

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
BIBLICAL MANHOOD - A MAN MAKING A CONTRIBUTION
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We are doing a series on Biblical Manhood - this is the last. This is the 12th message in the series, and I've been looking at men we admire in the Bible and asking why and what those fellows have in common. One of those things that they have in common, when you think about men in the Bible, is that they are men who made enormous contributions, men who left the world a better place. This morning, I want to talk to you about the idea of making a contribution. Biblical Manhood includes making a contribution. What I'll do this morning is talk to you a little bit about God's promise for us to make a contribution, then a little about his provision. In other words, he doesn't give us a promise then not provide the means for it. Then we'll talk a little about some practices - some very practical things that you can do when you leave here today that you might find useful in making a contribution.

When Ernest Shackelford was organizing his third polar expedition, he reportedly ran this advertisement in the newspaper. "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success. Now there are only 27 slots available for this expedition." Out of curiosity, how many men do you think applied for these 27 positions? Five thousand men applied for these 27 positions. The question is, of course, why would they do that? Are they nuts? The answer is that you and I have, within us, because we have been created by God, we have been created for good works, we have, within us, an almost insatiable need and desire to make a contribution. You cannot be happy, as a man, unless you are involved in some mission, some cause, some way to make a contribution to do something with your life.

I said it here not too long ago, that recently I came to the conclusion that, basically, all men want three things. They want something they can give their lives to, (I've said this here before), they want something they can give themselves to, they want someone to share it with, and then they want a system that gives a reasonable explanation for why these two things are so difficult. This something that a man give his life to is the mission or the cause that will animate a man, that will want to make him get out of bed in the morning. It's his vision. It's the thing he's going to do that will leave the world a better place. So, that's really the thing I want to talk about here this morning - a man making a contribution.

In the text we have in front of us, John: Chapter 15, Verse 4. I want us to look a little bit at God's promises to you about making a contribution. Jesus is speaking. He says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you for a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine. You cannot be fruitful apart from me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, or abide in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." Verse 8 says, "My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father." Turn to Chapter 14, Verse 12. While you're turning there, let me mention that Ephesians: Chapter 2, Verse 10 says, "For we are God's masterpiece, and we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works which He has prepared in advance for us to do." Then John: Chapter 14, Verse 12, "The truth is anyone who believes in me, " says Jesus, "will do the same works I have done and even greater works because I am going to be with the Father.

Let's look at what God is promising us here. First of all, we have been created by God. We are His masterpiece. Not only that, we have been created by God to do good works. Not only that, we've been created to do good works, and He has this whole kind of treasure trove of good works of fruit that He wants us to do that He's been thinking about since before you were created in your mother's womb that He wants to give you to do. I say that because serving Christ is a pleasure. Dale Mead used to say, "The reward of service is more service." When a man really is abiding in Christ, doing good works, bearing much fruit is His delight. So we are created to do good works, works that He has already prepared for us to do, and then, notice that, "my true Disciples bear much fruit." There's the big idea for you. True Disciples bear much fruit. Of course, this begins a series of internal questions going on.

Then the final thing we see here is that we will not only do good works, we will not only bear fruit, we will actually do greater things than Christ has done. Isn't that astonishing - the idea that the good works that you are going to do are actually going to exceed the good works that Jesus did? You are saying, "Come on, there must be a loophole in this deck. Greater things than Jesus?" Think about it. How many lepers did Jesus heal? Ten. One time he healed ten lepers. Leprosy was one of the raging diseases of Jesus' day. How many lepers do we have today? Not many, and why? Because God put it in some man's mind to develop a way to treat leprosy doing greater works than Jesus did. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Healed a dead man. Lazarus was a relatively young man and had a couple of sisters Mary and Martha. I wonder how Lazarus died. He probably died with something like a heart attack. It could have been something else, but it was probably like something like a heart attack. It seemed to be sudden so it was probably a heart attack. Jesus raised him from the dead. How many hundreds of thousands of people have been, in the matter of speaking, raised from the dead by bypass surgery or heart catheterization? God put it in someone's mind to develop self_____. You see _____ developed a type of catheter and was in the pioneering technology of patents and things and saved millions of lives. One man, greater works than Jesus _____, blind. Jesus makes a blind man see. How are you going to do greater works than that? We have an optometrist in the crowd. How many optometrists do we have here this morning? We have one. Think about the thousands of blind people that one optometrist can make see because God gives us the ability to do not only great works, but even greater things than Jesus has done.

Then, since we've been talking about the promise that we have here to make a contribution, let's also look at some of the other things that Jesus has promised. John: 15, Verse 16, " You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to do go and produce fruit that will last." There's another thing. What kind of fruit is it? It's lasting fruit that He wants us to produce. Verse 17, "I command you to love each other." Then Verse 18, "When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you." Whoops! What's that about? Chapter 16, Verse 1. He said, "I have told you these things so that you won't fall away." From 18 down to the end of the chapter, Jesus explains that the cost is high. The cost of serving Jesus is high. Guess what? If the cost of doing something is high, the cost of doing nothing is even higher. All you have to do is look at our society and culture today and realize that if Christians had just done these verses and allowed Jesus, by abiding in Him, to do these few passages we've read, do you think that we would be in the shambles that we are in today? I seriously doubt it. I seriously doubt it.

