

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

An equipping e-newsletter from Man in the Mirror to help you reach more men.



How I Became a Disciple, Part 1

By Patrick Morley

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NOTE: This two-part article is excerpted from my new book, Chapter 6, "How I Became a Disciple—A Case Study," Pastoring Men (Moody Publishers) scheduled for release January, 2009. Part 1 covers my "calling" to Christ, and in Part 2 I'll show you how I was "equipped" and "sent."

Growing up in the church, I assumed I was "in." Jesus was my example. However, I have no recollection of any teaching that I needed a Savior, or that Jesus wanted to have a relationship with me to help guide my life. I'm not saying the gospel was not preached, only that I have no such recollection. My parents and three brothers had the same experience.

Religion for me was veneration of a majestic historical figure but with no present relevance or personal application. I believed in a God I did not understand, and lived in a world which I had no reason to think He inhabited.

The Search for Meaning and Purpose

Like all young men, I wanted my life to count. As a high schooler, a voice inside my head kept screaming, "You were created for a purpose." But everything in my life bored me—school, my part-time job, my family. I even bored myself. I was angry that life seemed so "little," so insignificant, and so pointless.

I had no idea who I was, why I existed, where I was going, or how to get there. My world didn't work, so I quit high school in the middle of my senior year.

The next thing I remember it was 5:00 a.m. at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and a ferocious drill sergeant was screaming for me to get out of bed for a three mile run before breakfast. I was eventually assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, N.C.

The structure and boundaries of the Army actually created a sense of safety for me. After passing the GED test, I enrolled in night classes at N.C. State University's Ft. Bragg branch. I was still searching.

For an English Literature class, I read in Hamlet, "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." I thought, *That's the most noble thought I have ever heard uttered!* I adopted it as my life credo and said, "I will always try to do the right thing by everyone I meet." Essentially, on that day I became a *moralist*.

However, feelings of loneliness soon overwhelmed me. A fellow soldier invited me to a church in Fayetteville, N. C. They allowed me to be an assistant to the couple leading the high school youth group. The relationships filled a void, but only part of it.

I set an appointment with the pastor and, with tears streaming down my face, told him how lonely and sad I was. He smiled and said, "You will get over this. It's just something we all have to go through from time to time." I left his office knowing that we both were lost.



Having failed to find meaning and purpose in religion, after the Army and college I decided to try my hand at business. I became a *materialist* in addition to a moralist. Soon I was meeting all my goals, but the more I achieved the more miserable I became. Life was futile.

The Pain Leading Up to New Birth

In the meantime, I had met Patsy. She wanted to marry a Christian, so I convinced her I was one. Within weeks of our marriage, however, it was obvious that we had an ambiguity of terms about what it meant to be a Christian.

I thought being a Christian meant “living by a set of Christian values.” I was surprised to learn that for Patsy being a Christian meant “a personal relationship with Jesus grounded in faith.” I thought it was a *task*—something I did to make God happy (or at least avoid His wrath). But for Patsy it was a *relationship*—a love relationship in which God actively guided her daily life.

I wanted what she had. But I didn’t want to give up anything to get it. So I tried to “imitate” her while living like I had always done. The harder I tried, the worse things became. One dreary day I came home from work in my new luxury car, closed the garage door, then tried to knock down the garage wall with the sole of my foot for ten minutes or so. The angst was eating a hole through me.

Sunday morning I said to Patsy, “Let’s go to church.” At this point, I was blaming my wife for my miseries and thought, *If we go to church maybe it will help Patsy and I might meet some investors for my real estate deals.*

After the service, several young couples surrounded us in the most pleasant way—like they really cared. Two of the husbands took a personal interest in me. We went to lunch. We talked. We went to their homes for dinners. They invited us to a Friday night Bible study that met in the home of an optometrist and his wife.

I tried—I really did. I wanted to perform. I wanted to make them happy. I wanted to be like them. I did my best. But I couldn’t. I was selfish and, worse, pretended that I was not.

Waves of frustration swept over me. One morning I was ranting and raving, trying to expiate my pain, taking these frustrations out on my wife. I said things to her a man should never say to a woman. With tears rolling down her face, she just sat there and “took it like a man.”

When my rage was winding down, our eyes met and I was transfixed. I wanted to look away, but I couldn’t. After she held my gaze for what seemed like a brief eternity, she asked, “Pat, is there *anything* about me that you like?”

I wandered off to my office and spent the morning staring out my window. I wondered, “What happened to you, Morley? You wanted your life to count, to make a difference. But you’re just a nobody headed nowhere.” And it was true.

Young Couples Sunday School Class

It was time for another try at “religion.” We started to attend a Sunday school class for young couples led by a wonderful middle aged couple. It was a case of “equipping” before the “calling” had taken place! The man read from Ephesians 5:25-33. I only remember the first few words:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy....

At the particular moment he read, I was staring at the floor. My face flushed and I



started sweating profusely. Within a minute or so my undershirt was soaked. I have never felt more embarrassed in my life. I was certain that everyone knew that I was not loving my wife as I should. I was sure they were all now staring at me. I couldn't look up—I didn't want to. A powerful force of true moral guilt swept over me. It was the first time I recall feeling what I later came to understand was conviction of sin. But I didn't know what to do with it. I soldiered on.

Preaching

In his sermons, the pastor was telling me about Jesus in a way I had never considered—a personal God interested in me personally.

As we drove away from church one Sunday in August, 1973, I was picking on Patsy for something I cannot now remember. Something inside of me snapped. I finally came to the end of myself. I pulled out my white handkerchief and surrendered. I prayed, "God I just can't do this anymore. I'm a sinful man, and I need you to save me. Jesus, I surrender my life to you, and ask you to come into my life and change me." I have never been the same.

Of course, every man's story is different in the details. But in another sense every man's story is the same: the feelings...the futility...the pain...the lashing out...the drawing toward Jesus...the witnesses...the "hearing" of God's word...the conviction of sin...the preaching of God's Word...the coming to end of self.



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