

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY  
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES - CREATION  
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How many of you read Dilbert from time to time? I didn't even know which one was Dilbert, but he's the one with the square flat top and the little, round glasses and, at least in the one that I'm looking at, he never says anything. I'm looking at a Dilbert that has three frames in it.

This morning, we're going to be continuing in our series on Spiritual Discipline, and we're going to talk about observing God in creation or nature. This Dilbert has three frames in it, and each frame has three characters. On the left-hand side is Dilbert, on the right-hand side is the goofy-looking little guy with the glasses, and in the middle is the boss, the guy with the two little pointy things of hair that look like horns. As usual, the boss is talking and he says in frame number one, "I'll be taking my vacation in Africa so I can enjoy nature's wonders." Frame two, "And shoot as much of it as possible from the window of an SUV." Frame three. He turns to the goofy, little guy and says, "Have you ever seen monkey brains?" The goofy little guy says, "Yeh, once when you flared your nostrils."

Spiritual Disciplines - that's the series that we're going to be in for quite some time several weeks. Why are we doing a series on Spiritual Disciplines? Because every man who truly loves God wants to have a deeper relationship with God, wants to have more intimacy with God, wants to have more communion, more fellowship, and wants to grow in sanctification. Basically, he just wants to be with God.

Last week we looked at the disciplines that surround the reading of the Bible. I have two things to say about last week. First, I'd like to offer an apology. One of our men came to me afterward and was deeply offended when I referred to the Bible as a "sissy" Bible. I did that, not referring to its content, but referring to its size. But, I realize that in the past when I've used that, I've made that distinction very clear, and I did not make that very clear last time. In case I've offended anyone else, I want to apologize to you for that. So go out and get one of these "little" Bibles, that has big content, and read it.

The second thing I want to say is that I thought of an application last week that I wish I had thought of earlier before I gave the talk. As you know, I write books. I am an author. I just finished my tenth book. It's very exciting when someone comes to me and says, "I read your book, and I really liked it." However, over the 12 years that I have been writing, I notice there are different ways that people make comments about my books. For example, we'll be talking about one of my books and somebody will say, "Oh, yes, I have that book." I heard that, "I have that book." Or sometimes someone will say, "Oh, yes, I've been meaning to read that book." It doesn't have the same impact on me as when someone says, "Oh, yes, I've read that book, I like that book," or sometimes somebody will say, "Oh, yes, I've been meaning to read that." Somehow it just doesn't seem to have the same kind of an impact.

Let me tell you, here is the application. Someday soon you're going to meet the author of the book. What if He says to you, "How did you like my book?" Would it be a good idea, a little application to think about, it's your decision, not mine, but wouldn't it be a good idea to at least once before you meet the author to read the book? Think about it - that's the application.

Now, for this week, the other form of speech that we are going to be discussing is God speaking to us in creation. I want to start by giving you a little bit of a pop quiz. Do you think that creation is good, evil or neutral? What would be your conclusion - good, evil or neutral? How many of you would say the creation is good? Raise your hands. How many of you would say the creation is evil? Raise your hands. How many of you would say the creation is neutral? Not good, not evil. Okay. What I'd like to show you is that the Bible teaches that the creation is actually good. Until Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century, there was not much of a place for nature in Christian thought. All the art before Aquinas was Byzantine art, although it was very high and Holy subjects, even Jesus and Mary were never actually drawn as human figures, but were drawn as symbols. But, Aquinas attempted to create some unity between grace and nature, between

divine things and earthly things. Because of Aquinas then things like climbing mountains became something that people would do just for the sake of climbing the mountain. Petrock was the first person that we know about who ever climbed a mountain just for the sake of climbing a mountain in the 14th Century.

Then in 1410, someone drew a small portrait of a landscape, the way we would see landscapes pictured today. It was only 3 x 5 inches, but it was very important because it's the first time in history that we know of that there was ever a natural landscape painted. We don't know these things typically today, so nature did not play a very big part in Christian thought up until the time of Aquinas. Since then, a lot of things have happened that we're not going to go in to as we don't have time to go into today.

I want to show you what the Scripture says about creation. You're at Romans: 1 so keep your finger there, if you would. Turn over to Colossians: Chapter 1, Verse 15. While you're looking there, I'm going to read to you from 1 Timothy: Chapter 4, Verse 4. "For everything God created is good." Colossians 1:16 where you should be now, although I still hear the wonderful rustling of the crinkly pages of those large and small Bibles. "For by Him," meaning Jesus, "all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him." So a little syllogism here, God made everything. Everything God made is good. Therefore, everything is good. Those of you who are logicians know that this form of logic is indisputable. Everything that God made is good, and the creation itself is good. Now, that doesn't mean that that's the only report you can get about the creation. I won't read the words, but I was listening to them on the way over on Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon album. You guys need to get with the program. I didn't know this, but somebody told me last week, that this album has been on the top album chart, non-stop, longer than any other album in history, 25 years. So there, all you naysayers.

