

# The Journey to Biblical Manhood

## Challenge Two: The Gospel

### Session One: 4 Contrasting Visions of the World

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 118 verse 24. Let's go ahead and do a shout out. By the way, if you are doing the Bible study online and we haven't done a shout out, let us know. We've got a queue. We've been doing this for, what, five, six, seven years. Every week for that long, we've had a new group that we can announce and we'd love to announce yours too. I think we've got 20 or 30 in the queue yet to go, but we'd love to do that for you. We want you to join in in giving a shout out to the guys that we're going to welcome this morning too. When we do our applause and our hoorah, we want to invite you to join in.

Today's shout out goes to MAN, Man's Accountability Number, led by Lionel Clark. They're four men and they have a unique approach. They're doing the video Bible study every Sunday but they're doing it via video and phone conferencing. They're doing it to develop accountability in their lives based on a Biblical foundation. They're part of the Message of Hope Church in Columbia, Missouri. Would you join me in giving a rousing and warm Man in the Mirror welcome to MAN? One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We're glad to have you with us.

We are in this series, The Journey to Biblical Manhood. We're going to start the second of 12 challenges this morning. We're doing three-week mini series on each of these 12 challenges. We did manhood. This time, the gospel. The other ones are on relationships, fathering, disciplines, work, mission, money, integrity, sacrifice, leadership, and outreach. Each of these challenges has some faith and life objectives. You have a card on your tables. If you're online, I guess you could download these. Each faith and life objectives for each challenge has three parts, one for the head, one for the heart, and one for the hands. We'll be doing the head this morning. The messages, of course, are not necessarily tied to one of these cards, but these are the faith and life objectives, the things that we hope you would have as takeaways once we're through each of these challenges. That's for your encouragement.

Then today, first up, we're going to talk about four contrasting visions of the world. Psalm 118 verse 24 says ... What does it say? "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Now, if you would, turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 1. It begins, "The words of the teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem." When you get there, then I'll read the second verse. Verse 2, and so this is Solomon. Occam's Razor says this is Solomon. Nowhere in the book of Ecclesiastes does he actually say, "My name is Solomon," but it's pretty obvious it's Solomon. Occam's Razor, the simplest explanation is usually the

correct one. Solomon says in verse 2, he says, "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is a chasing after the wind. Everything is meaningless."

Here we have two contrasting reports. "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." You have these two visions, if you will. Are they incompatible? It helps to be very self-aware. The Bible helps us to be self-aware. These verses in particular, I would like you to be self-aware as you're thinking about these. Do you identify this morning with, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." What's interesting, the word rejoice can be used either as an action or a feeling in the text. You might feel rejoicing or you might not because you're not on top of the mountain today. The mountain's on top of you. You don't feel rejoicing, but because of your worldview, if you have a Christian worldview, you can go ahead and rejoice even in the face of the circumstances. You, actually, your feeling today might be rejoicing, but your feeling today might be vanity, meaningless, futility, frustration. It's all useless.

It's interesting because the first thing I want us to talk about this morning is Solomon's project and the problem that we're all trying to solve. Here's an interesting thing. You know, Christianity and secularism are not trying to solve different problems. They're trying to solve the same problems but in different ways. There are these four contrasting visions of the world that we find in the Bible and then we also find them throughout Christian literature, names like Søren Kierkegaard, CS Lewis, Pat Morley. They will be footnotes in history. I will just be history.

Anyway, I want us to look at Solomon's project and the problem that he was trying to solve because it's the problem that we're all trying to solve. The situation that has called the book of the Ecclesiastes into existence is this. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived other than Jesus. He was the wealthiest man of his era. He is the one who had these two visions from God and God promised to give him long life, riches, like nobody had ever seen before. He was the president of this country. He was the CEO of the largest corporation in his country. He was a shipping magnate. He was the premier real estate developer of his era. He had the biggest ranches and the biggest farms. He was the biggest citrus grower in the world. You get the idea. He was the poet laureate of his country. He was a botanist. He was a scientist. He put many of these things down right in the Bible itself. The Queen of Sheba came to visit and brought him all kinds of gifts. When she saw him in the splendor of his kingdom she said, "They didn't tell me the half of it. You're so wonderful." He really was an incredible person. In spite of all that, he begins his book, "Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless."

