

Why Doing What You Want Will Make You Miserable

A Special Message from Man in the Mirror Co-CEO and President, David Delk

Unedited Transcript

James 4:1-10

Good morning! I just want to mention this event that's coming up. You've got some fliers here on your tables. The next two Wednesdays we are going to be field testing a new event, Rock Solid Men, that Man in the Mirror is going to be rolling out, and we would love to have you join us from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. I know some of your schedules wouldn't allow for that, but for those whose would, we're looking for a dozen or fifteen guys that could come and join us. You have the information there, you can see how you can RSVP, we'll buy you lunch, and this will really help us. We'll get some feedback from you that will really help us shape this event, and we've had over 120,000 men across America come through our other events for men, so your input is going to be leveraged across the lives of quite a few men if you're able to make this opportunity and help us with the development of this event.

It is always a joy to be with you, and today it is a special privilege because we have ten of our Area Directors from around the country, I think it's eight states represented total. So, so if you're an Area Director, would you stand up just so the guys could see you? They're in town for training, their initial week that they go through, and we're so excited! It's an incredible week, and it's amazing to see what God is doing. More than ninety men around the country now! Can you believe that? Ninety men around the country! So if you're watching this online and you know a man in your community that might be interested in helping local churches disciple men, we would love to have them go the www.aredirectors.org website and learn more about being an Area Director.

Turn in your scriptures to the book of James, chapter 4. I've titled this with a very cheery title this morning, Why Doing What You Want Will Make You Miserable. So good morning, hope that brightens your day, and if not, wait until you read the passage of scripture we're studying today! James 4:1-10:

Submit Yourselves to God

⁴ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud

but shows favor to the humble.”

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Okay, I hope you have a good Friday! We'll see you next week! Not the cheeriest of passages, is it? Yet, I think it's so appropriate for where we stand in our world today. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you a very quick outline of what I see being taught in this passage. Then we're going to open it up and explore it a little bit, then apply it in some ways that will hopefully make a difference in our lives.

Let's look at three key items, three truths that we see in this passage. The first one in verse 3 is that in the flesh, we are radically self-centered. James is saying that that is a big problem! This is where your quarrels and fights come from, this is why you don't ever really seem to get what you want, and this is why you're unhappy, unsatisfied, and miserable, because in the flesh you are radically self-centered. Not only that, but the real tension is set up because in verse 5 it says God demands that we worship him alone. He is jealous for the spirit that he has set within us. So here you have man, who because of the fall, is relentlessly focused on himself with a God who is saying I want you to be relentlessly focused on me. You can see that there's a tension there, a problem there. So what does James say is the answer? In verse 7 he says the answer is to submit ourselves to God, which takes repentance and humility (verse 8, 9 and 10). Repentance, a changing of our mind, a turning of our direction, and humility, the recognition that we are not the measure of all things, that we are not the most important thing in the universe, and a willingness to bow our knee to Jesus Christ in recognition of who he really is. This is this passage, this process that James lays out for how we deal with this radical self-centeredness that every one of us is born with and seems so prevalent in America today.

I was looking for some images from the internet to represent this, and I found that one. I thought that's probably pretty good. When you think about the spirit of American men today, I love myself comes to mind. There's a lot of that kind of attitude, a lot of that kind of perspective that we see. It's really a crisis in America today. Everyone is so focused on my own agenda, my own desires, what I want, what I believe that I need and we orient ourselves strictly around the idea of getting what I believe I want and need so that I can be happy. Nobody wants to submit to authority, nobody wants to sacrifice for somebody else, nobody wants to serve somebody else. I understand that in the past there could have been an unhealthy submission to authority. I understand that in the history of our country, there were a lot of people who just did things because other people told them to without thinking about it or considering whether it was right or wrong, good or bad. So we have the pendulum over here where you could argue about it, but then we have the pendulum over here with this sort of blind obedience. Or if not blind obedience, just doing stuff because somebody said without any kind of heart or understanding or faith. But the pendulum has now swung back to where nobody wants to do anything that anybody tells them to do. That is where we are in America today.

I've got a young man in my life I've mentioned before. He's been involved with our family for quite a long time. He used to live in our neighborhood, came from a broken home, and would eat dinner with us quite a bit. He's now twenty six and he has hit this existential moment of angst. He's been living with a woman for seven or eight years. He realizes that there's no future in it. He doesn't have enough money for his own place, he doesn't have enough money for a car. He didn't pursue the education he probably should have, and he's over at my house in tears trying to figure out how in the world he is going to make

something of his life. Now how did he get here? He got to this point because what he saw and what he learned growing up was I do whatever I want, when I want. Why should I study? I don't like studying. Why should I finish high school? I don't want to do that. Why should I work hard at a job and do things that make my bosses believe that I can perform and should be rewarded with more responsibility? Way too much trouble. He's really living out the embodiment of the spirit of the age, and now at twenty six, he fortunately has come to the point of recognizing that this is never going to make him happy. Doing what he wants can only make him miserable. Pray for him, he does not yet have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We talk about it all the time.

