

I Have a Lot of Destructive Behaviors That Drag Me Down

Romans 7:15-25, 2 Corinthians 7:8-10, Exodus 34:7-8

Good morning, men. We are doing the series called Man Alive, and we are looking at seven primal needs we all have as men. They are characterized by seven symptoms that I've experienced. I'm sure at one time or another you have too.

1. I feel like I am in this all alone.
2. I don't feel like God cares about me personally.
3. I don't feel like my life has a purpose and it feels random.
4. I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me back down.
5. My soul feels dry.
6. My most important relationships are not healthy.
7. I don't really feel like I am doing anything that will make a difference and leave the world a better place.

We began addressing these needs and we talked first about the primal need not to feel like you are in it alone. Then we talked about the need that God really knows, loves and cares for me personally. We talked about the gospel for those who have not yet believed, and the gospel for those who are already believers.

We ended up talking last week about the idea that God has a BHAG for our lives — a big holy audacious goal. And that goal is for us to become disciples. The highest honor to which a man can aspire is to become a disciple of Jesus.

This week we will look at the symptom that is expressed this way: I have a lot of destructive behaviors that drag me down. We will address the negative things that hold us back from becoming the disciple God BHAG'd for us. The last three weeks we will look at the positives — the things we do want to do to become a disciple, the highest honor to which a man can aspire. The title of the message this week is, "I Have a Lot of Destructive Behaviors That Drag Me Down."

REPETITIVE SINS: "I GUESS THAT'S JUST HOW I AM"

One time a few years ago, when Patsy was asking me what I was going to be talking about [the next] morning, I very excitedly said, "I'm so excited. I'm preparing for the subject of repetitive sins." She said, "I guess you'll be speaking without notes then." Ouch. So the first little thing here to talk about is repetitive sins. Most of us understand what it is to be gripped by a pattern of destructive behaviors. It's something you might be in the grips of right now, or possibly it's something you overcame in the past and you remember just how difficult it was to come to grips with that.

The Apostle Paul described his own struggle with destructive behaviors. Let's take a look at it in Romans 7:15. Just remember: this is the man who has given us most of the New Testament outside of the Gospels and perhaps the greatest theologian who has ever lived. He says, "I do not understand what I

do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do.” And then drop down to Verse 19. “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.” What is Paul talking about here? He is talking about a problem of destructive behavior. You may have thought your pattern of destructive behavior was unique to you. No, look to your left, look to your right, and I guarantee you are in 100 % company of men who also have experienced destructive behaviors.

Look at Verse 22. “For in my inner being, I delight in God’s law.” Don’t you feel that way? You want to do what’s right. You delight in reading the Bible, you come to the Bible study, you go to church, you love God’s law. You delight in the idea of being the man that God created you to be — the man you want to be. Verse 23 says, “But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the sin that works within my members.”

Antonio is on his second marriage. He’s five years into his second marriage and he says, “I realized that I don’t have a clue about how to do intimacy, and about how to have a right relationship with my wife. I’m constantly trying to control her, to exert my will, to get her to do what I want to do, and I just see her shutting down emotionally. I hate myself for doing this but I just keep on doing it.”

Hector keeps telling lies at work and sabotaging his career.

William hates himself for doing it but he keeps feeling drawn back to look at pornography and he feels ashamed and dirty and guilty and he keeps being drawn back to that destructive behavior.

The problem is repeating these destructive behaviors over and over again. The result is that after we do them for a long time, it is hard for us not to conclude, “Well, I guess that’s just how I am.” The problem with that is it’s hard to believe that we can break free. We want to break free and we’d like to, wouldn’t we? Could life get that good? That is what we want to talk about today.

I’ve shared my testimony and personal faith story so many times here. But to repeat myself, the growing up experience for me does not have a lot of fond memories. Basically, I can’t remember being told that I was loved. I don’t remember ever my parents saying they were proud of me. I don’t remember being touched. I don’t remember being comforted. With the help of a counselor I figured out that I made some kind of a vow that if you don’t need me then I am not going to need you either. I cut my parents off. I think I know when I did it. I could be wrong about this. When I was about 10 years old, I was playing little league and I always rode my bike to the games by myself. My mother and father said they planned on coming to the game. I remember begging them not to come — so much so that I ended up in tears and finally I convinced them not to come. Then I threaded my glove over my handle bars and pedaled to the baseball park, sobbing the whole way because they weren’t coming.

A little sidebar, men with children: When your children tell you they don’t want you at their events, they’re lying. They’re lying. Force yourself upon your children. Be at their events.

I basically ended up shutting my parents out. As a result, as an adult I had a hard time accepting that people would really care about me. By God’s grace, I am way past that but I have to be honest that even now, every now and then I wonder, *Does this person really, really care?* And I have these problems

expecting that relationship to last. And you get a lot of positive reinforcement for that, too – not expecting it to last because there are a lot of people who are jerks, right?

