

Five Weeks to Live

Finding a Deeper Personal Relationship with God

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. If you would, please open your Bibles to Luke chapter 8. I would like to append Steve's announcement about the reunion. We have had 85 men who have been table leaders. I really kind of view the essence of my own personal ministry as building into the lives of these 85 men who have been leaders over the years. Then they, in turn, build into your lives. In previous reunions, it seems like somehow it's ended up giving focus back on the teacher. I've come up with a plan. For this reunion, this anniversary, we're going to focus on honoring the 85 men who have been table leaders over the years. We're going to have a special presentation to them. There have been emails that have gone out but we've sent personal invitations to these 85 leaders. I think they went out this week. We're getting the information out of the online strategies. If you bump into somebody who has been a former member, it's going to be a very special morning. There will be a hot breakfast as well. I want to encourage you to come to that.

With that said, let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. We've got ten men that are being led by Spencer Alexander. They're called Men of Standard at the City of Refuge Kingdom Worship Center in Felton, Delaware. These ten guys have been meeting for two years at Saturdays at 10:00 AM. Now they're part of us. We're part of them. We're part of something that God is doing among men in America, in the world. I wonder if you'd help me in giving these men a warm and a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome this morning. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome, guys. We're really glad to have you here.

We're going to start a new series today, interrupting the 1 Peter series. The name of the series is Five Weeks to Live. You went to the doctor and you've just been told, "I'm sorry to tell you this, but you've got five weeks to live." What will be important to you? What are the things that you will want to do and who will you want to do them with? Priorities, tasks, relationships, do they change? Does the way you spend your time change?

What I want to do in this series, I want to talk about, really, what I consider to be some of the most important things that I've learned in over 30 years of working with men in five different realms. The first realm is, week one, finding a deeper personal relationship with God. First things first, right? I want to start just by talking a little bit about how we get off track. I've watched this play out now for decades. There are three things that seem to be the locus or at the top of the outline of how men get off track.

Number one, the rat race. Guys just seem to, inevitably, get caught up in the rat race. By the way, this is for people who believe in Jesus as well as for people who believe in Jesus. This is not just for those who don't believe in Jesus. Men get caught up in the rat race. When they do, it's exhausting. If I could only

make one observation about how men are doing, it's the same observation I've been making for decades. If I could only make one observation about how men are doing today, it seems to me that wherever you look, no matter what demographic group you're talking about, what ethnicity, what level of the demographic profile, men are tired. I don't just mean physically tired, although that too, but I'm talking about mentally, psychologically, relationally, financially, morally, spiritually tired, just sort of exhausted with the me now fast pace of this virtual reality online culture that we have. My conclusion is this. We have created a culture that requires more energy than men have to give. We call this the rat race. That's one way guys get off track.

Second way is leading an unexamined life. Now, you can't say everything every time so I don't want to say a lot about this except Plato said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." When guys get caught up in the rat race, they don't tend to call enough timeouts to reflect on life's larger meaning and purpose.

Then, third is the cultural Christianity. Getting caught up in the rat race, leading an unexamined life, and then becoming cultural Christians. Sir Francis Schaeffer, in his book *How Then Should We Live* or something like that, he talked about how there are two impoverished values that seem to have taken over our culture, personal peace and affluence. Personal peace is just the desire to be left alone, not to be bothered by the troubles of other people. Just leave me alone and let me live my life. Don't call on me to be engaged in other people's issues. Personal peace. Then, affluence, which he calls things, things, and more things. The desire for an ever-increasing abundance or prosperity.

I would like to say that since Schaeffer wrote that book, I do think that there this other impoverished value that we could add to that and that is cultural Christianity. It's wanting the God that we have underlined in our Bible but not wanting the rest of him too. Because since Schaeffer, our culture has basically moved, it was already moving, but we moved to a postmodern culture in which most people believe that things are relative, truth is relative. You can make God up in your imagination to the God that you want him to be. That's okay. You have a god that's good for you. I have a god that's good for me. That's good for both of us. You see this kind of thinking that you can kind of wink at what the Bible says and kind of do what you want. Live by your own ideas. This is what we would call cultural Christianity.

