

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
BIBLICAL MANHOOD - THE HABIT OF DESIRING GOD
APRIL 12, 2002
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Good morning, men. We are doing a series on Biblical Manhood, and the question I am using to help prepare these messages is who are the men in the Bible we most admire and why and what do they have in common. Then I am trying to draw those things out and bring something here that, hopefully, would be meaningful and helpful for you.

Not long ago, a non-Biblical man that I really admired who used to be a member of this Bible study, passed. His name was John Flap. He was a painter and had Rainbow Painting. One time I used his illustration about looking for rainbows. John kept a card that his son shared in the eulogy which says, "God, I'm having a pretty good day today. I haven't been impatient, lost my temper, been judgmental or envious of anyone. But I need your help because I'm about to get up." Some days are like that even if you're born again, right?

Last week we talked about it's not enough to be religious you must be born again. A number of you men last week for the first time twenty years of thinking about it, talking about it, listening about it came together and for the first time last week you became born again. We praise God for that. A number of you last week realized that somehow you had gotten off track. You had become more religious instead of left the roots of being born again. The week before that we talked about, even if you're right you're wrong if you're not humble, and the importance of humility. Then the first week we talked about the wiring diagram and how we are images of God, we are also fallen and when we're born again we are redeemed.

Now this morning we want to talk about to say that last week you swept yourself clean, chased the bad spirit out? The Bible says if you don't do anything that that spirit, that demon he goes and travels about and comes back later with spirits and you're worse off than you were in the beginning. Some of you last week who had realized you had become more religious than spiritual you have that experience. Now you've re-cleansed yourself. The question is, now what, where do we go from here? What is it now that you, a Biblical Christian, a born again, should do? What are some of the things? Call them out. I heard read Bible. I heard witness. What else? I heard pray. What else? Join a Christian fellowship. Is that like a church? Join a church. Pay your \$2. It's all about the money, guys. It's all about the money. What else? Serve, neighbor love, the Holy Spirit, what else? Repent. I just didn't understand "repent" coming from you. Okay, what else? If you want to be a Biblical man and your born again what are some other things? Be a righteous husband, how about righteous everywhere, tithe and forgive? So we are starting to get a list that is an interesting list because pretty much any of us could make up this list all by ourselves given enough time. This is a very nice list. I am very proud of you, although I feel as the Bible teacher for the last 16 years to you men, I am a total failure - no I'm just kidding. This is a very nice list as far as lists go. I like this list.

Let me ask you a question. How many of you have ever been lost? I want the wives here when I ask that question because about 80% of you raised your hands, but I bet if our wives were here the number of hands that went up would be a lot less. I, personally, have never been lost, but I was on a hike on day with my family, and we were up in the Appalachian Mountains. One of our members, Bob Wilson, is hiking the Appalachian Trail. How many of you have hiked the Appalachian Trail? How many of you finished it? That's because you get lost as the trails crisscross and go every which way, and it's very difficult to find the trailhead sometimes so you end up going different ways and getting switched around. So, I was out hiking one day with my family and with all the trails crossing each other, we got a little confused. Just short of lost, confused. An event like this shows you the true difference between men and women. My wife is not a hiker to begin with so she sat down on a rock and said, "I'm not moving until you figure out where we're going to go." I said, "Well, let's just try this one over here. How bad could it be?" A man wants to keep moving. He doesn't mind being lost as long as he's moving because he figures that eventually he'll figure out where he's supposed to be. But you know when you've been lost you know that you have a sense of

confusion that sets in and, sometimes depending upon the circumstances, panic also sets in, doesn't it? Just picture yourself being lost and being a little confused and maybe having a little panic set in and you're looking for the right trail. Where's the trailhead? Which one of these - if I can just get on that trail then everything will be okay?

It could be serving God or could be any of these things that we've talked about. We have a problem, don't we? You've done all of this, and life isn't fair, or at least it doesn't seem like life is really fair. You've done all the right things and you've failed, and you have watched wicked men do all of the wrong things and prosper. Am I right? You have been dishonored, you have been disrespected, you have been persecuted, you've lost money, you've been cheated out of money, you've been dumped on, relationships, you've been maligned, you've encountered all kinds of pains - physical pains, some that won't go away, emotional pains and tangible pains, psychological pains, relational pains, and it hurts. I mean, it really hurts!

