

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

The Rat Race

Unedited Transcript

Galatians 5:7, 9, Hebrews 12:1-3, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Matthew 23:12, 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Good morning, men! Welcome to Man in the Mirror's Men's Bible Study, where we always have room for one more guy! I've got a couple of shout outs I want to do this morning. The first one is going to go to "BOLD Men," which stands for Bring Others to the Lord through Disciplining men. They are from Covenant Church of Newport News, VA. These are 7 men who meet at the church on Thursdays at 6:00pm using the Video Bible Study. It's a new group and they are led by Todd Carter. I made a little note across the bottom, guys we're still looking for an Area Director in Newport News, so keep that in mind. I wonder if you would join me in giving these men a warm Man in the Mirror welcome this morning? One, two, three, hoorah!

Great! Then we have a second shout out! In fact, we're going to start doing two shout outs a week since we have so many groups signing up. But this one is to a group that's been in existence for a long time, and we want to celebrate them this morning. Men in the Morning of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Orlando, FL. Led by Pete Greenfield. Group meets on Monday mornings at 6:20am at the Family Life Center using the Video Bible Study. The local Area Director is Pat Leupold. We have their leadership team from their men's ministry here this morning, so if you men would just rise and let us greet you. Prince of Peace! One, two, three, hoorah! Guys, good to have you here this morning! Welcome!

We're in this new series, The Man in the Mirror: Solving the 24 Problems Men Face. The world has changed a lot in the last 25 years since *The Man in the Mirror* first came out. Of course these changes, the foundations of those changes or fracture lines of those changes go back a hundred years, but the last 25 years a lot has changed. We've been dominated by the digital revolution, the internet didn't exist in 1989 when *The Man in the Mirror* originally came out, and we've also seen basically the crumbling of our culture. That once dependable consensus of Judeo-Christian values has been melting away faster than a polar icecap, but when we talk about what it means to be a man, not much has changed. The human heart has not changed, human nature has not changed, Jesus Christ has not changed, and what it means to be his disciple has not changed.

What is it?

We're going to begin by talking about the rat race this morning. First of all, what is it, then we'll talk a little bit about how guys get caught up in it, and what we can do to get out and stay out of the rat race. First of all, what is it? Larry and Carol; pretty typical couple. In fact, Larry and Carol could be anyone of a number of us here this morning. They wanted the good life. When they married, they poured themselves into a career, to raising a family, and then Carol got the idea that she wanted to go back to work. She had worked in a bank before they got married to make a little extra money to furnish their honeymoon apartment. So she sacrificed two nights a week for three years in order to go through an

education, an MBA program, and get a degree. She increasingly took on this ethos that women can assert themselves, that women need to make their mark in the world. So when she announced that she was going to go back to work, Larry didn't protest, because they had been accumulating bills from buying things they didn't want with money they didn't have to impress people they didn't like. They moved into a new two story house with a swimming pool. They had a boat. He got the new car instead of going to Hawaii. He put that impish grin on his face, that little smile that made her heart flutter when they were dating, and talked her into letting him buy this new European import. So their debts and responsibilities just kept mounting up, and they became discouraged. There were bills to pay, kids to pick up from daycare, quotas to meet, and not much time to enjoy all of the possessions they had been accumulating. Carol blamed Larry for not being able to be the leader who kept it all together, but he felt like he was in a trap. He felt just as discouraged as she did! He didn't know what to do! She couldn't take it anymore, she stressed out and he was pressured. He couldn't believe it when one day he came home and there was the U-Haul trailer pulling away from the house. He couldn't believe it! Carol had moved out! A question that his daughter had asked him a few months before haunted him. Daddy, do you still love mommy? Yes, yes he still loved mommy, but now he wondered is it too late? And a lyric from a song went through his mind: like a rat in a maze, the path before me lies and the pattern never alters until the rat dies. The rat race.

The problem is for Larry, for Carol, for lots of us, is that it's normal to want a better life! It's normal to want a higher standard of living! What idiot wouldn't want to have a higher standard of living? Everybody in the world wants to have a higher standard of living! The American dream is a higher standard of living! That's normal! But when the normal occupation becomes an abnormal preoccupation, then what happens is that we as men get a disease, let's call it success sickness. Success sickness is the disease of always wanting more, and then never being happy when you get it. The inevitable questions of the rat race, is this all there is? What's it all about? They've tortured all of us from time to time. Why do I exist? What is the purpose of my life? How do I find meaning? How did I get so far in debt? What was I thinking? Why are my relationships so fractured?