But it's really amazing, when I got through with this the whole subject that life is meaningless is the subject of a lot of songs you hear these days, the neologism and so forth. I had the thought run through my mind if life is so meaningless, why do you care so much? It's an interesting thought, you know. If life is so meaningless, why do you care? The reason people care that life is meaningless is because there is something deep inside every human being that rails against that. We know that by instinct life is supposed to be meaningful, and our frustration is not that it's meaningless, it's probably that we've not yet found that meaning. So people look at the creation, and they see the way nature works and they see the way man works, and they don't seem to understand, so they get frustrated.

Now C. S. Lewis, when he was an Atheist, wrote, "If you'd ask me why don't you believe in God?" he said, "well look at the universe - empty space, completely dark, unimaginably cold, very few stars, maybe none have any planets probable, it's probable that any planet except the earth sustains life, and earth existed without life for millions of years, and for million of years after life leaves us, you'll still exist, and while it lasts people live only by preying on each other. There is a record of crime, war and disease and terror with happiness and oppose to give them while it lasts an agonized apprehension of losing it. When it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering it." So, then he goes on to point out that, of course, "The one thing that never occurred to me if the universe is such a terrible place, how is it that people attribute it to a good God?" So you have the reports of the pessimists. The report of the Scripture is that God made everything. Everything God made is good. Therefore, everything is good. Everything is good.

Leonard Sweet tells the story in his book, *Soul Tsunami*. He's a great guy, by the way. If you have not read him, I would recommend that book. Tsunami is Japanese for tidal wave. He said when he grew up his mother was a traveling evangelist, and in their church, which was a very legalistic type church, they bought a television set when TVs first came out. So the pastor dropped by the house to visit, knocked on the door and they let him in, the TV was going in the background, the pastor said to them, "You bought the devil's blinking box." They put them out of the church for having the "devil's blinking box." She made the argument that matter is not evil, it's what people do with it that makes it evil.

So you have all these different reports out there about the nature of creation, but the Bible says that everything is good. The creation is good. You see incredible examples of this. We'll talk about it here. You have to come up with an explanation though for all of the bad things that you see. If you want to have a system that holds together, you have to have an explanation for that, and we have an explanation for that - it's called the fall. The fall gives us an explanation for why good is not the only thing you now see in creation. In fact, Pascal said this, "The fall is an offense to reason, but, once accepted, it makes perfect sense to the human condition." That is a profound idea.

Pop quiz question #2: The creation - does it hide God? Does it give hints of God or does it reveal God? How many say creation hides God, that you can't really find God in creation? How many of you would say that the creation gives strong hints of the existence of God? Raise your hands. How many of you would say that creation reveals God? Right again. The Scriptures tell us that the creation reveals God.

Turn with me now to Romans: Chapter 1. A couple of other texts you can look up later if you want - Psalm 8. I refer to Psalm 8 a lot. It was Dr. Martin Luther King's favorite Psalm. "When I consider your heavens," or when I observe the creation, "the moon and the stars which you have set in place." It brings questions to my mind. "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

Psalm 19, which we looked at briefly last week, the first half is about God speaking through His works, the second half is about God speaking through His word. General revelation is works, creation, nature; special revelation, His word, the Bible - the two main ways that God speaks. Listen, just listen. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of His hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." How many languages can understand the voice of God? "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat." The speech of God in creation.

Romans: Chapter 1, Verse 18, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, created things, so that men are without excuse."

Here's the big idea. To comprehend the visible is to apprehend the invisible. To comprehend the visible creation that we see, it is plain, it is clearly seen so that it is understood and to comprehend the visible creation is to apprehend the invisible God. To understand His invisible qualities, His eternal power, His divine nature, and it's available to all men.

This is a very interesting text. How many of you know the name Carl Bart, the 20th Century theologian? One of the most famous theologians of the 20th Century, he gained his fame by doing a commentary on the Book of Romans. He said he grabbed the rope and fell out of the Bell Tower, and it rang around the world. It was so important that he was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* as the man who rescued Orthodox Transcendent Theology from the man centered theology of liberalism in the 20th Century. Single handedly he rescued Orthodoxy. However, on this subject of knowing God in creation, he was so intent on making sure that the transcendence of God, or the otherness of God, that he made the comment that God is wholly other - completely other. He actually made the statement that you cannot know God through general revelation - through nature, through creation.

This text that we just read is in Romans, and it says the exact opposite thing of what Carl Bart said. So, even though he was the man that probably did more to rescue Orthodox Christianity than any other man in the 20th Century, he was finally marginalized and dismissed because of that position. The Scriptures clearly tell us what? That creation reveals God so that when we look at creation, we see God.

