

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
The Husband in the Mirror – The Phases of Marriage
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If you have been married for twenty or more years, would you please stand up? Wow! Only in a Christian gathering, right? Would you remain standing? If you can! (Laughter) And also I'd like to include you if your wife may be deceased but you were married for twenty or more years – I'd like to invite you to stand, too. Now if you have been married for thirty or more years, would you remain standing? Wow, we really want to honor you guys for keeping the faith. (Applause) And if you have been married for forty or more years, would you remain standing? Wow – this is pretty amazing! We appreciate that investment that you have made into not only your own marriage, but giving an example to the rest of us. If you've been married fifty or more years, would you remain standing? (Applause) This is awesome. Harold, how long have you been married? Fifty-four years – well, we appreciate and congratulate you. Bernie? Almost fifty-eight? Fifty-two for Al. Ken? Fifty-three? Fifty-five? And Fifty. Well, congratulations. I'll tell you what...Bernie...I have a little cake that I'd like to present to you and Clara – and on the top, I thought about putting a thought a message from today's message. I was going to put "You are still my mission in life", but I thought your wife might not understand, so I put "I love you" instead. (Laughter, applause)

This morning I want to talk to you about seasons of marriage – the phases of marriage, and you can see that a lot of men have figured out how to prolong the seasons, as it were, and so I'll put that up on the board: The Seasons of Marriage. I want to do this series as marriage advice to my 22 year old son and my soon to be son-in-law, a week from tomorrow, a very exciting time. And so how do these men stay together with their lives for so long? How does that work? We said that the big idea for the whole series is that: "After God, but before all others, I will make my wife my top priority". Now for some of you, you are just scintillating with resonance as you say that this morning. Others of you are kind of wondering, "Well, I could maybe warm up to that, but it's going to take awhile. And others of you are thinking, "Man, this guy is really, really...I don't know if I'm even going to come back to next weeks message because this guy is just so out to lunch from where I am!" However, after last week's message, I heard that one table's discussion went along this line: "That's great, but how do you do that?" And so for that table (or we could start a little bidding contest) I have prepared a magic wand that we can just sort of wave over your marriage, and make that all come true. Or you could keep coming back for the rest of the messages!

Now the reality is you know that it takes time to make this work out, and so we are going to be looking ways that you can make deposits into your wife's emotional bank account – the application that we talked about last week. We are going to be talking about those over the next twelve week series that we do this. Now you should be at 1 Peter 3:7, and I kind of want to set up the idea for this morning. "Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them however you want, because they are the weaker partner, after all, and they will always be there." Now, let's try this one more time. "Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner, and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Let me read that to you out of the New Living Translation. "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives treat them with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard." Let me give it to you literally out of the Greek. "The men likewise housing together by knowledge as to the weaker pot, the weaker vessel, the woman, assign value as also co-inheritors of favor of life, for the not to be hindered prayers of you." That's why you need translations, right? But this idea of assigning value as also co-inheritors of favor of life...this word, honor is best understood as to assign value, in other words, to assign value to your wife. When it says to be considerate, to treat her with respect, the idea is to assign value or honor or respect to your wife - and to do at every phase through every season of life. And so how do you assign value to your wife at every phase along the way? In other words, how do you make your wife after God, but before all others, your top priority at every phase of marriage?

