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Presentation Transcript
Ambivalence - Mental Health and the Bible 9
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King David said, in Psalm 119, verse 113:

Psa. 119:113 – *I hate double-minded men, but I love Your law.*

Double-minded men – what did he mean by that? Are there examples of double-mindedness in the Bible? Of course, we may be creating a new word there – double-mindedness. Are there double-minded people today? Does being double-minded have any mental health consequences or is it just a spiritual thing? Let's look at the Bible a little bit and see what it says about double-mindedness. Let's go to James 1, and verse 5, to start our study.

Jm. 1:5 – *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. So it's nice to know that, when we ask God for wisdom, He's not going to pick on us for our faults. He's going to give to us generously. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all that he does.*

Now I want to read you what one of the commentaries says about it. It says:

God's provision has some prerequisites. To receive God's wisdom in trials, the believer must be wise in asking. First, he must ask in faith. He must believe and not doubt. The word there, in the Greek, means to vacillate, to waffle – as we would say today. He dare not come to God like a wave of the sea, blown horizontally and tossed vertically by the wind. God is not pleased with a double-minded man. The word there is dipsuchos. It means two souls.

I remember an interview that Larry King did with Sam Donaldson about Ronald Reagan, after Ronald Reagan died. Sam Donaldson was Ronald Reagan's nemesis in the press. He

was always hounding him and harassing him. He was out to get him. So I was really interested to hear what Sam Donaldson would say about Ronald Reagan. He said, “When you interview people, you get to learn a lot about what they are like.” He said, “For example, Bill Clinton...he was this really bright guy, with all these really great ideas, but then, there was this other side to him” – talking about the sexual thing that he got into there. And he said, “You never really quite knew who you were talking to. But with Ronald Reagan, there was just *one* guy.” No two-souled thing going on there.

So continuing on here:

...unstable in all he does – like an unsteady, staggering drunk. And then it says: The answer from God depends on assurance in God.

So, in scripture, to be double-minded means to be double-minded about God. We can't profess to follow God without following God. We're supposed to pray. We're supposed to study the Bible. We're supposed to obey all Ten Commandments – that would include learning how to keep the Sabbath and then keeping it. We're supposed to tithe. We're supposed to take care of people. We all could add more to that list.

James said, *Faith without works is dead*. So profession, without works, is not Christianity. That's double-minded. That's talking like we believe in God, but yet, when it gets down to it – when push comes to shove – we don't *act* like it.

James helps us a little bit in chapter 4, and verse 8. He says:

Jm. 4:7 – *Submit yourselves unto God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you.* Does anybody want God near to them? I do. Don't you? I like God to be right there with me, if I can get Him to be. *Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.* So there's a measure of humility there and some serious mindedness. And, if we wash our hands and purify our hearts, then God is going to draw near to us. When we purify our hearts, we become *single-minded*.

I've noticed that when things are going well, it's a lot easier to be obedient to God than when they're not. When we're in trials, it's harder. Some years ago – and this is how I relate to this – Elaine and I found ourselves with half as much income as we had the day before. We looked at our financial situation and faced the prospect of losing our home. We were in a pretty dire situation. We were counting our pennies to see if we could make those house payments. Every penny was important. So what about tithes? Well, this was a time that we needed God to draw close to us – to save us, to help us – because we were facing financial ruin. James says that, if we want God to draw close to us, then we have to draw close to Him. So we assessed our situation. We set aside tithes – which were

about half as much as they were the day before because we'd lost our income – and then we tightly budgeted the rest, and we were still short of making that house payment. I hate to mess with the stock market. I'm a mutual fund guy, if I can be, because I don't like to check it every day. I did have, at that time, some stock – a single stock. It was not in a mutual fund, but was a stock issue. I hadn't checked it in about five years, because I hate to do that kind of thing. I decided that I would sell those and maybe that would help. Well, the day that I liquidated that stock, those shares were higher than they had been in five years, and they were never that high again for five years or so. By "accident" I sold them on the high day of the market. They had not doubled in value. They had not tripled in value. But they had gone up 6.7 times. And that amount of money is what saved our home. We liquidated those and refinanced and brought the payments down low enough that we could survive that. When that happens, you know that that is not what you did, or how bright you were, or what a sharp investor you were, because it was on *that day* that the market spiked for a short time. So I think that that blessing came because of that market spike. And I think God had drawn close to us.

