The Danger of Discontentment

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Let me invite you to turn to James chapter 4.

! Lord willing, next Sunday we will jump back into our study through Philippians. But I want to share with you, just setting up here for this Thanksgiving holiday that awaits us this week.
And hopefully as all of our hearts and minds are thinking about gratitude and our blessings, there is a threat that would seek to rob us of our gratitude, and that threat is discontentment.
And I want to talk to you this morning from James 4 about the danger of discontentment. The most recent study I was able to find, the research recently for Americans, listed the top five things that Americans are most discontented about.
The number one issue that brings Americans frustration and discontentment is misinformation and media, including biased news reporting.
[1:13] These aren't my words, this is the survey's words, alright? Number two, politics and government. Number three, violence and crime.

Number four, economic issues, including inflation and the high cost of living. Number five, social issues and divisiveness, including racism, discrimination, social media culture.
More than 81% of Americans cited one of those five things as a significant source of discontentment for them. Overall, 60% of those research said they're not sure they can do anything personally to fix or address those issues that make them so discontented.
Also interesting to me in that survey is that 66% of people said that the teachings of Jesus from 2,000 years ago might be relevant to the things that frustrate them today.
It's an interesting phraseology of that, isn't it? It may explain some of the discontentment in our culture. I guess in one sense, you could say it's good that two-thirds of people responded favorably to the teachings of Jesus, but even of those who did, they said it just might be helpful.
[2:42] When you think about discontentment in our culture, it is running rampant, is it not? And it's not just among unbelievers.

According to another recent survey, even those who are in pastoral ministry describe themselves as most often feeling discontentment.
The top five reasons for pastors that they cited, according to the survey, were stress and exhaustion, loneliness and isolation, stress from conflict, financial concerns, and unrealistic expectations.
I would want to add to that, while that may be true for those that are in pastoral ministry, that those five issues are not in any way simply for pastors.
Whatever your role is, whatever your job is, however you spend your time, I would assume all of us, no matter what we do for a living, can relate to feelings of stress, loneliness, conflict, financial concerns, and unrealistic expectations.
[3:56] The question I want to ask this morning of you is, is discontentment just a way of life? Is it just the way it is? Is it just what it means to be human?

Is it just what it means to live in our nation? Is it just what it means to live in 2025? Or should it concern us? Is it just life?
Or is it a red flag that should call attention that something is off? Is a lack of contentment just a personal issue that only affects you?
Or does it really have an impact on others around you? Now to be sure, there is a kind of holy discontentment.
There is a kind, I think, of discontentment of where you long for people to walk with the Lord, where you long for your church and your family to honor Jesus, where you see sin running rampant, and

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you're not content with people ignoring the things of the Lord.
[5:06] I think there is a kind of what we might call holy discontentment, where we see sin celebrated and the Lord rejected. But that's not what I want us to think about this morning.

I'm talking about the kind of discontentment that comes because your life isn't what you wanted it to be, or your career isn't what you imagined, or the circumstances of your life are not how you dreamed them to be.
James 4, while there is some debate among pastors and scholars here about exactly who is being addressed, the application from James 4, we would all agree on as far as the dangers that come from discontentment, whether a believer or an unbeliever, whatever it may be.
Look at chapter 4, verse 1 in the book of James. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?
You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.
[6:21] You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your own passions. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself to be an enemy of God. I want to walk you through this today as it relates to discontentment with the hope and the aim that we would recognize that in our own life, repent of it, and I pray even this week as we celebrate Thanksgiving together, allow our own hearts to be stirred with a new sense of gratitude and thankfulness for what the Lord has done for us.
Make note first of what discontentment promotes. There are several things in this passage that discontentment promotes.
The first thing it promotes is fighting each other. Fighting each other. Verses 1 and 2 again. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?
Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? When we are discontented, we find ourselves quite often fighting each other.
[7:46] When you feel a lack of satisfaction in your life, how easy it is to argue with your spouse or your co-workers or your church members.

Now watch this. What James is saying is that the reason there is fighting among you is because there is war within you. That's his point.
You fight amongst yourselves because you are at war inside yourself. This is why, friends, the feeling of discontentment is not something that you should ignore or take lightly.
And the fact that some 80% of Americans may say they feel in general a sense of discontentment, don't let the normalcy of it let you believe that it's no small thing.
When we are discontented, fighting amongst ourselves breaks out. He says in verse 2, Again, there's some various opinions of what he has in mind here.
[9:00] Some point out that people in the early church were filled with former zealots, those who had been violent political activists.

