

James 4:1-17

Worldly Living vs. a God Led Life

One of the emphases of James is the demonstration of our faith in God, not just by saying we have faith but by demonstrating our faith through our actions. And James emphasizes that if there's not outward evidence of this inward faith then it's entirely possible that the inward faith you claim to have is actually nonexistent.

With that as the premise it's like James holds up a life sized mirror for all of us to look at as we examine our faith lifestyle. And he points out several areas in which these 1st century Christians and the church they were a part of was looking a whole lot more like the world they lived in then the kingdom of God they claimed to be a part of. He's talked about sin in general, he's talked about favoritism and anger and the improper use of our tongues. Last week he contrasted worldly wisdom with Godly wisdom. And he said that worldly wisdom inevitably will result in fighting and disorder and a pursuit of selfish ambitions whereas Godly wisdom results in peace and a harvest of righteousness.

This morning we're going to be covering the entire 4th chapter of James as he continues to talk about the effects of worldliness creeping into the church through the lives of individual Christians. A great summary verse for this entire chapter can be found in verse 4 where he says: *"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."* (James 4:4-5 (NIV))

If you get your sense of value and purpose and hope and joy and determine your future plans based on this world then you're called an adulterous person and you've become an enemy of God. Does that sound overly harsh to anyone here this morning? There might be a tendency to ask James to lighten up just a little. After all we all have to live in this world. Can't we enjoy this world and still have a relationship with God? And yes it's possible to enjoy certain aspects of this world and still have a relationship with God, but unfortunately many Christians, both then and now, live much of their Christian life with God comfortably tucked away in their back pocket in case of an emergency. He's a **911 God**, ready and willing to jump to our rescue when we need Him. But I've got news for you; God is not content to just be your rescuer in time of a personal crisis. He didn't die on a cross to merely be your **backup plan**. He demands to be your **primary plan**. He wants to be your **Lord and Savior**. He demands to be your source of life and joy and meaning and purpose in life. He demands to be in charge of your life and mine and allow Him full access into every area of our lives and allow Him to change us from the inside out. But that takes finding Him as our greatest treasure in life rather than riches or possessions or career success or popularity. He requires complete allegiance to Him and full access to your life, otherwise you're just trying to play games with God – pretending to put Him in charge but really putting yourself in charge and using God as a **consultant** or a **genie in a bottle** to help you get through your life lived your way.

God wants this close knit intimate relationship with you. He has no desire to share your love with anyone or anything else. And that's why James can boldly call those who try to fit God into their plans or put Him in their back pocket as **adulterers**. Because at one point they committed themselves to God and His ways but they've gone back on that and are living by their standards and devising their own plans for their lives and nobody's going to interfere with those plans.

With that as a backdrop notice the issue that he begins chapter 4 with.

James 4:1-3 (NIV) *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.*

Right after James talks about godly wisdom producing peace he acknowledges that they don't have peace within their church and this is true today as well. Many churches develop quite the reputation for fighting within the membership. And it's all stemming out of the fact that they are living worldly lives

instead of Godly lives. They've forgotten all about seeking God and instead are seeking what they most want. And they will do anything to get it. I doubt they are actually *killing one another physically* but perhaps they are killing one another with words and slander and gossip. This type of attitude is forgetting all about God. It's all about what I want and what I need to do to get it. And it may not even be things. It may be ideas or long held religious traditions that churches tend to emphasize that others obey and follow if they want to be acceptable in this church. Or it could be the color of the carpeting or whether to sing hymns or modern choruses or whether to allow women to serve communion or teach a class or if people are banned from smoking outside of the church and the list of what divides churches grows longer and longer all the time. Christians are certainly good at fighting and quarreling among ourselves. And according to James these fights stem from us wanting things our way. Instead of together seeking God's way and will we insist on getting our way and will.

I find it illuminating that the two words James chooses to use to describe this conflict involve words that mean both *individuals fights* as well as *larger fights* that churches often engage in.

The core of this issue is really "*pride*". I think I know what's right. I know what I deserve and I'm going to do what I need to get it. Does this sound like anyone else we read about in Scripture?

Listen to the following description and see if you can tell me who this is and what their issue was.

Isaiah 14:13-14 (NIV) *You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."*

Who made those bold claims – *Satan*. His sin was pride just as ours often is as well. And the great sin of our society is pride. We want things our way now. And we will fight with others, both inside and outside of the church to get our way – rather than seeking God's will done God's way.

