

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES - A MAN AND COUNSEL
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I would like to begin by making an announcement that is really satisfying to me. I want to introduce you to the newest member of the Man in the Mirror team. I mentioned to you a couple of months ago that we were looking for someone to come along side me and really help me develop, build and maintain a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with our long-term donors. So I am pleased and honored to introduce to you this morning, and help me welcome, Bill Clemmer. Bill has a long and very distinguished career in financial services so this is actually his third career. Bill's son, Brett, is our National Seminar Director. So we have a little nepotism going on, and I'm glad of it. Welcome, Bill. Thank you for being here.

You should be at Proverbs: Chapter 15, Verse 22. We are doing a series on Spiritual Disciplines. We have looked at a half a dozen of them so far. By now, if you had thought about this, you would realize I am only talking to you about spiritual disciplines that are explicitly in the Scriptures. There are other spiritual disciplines you can do, but I am sticking with the ones that are pretty clear in the Bible. We've looked at the discipline of the Bible itself, looking at creation, prayer, worship, the Sabbath and fellowship. This morning I want to talk to you about counsel, the discipline of seeking counsel or advice.

What is the goal of seeking counsel? To make wise decision. In other words, you don't need advice unless there is a decision that's going to be made. The wisdom part of it is that when we make our decisions, we are looking for God's will. We are making a decision and we want to make a wise decision because we want to know what God's will is.

I want to talk to you this morning about three things - your heart, what is the problem that seeking counsel solves, and then I want to give you a few suggestions on how to go about seeking counsel.

I guess the first question is your heart. Do you really want counsel? My experience is that most people do not want counsel. What most people really want is permission. They've already decided what they want to do, and now they're looking for evidence and support for the decisions they've already made. A good example of that comes out of Nascar racing. How many of you follow Nascar racing? That's really interesting - probably 15%. How many of you have observed on TV, or live, a Nascar race in the last 12 months? That's interesting because that looks like almost 75% of us.

One of the really outstanding drivers this time last year was a young gun named Steve Park. He was driving for Dale Earnhardt, Inc., still is, and Penzoil is his sponsor. He drives the Number 1 car. A lot of these drivers who get to the Winston Cup Series, which is the top stock car league, and there are many other leagues, but the brass ring is the Winston Cup. A lot of guys in the Winston Cup want to race some of the other leagues as well for various reasons. Park said he was just kind of jumping up and down and asking Dale Earnhardt, when he was alive, to let him run a Busch race. He was begging Earnhardt to let him drive a Busch car, but Earnhardt, and his sponsor, Penzoil, said, "No, we don't want you doing that. We don't want you risking your career on a Busch race." Finally, because he kept begging, begging and begging, they relented and let him run, and I'm going to quote from Steve Park. "Then their worst fear was realized. Exactly what they told me over and over they were afraid would happen, did happen." In September of 2001 at the Darlington raceway, Park's career took a very significant turn when he crashed at the Lady in Black, that's what they call the Darlington Speedway, and he suffered severe injuries. In fact, he suffered a severe brain injury, and even today still speaks with slurred speech. I checked the Nascar ratings on the Net this morning, and he's 38th in points. That's way down there. He was, last year at this time, a title contender but now he is just an _____, but that _____ has earned \$1,700,000 of racing proceeds. That's pretty good to be in 38th place and win \$1,700,000.

The thing about Steve Park's story that is so interesting is that it really is our story. We want to do things, and a lot of times in our heart is not that we're really looking for God's will, but we've already decided what we want to do and we're begging, begging, begging and pleading to get what we want. Even when people, who are much wiser than us, are giving us good counsel to go in different direction.

As we're looking at this discipline, the first thing to do if you want God's will, and you want to make wise decisions, right? The first question is, do you really want the counsel of people who can help you make those decisions?