Some feel he refers to people who truly perhaps have extreme violence in their background. Others take this to be more of a metaphor how you and I might say that there is a war brewing in Washington, D.C.
Or there's a battle happening at the houses of Congress. We don't mean there's a literal physical war in battle, but we mean that symbolically of all the strife and friction and argumentation that takes place.
Either way, what we do know is that discontentment promotes our fighting with each other. And whether that be in attitudes or words or a physical expression of that kind of hatred, when we are discontented in life, our relationships with each other always are affected.
He says that you desire and do not have, so you murder, you covet, and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. There's things you want.
[10:20] You're coveting. The idea of coveting is you're desiring something that does not belong to you. And because you desire something that does not belong to you, you get into all kinds of fights, he says.

Sadly, if this year is like every other year, you're going to see this on video all over Friday. There will be videos on Black Friday of people who have been waiting in line, fighting over 80-inch big screen TVs, and you're going to see some crazy videos.

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And none of the people who are in those fights are pushing and fighting and punching because they want desperately to get that 80-inch TV to give to their neighbor.
That's not why it happens. It's because they want something for themselves. And if you want to go buy an 80-inch TV Friday, have at it, but please don't punch someone in the process.
And please don't lose your Christian witness as you do so. Why do people do that? Because they're discontented. It's not about a television.
[11:40] It's about a lack of contentment in life. And justifying that because of their lack of contentment, they ought to be able to do anything they want to anybody else to get what they want.

That's what discontentment does. It promotes fighting with each other. It promotes a second thing. It promotes a faltering prayer life. We see this in verses 2 and 3. First, he says, you do not have because you do not ask. This is a general principle that is true in Scripture, that we are to present our requests to the Lord.
Now, God is sovereign. We know that. We trust and affirm that at our church. But the Lord and His providence has so orchestrated the world that there are some things that He gives to His people in response to the fact that they ask Him to do so.
And he says, one of the reasons you don't have is because you do not ask. You're prayerless. I think, though, that there is something else we ought to see here, that when you look at the entire theme of this passage, the discontentment that's there, the selfishness, the coveting that is mentioned in chapter 4, there may be another reason why somebody who feels that way would be prayerless.
[12:59] If your heart is filled with envy and jealousy and anger and fighting, and if you are coveting and longing for things that are not yours, it makes sense that you would not even voice those things in prayer because to pray for such sinful desires would sound completely strange to us.

And so what happens, people who are religious and prayerful, when they allow their hearts to be consumed with discontentment and become envious and covetous, what they do is they continue, if they don't repent, to keep pursuing selfish worldly things, but they don't pray about them because who wants to ask God if you just speak out of pure covetousness in your heart?
And so we become prayerless. Longing and desiring for things that we do not need. Tolerating feelings and emotions and attitudes in our heart that are not pleasing to God.
And rather than repent of those things, we just simply become prayerless while we pursue those very same things. One good check for us is, if I were to ask you this morning, what do you most desire?
What dreams are you most longing to see fulfilled? And could you, with integrity of heart, lift those requests to the Lord? If not, we ought to recognize those as things that likely are promoting discontentment in our heart.
[14:48] He says in verse 3, not only do you sometimes not receive because you don't ask because our own hearts are worldly and selfish. Verse 3, you ask, here's another problem, you do ask, but you do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

In other words, sometimes we do pray for the Lord to give us things and bless us, but He doesn't grant it because our hearts are so filled with greed. Envy and jealousy and covetousness may make us prayerless and greed may make us prayerful, yet not receiving.
Either way, it's a problem with a discontented heart. Verse 3 says, you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. The word spend means to use up completely.
It's not just that you want to use some of it for yourself, it's that you're asking God to give you things and you want to use all of it for you and only you. By the way, that same word translated to spend it, to use completely, same word used in Luke 15 to describe the prodigal son who wanted to spend everything he was given on his own pleasures.
So discontentment promotes the fighting with each other and it promotes a faltering prayer life. There's a third thing it promotes and that is finding friendship with the world.
[16:16] Discontentment promotes that we find friendship with the world. Look at verse 4. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? The word friendship here comes from that root word phileo.

It's usually rendered love. It speaks of what is a true friendship in the sense of friendship is someone you have shared interest with, shared values, shared goals.

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And James says, when you have a discontented heart, you foster friendship with the world. Now let's think of the language of what he's communicating here.
When your heart's discontent, he says, you foster friendship with the world because you start to have a shared goal, a shared interest, a shared passion with the world.
How does the New Testament describe the world? The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.
[17:30] Those with a discontented heart who seek friendship with the world do so because they begin to love and long for that which describes the world.