Our text today is Psalm 73, written by Asaph, and it's a story about a man who has experienced all the same things that you and I have experienced. There is a great truth, a great idea, in here for our lives. Basically, Asaph is willing to show us where the trailhead is. Let's read the first 14 verses. I am going to read to you out of the *New Living Translation* - Psalm 73. You can either read along or you may just want to listen to the *New Living Translation*. "Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff," on this hike that he was on. "My feet were slipping and I was almost gone. For I envied the proud, but I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. They seemed to live such a painless life. Their bodies are so healthy and strong. They aren't troubled like other people or plagued with the problems of everyone else. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven with cruelty. These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for. They scoff and speak only evil. In their pride they seek to crush others, they boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. Does God realize what is going on, they asked? Is the most high even aware of what is happening? Look at these arrogant people enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. Was it for nothing that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong? All I get is trouble all day long. Every morning brings me pain."

Asaph notices that life isn't fair, or so it seems. You have noticed this, too, and you have gotten confused and doubts have crept in, and you have become a sinner, and you have become luke warm. The question is, what happens to a born again man, a believing man, when all of this comes upon him? A lot of things can happen. Some of you attending this Bible study this morning later this afternoon are going to cheat on your Income Tax. I know this is true, not because I'm the one who's going to do it, mind you, but in a group this size, I know that someone is cheating or has already cheated on their Income Tax this year. No blushing - it's not necessary - too many of you anyway to count. Just kidding about that. Some of you are attending this Bible Study this morning and within the next seven days you are going to be sleeping with a woman who is not your wife. I know this is true. This is a Bible Study, and before you leave here this morning, some of you are going to be very judgmental of another man who sits at your very table. Some of us are here at this Bible Study this morning, and we are the prisoner of a critical spirit. We're just critical and negative about everything. We're born again, but we're negative about everything. Why is this? The simple answer is Asaph has identified a very common problem - the problem that life does not appear to be fair. So, a man comes to the conclusion that Jesus, alone, is not enough to make me happy. I need something else. I need that extra money for my taxes or I need that affection from that woman or I'm bitter in my spirits, so I am going to make myself feel better by cutting down the other guy, judging the other guy, or critiquing the other guy. Am I right on this? Why wouldn't you? If life is such a raw deal, why would you believe? Why wouldn't you end up in some kind of unbelief?

How does this happen and what can we do about it? It happens because we believe the lie. Mark 4: 19 talks about the third seed, the seed that fell among the thorns. It's like the man who hears the word, balks at the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for the things of the world. Choke the word and make it untruthful. I know much about this verse. This is the verse that at the 12 1/2 year mark in my own spiritual journey finally jogged me or shook some sense into me - this very verse, the deceitfulness of money and the desire for earthly things. Self-deceit, men. "What each man wishes," Demosthenis said, "that he also believes to be true." It is so easy to be self-deceived, and money is one of the best talkers in this.

Luther, in commenting in Hebrews: Chapter 3, Verse 13 talks about the deceitfulness of sin. Listen to what Luther said in commenting on that verse. "This phrase, the deceitfulness of sin, ought to be understood in a much wider sense so that the term includes one's own righteousness and wisdom. For more than anything else, one's own righteousness and wisdom deceives one and works against faith in Christ. Since we love the flesh and the sensations of the flesh and, also, riches and possessions. We love these things, but we love nothing more ardently than our own feelings, judgment, purpose and will especially when they seem to be good."

At times here I have outlined a little formula for you. Correct reading leads to correct thinking leads to correct believing leads to correct behaving. Some of you will remember this, hopefully. I am going to amend that because in study this week, I realize there's a little piece that needs to be added to that diagnostic. So I have actually ended up changing the whole paradigm, and I want to show you why we do a little bit about why we do the things we do because understanding this will give us a much better result.

Now, the heart. The heart classically, theologians would tell us, consists of the intellect, the will and the emotions. So I am going to call the intellect thoughts - right thinking, rational thoughts. The second part is the will and these are the beliefs you have or your convictions. The third part of the heart is the emotional part. So you have the rational, the volitional, and the emotional. The third part I am going to call desires. These three things here make up the heart, and they're very interactive. They each inform each other. Your emotions influence your beliefs, your beliefs influence your desires, and so forth and so on. Is this connecting? This is very important, so I hope that you will get this. I have said in the past, correct reading, but the reality is that it's more than reading that determines what's going on in your heart, what you're thinking, what you're believing, what you're desiring. What are some of the things that determine this? Call them out. We have reading, listening and environment. Instead of saying environment, could I bracket that off and call that popular culture? The reason I am doing that is because I want to say with popular culture then you can wrap up TV, movies and things like that. Associations with other people - can I say friendships? What else? What other inputs do we have - our own speaking or the speaking of others? I'll put it up - speaking. In other words, a lot of men use speaking as a way of flushing out where they are. It's not a long list, is it?

