

The Christian Man

Session 1: Identity

Setting Who I Am and What My Life Is About

Edited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. And welcome to Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. So we're starting a new series today called The Christian Man. More about that in a moment. Let's go ahead and begin the day with a shout out. And the shout out comes from Wayne Burroughs, part of the Man in the Mirror family, area director from New York, Attica. And he leads a group called First Baptist Iron Men. Six guys, they meet on Saturdays at 8:00 in the morning. And Wayne writes, "Our prayer is for men to break free of the mediocrity of life by the transformation of the gospel of Christ, and join other men to find foxhole friendships, know they are created for a purpose, and to leave a legacy." That is awesome, and so I wonder if you will join me in giving a warm and a rousing welcome to First Baptist Iron Men. One, two, three. Ooh, rah.

Good to have you men with us. And so Wayne, being part of the family, I'd like to flash up here this slide to you, especially those of you online, but those of you here as well. For those of you who might be interested in a career in men's discipleship, oh my gosh, we have a career path, not just a job, but a career path in men's discipleship as part of the MIM field team. And you can go to that site and look it up, but I'll tell you a little bit more from one of our area directors in just a moment.

Okay. The series is **The Christian Man**. These are turbulent times for men. There is a lot of confusion out in the culture, even about what it means to be a man. And part of the consequences of this is that there does seem to be a growing malaise and sense of discontent about men and their manhood. One of our table leaders, Wayne Morgret, in Cincinnati sent a text, sent an email rather, about a man that he had met, Ted. And he was sort of on the fringe of what was going on in the church. So they had a meeting one night, and he noticed that Ted was sort of just hanging around the fringes of what was going on. So Wayne approached him, shook his hand, introduced himself.

What caught his attention, though, was Ted's body language, fidgety, eyes casting about the room. He said, "You appear to be uncomfortable, Ted. May I ask what you're looking for? Maybe I can help." This is what Ted said, "No. You can't help me. No one can. I'm trying to see if anyone else here is as screwed up as I am." This pervasive lack of contentment and knowing what it means to be a Christian man. So he touched Ted's shoulder, probably freaked Ted out a little bit. He didn't say that in the email, but it would've freaked me out a little bit if I was Ted. He said, "I don't know your story, but if you will be patient tonight, I think you're going to hear some stories that will amaze you and encourage you." And then he said, "I suspect you didn't believe me," but he did calm down a little bit and he sat down.

And then the evening started with a video. It was a video about the need for men to unpack their baggage. Next, a man got up and told his story about how God had reached into his broken life and given him a new beginning. And then several other men came during an open mic time and talked about

similar stories. And then Wayne looked over, and there he saw Ted slipping out of his seat up to the open mic. He took a deep breath and held it, but no words came out. His shoulders started churning in a silent sob. Several men slipped out of their seats to surround Ted. One was praying. More men huddled. They put their hands on his shoulders. Soon, all the men in the room were present in that huddle. Ted never spoke any words into the microphone that night. But he saw Ted several weeks later. The fidgeting was gone. His eyes had stopped darting around the room. Wayne went over to him and said, "So what's different?"

And this is what Ted said. "My life is different. Jesus has forgiven me. I have found a band of brothers here at this church who didn't judge me and have accepted me. I can finally breathe." Mm, mm, mm. To better understand what men really want and need, I have set out on a new mission. I invited 24 men from the ages of 24 to 47, some of whom are in this room, to gather and storyboard the question: What are the issues and topics that would make you feel compelled to pick up and actually read a book for men? And I won't go through all of the process that we undertook, but we ended up with a very clearly delineated list of 10 topics that these men, representing the racial and ethnic and demographic diversity of our nation in a pretty good sense, set out as the issues that they feel are most important to them.

And so I'm going to convert that into a book. The book is going to be called *The Christian Man*. Would you believe nobody's ever written a book with the title *The Christian Man* before? I mean, how crazy absurd is that? Now you realize this is a little bit of an old fashioned title, so we're going to warm it up with a subtitle, *Who I Am, What I Want, How I Get It*. All right. *The Christian Man: Who I Am, What I Want, How I Get It*. But nobody's ever used this title before. And so the target audience for this book ... I've written books and gotten reviewed and criticized for not writing the book. The person who read it wanted me to write a different book and so they told me how much they didn't like my book because it wasn't the book that they wished I would've written.

So I'm telling everybody right now, before you read this book, this is not a book for people who are trying to decide whether or not they want to become Christians. This is a book for men who are growing, who want to grow, or at least want to want to grow. That's the target audience, men who are growing, want to grow, or want to want to grow. Now here's what I know for sure. No man fails on purpose. Every man wants to be the hero of their own story. When each of us get out of bed in the morning, when our feet hit the floor, we're looking for a win. And so what this series is going to do is, it's going to show you God's way of how you can be the hero of your story, how you can get that win that you're looking for. So let's get started.