So many men mistake freedom for the opportunity to do what they want rather than the ability to actually obey Jesus Christ. Let me just ask you, what are you submitting to? The scripture here, James says submit yourselves to the Lord. What are you submitting to? What do you rearrange your schedule for? What do you sacrifice for? What are you planning ahead for? These are the things you are submitting to. If you had plenty of time and money to do something, do you still pray about it? Or do you just do it because you can, because you want to. Classic cars, work, hunting, college football, your family, the internet, making money, political news, these are the types of things men are submitting to today. Even Christian men, and they have allowed them to become this incredibly dominant part of their life, without even considering how and why they might do those things out of an in-submission to Jesus Christ. They're doing them because they want to and because they believe it's going to make them happy. We're in the default mode of doing things because we want to because we are in rebellion against Jesus Christ.

Look at the scriptures, think about head strong Peter. If anyone exhibited this I think it's a good idea mindset, it was Peter in the New Testament. Yet, at the end of Jesus' ministry, we have this amazing passage in John 21 where Jesus says to Peter truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished, but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go. Now this he said signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. Think about that! Jesus said when you were younger, you did whatever you wanted to do. But a day is coming, because of your love for me, and because of your commitment to me and your submission to me, a day is coming where you are no longer going to have any control. Everything that happens to you will happen because other people are doing it to you, and guess what? That's how you're going to bring me glory. What Jesus is showing here is that submission to him is the pathway to glorifying God. You can live your life doing what the flesh wants, but the only way to truly bring glory to God is to submit to Jesus' authority in your life, moment by moment, submission to the authority of Christ. This is what we were made for.

What does this mean practically? Let's talk about this, because this sounds great, but I need to know what to do with it. Let me tell you about two ways I see this in our culture today, that I believe you ought to consider as a man and all of us ought to consider as men.

Application One: You need to be under the authority of a local church.

So many men today have this casual connection to the church. I read a lot about the church, we focus on the church at Man in the Mirror, I read a lot about what pastors are thinking, surveys, all kinds of things. I've been reading recently that in a lot of churches, they consider if a person comes two or three Sundays, two or three weekends a month, that that's a committed member of their church. That's where we've gotten to as a culture. We've got folks that float into a church because they like the worship, but I'm too busy to really get committed. I need to heal, I need some healing, I need some rest

time. I've been working too hard the last few years, I just need to go to a church and sit. You heard any of these kinds of things? Am I stepping on any toes yet? But what does the scriptures say about the church? The scriptures say that the church is incredibly important! We're going to see that in a second, but imagine this. Imagine that you worked for a company. Imagine your workplace. What if most people just came to work three or four days a week. They feel tired in the morning, or maybe it's a pretty day. We've been having all these thunderstorms and it's going to be kind of a cool day with no rain, so they just don't show up at work and go to the beach. Then at the office, people just do whatever they want to do. The boss tells them hey we need to start this new project, and they say I don't really like this project so they just start doing their own project on the side. It's a nice project, it's connecting with some people in the community or whatever. But what kind of company would you end up with? One that went out of business, right? It would be a disaster! Yet that's the kind of way that most men, even Christian men relate to their local church. I go and show up pretty much when I want to. If I get a better offer, or something else is going on, hey that's fine. No big deal. I know they want us to do this kind of group or I know they want us to join this class, but I really feel called to this other ministry, this is the passion God has given me. I'm going to do that. What is that? That's people doing what they want to do, living under their own authority, rather than submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of hell would not stand against it.

