

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES - A MAN AND PRAYER
Patrick Morley
July 19, 2002

We are looking for 10,000 men who want to reach other men for Jesus Christ. So we want 10,000 men to reach 500,000 men, over the next year, by putting a case of books in the trunk of your car, or like Jack was saying, in the reception room of your office, or wherever you are. About once a week, give a guy a book. It's amazing how often a man will get hold of a book, and then God will use the book to get hold of the man. So, let's go for it. You can get them here, from Jim, as was mentioned, or you can log onto the website, *maninthemirror.org*, and click on the Book a Week Challenge. If you're not already doing that, most of you probably are in some way or another, but if you're not, let's go ahead and do that. Tell your friends to go to *maninthemirror.org*, get a case of 48 books, \$50, and let's reach a half million men through that strategy over the next year.

We're doing a series on Spiritual Disciplines. The first week we did the Bible, A Man and the Bible, and the main idea there was that change takes place by the study of God's word. The second week we did A Man and Creation or Nature General Revelation, and the main idea there was that the visible creation reveals the invisible God. As kind of a clarification, too, when we talked about knowing God, that through creation we know God, we are not talking salvifically. We know we have salvation through Jesus Christ, but we do know God and his invisible qualities through creation. As a spiritual discipline, a spiritual habit, it is good for a man to observe creation to know God more deeply.

This morning we're going to be talking about the subject of A Man and Prayer, so we will be looking at the spiritual discipline or the spiritual habit of prayer. We're going to look at three things about that - the study of prayer, we are going to look at belief in prayer, and we are going to look at what I am going to call the disposition of the heart. That will kind of give you the tracks we're going to follow this morning.

Jonathan Edwards said, "The substance of religion is conscious communion with God. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster makes the statement, "Of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer is most central because it ushers in perpetual communion with the Father." So the substance of religion for Edwards is conscious communion with God and prayer, according to Foster, is the best way that we can have ongoing communion with our Father.

This morning I want to give a talk to men who already pray. That's interesting. I'm not trying to sell you on the merits of praying, I want to talk to men this morning who already pray. When we look at men who pray, we see that some men pray a little and some men pray a lot. What I would like us to do is to explore the question, "Why do some men pray a lot and other men only pray a little?" As I was working on this, even getting ready this morning, something occurred to me and that was that a little and a lot may seem like I'm referring to the quantity of prayer. I think it would be fair to say that there are some people who talk a lot, but don't say much. In fact, there are some people who talk a lot and are kind of obnoxious about it. We need to define prayer a little bit, and I would say, and this is the big idea for this morning, that prayer is the conversation that turns salvation into a close relationship. Prayer is the conversation that turns salvation into a close relationship. I would have said an intimate relationship, but you're guys, so I'm using the word "close." I looked in the Thesaurus this morning to make sure I had the right word.

The goal here, if you're secure in your manhood, what you really want is intimacy with God. We all want that. But for men, we'll just call it close relationship. The idea is that prayer is a conversation, not just talking at God. Certainly we talk to God, but think about how boring the person is who you go to lunch with and from the time you get in the car together all they do is yap, yap, yap. All they want to do is talk about sales, talk about what they're doing, and they're the most utterly boring people in the world, are they not? So when we talk about a guy who prays a lot, we're talking about a guy who has a lot of conversation versus a little conversation. Make sense?

It's interesting, too, when we talk about a man in the Bible and that is a spiritual discipline. That's like a good book. When we talked about creation, that's kind of like talking about a good play. When we talk about prayer, we're talking about a good conversation.

Over the Christmas holidays, my family and my wife's family, 12 of us went to New York, and we toured the 9/11 site, which was the highlight, but we also went to see a play, *The Music Man*. Through my sister-in-law's friendship with a friend of a friend, we ended up back stage after the play. Let me tell you, there is a great difference between sitting in an audience watching people do something on the stage, which is like observing God in creation, and getting up on the stage after the play and actually having a conversation with the lead actor and lead actress. First of all, to be honest with you, it was a little intimidating. I mean these are stars. The woman who played the lead was Christine in *Phantom of the Opera*. I love this woman. I've loved this woman since the first time I heard her voice, and I was actually about to meet her. So, it's great to look out into creation and see God, but to get to talk to Him, have a conversation with Him - wow, now we're getting into a habit that's a habit I want to have.

