

## Grace to the Humble James 4:1-12

Joshua and I made a quick trip to KY last week for a pastor's conf.

- As we were going through security, the agent seized Joshua's backpack and had him come over for a bag check. I thought it was a routine, random screening, so I was standing at a distance. Then they began dialoging and I **could tell Joshua was a bit rattled**.
- So I started walking over and the agent asked, **"Are you with him?"** "Yes" I said.
- **Well .... I thought Joshua knew the rules about packing... That you could only take a 2-ounce bottle of liquids.** Apparently he didn't.
- The agent lifted up this **gigantic 16-ounce bottle of Axis body wash ... the scent of which was called "Dark Temptation."** "He can't proceed with this!" the agent said. **"I know."**

**So Joshua was bummed that his Dark Temptation had been confiscated, and that he was now washing with a less irresistible soap!**

Well that's a bit of a parable for this passage.

**James lifts up many of the dark temptations in our hearts in this passage – self-indulgence, unmet desires, coveting, spiritual adultery, to pride, to follow the devil, and more.**

- He puts our hearts under X-ray machine, and lifts out these things, and says "You can't make spiritual progress unless you deal with them."
- And he supplies a better cleaning, namely inward cleansing of God's grace.

It's a passage that while **hard to outline** because of its proverbial nature; it's a string of loosely connected aphorisms, but **can be studied under the broad theme of the heart.**

To switch the analogy, **James is like a master Spiritual physician who shows us the problem with our hearts, and then provides the cure.**

**He has been talking about our hearts repeatedly in this book.**

- The crown of life to those who **"love God"** (1:12); the poor who are rich in faith **"love him"** (2:5)
- We are **"tempted"** when our hearts are **"lured and enticed by our own desire."** (1:14)
- He has addressed **"anger"** (1:19-20), **lack of love** (ch 2), the negative use for words that **arise from a heart problem** (3:1-13)
- And last week, how **"bitterness and jealousy in our hearts"** (3:16) leads to disorder and conflicts, followed by a discussion about **sinful cravings/passions.** (4:1-3)
- Now we are urged to **"purify our hearts"** in **verse 8**, as we pursue **a heart of humility.**

So let's **allow James to pastor our hearts** this morning. We can look at it under two headings: (1)the **pollution** of the heart (4:1-5, 11-12), and (2) the **solution** for the heart (4:6-10).

**#1: The Pollution of the Heart (4:1-5, 11-12)**

## A. Cravings that Underlie Conflicts (1-2b, 11-12)

**1a:** Where do these quarrels come from? **“Cravings underlie conflicts!”** (Powlison)

- **“We need to return to the purity/ harmony of the early church!”** Have you read the NT!
- This is **the earliest letter in the NT** and James has to address conflicts!

**1b:** **“Passions/Desires”** that battle within you - the Greek word **hēdonē**, from which we get hedonism. One of the oldest philosophies in the world.

- It means **“pleasure,”** but often of **sinful, self-indulgent pleasure.** (See 1 Pet. 2:11)

**2a:** **“You desire and do not have”** — a different word for “desire” — **“unmet desires”** leads to strife, or as James says, **“you murder.”**

- **Murder** — Some think James is thinking of actual murder here. But most likely he is thinking along the lines of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: **being murderously angry with someone.** It’s as if you committed murder.
- **Bitter jealousy has led many to kill in history...**
  - **Cain** envied God’s approval of Abel’s offering and killed him;
  - **Joseph’s** brothers were envious & nearly killed him before they decided to sell him;
  - **Saul** envied the praise of David and sought to kill him;
  - **Absalom** envied the throne of his father and started a civil war to obtain it;
  - **Jezabel** had Naboth killed because Ahab wanted his property.
  - The **chief priests** deliver Jesus to Pilate because of “envy” (**Mark 15:10**),
  - The **early church** faced persecution because of others’ “jealousy” (**Acts 5:17; 13:45**).