Let me read a couple passages of scripture to you. You can write down the references if you want. Ephesians 1:18 and following. I'm going to read to you from the letters of Paul and Hebrews. Listen to where Paul locates a church in this and think about that compared to your job or political interests or whatever. Having the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. He's pretty much talking about the whole deal here, isn't he? That's about as important as anything could be and look what he goes on to say. And he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all and all. The church is a big deal! I understand he's talking about the church universal, the body of Christ, but the church universal is expressed biblically in the local church. There is no biblical basis for saying I'm part of what Jesus is doing, but I am just out here wondering around. No, the scriptures say get in a church. Be in a church. Colossians 1:15 he is the image of the invisible God, the first born among all creation. For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. Again, pretty much a grand sweeping presentation of the whole point of the whole deal, right? He is before all things, and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body, the church. So you can see that in the scriptures, if you go all the way to Revelation with the idea of gathering this people of God that are worshipping before the throne and worshipping the lamb that the church is the point. The whole point is God is calling out people to worship him. He is creating a people who love him, who worship him, who fulfill the first commandment, who fulfill the great commandment, not in their own strength but because of what Jesus Christ has done, because of how Christ has forgiven us and transformed us from the inside out. But the whole point is that he is gathering a people over whom he can be Lord and God. These are going to be my people he says. That's the church! It's a big deal!

Hebrews 13:7 remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace,

not by foods which have not benefitted those devoted to them. Verse 17 obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. So the church is a big deal! Obey your leaders, submit to your leaders. We need to understand that we are supposed to make the church a high priority in our life. It's a high priority of Christ, it's the bride of Christ and we are supposed to be a significant part of that in submitting to it. It's not a matter of whether it's convenient, it's not a matter of whether the music is too loud or the sermon is too long. I sometimes tell people that I love it when my church makes the decision I disagree with. That's a little hyperbole, at the moment I don't love it, but I make myself love it. You know why? Because when I wake up in the morning, I pretty much decide what I'm going to eat for breakfast, I decide what kind of clothes I'm going to wear, I decide when I'm going to drive to work, I decide what I'm going to listen to on the radio. At work, I've got projects and stuff that needs to get done, but I pretty much decide the order they are going to get done. I can have whatever I want for lunch. When I go home, I drive home any way that I want, listen to whatever I want, eat what I want for dinner, do whatever I want after dinner, watch whatever I want, and on and on. Me, me, me, I, I, I. And when my church does something I disagree with, it's good for me to remember that I don't always have to have my way. You know what? I'm wrong sometimes! They could be right! That'd be a real shock, wouldn't it? So I say I love it when my church does something I disagree with. It's great for me to remember that I am a man under authority, that I am not committed to the church because they always do what I want, I'm committed to the church because I believe that God has called me there as a part of the body of Christ to do my part in submission the leaders that he has placed in authority over us. We need to ask the question does our commitment to our church demonstrate true submission to the authority of Christ?

A second application all of us need to consider.

Application Two: You need to be accountable to other men.

We need to be accountable to other men. We have such a lone ranger mentality. Many of us are private, we want to make our own decisions, we play our cards close to our chest and not let anybody in. But the reality of course is that isolation brings danger, because that's when the mistakes are made. We need to allow people into our lives that can speak the truth to us that can help us understand what we are really facing and what the choices really are.

I had another young man that came over the other night and didn't have anyone to talk to. I'm glad he texted me, and he came over to the house and we talked for a while. He is going through a relationship situation that frankly is so obvious what he needs to do. But he can't see it and he has nobody in his life that he has allowed to say what in the world are you doing? Because he has insulated himself from allowing anybody to have that kind of access where they could really speak the truth to him. This is a very simple thing to determine, whether or not you have this in your life, and that is if you think over the last few months, or year and no man has challenged you on something significant in your life. If that's the case, you don't have men that you are accountable to. My guess is that you have probably had a wrong perspective or idea or choice in the last few months or what have you that somebody could have really helped you with. We need to find some guys, we need men in our lives that we allow to speak into the most important areas, to help us continue in that submission to Jesus Christ.

You see, the problem is we always end up submitting to what we worship. These things are idols, things we allow to attach themselves to our lives, these interests that come to dominate our thoughts and

plans, our money and schedules. These are idols, and when we do that, and the Big Idea for today, is that: **We are all shaped by what we submit to.**

I want to give you an example. I need a competitive, strong, volunteer. A volunteer willing to just really set an example for us here. Who's willing to step up to the plate? Come on up here! What you're going to do is you're going to help me out. I am going to embarrass you, but it won't be bad. So what we're going to do is we're going to try and set a record here. This is a little suction cup, and what we're going to do is you're going to put this right in the middle of your forehead and slap it down. We're going to see if you can keep that on for one minute. Ready? Give it a lick there. You've got to do it good, you came up here to do a good job. I'm not going to do anything to it! Let's see if we can do it for a minute.

