

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
PERSEVERING TOGETHER

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This morning, before we begin the Bible Study, I thought it might be a good idea, having done this for a number of years, to explain why we are here. What are we trying to accomplish? What are we doing here? On Monday, this week, I was with the President at the Oprey Land Hotel at the National Religious Broadcasters' Meeting in Nashville. Actually, I wasn't with the President. I was a few hundred feet away from the President. Well, I wasn't actually a few hundred feet away from him, I was in an auxiliary room where they were projecting a video of him up on a screen. But, I am sure if he had known I was there, we would have had a meaningful conversation.

That's a little bit of what we're doing here. This is a male context Bible Study. We are trying to make Bible truths come alive in the male context. One of the things guys like to do is to joke around, have a good time, and have a little fun. I have a worksheet I use to prepare the Bible Study each week, and one of the sentences is, "Step on their toes while making them laugh." Guys like straight kidding. They don't like sugar coating all week long. Men, everywhere in their businesses, are having people whisper in their ear and tell them what they want to hear. People trying to figure out how to manipulate. What is football? Football is a game of deceptive and detection on both sides of the ball, and that's what business is. A lot of time, there are bad people out there who are trying to deceive, so you are always trying to detect the truth. Guys really appreciate it when you come to a place where you give it to them straight.

That's what we do here. We don't sugar coat it. We don't mince it up, but, on the other hand, while we want to take God very seriously, we don't want to take ourselves too seriously. That's why we try to have a little humor.

I was talking to a couple of guys after the NRB President's speech, and we were discussing whether or not we were going to war with Iraq, and people were giving their different opinions, and what about the French and the Germans? One guy said he heard this statement, "Going to war without France is like going elk hunting without an accordion." That's male context Bible Study!

We are here to save souls. We're here to save marriages. We're here to save families. That's why we're here. There are 98 million men in the United States of America who are 18 years of age or older and 63 million of these men make no profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Only eight million men are involved in any kind of spiritual formation or discipleship out of 98. That's one out of 12. Picture putting a football team on the field and only one guy had ever studied the play book. Think of the chaos that would result. They would look like the New York Giants.

I mentioned I put together each talk using a work sheet, and part of it is just making sure I have the right attitude as I prepare. I am going to read what I have down here. First of all, I quote Matthew 9:36 where Jesus looked on the crowds and had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. I am reading, "Where men are coming from. No man wakes up in the morning planning to fail." Worth remembering! "Most men are trying to make an honest living, raise a family, don't beat men up, but show them Christ, invite them to be filled to the overflow, then responding gratitude. Remember God does not want to take men out of the world, He wants to take the world out of men. They are his special possession. Touch the noble impulse. Break through the husk around the soul."

I have a whole sheet like this that I have prepared. So it is important to understand that most guys really want to do the right thing. They just need to have occasional reminders. We come here to have Bible Study because we're trying to save souls, marriages and families. I could talk about this more. Come back next year, I'll tell you a little bit more.

Last year, on Valentine's Day, I spoke to you about building a marriage that bends. Use the word "submit," from Ephesians, Chapter 5. One of the ways to use that word is to bend, and I made several points. First of all, nature has a funny way of breaking what does not bend, a lyric from Jewell. Then we broke an egg up here to show you that nature has a funny way of breaking what does not bend, and that it is better to be imperfectly happy than perfectly unhappy. And that you are the only two people who are really in this thing together. That was about marriage that bends.

This morning, I'd like to talk to you about marriage that perseveres. How can you build a marriage that perseveres? Hebrews 10:36 says this, "You need to persevere," YOU need to persevere, you NEED to persevere, you need to PERSEVERE, that's what it says. "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." God has made incredible promises to us. That's not the subject of what we're going to be talking about this morning. You've heard many examinations of those promises. You've heard many of them, most of them, perhaps all of them. God makes many promises to us, but we also need to persevere in order to take advantage of them.

Well, that's the promise, what's the problem? The problem is that today marriage and family is under attack. You might be thinking, "I kind of know it is, but for me it's really not that bad." Yes it is, and I want to alarm you a little bit this morning. I want to alarm you because I want you to sense the gravity of a problem that, not only do they need to solve, they need to think about, they need to address, but you do, too.

I want to read a couple of statistics from Jim Dobson's book, "*Bringing Up Boys*." So the first thing we're going to talk about is that marriage is under attack and families as well.

