

The Journey to Biblical Manhood

Challenge 5: Discipline

Session 1: Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Please turn in your bibles to James, chapter four, verse eight, and as we get going, let's go ahead and do a shout out. We have a new group that's started meeting recently. 10 men, they meet in a home, they meet on Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. They're calling themselves Man in the Mirror, and I thought this was pretty cool. They are a group that wants to look in the mirror to see God don't make junk. I thought that was pretty good. They're led by John Steele in Ridge Manor, Florida, which is about an hour and 15 minute drive from here, so I wonder if you would join me in giving a warm and rousing man in the mirror welcome to Man in the Mirror. One, two, three, hurrah. Welcome, guys. We're glad to have you with us.

Okay, so we're in the series, The Journey to Biblical Manhood. We're beginning challenge five today on the spiritual disciplines, our faith in life objectives, and you have cards on the table for this challenge. Number one, I will understand how spiritual disciplines are a means of grace ordained by God to help me grow. I will be committed to engaging in the disciplines as part of my daily life, and I will read the word, pray, worship, and do other disciplines on a regular basis. So that would be what would constitute success for you at the end of this. All right. And today, and for this whole challenge, we are basically using this book, my book, A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines as the archetype for the series. So we'll be traveling along that road, and today, we'll be introducing the spiritual disciplines.

So when I prepare to talk, I've told you this before, I'm asking the question all the time, "What is the urgent problem that is screaming for an immediate solution that's addressed by our text?" Let's take a look at our text, James, chapter four, verse eight, which says, depending on your version, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." Or, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." So what is the urgent problem that is screaming for an immediate solution that's addressed by this verse? Well, we could probably talk about a number of different problems, but the one I want to zero in on is that there are so many men, so many men that you meet, that I meet, that we know, that do love God, who have Jesus in their life, who put their faith and their trust in Jesus, but they feel distant. Bette Midler, you know, God at a distance, or whatever it is that she sang about.

They don't sense this nearness of God, and as a result of that, they are not leading powerful lives that have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus. They know God, but they're not leading powerful lives, and I'm going to estimate to you that as many as 90% of all men who have professed faith in Jesus have a tepid spiritual experience, a lukewarm kind of experience. So the great need of our time, the great need of our time is to overcome this problem in men's lives that Christianity is prevalent but not powerful. Christianity is prevalent but not powerful. And so the statistics are amazing. I could roll

through all kinds of stats with you. We've done that here many times, but the promise here is that you can lead a powerful life. You don't have to lead a tepid life. You don't have to mark time just waiting around until you get to Heaven. Your life can be making a difference. You can change the world around you.

You can lead a transformed life, and I'm going to give you the tools, or begin giving you the tools to do that this morning, and there are many tools to do this. Abraham Maslow said back in the '60's, psychologist or psychiatrist, I can't remember, anyway, he said, "It is tempting if the only tool you have is a hammer to view every problem as a nail." So if you only have quiet time as your only tool, then you tend to view that that's a solution for everything, but there are many different disciplines, and you're going to be surprised over this week and the next following two weeks at how many different tools God has given us to lead this powerful life that's been transformed by Jesus Christ. All right?

So the Bible says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything, give thanks, for this is God's will for your life." Now, how do we do that? How do we pull that off? How do we do this drawing near to God so that he will draw near to us? How do we do that? All right. So let's begin by talking about what the disciplines are and what they are not, and so what are the disciplines? Well, think of the spiritual disciplines as habits, regular habits. They could be routine habits, or they might not be routine, but they're regular habits.

It's something that would be done somewhat frequently, so for example, if we were talking about reading the Bible, it might be that you have a daily or almost daily routine for that. But if it's experience God and creation, I was on hike two sections of the Appalachian Trail last week when I wasn't here, and so that might be a way that you experience God, and you might have the spiritual discipline of encountering God through creation. You might experience the majesty of God in creation. So you might not do that routinely, but you might want to do that regularly so you get some of the idea there. A spiritual discipline is a way you can break a cycle or get out of a rut. It's something that can lead us into worship with God and a deeper personal relationship with God. Basically, the spiritual disciplines help us access everything that God has to offer to us. They help us to draw near to him so that he can draw near to us, okay?

