

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
Series: A Mans Guide to the Bible

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Good Morning, Men!

Open your Bibles to John 5.

It is going to be a great day.!

I have this house - some of you have heard the stories - that has a drive way that opens on to two streets. The neighborhood calls my house the cut through house. It wouldn't be a problem unless someone gets hurt and sues me. But we also have a small, lappy, frou-frou dog that yips whenever anyone comes by. So I had the idea that a tasteful Private Drive sign on each end would solve this problem. I went online and spent about a hundred bucks on these signs. Last weekend I heard the dog yap, yap, yap and bam against the window. So I get up to investigate and saw this girl in athletics clothes, she had walked through and was just getting ready to exit the property. I wanted to run out and say are you stupid? Because I just put in those signs, but I didn't do it. I was pouting to Patsy that I just spent this money and the signs didn't work. She said they worked a little bit, the traffic is down some. Then she said paybacks are tough. When our kids were growing up, every long driveway with a private drive sign was my invitation to explore. I probably went down about a hundred of these drives with private drive signs.

Today we are doing a shout out to the Luck Group; these are 8-14 men who have been meeting for over 5 years on Saturday mornings. They get up at 5:30 a.m.; they belong to Luck Faith Fellowship in Luck, WI. Bill McEachern is the Pastor; and they don't do breakfast they do luckny. They have a really awesome time so I want to give a shout out to the Luck Group. Welcome them with me. Good morning guys!

We are going to continue in our series this morning, the Man's Guide to the Bible; we are going to break it into three parts. I have asked you to give me feed back on the wording and ideas. So part one is knowing about the Bible – we finished that; part two is knowing the Bible – that is where we are; and part three living the Bible. Last week we went over structure and this week we will go over the plot.

Last week I gave you Max Anders taxonomy of the order of the Bible. I mentioned that I would eventually do one of my own, so I was fooling around this weekend and got it done, it's on the tables and you can take it if you want it. The Bible is so rich, and this is the way I have chosen to do it.

Today we are looking at the plot of the Bible. Every story has a plot.

Ernest Hemingway, one of the great story writers of all time, said that in his opinion his crowning achievement, his very best story, was this: he made a bet with some other writers that he could write the best story in very few words. It is recorded he won a hundred bucks for writing this story on a napkin in their presence. And this is the story:
For sale, baby shoes never used.

Isn't that a great story? If you were to try to come up with a short story to capture what the Bible has to say you could say, this is my best take,
Loving father relentlessly pursues a relationship with his children.
That is where we are going to go.

The first thing I want us to talk about is a story that makes sense. The Bible is very eclectic, it is not systematic. It is a collection of stories all related to this single theme of a loving father who relentlessly pursues relationship with his children. All of the books of the Bible focus on this idea.

What I want to do is go up to 30,000 feet and show this to you in a handful of verses. The problem in studying it is that one thing keeps leading to another, so I have spent the whole time putting a spin on this; most of the time I spent trying to figure out what I wasn't going to say.

We are going to start at John 5:39

This is Jesus speaking and he says

39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,

Everything in the scriptures points to Jesus Christ. Jesus, in a story you usually have the introduction of the story and the characters, then you introduce a conflict and you have the rising action; some climax of the story and then the conclusion. The birth, death and resurrection; Christmas, crucifixion and Easter is the climax of the Bible.

We are starting at the climax. In the Bible that is called the fullness of time. The Greek word is pleroma. So theologians love to talk about the pleroma, it is a very rich concept. Jesus came in the fullness of time.

Then look at Luke 24:25

This is Jesus speaking after the resurrection to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they didn't recognize him:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

He took the Bible and went through it book by book and explained what the scriptures had to say about him.

The organizing idea or theme of the Bible is redemptive history; the history of God redeeming people or paying the ransom for people. Basically he is paying to get people out of prison.

People are in bondage to sin and that comes out in all ways. They can't get out of that bondage, they need someone to pay the ransom; they need someone to set them free.

Jesus goes all the way back through the Bible; I just picked the word covenant – the idea that God made a covenant to relentlessly pursue a relationship with his children is like the underlying organizing concept of the Bible. I found in the NIV 314 references to the word covenant. The word covenant was used 314 times in the Bible in the NIV.

Jesus explains this covenant that God made, that He would relentlessly pursue a relationship with his children and the way he will do that is through Christ.