Forty percent of all baby busters, boomers are those who were born between 1946 and 1964. There are 75 million of us. Busters are those who were born between 1965 and 1980 and there are 46 million of them. Only 60% of busters grew up in a home with both biological parents. Forty percent of the buster generation grew up in a home where the parents were divorced or separated. So we wonder why busters were slow to want to get married, or nervous about it. Forty percent of their parents' marriages failed. What is even more frightening, according to Dr. Dobson, "Only 34% of all children born in America will live with both biological parents through age 18." You've got to be kidding me. Are you telling me that in the last generation it was 40%, and the next generation 66%, that 66% of the children of this generation are going to end up living in some sort of a broken home? Men, women, your marriage, your family is at risk because all of the statistics show that what's going on in Christian homes is exactly what's going on in non-Christian homes. So this is not them. This is everybody at this kind of risk unless we do what it takes to persevere. Unless we understand what it takes to persevere we are literally at that kind of risk. That's what it says! Thirty-four percent, only 34% of children today, will make it all the way to the age of 18 in a home with both biological parents. How can we persevere?

Look at Hebrews 10: 25 and let's read together. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." One thing we are encouraged to do, to persevere, is to be in church. Christianity is a Jewish religion. Jesus was a Jew. Christianity is the natural culmination of true Jewish faith. There was no Synagogue until the Diaspora when the Babylonian captivity took place, 586 BC or thereabouts. What is the Diaspora? It is the dispersion of the Jews. There are about a million Jews living in Palestine and about 4½ million living elsewhere. According to Jewish law, the worship of God could only take place in at the Temple. Now the Jews are dispersed, so a concept of worshipping God developed at a remote location called a Synagogue. Synagogues could be formed by Pharisees. Pharisees was basically a lay movement, and any ten Pharisees could get together and start a Synagogue. So, God in His Grace, gave the religious community, where we find our roots, the blessing of the Synagogue, a place where they could gather. The chief architectural motif, the whole Synagogue, was built around the Torah, the Law of God - the *Old Testament*.

Today, a lot of the beautiful churches that we see have incredible, high, beautiful, ornate pulpits. What is that? That is, basically, bringing forward that idea of making the preaching of the Word of God, the chief architectural motif of the church. In a lot of new churches you don't see that because there is a more informal way of presenting the preaching, but that's what's going on there.

Now, I want to read to you a couple of sentences from my seminary notes and a professor for whom I have a lot of respect, Al Mohiney (sp?). He said this. "The importance of the Synagogue cannot be over estimated. It is what allowed Judaism to survive after the destruction of the Temple."

What does this have to do with persevere in marriage, you ask? I'm glad you asked. It has everything to do with persevering marriage because this text says, "Let us not give up synagoging together." The Greek word is Synagogue. Let us not give up meeting together. Let us not give up synagoging together. It is what preserved Judaism in the Diaspora. Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest to you that you are in a Diaspora. Eight-five percent of Americans say they are Christians. Do you know this? Eighty-five percent say they're Christians! Sixty-six percent – go figure.

A form of religion that denies righteousness, that denies Godliness, that denies holiness, that denies even the love of God, that denies love of neighbor, is not a true form of Godliness. So a Diaspora has come to mean a religious minority living among a religious majority of a different kind. That's what we are. If you are a genuine, authentic, biblical Christian, we are a people in captivity. This is a Babylonian captivity. We are a Diaspora in captivity, and it's in the churches, it's in the culture, it's everywhere.

You need to be in church, or in Synagogue, because you are a Diaspora, and if you don't do this, is it possible to persevere if you don't do this? I don't think so. Maybe. I don't think so. Let me give you the reason why I don't think so.

My family was in church. We Synagued until I was in about the 9th or 10th grade. I can't remember exactly when. My dear, sweet mother got her nose bent out of joint about something the pastor did, and she pulled the whole family out of church – six of us – Mom, Dad, me and three younger brothers. That was about 38 years ago. Our family has never recovered from that. I was in the Junior Honor Society. I was President of the PEP club. I was doing things that you would think someone with a good upbringing was doing. By the 10th grade, I started skipping school and drinking. By the 11th grade, I had skipped all or part of 74 days of my junior year, and on January 13th in my senior year, I quit, and I'm the lucky one of the four boys. I have a brother who died of a heroine overdose, I have a brother who has never had a job for more than six months, and I have another brother who is a recovering alcoholic, divorced and a recovering drug abuser.

Couples, single, to be married again someday, perhaps – if you want your marriage to persevere, please be in church. That's what God is saying, "Please be in church." I want you to receive what's been promised. You have to persevere. Let us not give up meeting together. Let us not give up Synagoging.

A man had attended worship services for several years, and then he stopped going. After several weeks, the pastor went by to visit the man on a chilly night, knocked on the door, the man opened the door and realized why the pastor was there. He welcomed him and invited him in. Then they sat down in two chairs before a roaring fire. The pastor did not say anything. He just sort of watched the flames dancing around on the hot logs. After a few minutes, he took the fire tongs and grabbed one of the logs out of the fire, and he laid it on the hearth. Still not saying anything, he sat back down and watched the single log on the hearth flicker a couple of times. The fire went out, and after a few minutes, all the glow and warmth left the log, and it turned cold. After a few more minutes, the pastor got up again, took the tongs, grabbed the log and put it back in the fire. Instantly it caught back aflame. The pastor walked to the door and said, "Goodnight." The man said, "Thank you for coming, Pastor. I'll be in church on Sunday."

