

# LAUNCH: Strategies for Launching Your Career & Family

## When Your Dreams Fail You

Edited Transcript

Featured Speaker: Brett Clemmer, President and CEO of Man in the Mirror

Patrick Morley: Good morning, men. We're going to begin the day with a couple of shout outs. We're in this Launch series, but we're doing some shout outs still. The first group is "Disciples for Christ", a new group of guys. They meet on Sunday afternoons at 5:30 in Wilmington, North Carolina at the church, led by Jerry Rhodes. They write their purpose is to help men become the men God meant to them to be, leaders they were meant to be, and leaders in their home, church, business, job, and community. That's pretty amazing, exciting. Thank you, men, for being part of the Bible study now, a new group. Then, also, we have an area director shout out to Bob Hanson. Bob is in the Cedarville, Ohio area. These men who are area directors, basically what we're trying to do is we're trying to put a trained... We're offering men a career in men's discipleship, and we're trying to put a trained men's discipleship expert within a one-hour drive of every urban church and within a two-hour drive of every rural church.

We're in 36 states, and that's why it just seems these men are out there. It's an opportunity for us to encourage them. That initiative was born out of the work that we do here, wanting to take what we're doing here and spreading it. Anyway, with all that said, I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to "Disciples of Christ" and to Bob Hanson. Rousing. One, two, three, hoorah. Okay.

Now, I would like to introduce our speaker for today who is the President and CEO of Man in the Mirror. He has been with Man in the Mirror for 19 years and has been the CEO and president for the last three years. He's married to Kimberly and his daughter Cassidy. She's an IT professional, and Jackson is a seminary student. He's engaged to Martha. They'll be married this summer.

Brett Clemmer: They just got married. They got married. I hope they're married. They're living together.

Patrick Morley: Okay. I guess I was out of town. Threw me off a little bit there. Three words, though, that I would use to describe Brett. First would be wisdom. He's got an incredible breadth of wisdom about how to professionalize a ministry that was started by an entrepreneur basically. The second thing that I would like to mention about him is his work ethic. He's just got an incredible work ethic. You know, some people work hard. Some people work hard and get things done.

He's the latter. He's just an amazingly productive person. Then, the third word is authenticity. That could encompass a number of things, empathy, a willingness to hear you out. Anyway, I learned in business school that the number one reason that CEOs fail is poor people skills. Did you know that? It has nothing to do with the professional aspects of the business or whatever. The number one reason that CEOs fail is poor people skills. Well, Brett has people skills coming out of his ears. I wonder if you would join me in welcoming the President and CEO of Man in the Mirror, Brett Clemmer.

Brett Clemmer:

Well, we are continuing our series this week, this Launch series that we've been working on. So far, we've had four just great leaders come in and share a story from their life about how their life has worked, about how different strategies and that God has undertaken in their life to help them become successful. All of these guys have had successes. They've had failures, and they've overcome those failures. That's really what we're going to talk about today, is how do you overcome a failure. Our theme for today, our title for today is When Your Dreams Fail. How many of you have ever had a dream die? Yeah. Look around the room. Keep those hands up. Look around the room. This is a common experience for us as men. Isn't it? We have all had times in our lives where we've had a dream that has died.

I was in high school, and my dream girl, she didn't die, but I wanted to after she broke up with me. You know, maybe some of you have had the dream of a perfect marriage, and that marriage has failed. Your wife has walked away or maybe, looking back, you realize you made decisions that killed the dream of having a lifelong, wonderful marriage. Now, you're trying to rebuild that. Maybe you've had a child. Maybe your dream for your children has not worked out the way that you really wanted it to work out. Maybe a diagnosis came along, and your dream of a picture of what you thought your life was going to look like has been dashed. It's not going to look like that. Maybe your life's going to be shorter than you expected or maybe you have a spouse or a child or parent whose life is going to be shorter than you expected. You're dealing with that. You're trying to figure out, "How do I move forward in my life when this vision of what I had, that I thought was going to come true, is going to fail?"