The flesh, lust, and pride. If you wonder, why is the world the way that it is today?
It's because those are the things people indulge. And while we would condemn those things as sinful and wrong, and we would all agree this morning, I'm sure that those are not the things that should describe our lives when we are discontented, we begin to look to the world to find happiness and look to the world to find fulfillment.
And when we look to the world and begin to find friendship with the world, we find ourselves in opposition to the Lord. Keep looking at the text.
Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. You may think that everybody is discontented.
[18:46] What's the big deal? Here's the big deal. discontented people find friendship with the world. People who find friendship with the world set themselves against the things of God.

So maybe our entire culture is discontented. Maybe our entire culture has lost a sense of gratitude and thankfulness.
And maybe our entire culture really does just covet for what is not theirs. And they may all truly live in greed and envy and jealousy. But even if that were true, let that not be true for you.
Because if you were to live like that, you set yourself in opposition to the things of God. Verse 5 says, do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says He yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us?
And so discontentment promotes people fighting. It promotes a faltering prayer life. It promotes friendship with the world. And even as Christians and Christian leaders, if our hearts grow discontented, we can fall prey to those same very things.
[19:56] that's what discontentment promotes. Let me show you a second danger here in verse 6. And that's that discontentment produces something.

And what discontentment ultimately produces is pride. And this at first glance is a bit counterintuitive. We might tend to think those who are filled with discontentment, those who aren't grateful, those who aren't thankful, may find themselves feeling so frustrated and may be left out that they are the last one you would expect to be prideful.
But the Scripture actually says that this is what discontentment leads to is our pride. In fact, the real danger of discontentment is that it fuels our pride. And it becomes a circle.
Our discontentment stirs up our pride and our pride leads us to be more discontented because it makes us less thankful. It works like this.
I deserve a better car. I deserve a bigger house. I deserve a larger salary. I deserve less pain.
[21:19] I deserve better coworkers. I deserve a better neighborhood. I deserve for people to listen to me more.

All of that comes from a sense of pride. pride. And the more of that you feel, the more self-absorbed you become. And the more self-absorbed you become, the less humble and grateful you become, which just fuels more discontentment.
And so it becomes a race to say, well, which is causing which? My pride's making me discontented. My discontentment is making me selfish. My selfish is making me more prideful, which is making me more discontented.
And it just becomes a never-ending cycle. Here's the good news in verse 6. But He gives more grace.
Here's the warning. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The problem with discontentment is that it produces pride.
[22:34] The problem with pride is that God opposes the proud. The fact that pride is all around us and the fact that discontentment is everywhere in our culture does not in any way make it okay or less dangerous.

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It just means that many people are living in opposition to God. God opposes the proud. And this happens even within churches.
When you think that you should get more of a leadership role or more of a voice or why is my Sunday school class not larger or why is my ministry not as recognized or why do people not ask my opinion as much or why did this person get asked to be on this team or why did this class get these new members in or why did this ministry get highlighted?
It can happen among churches. It can happen among pastors. When pastors say, why is their church growing more quickly than mine or why is that pastor more recognized than mine or why is that book selling more than mine or why is this man asked to speak here instead of me?
It can happen among all of us. It's not just about things of the world. It can happen to church members. It can happen in church ministries. It can happen to pastors. And any time we become obsessed with ourself, it's going to make us live in pride.
[24:15] When we live in pride, we become less and less content. And the more discontented we become, the more filled with ourself we become and God opposes the proud.

That's why this is such a big thing in the Scripture. Many people have made this observation for so many years. This is nothing new, but just the irony in our culture that the very night of the day we call Thanksgiving where you have so many people going to stores and fighting and just in all kinds of crazy displays of anger and sinfulness.
And it happens the very evening of the day we call Thanksgiving. But that's what happens when Thanksgiving is about a meal and not about the condition of the heart.
It produces pride. When we think like that, our hearts well up in pride.
And listen friends, nothing produces discontentment in your life as much as feeling sorry for yourself. When you cannot celebrate the blessings given to somebody else, when you cannot rejoice with those who rejoice, when you cannot be thankful for other churches that are experiencing the blessings of God, when you cannot thank God for answered prayer in somebody else's life and family, when you become fully obsessed with yourself, it will cause pride to come out of every pore of your body and when it does, you will be discontented and the more discontented you are, the more selfish you'll become and in the end we live, think, and do everything out of pride and the Scripture is crystal clear here,
[26:24] God opposes the proud. So discontentment is a spiritual issue. it's not about the government, it's not about taxes, it's not about inflation, it's not about the car you drive, it's not about your neighborhood, it's not about your coworkers.