I want us to look at three characteristics this morning of men who pray a lot. The first characteristic is in this area of study. The first characteristic of a man who prays a lot is that he spends time, he sits regularly with Jesus in the school of prayer.

Luke 11: Verse 1, the Disciples say to Jesus, "Lord, teach us how to pray." Easily the classic book on prayer is by Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. The first characteristic of a man who prays a lot is that he sits regularly with Jesus in the school of prayer.

I row. I row a skull, a long boat, 25 feet long, weighs 42 pounds with a full rig on it, and I've been rowing for eight years. In the first year, I took a couple of lessons. I have a neighbor who lives on the lake where I live who happens to be here this morning, and this neighbor has said, as well as a few others, "You know you really look so peaceful out there when you're rowing. You look so calm. You look so - whatever..." Let me tell you what's going on out there on the water when you're close up, I struggle for my life. This is a 25-foot long toothpick, very tippy. It has absolutely no stability; the boom on it is 14 inches. Can you imagine trying to keep it upright? Well, I'm balancing my very life out there, and the reason that I am is that I've been rowing eight years, and I haven't learned anything since the first year. You see, practice does not necessarily mean progress. Unless you learn something new about the art of rowing, there's probably very little chance that I will actually get any better. The last few years have proven that because I'm out there flopping around like a fish on the bank barely keeping it upright. Now that I think about it, maybe I will take another lesson.

It's the same way with prayer. Just because you pray a lot doesn't mean you're really good at it. The men who pray a lot tend to be men who understand they need to sit from time to time with Jesus in the school of prayer. There are so many Scriptures you could study, but let me give you a little paradigm that I think is worthwhile - 6, 11, 11, 14. You could study four passages; one out of each of the four Gospels, and you could spend the rest of your life just studying prayer and these four passages. Every idea in the Bible is inexhaustible. The Bible says, "If you ask for anything believing, you will receive." Now, let me tell you, that is inexhaustible. You can spend your whole life studying that one idea and never get to the bottom of it.

Matthew: 6; Mark: 11; Luke: 11; and John: 14. I'll give you the specifics, but you can find the actual verses within each of those on your own.

Let's take a look one of them in Mark: 11, Verse 22, that, hopefully, you are close to, and I'd like to contrast Mark: 11 with another passage which we're not going to look up, but I'll tell you what it says, and that's James 4: 3. James 4: 3 says, "You do not have because you don't ask, but when you do ask, you don't receive, because you ask with the wrong motives." You may spend what you get on your own pleasure, and there is a lifelong tug of war between James 4: 3 and Mark: 11 starting here at Verse 22. Jesus has just walked by the withered fig tree with Peter and Jesus says, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' it will happen. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if

you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." This is called righteous and unrighteous prayer - right and wrong prayer. Understanding that there is a difference between prayer that wells up out of our flesh and prayer that flows out of our relationship with the spirit of God, and understanding that there is a tug of war in our minds when we pray, there is a great release and it helps us to conquer some of the misconceptions that we have about how prayer works.

Now, there is much to learn in this Jesus school of prayer. I've given you four passages you can look up on your own. The second characteristic of a man who prays a lot, and again, prayer is the conversation that turns our salvation into a close relationship with God, is that he has come to believe that prayer is the most powerful use of his time. A man who prays a lot has come to understand that prayer is the most powerful use of his time.

If you've been here for any time, you've heard me say, probably more than once, that ideas are more powerful than labor. Ideas that force us into motion that once released can no longer be contained. The idea that we want 10,000 men to reach 500,000 men by taking The Book-a-Week Challenge over the 12 months - that's an idea. Once it's out, it releases forces that can no longer be contained. Prayer is like that. Prayer is also more powerful than labor. Prayer releases forces that once released can no longer be contained. That's the way the scriptures say it.

