

Reconstructing Manhood

A Man's Pilgrimage in the 21st Century

Rough Transcript

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Good morning, everybody. How are y'all feeling? How y'all doing? Great, great to hear. Well, I'm back again and we're still reconstructing manhood. How's it been going? Do you feel like you have a better sense of manhood so far in this series? Cool, then let's keep going. When Pat asked me to do this week, he said, you can do it on whatever you want. I said, awesome. Hope it goes well. And I was thinking about the reconstructing manhood and the concept of it. And I was thinking through this idea of order and chaos and reorder, basically in the way of creation, fall, redemption. This is how the world has gone about... There was the creation of manhood. And then there was the fallen chaos of what manhood is. And now there's this redemptive reordering of manhood. And we are in the midst of this reordering of manhood.

And as I was thinking about that, and over the past year, I found myself almost inexplicably drawn to this ancient idea of pilgrimage. And pilgrimage as the reordering of a meaningful experiences for men. If you know me, a lot of times, I like to do [inaudible 00:01:38] sermons and talks where just give me one verse, I'm going to dive head long and swim. And between each word of God, because there's so much beauty and depth and content there, but that being said, today, I'm going to do something a little different. I'm going to be basing this talk off a biblical theme. And I want to spend most of the time actually talking about the application of it and what it means to me, to us and to men. So, that being said, pilgrimage. When I say that word, what comes to mind to you guys? When you hear pilgrimage, what do you hear? People on the move. A long journey. Danger. Who said danger? You're my guy. I like that.

What was that? Okay. Yeah. When I was thinking through pilgrimage without really looking into it before this year, I imagine a journey to a sacred place. From the Muslims going to Mecca, from the Jews returning to Israel, to fans of the king going to Graceland, to Crimson tide folk going to the Bryant Denny stadium. War Eagle, fair enough.

So many people have a practical desire to religiously journey to an important location, either once in a lifetime or regularly to worship. Right? And, okay, there's a general sense where we know what pilgrimage is, but what exactly makes a pilgrimage? What's the definition of it? Well, I asked my friend who happens to be a PhD in church history from Cambridge. I was asking, what is a pilgrimage? And he said, well, there's really not a great definition of it. It's actually a slippery slope, but I would say most of us know it when we see it, I'm like, that's not helpful. I said, well, at least give me some context, the origin of pilgrimage. Where did this come from? What was the first pilgrimage? And the same man said, well, there's actually no specific beginning. I was like, what do you mean? He said, humans have been traveling to sacred places and walked on sacred journeys since the beginning of recorded history.

Okay. And he was just telling me, if we go back, you see that Israel walked through the desert for 40 years on this pilgrimage. Further back, Abraham's life itself was a pilgrimage. And even when Adam left the garden, his pilgrimage began. There is simply an impulse in humans and specifically men to pursue sacred travel. And recently, that impulse has arisen in me again. And being curious to why I'm so drawn

to this idea of pilgrimage, this ancient idea. Two reasons stood out among the rest. First is, I long for meaningful experiences. I personally long for meaningful experiences. And number two, the concept of pilgrimage helps me more accurately assess and view my Christian life.

So, the first point, my longing. I'm 36. I have four children. I have a growing list of responsibilities and I have less and less free time. My life is very busy at the moment and I really do long for those meaningful experiences, few and far between, when I have free time outside of my family. And if I'm going to leave my wife, I'm going to be honest with you guys. If I'm going to leave my wife to tend to our four children by herself so I can go do something, that activity usually fits one of two criteria. Either I'm going to go catch up and connect with some friends by hanging out with them or I'm going to go on some sort of trip and maybe hopefully do something a little wild. Maybe even a little dangerous. That would be fun. And I think the idea of pilgrimage actually ties those two things together really beautifully. And what I mean by that, a pilgrimage is obviously more adventurous than just hanging out. And it's also more intentional and more deep than just a typical guy's trip.

It seems like the perfect fit for what I long for, but I have a problem. Whatever happened to pilgrimages? Why did we stop doing them? Where did they go? And that's a earnest question. It sounds really interesting and really helpful. And yet, I don't see anybody pursuing pilgrimages anymore. And I don't know if it's because some of us think it's too cultish, some weird religious thing that different kind of religious people do. Or if it's become too commercialized, expensive or tourist trappy. Or we're just too busy and distracted to pursue it, which would signify we need to pursue it more than ever. And I think that most of you would agree with me. When I say, as men, we need to carve out a time, a place and a space to pursue sacred understanding of ourselves, of the world we live in and of God. We all need that. We desperately need to carve out specific time to do that. And when I look at the Jews who are returning from exile to Jerusalem every year for Passover, well, what are they doing?

They are coming back to remember who they were. They're coming back to remember where they came from. They're coming back to remember who their God is so they could return back into exile as a foreigner, as an alien, as a stranger in a strange land. And Passover itself gave them grounding. The event, it gave them grounding and renewal. But, what was interesting is you have grounding in renewal through remembering it, but then the walking journey is your where memories marinate and take hold and press in. Nici said, never trust a thought that didn't come by walking. It's an interesting thought.