First up today is the topic of identity. Wow, it was so profoundly interesting to see how interested the men that we storyboarded this topic with, how strongly they felt about identity, the idea of setting who I am and what my life is about. So it's a difficult question to answer. Who am I? Most of the things we'll be talking about in this series are very concrete categories that you will quickly have connection with, marriage, work, children. But identity, what is identity? What is identity?

A DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER

Why is it so difficult to answer this question? It's because there are many different ways of talking about it, of thinking about it. One way of talking about identity is to say it is that which distinguishes you from every other person on the planet, so your fingerprint, your DNA. I've got the new iPhone 10, baby. Facial recognition. It's like only one face. Can you believe this? Can you believe, your identity, how particular

you are, how individual you are that out of, what, seven or eight billion people, you're the only one who has that face? Praise God, you're the only one that has that face.

And then another way of thinking about identity is that which makes you known to every other person, so ID cards, driver's licenses. You fill out forms. They want your address. They want your phone number. They want your email, digital footprints. So if you want to check somebody out, you can check them out on social media. A lot of people, LinkedIn, different ways of creating social media profiles and so forth, your online footprint. That's another way of determining someone's identity. The resume. The resume, which is what? A listing of, essentially, their accomplishments, not their being, their accomplishments. But it's a clue into someone's identity. An identity is kind of like, today it's become kind of like your personal brand. You're supposed to think about who you are and how you brand yourself.

Maybe it's always been that way, but it is especially that way now. Other ways of thinking about it, your identity is your reputation, how other people think about. Another way of thinking about it is your legacy, how you will be remembered. Who I am is how I'll be remembered. Truth is, you're probably not going to be remembered, but don't worry about that. That's a different subject for a different day. But then there's this other idea of identity, which is the one we want to really tackle a little bit here today, and that is that your identity is sort of the fingerprint of your soul. It's the fingerprint of your soul. It's something that is inside of you. It's the essence of who you are, your being. It's particular. It's individualized. It's only yours. It's unique in all the world. God has created you in your mother's womb. He's knit you together in your mother's womb. He's known you from afar. He knows your thoughts from afar. He knows every word you're going to say before it forms on the tip of your tongue. And this is who we are.

And so these are different ways of talking about identity. Well, how do we get to know someone? How do we get to know someone? It's still a difficult thing to do. How do we get to know someone? Well, I'll tell you how we do it at Man in the Mirror, because we hire area directors and other people. And so we have a way of getting to know people. What we're trying to do is, we're trying to understand. Who is this person? Who are they? And what is their life about? And so we ask them a survey. We ask them a few questions to help them determine whether or not we're in the same world of men's discipleship or not. Then we ask them for a resume, a listing of the things that they've done. We want to know. What are the roles that they've had in life? We do an interview with them, so we get some face time with them on one of these online service. Zoom is what we use, but one of these online services.

So we have interviews where we ask them questions and give them a chance to reveal who they are. I don't know. Do we look at their online footprint? If we don't, we should start doing that, by the way. Make a note that we should find out what kind of crazy, stupid things that these people might've said in their background. We do a background check. We do a credit check. We get references, friends, but also their pastor, their wife. So we try to do what we can to create a profile of their identity. And what is it that we're looking for? What is it that we're looking for? We're looking for: What kind of person is this? We're looking for the patterns of who they are. I did this a long time ago, but I developed these six things that, I don't know how much they get used. But I use them all the time, and these are the things I'm looking for because these are the things that I think can help us understand who a person is.

Their charisma, are they a nice person? Their chemistry, how do they get along with other people? Their character, do they have integrity? Their competence, do they know what they're doing? Their contribution, do they get results? And then their calling. What is it that God has told them that their life is all about? So these are the ... You could see why the issue of who I am is very complex and

multifaceted. Now here's the problem. Even after we have all this information, if everything I said that Man in the Mirror has and everything else I said about everything else, about DNA. If you have all that information, you still don't know who that person is. You still don't know who that person is.

And why don't you know who that person is? For two reasons. Number one, everybody is trying to present the best version of themselves. I get that. We should be doing that. You'd be a fool to present to the public, anyway, your baggage. Now when you get into a group like Ted was getting into, then that's a great place, especially when you build some trust with a few other guys. You can do life together with a few other guys. Yeah. But the other reason is that there is a war going on inside each of us. And if you would look at Galatians chapter five, verse 17 with me. Galatians five, verse 17. I want us to take a look at this because here's the problem. The world, the flesh, and the devil are trying to hack your identity. The world, the flesh and the devil are trying to steal your identity. Identity theft is the business of the dark side.