**“Covet and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel” (2b)**

- **Rus Moore** — **“What’s it like facing on the hostility from unbelievers in this hostile political climate?”** **“Honestly, the anger and vitriol comes from inside the church.”**
- **We must learn how to speak with kindness, how to overlook minor offenses, how to forgive and reconcile like Jesus.**

## Evil Speech (11-12)

**Quarreling and Fighting often involves speaking evil against a person.**

- **“speaking evil”** is often linked to **“jealousy”** (2 Cor. 12:20; **1 Pet. 2:1**), **“selfishness”** (2 Cor. 12:20), quarrels, and pride.

**11:** Do not speak evil against another brother or sister.

- This Greek word (katalaleō) means to **“speak against.”**
- So James says don’t **attack, speak evil against,** or **slander** another brother or sister.
- Don’t call people names, or speak lies about them.

**11b-12:** Here’s why:

- (1) **Because when you slander you are putting yourself over the law, particularly the law of loving neighbor (11b).** You’re saying **“God’s Word is not my authority.”**
- (2) **In the process, you offend the Law-giver and the Judge, God himself. (12)**

**Now, there are times to confront a brother or sister when they are in sin.** (Gal 6:1; Ja 5:20)

- But that's **not** what James is talking about.
- He's talking about **slandering, speaking against, attacking another brother or sister.**
- Restoration ministry is done in love, not with ill-will and selfish ambition.
- **This kind of attack hurts the person and leads to discord in the community.**

## **B. A Total Breakdown in Prayer (2c-3)**

**Prayerlessness (2c)** — you don't ask God.

- Either because you know it's not right to ask for **your self-indulgent, covetous desires.**
- Or just because their spiritual life is such a state **that they have no desire to pray.**
- **Self-righteousness, self-satisfaction, self-sufficiency** will keep us from prayer.

**Selfish Prayer (3)** - When you do pray, you have the wrong motives!

- You want to spend it on your **pleasures.**
- The language here is that of Luke 15:14 and the Prodigal Son, who "**freely spent**" the inheritance of his father.

Understand that **pleasure itself isn't wrong; we aren't ascetics.**

- **We must pursue ultimately pleasure, namely in God's presence** (Ps 16:11; Ps 42), and **enjoy all the earthly pleasures unto God** — and not in a way that will cause us to **sin and be self-absorbed.**
- It's fine and good to pray for a job, a spouse, for your kids to be wise, and to experience rest on vacation.
- **But don't turn God into a holy ATM machine, or a Genie that exists to serve all your twisted and inordinate desires.** That's man-centered, selfish, unbiblical biblical prayer.

Put these together. What is James saying about **the way we should pray?**

- We should do **Matthew 7:7 with Matthew 6:9-10:** "Ask and keep on Asking" (Matt 7) but ask with God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will as our motivations (Matt 6:9-10)

## **C. Spiritual Adultery (4-5)**

Tell us how you really feel, James!

- **No more, "my beloved brothers"!** **He gets in our face that he may get to our hearts.**
- He calls these cravings, and this behavior something: **spiritual adultery.**
- **You are not being faithful to God.**
- The Greek word is feminine, "adulteresses"

**James is echoing the OT**

**Israel's relationship to God was often referred to as a marriage.**

**Isaiah 54:5** [Read this out loud with me]

5 For your Maker is your husband,  
the Lord of hosts is his name;  
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.

## When Israel committed idolatry, it was called adultery in **Jer 3:20**:

20 Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.' ”

## The imagery of Hosea is most vivid.

- Hosea was called to marry a prostitute illustrating Israel worship of idols, such as Baal and other false gods.
- **Hosea 2:5a**, “For their mother has played the whore”
- But the Lord did not give up on His bride. He speaks again in **2:14**:

14 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

## It’s a picture of God’s loyal love for his bride.

**Jesus** uses adultery image in Matthew, calling those who rejected him a “wicked and adulterous generation.” (12:39, 16:4)