Okay, that's kind of the promise so when I read the price that has to be paid, but the incredible joy that comes from producing much fruit, I then find a way to make sense of why Shackelford could run an ad like that and so many people would be willing to respond. The desire we have is so intense to make a contribution that we are willing to pay whatever price no matter how high the cost.

Listen to this quote from Bruce Barton, a Christian writer from the early 20th Century. He said, "Jesus brought forth man's greatest effort by the promise of obstacles, not rewards. When you look in the Scriptures, in this world you will have trouble. Take heart. I have overcome the world. The world will hate you." So Christians know that part of the calculus of making a contribution is that you will also find persecution, and yet the promise is that true Disciples will bear much fruit. What a great promise.

The second part, the provision that God has made for this, turn with me to 1Corinthians: Chapter 12, Verse 7. While you are turning there, I'm going to read to you from Romans: Chapter 12, Verse 6. "God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well." Verse 7, I am reading from the *New Living Translation*. "A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church." Or to each one has been given a gift as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. So, one of the ways that God makes provision for you to make a contribution is that He gives you one or more spiritual gifts - special, spiritual abilities to produce much fruit. If you don't know what you're spiritual gifts are, then it would behoove you, it would behoove us, to discover what those gifts are because that is the way that God provides for us to bear much fruit.

You can read 1 Corinthians: 12. You can read Romans: 12, 6 -10. I think it is. You could look at 1Peter: Chapter 4, Verse 10. While you're turning to 1Peter: Chapter 4, Verse 10, let me read to you from Ephesians: Chapter 4, Verse 7. "However, he has given each one of us a special gift according to the generosity of Christ." Verse 11. "He is the one who gave these gifts to the church the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers and their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church - the body of Christ."

Then in the text you've turned to 1Peter: Chapter 4, Verses 10 & 11. "God has given gifts to each of you from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you. Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory and everything through Jesus Christ." That's the deal. That's the provision that He's made for each of us. How do we get there from here?

You're sitting there and some of us are thinking, "Okay, well I feel like I'm doing pretty good here. You know I am producing much fruit, and I feel pretty good about that." Others of us are sitting here thinking, "You know, I used to do that. I wonder what happened. I wonder why I don't do that anymore?" Others of you are thinking, "You know I've never really produced a lot of fruit, I've produced a little fruit, it's been comfortable, but not this morning. It's not comfortable any more because I realize I'm not really producing much fruit. Maybe there is something to this true Disciple thing. True Disciples produce much fruit." Others may be thinking, "Golly, this is kind of - whoa! Okay, I'm a Christian - whoa! I've been kind of living for myself. I've never really thought of the idea that producing much fruit is part of what it means to be a true Disciple. I kind of thought you pray this prayer and everything turns out alright."

So, I guess the question would be, how are you doing? Are you producing much fruit? I know there are men sitting here this morning who, as I talk about this, border on having a desperate desire to serve Christ. You long to do something to produce much fruit; to do good works. You have the same wiring as the guys that responded to the Shackelford ad, and you have that because you've been abiding in Christ. Let me tell you, if you have not been abiding in Christ this is going "whish." There is no way that this is going to connect with you. For some of you you're feeling intoxication flowing through your veins. You're saying, "Wow, man, I want to do something big for God. Show me where to sign up." But that's because you've been abiding in Christ. Maybe you're already doing it, but if you're not abiding in Christ, "whish" right over your head. This is going right over your head. So, how do you get to a place where you can have a passion to do something great for God?

Back to John: Chapter 15, Verse 4, it says, "Remain in me, abide in me, and I will remain in you, and you will bear much fruit; fruit that will last. My true Disciples produce much fruit." So if you really want to have a powerful ministry of service, contribution, making a difference, producing much fruit, doing good works, works that will last, greater things than Jesus did, abide in Christ. Come into His presence. Come into the real presence of Jesus. Once a man has been in the real presence of Jesus, he'll never be the same again. That doesn't mean that you all go through periods of sinfulness and errs and strain. You know I do that every day, don't you? Of course, but in my heart of hearts at the deepest place in my heart, I have a passion for God, and that passion for God overflows with a passion that I want to do something to serve God. I can't be happy.

A man who used to come to this Bible Study and I were sitting one day in my office, and we were both crying our eyes out because we both had such an intense desire to do something to serve Christ, to make a contribution and, at that particular point, both of us were being stymied. He didn't have a clue about what he was doing, and I had started on something that seemed like it was the wrong thing, and we were weeping. We were weeping because we wanted to do something to make a contribution. We wanted to bear much fruit, and we were being blocked. It just seemed we were called but not sent. We were equipped, but not sent. I told him, and I'll tell you now, this was my prayer during that time. "God, you either have to give me the vision to serve you or you have to take away this desire I have. I can't live like this anymore. It is just too painful to want to do something to serve God, this much, than not to see the fulfillment. I can't take it anymore." You know what His answer was? He didn't answer me at all. He just left me wallowing in the sand. But you want to know something? In time, in season, the doors opened up.