So people are phishing you and hacking you and stealing your identity. How many of you had your identity stolen before? Raise your hands. A lot of you. I've had my identity stolen twice in the last month. My bank just told me that I was one of a million and a half people that got their identity hacked and stolen. And then Twitter just sent me an email and told me I needed to change my password. So by the way, if you're on Twitter, you probably ought to change your password since somebody got ahold of all this information. Anyway, the latest oxymoron, secure website. Yeah.

Galatians chapter five, verse 17 says this. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh." Got that? They are in conflict with each other. So when you see in the physical world real people like us, and then hackers like them. And we're in conflict with each other. It's a real thing. But there's a spiritual world, a world of the soul, and it's going on there too. Actually, the physical stuff is a manifestation of what's going on the soul. They're in conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want. You're not to do whatever you want. Live by the spirit.

And then look at Colossians chapter two, verses eight, Colossians chapter two, verse eight. See to it that no one takes you captive, no one hacks you, through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human traditions and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ. So we do have this problem. We do want to be the men God created us to be, but we're constantly trying to be hacked by the world, the flesh, and the devil. So how do we solve this problem? How do we solve this problem?

Now look at First Samuel 16, verse seven. First Samuel 16, verse seven. This is the story where the Lord has sent the prophet, Samuel, to anoint a new king to succeed Saul. So Samuel goes to the hometown of Jesse. And when he arrives he sees one of Jesse's sons and says, "Surely this is the one." So he's done. He's read his resume. He's gone through his interview process. He's got a beat on who he thinks this person is and he's ready to hire him. But the Lord says, "No." Verse seven. Do not consider his appearance or height. Do not consider these outward manifestations of identity. The Lord, this is it, the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

And so how do we answer this question? Here's the **Big Idea** for the day. Who we are ... I can't believe I wrote that wrong. Yeah, no. I wrote it right. It's a mouthful. **Who we are where only God can see us, is who we really are.** People look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the part. Our identity, the identity that we have that is known to God is completely different than the identity we project to the

outside world. And this text gives us the clue. Who we are where only God can see us in our hearts, that's who we really are. Now this might create a great deal of alarm for some of you, but it shouldn't. And I'll get to that in a moment.

FOUR WAYS MEN PURSUE WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEIR LIVES ARE ALL ABOUT

I say it shouldn't, unless you need a correction. And it's very possible that you need a correction. And so for that purpose, I want us to look at the four ways men pursue who they are and what their lives are all about. Four different ways that men pursue who they are and what their lives are about. And so I'm going to roll up this slide all at one time here so you can jot down the notes, or take a picture, or whatever you want to do. But there are basically four different ways that men go about figuring out who they are and what their lives is about. And they represent these four different world views. These are what I personally consider the irreducible minimums of the different world views. I think you can get it down. I think you can fit every world view into one of these four categories, the secular world view, moral, religious, and then Christianity. And I've written about this in: *Is Christianity for You?*

So the secular world view, sort of the core value ... By the way, most secular people are really decent people. They're really trying to do the right thing. They're trying to do it for selfish reasons, but they're not trying to hurt other people for the most part. The problem with the bad secular people is that they're like bad drivers. A few bad drivers makes you think that many more people are bad drivers than really are, or maybe they are. I don't know. Anyway, but for the secularist, it's the idea of maximum pleasure, minimum pain. This is right out of the epicurean philosophy or hedonism. But the secular person, it's maximum pleasure, minimum pain. And so they're trying to figure out who they are and what their life is about by pursuing the maximum pleasure and the minimum pain. And that usually focuses around the four Bs, beauty, brains, bucks and brawn.

Beauty is physical appearance, so it might be their own physical appearance. I know a guy at the gym. You can tell his body is his idol, that it's who he is. His identity is so tied up in his body that if he were to lose his body, he would lose who he is. Okay, you see that. Or it might be the physical appearance of a trophy wife, so beauty, brains, intellect, intellectual pursuits, the ability to do things that other guys might not be able to do. Thinking that you're superior, perhaps, to other people. Maybe you are superior to other people in this regard, but it's that feeling of superiority that makes it a secular point of view. Beauty, brains, bucks, money. Trying to acquire things so that ... I certainly have done this. I have had, earlier in my career, I can remember my identity was very much wrapped up in what I did and what I had.

Here's the problem. If who you are is what you do and what you have, then who are you when you don't do what you do and have what you have anymore? You see? That's how it works. Listen to the tape. Beauty, brains, bucks, brawn. Power, the exercise of power. A lot of people find their identity in being able to have control over other people and situations. So there are a lot more that could be said about this. But here's what Mark 8:36 says about this. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? So my question for you. To what extent has this been your identity? Secularism.