Turn to the Genesis 12

You know that little story about Jesus explaining the scriptures to them, we don't have a record of what he said but it is probably one of the most interesting talks ever given that we don't have recorded. How fascinating would it be to have Jesus explication there of how all the scriptures point to him?

We have a number of covenants in the Bible. God made a covenant with Adam. Josea 6:7 calls that a covenant. He made a covenant with Noah, Abraham and confirmed that covenant with Abraham to his son Isaac and Jacob. Then he made a covenant with Moses and confirmed that to Joshua. God made a covenant with David renewed a number of times. And then Jeremiah in 31:31-33 talks of a new covenant. This covenant language is all through the Bible. We see how the covenant that we are apart of begins in Genesis 12:1

1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

This is the same spiritual calling that God puts on all of our lives; to leave the old life and go to the new country.

2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

Turn over to 15:6

Abram is about 99 and still has not children and the Lord says as many as the stars your offspring will be.

6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram put his faith in God. Abram was declared righteous before God by faith. Salvation has always been by faith in God; and that faith is how we become righteous. Not by doing works or good deeds.

The creation covenant was a covenant of works and every covenant since then has been God graciously moving us towards this idea of redemption.

Look at 17:7

7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

8b I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

This is the covenant given to Abraham. Some people think there are a series of covenants, those would be dispensationalist and others think there is one covenant that God keeps improving and those would be covenant theologians. I am not sure it makes any difference the point is the Bible is eclectic and every time you try to fit the Bible into your theology your theology starts breaking down. You have to fit your theology into the Bible. What happens after theologians have been at it 30 years or so is they become flexible. You cannot contain the uncontainable.

Let's make it practical, the reason this covenant is so important to you is that this covenant that God made with Abram 3,000 years ago is an everlasting covenant and a promise that He will come for you.

The idea is that there is a loving father who made an everlasting oath and staked it on his own life that He will relentlessly pursue you. And this covenant cannot be broken. He is coming for you. He wants a relationship with you; you are His adopted son. You are as much an heir to all these promises in the Bible as Abram himself. That is what the Bible teaches.

Now in Galatians 3:16

16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Paul is our best theologian. He is our most important theologian.

He is the theologian of the Christian faith. When he gives his theology he is giving scripture. It is not just some smart guy; it is actually scripture that Paul is giving us. When Paul explains to us what was going on back then he says to us that the seed of Abraham is actually Jesus Christ.

Track with me now because I want you to drop down to verse 29 and it says

29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Do you see this? You are a son of Abraham! God made this covenant 3,000 years ago that he would relentlessly pursue his children fulfilled in Jesus Christ; and it is about you! It is all about this absolutely extravagantly gracious God who absolutely will not be denied. He is going to have a relationship with you! This is love, not that we love God but that He loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love him because he first loved us 1 John 4:10 and 19.

Now turn to Hebrew 9:15

Here it talks about the blood of Christ and this unblemished Lamb of God is made a sacrifice because of these people captured by their sins. This is the climax the ultimate way that God relentlessly pursues us and that is he takes His perfect son that he loves dearly, the only begotten son of God that is perfect and sinless, the exact representation of God's being. All things hold together by His power, he is the sustainer and he allowed sinful men to slay this perfect son as part of his relentless pursuit.

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Every sin you have committed stab it in the heart of your best friend.

Here is this week's perspective: the Bible is the story of a loving generous father who refuses to give up on his sons and makes an everlasting covenant to be their God. But they, unable to obey, remain prisoners of sin, until he inaugurates a new covenant which is the gospel of the kingdom in his son Jesus, who redeems us to walk in right relationship with him and right relationship with each other. There is no possibility of you being in right relationship with any human being on a consistent ongoing basis apart from the love and grace of this God who redeems us from ourselves and sets us free from our bondage.

If I was going to write a newspaper article to explain the Bible that would be the headline: Loving Father Relentlessly Pursues His Children. That is the headline for this story of the Bible. You just need to know how much he wants you! You need to understand that this is not that it would be nice if you could come, this is like everything with in me longs to have a relationship with you and I will not be denied. I will make it happen no matter how rebellious you are, no matter how much you draw away I am coming for you because I love you.

That is the second thing I want us to talk about. How does our father relentlessly pursue us?

