

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE MAN IN THE MIRROR
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Good Morning, Men!

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to a man, and he was relating his experiences with religion and Christianity, and he said, "You know, when I go to church or a Bible study, do me a favor, tell me how to be good. I already know how bad I am." I thought that was pretty clever, and I've been thinking about it, and that's a good lead-in for our new series that we're going to begin this morning on Spiritual Disciplines because, in effect, that's what Spiritual Disciplines help us do - they teach us how to be like we all want to be anyway. So what are they, and why are they important?

How many of you are golfers? Raise your hand if you're a golfer. How many have played golf before? I would like about three or four men to come up here and show me your golf swing. Bob Willson, I'm going to ask you to come up because I just heard you say you've had some lessons. Dave, I'm going to ask you to come up. Let's see. Who else is a golfer over here in this section? Look, I may ridicule you; I may make fun of you, but it's worth it - to everybody else. Seriously, how many of you over here are golfers? Raise your hand. Scott? Okay, we've got three guys here. Scott, what I want you to do is take this club, and take a little practice swing - back up though and get away from me, and I want to see what your swing looks like. Whoa, have you taken lessons before? So, you're trained. I would say it shows. That was a very nice looking swing. I don't think Tiger's in any trouble, but that was a nice swing. You can go ahead and sit down now. Dave, why don't you come over and take a swing. This is David Outlaw. Now, David, that was interesting. Have you ever taken any training? (No) I didn't think so. Thank you very much. You can go ahead and take a seat now. Bob - this is Bob Willson. He's going to take a swing now. Okay. Keep your head down. Bob, have you ever had lessons? (I try) You'd better get a refund. Thank you very much. Let's have a round of appreciation for these brave souls.

Now, listen to me. A golfer who doesn't receive training on how to swing a club will, nonetheless, develop a habit of swinging a club in a particular way and certain beliefs for why you should do that. Likewise, if you are a new convert and you don't receive any training on how to be a Disciple, you will, nonetheless, develop certain spiritual habits and beliefs about why you would do the things that you do in that particular way. Does this make sense? As we all know, it's more difficult to unlearn a bad habit than to learn it correctly the first time. So, in many ways, we are teaching old dogs new tricks here. Some of you old dogs are not quite as old as the others, of course, and some of you old dogs are well ____.

Quickly, the purpose of Spiritual Disciplines - you could go on and on about this - but essentially the purpose of Spiritual Disciplines is to help you grow in sanctification, to grow in your relationship with Christ, to grow in intimacy with God, in fellowship with God, with communion with God. They're to help you glorify God and to enjoy Him, to help you grow in holiness, in love, in faith, in humility, in obedience, in service - all the things that you are interested in that would help you become good. The Spiritual Disciplines are, basically, the things that help you get there. They are the methods of discipleship. We don't put our faith in the disciplines themselves, but they get us to Jesus in a deeper way.

Let me give you a bibliography for the series. This will be 10 or 12 weeks. One book is called *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney and is highly recommended. Another book is called *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard, and this may not be the most accessible, but it certainly is a great book, and I got a lot out of that. Then the classic text on this is called *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster. If you buy only one book, I would recommend that it be the Foster book. He sort of started the current renaissance of Spiritual Discipline when he wrote this book. He studied all the old masters, and it's a very excellent text.

We are going to be using the approach of really only talking about those disciplines that are very obviously suggested in the Bible. They are disciplines that people employ that are not necessarily suggested by the Bible, but also useful, but we're going to stick to those in the Bible.

The first disciplines that we're going to look at this morning are the ones that deal with the Bible. You should be turned to Psalm: Chapter 19. How many of you do not have a Bible? Please raise your hand. Let me encourage you to pick one up; they're not that expensive. If you don't have a Bible, please look on with someone because I would like you to see this text we're looking at this morning.