Second, the moral world view. This is a progression. It's not linear, but most people will go in generally a linear way. So you might have some backsliding from time to time. But after a while, most people realize that this is a very empty way of living, so they progress to a moral life, so they want to do good. It's known all over the world in medicine in bioethics, do no harm. Do no harm. So to try to do the ... And this is me. When I was a secularist, my life philosophy was, money will solve my problems and success

will make me happy. When I became tired of that, I became a moralist. I was reading *Hamlet* and this verse popped off the page. "This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man." And I said, "I love that idea. That's what I want to do. I'm going to adopt that as my life credo. I'm going to try to do the right thing by every person I meet every day, and that's how I will find the secrets of meaning and happiness and purpose in life. And that's how I'll discover who I am and my identity and what my life is all about."

And guess what, it worked for a while. But then the luster wore off, and so I said, "I need to try God." And so then I got involved, as many of us do, in the religious world view. And all religions except Christianity have one thing in common. They're all based on performing to please God. All religions other than Christianity are based on performing to please God or to make Him happy or to avoid His wrath, however you want to put it. And so I meet with guys all the time and I always ask men at some point in the conversation, usually early. Tell me about: Where are you on your spiritual journey in life? And it's amazing how often a man will sheepishly, rather sheepishly, sort of drop his eyes and say, "Well, I know I really don't go to church as much as I should."

And I'm thinking, "That's not what I asked. That has nothing to do with what I asked." But I can't say that. You know? And I'm a little dumbfounded every time I hear it, even after all these years, because it's the difference between "church-ianity" and Christianity. A lot of men are very confused. They think that "church-ianity" equates to and is the same thing as Christianity. They are two very ... Well, they're not two very different things. But they are two separate things. And so you will find, I certainly found it myself, that I grew up in a Christian church that didn't know Christ. Does that make any sense to you? And the reason was is that, we were religious. We were trying to do what we could to make God happy. And then eventually, if you're fortunate, and I hope you are, you come to understand the gospel of grace. And you embrace Jesus.

And the world view here is that when we love, out of the overflow of that love, we love God and then we love other people. And that's kind of the main value there. But you can see how these are very much identities or parts of identities of who we think we are. We're in this to get the maximum pleasure, the minimum pain. We're in this to do right. We want to do ... We're in this because we want to make God happy. We're in this because we love God and we love other people, so these are some different ways of thinking about it.

I came to Christianity because I could not manage my life. I came to Christianity because I was like Ted. You came, if you have come to Christianity, because you were like Ted. You could stand in front of the mic, and you might be able to say words. But it would've probably meant just as much as if you kept your mouth shut because what you were saying didn't make any sense anyway. That certainly was the way it was for me. I couldn't perform. I tried to make God happy. I could not do it. I could not manage my life. And so I embraced the gospel of Jesus, and that's when my identity was released, or that's when I was released to begin to understand who I really am, and how helpful it is to know that who we are where only God can see us is who we really are. And when I was confronted, when God allowed me to see myself as I really am, I was not the guy on the resume. I was not the online media presence. I was Ted. I was in despair, completely lacking in contentment, not knowing where to turn, and in need of a savior.

HOW CAN WE BECOME CONTENT WITH WHO WE ARE?

And so final. How can we become content with who we are? I've already used all my time for the things that I've told you, but let me summarize by saying, embrace grace. If you want to know how to be content with who you are, embrace grace. Embrace your identity. Embrace grace. Go ahead and make the progress through these different world views, and then embrace grace. Don't think, I'm a really good person who occasionally stubs his toe. Don't think that. Don't think that. See yourself the way the Lord sees you. But understand that He loves you so much, not in spite of who you are. He loves you because of who you are and because His son, Jesus, died for your sins.

And then secondly, becomes His disciple. If you want to content with who you are, become His disciple. That's what we'll be unwrapping in the rest of this series. Just how do you do that? How do you become his disciple? How do you become transformed? That's enough for today. The Big Idea is this. **Who we are where only God can see us is who we really are.** That's our identity. That's who we are. He is what our life is all about. You will never know who you are until you can answer the question, whose you are. And you will never know what is the purpose of your life until you can answer the question. Who is the purpose of your life? Let's pray.

Our Father in Heaven, thank you for your gospel, your grace, and the identity that we have, the roles that you give us, of becoming your sons, your friends, your servants, your disciples, your vessels, your temple, your body, the church. And I pray that you would help each of us to maybe take whatever next step there is toward just simply allowing you to, the power of your gospel to release your identity in us to become the men that you have indeed created us to be, and that we would be content in the gospel of Jesus. And we pray this, Jesus, in your name and for your glory. Amen.