The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9

9 The LORD is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So how does he pursue us relentlessly? He pursues us relentlessly slowly, the Bible says. Abraham starts at 75, 25 years later the promise is starting to be fulfilled. Abraham never actually takes possession of the promise land.

I got an email from a man who became a Christian 19 years ago, had started teaching Man in the Mirror groups. One story he told was about a man (let's call him Joe). He met Joe on a bow hunting trip. Immediately I didn't like him, he was loud, brash, knew it all and was a very angry person. So I made up my mind that I wouldn't go overboard trying to reach out to him. But as God would so orchestrate things we ended up meeting for breakfast and started talking about the Rat Race and why we exist and the purpose of life. We met again and again and one day Joe finally began to open up and said when he had been a young boy his father was an alcoholic and a very violent man. So his father would get wasted and beat Joe then lock him in the hall closet then leave to continue a drunken binge for two or three more days. When he would come home he would unlock the closet and Joe would have defecated in the closet which would throw the father into an even deeper rage and he would beat him some more, keep him locked in the closet and leave again.

When Joe became a man he had many physical scars but they were nothing to the emotional scars. As a coping mechanism Joe decided that he would cope in two ways alcohol and marital arts. Joe has a 7th degree black belt in three different forms of martial arts. At 6'2" 235lbs, and being an angry guy, he is a pretty scary individual. So for entertainment what Joe would do is go to the local bar and pick the meanest looking son of a gun in the place and would go pick a fight and beat the crap out of him.

That gave Joe a little relief. You get the picture?

They start talking and he tells this story. The man who wrote me the email invites him to come to a Man in the Mirror group. At first the attendance is a little sporadic, but as more and more he sees the other men's lives he is drawn and his life, over the period of a year, comes transformed by Jesus Christ.

So one day, the man who wrote the email, got a call from Joe and said I have written a poem about you. The guy was thinking that was a little weird, but said fax it over to me and I will take a look at it when I get a chance. Joe said no I want to read it to you in person. Joe came to his office and read the poem and this is the poem. It's called A Wise Man (the man who wrote the emails last name is Wise)

A wise man once told me from the cradle to the grave.

Don't let you take charge, don't be a slave.

The only one I could talk to in time of my need.

A man of wisdom thick as a tree.

Me being raw from the thoughts of my past.

I called up him to see if he could pass my test.

I cam on him raw to see what he had.

To my surprise he was above my class.

He spoke with authority, passion and love

And talked to me about a man above.

Anyone else I would call a bitch

But not this one, I listened and wished.

Could his God love me?

Did I have a chance?

Tears fell from my eyes once again.

He spoke with strength

His name is wise thank God he is my friend.

3,000 years ago God decided he was going to relentlessly pursue Joe. With the foreknowledge that Joe would have an evil wicked human father. But that he was bound and determined to have a relationship with Joe. So how does the Father relentlessly pursue us? Slowly but also relentlessly pursues us through each other. Every man in this room has a story to tell where you have helped a guy like Joe. That is your lifestyle, helping men like Joe; and why? Most of us have been Joe in one way or another; maybe not as vicious and now we are like the wise man.

How does God relentlessly pursue this relationship with his children? He does it through us. He is counting on you and me.

That is the headline today: Loving Father relentlessly pursues relationship with his children.

Closing point: it is important to know who and where you are in this story.

My first granddaughter, her first name is Story. When I asked my daughter why she picked that name she said we just wanted to make sure that our daughter had a constant reminder that she was part of God's story in the world. So she would know who and where she was in that story.

This is a great story that has been going on for thousands and thousands of years and the headline is: There is a loving Father who, even now, is relentlessly pursuing a relationship with you; that you can be in right relationship with him and right relationship with each other.

Every person you meet today is a candidate for this relentless pursuit. You might be Joe or you might be Mr. Wise. Where ever you are in the story today be sure to make your move because you are part of the story.

Let's Pray:

Our dearest Father what a great plot to your story. Father I pray for every man who is hearing this message, that you would absolutely convince us that you are not maybe after us but that you are absolutely, everlastingly, unbreakably, relentlessly after us and every other person you are calling as well. Whether we are Joe or Mr. Wise show us our place in this story today and give us that strong confidence that we live in a covenant relationship with you. Amen.