We want to look at Galatians 5:7, and if you're not already there please turn there. Paul, in a section where he's talking about freedom in Christ, says to these Galatians what's the problem? How did this happen to you? He says in verse 7:

⁷You were running a good race (you were running God's race!). Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

Keep your finger there because we're going to come back, and turn to 1 Timothy 6:9. By the way, if you don't have the experience to flip around the Bible, that's fine, just listen. But from a learning theory perspective, it's always good to hear auditory and see visually both the word of God. In 1 Timothy 6:9:

⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

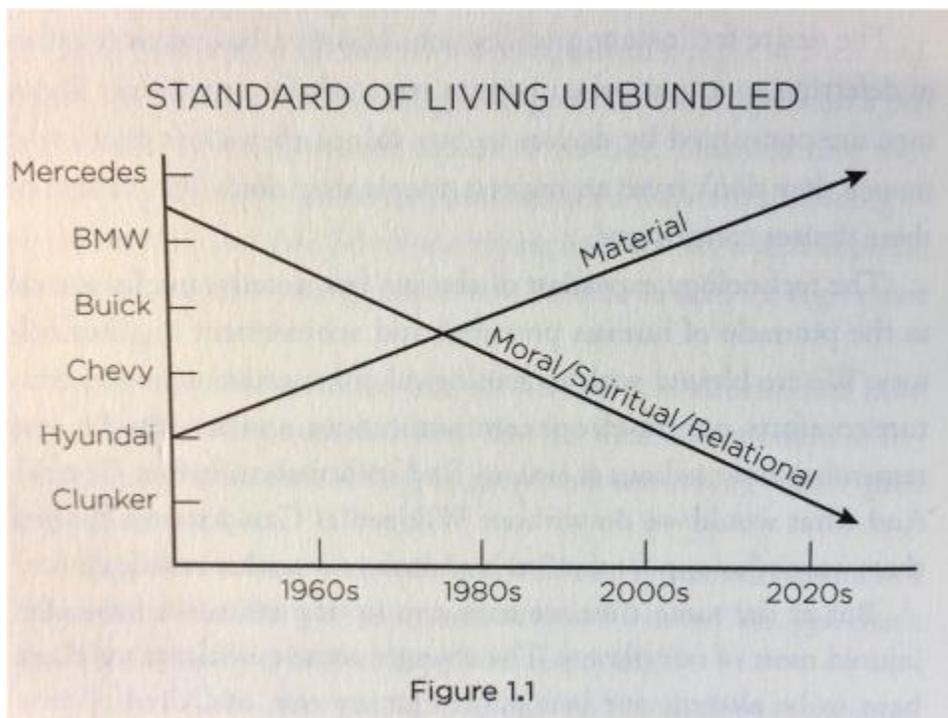
Oh my gosh! That's the theme verse for the rat race! Men want to get rich! Men who get success sickness fall into temptation! A trap! A rat trap! They fall into a rat trap, and then they plunge themselves into many harmful things. This is the man you are tempted to be. This verse and other verses like it, ones like they exchange the truth of God for a lie and the glory of God for idols, all of those verses like that. This is the man you are tempted to be, and I am tempted to be, I might add. So the Big Idea today focuses not only on the fact that we are tempted to be a certain kind of man but that God... 2

Corinthians 5:7, you are a new creation. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old man has passed away, the new man has come. You have been created to be a certain kind of man in Christ, so the Big Idea today is this: **The Big Idea: The Rat Race is the conflict between who I am created to be (2 Corinthians 5:7) and who I am tempted to be (1 Timothy 6:9 and other verses, too).** For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves, plunged themselves into many grief's, you see? That's the rat race.

Back at Galatians 5 where I asked you to keep your finger, how did it happen? How did it happen to the Galatians that they were running a good race but they had somebody cut in on them and keep them from obeying the truth. Verse 9 gives the answer. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. The yeast of the culture, the culture which has collapsed around us over the last twenty-five years. Explicit sex during prime time TV, internet pornography; this thing is off the rails! And it's easy to get lulled into complacency with this.

