married; and then he goes off to work one day, two weeks after the honeymoon, and he forgets to come home. He has conquered her, and now he is off to conquer his next big challenge.

One day, about a month later, she says, "I thought we were going to build a life together." He says, "Well, we are. All of our dreams and ambitions will come true. First I have to put a few deals in place. I have to get a few things going and then I'll be back right where I promised that I would be. You can count on me." Because she has a desire for him that borders on disease because of the fall, she trusts him. So a week becomes a month, a month becomes a year, which becomes two. Again she confronts him. And he gives the same type of answer. She trusts him because she cares for him. Time goes on and little Jesse comes along. She confronts him again. She tells him that she feels alone as he is off chasing these business deals. His answer is that he is doing all of this because of his commitment to her and their child. Again time goes on. Seven years becomes ten, and ten becomes twelve...

One day she is sitting around in the privacy of her own thoughts, and this thought goes through her mind, "I don't think he is ever coming back." She begins to brood on that thought. She turns it over and over in her heart, for months. Then one day, in the privacy of her own thoughts, she reaches over and she ...the line that kept her lured into the marriage. As he is out chasing his career goals, she slowly begins to

drift away from where she said that she was going to be. He is very bright, and notices this, so he rushes back to where he said he would be when they took their vows. He begins to beg and plead with her to come back. No matter what he says, she just keeps drifting away. Nothing he can say will bring her back. What he doesn't understand is that she is emotionally dead, and he killed her. That is how marriages get broken: moral reasons, but usually priority reasons.

What is the real problem here? This is what I think. You have to ask why an intelligent man like this can't figure it out on his own. You guys are smart. You know how to make things happen- get things done. The question is, if you are so smart over there, why can't you work it how here. "I want to restore this relationship, but I just don't know what to do. I try but I just can't seem to keep it going."

Look at 1Corinthians 7:10. **It is God's will for this marriage to work.** Here is the text for that: "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. A husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (not I but the Lord): if any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. If a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her she must not divorce him." **It is God's will that this marriage work.**

Turn to Matthew 22:29. I want to show you how God has provided for us. God has provided for us to be able to restore a broken marriage. This is a story that happens to be about marriage, but we will apply it in a different way. It's a story about some religious men who are talking to Jesus about a man who, under Jewish law, is married to a woman and dies. That woman then marries the man's brother who dies, and she ends up marrying seven of the brothers. The religious men want to know who will be her husband in heaven. Jesus replies to the question (v 29). "Your problem is that you don't know the scriptures and you don't know the power of God."

That's it. That is how God has provided for us. The problem is that if the idea that it is God's will for this marriage to work, doesn't connect with you; the problem is that you don't know the scriptures. If you know that thought and you don't really believe it in your heart, the problem is that you don't know the power of God. The scriptures give you the power of God. If you want to seize this idea- that it is God's will for this marriage to work, then take the passage from 1Corinthians 7:10 and drill it into your brain. Allow the power of the Holy Spirit to make it your abiding reality. God has provided everything that we need for everything that we need. Hah, I like that. If you are over here chasing that deal and thinking that somehow that is going to make your life right, then you don't know the scriptures and you don't know the power of God. It is God's will for *this* marriage to work- not the next one.

A word of encouragement: Do you know that 75% of all marriages work? We always talk about the divorce statistics. When people tell you that every other marriage ends in divorce, it is not exactly true. What is true is that every year, when you compare the number of marriages to the number of divorces, (usually, there are about two million marriages and roughly one million divorces every year) when you look at the total population, actually only about 25% of people are divorced. That means that three out of four marriages work. That ought to provide you with a lot of encouragement and a lot of hope.