These are the three primary ways that I think after all these years of thinking about it. Watching guys get off track, they run the rat race, they lead unexamined lives, and they become cultural Christians. Who is responsible for this?

How many of you are fishermen? Raise your hand if you're a fisherman. This is my fish. I, Pat Morley, caught this bass. I'd like to tell you the story of how it happened. It was a hot, muggy Memorial Day morning. My family was sleeping in and I thought how wonderful it would be if I could go out and get a little fishing time in. I slipped my jon boat quietly into the water and I stationed myself about 75 to 100 feet off the shore. Then, put the little trolling motor on and then I began to make my way around the lake, casting my plastic worm on weedless hook into these little pockets where I would hang out if I was the Loch Ness bass. I kept casting. It's a little 40-acre lake. I went all the way around the lake and I didn't have a single strike. I was discouraged. I was disheartened.

I thought about quitting but I'm not a quitter. I said, "I'll just go a little bit past the dock." I did and I went a couple casts past the dock and then I saw this perfect little pool right next to some weeds, right next to the shore. I knew that this would be the place where King Kong with fins would be located. I cast my

plastic worm on weedless hook and it landed in the water. I let it settle to the ground and then I slowly began to reel it back in. All the way back in. I saw the worm come up out of the water. Nothing.

I just, out of frustration, I sort of and I flicked the worm over to the other side of the boat. Then, King Kong slammed into that worm and began to race off from the boat. I had learned from experience that you don't try to set the hook right away. You count to twenty. I began to count: one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, three thousand, yank. I hooked that monster bass right there. Once I set that hook, the only thing that was left was to reel him in which I did. He's mine. I owned him, but I knew that to catch a wily bass like that that I would need to allow the bait and him take the bait and feel no resistance. I knew that I would need to let him take that bait and run with it for a while so that he would be lulled into complacency. I knew that at just the right moment when he thought that he had won, I, the deceiver, would yank and hook him and I would hook him so hard that there would be no possibility of him getting away. All I had to do was reel him back in.

In this world, we have an evil fisherman who wants to catch men. He gets us caught up in the rat race. He leads us to unexamined lives and he lures us exchange the truth of God for a lie and the glory of God for an idol and to make truth relative. That happened to me. That's my story.

Some of you know that I used to race cars. First of all, I have to brag and tell you that I won 25 out of the 43 races that I was in. In the races that I did not win, the problem typically was that I didn't want to win, but I lacked the power. I didn't have enough power to win. That's what happened in my early Christian life. I knew that I needed help and so I gave my life willingly to God. The problem was that I did not understand the gospel, the good news. I assumed that to be a Christian and to have a deeper relationship with God meant that I needed to figure out what a proper list of Christian behaviors would be and then to obey them.

By the ten year mark, I was getting a very different result from my Christianity than you were from yours. At least I noticed that and I was troubled by it so I called a timeout. I thought that would last a couple of weeks. I'm a smart guy, smarter than you, that's for sure. I would easily be able to figure out what it is that you are doing, make the adjustments, and then move on with my life. It's like God said, "Well, you know, I'm glad that I finally have your attention because there are some things that I've been wanting to show you, but you've been too closed-minded for me to talk to you about these things."

My two weeks turned into two and a half years of staring at my navel. There were no books for men at that time. I was just reading the Bible. I was reading the Bible every day and I kept learning things with regard to the rat race, Galatians 5:7, Paul says, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" Two verses later, mixing metaphors, that was before it came grammatically incorrect to do, Paul said in Galatians 5:9, "The problem is this: a little yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough." I said, "That's what's happened here. The yeast of culture has worked its way through my whole batch of dough."