I wonder if you can feel what I am saying this morning. Do you feel it? There's a way out of this and it is the biblical way out of this – out of these destructive behaviors. The biblical way out of this is called repentance. We are going to probe repentance but first I want to give you the big idea for the day.

Repentance is a commitment to see ourselves as we really are, to then own it, and then allow the godly sorrow that we feel to inspire deep change.

Of course, this is always under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. You'll get a chance to write more of this down the next time you see it. I want to talk about having a lifestyle of repentance. Repentance is the starting point for breaking out of the destructive behaviors and it is really about what you do next. What you do next is what really counts. What I would most like to do is just read you my book because I can't say it any better than this. Clearly, what is happening to us is not always the result of our parents, what happened to us or what happened to our parents; it's not always this intergenerational sin, but it shows up often enough that it is a troubling pattern. That is why I want to give it a closer look.

Here is how I would describe this primal need. I'm going to read it. Men have a primal need to break free from the destructive behaviors that keep dragging them down. They are baffled that they can't break free and it's embarrassing. They desperately want to experience freedom from their bondage from their sins. They do their best to manage these behaviors but what they really want is for the damage to stop, but they feel weak and stuck. Unfortunately, millions of us just don't know where to turn. I know you know what I mean. I know that you know what I mean. These negative behaviors seem to hold this mysterious power over us, but I've got good news. That powerful desire you have to escape is put in you by God Himself, and with His help you can escape from these destructive behaviors. Now, let's push the pause button now.

Because of this, "Well, I guess that's just how I am," there are probably some of us listening now who have already checked out, because you say, "Well I've heard this before, I've tried this before and it just doesn't work for me." I want to ask you, would you be willing to suspend that disbelief this morning and see if God might have a fresh Word for you? What is the pattern of destructive behavior that you struggle with? Maybe it's lust, maybe it's some kind of a sexual thing, maybe it's pornography, maybe it is that you just struggle with being a proud person.

You struggle maybe over and over again; you try to control your wife, your children, and you can just see them shutting down; or maybe your destructive behavior is that you have an angry spirit. Don't tick me off! Angry spirit. I used to walk around with this volcano of anger inside of me but it was undifferentiated. I had no idea why I was angry. I was mad about everything and had no understanding why – kind of like a perpetual inner rage. The thing is I would control it during my work hours, because the penalty for having anger in the workplace is you don't get what you want. I would store it all up and bring it home. I didn't bring it home and start out that way but tiny little things would trigger me and I'd turn into this angry person, this grumpy pouty kind of person. That is a destructive behavior - a pattern. Maybe that's your pattern. What is your pattern?

A LIFESTYLE OF REPENTANCE

You can develop a lifestyle of repentance that will either immediately, or more likely over time, allow you by God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome that destructive behavior that keeps dragging you back down. The starting point for everything here is the spirit of repentance.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 7:8. Paul had written a very strong letter of rebuke to the church in Corinth and that letter is called 1 Corinthians. Then later, he wrote them a follow-up letter, which was 2 Corinthians. In Verse 8 he talks about this concept of repentance. He says, "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter (his previous letter of rebuke), I do not regret it. Though I did regret it I see that my letter hurt you but only for a little while. Yet now I am happy. Not because you are made sorry but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended."

God intends you to become sorrowful. Whatever destructive behaviors keep dragging you down, God intends for you to feel sorrowful for those things. Today, and maybe through the weekend, we'll see what happens. God intends for you to feel sorrow about those things. You were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. But worldly sorrow brings death. Again, the big idea today is this: **repentance is a commitment to see ourselves as we really are, to own it, and then let the godly sorrow that we feel inspire deep change.**

Just as Paul explained here in 2 Corinthians, repentance is at the heart of the gospel; it's the foundation. Repentance is the foundation of discipleship and personal transformation. In fact, I will go so far as to say it is hard for me to picture a man ever, ever getting discipleship right—ever leading a powerful life transformed by Jesus—unless he figures out how to get repentance right.

Martin Luther thought it was so important that when he tacked his 95 theses to the church door, the very first one was that when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said repent, he meant he intended that all of a Christian's life would be repentance – a lifestyle of repentance. That's how Luther interprets and that's how most people, scholars, theologians today interpret repentance; it is not a one-time thing. It is something we do all the time. Let me give you a few examples.

I have been trying to perfect for a long time a lifestyle of repentance. I have not. But I am active at it and I'm getting better and better each passing year. Where I am today is that I allow my moods to trigger a lifestyle—or a spirit—of repentance. You've heard me say here a couple of weeks ago that research shows that most men are so out of touch with emotions, 80 % can't identify them.