Discontentment in life is a spiritual problem and as such demands a spiritual remedy. we'll look in just a minute what that spiritual remedy is.
But consider a third reality with me and that's the deadly dangers of pride. If discontentment produces pride, what are the significant dangers of pride?
And I want to think about this as it relates in the body of Christ. My primary concern with pride in this context today is not that it makes somebody obnoxious, it's not that it makes somebody hard to be around.
My primary concern with pride today is how it affects us within the body of Christ. I mean, if you watch a football game and a wide receiver catches a pass and scores a touchdown and dances and prances to get all the attention on him, it's kind of obnoxious because it ignores the fact that a coach designed and called the play.
[28:04] It ignores the fact that an offensive line blocked. It ignores the fact that a quarterback made the read. It ignores the fact that the quarterback threw the ball. It ignores the fact that other receivers are running their route to draw attention of other defensive backs that allowed you to be open in the first place.

When we act like that, when we act like all the glory and recognition belongs to us and us alone, it is obnoxious. However, that's not the primary problem within the body of Christ.
It's not just that it makes people frustrated with you, it's that it leads us to disobedience. That's the problem. And specifically in the body of Christ, there are a few deadly dangers of pride.
One of them is that when we live in pride, we fail to serve as we should. We fail to serve as we should. When we're discontented, we feel like we deserve better, and if we feel like we deserve better, then we're not likely to serve others because we're so obsessed with ourself and what we think people or the world owes us, the last thing we want to do is serve somebody else.

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Discontented people fail to serve as they should. Here's another danger. We forget that we've been given more than we deserve.
[29:28] Discontentment screams out, you deserve more, but a biblical understanding of grace reminds us that we in Christ have been given far more than we ever deserve in the first place.

We need to remember that. That God in Christ has given us grace and mercy, and grace and mercy has given us salvation, and that by itself is far more than we could ever deserve.
Pride makes us fail to serve. Pride makes us forget that we've been given more than we deserve.
Third, pride makes us fall prey to other temptations.
Pride makes us fall prey to other temptations. This is where it gets really dangerous. Listen, friends, when a person feels discontented and feels they have not received what they deserve, it becomes very easy to indulge in sin and justify it by saying you're doing it because you haven't received what you deserved.
You don't have the job that you think you deserve, you didn't get the raise you think you deserve, your spouse doesn't give you the attention you think you deserve, your co-workers don't give you the recognition you think you deserve, and so you begin to indulge in sin.
[30:58] And while every part of your heart screams out this is wrong, you indulge in it because you think to yourself, I'm making up for the pleasures that have been withheld from me that I feel like I deserve.

all of this comes from pride, and all of that stems from discontentment. Here's a fourth danger, we forfeit the peace of resting in God's providence.
We forfeit the peace of resting in God's providence. This is where pride leads us spiritually, thinking we deserve better, which is the same as saying God has robbed us.
I didn't receive this blessing and I should have, God has done me wrong. Now, I'm not saying we should sit back and accept sin.
We ought to be bothered by it. We ought to warn against it. We ought to, Galatians 6.1, confront people with gentleness if they are in sin. I'm talking about the kind of discontentment that comes from what you think you deserve that you do not have.
[32:17] We forfeit the peace of resting in God's providence. My mind goes here to Jonah 2, where Jonah has been swallowed by the fish, and in the fish, he begins to pray, and he prays the psalms, and one of the psalms he prays from the belly of the fish is those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. When we live in pride, we forfeit the peace of resting in God's providence.
So, in this week, where our nation will celebrate thanksgiving, and there will be many people who will pay lip service to being thankful, the actions of their lives show something altogether different. And if we're not careful, that may be true in our own homes as well. That we could be all week long complaining about our marriages, and complaining about our children, and complaining about our incomes, and complaining about our jobs, and complaining about our government, complaining about all of these things, and then we have a meal and say how grateful we are, and then an hour later complain about the life around us, the world around us, and then we turn to all kinds of worldly things to try to produce happiness and contentment, all because our hearts fail to rest in Christ. And while most of our nation would say that's just life in 2025, James 4 would say it has nothing to do with the year, it has everything to do with the heart.
[34:08] People are discontent in our world, and they were discontented in James 4 as well, and because of sin, that has always been true. So what's the remedy?

Suppose today you in an honest evaluation of your own spirit said, you know what, I do find myself living in discontentment. I do find myself complaining frequently. I do find myself at times thinking I deserve more than I've been given.
I do find myself fighting with people much more easily than I used to do. You know, we can see that in our own life, people begin to frustrate us more easily, and our responses become less and less filtered, and the more discontented in life we become, the more we tolerate our outbursts and expressions of anger, and the more discontented we become, the more prideful we become, the more prideful we become, the more like the world we become.
So, suppose today you were to honestly say, you know what, I didn't think that I was living this way, but I see it. I do think I'm fighting with people more easily.