Then one day I was reading in the parable of the sower, Matthew 13:23, that particular version. We'll look at the Luke version this morning. "The seed that fell among the thorns is like the man who hears the word." I was reading it every day. "But," the big but, "the worries of this life," and boy did I have them, trying to build a big empire business. See, I'll wake up at 2:00 and bam, brain comes on, monkey brain goes everywhere. No chance of getting back to sleep in. "The deceitfulness of money," and, man, I was deceived, buying things I didn't need to impress people I don't like with money I didn't have. It says

it will choke the word and make it unfruitful. Oh, when word said that deceitful somebody will choke the word and make it unfruitful, I said, "Bam, that's exactly what's happened in my life."

I got down on my knees on the same month we started this Bible study 30 years ago and I wrote it right there in the front of this Bible. That's why I still use this old beat up Bible because I don't want to give it up. I wrote in the front of that Bible, February 1, 1986, "I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God." I really meant it and still do. Problem: I thought I was signing up for remodeling, redecorating, big expansion on the back of the house. I was waiting for the construction company to show up. I heard the rumbling of construction equipment one morning and I opened the blinds and looked out but it wasn't a construction company. It was a demolition crew and they leveled me right down to the foundation. It's like God's was saying, "Pat, I'm glad that you was to live the rest of your life for my will but guess what. You've given me so little to work with I have to start over with you."

Some of you guys were looking at me when I was having my problems and you were saying, "Wow. I don't know what he did to tick God off but I'm going to stay away from him. I don't want to catch that leprosy." I wanted to shake you, saying, "No, no, no, no. You don't understand. This is not a curse. This is a blessing. God is removing the shakable kingdom, the things that can be shaken, the created thing." Why? Hebrews 10:25 and 20. Why? So that the unshakable may remain. We make shakable kingdoms. God wants to give us the unshakable kingdom. In order to do that, sometimes he has to remove the dross from our silver. I praise him and I thank him that he did that.

Rat race, unexamined life, cultural Christianity, a predator who wants to reel us in, an evil fisherman, a God who loves us and wants to bring us into right relationship with him, who wants us to find a deeper relationship with him. What is the one idea that, if fully understood and truly believed, could change everything for you, could change everything for me? I'm going to tell you what I think it is. I think this is the greatest lesson that I have ever learned.

I was sitting around in the rubble of my collapsing business and this is what I, in my mind or spirit or however your tradition allows you to hear this, this is what I heard. There is a god we want and there is a god who is. They are not the same god. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god we want and start seeking the god who is. Does this resonate? Does this make sense? Let's make part of that, at least, the big idea for the day. The Big Idea for Five Weeks to Live, week one, **the turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god or gods we want and start seeking the god who is.**

It just dawned on me one day, "Morley, what were you thinking? Did you really think that any amount of you wanting to reinvent God in your imagination to be the god that you wanted him to be was going to have one iota of impact on his unchanging character and nature?" I can laugh about it now. This is the God that hurled the cosmos into existence, who regulates the rising and the setting of the sun and the lunar cycle and the ebb and the flow of the tides and I'm going to work him. It dawned on me I think he wants to work me. I realized that because I am a rebel, as are most men, that I must each day, each morning, come humbly again to the foot of the cross and make a full, total, and complete surrender of my life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's the deal.

Where are you on your journey? I want us to look at this question: cultural Christian or biblical Christian? Now, after what is an enormously long introduction, let's look at God's word and see what God's word has to say.

The parable of the sower begins in chapter 8 of Luke in verse 4, in which Jesus describes four situations. A farmer goes out to sow some seed. Some lands on the path. The birds of the air come and snatch it away. Some lands in rocky soil and springs up but then without any water and no root, it soon disappears. A third scenario that he describes is the one that I mentioned earlier. Some goes into the thorns and sprouts up but it gets choked by life's worries and so forth or it gets choked. The fourth falls on good soil and produces a crop a hundred times what was sown. The disciples didn't understand but they asked him to explain and he did.