You know, I had a vision for a career. I really thought I was going to be a doctor, and then my professor in organic chemistry in college informed me that I was, in fact, not going to be a doctor because I couldn't pass an organic chemistry course. There's all these times in our lives, and we have a vision, and those visions don't come true. Probably the biggest, for me, the biggest dream that I had that failed me was that I wanted to be a successful software entrepreneur. Some of you have heard me talk about this in the past, but it was 1999. If you looked around in 1999, there were successful software companies everywhere. Through a course of events, with about four or five friends, we took a piece of software that we had developed for Orlando's community, and we created a company. We developed our own software company.

In 1999, we did fantastic. We took off like a rocket. We launched that company right off the bat. We did \$1 million in sales in our first year with five employees. We had big clients. We had a municipality that was a big client. We had United Way that was a big client and then other clients around. We were really going like gangbusters. In late 1999, some of the people that got involved with us as investors in that first round, sort of angel kind of investors, started talking about the next level and really talking about venture capital. We had a couple venture capital firms come in and talk to us. I'll never forget. I had this one conversation with a venture capital. We were about a \$1 million company. He said, "Where do you see yourself in three years and five years?" I didn't know what to say, so I made it up. I said, "Well, you know, in three years, I think we could be at about five million. I think in five years, we could be at about 25 million."

He looked at me, and he went, "Yeah, that sounds about right." I went, "Holy cow. What? Are you kidding me?" That just expanded my dream. I'm like, "Wow. Imagine what this could be like." One of the things that Pat said about me was that I have work ethic. Well, you know, your strengths can be your weaknesses as well. Right? When this guy said five million, 25 million in five years, man, I buckled down. I mean, I had already been focused, but I focused even harder. I was going to make this happen. I was reading all these books about business success but also about personal success. I was reading about visualizing things. I went, and I bought, you ever heard of a dream board? People make these dream boards. It's this crazy thing that works really well for materialists. You make a poster, and you put pictures of like the Harley that you're going buy and the vacation home that you're going to get and the private plane that you're going to eventually fly on. You put all these on your dream board.

Well, I didn't do a dream board. What I did was I subscribed to Inc Magazine because every month on the cover of Inc Magazine was a 20-something-year-old software entrepreneur who had made it big, every month back then. I would get the new Inc Magazine, and I'd look at the guy, never bothered to read like about the failed marriages and the broken relationships and the former business partners that wouldn't talk to them anymore. I didn't read. I didn't care about that stuff. I just wanted to be that guy that wore the gray t-shirt and blue jeans and Birkenstocks and drove a whatever, would have been a Tesla today, but a Ferrari or whatever. I was going to have this life. I had this vision of what was going to happen, and it almost cost me everything because as I worked harder and harder and harder, we grew the company to 35 employees, from five to 35 employees, and had five or six sales people around the country that were going and soliciting business.

You know, every serious prospect they had, they would fly me out to talk to them, so I'm just on the road constantly. I've got two toddlers at home and a wife, and I basically abandoned my marriage to build my company. I just thought, "Well, they'll be there when I finish this. I'm going to get to some point here, and it will be good. Then, I'll come back, and my family will be there for me." I was working. You know, I'm running and gunning. Increasing the pressure

on this was a lot of the first round of money in this was what they call the three Fs of first round funding, friends, family, and fools, but the middle F is family. I've got family money. I've got some of my inheritance, in fact, probably all of my inheritance now that I think about it, was in this company.

The pressure's just incredibly, you know, just ratchet it up. Man, the VC guy said five million, 25 million. I mean, he knows what he's talking about. Right? Two things happened. First thing that happened was I call my wife one day, early, early 2000. Things are going like gangbusters. My guy in Texas had gotten this opportunity for us to go in after an unresponsive bid. In other words, the state of Texas had put a request for proposals out there and hadn't gotten any qualifying proposals. That meant that they didn't have to go through the bid process anymore. They could just pick a vendor. My guy in Texas had gotten us a meeting with the committee that was going to pick the vendor.

