

Six Habits of Spiritually Happy Men

Spiritually Happy Men Read the Bible Regularly

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 55, starting at verse 10. So, not long after I became a follower of Jesus I was attending a CBMC luncheon. The speaker was a man named Walt Meloon, he is the founder of ... was, he's deceased, Correct Craft Boats, the Ski Nautique. At the conclusion of the luncheon Mr. Meloon stood at the door and shook hands with all of us as we left the space, the Citrus Club downtown. As he reached for my hand he had the most authentic and genuine smile on his face and he grabbed my hand, and he grabbed it with his other hand as well, and he looked squarely into my eyes and he said, "Isn't God good?" I was rocked because 2 things occurred to me. Number 1, I was absolutely convinced that he believed that God was really that good. But as a new Christian the second thing occurred to me, I know God's good but I don't know yet that he's that good. Because of the deep relationship that this man had with Jesus, you could tell that he was a spiritually happy person.

What we're going to do over these next few weeks is we're going to do a series on the habits, the 6 habits, of spiritually happy men. First let's begin our week with a shout out. We want to greet 5 men that have just started meeting weekly at 6:00 on Wednesday evening at their church. Seth Phillips is their leader, called the Episcopal Church Men at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church in Summersville West Virginia. They're just rebooting their men's discipleship effort in their church after being absent from that for quite some time. We want to encourage the Episcopal Church Men. Would you join me in giving them a rousing and a warm Man in the Mirror welcome? 1, 2, 3, hurrah. We want to welcome you guys. Glad to have you with us. Hope this helps you, your church, and your community to become disciples of our Lord and savior Jesus.

This series is going to be called as I say, "6 Habits of Spiritually Happy Men." The first habit we're going to look at is that spiritually happy men read their bible regularly. I have a plant in my office. I've treasured and nursed and suckered this plant for years. It's a giant lily and some of you have been in my office and you've seen this beautiful plant. It almost blocks out the sun light coming through the window. It's such a beautiful plant. Until I went on vacation and forgot to water it before I left. I walked into my office this week and this is what greeted me. This luscious, beautiful plant drooped down. It seemed like a perfect metaphor for talking about being a spiritually happy guy.

Some of us end up feeling a little droopy like this from time to time. What we're going to talk about here is how we get around that. It was Charles Spurgeon, the great London Baptist preacher, who once said, actually lamented, that he could find 10 men who are willing to die for the bible, for every 1 who is actually to read it. Why is reading the bible so valuable? First of all because it's true. Jesus said, John 8:31-32, "If you abide in me and my word abides in you, then you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." John 17:17, Jesus is praying the high priestly prayer,

"Lord, sanctify them, make them holy with Your truth, Your word is truth." Proverbs 30 verse 5 says that, "Every word of God is flawless."

The first thing that makes the reading of the bible so valuable is that it's true. The second is that the Bible, the Word, is how God speaks to us. I was, many years ago now, I led a young man here at the bible study to Jesus. He was 31 years of age, his name was Andy. I don't even know if Andy still comes. Probably not because then I think I would remember. I saw him over the next couple of months 4 or 5 times specifically. After 2 months I asked him, I said, "How is it going on the spiritual journey?" He lit up like a Christmas tree. He said, "I am so happy." I said, "That's awesome. Tell me what you're doing to grow in your relationship with God." He looked like I had just hit him upside the head, like he was a deer caught in the headlights. I say, "Tell me what you're doing to advance in your relationship with the Lord." He looked around a little bit, he said, "I think about God all the time," and then he looked at me to see if that was a satisfactory answer.

I thought to myself, "That's good," but I kept looking at him and he realized that he needed to add something. He said, "Oh, and I pray to God all time. I talk to Him all the time." As though he had now ... and then he settled back as though he was completely satisfied with the answer that he had given. I asked him. I said, "Well I think it's great that you talk to God, but why don't you also let God talk to you?" At which point, not knowing what I meant and being a new Christians he said to himself, I could see the wheels turning, "Uh oh, what kind of a cook have I gotten involved with here? God talking to me?" Then I explained to him that prayer is how we talk to God, one of the ways that God most, really the primary way that God talks to us, is through His word, through the bible. To incorporate regular bible reading into your life, it's because how God speaks to us.