All right, we'll look at several phases here. Phase 1 I'm going to call courtship, you might want to call it pre-marriage, but I'm just going to suggest that courtship is part of the calculus of marriage. How long does courtship last? A few months to a few years, yes? I remember asking Patsy for the first date. I had seen Patsy around while I was in College, she had graduated, and she was hanging around Orlando living with some girls in an apartment. She wanted to be a flight attendant, she was waiting for a class date, and she just was on, kind of like a party up here in Orlando. I remember seeing Patsy. I remember those corduroy jeans that she wore, and I can remember seeing her walk down the street, and I can remember that I would feel like my heart was going to pound out of my chest, and my legs would be wobbly and my knees would be buckling, and sometimes I would feel like I was going to pass out. Remember that? Remember those feelings of intoxication you got from your wife when you were dating her? So I asked her a few times to go out, and she said no, and that's in the story for another day...One day, I knew that she was substitute teaching. She got home at 2:30, so half an hour before I knew she would get home I pulled into a parking stall at her apartment complex, and I just waited until she drove up. And when she got out of the car, I acted like I had also just arrived by "coincidence". And I said, "Hey, Patsy, How you doin'?" She said, "Hi, Pat." She never stopped walking. I said, "Hey, Patsy, there's this really great group playing over at the Holiday Inn over at Daytona Beach, I thought I'd head over there this evening, thought you might like to come along?" She said, "No thanks." Never stopped walking! She never stopped walking. But finally, finally – you know I've never had a woman turn me down for a free meal. Have you ever had a woman turn you down for a free meal during a date? Of course not! So, finally it dawned on me and so I called up her apartment and she wasn't there, and so I told her roommate, "Betty, I'm taking Patsy to dinner tonight, tell her I'll be by to pick her up at 7:00." Well, I made it sound to Betty like Patsy had already said yes and she was going out with me – I didn't exactly say that – but I left the impression, and then I showed up at 7:00, I didn't know if Patsy would go out with me or not. But she opened the door and started laughing, and we went out to dinner, and we've been together ever since. In fact, everything she ever said fascinated me. And that's how it is when you are in courtship. Everything she did was intriguing. Every move she made, every time she shook her hair a certain way, it would send little tingles all over my body. It's a time of curiosity; it's a time of mutual attraction. We literally, on our first date, we literally stayed up all night long talking. We were shocked when we looked out the window and saw daybreak. The time just slipped by so quickly. And the bottom line is that during the courtship phase of marriage, it's impossible to neglect your future wife, because you are a man on a mission. And the relationship is the task. Your task-oriented, she's relationship oriented, when you are courting her, the relationship is the task. It's what your mission's all about. Now, unfortunately, she is under the illusion that this is kind of the way that you're wired. She doesn't understand that for you, it's not the way you are, it's just the current mission that you are on. So you don't have to worry about making deposits into her emotional bank account at this stage because everything is a deposit at this phase. And these deposits are oxygen for her whole system.

Then the second phase is the honeymoon phase of marriage. How many of you are still in the honeymoon phase/season of your marriage. Quite a few, quite a few...How long does this season of marriage usually last? From two days, to forever, right? I was recently asking a young couple, who had been married for a brief time – I said, "What has been the most surprising thing to you about marriage?" He said, "Nothing". She said, "You know, I thought we were going to spend more time together. But we get home and there are all of these chores to do, and all of these errands to run, and I really thought we'd have more time than this." And, this is where the problem starts to come in, because she never really understood that because he is task oriented, because he is looking for a cause, because his three wants are 1. Something he can give his life to – the need to be significant. 2. Someone to share with (her). 3. A system that explains why these things are so difficult. He really does want someone to share his life with. But the way he's wired, even more important to him, is that he's on a mission, that he's giving his life to something that really will make a difference in the world. And so, he goes off to work one day, and forgets to come home.

I know this is true, because about two weeks after we got home from our honeymoon vacation and got the apartment set up, I went off to work one day, and I forgot to come home for thirteen years. You know that this is true, because whatever time duration it is, virtually all men make this mistake. Hopefully if you are not married, we have a number of bachelors in here who will not make that mistake. How can you not make that mistake? Here is the big idea for today. And I'm going to word this in a way that you can go home and tell your wife. The Big Idea today: Our relationship is my task. Our marriage is my mission. You are number one. Now you go home, and try this out on your wife today. Our relationship is my task.

Our marriage is my mission. You are number one. And she's going to say, "Have you been drinking again?" What an incredible idea! Just think about the implications. Now, it may be better in your case to kind of hold back and not tell her this right away – but to live it out in front of her, because she might not trust you right away if you go home and just dumped on her. But, if you look at 1 Peter 3:7, is this not just another way of playing it back to our wives? I had a young guy with young children come to me one day, tearfully, just really distraught, because he's just consumed with his work and his career. He'd won all kinds of accolades in his career. He'd won all kinds of plaques and trophies for different sales contests that he's won. You know, I want to make my wife my top priority – but I'm just so task oriented. I'm just not relationship oriented. So I shared with him this – "Okay, so your task oriented. Well, we'll stipulate to that!" For those of you who are very task oriented, the ideas, the relationship, is the task. Make the relationship the task. What's so hard about that?

John, Jay – warning label on honeymoon. The problems that you have in your first year of marriage will be the exact same problems you are struggling with twenty years from now. Whatever it is that is messing you up now, by degrees, it's going to be the exact same thing that's messing you up now - unless you understand the importance of making your wife your top priority. Make the relationship into the task. Make the marriage the mission. Make her number one after God, but before all others.

