

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## Introduction

Last session we moved further through James as we talked about our faith being present in what we do and what we say. Today we will look a little closer at how our actions and faith go hand in hand. First, let's discuss how we have been doing at putting it into practice.

*We were given several focuses to begin implementing in our lives; 1) Holding up the mirror (that is the Bible) to our lives and taking a look at how we really look; 2) begin reading a Proverb a day; 3) being intentional about the words that come out of our mouth. How did you do on one or more of these challenges?*

## Faith Shows in Our Passions

**Read James 4:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup>What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>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.*

*<sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

*<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? <sup>6</sup>But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:*

*"God opposes the proud"*

*but shows favor to the humble.”*

- *Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*
- *Is it me, or does the phrase “Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God,” sound a little harsh? What do you think James is trying to say here?*

I have had this Scripture quoted to me at times when I had chosen to spend time with people whose beliefs did not parallel my own and, likewise, at times when I had chosen to take on an environmental focus. It seems to me that these are all too familiar opportunities of taking Scripture out of context to judge the action and intent of another.

I think it is clear, when we read this portion in its proper context, that James’ expression, “Friendship with the world” is not referring to being friends with people in the world or loving our earth and taking care of it - but in putting wants and possession ahead of God. When our world becomes a “me, me, me” environment there is little room for God. For example when one feels compelled to give to a church ministry but opts, instead, to spend their money on a new HD TV. And it is not all about money or possessions - sometimes it is just how we spend our time or how we treat others. So often some in the church choose to ostracize others because of their belief system, without even checking in with God and what God would want. Could it be that even our zone of comfort within the church that prevents us from reaching out could be a friendship with the world?

## Faith Shows in Our Pursuits

### Read James 4:7

*<sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and the devil will flee from you.*

*<sup>8</sup>Come near to God and God will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and God will lift you up.*

*<sup>11</sup>Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. <sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

*<sup>13</sup>Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” <sup>14</sup>Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” <sup>16</sup>As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup>If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.*

*Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

I’ve heard it said, “If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything.” I think that applies in many areas of our lives, including our Spiritual choices. We often saunter through our spirituality as if we are expecting God to make all the moves and we are expected to do very

little - but this is a passage packed with required action on our part. As a quick overview, here are the verbs encouraging us in verses 7-10: Submit; resist; come near; wash and purify; grieve, mourn and wail; humble yourself.

- *Look back at each of these verbs in their context. How do these verbs fit into your lives? What seems particularly easy or difficult/ natural or foreign? Why?*

I know that we, as a community, have had our share of judgments and condemnations hurled our way in the name of God. It is astounding to read verses 11-12 and wonder how so many can completely ignore this particular passage of scriptures in their rush to condemning judgment. And yet, even as I write those words, I wonder how much of my perspective and attitude is, in and of itself, violating the call to remain judge-less. The church is a body of believers throughout all of time and space - not just the LGBTQ and accepting believers in the here and now. With that in mind, read Gal. 5:15 *“But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”* It is far time to find a way through the “us” and “them” mentality and into the “One body of Christ,” mentality. God is the only One who has complete and full knowledge of people; therefore, only God has the capacity to judge others fully. That is why judgment is God’s sole prerogative.

- *How can we demand for Biblical truths to be told without judging those whom we believe are espousing Biblical fabrications?*

Finally, the last several verses of our reading deal with the plans we make in life. It is hard to believe that God does not want us to make any plans in life. While that would be great for those who are not so good with a calendar (speaking from the voice of experience) when we make plans it is easy to see that much more can get done. James is not referring to the general since of making plans, rather of not acknowledging the providence of God in our plans. If we fail to put our plans through the filter of God’s will we are elevating our authority above God’s in our life.

It is also imperative that we understand that our time is not our own, it belongs to God. We need to make most of the moment for we cannot be sure of tomorrow. Unexpected situations may make us change our plans totally. Procrastination or delay may lose opportunity. Just as the non-believer may say, “I’ll look for God tomorrow, today I want to do my thing,” a Christian can easily making the same mistake by putting off that letter of forgiveness, or assuming that tomorrow will be a better opportunity to tell someone of God’s love.

- *What is something that you might do differently if you sought God’s plans for the immediate moment?*
- *How might you better spend your time after contemplating this Scripture?*

## Putting it into Practice

Just a reminder that throughout this series each session will end with a few practical focuses and the Scripture for next session’s study. Your group is encouraged to add to the list if any discussion prompted other focus or actions.

- Check your motives
  - Take a look at your life and ask why you do what you do - why do you spend your time the way you do, why do you spend your money the way you do, why do you do the things you do?
  - What are the consequences (good and bad) of these choices?
  - Try to identify one or two things you can do differently.

- Consider your pursuits
  - If you identified any verbs from verses 7-10 that should be better represented in your life make a focused effort to apply one of them in the next two weeks.
  - Identify if you have any judgments in your life that need to be surrendered to God.
  - Consider anything you have been putting off - is it time to do it now?

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Session V Scripture: James 5:1-20