Let me tell you what's going on here right now. There are men in this room right now, right here this moment, who are trying to decide whether or not you're going to divorce your wife. How do I know this? Because we've been doing this Bible Study for 16 years, and every year we have several men who divorce their wives. So I know you are thinking about it. Do you want counsel for that? There are some men here this morning and the reason you are wondering whether or not you should divorce your wife is because you are involved in a sexual affair with another woman. Right now, some men in here are, I know, involved in an affair, and you're trying to decide whether or not to break it off. The question is do you really want counsel about what is the right thing to do? Those are moral decisions.

In the area of priority, some of you in this room right now today are trying to decide whether or not to make an investment in the stock market, or to take a particular job. The question is, do you really want the wise counsel of other men?

Let's look at the Scriptures and see what the Bible suggests we should do - where our hearts should be. Proverbs: Chapter 15, Verse 22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." That's it. Plans, not always, but plans tend to, that's what a proverb is. It's not always true, but it is generally true. Plans generally fail because of lack of counsel. They do. Generally speaking, with many counselors they succeed especially if their heart is right and we're not waiting for permission to do what we've already decided to do and we're actually looking for Godly wisdom and Godly advice.

Turn over to Chapter 20, Verse 18: Do I have you hooked yet? This stuff is so good. "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance." It says the same thing - different way.

The second question is what is the problem that seeking advice solves? What is the problem that seeking counsel solves? What do you think? Turn to Hebrews: Chapter 3, Verse 13: Just look at the terrible decisions you've been making, okay? When I look at the terrible decisions I've made in my life, there is a correlation between the degree of imbecility of those decisions and the degree to which I have not sought the advice of other people. This happens all the time.

I was at lunch with a man a couple of weeks ago who two and one-half years ago asked me for some advice. He said, "Pat, I am thinking about putting a mortgage on my house and taking my life savings and putting it into a franchise business, second tier franchise business. What do you think?" I said, "You don't care what I think. Why are you asking me? You really don't care what I have to say, why bother asking me? Why go through the ruse of asking?" He said, "Well, I want to." I said, "No you don't. You've already decided what you want to do, and you're going to do it so it doesn't make any difference what I say." He did it, and two weeks ago we had lunch. Because now he's lost his life's savings, and he didn't have the good sense to not allow the bank to demand that his wife sign a Promissory Note on the house, so he'd lose the house, too, so there you have it.

Here's the problem. The problem is self-deceit. The problem we're trying to overcome by seeking counsel is that our minds are very subject to self-deceit. Demosthenes, the greatest orator of 4th Century B.C., Athens, the greatest orator of the times, said it well. He said this, "Nothing is easier than self-deceit for what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true." Some of you guys know what I'm talking about, and if you don't know what I'm talking about that's why I'm giving this message here this morning. There isn't a man in this room who is not subject to self-deceit. And the greatest self-deceit of all is that I'm not self deceived.

Let's take a look at Hebrews: Chapter 3, Verse 13: It says, "But encourage one another..." Now a little bit of a stretch here, but, anyway, counseling would fall in that area. The last time we were talking about disciplines and fellowship, and I made the point, did I not, that in His wisdom, God does not give any of us everything that we need. Instead he chose to give us each other. So this is part of the "each other." Seeking counsel is the application of that fellowship. "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Big problem, men, big problem! A made-up mind is almost impossible to change. If you're married, you know this. We don't ask for counsel because we don't want it. We don't take counsel because we don't like what we hear. Edited to here.

Let me give you some suggestions now for how to seek counsel if I have re-awakened that belief in seeking counsel that once was there. Or, if you're already a believer in seeking counsel, the big idea this morning first, Godly counsel exposes self-deceit. That's why we seek counsel. It's not just that we want to make good decisions, but it's because our hearts often don't want counsel but because of the problem of self-deceit, we are always out there, always out there, wishing that what we already wanted was true. Demosthenes. We're always like that.