Five Rat Traps

What I'd like us to do is to look at the traps, at least five of them. Five rat traps. These are all out of the book. The first one is the standard of living fallacy. I was on a plane one time with a man, Mr. Silver. He was leaving Orlando, he had come here to give witness to his son's wedding in a hot air balloon, and he was sort of reminiscing at how cavalier young people have become about the hallowed institution of marriage. Then he began to reflect about how he was so much better off financially than his parents had been, and he was set, but he just had this lingering feeling that something wasn't quite right. So I pulled out a graph that I was working on at the time, and I showed it to him. This is the graph:



I told him when you take the standard of living and unbundle the different components of it, you see that we're getting different results from different components. Down here are the different years, and then the cars are to represent possible life styles. So yes, our material standard of living has gone off the

charts! It's a modern miracle! It's fantastic, it's wonderful! I mean anybody that grew up in a tract house from World War II home, you know that the average house is now many times bigger than it was! Then all the advances in biotechnology... all these things! But, at the same time, when you look at our moral/spiritual/relational standard of living, this has fallen off a cliff! So this is the first trap. You've got to be careful so you don't spring these traps. I've got these traps all around this room, just waiting to catch you guys! So this is the first one, all right? The standard of living fallacy.

The second rat trap is consumerism. Consumerism is defined as the economic theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is beneficial. You get that? This is the economic engine of our economy. All of the ethics of business are focused on a progressively greater consumption. The iPhone 6 for example. I haven't even paid off my iPhone 5! How am I going to get an iPhone 6? But it's out there, and not only an iPhone 6 but an iPhone 6 Plus! Anyway, the deal is that this is an economic trap, and you've got to be careful! Consumerism! Don't let it get you!

The third rat trap is the influence of the media. Oh my gosh! I remember so clearly in 1989 sitting and watching Peter Jennings on the NBC evening news when he announced that the censorship department at his network had been dissolved and that the other networks had also dissolved their censorship departments. I said oh my goodness! You know what? I have searched and searched and I would like to enlist your help to find this! I've searched Google, I've searched all the other engines, and I can't find anybody willing to make a reference to that night. I have spent hours trying to find what I saw. I saw it, but nobody wants to admit it! You look at the pornography and honestly, for you younger guys, my pornography would have been what is today the Victoria Secret catalogue. What young men are exposed to today! Do you know how a young 10 or 11 year old boy finds out what pornography is today? What he does? He goes to Google images. I did this. I don't recommend that you do it, because the images are so graphic that even as I'm talking about it I'm thinking about those pornographic images. The standard of living fallacy is a great trap, consumerism, the progressively greater consumption of goods as beneficial, is a big trap. The influence of the media, a big trap. If those commercials are true, then who are you and what are you? Don't get trapped!

The fourth trap is the beautiful, wrinkle free life. This next graph, figure 1.2, across the top says The Madison Avenue Lifestyle. This is promoted everywhere, the beautiful, wrinkle free life.