Now, what are they not? They're not why God loves you. In other words, and there is some research, I'm not sure how accurate it is, but there is certainly a lot of anecdotal and observation research that men try to fake it, try to pretend that they have that which they think other people think they're supposed to have, but there is research that a lot of men don't really believe that God loves them, not really. They don't sense the presence of God. They don't sense God's love. And so they will work hard and do the disciplines because they think that that's the thing they need to do in order to get God to love them. No. The idea is that nothing you do will ever make you good enough for God to love you. Absolutely impossible. God loves you because he made you. He knit you together in your mother's womb.

So God already loves you, and so what the spiritual disciplines are not, they're not a way in order to get God to love us, to make Him happy, or maybe to avoid His wrath. That is not what the disciplines do for us. He loves you exactly the way you are, and if you never do a spiritual discipline, He will never love you less. You may be miserable, but He will never love you less. Spiritual disciplines, what they are not, they do not improve your record with God. Your record with God, if you are a follower of Jesus, is based on the record of Jesus Christ. It's not our goodness. It's his goodness. He's the one that took our sin and nailed it on the cross, and so it is his record, not our record that we are depending on, so we don't have

to improve our record with God. Our spiritual disciplines do not earn us merit with God. They do not earn us favor with God.

All of the merit and favor that is available to us we have because He loves us, and because Jesus Christ died for our sins. That's the gospel. That's the gospel. It's faith in Jesus and not performance. You don't have to perform in order to make God happy. You don't have to perform in order to make God love you. That said, if we were to create a subtitle for the Bible, in other words, the Bible says, "The Holy Bible," and then a lot of books have a subtitle. The Bible doesn't have a subtitle, right? But I've thought about this. I've actually written about it, too, for over decades, and I think I have a good candidate, there would be others I'm sure, but I think the best subtitle that I could possibly come up with for the Bible, and it would make a great headline, too, by the way, in The New York Times. "Loving Father Relentlessly Pursues a Relationship with his Children."

That's what the Bible's about. Loving father relentlessly pursues a relationship with his children. And so there's our part in that, and then there's His part in that. So His part in that, because of His great love with which he loves us, God demonstrates His love by sending His one and only son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. This is love not that we love God, but that He loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. But God, because of His great love, He who is rich in mercy, has made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins. It is by grace that we are saved. That's His part.

The main thing that God is doing in the world, I've taught this for years, many of you know this, the main thing that God is always doing in the world is He is sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even the seemingly random circumstances of our lives to bring us in the right relationship with him and right relationship with each other. That's what God's about. That's what He's doing. That's a fancy way of saying, "Loving father relentlessly pursues a relationship with his children." He's sovereignly orchestrating everything to bring us in a right relationship with him and a right relationship with each other.

Well, what's our part in this? It's the first commandment. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But that is best understood as a response. We love Him because He first loved us, and so to enter into this love, so what the disciplines are all about, they're not trying to figure out, how do we get into this relationship with God? They're best thought of as a response, something we do in response to God's great love for us, something we want to do because we're so overwhelmed, and maybe the best way to think of it is to think of the relationship of a father and his son, and this father, verse John 3:1, "How great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called his children, and that is what we are," and because of that, because of being lavished with this love, he lathers it on. It's like, "Oh my gosh. Sometimes stop licking me. I get it. All right. I know you love me. Stop it. Stop it. Leave me alone."

But because of the way he lavishes this love on us, we want to draw even closer to him, and he gives these spiritual disciplines to us as a way we can draw close to him. Now you're thinking, "I don't really feel like he's been lavishing the love on me." All right. All you need to do is reorient your mindset and look at your life, and look how much he has blessed. So it's the 90/10 principle. I've told this story before, but my brother used to call me on the phone and tell me all the things that were going wrong in his life, and he'd hang up the phone, and I would be depressed for two days. Then I'd go out to mom and dad's house for a monthly dinner or something like that, and there he'd be, "Hey," and he's just as excited and happy as can be.

Well, after about three or four years what I figured out was 90% of his life was great. 10% of his life really was crappy, but he was calling me and giving me the 10% of the stuff that was crap, and so 100% of my relationship with him was about the 10% of his life that wasn't any good, and if you're not careful, you can take the 10% of your life that's not going the way it should, or the season of life that's not going the way it should, and when it says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything, give thanks," that means even in the times of suffering. Even in the times of suffering. Remember I told you the verse that says, "This is the day the Lord is made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Do you remember what I taught you a few weeks ago about the word "rejoice"? It can be either an action or a feeling in the Hebrew. It can be either an action or a feeling.