All scripture 2 Timothy 3: 16-17, "all scripture is inspired by God and valuable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the men of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". We read the bible, it's valuable because it's true, it's how God speaks to us. He also speaks to us through his works and creation. He also speaks to us through the whisper of the Holy Spirit, through the witness of other men. We have the word, the works, the whisper and the witness, but the word is so prominent in the way that God speaks to us. It's true, it's how God speaks to us, and it works. It works.

Isaiah chapter 55, where you should be, 10, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth," think about my little poor plant here, "and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater," that's what the rain and the snow coming does, it refreshes, it makes to flourish, it brings a yield. Verse 11, "so it is with my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which it is sent." The theological word is efficacious. Efficacy, you know in scientific experiments the efficacy of the experiment, that it actually works. That's the thing about the word of God.

Then, how does it do that? Turn with me to Psalms, back to the left, Psalms chapter 19. I want to have you see a couple of things. Psalms chapter 19 verse 7. The first half of Psalms 19 talks about the glories of a natural revelation or general revelation, how God reveals Himself in nature. The second half talks about how God reveals Himself in the word through special revelation. These are the 2 principally considered ways generally speaking of how God reveals Himself, in general revelation and then through special revelation.

Psalms chapter 19 verse 7, how does this word accomplish what He desires and so forth? "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." You need your soul revived? "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul," reviving my poor little plant. "The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." Anybody need more wisdom? "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart," anybody need more joy in their heart? "The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes," do you need more light? "The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure, and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold." The word of God is more valuable than gold.

How many men in this room are wearing an expensive gold watch? Raise your hands. Is anybody here wearing an expensive gold watch? Come on, raise your hands. Anybody? It's okay. I love expensive gold watches. Really? Nobody has an expensive gold watch? How am I going to make this next illustration work if nobody has an expensive gold watch?

How many have a semi-expensive gold watch? There we go, all right. Gee. Are you guys just poor? Are you cheapskates? Are you really just like spiritual giants that shun materialism, "I'm done with all of that?" Actually, how many of you have an expensive gold watch but you left it at home because you wanted to fake us out? All right, all right. Let me see this beautiful semi-precious gold- Take it off and let me have it.

Let me see it, take it off and give it to me. Don't give me any static. You never mess with the man with the mic. Actually this is a pretty cool watch. It's a lot better than the watch I have by the way.

This watch is more precious than this bible, or this bible is more precious than pure gold, the little bit of gold I can see at least in this semi-precious watch? Now my brother because you love God and because this word is more precious than gold I'm going to give you this bible and I'm going to take this watch. That's what it says, it's more precious than gold, pure gold. "They're sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward." How many of you are looking for a great reward? How many of you want these things that are talked about in this text? It's cause and effect, it's not correlation. It's cause and effect. These is causation.

The word of God and joy in the heart, peace in the heart, wisdom for the simple, a great reward, reviving of the soul, light for the eyes. This is how it works. This is how it works. Now I will say, to appreciate the value of God's word it's worth reflecting on its absence, what happens when it's not present, when it's absent. Several things happen. We begin to make decisions based on our own best thinking, rather than being under the authority of an independent moral compass. We not only do what seems right, we not only make decisions based on our own ideas, we begin to do what seems right in our own eyes. We begin to interpret our bible based on our experience, instead of interpreting our experience based on our bible. The next thing that happens is we start to become Christian in spirit but secular in practice, and then finally we end up with a culture not unlike the one we have now, in which Christianity is prevalent but not powerful.

We have a very Christian nation, very prevalent, but it's not a powerful kind of faith. The reason is because the vast majority of people are not, one of the things that they're not doing is, reading their bible regularly. They're not getting this wisdom for the simple, they're not getting this light, they're not getting this joy, they're not having this revival of the soul, they're not getting that reward that it talks about in Psalms 19. It's interesting because if I could say this, I was speaking to the board of directors of the National Coalition of Ministries To Men, NCMM. Something I founded 20 years ago and haven't been

involved for a decade. They asked me to come because they had a board of directors meeting here in Orlando and bring a devotion, which I did. Here's what I found with them, and it's what I find with you too but this just happened, it was fresh this week.