Looking at the explanation starting at verse 11, Jesus Christ says this. This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear and then the devil comes, the evil fisherman comes, and takes away the word from their hearts so they, and you might want to underline, cannot believe and be saved. You cannot believe without the word being sown in your heart. It can't happen. When we're in that state of mind where we're not that interested, then the devil knows, "They didn't take it in, I'm going to go get it before they do." You see how that works?

Next, let's just call this person the non-Christian. There are four kinds of people being described here. This is the non-Christian. Number two in the next verse. What is that? Verse 13. I've written over and I can't read it anymore. 13? Yeah.

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it but they have, and you might want to underline, no root. Now, in the version that I have which is NIV 1984, it says, "They believe for a while." It's interesting. It's not pistos. It's not the Greek word for believing like a believer believes, like a Christian believes. Most of your versions today now will say receive. They receive the word. There is an element of belief but it's not Christian belief. It's not a surrender. It's not a faith type of belief. It says they believe for a while, they receive the word, but in a time of testing, they fall away. Let's call these people the cultural Christian type C. We have the non-Christian now we have the cultural Christian type C. They fall away. The C stands for counterfeit. They had a type of faith but it was a counterfeit faith. You know, the counterfeit \$100 bill that makes it into circulation is which one? Which counterfeit \$100 bill makes it into circulation? It's the one that looks the most like the real thing. There are people running around who look like they have a real faith but they don't. You should never assume that because somebody's in church with you that they know the Lord.

Next, the seed that fell among the thorns stands for those who hear but as they go on their way, they are choked by life's worries and riches and pleasures and they do not mature. Underline do not mature. These people are Christians but they do not mature. Paul writes to the baby Christians, "You ought to be further along than you are now. You ought to be teachers by now." That's what he says. He says, "But you're not." That's because the third type, cultural Christian type D. The non-Christian, the cultural Christian type C for *counterfeit*, and now the cultural Christian type D for *defeated*. They know the Lord but they live in defeat in the important areas of their lives. They're not getting out of their faith what they had hoped for. They're lukewarm in their faith or you might say they've lost their first love.

Bill Bright, I love Bill Bright. You know, I knew Bill Bright. I worked for him and served on his board of directors for a decade. I got to watch that man. A friend of mine, Ron Jensen, went around the country when he was doing his doctoral thesis and talked to 350 Christian leaders and Bill Bright was the only one that cried when he talked about Jesus. Everybody else had great zeal for doing the work but he had great zeal for Jesus. Bill Bright, I'm sure I heard him ask me 100 times, "Pat, please pray that I will never lose my first love." That was his constant prayer. He asked everybody that.

The fourth kind of person then is the biblical Christian. We have non-Christians, cultural Christian type C for counterfeit, cultural Christian type D for defeated and then we have biblical Christians. Look at this. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, thanks to Jesus, who hear the word, retain it, and persevering produce a crop. Isn't that what all of us want? Well, here's how you get it. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god or the gods that we want and start seeking the god who is.

How do we get back on track if you happen to be off track? Here's what I'd like to say to you. Where you will be five minutes from now is very likely where you'll be five weeks from now, five months from now, five years from now, fifty years from now, or fifty thousand years from now. I don't think that the Lord God almighty wants you to hear this message and not walk away healed, restored, redeemed if in fact that's what you might need. You may not. Or forgiven or whatever word that you want to use.

Finding a deeper personal relationship with God, it is not about us constructing a checklist of behaviors that you need to figure out how to do better. It's not a bad idea but that's not what it's about. What it's about is the relationship ... It's very much like the relationship between you as a father and your children, your sons if you have them. That's what this is like. It's a relationship between a father and a son.