Now Elaine and I know that we have many problems. We're faced with our own failings all the time. It's not like we think we really deserve all of these things, but, in that one area, we were faithful under pressure and God took care of us in that area. That's how it works, I think. And I think He does that because He wants us to learn how to follow Him and how to be humble and how to trust God.

So that's a little bit about what the New Testament says about it. Are there any examples that we can point to in the Bible of double-mindedness? Well, there's a great story, but it's about Elijah. It says, in verse 16 of 1 Kings 18:

1 Kings 18:16 – *So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. And when he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" You know, they always like to blame it on somebody else. Right? Shoot the messenger. That's what is going on here. Elijah said, "I have not made trouble for Israel, but you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel, and bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel, and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. So there's this big gathering. Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, follow him. And they just couldn't decide. Back and forth, waffling around. So that's an example right out of scripture of that mentality.*

Another one – it's in 1 Samuel. But it's the account of Saul after David had killed the giant and was now his hero. Then he becomes jealous. So one minute, he's giving him his own clothing to wear, and he's promising him his daughter to marry, and offering him all this stuff, and the next minute, he's filled with rage with him and trying to stick him to

the wall with a javelin. We learn that he's depressed and, at times, bothered by an evil spirit. And David comes and plays for him to try to lift his spirits, and pretty soon he's trying to kill him, and David is having to run for his life. So there's that double-mindedness that is going on there.

Probably the prime example, though, in the entire Bible would be Judas Iscariot. He walked with Christ for three-and-a-half years, saw all the miracles, listened to Him teach, professed to be a follower, and then betrays Him for money. And then, so overwrought at the end that he hangs himself. So we've already answered the question about mental health, haven't we – double-minded taken to extremes. Suicidality is not a fun place to be.

Now, at LifeResource, we've noticed that many people who read the Bible have trouble connecting what they read with their own lives, and what they see in the news, and what's going on around them. Part of that problem is the language. The Bible uses different language than we do today to talk about the same things that we're looking at.

So what terms do we use today when we talk about being double-minded? Well, one word, that is probably the most common, is *ambivalence*. From *Wikipedia*, the word *ambivalent* derives from the Latin prefix *ambi*, meaning *both*, and *valence*, which is derived from the Latin *valentia*, meaning *strength*. Now, it's common to use the word *ambivalent* to describe a lack of feelings one way or the other about something, but that is *not* what that word means. It actually means *to have strong feelings about the same issue two different directions at the same time*. *Ambi* means *both*. So, if you're ambivalent, you have both positive and negative feelings toward something, or have feelings for both sides of an issue. It says that *ambivalence is experienced as psychologically unpleasant when the positive and negative aspects of a subject are both present in a person's mind at the same time. This state can lead to avoidance, or procrastination, or to deliberate attempts to resolve the ambivalence. When the situation does not require a decision to be made, people experience less discomfort, even when feeling ambivalent.*

Saul had ambivalent feelings toward David – strong feelings both ways – love-hate. We talk about “love-hate relationships.” That's all about ambivalence.

Another one. *Cognitive dissonance*. This term I'm a little reticent to mention, because of its past history, used by a particular person that used it a lot. *Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two contrary ideas simultaneously. The ideas – or cognitions – in question may include attitudes and beliefs, awareness of one's behavior and, also, facts. The theory of cognitive dissonance – and that is a psychological theory – proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs and behavior, or by justifying or rationalizing their attitudes, beliefs and behavior. The cognitive dissonance theory is one of the most influential and extensively studied theories in social psychology.*

So now they are going to give us a definition from *Wikipedia*. *Dissonance normally occurs when a person perceives a logical inconsistency among his or her thoughts. This happens when an idea implies the opposite of another. For example, a belief in animal rights could be interpreted as inconsistent with eating meat or wearing fur. Noticing the contradiction would lead to dissonance, which would be experienced as anxiety, guilt, shame, anger, embarrassment, stress and other negative emotional states.* So did you get that? When we have dissonance within ourselves about what we're doing as opposed to what we believe, that can create anxiety, guilt, shame, anger, embarrassment, stress and those those things. *And when people's ideas are consistent with each other, then there is a state of harmony, or consonance.*

Would you say Judas was in a state of cognitive dissonance? Yeah, I would definitely say that he was. He became so unstable mentally, it tells us, that the devil took over his mind.