According to, this is salesman talk, he's like, "It's in the bag, man. You just got to come out here and close the deal, and we'll get it." I'm like, "That sounds great." It's huge, huge. It's the state of Texas. Right? I call my wife up. I'm like, "When do you need me to be there?" He's like, "Can you get here tomorrow?" "Yeah, I can get there tomorrow, man. I'm going to sacrifice. I'm going to work hard." I call my wife, and I said, "Honey, I'm really sorry, but I've got to go on another business trip. It's this great opportunity, the state of Texas. No bid deal, blah, blah, blah." My wife's like on the end of the phone. Then, I said, "But I got to leave tomorrow."

My wife said a sentence to me that changed everything. She said, "That's okay. It's easier when you're not here." Then, I thought, "That's not a very nice thing to say." I mean, I'm a good dad. I'm a good husband. We're in our church on Sunday. I do children's ministry at my church, multiple services every weekend. I do puppet shows. I do voices. I lead worship songs with kids. I'm a good man. I come home on the weekends, and I minister to these kids and say hi to my kids, and then abandon my family and go back to work to build this company that in my head I thought, "Well, a few years from now, that's going to be there for my family. We're going to have the life that I always wanted to give them." That was part of my dream. They can fly on my private jet with me.

I got home that night, and I said, "What do you mean it's easier when I'm not here? What was that about?" She said, "Look, I get it. You're trying to build this company, but you're not here for us. You call me at 5:00 at night and say you've got 30 minutes of work to do, and then you'll be home. We live a half an hour from the office. You know, I know you're an optimist. I know it's probably more like an hour of work to do, but 6:30 comes, 7:00 comes, 7:30 comes, you're still not home. Then, I call you, and you're at the office, but you just got, 'Oh, I'm sorry. I'm just trying to finish up one more thing,' so you walk in at 8:00, 8:30 at night, dinner's ruined. The kids are already in bed. You leave early in the morning to get going, so they never see you. They only see you on the weekends occasionally. Even then, we're so busy doing stuff that we don't talk."

She said, "In fact, the only time that we really talk is when you're on a business trip, and you're in a hotel room, and it's 10:00 at night. You're 1,000 miles away. The kids are in bed, and we can actually talk on the phone, so don't worry about us. We'll be fine." By the way, fine, not a good word to hear your wife say, just in case you didn't realize that. When your wife says she's fine, she may be fine, but you're in trouble. She's not fine. She's frustrated. She's insecure. She's feeling alone and abandoned, and I couldn't see it. Then, the next thing that happened was a buddy of mine called me up from church. He said, "Hey, you know how our wives have been in this women's small group?" My wife was in a women's small group on Sundays. I said, "Yeah."

He said, "I think we should get the husbands together if for no other reason than just to protect ourselves because I'm pretty sure they're talking about us." I was pretty sure they were talking about us too because my wife had told me stories about him from his wife. I'm like, "Yeah, yeah," because I just had this experience with my wife telling me that she likes it better when I'm not home. I got to figure this thing out. I grew up in church. I'm a very die hard cultural Christian at this point. I know all the words to say. I can pray anybody under the table from a vocabulary standpoint. I sounded good. I looked good, but I wasn't living well. I'm like, "Yeah, man. I need something. I'll get in that group. What are we going to study?" Because I grew up in the church. You got to study something if you're going to be in a small group. He said, "I don't know. They gave some book away at church a few weeks ago. Just bring that book." I'm like, "All right."

I go. I find the book on the shelf. I dust it off a little bit, *The Man in the Mirror*. I'm like, "Well, that's interesting." I open up and, you know, 'The Rat Race'. I know about the rat race. 'Living an Unexamined Life', come on, now. It's getting a little too close to home. 'Are you a Cultural Christian or a Biblical Christian?' Now I'm mad because Pat wrote a book about me, and I didn't get any royalty. I'm going through this book with these guys, and then the third thing happened. The market crashed. All of a sudden, *Inc Magazine* stopped having software entrepreneurs on the cover because all these guys, everybody was struggling. The tech bubble burst. The venture capital guy that told me five and 25 million disappeared. I don't mean like he said, "Hey, sorry. We can't do anything anymore." I feel like he like poof, up in smoke. Phone number disconnected, everything.