## So now, James uses this same picture to describe the church’s unfaithfulness.

### How were they committing spiritual adultery? (4b)

#### By seeking friendship/companionship with the world.

- Friendship in the ancient world is different than our world, and certainly different than having “Facebook friends.”
- **Friends shared all things together, spiritually and physically (Moo)**
- To be a friend of the world means that **you share everything in common with the world.**

## Is that you?

- **Do you feel more at home outside the church than inside it — with it’s values and interests?**
- Would you say today, “**I’d rather be somewhere else?**”
  - “**Someone please get me out of here.**”
- **James then takes it a step further: you’re an “Enemy.”**

## **Test your own heart.** Are you imitating the world, the way James describes in this letter:

- Are you discriminating against people? (2:1-13)
- Are you speaking negatively of others (3:1-12) and slandering others? (4:11-2)
- Are you full of “bitter envy” and “selfish ambition”? (3:13-18)
- Are you pursuing sinful pleasures? (4:1-3)

## God will tolerate no rival. He wants us completely!

He’s a jealous Husband, which is what I think verse 5 means....

## God's Jealous Love (4:5)

This verse is translated differently because it's not clear in Greek.

- It can refer to **(1) human envy or (2) God's jealousy.**
- The language itself isn't conclusive, so we must look at the context, and from the context I think the ESV is most likely. The CSB translates it as human envy.

CSB:

5 Or do you think it's without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely?

### Implication: God loves his people!

- **The next verse highlights his astonishing grace, and this verse highlights his astonishing love!**
- **God is a jealous Husband who has put his Spirit in us, and we will not be at peace until we repent of chasing other lovers.**

**"Scripture"** — What "Scripture"?

- Most likely James is paraphrasing a text in the OT or various texts to convey this idea of God's jealousy (e.g., **Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Zech. 8:2**).
- **He's citing a biblical theme and not a precise passage.**

**Our God is not dispassionate. He is not indifferent. He loves whole-heartedly!**

**If your heart is chasing other lovers, return to this covenant Keeping, all satisfying God, who is jealous for you!**

## #2: The Solution for the Heart: Grace for the Humble (4:6-10)

**The Bible is not a bland book. It's not rice cake. As we read it, we taste the awful bitterness of our sin, and the amazing sweetness of Christ's grace.**

We taste both in this flavorful passage, but the flavor of God's flavor is all-satisfying.

### A. The Humble Are Promised Grace (6)

**6a: "But he gives us more grace."** Hallelujah! This is one of the sweetest sentences in the NT.

- God's grace is greater than our sin. (**Rom 5:20**)
- His grace never runs out.
  - **There's grace for your needs.**
  - **There's grace when you've been wounded, broken, hurt.**
  - **There's grace when you've sinned miserably.**
  - **There's grace for the person that you're at odds with.**

**How does James know this?** Because his brother died for sinners.

- **Romans 8:32 — God did the big thing already, and he will take care of the little things. The work of the cross in the past assures us of ongoing grace now and in the future — because God didn't redeem us to leave us.**
- He will be gracious to us all the way to glory.

6b: This grace is for **those who will humble themselves.**

- **Grace is found downstairs: Grandma in Michigan, popsicles downstairs...**
- 6bis a quote from **Prov. 3:34**
- It also appears in **1 Pet. 5:5.**
- **The condition for grace is humility.**

**Humility gets God's attention;  
Pride gets his opposition.**

**But God opposes the proud.** He stands against them. **It's military language.**

- See Ps. 18:27; 34:18; 51:17; 72:4; 138:6; Isa. 61:1; Zeph. 3:11–12).

**“For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.” (Ps 18:27)**  
**For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from a far.**  
**(Ps 138:6)**

We must pursue humility. Peter says, **“Clothe yourselves with humility.”**

- It's the language of **putting on an apron, or towel to serve someone else.**
- Peter probably had Jesus' washing the feet in mind. The point: **Wear humility.**

**Humility involves** having an **accurate assessment of God, self, sin, Christ and the gospel.**

**John Stott: “At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.”**

**What are the marks of the humble? Here are some:**

**Humility** makes us to get quieter, not louder;  
more grateful not more critical;  
more gracious not more condescending;  
more desperate for the Spirit, not more self-reliant;  
meeker before the Word, not more intellectually arrogant;  
more faithful in prayer, less confident in our own gifts and strength and wisdom.