And so, when I look at the American church and see what our offering is for this idea, the only thing I see that comes close to Pilgrimage is the 20 foot walk we take to the communion table at worship service. We do that in remembrance of Christ, right? We do that to remember his sacrifice, to consider our own standing in Christ, to renew our hope that his life, death and resurrection is enough. And I'm here to tell you 20 feet isn't long enough to think through those things. We need more. There is a huge need to remove ourselves, to pursue our God, to then find ourselves. And I'm saying that, especially with young guys and a pilgrimage provides a great opportunity to do that. It's a spiritual intervention for our lives, which brings me to my second point.

As a metaphor, I think the Christian experience is best summarized as a pilgrimage. Growing up, my parents went to church and I knew about Christianity. But, if you were to ask me a metaphor for the Christian experience, like if you said, hey, what would you say kind of represents that. I would've said a light switch. I would've said you're either on or you're off. Okay. You're either a Christian or you're not. And once that switch turns on, well, then you're onboarded and then you're on mission and just it's go time. And there was no room between on and off. There was no room for questions or seeking. It was like, are you on or you off? And that actually causes some problems because what happens when you're switched on and then you're starting to feel off? Everything kind of breaks down, right? You begin to question, am I off permanently? Was I ever really on? Is there even a light switch? And this mentality

and this representation of Christianity to me had a part in bringing about this big dechurching and deconstruction movement. Because we're viewing it as this on and off switch. And I believe our walk with God is more complicated, more complex than an on and off switch, but I was never shown that way growing up.

I don't see Jesus saying in the Bible, Christian, not Christian. Christian, not Christian. I don't see that. As I read scriptures, how does Jesus talk with people? And he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. And he said to them, follow me. And I will make you fishers of men. My sheep hear my voice. And I know them and they follow me. Jesus calls us to be followers, right? Not stand byers. We're to be moving or to be following. And to be honest, in my ignorance and probably arrogance, if I was back then, and Jesus was to say that to the crowd, I'd probably look around for a second. And I'd say, follow you where? Where are we going? Okay. For how long? What do you mean by follow? Where are we going? Right?

And the call of Jesus then and now is for us to follow him throughout our life's journey and into eternity. This sacred and fragile journey called life is fraught with multiple paths and multiple barriers and multiple hazards, multiple elements, multiple people, multiple course corrections. It's not as simple as you're on and off the team.

And I saw this this past year by framing our Christian experience as a pilgrimage, really resonate with younger guys. So, earlier in the year, I conducted an experiment on my driveway over the course of several weeks. I led 10 young guys, both Christians and non-Christians, in their twenties and thirties through some conversational exercises. I was doing an experiment from your labs. And one of the weeks we talked about our souls and we talked about our souls in the way of pilgrimage. And the way I framed it was through location, destination, community. Okay. Now you have to understand some of the Christian guys were really Christian-y. They spoke Christianese in a way that some of the non-Christians were looking at them, like, what are you talking about? I have no idea what you're saying. I remember one of the guys and we were talking about... They're so conditioned to talk in certain Christianese that sometimes their mouth would open without thinking and they would just speak Christianese.

So, I asked the group, I said, completely different topic saying, hey, when you're analyzing your eating habits and your health, is there anything you can think of that is unhealthy, that you maybe should pull back on, any kind of food? And this one guy was like, oh yeah, man, I dominate some Oreos almost every night, half a pack. But, I read my Bible every day, and sometimes it's a struggle, but I still press through. But, those Oreos, they're tough because it tastes great. Everyone's like, what? What did you just say? Why did you say that about reading your Bible every day? Where did that come from? He's like what? And he almost didn't even realize he said that. It was the strangest thing, but it was great because now you have Christians and non-Christians actually engaging one another and having to speak in a real way.

And eventually we got to the soul part, the soul week. And I noticed an interesting thing when I was talking about the first part, location. I started with your past journey to your present location. Tell me how you got to this point in your soul journey. And then after that I asked them about their position. Okay. What is your current position in your current location? And I gave them a few examples of what they could say. I said, are you standing, either looking forward at what's to come or looking back in regret? Are you sitting, resting for the next leg in your journey? Or are you sitting in complacency? Are you laying down, crawling through the weeds or injured in need of help? How would you describe your position?

And if there's five Christians and five non-Christians, here's the interesting thing that came about. Every Christian guy there said I'm sitting and complacent and every non-Christian guy said, yeah, I guess I'm standing and wondering what's next and ready to go. And I had to pose a question to the group after

that response. I said, if there is a God and he's the only one that actually knows our location on this life pilgrimage towards him, who would you guys say is in better shape to know God presently? The ones who are sitting complacent or the ones ready, standing to move forward? And this shocking light bulb went off on all the Christian guys minds. Like, what am I doing? I need help. I have lost my way. They are seeking God, actually, more than I am in my present state. And that was helpful because it was an awakening moment for them and a motivating moment for them.