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I do find my prayer life faltering. I do find that I'm longing for worldly things. I do find that I tend to put myself at the center of everything and want everything to revolve around me.
[35:37] I do find it hard to celebrate somebody else's victory and somebody else's answer to prayer because my first thought really is, that should be me, if that's true for you today.

I don't have a message of condemnation, I have a message of hope for you. And the hope for you is that there is a remedy for that kind of thinking. I'm going to give you two things that this text gives us as a remedy.
Number one, repent. Verse 7, Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.
Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep and let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
Repent. If you're not a believer, you've never given your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to repent of your sin unto salvation. And if you're a believer, you can't lose your salvation, but if you allow your heart to become discontented and begin to live like the world, you need to repent of that.
[36:54] Here's why repentance is such a challenge. to repent demands that we first affirm with God that what we're doing is sinful.

And this is why so many people fail to repent. We'd rather justify our sin than acknowledge it. why are you breaking the law and speeding?
It's not your fault, it's because the speed limit's too low. Why are you speeding? It's not because you're breaking the law, it's because everybody else is speeding too.
Why did you get a ticket for speeding? Well, it's not my fault, the policemen should have been preventing real crime, not worrying about me going 50 miles over the speed limit, something that's silly. We can justify it so easily.
And if that's true in that regard, that's true in so many regards, how easy it is to blame someone else, justify our sin, and if we never acknowledge or admit our sin, we will not repent of it.
[38:12] That's why the remedy for all of this is to truly repent, truly agree with God about the sin in our hearts. God, I sense discontentment in my life.

God, I sense pride in my life. God, I sense that I'm fighting with people so frequently, and God, I acknowledge that I'm letting worldly things distract and disturb me so much more than they should. God, I acknowledge and confess that I'm not trusting in your providence. I'm working so hard to try to control every circumstance in my life and my kids and their school and my family and my finances and I'm trying to control everything and the reality is I need to trust you.
Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Repent.
And second, seek humility. This is verse 10. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.
[39:25] Let the Lord break you and he will put you back together. The Bible affirms the path to contentment is paved with humility.

The path to contentment is paved with humility. This is why God's people need to serve. It's not because the church needs one more Sunday school teacher.
It's not because the church needs one more greeter. It's not because the church needs one more anything or else it's going to fall apart. No. It's that we as human beings need to live in humility because humility is the path to contentment and discontentment leads us to sin.
And one of the great remedies of pride in our hearts is to be a servant. Seek humility. And friends, nothing brings humility like extended specific confession of sin.
I'll tell you what's hard to do. It's hard to take 15 or 20 minutes alone with God and confess your sin, your greed, your pride, your anger, and to honestly, specifically confess that to the Lord and ask for His grace and ask for His forgiveness.
[41:04] forgiveness, it's hard to do that and then leave that prayer time and say, God, You really owe me more. But if you don't confess your sin, your heart will convince your mind that God owes you more.

That's why nothing brings humility like confession of sin. Repent and seek humility. Let me close with the words of Hebrews 13, verse 5.

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Be content with what you have, for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. I want to end with this thought this morning that this Thanksgiving holiday, it may not be the holiday of your dreams.
Life is far more real than the Hallmark movie. Hallmark movies, I'm told, I can't speak out of great first hand, don't look at me like that, I don't watch them, but I hear about them, everything turns out good.
Let me tell you something, sometimes life doesn't turn out good, right? Sometimes Thanksgiving is lonely, and sometimes the friend betrays, and sometimes the relationship is not restored, and sometimes holidays are far too quiet, and sometimes if we're honest, we have to say, this is just not.
[42:53] what I envisioned. And in that honest moment, let your mind go to Hebrews 13, 5, be content with what you have, and you may be tempted to say, but I don't have much.

Here's the answer from Scripture, for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. what you have is the presence and nearness of God.
And in that, we have everything we need to be thankful. The world won't live like that.
In that sense, let the world be the world. God's child, but you as God's child, you've been given in Christ more than you could ever in 10,000 lifetimes give adequate thanks for.
Let our hearts be thankful. Let our God be praised. Lord, I pray you would use your word this morning to stir our affections toward thankfulness and gratitude that we would repent of our discontentment and repent of our pride.
[44:26] And in so doing, make much of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's in His name we pray. Amen. Let me invite you back tonight. Passion Youth Choir is going to be singing and leading us.

We'll take the Lord's Supper together. It's going to be a great hour of worship tonight at 5 o'clock. Come back and join us. God bless you. I love you, church. You're dismissed. Be honest.

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