

newark united pentecostal church

Lesson Title: Book of James - Chapter 4



Key Concept: James is action-oriented “wisdom literature” filled with good advice that reflects the teachings of Proverbs and Jesus. Chapter 4 is all about keeping ourselves submitted to God.



Scriptures:

So humble yourselves before God...
(James 4:7a *New Living Translation*)

What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.”
(James 4:15 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: James 4



Lesson Thoughts:

In chapter 4, James focuses on one theme. Even as he talks about incorrect focus, contention, and overconfident plans, the theme remains central: submission to God.

James starts the chapter by addressing fighting among the people he’s writing to. That fighting, he says, comes from evil desires, which come from focusing on what gives us happiness. His instant rebuke is: “You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God?” But wait, he was talking about happiness, not about the world! Where did this come from? And this is his first point. Our pleasures are all in the here and now, and when we focus on those, we lose our focus on the eternal, and side with the world instead of with God. What is James’s solution to this problem? “Humble yourselves before God.” If we’re to be faithful to God, we have to leave what we want and commit ourselves to doing and being what God wants, no matter whether that makes us happy or not. (James 4:1–10 *New Living Translation*)

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Having addressed the root problem, James addresses the fighting and contention directly. He instructs us not to speak evil against each other. And why? Because by doing so, we're stealing God's job. It's God's job to judge us and our brothers, so what are we doing taking that responsibility for ourselves? When we criticize each other, we have decided that we're able to do God's job for him. So stop. (James 4:11–12 *New Living Translation*)

Then James seems to shift topics, and talks to those who say, "We're going to do this tomorrow" or "I'm going to do that later." He rebukes them for acting like they know what's going to happen. But as he explains his reasons, it becomes clear that he's still talking about staying submitted. The reason we shouldn't say those things is because we're taking God out of the equation and acting like we have control. As in everything else in this chapter, the solution is to keep God in command and remember that we are his servants. Instead of saying "I will do this," we should say "If God wants, I will do this." Even in discussing our plans, we must stay submitted to God. (James 4:13–16 *New Living Translation*)

James 4 is all about submission to God. Whether we are choosing our focus, interacting with our brothers and sisters, or even just talking about what we're going to do, we have to keep God first. If we don't, James says we are adulterers, forsaking our savior for worldly pleasures. But if we do, James says, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you."

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What are some areas you have trouble keeping submitted and secondary to God?
- 2) Why do you think focusing on what makes us happy keeps us from submitting to God? Doesn't God want us to be happy?
- 3) Why is it so easy to start judging others instead of letting God do it?
- 4) How can we make plans and remember to include God in the process?

Next Lesson: Book of James – Chapter 5 (Do a slow read before the next lesson)

Notes and Reflections

- 1) What is something you like that can easily steal your focus and attention from God? What can you do to guard your focus from distraction?
- 2) What are steps you can take to keep yourself from stealing God's job and judging other people? (When you've thought of them, do them.)
- 3) If we forget to include God in our plans, what can he do to fix our error? How can we make it easy for him to remind us when we forget?
- 4) Why do you think James spent a whole chapter talking about submission to God, when he only spent half a chapter earlier talking about how important it is for your faith to be accompanied by good works?
- 5) Before the next lesson in this series, do a slow read of James chapter five.