How many of you would like to be a theologian when you grow up? For those of you who would like to be a Theologian when you grow up, theologians talk about a concept called the Noetic influence of sin. That's a good one. The NOETIC influence of sin comes from the word, nous. Nous is mind - so the influence of sin on the mind. Theologians tell us that in the fall, the entire man fell. It was not just the body. It was not just the emotions, but the mind is falling also. We are not fully capable of doing perfect work with our minds. Our minds have been influenced by sin. You know this is true. The Scriptures say it. Now I know in part. Then I will know fully, even as I am fully known, but now we know in part. Our minds are limited and they're not only limited, they're fallible, they make mistakes, and that's why we need counsel. Godly Counsel exposes the self-deceit. That's the big idea.

Here are some suggestions, and what I want you to do as we start talking about these suggestions is to get in your mind the decision that you have before you. What is the decision that you're facing right now but you don't know whether you should go to the left, go to the right, should I stop, should I go back? What is the choice, the decision, right now that you're about to make? The one for which that little noetic stuff is going on, and you just can't figure it out.

I want to give you some practical suggestions that you can use as you go about seeking Godly counsel. First, understand that there are two kinds of decisions that you can make - moral and priority. Moral choices are choices between right and wrong. Priority choices are choices between right and right. Do I invest in this stock or that stock? That's not a moral choice; that's a priority choice.

A thought! When you are seeking counsel on a moral issue then you probably should go to someone with moral authority and moral knowledge. In other words, when you're making a moral decision, seek counsel from people who know the Scriptures. When you're seeking counsel on a priority decision, if you want to buy a good used car, don't go see a preacher. Unless you buy vocational, of course.

The second suggestion is to ask yourself honestly, "Am I decided or undecided?" Because let me tell you, I've already said it, a made-up mind is almost impossible to change. If you've already decided what you want to do, you're going to seek counsel in a very different way than if you're undecided. That's what happens in decisions. There will always be two things going on as every decision when seeking counsel is either decided or undecided. When I ask Ken, "Should I do this?" I already know whether it is the desire of my heart to do it or not. I know that. So then I'm looking for confirmation. It's okay if you've tentatively made a decision and if you're looking for confirmation, that's okay. But the other way you can be is undecided. If you're undecided you're not looking for confirmation because you don't know which way to go, left or right, so you're looking for direction and it's a very different thing. May I suggest that it's probably more dangerous to seek counsel if you've already decided what you want to do? That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it; in fact, you should open yourself up more to the counsel and be willing to listen.

The third idea is to make a distinction between human ingenuity and God's wisdom. Where is God's wisdom found? It's found in the Scriptures, and administered through the Holy Spirit. So you can find a lot of rather clever pieces of counsel, especially you go to David Poplar's ??? office. He can give you all kinds of godly clever ideas.

There are a number of men here, lawyers, counselors, pastors who can give you all kinds of wisdom, and you have to decide whether or not you're getting human ingenuity or godly wisdom. There is a huge distinction. I know myself as I'm pretty big on counsel. I have a lot of people who give me advice all the time and sometimes I even ask for it. This is something I actually know something about here. Okay. I have two rules for counsel: 1) It can be taken as a general rule when someone doesn't ask for your opinion, they really don't want it; so why waste your opinion. 2) There is no greater loss than the right advice given at the wrong moment. You know this if you have teenagers. Those are my two rules for advice.

Ingenuity vs. wisdom: I am an idea person. That's what I do. I have ideas. I have ideas all the time. I have ideas like popcorn machines make popcorn. The problem is that most of these ideas are very very terrible ideas. I mean they are just really horrible ideas, but, over the years, I have come to realize that most of my ideas are born out of human ingenuity, not Godly wisdom. So instead of rushing into the office on Tuesdays for our executive team meetings and say, "We need to do this or we need to do that, we need to do the other," I say, "Okay, here are the ideas I've been thinking about this week, which ones do you think might haunt?" We talk about it; we counsel. I've never said, "We're going to do this," because I know better.