The third word that we could talk about – or term – is *approach avoidance*. Approach avoidance conflicts are choices between something positive – say, going to a party – that has negative avoidance to it – say, getting grounded for being there. These decisions and the emotional state of ambivalence cause stress. So approach avoidance – the way I think about it most often – is when an individual moves closer to a seemingly desirable object, only to have the potentially negative consequences push back against their behavior. And a lot of times, I've noticed, the consequences are only imagined. We could think about the nation of Israel, in Elijah's time, as suffering approach avoidance with God. That's one way to think about it.

Let's look at some examples. Approach avoidance is easier to understand when you see some specifics. I've got some examples here of people that suffer from some of these things.

I saw a woman, for several years once, who was deep in conflict about whether to stay married or not. She had a five-year-old son. And the father's way of dealing with the boy was not good. And he was suffering emotionally. It wasn't that he was really emotionally abusive. It was just that he was clueless about how to treat his son. She was pretty perceptive about things like that. She tried and tried to get him to change his ways and he just couldn't do it. And what he was doing, really, was causing his kid a lot of stress and anxiety. So she was saying to herself, "Should I leave or should I stay? Children need a father, but this one isn't doing so good." You know, we all have our opinions about marriage and divorce and all that, but we're not *her*. She's having this discussion within herself. Then it comes up, "If I do leave him, what's going to happen to *me*? It's more secure financially to stay married. So can I make it on my own financially or will I become impoverished?" Then there was the issue, "Well, actually, he hates me, so why should I stay married to somebody who hates me?" So there's that going on. There were these three issues of ambivalence. If half the stuff she told me was true – that he said – he *did* hate her. So, I think that was a real part of it. I talked to this lady for two years. During that two-year time she was very anxious and very unhappy, because she couldn't

make a decision. She was just stuck in that ambivalence. You could just see how unpleasant it was for her to be in the state. The marriage was uncomfortable. And it was uncomfortable to see her child suffering. But I think most of her suffering occurred because she couldn't come to a decision. She even described herself as a person that takes a long time to come to a decision. She was very unhappy and very miserable. I don't like to make other people's decisions for them, so I didn't. And I don't know that, if I had tried, it would have worked anyway, because she was really stuck in that ambivalent situation.

Another example. I had a guy walk into my office one day – very bright – 4.0 grade point average all through college – all kinds of academic awards. He told me that he had married his high school sweetheart not long after he got out of college. They had been married for thirty years. They had three children. The youngest was eighteen – just gone off to school. He told me that he worked out of town and that he had a girlfriend there. So he had his wife of thirty years and he had this girlfriend. He told me that his wife *knew* about his girlfriend and that they were separated. He told me that he loved *both* women. What's that song? *Torn between two lovers, feeling like a fool*. At one point, he said he wished he could combine the good qualities of both women into one. I was just thinking, when he said that, how that would go over. His kids, having found out what had happened from his wife, distanced themselves from him and were judgmental – appropriately so. All of their friends thought that he was a jerk. I started inquiring about his moral values and he told me that he went to a very large church here in town. It's not the biggest one. We started talking about how he was feeling, and he felt extremely guilty, extremely ashamed. Is that fun – to feel that way? Noooo, no, that's not fun at all, is it? He was not sleeping at night, couldn't focus on his work – which could be dangerous, because he worked in a job you have to really pay attention or you're going to get hurt. He said that he felt a lot like his head was going to explode from the tension and like there was an electric buzzer going off all the time in his chest. I guess that's central nervous system stuff from the anxiety. So he had ambivalence over the two women and cognitive dissonance over his values. Right? He was acting one way, when he believes he should be acting another. He had made himself very miserable by his ungodly choices and then waffling back and forth about what to do. I think Judas and Saul probably felt that same way some. This man came for counseling because he and his wife went to a marriage counselor, and when she realized the mental state that he was in, she said, "We're just going to suspend this until you can get this straightened out. You have some individual work to do before you can come in here and concentrate on this." Very wise thing for that counselor to do, I think. There's an example of somebody that totally violated his own conscience and really was suffering for that.

