

**James**  
**Humble Yourself Before the Lord**  
**James 4:1**

So glad to have you. We're studying the book of James, actually, this the last Sunday. We're in James four, but we did James five, a few weeks ago for various reasons. And, now we're looking at the gospel according to James, a call to humility, the Christian life. We'll see is one marked by humility, not humiliation, but humility as we see what Christ has done, how we need it, how hard it is, in fact impossible. It is for us to break adequately from our sinful tendencies and the hope we have in him. So if you are willing, follow me as I read to you from God's Word, James 4: 1-10.

*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 don't ask. 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 hatred toward God? Anyone who is a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God? Or do you think Scripture says without reason, that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely, but he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 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 a joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Let's pray for a moment. Lord, there's a lot to think about, a lot to hear in this passage, and I do pray that we would have ears to hear all the spirit is saying to us today. Pray in Jesus name, Amen.

I'm going to start with a poem today for the first time. The author's name is Shelley. The poem's name is Ozymandias. Goes like this...

**Amid a traveler from an antique land who said two vast and trunkless legs of stone, stand in the desert near them on the sand, half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command. Tell that its sculptor well, those passions read which yet survived. Stamped on those lifeless things. And on the pedestal these words appear. My name is Osmond Dias. King of Kings. Look on my works, you mighty, and despair. Nothing else remains round the decay of that colossal wreck. The lone and level sand goes far away.**

That's the voice of pride. Look on my work, she mighty and despair. Nebuchadnezzar, an actual king in the Old Testament, said. Is this not great Babylon that I have built? But of course, God

opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. He humbled Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar. He lost.

He humbles the proud job. Chapter 41 says, God is King over all that are proud. Proverbs one says that God mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble. And Jesus said, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. James is talking about boastful people, ambitious people. A little bit later in this chapter, we study this last week, he says.

There are people who actually think they can determine the future by making their plans. They say things like, tomorrow we will go to this city that year, spend a year there and make money. We're so sure that our plans will succeed. And James warns the boastful, the ambitious about this. And he also tells them that their ambition leads to fights and to quarrels and to maybe not physical murder, but forms of murder.

James knows the source of this. It's sinful passions, not passions. Some passions are good, some zeal is good, but sinful passions. And he rolls through them and tells us the consequence. I'm going to go through a passage again and just watch the way he says things. He starts with a fact, and then he tells the results of that fact.

He says you desire and you do not have. The result is you murder and you covenant cannot obtain, and the result is you fight and you quarrel with each other. And then he says, sometimes your desires are so disordered you don't even have the courage to pray about them. And the result is eventually you do pray usually, and God says, no, that's entirely selfish.

That's another result.

Because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. James says that passions are waging war within us. Among you leads to murder. What it means not is passions are waging, raging between each other. He means when their passions are raging among you. Literally. It says among your members and not the members of the church, but within your members.

Your will says one thing I want, I want what I want, and your reason says, I shouldn't want that. And your conscience or God's will says, not only should you not want it, it's actually a sin. And so you're waging war within yourself. And when you wage war within yourself, you end up often waging war with other people and you get into fights.

Now, these aren't literal fights, usually are literal murder. But, you know, we talk about it. There are fights in Congress and there are fights in the boardrooms of major corporations. People aren't literally punching each other, usually once in a great while. It happens. The great majority of time, it's words, it's tensions. And when you have tension within, it breaks out in detention.

Brother, the people because you want what's good, you want what's bad. You have disorderly desires. For what material things? For power. Prestige. A name for physical delights or delicacies. For personal satisfaction. And so you're at war with other people. Resources are

limited. Desires are infinite. Some years ago, I was in a conversation. A couple who were, I'll say, true middle class, true middle class.

They had some disposable income. Not a lot came to me and said, Dan, we need to talk to you about a quarrel we're having. I said, okay. And it went like this. The husband is a hunter and wanted to go on a pretty exciting hunting trip. I can't remember it was Wyoming or Montana now. And shoot some elk and bring them back.