There is evil in the world and there is good in the world. In the Bible, there's actually a third force at work in the world and it's this concept of futility or meaninglessness or vanity or frustration or that which seems to be useless. We know that there's some things that are just evil, but when you get a flat tire and you're late to work or you can't get a sale closed that you really need, those are not evils. The truth of the matter is that you and I and even secular people, we have a lot more interaction every day with futility than we do with evil. What's it all about? What's the point?

I was walking down the streets of Oxford, England one day. My daughter and I were there for a six week summer program. My wife was there too. We were walking between two buildings that created an acoustical chamber not unlike that of a beautiful European cathedral. The sound ... This had not gone unnoticed by street musicians. There was one there and the sounds that were reverberating off of the buildings just were so melodious. There was this one young man strumming a guitar one day when we walked through and these were his words. "So this is what it feels like to be lonely. So this is what it feels

like to be alone. So this is what it feels like to realize that my work doesn't matter at all." Does that not capture the sense of meaninglessness that is so pervasive in the world? This is the problem that we're really all trying to solve and the domino effects of sin that cause that to come into existence through the fall.

With that in mind, what is it that we can learn from Solomon that we would otherwise never know? Look at his project first. Chapter 1 verse 13. This is the project, Solomon's project. "I devoted myself," now, remember, this is the wisest guy who's ever lived except Jesus. "I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men. I have seen all the things that are done under heaven. All of them are meaningless, chasing after the wind."

Let's look at his question that he was pursuing in chapter 2 verse 22. This is the question that he was trying to answer, "What does a man get from all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?" What is his conclusion? Verses 10 and 11. You know, you can read the first part of 2 and just look at all the different things he did trying to find meaning and purpose, building buildings and planting vineyards and accumulating money and pleasure, blah, blah, blah. Verse 10, "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and when I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind, nothing was gained under the sun." Then in verse 17, "So I hated my life."

That was his conclusion. What happened to him? What happened to Solomon is that he had the right vision of the world, the right belief system at the beginning, but then he morphed. He married foreign women and they turned and start to run after other gods. His vision of the world changed and he thought he could find meaning and purpose apart from God. Remember in the introduction, whole series Apart From God, Life Has No Meaning? He went off the rails. His belief system failed him. Interesting, after getting everything, everything he ever wanted, he still wasn't happy. After getting everything, everything any man could ever want, all of it, he still wasn't happy.

What do we learn from Solomon? What is obvious here? What's obvious here is that if he, being as wise and rich and powerful and having no human limitations to speak of, if he couldn't find meaning and purpose and happiness in worldly pursuits apart from God, do you really think that any of us are going to be able to accomplish what he could not? It should be obvious to each of us.

It's the problem we're all trying to solve. If you have the wrong vision of the world, you'll never be able to solve the problem. In business, we have this idea. You've heard me say this before if you've been here. Your system is perfectly designed to get the results you're getting. In business, what we mean is if you're manufacturing automobiles and ever third car that rolls off the assembly line goes 100 feet and the front bumper falls off, you have a manufacturing system that's perfectly designed to produce that result.

We can co-opt this idea into the religious world, into the Christian world, and we can say this. We can also say that we each have a belief system that's perfectly designed, like Solomon, to get the results that we're getting. This is the big idea. I'm always looking. When I'm preparing the message, I'm always asking, "What is the one idea, if fully understood and truly believed, could change everything?" This is it. This is the big idea today. My belief system is perfectly designed to produce the results I've been getting. As in the case of Solomon, your life, my life, whatever results we're getting, we have a belief system that is actually perfectly designed to produce these results.

What I want to do now is I want to take the rest of our time and I want to talk about these four contrasting visions of the world or these four belief systems. They are secular, moral, religious, and Christianity. By the way, these generally, most people generally progress through these in a more or less linear fashion. Don't be mistaken because some people start out secular and move straight to Christianity. Some people start out religious and end up secular. Some people oscillate back and forth between some. Some have a little toggle switch that they're moving between Biblical and cultural Christianity. But in general terms, it would be normal for somebody in the secular belief system, the secular vision of the world would be well-founded in say like different philosophers like Epicurus, who the Epicurean philosophy. He believed that the highest good in life was to minimize pain, maximize pleasure. You've heard this before. Minimize pain, maximize pleasure. That's one summary of the secular worldview.

The idea and the way that I have always, when I was a secular person, the way that I summarized it, this is reading back into my circumstances, I didn't think of it this way at the time, but now I realize that my life view, my belief system was that money would solve my problems and success will make me happy. It's just another way of saying minimize pain, maximize pleasure, you see.