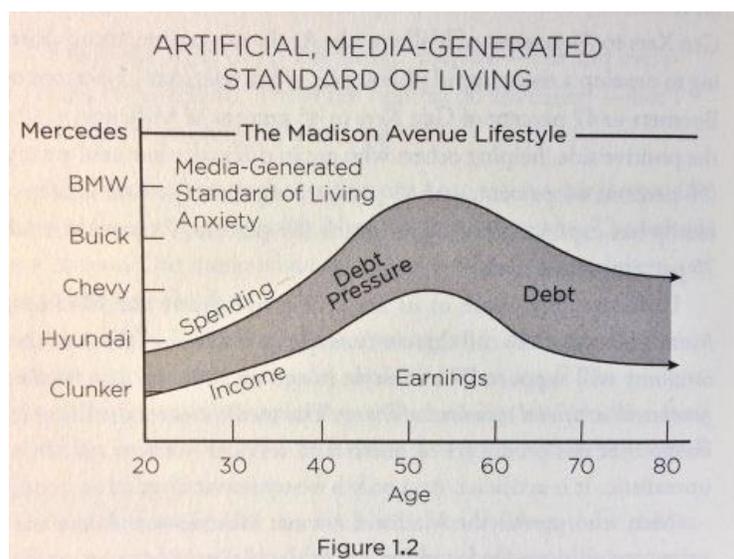


Figure 1.2

I've told this story here before, but it's worth retelling. We were doing some video taping in Columbus, OH at a studio, and it turned out that's where they photograph the Victoria Secret catalogues. Nothing going on that day, but I asked one of the producers, I said tell me how it works? He said tell you how what works? How you get the photographs that you get? Well, I understand what you're asking now. What we do is we search the world and find the most beautiful exhibits of the female of our species. Then we select a handful of them, and we know of course that they have put years and years of preparation into looking so beautiful through healthcare and diet and exercise. Then we pick a few from this handful and send them into make up for two and half hours. After two and a half hours, they go in front of a camera and we shoot a hundred and fifty photographs. Then we scan carefully through all one hundred and fifty and we pick the single very best one. Then we take that single best one and we send it to our computer enhancer, and he works on it to remove any remaining flaws. Then we publish it so that young women will think this is what they need to look like. This beautiful, wrinkle free life, beauty, brains, bucks, brawn for us. You've got this spending we all do, and none of us never has enough to spend up to the lifestyle we would like, so it creates this media generated standard of living anxiety. You see it, you see the commercials, you can't help but want some of these things, but you don't have the money, you're not earning enough, and so you have this media generated standard of living anxiety. This Madison Avenue Lifestyle, it's a trap! I've got \$20 right here in this trap. Who wants to try and come get this \$20? If you know it's a trap, you're not going to fall for it! Excuse me, I'm going to get my \$20 back before one of you guys... it's not that I don't trust you, it's just that I don't trust you!

The fifth trap, debt pressure. Debt! Oh my gosh! So the problem is that the Madison Avenue Lifestyle is way at the top there. We can't get to it, and we're only earning this much income, so the ease with which you can get debt... I just went on a new credit card strategy to try to get the 2% here and the 5% there. They'll run these little specials. I had one credit card, and now I have five, and it's not working out, so I'm going to go back. But here's the thing! I was able to get five new credit cards and \$75,000.00 worth of credit over the internet! Unbelievable! And I did them all at the same time so none of them knew I was applying to the others. You can pull this off if you want to, but the problem is you have to pay it back. I wonder why it doesn't occur to more intelligent men that it takes more energy to earn a living and service a debt than it does just to earn a living? So this debt pressure is a great big pressure. Standard of living fallacy, consumerism, the influence of the media, the pursuit of the beautiful, wrinkle free life, and debt. These are five traps that keep us from becoming the men that God created us to be when we fall for the temptation to be the man that they want us to be.

The Big Idea today is: **The Rat Race is the conflict between who I am created to be and who I am tempted to be.**

Steps to Finish the Race You Can Win

Let's look at some steps to help you finish the race that you can win. How do we get out and stay out of this rat race? Turn with me to Hebrews 12:1. There is another race.

Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses and the writer of Hebrews is referring back to the hall of heroes in chapter 11, let us throw off everything, all these five traps, everything that hinders and the sin, or everything that tempts us if you will, these five traps that tempt us to be the man that God didn't create us to be, throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

God has a race marked out for us! It's to become his disciple! Let us fix our eyes on money! Let us fix our eyes on possessions! Let us fix our eyes on the media! Let us fix our eyes on debt! Let us instead fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfect example of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Jesus, him who endured such opposition from sinful men and you will have opposition, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Then, over at 2 Timothy 4:7, yes there is another race. Run it with perseverance, and it is a race that you can win. Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, verse 7, what Jim Seibert said six months ago just before he passed away. He said this is my verse, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me. And not only to me, but also to all of us who have longed for his appearing. That's the race we want to win! That's the race we're going to win, that's the race we want to run!

How do you do this? How do you run with perseverance the race that's marked out? You need to understand the difference between who God has created you to be and the man you are tempted to be, and you're doing that! You're here, you're in this study or online. This is a powerful step to understand the difference between the man you were created to be and the man you are tempted to be, because that's where the conflict is that describes what the rat race is! So how do you do this? You do it by becoming and making disciples. Jesus has no other plan! Jesus did not come to wage war against the culture. You understand this, right? Christianity is lived inside cultures. Jesus' mission is not to wage war against the culture, his mission is to seek and to save the lost! Then, the people sought and saved improve the culture, but the mission is making disciples, becoming a disciple.

I've seen a lot of men come and go from this Bible Study over the years. Most of them have gone on to better things, and I thank God for having had the privilege of knowing them for a season. But there is a percentage of men who have gotten caught up in the rat race. Even as I scan the table leaders now, I'm thinking about guys from your tables that have left because they... well, reading on in 2 Timothy 4, verse 9, he says do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me... There have been a lot of men who have deserted. Now, I am of the personal theological persuasion that the Bible, when it says we are faithless, he will remain faithful, that God is going to snatch those people back, but only after many sorrows. The Big Idea this morning: **The Rat Race is the conflict between who I am created to be and who I am tempted to be.** Don't let this happen to you! Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest father, Lord, we thank you so much for this day, thank you so much for these men, thank you so much for the word that you've given us to guide us. Lord, I pray, I suspect that we're all walking rightly with you, but Lord we're all tempted here, every day! I am! I know! We all are! So help us just to keep this in mind as we leave this place today. We want you to receive glory for the changes that are taking place in our lives, in Jesus' name, amen!