Now the first thing I want us to look at is how does God speak to men? How does God communicate with men? So we're going to look at forms of speech. If you want to have a relationship with somebody or when you have a relationship with somebody, there are a couple of things that take place. There is attraction. The next thing that takes place is communication. We see how God speaks to us in Psalm: 19, Verse 1, and you could call this God speaking to us through His works, called by the Theologians general revelation or nature. God speaks to us through nature through His works or general revelation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech..." You should read the next several verses on your own if you'd like.

Then in Verse 7, we see another way that God speaks to us. If the first way is through His works, the second way He speaks to us is through His word. One way is through His works, also known as general revelation, and He speaks to us through His word which is called by the Theologians special revelation. Verse 7, "The law of the Lord is perfect," we're in the *Old Testament*, "it revives the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy," notice what it does, "it makes wise, simple men. The precepts of the Lord are right." Notice what happens, "They give joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant," notice what they do, "they give light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." Notice the benefits here of hearing the speech of God in the Bible in His word. "It revives the soul, it makes the simple wise, it brings joy to the heart, it gives light to the eyes, and in keeping in obedience, there is great reward in obeying the word of God."

I had this many years ago, but does anybody here have a gold Rolex watch? Hal, will you take that off and let me take a look at it? I'm not going to go anywhere, but yes, this is a gold Rolex watch. In fact, this is not only a gold Rolex watch; it's a Rolex President. This is a very nice watch, Hal. Harold Brannigan has a diamond-studded watch. I am going to guess, because I happen to know he is one of the greatest salesmen in the entire nation, that he probably won this watch as a gift. It probably doesn't mean as much to him as it would mean to me. Hal, it says here in the Bible "that the precepts of God are more precious than gold, than much pure gold." Do you have a Bible with you this morning? Well, I have the Bible, and you have the watch. Hal is a first-time visitor this morning, and probably a last-time visitor this morning, so that's why Hal, obviously, does not have a Bible, but he does have this great watch. So, Hal, just out of curiosity would you be willing to, seeing as the Bible is more precious than gold much pure gold... which would you rather have? Would you rather have the Bible, the word of God, or would you rather have this gold watch? (Bible) Okay, that's what I was hoping. Interesting. So, a watch that might cost \$25,000, and there are watches that cost \$25,000, and Bibles you can buy for how much? Invaluable, invaluable!!! So, God speaks to us through general revelations, through His word, which is special revelation.

There are a few other texts I would like you to see. Turn with me to John: Chapter 20, Verse 30 and let's look a little bit at the purpose that the Bible has been given for. The Apostle John writes, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His Disciples..." Incidentally, in 1994, a study was taken and did you know that 73% of all Americans indicate that they believe that all of the miracles in the Bible took place exactly as they are stated in the Bible? "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His Disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." So the purpose of the Scriptures is so you can believe in the Messiah in the Christ. And, by believing, you can have "zoe" life which is abundant life now without troubles, and in the world to come everlasting life. So the purpose that the Scriptures are given for are basically, for those of you who are interested, justification and

sanctification. Justification is for bringing us to faith and sanctification is becoming Holy, becoming Christ-like, growing in our faith. That's the purpose for which the Scriptures are given.

Now, turn back with me to Psalm: Chapter 1 and let's take a look at what the promise of God is to the man who plugs into God's word. Psalm: Chapter 1, Verse 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the mocking, proud man. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." What an incredible promise. Then many others like this in the Scriptures. It's a great promise for the man who would follow Christ.

My son, my dear 22-year old son, was married this last weekend, and this is a young man who decided that he was going to be a man of God's word. So he's been following the Lord. He is leading such a rich, full life. He lives like this man in Psalm: Chapter 1. These are the kinds of things that sound almost like boasting because a father's heart is so proud. You are almost repelled when you see a father do what I'm about to do, but one of the mother's of his groomsmen happens to be a good friend of my wife, and so she was asking her son, "What are you going to do for your bachelor party? Are you going to get a stripper, a keg of beer?" He said, "Mom, we're not going to be doing any of those things. John Morley is cut out of a different kind of cloth than that. We'll probably watch the Beverly Hillbillies movie or something." I'm sure they drank a few beers or whatever kids do, but the point is that he has decided to cling to the promise that God has given for the man who would be a man of the word. My son, because I paid him to do it, has studied the Bible ever since he was about 12 years old. We paid him money to read the Bible every day, and he has become a man of God's word. So when he went off to college, he went to church. When he went off to college, he joined a campus ministry. When he went off to college, he taught four or five high schoolers every Thursday morning in a Bible study in an IHOP up in Auburn, and he's a man who has been reading his Bible. The result of all that is that he is like a tree planted by a stream of water whose leaf does not wither, and everything he is doing right now is prospering. Does that mean he's not going to have hard times and suffering? Of course not! But on balance, here is a young man who is experiencing the promise of applying the Spiritual Discipline of God's word. Make sense?