Now I want to give you some steps that you can take in applying this truth. In Italy there is a famous building, whose name I can't even say correctly, because I grew up calling it the leaning tower of pizza. The tower is 179 feet tall, made out of marble. It's construction began in 1174. This building is so famous because it is about to fall down. In 1990, because the building was in such disrepair, after 300 years of leaning, they shut the building down to tourists. This created all kinds of havoc because it is a great part of their economy, and so they brought some scientists in and began looking at the building. They decided to try out a way of restoring the building in small increments. In 1999, they started digging out about five gallons of dirt every couple of days on one side of the building. They were hoping that they would see any kind of movement. The building is moving five archeseconds a year of tilt. They were hoping that they could see the building tilt back upright even a centimeter. In one year they got an inch. The building actually leans 16 and a half feet which is about four and a half meters off center and they got it to come back an inch. The interesting thing is that it is 16 and a half feet out of kilter. However, they have determined that if they can correct this by only half of a meter out of the four and a half meters that it is leaning over that they will stabilize the building for the next 300 years.

The first thing that you need to know is that you don't have to perfect your marriage to restore it. Small increments.... I think that you ought to be looking at three things: a mindset, a process, and a plan. These are the three things that I would focus on if I was wanting to restore my marriage.

Mindset. Is it worth it? Can God restore what the locusts have eaten? Am I a true believer in these scriptures? I think that one of the biggest problems in relationships is reservations. Because it's not standing upright, I miss that it is standing at all. You can be a true believer because it doesn't have to be perfect. Am I in denial? Am I humble? Am I repentant? Am I extending grace? Am I willing to forgive? Am I realistic about setbacks? Am I willing to let her be her in the same way that she is willing to let me be me? Does she need to learn how to let me be me? The important thing is having a Godly mindset; and being a true believer, setting aside my reservations in light of what is there, not just because of what isn't there- rejecting it.

Then I think of process- some way of honestly confronting the things that are not working correctly, and having some system of conflict resolution. If you don't have a process of conflict resolution in your family, chances are that your family is dysfunctional. If your wife can't tell you what is really in her heart without you blowing up; and vice versa, with out her pouting and running off, your family is probably not working properly. If you don't have a process of conflict resolution and don't know how to go about it, then I would go and get some counseling. I would go learn a process for dealing with conflicts honestly. Maybe your spouse won't go- you go! Hey, I'm going to counseling. If I can go you can go. I need it. I didn't think I needed it at first, but the more I get into it the more I realize that it is really good. I am learning some incredible things about myself. I am a freer happier Christian. I am enjoying grace more because I have been in counseling. You can too.

Then comes the plan. We are trying to get ourselves to the place where we believe that it is God's will for this marriage to work. It is! The problem is that you do not know the scriptures. I would encourage you to take a favorite chapter of the bible (I was playing around with Matthew 18 this week) and apply it verse by verse to your marriage. Read each verse and ask yourself what it means to your marriage. If you want to have the power of God, then you need to know the scriptures. Look at the scriptures in the context of your marriage. Invite the Holy Spirit to be powerful in you and allow Him to work in your life. My last little thought in the plan would be to consider praying together with your wife. She may not want to pray with you, or you may not want to pray with her, but it is incredibly important.

I'm going to share what something that I got from two secondary sources (I haven't confirmed it with the original source which is the 1995 gallop poll). For married couples that attend church and who pray together every day, one couple in 1,052 get divorced. Study the scriptures, know the scriptures, know the power of God, pray with your wife, have a mindset, have a process, and have a plan. It is God's will for this marriage to work. By God's grace I believe that you will make it happen. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, not all of us this morning, can really relate to the struggle that has been described. We thank you for those men who have strong marriages- who are models and examples for us. We bless them and pray that they would bless us with sharing their lives with us. For those of us that do have marriages that are leaning, maybe they are standing, but they are on the verge of collapse. Lord, give us the courage to know the scriptures, and to allow your Spirit's power to work in us to take some small steps to move and stand upright. For those of us that didn't catch it in time and the whole thing collapsed, I pray that you would still extend a deep sense of grace and mercy, to those men. For those who have not married yet, I pray that you would use the lessons of today and this whole series to build into their lives the firm conviction that it is your will for every marriage to work. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.