When you meet people that you know day-to-day, some people bring you a great amount of joy – you feel a squirt of adrenaline. [With] other people, you have a little knock on them. If you are a negative person, you have a knock on everybody. When you have a knock on somebody, you are sinning against that person. That person is made in the image of God. All that means is that you are jealous or envious of them, or you think you are superior to them; it's either pride, jealousy — something's wrong. If you have a knock on somebody, anybody, there is something wrong with you....Now, there may be something wrong with them, too.

When I become aware that I'm having a negative thought toward somebody—usually the closer you are to someone, the likelier it is to happen—I just stop and repent of that. Here is what I do. I say, “Lord, my wife right now irritates me more than any person I've known in the whole world. I can't believe I married this woman. This is the worst decision I made in my life.” I've been married for 38 years. But I still think that every 2 to 3 weeks. But repentance works best as a daily exercise in self-awareness. A lot of men in particular have these thoughts but are not aware that they are having them. It is an exercise of self-awareness. When you are aware of these thoughts, realize you are not supposed to have these thoughts. “So Father, I repent about feeling this way about my wife right now.” Simply by faith, receive his forgiveness and move on.

I've been having some sleep trouble for the last couple of weeks, so I was up for a couple of hours last night. I was sitting at my desk working on the message at 2 a.m., and I experienced jealousy toward somebody who also writes books – who has had a better career than me writing books. I love this guy and I couldn't care less that he has a better career than me. I am completely happy with who I am. I don't want to be anybody else. I don't want to live any longer than I've already lived and I don't want to go back and live any more. I'm really happy. And you can be, too.

Because of the flesh and the world, you can still have these destructive behaviors that keep coming back. I have these thoughts about people on a regular basis. I don't do what I want to do; I do what I don't want to do, this evil I keep on doing. The idea behind a lifestyle of repentance is that it is like cutting a piece of string in half. No matter how much you cut away, half of the string is always left. You will always have this. But through a lifestyle of repentance, you can get victory over these destructive behaviors so you are not physically, actually doing them.

I don't blow up – well, let me back up. I don't routinely blow up like I used to. Last night, we were talking about figuring out how much reimbursement we get for a deductible. I just had an MRI. I had some ringing in my ears and it looked like I had to pay for the whole thing. We have some kind of a reimbursement policy. I haven't looked at insurance papers in decades. I was trying to explain to my wife why she was making a mistake and that didn't go too well, especially since I was wrong. I don't routinely blow up anymore. Through a lifestyle of repentance, I've been cutting that piece of string in half, so the majority of the time, through self-awareness, I become aware right away that my mood is becoming dark. And I say, “Father, please forgive me for that,” and then it goes away. That's what a lifestyle of repentance looks like. **The big idea: repentance is a commitment to see ourselves as we really are, and increasingly so through self-awareness, to own it, to not deny that you feel that way, and then to allow the godly sorrow we feel to inspire this deep change.**

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Let's talk a little bit about breaking the cycle. What do you do? What do you do to get started? Nobody can tell you to just get over it. If that would work, it would have worked by now, right? What I've done is prepared a tool for you this morning on your tables. It is called “The Breaking the Cycle” worksheet. This is not for you to do in your groups this morning. This is for you to do on your own when you have at least an hour – maybe on Saturday morning or this evening. This worksheet is proven to be very

effective in helping men work through their destructive behaviors. First is to understand what the repetitive and destructive behaviors you have are. Second is to get out of denial and to own it. You can share with your group if you'd like to. And third, to grieve what could have been. One of the important pieces of getting by something is just to grieve. Okay, I'm not going to be a rock star. I'm not going to be the number-one-lawyer in town. I'm not going to be *whatever*. My kids are not going to make me proud. My wife is not going to love me the way I want her to love me. Just grieve what could have been. Forgive those who have sinned against you and repent of the ways you sinned against others. There are some guides there, and then ask the Holy Spirit to help you and transform you. Be patient. Now it's your turn, and I want to exhort you, to encourage you, to challenge you, to do this worksheet and get on top of your destructive behaviors.

I asked of you who were checking out, if you would suspend your disbelief. I'd like you to check back in and I'd like to ask you this. Would you be willing—even if you think that's just the way you are and you have a hard time believing that you could change—would you be willing to go through this worksheet and see if God might meet you in a new and fresh way? Would you be willing to do that? Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our dearest Father, Lord. Some of us have been set free from destructive behaviors and are living in a lifestyle of repentance, but there are others of us, Lord, who have things that we are so ashamed of and embarrassed of, that we don't want to talk about them. We want to deny that they are even there, but Lord, we know that these things are real. Lord, we come to You and we'd like this to be a turning point in our lives. We really do want to meet this primal need to be free from the destructive behaviors that keep dragging us back down. Father, I pray that You would, in each of our minds, free us up to the possibility that Your Word is true and that You will do what You said You will do. I ask this in Jesus' name on behalf of my brothers. Amen.