Luther is famous for making the comment once that, "I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done." Why will a man not come to this belief that prayer is the most powerful thing that he can do? Reality is that it doesn't look like it works. You pray, and it doesn't happen. You pray, and it does happen. You pray, it happens. You pray, it doesn't happen. He loves me; he loves me not. Well, what is it? Does he love me or does he not love me? Yes or No. You answer prayer, don't you? I work; I get the thing I work for. I work; I get the thing I toil for. I labor; it happens. By my own efforts it seems it appears that by my own effort I can get for what I pray. So there is a tendency to think, well, you know, it's spiritual or it's mystical. You don't understand it, so I'm just going to pray a little not a lot.

This summer has been agony financially. Every summer is agony financially in a ministry. But, we're in a recession for crying out loud, and the stock market is at its worst. It just couldn't be any worse. So I'm praying, and I praying to a couple of passages. "My God will supply all your needs according to his Glory in Christ Jesus." Then Matthew: 6, "The pagans run after all those things, but your Father knows that you need them." We have 20 full-time staff. They've got mortgage payments, rent payments, groceries, childcare, gasoline, car payments, and doctor bills. These are not new wants; these are needs. They need these things. So I'm staring down at payroll every two weeks, twice a month. You know what percentage of payroll we were short a couple of weeks ago? All of it. On Monday, I needed the whole payroll. We had some meetings, and I went home, and I wrote in my journal, "God I feel like you have failed me. I don't believe that you failed me, but that is how I feel." How can a man say to God, "I feel like you've failed me?" I'll tell you why because I have a personal relationship with Him. As you might suspect, He met that need and He's met every other need, and I'm starring down the same need again. But the point is that there are moments in our life when it just doesn't work, but prayer works.

I've mentioned this here before in a three-week series we did called Prayer and the Man in the Mirror. By the way, if you want to study, that would be something to study. Also, I'll give you the bibliography for the other books you can study. *Christ in School Prayer* by Andrew Murray will make you weep. Foster has a great chapter that deals mostly with intercessory prayer. If you want to read a biography of a great intercessory prayer warrior, *Praying Hyde* is a great classic book. C.S. Lewis has written a book called, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer*. That's a great book. Then the book, *God and the Dock*, Lewis wrote an article called Work and Prayer. For those of you who are struggling with the idea that labor works all the time, prayer doesn't seem to work all the time, this is an insight that can turn you into a prayer maniac. That's what I've become because of this.

Pascal said, "God instituted prayer in order to allow his creatures the dignity of causality." Then Lewis goes on to say. "It would probably be more appropriate to say that God invented both prayer and labor, or physical action to give creatures the dignity of causality and that there are really are two ways we can bring about action - through labor and through prayer - two forms of causality". Let me read, "The two methods by which we are allowed to produce events may be called work and prayer. The kind of causality we exercise by work is, so to speak, divinely guaranteed and therefore ruthless. By it we are free to do ourselves as much harm as we please, but the kind which we exercise by prayer it not like that. God has left himself a discretionary power. Had He not done so, prayer would be an activity too dangerous for man, and we should have the horrible state of doing things that end up destroying ourselves." In other words, prayer is so much more powerful than labor that God has had to put some limitations on it where He's not had to put limitations on your labor because had he not put some limitations on prayer, you'd all destroy yourself. I would destroy myself because it is so powerful.

Lewis goes on and gives this wonderful illustration, "It's not unreasonable for a headmaster to say 'such and such things you may do according to the fixed rules of this school, but such and such things are too dangerous to be left to general rules. If you want to do them you must come and make a request and talk over the whole matter with me in my study and then we'll see.' Do you trust God enough to understand that that he already knows everything you need before you pray for it, that's what the Scripture says? He's going to give you everything you need out of His glorious riches, and He answers every prayer that you offer up to Him some of which you have gone to His study to explore with him." That's the way it is.

A man who prays a lot sits regularly with Jesus in his school of prayer. A man who prays a lot has come to the firm belief that prayer is the most powerful use of his time. A young, businessman told me not long ago, "You know, I really just don't have time to spend a lot of effort on prayer and Bible reading. I have young kids at home, I'm building my career, and I'm very active in my church." I would just suggest that anybody who thinks that way is that the reason you don't have time to pray is because you don't pray. The reason you don't have time to read the Bible is because you don't pray. Prayer is a conversation that turns our salvation into a close relationship with the Father who wants to give you everything you need. All he wants to do is have this conversation with us if you would ask.