So sometimes you're feeling it. "I'm feeling rejoicing." But other times you're not feeling it, but you can do it as an action because you know that 90% of your life has been great, and even the suffering God is using because He is the one who's sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even those sufferings, to bring us in the right relationship with him and right relationship with each other, and so we know because we're Christians, we know that suffering forces us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need, and we've all been there, and we've all been there.

So if you're part of the family, then what do you do? Now what? Well, you can be doubtful. You can be resistant. You can be resentful. You can take it for granted. You can try to use God, or you can say, "Oh my goodness. I have a reciprocal relationship with the God, the father, who has been relentless pursuing a relationship with all of his children, and I can tap into that."

So that's what the disciplines are and what they're not, so here's the Big Idea today. **Disciplines are how I release the power of God into my everyday life.** The spiritual disciplines are how I release the power of God into my everyday life. And I'm focusing here on leading a powerful life because this is the problem that we need to figure out how to help men solve, is that they know God, but they're not leading powerful lives. They're not leading transformed lives. Disciplines are how we release that power of God into ... I could have written this different ways, into the minutia of everyday life, you see. This is how it happens.

All right, so next up, I want us to look at four ways, this is introducing the spiritual disciplines, four ways that God communicates with us, and so he communicates with us four ways. First of all, through his works. Second, through his word. Third, through the whisper of the Holy Spirit. I had to get a "W" word in there. And then fourth, through the witness of believers. And so let's just take just a moment because this is introducing, if you will, the disciplines, and just a moment on each of these, through his works. Let's turn to Psalm, chapter 19, Psalm, chapter 19, and let's take a look.

By the way, all of the disciplines that we will be looking at, all of the disciplines period, are biblical. You will find every spiritual discipline down through the ages, and the disciplines have been practiced for millennia now. You can look at Saint Thomas Aquinas. You can look at, who wrote *The Imitation of Christ*? Thomas à Kempis. You can go back into medieval days. You can go all the way back to the early church fathers, and these disciplines basically have flowed out of the scriptures. So first through his works. General revelation. General revelation is God revealing himself in the creation. Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work 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." And so on and so forth.

And then, God communicates through his word, which in theology, the term is "special revelation", so God reveals. Revelation is revealing. God reveals himself in his works, but he also reveals himself through this word. We're still in Psalm 19, but if you look down at verse seven, so verses one through six, you could make a note in Psalm 19 versus one through six, "general revelation", verses 7 through 14, "special revelation". Verse seven, "The law of the lord is perfect, reviving the soul." There it is. Draw near to me. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. "the law of the lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the lord are right, giving joy, rejoicing to the heart. The commands of the lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes." And so on and so forth.

So that's special revelation. And then third, through the whisper of the Holy Spirit. So I want you to take your hands and space them about 12 inches apart like this, all right. Now just go like that. So you've drawn that side of a 12 inch cube. Now take your hands like this about 12 inches, and then back and forth so now you've got the other two sides, so now you've got four sides, and now go like this, 12 inches. Now what you've just done is you've just outlined a 12 inch cube in front of you. What's in that cube? Air is in that cube. What else is in that cube? All of the day's news. All of the cellular signals that are available. Radio. Television. Microwaves. You name it. There is so much information. The knowledge of the whole world can be accessed in this 12 inch cube. You know that. You know that.

That is a type of spirit world, right? It's there. You can access all of it right there. So why should we be surprised that there would be an invisible spirit of God that would also be right there? Be right there available to us, speaking to us. I get all kinds of crazy ideas that are good ideas, or helpful ideas, you know, "Send so and so an encouraging note," or, "Oh, this idea, this problem I've been thinking about at the ministry for six months, that would be a great way to solve that problem." But I get so many of those ideas when I'm doing my devotions. My mind wanders all over Sam Hill when I'm doing my devotions. I can't concentrate on any one thing. It just goes everywhere, and I let it. I let it chase every rabbit trail, every rabbit down every trail because at the end of those trails, the spirit is whispering things to me.

So we went camping up in the Ocala Forest, and there's a couple that is the campground host there, and as I was pulling out, Patsy and I were pulling out at the last time we camped there, she was not telling me, but I was asking her how she was doing, and she had just found out that she had her cancer come back. And so I told her that I was going to be praying for her, and I pray with fasting one day a week. I've been doing that for five years, and so I pray and fast for Jill one day a week. And so for the last two weeks or so, on about four or five occasions when I've been doing my devotions, I've been prompted to call Jill. I have no idea why I'm supposed to call Jill, but I told my wife yesterday at dinner that before the next few days go by, I'm going to give Jill a call.