And and the wife wanted a refrigerator. And they had a conversation about it when it went kind of like this. you know, I work hard. The man says all year long, and I just need to have some fun with my friends, and just get out in nature and escape the pains and the agonies of my work. All I'm asking for is one week. And the wife said, yeah, but with the same money that you would spend on your trip, I could buy a really nice refrigerator for our whole family. And that would last 20 years, seven days, 20 years. Come on, Mr. Investment, let's make the right decision here. And he said, you know, just haven't had much fun lately.

And she said, we just had a family vacation three months ago. And he said, yeah, but it rained the whole time. And the children quarreled constantly. And the wife said, they quarreled sometimes, but we still had a pretty good time. Don't you remember the good times we had? And then what happened next is each of them started to pick up the sad reality that they're both distorting what happened a little bit to get their way.

Just spinning the facts, just making the case for what they desired. Can I tell you that after the first service, the number one, two, three, four and five question was so what they do refrigerator or hunting trip? And the truth is I don't remember. I just remember them being really irritated with each other. So you can finish the story yourself.

Envy. Selfish desires, material desires. I want what I want. And James says it gets so bad that you won't even ask God about it. You don't have because you don't ask. Well, here's why people don't ask. They don't ask because they know that what they want to ask for is the wrong thing. And so they think to themselves, if I don't tell God out loud in prayer what I'm thinking, he won't know.

Now, that's not good theology. But people think that way. They think I'm just going to shove my desires so low. I'm going to put it underneath a cabinet in the basement. I'm going to drop it behind, you know, some piece of defunct equipment I'm keeping for unknown reasons, and God won't see it. There because I'm ashamed of what I want when I hide it from myself.

And then, of course, you say to yourself, well, that's ridiculous. God does know what I'm thinking, even if I don't make it into an official prayer. And so I might as well I might as well pray about it. And God says, well, thanks for finally articulating it. And the answer is no, because it's a preposterously selfish request. Now, as a sidebar, in the Christian life, sometimes people have a little bit of a harder time praying for themselves and for other people.

You know, if I'm sick and you're sick, strangely enough, I find it easier to pray for you than for me. Because to be brutally honest, it hurts me more if I don't get relief from my illness than if you don't get your relief. And so we manipulate our prayers. God knows all about our prayers. And so we finally say, okay, I will pray. And the answer is no, because. Because we pray for the wrong things, for luxury and honor and the pleasure and whatever the case may be.

Can I just tell you, I don't like to buy cars. I buy a really nice, car. By which I mean it doesn't break down. Lasts a long time. Goes many, many miles. as. And I keep it as long as I possibly can. Because I hate my new cars. And it's hard to pray about new cars, because when I buy a new car, I really have one prayer, and that is that I get a an outstanding car with all kinds of marvelous features and a 90% discount. That's what I want. That's what I want to pray for. And it's hard to pray for that because it's a preposterous prayer.

So be honest with your prayers, my friends. And when you find yourself praying for something preposterous, it might move you to pray more wisely. Well, James says that these desires that we have are not just a sin, they're actually adultery. Verse four you adulterous people, he says, you adulterous people. Now he calls false desires adultery because he's wanting us to think about our relationship with God a certain way.

And that way is he's not simply God. He is our covenant Lord. He is in a a loving bond, a sacred, abiding, exclusive bond. He says, when you commit a sin against me, it's not like you're betraying a friend. You're it's like betraying your spouse because you pledged to live together. Now, when people commit sins over their own desires, most of the time, most of the time they're not actually thinking that way.

If you look at Israel in the Old Testament, when they went after other gods, which they did a lot, they almost always kept worshiping God in the temple and kept offering his sacrifices. But then they'd go elsewhere and offer sacrifices to other gods above all, God name but all or bail, depending how I'd like to pronounce it. And Baal was a god of fertility and prosperity.

Their crops abound, made all your animals worthless and animals in those days. May all your animals bear plenty of young and and bale would take care of that for you. And so we're going to worship God. He's going to remove our sins. And bales are going to give us prosperity. And the prophets called that adultery. They didn't simply call it soon or mistake.

Jeremiah in chapter three says, like a woman unfaithful to her husband. So you have been unfaithful to me or House of Israel. James says it's adultery. And he also says, you can't be a friend of the world and a friend of God. If you're a friend of the world, you're an enemy of God. Now, this this gives us another image.