Here I am with this company, with these employees, with my family, with my sort of mental dream board, and it's all just evaporating. I'm in this group with these guys. We're about five or six weeks in, and we were going around the table, "How was your week?" "You know, I had such a blessed week. God really blessed me this week." "How was your week?" "Well, you know, my week was a little difficult, but I trust God because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I'm ready to puke on the table. I'm like, "This is just Christian mumbo jumbo. This is jargon. This is all the stuff that we say to each other when we get together in church, and we don't want to take the mask off of how things

are really going, and so we just say stuff to each other so that we can have this false sense of intimacy."

I remember I threw my book on the table. I said, "Guys, you don't understand. I can't do this anymore. I can't sit in this room and just act like everything's going to be okay if I just have the right Bible verse memorized or say the right prayer. My life's falling apart. My business is falling apart. My marriages is in trouble, and I don't know what to do about it. We're sitting in this room talking this BS to each other. If this doesn't get real right now, I'm done." Now, looking back on it, what I meant was I'm done with this group, but looking back on it, I think I might have been done. I think I just would have been like, "Well, this church thing, it's not doing it for me. I'll maybe keep going to humor my wife," but it just didn't seem real.

One of the guys at the table looks at me, and he goes, "I can't believe you just said that." I'm like, "Here we go." He said, "I'm struggling with porn, and I don't have anybody to talk to about it." Next guy says, "My marriage is really struggling too." Next guy says, "My business is in trouble. In fact, I just took a second mortgage out on the house to make some payments for the business, and I didn't tell my wife about it." We go around this table, and we start getting real with each other. We start talking about all of our dreams that were failing, all of the ways that we had seen our life that we thought were going to work out. We were all struggling. Just like just about everybody in this room raised their hand when I asked you if you had a dream that failed, just about everybody in that table also had a dream that was in the midst of failing. God had brought us together.

Then, we got around to Jim. It's like we're all going around. It's like true confessions time. By the time we get to Jim, Jim's got his book open, and his eyes are like as big as saucers. He's looking at us. He's like, "I'm actually okay. Things are pretty good in my life right now. In fact, I'm not really sure I should be here with you guys." We're like, "Jim, you can't leave. You're our only hope." Jim was a table leader at this Bible study back then. Over the course of the year, I'll cut to the end of the story. The market tanks. The company spirals down. In one day, we went from 36 back down to six employees. We couldn't pay severance. We couldn't even pay a vacation or anything. We just said, "Today's your last day. We have no money." We struggled along for a few more months. By the end of September, we knew we were going out of business.

We told everybody to get jobs, the people that were left. They got jobs over the course of end the September and October. At the end of the first week of November, I walked into a bankruptcy attorney's office and handed him the keys to the office. My dream had failed. It had been dashed, but all the weight was off my shoulders because the dream, it was a false expectation. You know, what the dream was actually showing was what I had faith in. My dream showed that I had faith in my ability to work hard enough to be successful. My dream showed my faith in the fact that I thought that a successful company would make me happy, that money would make me happy and it would make

my family happy. That was my belief system, and the dream failing helped me dispel that belief system.

You know, if think about it, if you think about a Biblical story that's like this, from Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, you have the story of Joseph. It's this amazing story. When the story begins, Joseph is sort of the most favored son. He's not the oldest son. In fact, he's the second youngest son, but he's the most favored son. He seems to be the one that has the best head on his shoulders, and his dad is showing him favor. He's a little bit raw. He's a little bit unsophisticated maybe, maybe even a little of a jerk. I say that only because he had a dream about his brothers bowing to him, and he was dumb enough to tell them all that he had a dream about them bowing to him. His dad gives him this coat that basically says like, "You're the man. You're the guy." He starts sending him out to supervise his older brothers, like go back and report back to him. It's obvious that he's being positioned to take over the family business, and his brothers are not happy about that.