I find that I have a bond with men, and women but especially men. I have a bond with men who have made the bible their final authority for all matters of faith in life. I have a bond with men like that that is unlike any bond I've ever had with anybody before. It's phenomenal, because you know when you share this common bond in the truth of God's word, all the foreplay and building relationships, it just goes away. You have this instant connection with this person because you know you are worshiping the same God. You have been saved by the same Jesus. You are being empowered by the same Holy Spirit, to do the work, a common work of building the kingdom in many different ways but we're all doing the same work for the same reason. We're all seeking to love God. We're all seeking to love our neighbor. We're all fumbling around with the same problems. We're all on the same pilgrimage. We're all headed for the same destination. There's a bond in that. There's a bond in that.

But men that don't read the bible I don't have that bond with them, even if they love Jesus. I just don't. I just don't, because they don't know what they're talking about. They're Christian in spirit but they're secular practice. They are spiritually stupid. I shouldn't say that. I should say they're biblically illiterate, and spiritually stupid because they don't know what they're talking about.

I was at a race track once, one of the guys from the bible study went with me up to Atlanta. He took his own car but we met up there and everything. He likes cars. The guy that runs my race team, he knows more about cars than anybody I've ever known. He's won the Rolex 24 for crying out loud. He's a master. Our friend started talking about cars and pontificating about all these things, letting everybody know how much he knew. Ron, who happens to be German, he said, "Why don't you just shut up?" He said, "You don't know what you're talking about so why don't you just shut up?" That's the way it is. The way that Ron feels about him talking about cars, that's kind of what I don't say but I want to say when I'm talking with somebody with whom I don't have a common bond because they don't know the bible.

You don't have to know the whole bible but how about one verse? Just give me one verse. I want to have a bond with you but I can't find anything to bond to, because it's not there. Anyway, conversely I need to say this, I've never known a man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's word. Personally I've never known one. I've never known a man whose life has changed in any significant way, I'm talking about positively in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's word. It's just not going to happen. Here's the big idea.

The Big Idea today is this, **your life will never change in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's word.** Yeah, can I get an Amen? This is not even an Amen kind of a bible study but that's worth an Amen. Honestly, this get right up close to the top of all the most important ideas that I could ever possibly talk to you about. It really gets very close to the top. I would say that easily, in this bible study, easily, and we say this at Man in the Mirror, we teach this to leaders all over the country, easily the single greatest contribution that we can make to another man is to help him change the core affections of his heart.

Did you hear that? Easily the single greatest contribution that we can make to man is to help him change the core affections of his heart, to turn his affections from worldly things that bring a certain modicum of temporary happiness, let's call it almost happy, to spiritual things, thinking about things above not

things below, Colossians 3, and finding that happiness, that joy, that peace that comes from resting in the knowledge of the word of God and Christ alone. If this is true then what is our goal?

Turn with me to ... How am I doing on time? Almost out of time. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1, the goal is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus, Romans 8:29, and how does that happen? "Therefore," verse 1, "since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us," that's how we do it. How do we do that? That's the goal, to become like Jesus, to run this race with perseverance. How do we do that? Verse 2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

How do you do that? You do that, how do you fix your eyes on Jesus? You look at his word. John 14 verse 26 says, "And the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name," there we have the trinity by the way. "And the helper, the Holy Spirit," Jesus said, "whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to remembrance everything I have told you." The way that he does that is through the word, through the concept that we call private devotions. The goal of having a private devotion with God, now there is tremendous research that's been done by the Center for Bible Engagement and I'd love to give you lots of information about this but you hear these stats I'm sure from time to time.

Here's the main finding, number 1 is they found that people who would read the bible 4 days a week or more have a significantly different outcome in their lives than people who read the bible either not at all or 2 or 3 times a week. In the general population in the age group 25 years and older, 18.2% of the general population is reading the bible 4 times or more a week. Basically less than 1 in 5 is doing this. Born-again, people who've professed to be born again Christians in this age group of 25 and older, 39.2% read their bibles 4 times or more a week. That means that 6 out of every 10 born-again are setting themselves up to not be wise, to not have pure joy, to not get the reward and so forth and so on.