What I did when I was in that same position was I took a piece of paper, and I began to chart how I was actually using my time. Peter Drucker, one of the first things he does when he works with an executive says, "Well, how do you use your time?" Then he requires them to chart it for a couple of weeks. Invariably, without exception, nobody spends their time the way they think they do. So I made a list of how I spent my time, and I found I had about a one to two-hour block of time every night that I was watching television and watching whatever was on. A lot of it was lusty and sensual which was making me think things I didn't want to think. So I said, "Hey, I want to spend more time with God, and I want to spend less time being tempted." So I decided to go to bed when I would start watching TV and get up two hours earlier. People sometimes think I am crazy when they hear that I get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, but what's the big deal? I'm in conversation with God. What are you doing? Ha-ha. So the reality is, young men, you can do it; old men, you can do it; middle age men, and you can do it because you can do whatever you want to do. You're going to do whatever you want to do anyway. We all do exactly what we want to do. So if you want to have a close relationship with Jesus, you can have it, you just have to do that which is the definition of a close relationship and that's to have a conversation. Let's talk. I'll get with you later. I have stuff to do. We all do exactly what we want to do.

Final thought here. Prayer, for the man who prays a lot, has become the first disposition of his heart. I'll read to you out of the text of 1 Samuel: 14. Saul declared, "Let's chase the Philistines all night and destroy every last one of them." His men said, "We'll do whatever you think is best." But the priest said, "Let's ask God first." Interesting. The difference between Saul's heart and David's heart, one of them, was that Saul really never made inquiring of the Lord the first disposition of his heart. He was listening to James 4:3, he was not listening to Mark: 11. He lost a tug of war over and over again. David, on the other hand, made the inquiring of the Lord the first disposition of his heart. The man who prays a lot will do the same.

What's the best method to use for prayer? Of course, the best method to use is the one you will use. I switch around a lot. I do a lot of different things. I make up a list of things I want to pray about, then I get bored, so I switch it around. But the one thing that I found over the last few years I've done pretty consistently is I used the Lord's Prayer, the model prayer, "Our Father who are in Heaven," and what I'll do is pray through a phrase of it and then I just let my mind wander and then pray about the things the Lord brings to mind.

You might want to have specific lists of things. You might want to keep a prayer journal. There are no rules here except that prayer is a conversation, and it is the thing that will turn your salvation into a close, dare I say, intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I'd encourage you to pray with your wife. I pray with my wife every day. I was surprised recently to hear a man who is going through some marriage problems take the advice of another man at a Promise Keeper rally, pray with her. He's begun to pray with her, and guess what, things are sorting themselves out. So pray with your wife, pray often, and pray right now.

As I put this message together yesterday, what I do is visualize each table and pray for each table. I ask the Lord, "What is it you want to say to your men tomorrow, about this topic through this week's lesson? So I pray, and it took me about an hour and a half or two to pray. I've done a lot of study already on prayer, so I kind of had the raw data, but then I apply that raw data to you, and to you, and to you. How do I do that? I pray then things come into mind. I don't know where they come from, but when they come into mind, I jot them down. Some of them I end up throwing away, some of them I keep. But the point is, I'm having a conversation, a lot of it, and it makes a difference because this morning, with all my problems, I really feel like I have a close relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're tight. We're like that. We're close. If you don't know what He's up to today, check with me, I know what He's doing. We've been talking about it already this morning.

Let's pray:

Father, this spiritual discipline of prayer has been the chief business of your great saints all through the ages. Lord, we pray that you would make it our chief business, too, that we would pray a lot, and that we would understand that this is a conversation that we're having with you -back and forth - and that by this conversation a precious salvation also becomes a close relationship. Father, I pray for these men. I pray that you would encourage them to sit regularly with you in your school of prayer, that you would give them the conviction, the belief, that prayer is the most powerful thing they can do. Also, that you would help each of us that prayer would be the first disposition of the heart. Whatever we encounter, good or bad, whether praise or supplication, that the first disposition of our heart would be to talk to you. We ask this in the name and the power of Jesus. Amen

/cjb 9/18/02