And that is friendships are, in the Old Testament much deeper. The Old Testament uses the word friend more rarely than we do. We say so-and-so is my friend, meaning you have gone through their checkout line at Walmart on numerous occasions. Enough that you recognize your face, they recognize yours, and you smile at each other regularly. That is not a friend.

It's a friendly person and you've been friendly to them. And that's great. It's not a friend, it's somebody you like. It's a friendly associate. It's a post-it note relationship, mildly adhesive. Not much strength there in the Bible. A friendship is between two people who share a way of life, who share an understanding of life, who say we stand together come what may.

We have the same values. And there are countries in the world today that still view friendship in that sacred way. There are countries in the world where you almost never invite someone to your house. And let's just look at the crown of long sharing of life. And that's what James is saying here. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God.

Now, of course, this means, among other things, that we are friends of God. That's encouraging. It also means that we are married to Christ, which is quite an honor. But if you're married to Christ and you're God's friend, then you are going to be at odds with the values of our culture. Because our culture is acquisitive. And the more you have, and the more you maybe pictures of it on Instagram, and the more you experience, the more noble you are.

And the society we live in is a meritocratic. The higher you go, the more you achieve, the higher your test scores. When you're young, higher you rise in the corporation, the more money you make the whatever, the higher you go, the more important you are. And God's values are entirely different. Not that the Lord is disinterested in business success.

The Lord is not against business success. He's not against doing well in school. He's saying that's not where your identity comes. That's not the source of your being. Your value, the source of your being. Number one, is it God created you in his image. And everybody we see has enormous value, intrinsic value, no matter what. Whether your grade is a plus or C minus.

And the second way you have value is that Jesus Christ came and lived and died and rose for you. And if you receive him, then you are a child of God. You are a member of God's family, and that's a source of value. I'm not saying there's no value at all in accomplishment in this world any more than I'm saying.

All of our desires are bad, but they're different systems of life. People who make it in this life promote themselves, and they look for a platform and all the rest.

Well, James comes to a bit of a conclusion in verse five when he says this. Do you think the Scripture says without reason, that the spirit he causes to dwell in us envies intensely? I'm going to read again. Do you think Scripture says without reason? For no reason? Do you think Scripture says this for no reason? The spirit he calls to dwell in us has intense desires.

Now, ordinarily, when we read the words Scripture says in the New Testament, about 98% of the time, what follows is a quotation from the Old Testament. There's no quotation here, which means he's describing the message or one of the leading messages, one of the pervasive messages of the entire Bible, and one of the pervasive messages of the entire Bible, is that the human spirit.

That's the theme of James chapter three. And for the human spirit, the spirit God put in us has since the fall, since rebellion come to be marked by envy.

Do you know the Old Testament? You remember that the first two children born in this world, Cain and Abel, brought a gift to God. And Abel sacrifice was acceptable and praised by God, and Cain was not. So Cain killed his brother, envious of God's pleasure. A little bit later, Jacob and Esau and they both wanted God's blessing. And Jacob and Esau didn't.

And for years Esau planned to kill his brother. And then there were 12 sons born to Jacob, and one of them was favored more by God and by their dad. And so the other 11 brothers said, let's kill him. And one said, let's not kill him. Let's pretend he's dead and sell him into slavery. That's just in the book of Genesis.

The spirit that dwells in us is prone to envy. People see someone in a position they wish they had, and they hope they fall. People see someone possessing something that they don't have and they want something more, better, newer. This is this is a diagnosis of the sinful human condition. This is the nature of the human spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit.

Selfish desires. Again, not all desires are selfish. Moses desire to lead the people of God out of Egypt to the promised Land. David desired to save Israel from their enemies. It was a strong desire. The battle's, the Lord's. He said. David wanted to do that. Paul wanted to plant churches where no one had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So there are definitely good desires and godly desires and godly passions. But most of the time our passions are disordered. Zechariah chapter one says, God yearns jealousy for his people, so we're jealous. And God is jealous that we stop being jealous. All scripture describes this and we see it in in society. if you think about the Communist experiment from Plato to Marx and Lenin, one of the main ideas of of communism is to say, we're to we're going to eliminate differentiation.

