

Introduction: Serve Medford... I believe God is going to do a BIG work through us this week. We should pray for it, work toward it, and expect it! James 4. Page 1013

Usefulness. We live in a “get things done” world. Sure we want things to look nice, but at the end of the day, we want products, people and plans that produce. Boston is a “get things done” city. People come here from all over the world to develop their knowledge and skills in order to be used in their professional fields. We value that which is useful and fulfills it’s reason for existence.

No one picks up the remote and says: “I hope that does not work this time.” Or uses the toaster for breakfast and says: “I hope my bread burns this time.”

We value that which is effective and useful, primarily because God has designed us to desire that which flourishes and fulfills the purpose for which it was created. In fact, this is, I believe part of what it means to be made in the image of God.

As we think about being useful according to our original design, the story God has given us in the Bible reveals this is true for humanity as well. God made us to live lives that are useful to him... Our lives were made for God and his glory.

So my question for you is this: is your life producing the results that God intends for you?

Jonathan Edwards, who some call America’s greatest theologian, penned a series of seventy Resolutions, most before he was twenty years old. Most of them would probably sound radical to us. I think they would sound normal to Jesus. Here’s **Resolution 43**, written at the age of 19. **“Resolved, never henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God’s.”**

This morning I want us to consider what a life looks like that is given. . .

**“All for Him”
James 4:7-12**

Here’s our problem. Far too many people go through life guilty of one of two great crimes:

#1) We fail to believe God desires to use us. “God may use other people, but not me. Why would he want to use me?” Listen: God did not send his Son to die for you and rise from the dead, so that we would chill in a state of uselessness the rest of our lives.

#2) We fail to depend on God’s grace to fulfill our kingdom potential. Listen: God is not limiting us. We limit ourselves.

T: What about you? Do you realize how greatly God desires to you? Do you desire to be used for him? I believe James shows us how we can be used greatly by God. He says . . .

The Point: Commit your entire life to God in humble devotion and watch what he will do!

James 4 is a call to repentance. You'll remember from the last few weeks that James has showed us how: "Public problems have private causes" (Motyer). In other words, sinful speech, unwise living, selfish ambition, jealousy, conflict all come out of our lives because of the sinful desires within us.

James wants his people to return to God so much that he straight up tells them that to forsake God's ways and become a friend of the world is to commit spiritual adultery and live as an enemy of God. But those first five words of verse 5: "But he gives more grace." (have you memorized those yet?) . . . Those set the stage for his call to repentance. This is the good news! God desires to pour out his grace on you if you will return to him. In rapid-fire succession, James lays down 10, count em' 10 imperatives, revealing what true repentance looks like in verses 7-10!

Read 7-10.

I. Submit your life to God completely (4:7-10).

What does it mean to submit to God?

- Submission is living under the rightful authority of God's wisdom and will for our lives.
- It involves coming to God and saying: "God *you* know best, not me, so I will follow *your* ways, not mine." Simple as that.

- But this takes humility. Don't miss the "therefore" in verse 7. James just said what?
- Look back at v 6: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- Some of you may be thinking: "Oh, man good news for me: I'm humble. Man, don't you know me. I'm the lowest of the low. I can't even see you up there because I'm so low all the way down here." If you are thinking that, you are probably wrong, quite proud, and not very humble ☺ . . . But, we'll be nice and give you the benefit of the doubt. . .
- If you think you're humble here this morning, my response to you would be "We'll see. Time will tell. We will know by the way you live your life."
- If you consistently do your own thing, disregard for God's desires for your life, your humility is a figment of your imagination.
- BUT, if you strive to be a doer of the Word, a pattern of humble devotion to God will be uncovered from your life.

- The central confession of the Christian life proclaims: "Jesus is Lord." That means he runs everything. We follow him in everything.
- He expects and deserves an All Day. (Point to them) Every Day commitment from us.
- Apol: Now I know some non-Christians here this morning may feel like the idea of allowing God to call the shots in our lives sounds totally restrictive and cuts against our cultural values of self-sufficiency and autonomy, but let me say two things to that:
- One: It is a bit hypocritical for us to quickly resist God's authority over our lives when we so readily welcome the wisdom and experience of personal trainers at the gym, professors in school, experienced supervisors at work, geniuses at the Apple Store, you get the point and gladly submit to their counsel and authority.
- Not very smart, ok!?
- But #2: I have made a surprising discovery: the more I submit to God and his will for my life, the more I discover true freedom and true flourishing.

T: So how? How do we submit to God in all things? James gives us 3 ways in verses 8-9.

1) Resist the Devil

- Who is the devil? The Devil is a spiritual being who leads all demonic forces, opposes God, and seeks to destroy God's people.
- So James instructs us to "resist" him. How?

Know his schemes. Some people fail to even consider the devil's existence. He likes that because he works through lies and deception. He allures us by making wicked things look good and empty things look satisfying. He is out to disrupt our fellowship with God and render us useless in God's kingdom. That's why, #

Arm yourselves. Understand life is a constant spiritual battle. Put on the armor of God that Paul lays out in Ephesians 6. To experience peace with God, we must be at war with Satan.

Go on the Offensive. I love how Paul commends his ministry in 2 Corinthians: "**But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities . . . by purity, knowledge . . . truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left**" (2 Corinthians 6:4-7)

Strengthened by the grace and Spirit of God, initiate the battle. (Mt. 16:18). The church does not cower back in fear but marches forward on the attack. Go dunk on somebody this week!

- Resisting the devil is a form of submitting to God, and when we resist him, he flees.