You know the story. They whack him over the head. They throw him in a pit. They sell him off in slavery. They lie to his dad, tell him that a wild animal got him. He gets sold into slavery. He eventually ends up in an official's house. The wife of the official comes onto him. When he rejects her, she accuses him of assault. He gets throw in prison. He's in prison. He meets a couple of guys that are officials from the kingdom, interprets their dreams for them, says, "Don't forget me." They forget him. They walk out. Then, suddenly, one day one of the guys goes, when a king has a dream, he's like, "Oh, yeah. I met this guy in prison. He interpreted my dream. We should call him." They call him out, and Joseph becomes the right hand man to the Pharaoh of Egypt and foresees a famine coming, so he takes the seven years of bounty and helps the kingdom save everything they can to prepare for seven years of famine.

Imagine the length of this story. Imagine Joseph as a young man whose dad is positioning him for this amazing life. He's going to have these division vice presidents that are all his older brothers, and he's going to be in charge of the business. Everybody's going to be prosperous. Then, mutiny. Now, you're years and years later, and when the famine comes, and his family is worried about dying because they won't have enough food, because of Joseph, the family doesn't die, because the vision that Joseph had. Really, the preparation through all those experiences that he had, he puts an entire country in the position to save his family, and then you know the whole story about his brothers coming, and they don't recognize him. He messes around with them. I think I would have messed around with them too, honestly.

I'm telling you, Genesis 37 to 50, the last 14 chapters of Genesis, there's your quiet times for the next two weeks. Just take a chapter a week for the next two weeks and read through this amazing story of what happened. Then, you get to the end of Genesis, and you see this verse. Sorry, I missed my screenshots here. You get this verse. He says in Genesis 50:20, he's talking to his family, and he says, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." He's saying this to

his brothers. His dad has died. His brothers are scared. Now that dad's gone, maybe he's going to come back and whack them. Even at this point, they lie to him about stuff that his dad said, "Dad said you have to forgive us." That's what they say. He just laughs. He like weeps when he hears them say that because he can't believe that they're still not getting it.

He says, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. When God saw me in this position," Joseph says, "with my dad and gave me all this preparation of how to run things, how to run a multisite business," which is basically what his family had, "that was preparing me for the next step, which would be an official's house, running his affairs, which prepared me for the next step, which would be basically running a country, being the economic minister for a country, so that Jesus' ancestor, Jacob, would prosper, would be alive, would be saved. His family would be saved. What you meant for evil, God meant it for good." You know, guys, when your dreams fail, you may feel like, man, especially when your dreams fail because somebody did something wrong, but whatever those things are that you might feel are evil, are wrong in your life, God uses that.

He's weaving a tapestry that you can't sometimes see until you take some steps back from it, and you see the picture. When you're right up against a tapestry, you know, all you can see is threads, but when you stand back from the tapestry, you can see the picture that's created there. Our lives are those threads, and when we can step back from that, we can see the picture. When your dreams fail, your faith prevails, whatever faith you have. My faith when my dream failed, my faith was in money and possessions and status and reputation. I didn't just want to carry around an *Inc Magazine* for inspiration. I wanted to be on the cover. That's what my faith was in. The question is, "What do you believe in?" Because you when you face failure, what you believe in is going to come to light. If you believe in things that have no power to save you, you're going to be disappointed.

There's three things that I see guys having faith in. You know, the biggest thing I think guys have faith in is themselves. That's kind of where I was. If I just work hard enough, I can make this happen. The other thing I've seen, though, is what I would say is, you know, I like mythology and stuff, I've seen guys have faith in fate. They're like, "Que sera, sera. Whatever will be will be. There's nothing I can do to change how things are going to happen, so I'm just along for the ride, whatever the fates decide, you know, like this sort of amorphous, the universe, the force, whatever it is is going to control things. I don't have any responsibility. I'm just going to, whatever happens." I'm going to tell you that you and fate will both fail you, but God will never fail you.

Because God loves us, Pat says this all the time. Because God loves us, he doesn't allow our lives to turn out the way that we want them to because he has a better plan, because we see the threads, but he sees the tapestry. He wants to give us that vision as well. When you look back at your life, and you see the dreams that failed you, have you seen the end of the story yet? Have you seen the ways that God is going to use that, what you think of as a failure, to bring



you to much better things? When that software company went out of business, even though there was a sense of relief, there was also just a tremendous sense of failure. Jim, the guy in my small group, and Tom Hollingsworth. You here, Tom? I'm calling guys out that aren't here. Who's a table leader here were both friends of mine. They both give my resume to Man in the Mirror.