**Pride says, “I'm better. I'm right. I'm more important. I'm smarter. I'm good.”**

**One writer noted the following exchange with a lady and Spurgeon:**

**Oh Sir,” said a lady to the victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon one day. “I pray for you every day that you may be kept humble!” She was a wonderfully fine looking woman, and splendidly dressed—and Spurgeon replied, “Thank you much; but you remind me of a failure in my duty. I have never prayed for you that you might be kept humble.” “Dear Sir,” she cried, “there is no need for such prayers, for I am not tempted to be proud.” Spurgeon commented “How proud she was to have obtained such a delusion.”**

## **B. The Humble Practice Repentance (7-10)**

**Humility enables us to see our sin, confess it, repent of it, and experience God's renewing grace.**

## Bookends: “Submit to God” (7a) and “humble yourself before God” (10)

- Both commands involve the act of **coming under**, that’s what “**submit**” means.
- **Between these two “bookends” are series of commands that highlight various aspects and implications of a humble submission to God, of humble repentance.**

“**Submit to God**” — Don’t submit to the devil (next verse).

But put yourself underneath God’s Word, and God’s authority. What does that look like?

- In every decision ask, “**Are you living under God’s authority?**”
- **You will not flourish when you rebel against God’s design.**
- **God knows what is wisest and best, and we would be a fool to not live under his rule.**
- The **alternatives** are to submit to **(1) your selfish desires, (2) this world, or (3) the devil.**

## What Humble Submission to God Looks Like (7b-9)

1. Resist the devil. (7b)
2. Draw near to God (8a)
3. Cleanse Your Hands, Purify Your Hearts (8b)
4. Take Sin Seriously (9)

These exhortations are very similar to **1 Peter 5:5–9**. With that in mind, we probably have heard a widespread call to repentance among the early Christians. (Moo)

1. **Resist the Devil** (7b)

Behind Conflicts with people, and the dark temptations of this world is the **Devil**.

- **To be under God’s authority means to refuse Satan’s authority.**

**Devil.** I read this week of a student, an all-American kid, a paperboy in fact, in 1988 who was assigned to do a study on a major religion. His attention got diverted, and he studied Satanism intensely. He became defiant and hostile. He ended up murdering his mother and brother, and tried to kill the rest of the family by setting the house on fire. He ended up slitting his wrists with a boy-scout knife. All of this in response to a vision from Satan that he apparently received.

- Well, I do believe that many of the tragic killings around the world are to be attributed to Satan. He came to “**kill, steal, and destroy.**”
- But Satan is not only at work in school shootings, *he is also at work in other ways.*
- Scripture teaches that (1) anger (Eph 4), (2) pride (1 Tim 3), (3) false teaching (1 Tim 4), (4) and jealousy and selfish ambition are also related to the devil’s work.

To be sure, not everything is demonic.

- Scripture also speaks of **physiological** problems, **mental/psychological** problems, the influence of the **flesh** and the **world**, and **mental/psychological** issues.
- **But let’s also make sure we are aware of the devil’s activity.**
- He desires to “sift you like wheat.” (Lk 22:31)

“**Resist**” - means “to stand against” (cf., Eph 6:13)

- When we resist the devil’s lies and schemes, James says, “**He will flee from you.**”

- What's important to see in this: **the believer has the power to resist him!**
  - **When you are tempted to go to that website, "Resist the devil."**
  - **When you are tempted to lash out in anger, "Resist the devil."**
  - **When you are tempted to doubt God's provision, "Resist the devil."**
  - **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**
- Submit to God, Resist the Devil. You want to be under God's authority; you don't want to be under Satan's authority.

## 2. **Draw Near to God** (8a)

This is a positive parallel to the negative exhortation in 7b.