Everyone will give according to his ability and receive according to his need, and the law will be level. No one will be better than anybody else. The end of envy. Truth is neo Marxism, as we see it in various forms in our society today, is very similar. Let's make sure we redistribute so everyone has the same rights and privileges.

It is a it is a hidden form of envy that no one can get any higher than me. A Christian philosopher named Joseph Epstein put it this way. He said, when I was a boy. I lived in a faint cloud of envy. I envy boys who were more athletic, more attractive to girls, more cool, more socially adept, and even had better parents.

I lived in a cloud of envy. Bertrand Russell, who was no friend of Christianity at all, said we simply are unable to stop comparing ourselves to others for some perverse reason, and we always come up short. He said it this way if you desire glory, you may envy Napoleon. But Napoleon envied Caesar, and Caesar envied Alexander, and Alexander envied Hercules, who probably never even existed.

I talked to the president of a Christian organization some years ago, an extraordinarily candid man, and he'd been out for about three years, and the organization he had led was, doing well. And I said, how does it feel that, you know, the organization you led is doing so well? I said, I'm so happy. And he talked about that for a minute.

And then he said, of course there's a part of me that kind of wanted it to fail. So everyone would look at my leadership as the glory days. Unfortunately, I'm seeing too many heads nod right now because we know what that means. We know that something similar could dwell in us. What's the solution? One solution is to have good desires and to desire good and godly things.

But if we can't stop our selfish desires and it's hard, then James says, But God gives us more grace. How does he give grace? He gives grace as we're going to celebrate in a few moments by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross. For people who can't stop sinning. And Jesus accomplished this for us. But we also hear more about what humility is in verses six, seven, eight, nine, and ten.

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Now that means among other things, he gives grace. It means, among other things, that although we should humble ourselves to see, our sin is also a gift from God. God regenerates us and gives us a fair look at things. One of the problems with people is they don't see themselves well.

I have a friend whom I call one because his name is one and he was a young pastor and at the age of 35 or so, he's 50 something now, at the age of 35, he had a there was a prison kind of near his church, and

And so they sent him up to the floor that had the murderers and other highly violent criminals. Now, he'd heard, because, you know, we went to college and this is what you hear in college. He'd heard that low self-esteem is one of the main causes of, crime and criminality, various problems. This, by the way, is false, but people say it a lot, so it seems like it's true.

And so he gave them a little test and that very simple test. He said, rate yourself morally 1 to 10, one being the lowest, ten being the highest of all the prisoners. He questioned the lowest score and a prisoner gave himself was ten. I am the most exalted moral person I know, but a number about a quarter of them said, I'm sorry, but I have to give myself an 11.

Ten just isn't high enough for me. Murderers, violent criminals. We're filled with pride now. The solution of pride is not to think of yourself as a worm is nothing. The solution to pride is not no self-esteem. It's proper, realistic self appraisal. And that, of course, includes the idea that we are sinners. We can't stop. But the God still loves us because we are his creatures.

And so a realistic self appraisal says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up. That's a promise that he gives us or is a warning. God opposes the proud, and there's a command humble yourself with a promise attached. He will lift you up. And the passage tells us how to go about doing this.

It says, for example, if you want to humble yourself before the Lord, the first thing you need to do is resist the devil and he'll flee from you. He'll run away. Don't succumb to temptation. That's number one. Number two, come near to God. That means pray and read the Bible and think things through. And God's presence come near to God and he will come near to you.

Wash your hands, meaning repent of your sins and purify your hearts. You double minded. Admit before God into yourself that you have double desires. You desire what's good and you desire what's evil. Admit that, and when you see your sins, he says, grieve, mourn and wail. I don't know how many of you know the name Steve Garvey. He ran for Senate in, California and lost.

He was a Republican. So Republicans always lose the Senate races for some years in California. And he got on the ballot in part because he's a handsome sort of guy and energetic. And he accomplished some things early in life. Specifically, he was an all star first baseman 7 or 8 years. I looked it up, but I forgot to write it down 7 or 8 years for the Los Angeles Dodgers and the San Diego Padres.

So he was a very accomplished baseball player when he was a baseball player, the media called him Mr. Clean because it a very clean image, and he had a high profile marriage to a wonderful woman. But his teammates called him Mr. Phony. And it became clear why, when his first marriage fell apart, he was going to marry another woman, a second woman to whom he was engaged, and she claimed to be pregnant by him.