When we talk about the good news, here's the thing that I never really understood until a dozen years after I actually became a Christian. I never really understood the good news. Here it is. Once there was a father who had many sons but a number of the sons got hooked, got reeled in, got captured and they were in bondage. The father was brokenhearted over his sons that were enslaved. He called to his eldest son and he said, "Son, you are strong and they are weak. I want you to go and save them even if it costs you your life. I want you to go and save them." That's exactly what happened. The eldest son came and liberated the younger sons, his younger brothers. He liberated them but they killed him in the process. Thank God the father had enough power to bring the son back to life in the same way that the son brought the younger brothers back to life. That's the gospel.

If you're the first soil, you know you've been hearing this and then letting the birds of the air, the enemy, come and snatch it away. Why not today let this be the day that instead of letting him take it in, him eat it, you eat it? Or you're the second seed. You have a show of religiosity but in your heart of hearts, you know that you've fallen away. Let this be the day that, again, you take this good news into your heart and begin to deepen your relationship with God. Or maybe today you're the third soil. Maybe you're in a place like where I was. You've been following the god that you have reinvented in your imagination, the god that you wanted and not the god who is. The message for you today would be to move from a partial surrender to a full, total, complete surrender to Jesus. It would be to stop making your plans, then praying, but it would be to start praying and then making your plans.

You can't do this on your own. Did I say it emphatically enough? You can't do this on your own. You need to be with some other men doing life together, life on life together. That's why you're here. Embrace that. Engage that. Give yourself to these other guys. Be vulnerable. Listen to them. Love them. Care about them. Then, the fourth soil. Maybe that's you.

How are you going to spend your five weeks to live? Francis of Assisi famously said when asked, "What would you do if you heard Jesus was coming back this afternoon?" He said, "I would finish hoeing my garden." In other words, he was already so convinced that he was doing exactly what God's will for him was that he would not make any changes to what he was doing. Oh man, that we would all be able to

grow and flourish in that fourth soil and produce a hundredfold and be able to say if we had five weeks to live we wouldn't change anything and many of you are living like that. You are examples to me and examples to us and examples to others in all your spiritual influence. Praise God for you.

For those of you who have not and would like to go ahead and take this seed that the devil wants to come and pluck away, what I would like to do is close and give you an opportunity to pray and to take in Jesus and begin going to the next step of how you can find this deeper relationship with Jesus. Then, right after that, if you're the third seed and you have been seeking a God you have wanted and not the God who is, I'd like to have a prayer for you to fully surrender your lives to Jesus.

Let us pray together.

Our dearest Father, we come to you five weeks to live. Obviously the most important thing is that we figure out how to have a deeper relationship with you. Lord, some of us are in the first and the second soil. If that's you and you are ready to eat the word that the birds of the air want to eat if you don't, then take in Jesus right now. You can do that by telling him through prayer. You can do that any way you want but let me pray a simple prayer. If you would like to, you can repeat it silently to yourself after me. You can do it out loud if you want to. You can do it however you want. Repeat this prayer in sincerity of heart and not just receive the word but actually put your faith in Jesus, in the one who the Father sent to rescue you.

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me, for my sins. I humble myself before you and I ask you to come into my life. I do believe in you. I want to receive you to be my Savior and my Lord. I thank you that you died for all of my sins and I now invite you to take your rightful place in my life and to give me the power that I need to run the race, to overcome the rat race, the unexamined life, my cultural Christianity, and that I would exchange the lies that I believed for the truth of God and the idols I have made for worship of you. I ask this in your loving name.

Then, if you've been the third soil and seeking the god you want, not the god who is. Here's a prayer that would help you to move from partial to full surrender. You would probably, if you're like me, need to pray this every day. Let this be putting the stake in the ground right now.

Pray this after me. Some of you might want to pray this out loud after me.

Lord Jesus, I need you right now more than I ever have. I confess that I have been seeking the god or gods that I have wanted but I want to seek the god who is. Now I humble myself before your cross and once again and for always, I am making you the Lord of my life. I am moving from partial surrender to full surrender. I invite you to take control of my life, make me into the man that you've created me to be. In Jesus' wonderful name, amen.