A week later, David Delk calls me, and he says, "Hey, we're looking for a guy that we feel like you might have the skillset for that, and two different people have given us your resume, so we think maybe we should talk to you." I walked into Man in the Mirror for that interview like, "If they know that I just wrecked a company and almost wrecked my marriage, they will never hire me." I really didn't bring it up. They're asking me questions and, you know, "Yeah, we shut the company down. Got a wonderful wife, great kids." Three months later, my wife had been in counseling already. She said, "You know, we really need to go together. We need to go to marriage counseling." I said, "Okay. I love you. I will go to marriage counseling. I'm in this group with these guys. They're encouraging me to go." I go to marriage counseling. I'm going to go to marriage counseling.

I thought, "You know what? When you work for a ministry, you can't go to marriage counseling. You have to have your stuff together to work in a ministry. Your spiritual stuff has to be together. Your family has to be together. This is probably going to disqualify me from ministry," but I didn't want to lie to David. I go into David's office in the morning, and I say, "Hey, David. My wife and I have an appointment at lunch today." He's like, "Oh, that's great. What's that?" I said, "We're going to marriage counseling." He's like, "You're going to marriage counseling?" I said, "Yeah." He went, "That's great. Let me know how it goes." I'm like, "I got the win. I'm just going to get out of the office. I'm not going to press this right now," but I was kind of wondering, so I talked to him like a month or two later.

I'm like, "I kind of thought it would be a problem." He looked at me, and he said, "Problem? You're willing to do whatever it takes to make your marriage better, to grow closer to your wife, to show her Christ. Why is that a problem? That's exactly what we want men to do." I got to tell you, without guys like David who mentored me for 16 years while we were together at Man in the Mirror, 16 years... There was a convenience store about a quarter of a mile from the office, and we would walk up to that convenience store and back probably three or four days a week. I can't imagine the hours that we spent walking back and forth to that convenience store talking about life, about theology, about our families, about the ministry, about politics. I mean, we talked about it all, and it was just time that we spent together, hours and hours of time over the years, and he mentored me.

That group of guys in that small group, you know, we spent three years together. An hour a week? Yeah, maybe. I mean, we would start talking about stuff, and we would be like, "We got to go home, man. It's been a couple hours. We got to go home." Meeting with those guys outside of the group and going

camping together with our boys, some hilarious Father's Day weekend I'll tell you about another time, with those guys and just growing closer to each other. It was men like David, like Pat through his book and then through the years personally, like one of those guys in that small group that he and I became closer. The verse in Proverbs, "There's a friend who's closer than a brother," that was this guy for me. It changed everything about my life, and it made me see that my dreams didn't fail me. The dream failed. It didn't fail me.

God had a much bigger plan, a much bigger vision. Because of those guys and because of the grace of God, I can see that today. That's what brings me here in front of you. What do you believe in? What you believe in will determine how you see your dreams when they do fail and how you look for the tapestry instead of just looking at the threads.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you so much for your grace, your mercy, Lord, for your sovereignty, for your providence, Lord, the way that you are orchestrating every event and success and failure in our lives to help us become the men that you want us to be, how you are preparing us for greater tasks than the ones that we think are the most important thing in front of us right now. Just like you prepared Joseph to run a country, you prepared me to come into a ministry, Lord, by doing things we would have never thought at the time that that's what you were doing, but you could see the end, Lord. You can see the end of the story. Father, thank you for your grace and your mercy in our lives. Father, help us as we think about the disappointments and failures that we've had in our lives. Help us to see the bigger picture. Help us to put our faith and our trust in you, not in our strength, and to not give up and just let fate decide, Lord, but to lean into our relationship with you, to have brothers around us who give us counsel and walk that journey with us, Lord, so that we can follow you, so that we can live the life that you have for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.