T: But then James says, "That's not enough, we must also

2) Draw Near to God

- Do you see the clear contrast? Resist the devil, BUT draw near to God. Don't believe Satan's lies; believe God's truth.
- It is not enough to say "No!" to temptation without saying, "Yes!" to godliness.

Consider this from two angles:

- **Drawing near to God includes our devotional pursuit of him.**
 - Do you regularly go to God in *prayer*, not out of routine or desperation, but because you love him?
 - Do you regularly seek God in his *Word*? Do you live on it as though it were your spiritual bread? It is.
 - Do you delight to come to *worship* God with others? You might say, "Well, I just don't feel anything. I don't like that song. That sermon was stale." Here's the deal: if you are not worshiping God Monday-Saturday, the music, the preaching, the people will not be the issue; it will be your self-centered, stale heart.
 - Draw near to him through these rhythms of grace, but that's not all.
- **Drawing near to God includes our devotional living for him.**
 - Out of our time pursuing him, comes our living for him. Loving people, seeking peace, showing mercy, persevering under trial, sharing his Word: these are all ways we draw near to God.
- And don't miss this: As we draw near to him, he promises to draw near to us, which should only make us want to draw closer and closer to him!
- Can you say with the Psalmist: "**But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;**" (Psalm 73:28a)?

T: Verse 8 continues to illuminate what giving our lives to God looks like. James says in strong terms

3) Seek Comprehensive Holiness

V 8: Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- “Cleanse your hands” refers to what people can see: our actions and sinful deeds.
- “Purify your hearts” refers to what only God can see: our thoughts, desires, motives, and affections.
- I hope you have learned it is possible to do the right thing in the wrong way. God wants right actions from a pure heart. Do you remember these two words from last week: **“For who?”** When you are out serving, giving of your time, even pursuing God, ask this question of everything: For who? Who did you do that for? It’s all for him.
- Anything less is to be “double-minded,” vacillating between devotion to God and friendship with the world.

James continues to press for true repentance by saying: *“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”*

- When we see how holy God is and how sinful we are in comparison to his holiness, we should have such an internal feeling of wretchedness that it manifests itself externally (at times) in “mourning and weeping” before God.
- When is the last time you shed a tear over your sin? Is there any sin in your life over which you need godly sorrow and godly mourning? Go get alone with God and seek his transformation.
- Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)**
- These words from James show us there is no such thing as casual Christianity.

T: Verse 10 brings us to the encouraging result of submitting our lives to God.

- *[Here is one of the paradoxes of our faith: I love how one scholar said it, “The Lord sets the downward path before us because there is no other way up.” – Motyer]*
- Lose your life to save it. Be last to be first. Give yourself away and gain it all. Humble yourself and be exalted in the eyes of God. Welcome to upside-down Kingdom of Christ.

II. Submit your life to God by loving your neighbor with your words (4:11-12).

Read 11-12

- James continues to address how we use our tongue. What does he mean when he says, “Do not speak evil against one another”?
- He may be referring to slandering or criticizing. He could also be talking about something as strong as condemning others by standing over them in judgment.
- Clearly, some form of verbal attack against a brother or sister in Christ is in view.
- When we speak evil against our neighbor, we arrogantly elevate ourselves in order to bring them down, but this is not how family should act. Families must be characterized by love.
- Some of you are thinking you titled this sermon “All for him” but what does how we talk about others have to do with God? EVERYTHING!
- Here is why this is such a big deal: If we speak against our neighbor with arrogance, we simultaneously commit two evils:

1) We Fail to Love our Neighbor.

- James is very concerned with how we love our neighbor. In 2:8, he calls “loving our neighbor as ourselves,” “the royal law.”
- When we use our words to tear down, we disregard God’s law of love and functionally stand over it in judgment as if we know best.
- J. A. Motyer points out that this usually happens, not in extreme cases, but in fault-finding and criticizing in the grayer areas of life. I don’t like how they ____ (spend \$, parent their kids, dress; they are just trying to be cool).
- James says, “Stop judging with arrogant self-righteousness and start loving.” Not only that...

2) Subtly Take the Place of God

- I cannot say it any more clear than James in verse 12: “*There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.*”
- God alone is qualified to judge. He alone knows the thoughts and motives that accompany our actions. He alone judges justly.
- We all will be judged at the proper time, when we stand before God. It is not our job to do the work he has reserved for himself.
- That’s why James ends verse 12, if I can paraphrase, by saying: “Who do you think you are!?”
- The answer at this point should be obvious: we are humble servants who exist to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Conclusion: So James, with a flurry of strong exhortations, called his people to return to God by giving everything to him, and God is calling us to do the same.

- As we stand on the edge of our Serve Medford week, I want to close by showing how giving God our all in humble devotion is absolutely essential for joining his mission in the world. There is an inextricable link between our:
- **Devotion & Deeds:** Paul wrote to Timothy about this connection in 2 Timothy 2: “**Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable [devotion!], he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work [deeds!].**” (2 Timothy 2:20-21)
- But that is not all. Not only do we want to display the gospel through our service around Medford, but we also want to declare the gospel to many that we come in contact with this week.
- **Devotion & Declaration:** “**But as for me, the nearness of God is my good [devotion!]; I have made the Lord God my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works [declaration!].**” (Psalm 73:28, NASB)
- This is our aim this week and every week: display the gospel through our works; declare the gospel through our words. Devotion to God is the foundation for both.

Today, would you: “Commit your entire life to God in humble devotion?” When you do, it will be awesome to watch him work through you for his glory.

Let’s pray. [Devotion >> Praise. Confession.] [Petition >>> Deeds. Declaration]. Father, thank you for more grace. Thank you that we can live devoted lives to you because of your surpassing greatness. Thank you for filling us with grace and strength in all things.