Then this one quote, "There is no statistical difference between Christians who read or listen to the bible 2 to 3 days a week and those who do not engage scripture at all, or only once a week." Scientific, I think like 8,000 people involved in that study. Why? Because their lives are not changing. Your life is not going to change in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's word.

Let me wrap it up here, I know you want to say, "But what can you do? What can you do?" First of all you can think about this 4 times a week and let that become part of your life. One year bible, I'm reading the bible cover to cover this year, it's my 29th year. I'm in my 29th year and I think of you may have heard this before. Yeah, I read the one year bible, sometimes I get behind, sometimes I get ahead. Usually I get behind.

Sometimes at the end of the year I'm 3 weeks behind so I end up doing, if I catch that in November I do 2 a day, but sometimes I'm in November and I'm 3 a day. I have one goal, I don't have a daily goal for bible reading, I have an annual goal for bible reading, I'm going to read the bible cover to cover once a year. If I miss 3 days in a row, I don't worry about it because I know I'm going to make it up. That would be one strategy for somebody that's a little bit further down the road, a little bit more serious.

Peter Hone, one of our area directors down in Naples Florida, he got ahold of an audio version of the bible. He's riding around, he said, "I was not a good man", and he wasn't. He had 400 employees down in South Africa, big business and everything. In his own words he says, "I was not a good man, but I ended up getting cheated out of some money and so forth and I ended up over here in Naples Florida with my father in law witnessing to me every day. He gave me a copy of the bible on audio. I'm driving around in my car, and one day I heard the words come over the audio, 'I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except by me,' and I knew it was true. Just like that I knew it was true." That was the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the word tutoring that to his heart.

Maybe it's an audio version of the bible if you're driving around a lot. For those of you who are more on the front end, I would give you the 30 day 5 minute a day 5 days a week challenge. For the next 30 days just give it a try. You want light for your eyes, you want joy for your heart, you want wisdom, you want a reward, try this. Make a commitment. A commitment? "Oh my gosh, I can't believe he said that, the way you use that word commitment in this day and age he used the word commitment." Yeah, just make a commitment for the next 30 days that you're going to read the bible for 5 minutes a day 5 days a week. 5 minutes a day 5 days ...

Here's what you do, just read one chapter of the New Testament. Start at the beginning of the New Testament if you want, start anywhere you want. But listen here, watch this, if you get to the end of 30 days and you find that some of the stuff is actually happening in your life, maybe your life is sputtering a little bit but it's sputtering back to life, maybe you remember you're like this. I took another picture, now my plant is going to take a while to come back if it ever comes back, right? You can see that, but here's what it looks like this morning, just after watering it a little bit yesterday. This is what can happen.

If you get this far and you want to keep going and you do 5 days a week and you read 1 chapter of the New Testament in 5 minutes. 52 times 5 is what? 260? 260. You do that 260 times in a year, 5 minutes, 260 times. Guess what? Guess how many chapters there are in the New Testament? Just take a wild guess. 260 chapters. You could read through the entire New Testament in 1 year, in 5 minutes a day. Would that not be a phenomenal accomplishment? You say, "I just don't really feel like ... I just don't want ... I don't have any motivation to do this."

A friend of mine, John Smith, he said, John Smith said to our Sunday School class, he said "If I offered you \$1 million to read through the bible over the next 12 months, do you think you would read through the bible over the next 12 months? Absolutely you would read through the bible in the next 12 months if I would give you \$1 million. I'm going to give you exceedingly, abundantly beyond what you could dare to ask or imagine. I'm going to give you a million times a million dollars or value if you will the word." Substitute discipline for a lack of natural interest, make the commitment, because your life is never going to change in any significant way apart from this regular study of God's word.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father thank you that we can have fun talking about your word, and yet have it sober our spirits at the same time. Lord tutor our hearts on how you would have each of us respond. We give our lives to you. We want the benefits, so Lord help us make the investment. We ask this in your loving name Jesus. Amen.