Proverbs 13:10 (NIV) *Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

Isn't it fascinating that he says that much of their disagreements could be solved if they had just asked God for what they wanted in the first place. So, the first reason they don't have what they want so badly is that they've never taken the time to ask God. They've been so focused on what they currently don't have and what someone else does have and how can they possibly get it that they've taken their focus entirely off of God. Can't you just hear some of the members of that church saying, "*that's not true at all!! I asked God for this but He never delivered. He never answered. So I'm taking this into my own hands.*"

And so James responds with: "*When you ask you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*" Do you see James' point? We were created to glorify God with our lives. And they instead are focusing on satisfying their own needs and disregarding God. When they do ask they are treating God like a *cosmic vending machine* or a *genie in a bottle* standing ready to grant us whatever wish our hearts desire.

Then James gets even stronger in the very next verse when he says that it's not just that you're absent mindedly forgetting God, no he says by your actions you're in essence *an enemy of God*. And that's because God is a *jealous God*. He doesn't want just part of you or $\frac{3}{4}$ of you, He wants *ALL of you* or nothing at all. Because God knows that part of you is like being married to your spouse but having a girlfriend or boyfriend on the side. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was he didn't say: "*Love the Lord your God with $\frac{1}{2}$ your heart and with $\frac{1}{2}$ your soul and with $\frac{1}{2}$ your strength and with $\frac{1}{2}$ your mind*"; (Luke 10:27) No, Jesus said we need to *love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind*.

We get a glimpse into the jealous heart of God in verses 5-6

James 4:5-6 (NIV) *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."*

There are several ways that this verse could be interpreted. I think what makes the most sense is God loves us so much and wants this deep relationship with each of us that He's helped us in this regard by placing his very presence inside of every believer, called the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is there to

connect us daily with God. And for every person that humbles himself and seeks God's will rather than the world's will for their lives, He empowers us toward that end with a thing called "grace." It's God's empowering and equipping presence within each of us to help us go deeper with God. This grace, used and empowered by the Holy Spirit, affirms to us God's love for us and then draws us toward the Father. He helps us to resist these fights and quarrels by finding peace and contentment in God. To such an extent that the longer you're a Christian the less a draw the world should have upon your life and the more you'll deeply desire God, because He's the only one that can ultimately satisfy the longings of your soul.

Now that James has got our attention by calling many Christians adulterous and enemies of God and has shared with us that God really really wants a deep relationship with you he gives us a step by step approach to getting out of worldliness and into this personal relationship with God.

Steps to flee worldliness and embrace God

1. *"Submit yourselves to God."* The word for "submit" that James uses here is a military term and means to submit yourself to the proper authority. To realign yourself up under the person you rightfully should be following orders from. James is stating that for awhile now you've been taking orders from the world and chasing down the devil's path. It's time to wake up and realign yourself up under God.
2. *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* This step would involve waking up and realizing the sins you've so willingly chased after in your involvement in worldliness. It could be you've chased after monetary success, or you've become involved in all sorts of prideful attitudes and have sat in judgment upon others, or maybe you've chased after pornography or unforgiveness and have justified it because of the pain someone else caused you. Satan watches each of us closely and he knows what triggers to pull and what buttons to push to nudge us away from God and into worldliness. James is instructing us to wake up, realize what tricks Satan has successfully been using in your life to draw you away from God and toward the world and turn away from Satan's desires on your life and run back to God. This about face approach is called **repentance** in the Bible.
3. *"Come near to God and he will come near to you."* This is a **Godly sandwich**. Turning back to God is on both sides and turning away from the devil is in the middle. This structure is key. Because if you just try to resist the devil on your own you're in for a long fight. But Satan knows that he's already lost to God and can't defeat Him. So, if you run to God and find your life in Him, Satan knows he can't defeat you in that stronghold. So, he has to subtly try to draw you away from the safety and protection that exists in God's presence and only then can he attempt to defeat you.

Right after that James has some sobering instructions which are there to remind us that this isn't a game you're playing in this struggle for your life between Satan and God. This struggle has eternal consequences and shouldn't be trifled with. So James says take this seriously – wake up and realize what's at stake here. He tells us to *"Wash your hands and purify your hearts. Grieve, mourn and wail."* Quit laughing about your sinful worldly life and mourn some more. And in the midst of all of this humble yourselves before God and He will lift you up." God doesn't want to punish you. He desires for you to return to Him and He will restore you back into this wonderful relationship with Himself. Just like the father did for the Prodigal Son who returned in that famous parable Jesus told.