The third example I have is of a nineteen-year-old girl who had a terrible relationship with her father. She had seen him beat her mother. She knew that he had committed adultery. This had happened multiple times – both the beatings and the adultery. He totally ignored this girl as a child. She lacked any kind of confidence in herself, because he never gave her that confidence that she needed. She fell into a sick relationship with a

real manipulative, blackmailing, abusive guy and had no trust for men. She was telling me how hard it is to trust her new boyfriend, even though he has done nothing to earn any distrust. But you could see how that could happen, couldn't you? I mean, she never learned to trust her dad, and she got burned by one boyfriend, so now she has another one and she's always worried. She tells me that she can't concentrate on her schoolwork. She can't sleep, cries all the time, filled with hatred for her father – hating him – wants to be loved and to love him, but after everything he's done, she just can't find a way to let go of all of that. So there's some cognitive dissonance there. She doesn't want to be a hateful person, but she finds herself doing that. I asked her – because it always gets down to the relationship between the therapist and the client – if it was hard to trust me. And here's what she said. She said, "I thought about switching to a woman therapist." So there it is – very honest. She comes right out and admits it. And she said, "But I tried that before and it didn't work either. And the things we're doing are helping me." So that's kind of an approach avoidance thing, which happens to people that have relationship problems with primary care givers. That's one of the primary ways that is expressed. We want to have a relationship with them, so we approach and then we're disappointed, or think we're going to be, and so we pull back. That's what she's doing with me right now. She approached and now she's thinking about pulling out of the therapy, because she's afraid I'm not going to take care of her like I told her I would. She tries to enter into the therapeutic relationship, she's overwhelmed with feelings of fear and she wants to pull out of it. I'm hoping she'll hang in there long enough to start feeling better. And if she does, then those feelings will start to melt away. But I don't know if she will or not, because she's really suffering a lot.

So there's some examples from the Bible and there's some examples from everyday life that we can connect to a little bit. I hope they prove to you that, when the Bible talks about being double-minded.... I said, "Is that about spiritual things?" And of course, it is, but spiritual things affect our mental health, just like everything else. In fact, maybe they affect it *more* than anything else. One of the worst things you can do for your mental health is to violate your own conscience. All the books talk about that. Everybody knows that works in our field. We look for that. We want to see *consonance* between belief and behavior in people. We know that's what helps people be free of anxiety – one of the things.

So what things can we think about to avoid that problems of ambivalence, and approach avoidance, and cognitive dissonance, or double-mindedness, if we want to call it that? Well, one of things I think about is decision-making. Work at making decisions and then stick to them.

I have a professional friend who is in therapy because of her background as a kid. She was telling me about the mess that the congregation is in and how unpleasant it is. I said, "Well, why don't you go to church somewhere else?" She said, "Well, we may have to, but my style has always been to cut and run when things get tough, and I'm trying to

overcome that.” So she’s trying to overcome that approach avoidance kind of deal. I thought, “Wow! So she’s really thinking about the decisions she makes.” Very important.

The second thing is to follow our values. All three examples from real life and all three examples from the Bible that we talked about today have one thing in common – a failure to live by one’s moral values. There’s a piece of that in all of those examples.

Have you ever seen the movie, *Matchstick Men*? It’s sort of picture of how that all works. A guy who is a con-artist – that’s what he does for a living, as he tricks people out of money. In the end, you see what it does to him and how he gets out of that problem. Very good movie to understand how that works.

The third thing I think about is to get objective help with conflicts. It’s so helpful to get feedback from someone who is not emotionally involved. At LifeResource we often offer to help congregations that are in conflict. So far none have taken us up on that offer, but if they would, the mediation would be incredibly helpful to everybody involved. Because, when you’re outside the problem, you get a different perspective of it than the people that are *locked* in the struggle. The mediator is not a part of the problem, and they can see things from an objective perspective, and help with those conflicts.

So, once again, the Bible and psychology come to the same conclusion. We should make sound decisions and stick to them. That’s called *wisdom* in the Bible, isn’t it? And then we should live by our values. And then we should learn to trust the trustworthy and to be able to tell the difference between people who are trustworthy and who are not. And we should be wise and seek help with conflicted decision.