Watch this with me. These are the inputs and they go into the heart. All these things go into the heart. Jesus says, "It's not what goes into man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of him." These are the things that go in and they do have an influence, don't they? It's out of this then, flowing out of this is the behavior. Is there anyone beginning to see a problem between these two sides of the board? The problem, or one of many problems, is our tendency is to become born again and move right to behavior, and we neglect the heart. We neglect it. So we look at the world, we see that it's seems unfair, that the wicked prosper, that the righteous don't, and we say, "Well, I'm doing all of the right things," and the reality is we're not doing all the right things because we're neglecting the heart. Now, is it true?

Let's move on to the next verse 15 and ask the question, "Is it true?" This is the rest of the story. This is Paul Harvey. "If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to your people. So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is. Then one day I went into your sanctuary, oh God, and I thought about the destiny of the wicked. Truly, you have put them on a slippery path and sent them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, swept away by terrorists. Their present life is only a dream but it's gone when they awake. When you arise, oh Lord, you will make them vanish from this life. Then I realize how bitter I've become, how pained. I was so foolish and ignorant. I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you, oh God." The truth is life is, for the non-believer, life is fair. Life is completely fair. The problem is when we look at life is segments and short time frames then when you look at the whole life of a non-believer, life is absolutely fair because the non-believer gets justice. God makes everything right in the end. For the believer, why is God not fair, because you don't get justice? You get grace. Life isn't fair.

So, what can we do about it? Men, we always do what we most want to do. We always do what we most want to do. You cheat because that's what you most want to do. You adulterate because that's what you most want to do because you think that's the thing that will make you happy. How can you overcome this? Instead of focusing on right behaving, focus on right believing, right thinking, and right desiring.

Here's the big idea this morning. Read with me, Verse 23. "Yet, I still belong to you. You are holding me. You are holding my right hand. You will keep on guiding me with your counsel leading me to a glorious destiny. Who may I find in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything. My health may fail and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart. He is mine forever, but those who desert Him perish for you destroy those who abandon you. But as for me, how good it is to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about these wonderful things you do because life is unfair, praise God. Life has been unfair me, I've gotten grace."

There's a better way, and this is the big idea. I will make it my habit each day to desire nothing more than God. I will make it my habit each day, each and every day, to desire nothing more than God. So, brothers, I commend you for your list. It's a wonderful list. At the trailhead, these are the trails. You can take any of them, all of them or many of them over and over again. The trailhead is the habit of desiring God. I will make it my habit each day to desire nothing more than God.

Now what if you don't really feel that way right now? Would you like to? Well, maybe instead of saying, "I will make it my habit each day to desire nothing more than God," maybe you can make your statement, "I will desire-to-desire nothing more than God." At least, if it really isn't true, you have to be totally honest with yourself right now. If this is true, "I will make it my habit each day to desire nothing more than God," because if you're going to cheat yourself, and it's not true, if you're going to have an affair next week, it's not true. Would you be willing to desire-to-desire, want-to-want? How do you do this? You go lock yourself in a room and you work it out. Make a list of little behaviors that you do. Pascal, you know he's one of my favorites, said, "The soul cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Take a Bible with you, too, by the way. Do some of these things.

Will you say that with me, the big idea? "I will make it my habit each day to desire nothing more than God." Lukewarm? Make it your habit each day to desire nothing more than God. Bitter? Make it your habit each day to desire nothing more than God. Immature new believer? Make it your habit each day to desire nothing more than God. Mature believer? Make it your habit each day to desire nothing more than God. On-target believer? Make it your habit each day to desire nothing more than God. Desiring God is the trailhead of the Christian life.

Let's pray:

Father, thanks for this message to me this morning. May I hear it? May we all hear it? And, Lord, help us not to try to flee from our behaviors, help us to flee to You. Amen

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