Now pop quiz question # 3: What's the best way for you to observe God in creation? Is it to look at nature or is it to look at man-made things, the accomplishments of men, skyscrapers, computers and things like

that, or people? Well, people are created in God's image. How can we observe God in creation? How many say it's through nature? Raise your hands. How many think through man-made things? Raise your hands? How many think through people? Raise your hands? Trick question. How about all of the above? The reason this can be so powerful for us is that there is a tendency to walk out of a Bible Study like this and go off to our secular job and do our secular thing. Am I right?

Everything God made is good. God reveals himself in creation in everything that is good in creation. God is revealing himself through nature, He's revealing himself through the accomplishments of mankind. He's revealing himself the excellence and beauty of people. When we leave here this morning, when we walk out of here this morning, it may be the weekend before you plug yourself into nature, but some of you might be on your way to the mountains or some of you just got back. You've seen the splendor and the majesty of nature and it can lift your thoughts to the divine. Or maybe it's at the beach. Or maybe it's, my favorite thing I've said many times, I love sitting in my backyard before dawn and gazing up into the sky. The contemplation of that part of creation -- Talk about God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, when you start looking out there - in order for that to work for me, it has to be a being of infinite size. It has to be a being of eternal duration. It has to be a being of omnipotence - some being that is so beyond my ability to capture that I am just blown away. I am humbled. I become like a little flea.

One of our men has brought to my attention something that I will pass on to you. A Christian photographer of nature whose name is Ken Duncan. You can look at some free stuff at [Kenduncan.com](http://Kenduncan.com). This is his book on America, he's actually an Australian. You look at these pictures and it just inspires awe. It turns one's thoughts to God. He's a believer, by the way; in fact, I was out there this morning just making sure everything was working on the website before I suggested you go there, and, would you believe when you turn the website on guess what verse pops onto the screen - the first thing that you see? Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Look at the Lilies of the Field. Look at a little mother duck with her little ducklings following along behind her. My wife went crazy this week when my son drove away with his wife with a U-Haul trailer attached to the back, left forever, we really miss him!!! He is such a great guy. We like being around this guy. He's a great guy. So Patsy needed something to nurture. So Patsy went out this week and bought a little Bijon to replace the one I finally got rid of that was on loan from my daughter for a year and a half. Now we have another little puffy fu-fu lapdog in the house, and I look at that little dog and I just can't help but praise God. It's so extraordinary the way that nature turns our thoughts to God. Also there are man-made things - almost limitless - the intricacy of a fine watch, the grandeur of a skyscraper. Almost anything. I went for a motorcycle ride last weekend and driving by beautiful homes. It's just unbelievable how beautiful men can make homes and lawns and flower gardens and golf courses and the smell of fresh mown grass - man-made things - then people, with the temple of the Holy Spirit.

My wife and I were talking about Britney Spears this week. I don't know if she's the most beautiful woman in the world, but she is certainly one of them. She is unbelievably beautiful. It's just amazing how beautiful God can make a human being. That's not the only thing that men do when they look at Britney Spears, but I can honestly praise God when I see her, as long as I don't see her doing some of the things she does. Then the way we celebrate human achievement, Espees, Emmees, Oscars or whether it's the exploits on the hardwood by Michael Jordan or on the asphalt by Jeff Gordon. Those kinds of things can thrill us, and these are all aspects of creation. They, by comprehending the true meaning of the visible, we can apprehend the true meaning of the invisible.

Let me close by reading to you from Rudolph Otto's book, *The Idea of the Holy*. Three books I used this week in preparing this talk are on my shelf with my 50 top books. One is Francis Shaffer's *Escape From Reason*. I highly recommend it especially you want to know more about nature, and grace and Aquinas. C.S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*, I read from that, then Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*. He writes of the mysterium tremendum. Just listen. You don't get this if you don't contemplate nature or creation. "The feeling of it at times may come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing as it were thrillingly vibrant and resonant until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its profane ominous

mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul as spasms and convulsions or lead to the strangest excitements to intoxicate its frenzy, to transport and to ecstasy. It may become the hushed, trembling and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of hope, for what? In the presence of that which is a mystery, inexpressible and above all creatures."

That's what we're looking for, men - the experience of the holiness of God. You can find it in creation, and how do you respond? Verse 21: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave Him thanks." Glorify God; give thanks to God. That's why we're doing these disciplines to begin with. That's why we want these habits so that we can be brought to a place where we can voluntarily glorify God and give Him thanks.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, Lord, we do worship You, we do glorify You, we do give You thanks, and we do see You in creation. We see You everywhere around us. We see You in people. We see You in things made well by man. We see You in nature, and it is good, and we acknowledge that you have revealed yourself to us. Lord, give us the habit or the discipline to come often to this place, to this attitude, to this mindset so that we might be with You, that we might have communion with You, that we might have fellowship with you and that our relationship with You might deepen. We ask this in the name and the power of the invisible God made visible in creation. Amen.

/cjb 9/4/02