- Both have a command and a promise.
- **Come back to God and he will draw near to you. That's a promise!**

Like the Father in the story of **the Prodigal Son**.

- **This young guy had squandered it all in "reckless living."**
- **He was empty, hungry, alone, broke; he needed a bath, rehab, and some friends.**
- **And then "he came to himself" and said "I will go to my father."**
- **The Father wouldn't let him even get his speech out, He embraced him and reconciled with him. The Father had compassion on him, and kissed him; gave him a robe, shoes, ring, and threw a party.**

**Don't turn your back on this God. You can't be happy without him.**

**You can't be at peace without Him. Draw near to Him.**

**He stands ready to receive you. He waits with mercy.**

## 3. **Get Clean** (8b)

**"Cleanse your hands, You Sinners"** - more strong language here (v. 4).

- **James is trying to wake them up to their need for grace and renewal.**
- If you don't **know you are a sinner, you won't seek grace.**
- The **cleansing language** is probably taken from temple worship.

**"Double-minded,"** - A major them in James.

- Don't be the person who **wavers**.
- Don't be a **friend with the world** and a friend of God.
- **Don't flirt with other husbands when you are wed to Christ.**

Repent of this duplicity and **"purify"** your hearts.

- Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? "clean hands and a pure heart" (**Ps. 24:3-4**).
- We go to God and confess sin and take a bath.
- **Egypt Documentary: Ritual baths in cultic religions, men and women shave themselves entirely and daily; and took multiple baths a day.**
- **I recommend a bath**, but the cleansing **we really need is on the inside.**
- **You can't scrub sin off you.** You need Psalm 51 cleansing.

**Psalm 51** [Let's read this out loud]



- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!

#### 4. **Take Sin Seriously (9)**

This is the language of the prophets who called people to repent.

**James isn't saying you should never laugh, or that the Christian life is a life of gloom.**

- **"A cheerful heart is good medicine"** says the Proverb.
- **The fruit of the Spirit is joy!**
- **A church is in bad shape when it can't laugh.** The gospel is **"good news."**
  - Barth: the closest thing to grace in this life is "laughter."

**But we aren't to laugh at sin.**

**We take ourselves lightly, but we must take sin seriously. We must take God seriously.**

- Joel: "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (2:12).
- Paul called the Corinthians to "mourn" for their sin instead of **tolerating** it (1 Cor. 5:2).
- **The world celebrates sin.** But James says, "Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom."
- Jesus said: "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25b).

To not weep over sin is to **adopt the Hedonistic worldview**: "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,"

- This worldview denies the reality of God's holiness and of His judgment.
- It creates a casual attitude toward sin.

**See sin for what it is: it hinders our communion with God. It can lead to disaster, disorder, and a total loss of joy.**

**Repentance leads to the restoration of joy.**

- Moo: "True Christian joy can never be ours if we ignore or tolerate sin; it comes only when we have squarely faced the reality of our sin, brought it before the Lord in repentance and humility, and experienced the cleansing work of the Spirit."

#### **God Will Lift You Up (10)**

This is the great Kingdom principle: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14; Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Pet. 5:6).

- **It was like the motto of the church.**
- **We find spiritual renewal by humbling ourselves.**

The way to glory is through humility.

**"Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility." - Augustine**

**This is ultimately the example of Jesus — he humbled himself and he is now exalted above every name (Phil 2:5-11).**

**He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross.**

- **He was never unfaithful to the Father, but died for spiritual adulterers, for self-indulgent people, for the coveters, quarrelers, and murderers.**
- **He gives more grace to sinners today.**
- **He submitted himself to the Father's will.**
- **He endured the evil slanderous words of others without reviling in return.**
- **He resisted the devil throughout his earthly ministry, and then crushed his head at the cross.**
- **He provides the purity and cleansing we need. His blood makes us clean.**
- **And for those who turn to Him for forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father, He promises to exalt them.**

**The pollution of the heart - not a pretty picture**

**The solution of the heart - a marvelous picture.**

**There is more mercy and Christ than sin in us.**