In the final section of this chapter (vs. 13-17) he addresses one of the real subtle dangers of living a worldly life style. And that's in the area of planning your life. Now, it's not inherently evil to make future plans for your life. But it is when you arrogantly do it thinking you're the ultimate controller of your future and that God is simply there to put His stamp of approval on your wonderfully conceived plans. There's a huge difference between asking God to approve of your plans for your life vs. seeking God's plans for your life.

With that understanding follow along as I read this section.

Read **James 4:13-17**

James points out the ridiculousness of our planning when he says that you're planning what you're going to do tomorrow and the day after that and for the remainder of the year and the reality is – you don't even know for sure what's going to happen in the next minute. I would imagine that **Lt. Jay Cullen and Pilot Berke Bates** both had future plans before their helicopter crashed to the ground outside of Charlottesville, Virginia yesterday. And the **32 year old woman** who was hit and killed by the car in the same city yesterday fully believed that she would still be alive today. James is saying that you're making all of these future plans acting like you're independent of the circumstances of this life but the reality is that all of us are bound by this life and world we live in. We can't always predict what's going to happen any given day. Most of us experience the reality of this several times a week. The person James is writing about makes plans to *go to this or that city* – and yet on any given day I'm not even sure what ramps are open or closed for me just to get onto Hwy 169 and travel home from work. Several times I've come to work one way in the morning only to discover that I can't go home that same way because they've closed the ramp during the time I was in my office.

James compares our lives to a *mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*. Earlier this week I left my house and I couldn't even see any of the buildings downtown because the fog or mist was so thick. But a short time later it all burned off and I could see it perfectly. Our lives are like that. So rather than spending all of this time planning a brilliant future for the mist – why not instead seek the one being who is independent of all of the twists and turns of this life – God Himself. He is the only one who is **independent** of the circumstances of this life.

We see Jesus modeling the approach James is suggesting throughout his life when he went away early in the morning to seek the Father's direction for that day. And we saw it quite clearly at the end of his life when he asked the Father for another option besides dying on the cross and yet what? *"Not my will but your will Father."*

Again, there is nothing wrong with planning – but when you do it simply with your ideas and wisdom rather than seeking God's arrogance and is often doomed for disaster. James says a much better approach would be to say, *"If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

Shortly after the service ends this morning several of us are taking off for Pine Have Camp to serve at the 5th-6th grade week. And I believe it's the Lord's will for us to do this. However, last year God reminded us that He is always in charge in the midst of details. On the way up to camp last year the church van's transmission went out and we were stranded in St. Cloud. By the time we were able to get back up and running and on our way we were more than an hour behind schedule and others in our group were going to be even later than that. I'm the dean of this week of camp and so I was kind of frazzled the rest of the drive up there trying to figure up how to make up this lost time. However when I arrived at camp I discovered I really didn't have anything to worry about because they were over an hour behind schedule anyways because of checking everyone over for lice. I'm not saying God sent the lice in order to get us back on schedule, but what I do know is when the church van broke down in St. Cloud, He already knew what was happening 3 hours ahead at camp and knew what we'd find when we showed up. So, when things don't seem to happen like we'd like them to happen the lesson is to rest in God and trust that He's not been rattled by these circumstances and He still wants to work everything out for your good and His glory – but it may not always look like what you'd like the details to look like.

Lastly, James ends this section with: *"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."* (James 4:17 (NIV)) His point is that it's not just enough to know this teaching or understand this teaching – it goes much deeper than that. The application of this teaching isn't optional. If you don't put into practice what he's taught us here, it's not just an oversight – it's sin.

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Summary verse for chapter 4: (vs. 4) *You _____ 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 _____ of God.*

What does James say is the source of fighting among believers?

How have you witnessed this among Christians or within churches?

The core issue with this fighting is _____.

How do you react to the concept that God is a jealous God?
Is jealousy always a bad thing? Why or why not?

Steps to flee worldliness and embrace God:

1. _____ yourselves to God.
2. _____ the devil and he will _____ from you.
3. Come _____ to God and He will come _____ to you.

(Vs. 13-17) Is it wrong to plan for the future? Why or why not?

Understanding this text without changing - James calls _____

What do you need to change as a result of your new understanding of James 4?

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