If you have money and possessions and things like that, enjoy them. Please, enjoy them. God is the one all throughout Ecclesiastes it's says God's the one who gives these good gifts. By all means, enjoy them. Remember this. This is so action-packed. This is so condensed today you may need to or may want to watch this when it comes out on the video because this is one of those ideas. Enjoy your nice things but remember all the benefits of prosperity are temporal. All the risks of prosperity are eternal. That's a whole message, you see. You might want to think about that and unpack that at another time. Maybe I'll do it at another time. We'll see.

Anyway, it's the secular ... Another way of summarizing the secular vision of the world is materialism. I became a materialist. I thought that money would solve my problems and success would make me happy. Well, what happens is is that anomalies begin to appear, as in the case of Solomon. It doesn't work out exactly the way that you think it's going to work out. Anomalies are variations.

Thomas Kuhn, the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he's the one who articulated this. In science, what happens is is that you have a system or a paradigm or a model. In our case here, the secular model. Then anomalies begin to appear and then scientists try to come up with explanations for the anomalies. What happens is is that when the anomalies keep accumulating, there are more and more and more and more, then the explanations seem less and less satisfying. Another scientist comes up with a new model to explain the anomalies. For the Newtonian Paradigm to the Einsteinian Paradigm, for example. Of course. In science, that's how it works. Well, it works the same way in these belief systems, these visions of the world that we have. The anomalies just become too much for us and we find what Solomon found, that oh my gosh, the secular beliefs, it's meaningless. Then we transition. A second one we often transition to is the moral belief system. We move from pleasure to trying to do the right thing.

That was me. I remember reading Hamlet. I was in the army but I was in college at night and I was despairing. I was crying. I was a young soldier. I was driving around Fayetteville, North Carolina crying at night because I was in such despair. I just didn't know what to do. I didn't have anybody to talk to. I was reading Hamlet and it said, "This above all." Shakespeare wrote, "This above all: to thine own self be true. It must follow as the night the day thou canst then not be false to any man." I said, "Eureka! That's

it. I've discovered the secret of meaningfulness, of happiness. It's to become a moral person. It's to try to do the right thing by every person I meet every day." I became a moralist.

Of course, you know, when you join in a new group like the Chamber of Commerce or the Rotary Club or whatever it is or your shooting club and you meet the other members of the club, you begin to get a feel for what's going on. Well, when I joined the moralist club, I quickly realized that basically all moralists have one thing in common. None of them have any money. That's why I tried to combine the secular and the moral. Have my cake and eat it too there.

You know, the big idea today is what? My belief system is perfectly designed to produce the results I'm getting. Here's the problem in the moral system. This is the problem in the moral system. It's exhausting. I don't have the power to be the man that I say I want to be. I mean, most of the time I'm good, but the whole idea is that my vision of the world is that I'm going to be a good boy. I'm going to do good. Then the anomalies, they just keep adding up. I can't make it work. My belief system is perfectly designed to produce the results I'm getting and I'm not moral. I realize that I need to make a shift in my paradigm. I need to have a different vision of the world.

I move towards a religious vision of the world. Every human being has religious instincts. Every human being has religious experiences. You realize this, right? Every human being has religious experience because it's planted within us. I'm not anywhere near Christianity yet. I'm just talking about religion. The sense of you stare into outer space and you ponder it and then, all of a sudden, you're overwhelmed with this sense of awe of what or who. We move from pleasure in the secular to trying to be a good boy in the moral and do the right thing to, in the religious, this idea that there must be a God because it's obvious. Again, back to Occam's Razor. Where there is a painting, there must be a painter, right? There must be a god.

We move into a church and we want to get some moral and religious instruction for our children. We think that'd be a good idea. We're feeling the meaninglessness and the futility of the anomalies of trying to either find it in a secular vision or moral vision. We become part of a church and we adopt this religious vision of trying to do good deeds to please God. We're already trying to do the right thing and be a good boy, but now we're trying to do that for God. It's an elevated form of vision that we have for the world. What's the problem with that one? It's never enough. You can never do enough to make God happy. You can never do enough to earn merit. What we're trying to do is we're trying to earn that which can only be received as a gift, you see.