And then there was a second interesting thing that happened. After we talked about our location, we about our destination. Do you know where you're going? Do you have a destination in mind? Are you wondering aimlessly? Or do you have any tools or resources or a roadmap on how to get there? And there's some healthy conversation with that. But, after that we discussed community, right? The soul's journey isn't meant to be traveled and traversed alone. I told them to me the journey of the soul, you need two types of relationships to make it. You need soul level friendships to walk alongside you and you need a spiritual guide, right? You need soul friends and spiritual guides. You need a guide who's been before you. You need a guide to help you and see you make it through the way he made it through, who can help you along the path. And everyone agreed with that. Everyone's like, yeah, totally, we need both those things.

And then a funny thing happened after this experiment was over because that was the last week. All the guys said, okay, great. So, what are we doing next? Are we meeting next week? When are we doing this again? And these guys didn't even really know each other. And then you have Christians and non-Christians actively being like, I'm ready. Yeah. I would love these things. Help me along the way. Christians and non-Christians together. Imagine that.

The moment the group moved away from like, hey, I'm theologically or scientifically on correct island. And you need to leave your foolish ways and make the leap of faith over here to, hey, I'm on a path towards truth, understanding and hopefully God himself. And I'm going there either way. But, if you're interested, I'd love the company. Everyone jumped on board. Everyone jumped on board.

There was a difference of correct your thinking and live in the truth that I'm telling you to verse come walk with me into the mystery and pursuit of a more meaningful life. I'm going there. I'd love for you to come along with me. One saying, I'm standing here and you can come to me. The other one's saying, I'm going, do you want to come with? All these guys were all curious about the path forward, traveling along the soul's pilgrimage rather than needing to know what the arrival actually looked like. They just wanted to actually travel.

And to reiterate, they were not interested in being led by some spotty, outdated GPS system in the middle of their own wilderness. They were not interested at all, but they were very interested in trusting a guide on the same path who was more hungry than they were to continue going forward towards a meaningful life. Do you see the picture I'm trying to paint for you here?

When you follow Christ, you are moving towards eternity and towards our heavenly homeland. And everybody who is stuck, everybody who's lost, everybody who's wondering will gravitate to someone who's passionately, seriously and intentionally moving down the path of life. They will hitch their wagons to those people. We will hitch our wagons to those people. We have hitched our wagons to those spiritual guides in your life. So, here's my main point. The big idea for today. To reconstruct manhood, we need to rediscover our pilgrimage. On the one hand, we need to engage in actual pilgrimage with other men so that we can create the time, the place and the space to remember who we are, to gauge our lives and refocus on God. We need that interruption. And we need to do that. We all need to make the time to consider life's biggest questions that are staring all of us in the face. As someone told me recently, inside every question is a quest trying to get out. To get to the question you have to get out.

On the other hand, we also need to rediscover the pilgrimage we call life. Doing so allowed us to build commonality and community with other men. And our lives are an exploration, an adventure, not a settlement. We're meant to move. So, to deny myself, to embrace suffering and to find meaning and purpose by following Jesus home with other men. Now, that would be an awfully big adventure. One that I personally want to go on. And I hope all of you guys do as well.

Let's pray. God as men, we want to be movers. We want to have meaning and purpose. We want to face challenges. We want to conquer challenges. Help us to reengage in a way that we are not people just standing by. That we are engaged in our walk following after you. That we are engaged in our life in a way that it draws other men to want to walk with us. That we're engaged in finding the spiritual guides that will help us move forward in life.

Too much of manhood today is based on standing around and doing nothing. And I would hope and pray that you could invigorate passion and joy in men to move forward in life and to keep searching and keep going and find you and walk with you. In your name we pray. Amen.

All right. I want to give you guys two assignments. Do you want to come up and talk for a second? Okay. Two assignments. I didn't print out any handouts. I'm going to put the questions on the board. And so, just some general questions that you can discuss at your tables, but here's the second one and the more detailed one. I'm actually taking some guys, some dechurch guys on a pilgrimage in January. Basically, I've convinced them that we're going to go out of Miami on a sailboat, sail five hours to an island with only beans, fresh water and rice.

And we'll have some fishing poles and some spear guns and all that stuff. And for three days, we're going to stay on this island and whatever we catch, we'll eat. And all of them are jumping at it like, yes, I'm in. I want to do that. And I said, now, listen, it's not going to just be a guy's trip. I'm going to have a structured three days. We're going to go through a soul journey and just see where we are within our lives and where we are spiritually. And they're like, yeah, yes. I'm in. How much does it cost? I want to go. So, I'm telling you this because I'm personally experimenting with the idea of building out pilgrimage and pilgrimages here throughout America and Mira Labs. And I'd actually like your help. People here and people who want online, I would like your help. And if you're interested in conducting or participating in a pilgrimage, not everyone has to be as intense as that, of some sort in 2022, I'd love to speak with you. My email will be up there on the screen with the questions, but it's Jeremy@mirrorlabs.us. Jeremy@mirrorlabs.us. And please reach out to me. Let me know if this is interesting to you and you want to participate and we'll go from there. All right. Thank you very much.