He was testing me. "Do you really want to serve me or is this some kind of emotional thing that's going on?" So He left me in the _____ for a long time, but then He opened the door to make a contribution.

True Disciples produce much fruit. True Disciples can't be happy producing little fruits. How many of you are producing kumquats? I want grapefruits. I want watermelons. I want big fruits. I want much fruits. I don't think I even want my fair share. I think I want more. I want do something. I want to make a contribution. I wouldn't answer the Shackelford ad, are you crazy? "Safe return, doubtful!"

Here's my ad. We're going to post this on the website in a few weeks - part of our BHAG - our Big, Holy, Audacious Goal. "One hundred thousand leaders wanted to champion the cause of reaching men - trench work, thankless, need thick skin, sweaty forehead, willing to grab a shovel. Anyone looking for glory or parades need not apply - eternal rewards only. Definitely not for weenies." The provision that God has made is that He's given you gifts, and He's given you the opportunity to abide in Jesus.

In terms of putting this into practice now, there are a number of small points here to make by way of application, I suppose. The first one is to make a distinction between ambition and calling. A lot of men are out pursuing ambition for personal gain and personal success not really born out of a sense of God's calling on their lives, but just sort of to make a better life. I would say this is the majority of men. The majority of men are Christians, as well. They are not pursuing God's calling, they're just pursuing their own best idea of what would be a good life. They never really knelt before God humbling, bow their head low and say, "Lord, I am a sinful man, and I have been making my own plans for my life, and Lord, I want to follow your plan for my life. I want to make a contribution, Lord, but I want to do it in a way that there are fruits that will last." That would be one thing a man might want to consider taking a look at in practice.

Another thing is that you might want to look at your overhead, how much you're spending on your lifestyle because the reality is a lot of the service that God would have a man do most men can't afford to do it. They can't afford to give five hours a week to a ministry. They can't afford to take a man to lunch and talk about the state of his soul because it has such a high overhead they need to take another man to lunch and talk to him about doing a business deal. You might want to just think about, "Am I living above my means? Am I living at my means? Am I living within my means?" Or, for some of us we might be called to live below our means. Why would you want to live below your means so that if God would call you, you'd be able to go? The biggest problem that I see with the men who come to me that are exploring whether or not God is calling them to ministry is that they have such a high overhead that they can't afford to go. They can't afford to go so they turn away. God's calling on their life, and they can't afford to go.

A little acid test for you - if you're not tithing, you're overhead's too high. As someone else said as well, and I'm going to join this man, if you're not tithing because you can't afford to, then I'm going to pray that God will lower your income to a point that you can afford to tithe.

Prayer. Another very practical thing you can do if you really want to bear much fruit, and I've kind of already said this, is to get on your knees to pray, but to do this with your wife. Try to be yoked with your wife together so that you're not off doing something that she feels like (this happens a lot and I get calls on this) the man is doing so much ministry that he's neglecting the family responsibilities. So just make sure you are together with you wife on this. Her greatest need is you. Your greatest need is mission.

My son is getting married next week, and so they're having all these lovey-dovey talks about goals, how many children do we want to have, and things like that. He's into this relationship thing. What she doesn't understand is that he's on a mission, and for the time being the relationship is a mission. Once the mission is accomplished, when they get home from the honeymoon a couple of weeks later, he's going to find a new mission. She's going to look around and say, "Where did he go?" You better not go too far; you better not go too far.

Finally, I would just say another really practical thing is to be a witness for Jesus Christ in your place. Are they going to hate you? Yes, they're going to hate you because the cost to serve Christ is high, but the cost to not serve Him is even higher. True Disciples are going to bear much fruit. You can't bear much fruit if you keep your mouth shut. _____ Is this too harsh to step on your toes? Nobody is going to have much of a ministry if they never speak.

Dwight L. Moody was approached by a woman one day, and she said, "You know the way you talk about Christ and sinners, I don't like the way you do that." He said, "Well, I don't like it either, how do you do it?" She said, "I don't do that _____." He said, "Lady, I like the way I'm doing it a lot better than the way you're not doing it."

So, men, there you have it, true Disciples bear much fruit. I want to be fruitful. I want to make a contribution. I want to do something with my life. I don't want to be a shooting star that streaks across the sky one night then disappears. Lord, don't let me be like that. Let me be like the sun, your son.

Let's pray:

Father, some of us this morning have all kinds of different, interesting thoughts swirling around. Lord, I pray there something swirling around for all of us. You know what you want us to do. Lord, I pray that you would help each of us abide in Jesus, to know our gifts, to cling to your promise, to take hold of your promise, to bear much fruit, to be true Disciples, to know your calling, to have our finances in order, to be men of privy, to yoke with our wives, to be witnesses for Jesus. Lord, help us to do these things so that You might receive glory and praise. Amen

/cjb 7/31/02