I don't know, but I believe that in this cube where the spirit of God is speaking to me, that I should respond to that because it's one of the ways that he communicates with us. And then the fourth is the witness of believers, and then this is mainly to help others, but it helps us, too, when we share with others. It could be through stewardship. It could be through service. It could be through evangelism. Those are the three of those that I cover in that book, A Man's Guide to Spiritual Disciplines. These are the four ways that God communicates with men and women, and then the disciplines fall under one of these categories, but again, the Big Idea, the disciplines, it's how I release the power of God into the details of my everyday life.

And then we're going to just spend a couple minutes just on the first of the disciplines that we'll be looking at, and that's a man and creation. So let me ask you a question. Do you think creation is good,

evil, or neutral? So yes, good because Colossians one, verse six says that, "Everything that God made is good." So why is there evil then, if it's so good? I mean, evil abounds.

Speaker 2: The devil controls the world.

Patrick Morley Well, the devil is active in the world, and we do live ... Okay. Isaiah, chapter six, verse three, says, "The whole Earth is full of God's glory." This is one of the two verses that almost made me stop believing in Jesus, believing in God. So one day I'm reading along to that verse when I was really under oppression, and it says, Isaiah 6:3, "The whole Earth is full of God's glory." And I thought to myself, "I ain't buying it. I ain't buying it." And this troubled me for many, many months. I take a problem and I brood on it. I brood on it. And so I brooded on this problem for months and months and months, and one day it hit me. Bam. C6H12O2.

What is that? I don't even remember. I don't even remember because I'm just remembering the illustration extemporaneously as I'm speaking, but I do remember this. I thought about this particular chemical formula, and I realized that C6H12O6 or whatever it is. I might even have the sixes and the "oh"s wrong, but there are chemicals like that, and the C6 is full of carbon. It's also full of hydrogen and oxygen, and so when we say the whole Earth is full of God's glory, it is. It's full of God's glory, but that doesn't mean it's the only thing it's full of. It's also full of evil. Evil, we know what that is, but it's also full of futility. In other words, that which just seems pointless. It doesn't seem to make a difference.

So the Earth is full of all of these things. And so does the creation then give a hint of God? Does it tarnish God? Does it conceal God? Does it reveal God? The creation reveals God, and so ... I'm so out of time here. Let me say that the creation reveals God through nature, which we read about in Psalm 19, but if you just flip quickly to Psalm eight, you can also see at verse three, the psalmist writes, "When I consider the heavens, the moon, and the stars which you have set in place, what is man, that you are mindful of him, that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and you crowned him with glory and honor." You also, people, are part of the creation, and we can make engaging with other people into a spiritual discipline also.

So it's not just walking along the Appalachian Trail. It's also sitting down and having breakfast with you or a cup of coffee, is a spiritual discipline that helps me draw near to God, and God draw near to me. And then also, if you read on, it's not just nature, it's not just people, but it's also manmade things can lead you ... Are a part of creation and can lead you to worship God more. Verse six, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet, all the flocks and herds and the beasts of the field." What's the fastest animal in the world?

Cheetah. How fast does it go? About 60 miles an hour, 61. "The birds of the air," what's the fastest bird in the world? Peregrine falcon deep dives 200 miles an hour. "And the fish of the sea," what's the fastest fish in the world?

Speaker 4: The one that got away.

Patrick Morley It's the sailfish. 68 miles an hour goes a sailfish. "All that swim the paths of the sea," and he has given us dominion over them. How fast can a man go?

Speaker 5: 22. 24.

Patrick Morley: Well, it depends. If you're on land, I found the record, 760 miles per hour. In the air, man, I found this, mach 6.72 at 4,520 miles an hour. In the space, I found this, 24,791 miles per hour. Manmade things. So a man is infinitely more interesting than even the most interesting animal or fish or bird in all the rest of creation, and the things that we can accomplish. Skyscrapers, internet, brain surgery, cures to cancer. It's just so amazing what people can do, and these things, if we ponder them, if we ponder creation as a discipline, it can draw us near to God so that He will draw near to us and lead us into worship, and help us to fuel the power of the transformed life surge, surge. The Big Idea. **Disciplines are how I release the power of God into my everyday life.**

Let's pray. Heavenly father, thank you so much for this day, for this topic, for these men, for your goodness. Lord, we draw near to you. It is our desire to draw near to you, and we know that the more we draw near to you, the more we will experience the reality that you are our loving father who is relentlessly pursuing a relationship with us, and that we will experience more of your love as we said. We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen. Have a great weekend.