How can we be sure, or confident, that we are actually looking at God's word? Where does the confidence come from that this is, in fact, God's word? First of all, the Bible does claim to be the very word of God. Now an internal claim, if I claim to be the King of England, that doesn't make me the King. An internal claim doesn't prove anything, but do not miss the fact that the Bible does make this claim. The Bible does not prove that it is the word of God. It is not insignificant that the Bible claims to be the word of God. From beginning to end the Bible makes the claim that it is the very word of God. Sixty-six different books, 40 different human authors, written over a time span of 1,500 years, and yet with such a continuity that from beginning to end, it looks like it's all one piece of cloth. Amazing. Then there are, I believe, 13,000 New Testament manuscripts in existence. Compare that with five, six or seven copies of Plato and five copies of Aristotle. So the manuscript evidence alone is just overwhelming.

How did this Bible come into existence? Well, by the end of the 1st Century, the Scriptures were beginning to be recognized. The letters of Paul, 13 letters in circulation, and the churches were beginning to collect copies of these letters and archiving them. Clement, when he was writing the reference letter to the Corinthians that apparently was in the Roman Church at that time, in their library. They had archived his letter. Also, there were many Gospels, many Gospels, circulating by the end of the 1st Century and the beginning of the 2nd Century. Most of them were fraudulent. They were called . . . They were false. They were written in the name of Thomas or written in the name of Peter, but Peter and Thomas did not write them. Those people were no dumber than we are, but they figured out which of these writings were the authentic ones and which were not. So by the beginning of the 2nd Century, there were four Gospels that emerged that were really deemed to be the authentic written word of God. Those are the four gospels that we have.

Toward the end of the 2nd Century, a man named Marcion, came out with his own list of what he thought were the New Testament books. The Old Testament books by Cannon - Cannon being a body of sacred writings - was pretty well set by 300 B.C., so for several hundred years, Jesus referred to the Old Testament writings as a sacred body of literature. He talked about Moses and the prophets and so forth. That Cannon was pretty well formed by 300 B.C. These 27 books that we have, though, in the New Testament, Marcion was calling those into question. There was already a list in circulation of the books of the New Testament, but Marcion said, "No, only Luke," and a very highly edited version of Luke (he did the editing, by the way), then about ten of Paul's writings. He said, "No, this is the Cannon. This is the New Testament." This forced the church to take a stand because the books that made up the Bible were being challenged. This is where, then, the effort started to formalize the Cannon.

There is a lot I'm going to leave out of this story, but the next main thing I'm going to tell you about was the Meritorium??? Council. The Meritorium Council took place in 180 A.D., and that was a list of the books of the Bible that was made in Rome. It is very, very close to the Bible that we now have. There was a tradition that Aphinaseus???, the bishop in Alexandria, would write an Easter letter every year. He was given the opportunity to make a list of the authoritative books of the New Testament. In his Easter letter in 367 A.D., Aphinaseus??? acknowledged all of the 27 books that we have in our New Testament as being authoritative, not that the church was declaring which books were in and which books were out, but simply recognizing what was already taking place throughout the world. That was that these 27 books we now have were being completely recognized by the internal testimony of spirit by a broad range of people as being the very word of God and having authority. So, the official sync date we have for the Bible that we now read is 367 A.D., a long, long time. Luther, Calvin, Tyndal, every great name down through the ages, has agreed that this is the right Bible that we have.