One of you, when you first came to the Bible study and we visited at the first timer table, you said to me, "I have four kids and I joined church with our family and I got involved and became an usher. I got involved in a committee, but I just found religion to be exhausting and so I quit. Now it's ten years later and I'm nowhere." People who try to satisfy this futility problem by becoming religious, they have the exact same feelings, the exact same outcome as the person with the secular vision or the moral vision. They still have anomalies. They still end up thinking, "Meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Again, because my belief system is perfectly designed to get the results I'm getting. That vision of the world, that religious vision of the world, it's perfectly designed to produce these kinds of outcomes.

Now, we should talk about Christianity as the fourth vision, but that's not exactly what we're going to do today. What I'm going to do is I'm going to introduce it this way. The Christian belief system can be understood in two parts. Christianity in two parts. There is the gospel and then there are the teachings.

This is a traditional distinction in theology. The gospel is the word kerygma. You can see it up on the screen. Those are the minimums that are required to understand salvation. Then there are the teachings or the didache, D-I-D-A-C-H-E. The teachings. We go over both of these here, but most of the time we spend in the teachings. Well, to have the Christian vision of the world, you don't really need to understand the teachings. Hey, look, do you need to understand how a combustible automobile engine works to ride in a car? Not particularly. Do you need to understand all of the teachings to ride with Jesus? Not particularly. Will you have a better experience if you understand the teachings? Of course you will and it will be a lot more fun and you'll be a lot more productive and useful in general.

At this point, I'm not so much interested in helping us understand that or talk about that, that's what the rest of the journey to Biblical manhood is about. It's the teachings. What I want us to focus on is the kerygma. When the anomalies of a secular moral a religious system just become overwhelming to us and we're crying out like Solomon, "Meaningless, meaningless," or even if we made a profession of faith in the past but for some reason, we now are feeling like life is meaningless, guess what. You have a systems problem. Your system's perfectly designed to be producing that result. The answer to that is to get back to the simplicity of the gospel, of the kerygma, the good news of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's what we're going to look at next week. Right now, though, my belief system, remember, it's perfectly designed to produce the results I've been getting.

Now, what I want you to do is I want you to take the next 20 minutes and discuss the three questions on the handouts. Then we will come back for the last few minutes and we'll just open it up and give you an opportunity to give us some of the answers that you come up with. If you are a first time visitor this morning, we do want to say welcome to you. We want to give you a hand clap so where are you first time visitors? Up here, anybody else? Great. Welcome this morning. And here. Great. You men, all you first timers, if you would come up to this empty table on the front corner of the building right now, I would love to have an opportunity to greet you and get to know you a little bit. Then go ahead and discuss those questions. Thanks.

Okay, men. I want to say this. Let us pray. Let us pray. That always quiets the group down. We will pray but not right now. I just wanted to quiet you down.

I wanted to mention that I based a lot of what I've said this morning on this book that I wrote. It's Christianity For You. That's another way that you could do a little bit of a deep dive on some of this. It's available. You can go and click it on Amazon. You can get it on iBooks. If you really want it for free, you can go to PatrickMorley.com, go to books, and you can download an evaluation copy, PDF of the book for free there if you want to delve into that a little more.

Let's do these questions. The first question: Which of the following two statements do you most identify with and why? The two verses, "This is the day the Lord has made," and then, "Meaningless, meaningless." Who has a comment or a thought about that? Yes, John?

John: I most identify with both.

Patrick Morley: You most identify with both. Yeah, I agree. I get it.

John: Because everything is completely meaningless until you get to the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes where Solomon says without God, everything is meaningless which brings us back. Today is a great day...

Patrick Morley: Yeah, that's great. That's beautiful. So many things in life we set up as it's called the logical error of the false dilemma. We set things up as either/or where in reality, most things are both/and. Yeah, that's good. Anybody else have a comment on this one?

Then the second question: Besides good and evil, what is the third force at work in the world described in Ecclesiastes 1 and Romans 8:20? We didn't get to Romans 8:20 today. You know, you look at the clock and say, "Gosh, I didn't think it would take this long to get to this point." I just left that one out. Anyway, according to Romans 8:20, it says, "For the whole creation has been subjected to frustration or futility or meaninglessness." Why is this third force bad? You looked up the verse, right? Why is this third force bad and how does God use it for good? Yes?

Speaker 3: I guess if you have good and evil and useless, which is really evil [inaudible] that at least shows you what you're not supposed to be doing so you can focus on the things that matter.

Patrick Morley: Yeah. Okay. Good. Yes?