Phase two: Building: After the honeymoon phase is over, we get down to the business of accumulation, expansion, starting a family, building a life together, shared responsibility, working out all of the quirk and the kinks in the marriage knot. And it's going to be a long 25 year run. You as the man, it is the time of your greatest strength. It is also that consumes the most of your energy. And so you come home from work, exhausted, spent, and a lot of times, there is no time left over to let the relationship be the task, to let the marriage be the mission, to let her be number one. You want to know how do you do that? There are 960 minutes in a day. Let's call it 1,000 for talking purposes. You work, say, eight hours, okay? That's 480 minutes. Let's call that 500 minutes. So, during the week, at least – half of your waking hours are devoted to working. Now to eat, to prepare, to drive, everybody's going to be different, but let's say that on average, you spend 100 minutes negotiating food, travel, and stuff like that. Now, I would say that it's reasonable to say that most men need a couple of hours of downtime each day, you know where you crawl into your little hole and recover from your wounds, and so, that's 120 minutes. What else might a man be involved in? If he has kids, he wants to give an hour to his kids. You know, play, tussle the hair, play these stupid games they have these days, you know, things like that. And then, because you are a loving, affectionate husband, and besides that you have a two car garage and a lawn, then about another 60 minutes of chores each day. Now, I haven't added that up, what does that up to? 840 minutes? So you have been left 160 minutes of discretionary time. Now, if you want to make your wife into the task, and make her number one. Would you be willing to give her 2% of your time? What's two percent of 1000? Twenty minutes – the twenty minute rule.

There it is. Do you think that under any set of circumstances...any conceivable, imaginable set of circumstances, that you possibly could make your wife even a remote priority in your life by giving her less than two percent? Do you think that there is any way that your marriage can be your mission if you don't put any time and effort into it? How do you treat your wife with value and respect? Assign value to her. Assign time to her. Twenty minutes – the twenty minute rule. So when you go home, maybe your best time with her is in the morning. (Laughter) And, maybe not! So what if you set aside twenty minutes in the morning for coffee. Or, twenty minutes in the morning to discuss the day ahead, and pray together. Or, what if, at the end of the day, after dinner, what if you stayed around the dinner table for about twenty minutes? The kids go off to do homework, play guitar, and you hang out for about twenty minutes with your wife. Not to balance the family checkbook, not to discuss family business, but just to make the relationship the task, the marriage the mission, the top priority after God and before all others. Would there be any value to that?

At the thirteen year mark in our marriage, I made a list up of 11 of our friends in our immediate circle, including my brother, of people who were separated, getting divorced, or in the case of one couple, the woman had gone off to this farm to think about it for a month. And I was terrified by this, because I realized that I did not have a bad marriage, but that had only deceived me into thinking that our relationship was more meaningful than it really was. And for the first time, it dawned on me: I could become one of

these statistics. I'm on my way, because my business is my task, my business is my mission, and my business is number one. I'm going to talk more about that in the weeks to come. However, I'm going to say that the idea I started working on was this twenty minute rule. My wife and I, for the last 17 years, every day, after dinner, we hang out for about 20 minutes and just talk. Do we do this every day? No. It's not a law, or a rule, that you have to do this. But almost every day, at least 6+ days, we spend twenty minutes, and let me tell you, she feels like I'm treating her with consideration and respect, and assigning her value and honoring her. My wife would tell you, if you asked her, she would tell you that in my life, she's number one. I give her twenty minutes! Two percent! She sure is easily pleased. I mean, if I wanted her to prove to me that I'm number one in her life, I'm not going to settle for any twenty minutes! No, Baby! I want hours! I want hours!

Next phase: Empty nest, and then the final phase, which is called maturity – same principles apply. Over here, she's trying to figure out what her new purpose is, because when the kids leave, she has to repurpose her life – she needs some consideration and respect. Over here, under maturity, she's earned her honor. It should be a time of celebration for her, a time of grandchildren, a time where she is being honored and celebrated, special occasions, take that cake home! Give her that cake, pretend you bought it all by yourself, it was your idea, man! Honor her. Men, the system that you are working in your marriage is perfectly designed to produce the results you're getting. Your marriage is perfectly designed to produce the results you are getting. The way out is to make the marriage the mission, to make her number one. Now, I don't know where your head is right now. You might be saying, "I know that's right, I know that's true, but I'm just not there." Brothers, this might be total review, this is just exactly who you are. Or you might be, "Well some days I am, some days I'm not." I'm going to pray that the Holy Spirit would superintend this to your heart. If it is true, then, the next question is, do you believe it? And you can believe it in your head, but not in your heart. So the next thing is will you let it change your life? You are the only two people who are really in this thing together. Yes? Yes? Yes? Yes? Yes? All the men over fifty years, yes. You are the only two people who are really in this thing together. Every one else will phase in and out of your lives, even your children. So why not consider going home, and telling your wife either in words or in actions, our relationship is my task. Our marriage is my mission. You are number one.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thanks for the freedom to have one with what is a very important and sensitive topic to all of us. Lord, I just pray that you would help each of us through this message to really understand there is no magic wand here for this – it just takes time. And that we will give time to whom time is due. That we would show the consideration and respect that you taught us we should give. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.