But just before the wedding day, he married a third woman who also said she was pregnant by him. And when that hit the news, a fourth woman came forward and said, I too am carrying Garvey's child.

Garvey did not deny any of these women's claims. We might say he acted more like a Padre than a Dodger. It's true. It's actually true. And I apologize for that. The only pun I'll tell this year in the pulpit.

He said it gets worse. He said if the children are mine, I'll live up to my moral obligations, which I feel very strongly about because I am a Christian. Oh no, he went on TV for an interview and the interviewer said, you don't seem very troubled by any of this. And he said, God has a purpose in everything we do.

Now, that's not repentance. That's a fatalistic shrug of the shoulders. I have my desires. I have God indulge my desires. James says. 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. God doesn't lift you up. If you couldn't care less about your sin.

But if you grieve. Morning well, God says, I will lift you up. I'll forgive you. I'll make you my child. I'll set you on a better path. I'll give you my spirit if you're willing. Join a church, have fellowship and friendship and people, and encourage you to live a Christian life together. Become a disciple. That's what God offers.



But you got to humble yourself.

Now, there are a variety of ways to live a life of humility. The chief of them is to believe the gospel, to trust in Jesus Christ. But there's many other ways Jesus does say, you know, James is the half brother. Jesus is following Jesus. Jesus says, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

How do you do that? I'm going to just ask you, would you look at your speech, just looking at your emails, see how many eye words there are? I mean, mind myself and then compare it to how many we and us words there are. And when you start putting others first, you may actually be exalted, respected for being a good team member.

That would be one simple example. Or you could present your desires, your goals to God and say, Lord, this is what I want. Is it godly or is it not? But above all, above all, of course, the best way to humble yourself is to repent and turn to Jesus. And when you turn to Jesus, you also remember that you're living a life under the Lord.

And and that means you accept. God sends, a friend of mine called it once the life of if only it's not a good life. The life of. If only, if only God had made me more healthy. Give me more friends. Put me in a better neighborhood. Better job. If only, if only, if only I my way were not blocked by someone who just won't retire.

If only humble yourself before the Lord serving the place God places you. But above all, above all, the greatest way to humble yourself before the Lord is through belief in Christ. And we have a beautiful picture of this today in the Lord's Supper. You understand, of course, that communion says there is one hope for you to gain eternal life, to be right with God forever.

And it's not in you becoming a better person. It's an understanding, believing that Jesus knows how sinful you are, and your only hope is you would repent and turn to Christ who came into this life. It's so bad that Jesus could not give us instructions. He had to come to this life to live a humble life among us as a as a as an artisan who made his living with his hands, who slept on the ground, who was hated, mocked, falsely accused, died in the cross, rose again.

That's what it took. And if this is what it takes to rescue you, then friends, let us humble ourselves before the Lord. And let us also humble ourselves before the Lord. When we recognize how very much he's done for us. Now, if you're a Christian who's struggling today, you're thinking, I'm not worthy of the Lord's Supper. I say to you that that saying the words as a believer, I'm not worthy.

The Lord's Supper are actually the first words you should say before you partake. Because if you're weak and you know your only hope is Christ, by all means, feed on Christ today. Now, if you're at the top of the world and God's been good to you, and you've had a wonderful week or month and you've put sin aside, praise God and celebrate the Lord's Supper, you can confess your sins at the Lord's Supper.

You can celebrate the Lord's Supper if you do not yet know the Lord. If you know if you know, you have not yet humbled yourself before the Lord. There are two things you can do today. Number one, you can humble yourself before the Lord right now and say, Lord, I'm convicted of my selfish desires, my inability to stop, and I'm going to trust you this very day.

And if you're an unbeliever, we're so glad you're here. If you are, if you're an unbeliever and you're not there yet, then I say to you, pause. Pray, meditate, think, talk to somebody near you. Maybe the Christian friend who invited you today and keep on working on this and see if God's going to call you to himself. If you're going to respond in faith.

So come, come and partake. If you belong to Christ and you're at the top of the world, or if you're at the very bottom, and if you're ready, I invite you to stand. Now, we're going to confess our sins as we prepare to head to the Lord's Supper.