Speaker 3: The frustration will hopefully – well, eventually, point you to God. You would think.

Patrick Morley: Okay. Listen to this. This is the big idea for next week. Futility is the chief tool by which God's sovereignty draws him to himself of our own free will. In other words, God did not design creation to be able to fulfill all of our meaning and purpose unaided by Himself. He uses futility as his chief tool, really, to draw us to himself. He gave us free will. How can God be sovereign and have free will? That's the answer. The point that the brother's making is correct. God does use this futility for good. It is bad because it leaves us in bondage to decay. That's verse 21. Should have put 8:21. "For the whole creation has been subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but by the one who," which would be God, "who did that. Why? In hope that the whole creation might be liberated by its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of life." We're in bondage to decay, so the third force is bad, but then God uses it for good. We'll talk more about that next week. Anybody else on this one? Yes?

Speaker 3: I remember listening to your teaching this morning, and considering all of this – I've had a feeling of each of us here – where did you learn my life story?

Patrick Morley: Well, did you remember what the first circle said? Solomon's project and the problem we are all trying to solve. We are all in this same ... We're not different. You look different but our similarities dwarf our differences. Republican, Democrat. Our similarities dwarf those differences, you see. Yeah, I'm reading your mail because I'm reading my mail.

Speaker 3: [inaudible 00:37:18] Well, then we thought about the whole process of stages and moral and religious and we got to thinking, in terms of – we get the metamorphosis of the end product of the butterfly – what we go through to get be a butterfly, well – there you go.

Patrick Morley: There you go. Gosh, I should have used that illustration this morning. That was good.

The next one: What is your vision of the world, of these four visions? What is your vision of the world? Give an example of how you have maybe blended multiple visions together and the result of that. Then, can you relate to the big idea today? My belief system's perfectly designed to produce the results I've

been getting. Then, what do you think the Lord is trying to say to you today? Yeah, that's one question, not just a piece of it. Anybody have anything they'd like to say on this one?

Speaker 3: Just the old saying of, "If you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting."

Patrick Morley: "...you'll keep getting what you've been getting." That's nice.

Speaker 3: It's just a matter of stepping forward and moving on.

Speaker 4: We're all that rich, young ruler. We want the answer to the questions< "What can I do to affect my eternity?" It's not about that. And it's about surrendering to the will of God and not trying to fix it ourselves.

Patrick Morley: The brother's saying the rich young ruler says, "What must do I do to inherit eternal life?" It's not what I must do. Okay. Good point. What else? How are we doing on time? 7:58. Great place to stop.

Who wants the last word? Anybody?

Speaker 4: Looking at this, I thought here that the four systems can relate to four levels in relationship with God.

Patrick Morley: Four levels in the relationship with God.

Speaker 4: So secular having the lowest and the least amount of relationship with Him, then as we go on, we get to the place of the moral, we think we're having a little bit of relationship with Him, go to the next level, religious, more relationship with Him, but in reality, we really needed Christianity to have the relationship.

Patrick Morley: This is one of the ideas that didn't make the cut for the 30 minutes today. The idea is there are traces of truth in each of these visions of the world. How do we know that? Because if they were utterly and completely false, nobody would ever adopt them. There's enough truth in there ... As one of my seminary professors said, he said, "It takes a lot of truth to float an error." You get it? Which is the counterfeit bill that is most likely to make it in to circulation? The one that most looks like the real thing. These are counterfeit visions but they have the appearance of really looking like the real thing. It takes a lot of truth to float error. Yeah, there are traces of truth and there is this cumulative impact of these four different visions of the world.

Okay, so that's great. Let's pray.

Our dearest Father, we come to you. We thank you so much for your Word, just that these two crazy ideas can coexist in the Bible side by side and yet have a complete synthesis in the coming together and they just totally work together. We can look at the day you've made and rejoice and yet experience the meaninglessness of it apart from you. It's been well said by the table groups here. So Father, we do ask that you would help each of us to self-examine, look at the belief system that we have, and whenever we have. This can happen multiple times during the day. At any time during the day when we don't like



the result that we're getting, help us to understand that we have a belief system that's perfectly designed to produce that result and help us to reexamine, reevaluate, and then once again come humbly to the foot of the cross, if we need to, to ask for forgiveness or for direction and to make that full total complete surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ in whose name we now pray. Everybody, amen.

Thanks. Have a great weekend and we will see you next week.