Next is to know whether you need to hear, when seeking counsel, the voice of reason or the voice of passion. If you already know what it is you need to do, you know that "yes, I need to go to the left, I need to do the morally-correct thing, I've been going over this way and doing the wrong thing, I want to break with that and go in the right direction." You don't need the voice of reason. You already know the right thing to do. What you're looking for now is the voice of passion. You're looking for someone who is inspirational to you someone who is going to say, "You can do this. You can make it happen." You know encouraging people. Sometimes you need the voice of passion. Other times, though, you need the voice of reason. That's when you're muddled and confused and you don't know which way to go. It's probably a good idea to know where you are in this decision process and which kind of voice you most need. That would have a big impact on the kind of person you went to for counsel.

Next suggestion. Beware the counselor. Beware the counselor's counsel. This is the person you go to and you've had an excruciating problem that you've been wrestling with for many, many months. You ask him or her if you can get a little advice, and you get out three or four sentences, and you're beginning to unburden your heart a little bit. And he (she) says, "Let me tell you what you need to do." You don't need any advice like that. There are way too many people out there willing to give the counselor-oriented counsel. Let me tell you I would do if I were you. They're not in the same situation, and generally, they're not taking enough time to really get to know the guts of the problem. It can take a long time to understand the problem correctly. The counselee-counsel goes like this, "Oh, well, tell me again just so I understand what you are really saying here. What are you really saying here? Talk, talk, talk. Hmmm, what do you think God is saying to you on this?" They ask a lot of questions. They try to draw you out instead of telling you what you need to do. A huge difference!

A couple more. In seeking counsel it is a pretty good idea to remember that some people have agendas. Employees have agendas, salesmen have agendas, and it's probably a good thing to know if you're seeking from someone who is for you vs. for a particular outcome. A lot of times, think about this, I do it all the time, it's stupid, but you go to somebody who is going to be financially enriched if you say, "yes" and financially deriched if you say, "no." Then you wonder if his advice is something you should do. Duh!!! What's wrong with this picture? Get all the features and benefits from that person, but then go to someone who is for you and get their counsel.

One more. Don't explode, don't pout, and don't put down. This is pretty interesting. What is the best way to get bad advice? Repeatedly chafe at good advice. Ahab found this happening and was surrounded by all kinds of counselor who were giving horrible advice because every time his advisor said something he didn't

like, he'd whack their head off or put them in jail. It doesn't take long for people to figure it out. What side of the bed did you get up on this morning, King? You figure out which way the wind is blowing. So, that's a very important point.

Finally, peace is the umpire. Once you've sought counsel and it feels emotionally right for you, it thinks right, it reasons well, it reads right for you, you're in the word, peace is the umpire. Therefore, un-peace is another kind of umpire. I would recommend as Godly wisdom exposes itself, and the way you know you've got it all figured out is when you come to that place of peace.

What do you think this morning? What is your decision here this morning? And you want to make a wise and Godly decision, right? And you haven't been able to get there on your own, right? How will you get there unless you seek counsel? I am not asking you to make a commitment to seek counsel here. I'm just asking you, "Do you think it's possible to get where you need to be without it?"

I hope that this message will make you a believer that you need it, that counsel really does help solve this problem of self deceit, and you have a great forum right at your table with other men to seek Godly counsel. Whatever it is going on with you, you have great counselors right there at your table. But you have to take a step. You need to open up. For some of you it's a priority decision and some of you have moral things you need to talk about or you need to seek advice on. I encourage you to be brothers to each other at these tables. Be honest with each other; open up. Seek the counsel. Be good counselors.

Let's pray: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift you have given us of each other. Lord, I pray that we all knew we were subject to self defeat before we got here today, but I pray, Lord, that you would help refresh our memories, and that this gift you have given us of seeking counsel really is the solution to the problem of self defeat, and, Lord, none of here wants to fail today, and by seeking counsel we certainly do enhance our probabilities of hearing your voice through the men you have given us. I pray that we would be believers in counsel and believing that we will also be doers. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.