In 393, a couple of synods were held and Augustin was at both of these synods where they affirmed that these are the 27 books, and it wasn't a meeting of old, white-haired men who were deciding what the Bible is. The church did not create the Cannon, they simply recognized the Cannon that was already in use. A lot more can be said about it, but what I want you to do, even though you aren't going to remember that, I know this, you're not going to remember what I just said, but remember that literally tens of thousands of scholars have spent millions of hours and billions of dollars studying the authenticity of the Bible, the credibility of the Bible. You can go to sleep tonight with absolute confidence that we have the right Bible. It is a Bible that has basically been in existence officially now since 367 A.D.

Let me give you some practical things here. I spent way more time on that than I needed to, but I wanted to get that out. From a practical standpoint, Francis Bacon said, "Reading maketh a full man; conference maketh a ready man; writing maketh an exact man." The first thing I would like to suggest to you is read the Bible. It's interesting because Charles Spurgeon lamented that he could find ten men who would be willing to die for the Bible for every one who was actually willing to read it. So, the idea is to read the Bible.

I am going to make a few suggestions. First of all, get yourselves a little sissy Bible like this and put it in your pocket. I remember early on when I was out selling, I was going to see people who didn't want to see me, so I always knew I'd have a long wait in a reception room. Sometimes I'd have 25 to 30 minutes sitting in the reception room waiting for this person to see me because I wanted to talk to them, and they didn't want to talk to me, but I was persistent enough to get the appointment. They were going to make me wait to make sure that I appreciated it. So I had my little sissy Bible and you know what? I used to read this over and over again - it's just the New Testament in the Living Translation. You travel. You say I don't want to take my big bulky Bible so get yourself a little travel Bible. I got myself a little travel Bible. I can throw it in my brief case, and although I don't leave it there, I could so I wouldn't forget it. Then this is a one-year Bible. Don and I have been tracking each other and some of you did, too, but this year is my 15th time reading through, at least the ones I've kept track of, the one-year Bible. So I know that every year I am going to read the Bible from cover to cover. That's a great idea - the one-year Bible. I'd encourage you to do that.

Then, secondly, conference maketh a ready man. Are you ready for anything? You are already in this Bible Study, so that is a great step in the right direction.

My brother, Pete, became a follower of Jesus Christ seven years ago. For the first five and one-half years, I kept wondering, I said, "You know, I hear the profession but I don't see much to recommend the message." That's it. A year and one-half ago, he got involved in a Bible Study, a small group men's Bible Study in his church. Let me tell you, this young man has been transformed. He is a different person. Here's my big idea today. Personally, I have never known a single man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's word. It's just not going to happen. You take this Bible Study here, and you can stream this through to your computer off the web site. Also, if you want to reproduce this in your church or a small group, for \$25 a month you can get four CD's along with the discussion questions. We have links to all kinds of related articles and other web sites. It's really a pretty amazing little product that we've put together, both video and audio. So you can have your own group. You can have your own group here or you can start one somewhere else.

The Bible, once accepted, really demands a response. Isaiah 55: 11 says, "My word which goes out from my mouth will not return empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which I've sent it and the desire I have intended." That's what's happening in my brother, Pete's, life. That's what's happening in your life. That's why you are here. Using Spiritual Discipline, reading the Bible, it's like training for a golf swing. If you want to play well at this idea of Christianity, and you want to have a good swing, then you have to go into training. You're going to have to take the lessons, and the starting point for all of this is the word of God. I recommend it. I can honestly tell you I don't know a single man whose life has ever changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of this word. The Bible is the starting point for all spiritual discipline, for all glorifying of God, for all communion with Jesus Christ, and for all growth and sanctification.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, Your word is powerful. Your word has wonderful purpose. Your word has wonderful promises. We can have great confidence that when you speak we can trust what you are saying to us. We would like to pray that each of us would have the highest possible regard for Your word, based upon where we are today in our own spiritual pilgrimage. Lord, I pray that these men who are here in Bible Study, conferencing together, that You would let us leave here ready, each week, for the challenges we face. In Christ's name we pray, Amen

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