Men and women, I'm just telling you, that's it, that's it. I thank God that my wife picked me up and put me back in the fire. She saved my life. Unfortunately, there was nobody else to pick up any of my other brothers and put them back in the fire so they struggled and still struggle. Put yourself back in the fire.

Now if you would, please turn to Matthew 22:29. We looked at this passage when we did the marriage series message on Restoring a Broken Marriage. You can read the story surrounding this another time but here's what the Scripture says in the *New Living Translation*. "Your problem is that you do not know the Scriptures, and you do not know the power of God." A marriage that perseveres needs to be in the Word. The Word here is discipleship. How can a man or a woman or a child, a 12-year old little girl with pigtails and a frilly skirt, how would it be possible for you, how could anyone know who God is if they never look at the Scriptures? How would you know who to worship or how to worship? How would you know what it means to be a steward of all that God has entrusted to you? How would you know anything unless you were involved in the Word.

These were religious leaders that Jesus was speaking to here. Religious leaders not just church folk, but the leaders of the church. These are the Sadducees, the people powerfully committed to the Temple. It's not enough to be committed to the Temple, to the church, not enough to Synagogue if you don't know the Scriptures. Your problem is not that you're not in church, your problem He's saying this group of people is, is that you don't know the Scriptures, therefore you don't know the power of God. You want more power in your marriage - persevering power? I exhort you to make you are in the Word.

It's interesting because we talk here a lot and there is a general assumption that most men here have given their lives to Christ. There is certainly not the assumption that all men have, but most men have. There is a difference between teaching to men who are on this side of the Cross, versus the other side of the Cross. There's a third thing, though, that a marriage must be in order to persevere and that's to be in Christ. The word here I would use would be the word "surrender." The irony of surrender is that it leads not to defeat, but victory, or as Ken Moar said to me this week regarding surrender, "The problem is unless you surrender, you don't win." Interesting.

Turn over to Hebrews 12:1. Last Friday night Patsy and I attended the 50th wedding anniversary of Jim and Thelma Walton. Jim, for 16 of our 17 years, was the table leader for this table. Now, David is the leader of this table. Jim and I, Patsy and Thelma, all met with the Moar's, and some others, 30 years ago when a revival was breaking out at Asbury Methodist Church. It was a powerful revival. A lot of us got saved. So Jim and I have been doing ministry deals for 30 years. He's about 75 years old and has had a stroke. Thelma's not well and they have moved up to an assisted living facility in North Carolina. So when the idea came up to do a 50th wedding anniversary celebration, it made sense to come back and do that here. I am going to describe to you what happened at this wedding anniversary.

Jim and Thelma moved graciously and greeted all of the guests. Then there was a little program in which Jim honored his wife, and his wife honored him - a loving relationship between them and one that persevered. Their children flew in to honor them. Jim had made a big enough contribution at his church that his pastor was willing to attend and give a good report, and in total, there were about 40 to 50 of us. The rest of us were friends who had known this dear couple for a number of years and had done things together and loved and cared about each other. You want to know something? I've never seen Jim happier. That's it. That's what you get if you persevere. You get to have a soul mate that you went through it with (if you're married, of course). You get to have children who honor you, you get to have a pastor who recognizes you made a contribution to the body of Christ, and you get a few friends. That's what you get - that's it.

You may not think that sounds like much, but what else do you want? Do you want to be there alone? Do you want to have your kids hate your guts? Do you want to have your pastor say, "I wouldn't be caught dead with that guy?" Do you want to have people who are looking at their watch wanting to know what time the party is going to be over? ("I can't believe it's going on and on and on!") You do this by persevering and by being in church, by being in the Word, and by being in Christ.

I want to read this last Scripture then we have invited Scott Alexander to sing. Actually, I asked him to sing the same song he sang last year. Thank you, Scott, in advance for blessing us this morning.

Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,” the Walton’s, “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. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Let us surrender our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

That’s the deal. If you want to persevere, be in church, be in the Word, be in Christ.

Thank you, Scott. Patsy, thank you for saving my life. Thank you for snatching me up and putting me back in the fire. You are my hero, and because of you, I have been able to persevere. Men, women – give each other a break, okay? We’re just trying to get through this thing until we can move over to the other side.

Let’s pray:

Father give us the strength and the courage to persevere. Lord, all of the silly things that have been so important to us this week. Lord, would you just by your grace, make them all slip away and help us to see the importance of being in church, in your Word, and in Christ and that persevering is what it is all about. That’s how we take hold of your great promise.

In Christ’s name, I pray. Amen

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