Actually you better take it off right now. I'm going to tell you what happened in college. I don't have the heart to do this to him, but in college we had a guy in our dorm, an apartment on campus. There was six of us and one of these guys had a little suction cup and he would stick it on different things. He stuck it on his chest or somewhere and he noticed after about twenty seconds or so he had this round hickey. He's like that's crazy! So everyone's looking at his chest going haha! Then this football player comes in, this big gregarious guy, and says hey everybody how you doing! We say you're just in time, we're having a contest. They guy says really? What is it? We're taking this thing, licking it, and putting it on our foreheads and seeing how long we can keep it on our foreheads. The guy says well how long is the longest time so far? The other guy says about a minute and ten seconds. The rest of can hardly believe he's doing this. So the football player grabs the suction cup and says I can beat that! He licks it up real good, takes it and slaps that sucker on there and holds it down. We're all looking at our watches, some of us our turning around about to die laughing. He can't figure out what's going on, why some of us are coughing and leaving the room. A minute thirty goes by, a minute forty five, two minutes goes by. Finally he's like I don't think this thing is going to come off. Everyone just starts dying laughing! He takes it off and he has the hugest purple hickey in the middle of his forehead! So I saved you right now! Thank you very much!

I was actually going to do this myself last night, but thought you know I don't think I love these guys that much. So I mocked it up for you! There's a simulated purple hickey on the forehead. And the best part of this story was that the biggest formal dance of the year was the next night and felt so stupid that he told his girlfriend he got hit with an elbow playing basketball. I don't know how somebody had a perfectly round elbow! But the reality is we are all shaped by what we submit to, and when we submit ourselves to the things of this world, it's like sticking a big suction cup to our forehead. Those things mark us, those things shape us. We may not be able to see it, but the people around us, when they spend time with us, they can tell the difference between a man who is radically submitted to Christ. He exudes Christ, he sweats Christ, versus a man who is actually submitted to golf. He loves Jesus, but he's submitted to golf. He loves Jesus, but he's submitted to his family. He loves Jesus, but he's really submitted to making money. They can tell the difference because we are marked by what we submit to. Every one of us is going to be shaped by what we submit to, the only question is what is that we are going to be shaped by? To become like Christ, we have to live moment by moment under the authority of Jesus. It's not that we can't enjoy hunting or nascar or college football or golf or gardening or families. It's just that we need to do them for the greater goal of bringing glory to Christ. Not to satisfy those desires of the flesh, but to bring glory to Christ. As Pat says a servant doesn't ask what do I want to do, a servant asks what does the master need? The reality is every one of us is going to submit. Every person who has ever lived is going to submit, the only question is are we going to submit now or later? Philippians 2 every knee will bow before Jesus Christ. It's going to happen! The only question is will it be now or later.

John Piper in a book called *Don't Waste Your Life* tells a story. He says I will tell you what a tragedy is. Consider a story from the February 1988 edition of *The Readers' Digest* which tells of a couple who took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast. Now they live in Florida where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, playing softball and collecting shells. At first when I read it, I thought it might be a joke, a spoof on the American dream, but it wasn't. Tragically, this was the dream, come to the end of your life, your one and only precious God given life and let the last great work of your life before you give an account to your creator be this. Playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great Day of Judgment. Look, Lord, see my shells? That is a tragedy. But you know what? You don't have to wait until the end of your life to waste it. What are you submitting to today? We all need to come back to the cross. We need to do what James says, we need to submit ourselves to God, which takes repentance and humility. True repentance and humility. Jesus is worth so much more than the things that are distracting your heart. Jesus is the one who can help us find everything we've ever wanted. This is the radical paradox of the Gospel; when we do what we want, we end up miserable. But when we submit ourselves to Christ, we find a joy that can never be taken away. We lose our lives to find them again. Submit to God today, repent from anything that is pulling you away and distracting you. Submit to him, for his glory, today. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank you so much for your word and we thank you for the clarity with which it speaks to our culture. We do see today the desire that almost all of us have to make our own decisions, to what we think is right, to do what we want to do, and an unwillingness to truly submit. So I pray that you would make us men who would submit to you first of all, but also to the authorities that you have placed above us. That we would be faithful men, that we would enjoy the good gifts that you have given us, enjoy all these incredible things that we get to do and participate in as a man in America today. But that we would enjoy them for your glory, and we would be men who are shaped by submitting to you. That we would not be walking around with some kind of purple hickey on our forehead from any of these distractions, but we would be men who have been shaped by the cross, shaped by the authority of you, Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you would do that in our hearts. I pray that it would be seen in the way that we love our church, I pray that it would be seen in the way that we allow men to speak into our lives, and I pray that you would make us men who would make a difference because we have become like you as we lay down our lives for your sake and for your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen!