

James 4:4-6 — Grace to the Humble

We continue our study through the book of James, covering James 4:4-6.

Memory Verses:

James 1:2-4 NKJV

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Revision: the effect of pride on our prayer life

The reality we learn today is very simple. If we are struggling with sin, if we are loving the things of the world more than God, then the cause is pride. This will become clear as we go. But the main point was made last week — pride destroys our prayer life and therefore our relationship with God. Sin is a result or consequence of pride, therefore sin also destroys our prayer life and relationship with God. So how does pride affect our prayer life and our relationship with God?

Firstly, we may convince ourselves that we don't need God's help so we don't ask for it (we don't pray — James 4:2). Why? Because we are too proud to ask for God's help; we think we are good enough or strong enough on our own, trusting in our own resources. The reality is that we are choosing to be dominated and deceived by our desperately wicked sinful nature.

Secondly, still due to pride, we pray selfishly asking God to satisfy the desires of our sinful nature (James 4:3), again because we are dominated and deceived by our desperately wicked sinful or human nature. We pridefully, thinking that we know best, believe that we can be satisfied by chasing the desires of our sinful nature. Of course God won't answer these prayers as they will only hurt us — the fruit of the sinful nature is death (Romans 8:5-6). So we go on our merry way living by dead faith and producing dead works.

Another way of saying this is that we are living or dominated by our sinful nature and will reap the painful consequences. Consider:

Galatians 6 :7-9 NLT

⁷ Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. ⁸ Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. ⁹ So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

Also consider just how deceitful our sinful hearts are, and how easy it is for us to forget just how ugly our old self, our sinful nature, really is. The following verses from Jeremiah also remind us of the two choices that we make every moment of every day — do I trust in my own strength or God's strength. ***Am I limited by what I can do, or by what God can do?*** The following verses in Jeremiah sum it up well.

Jeremiah 17:5-10 NLT

⁵ This is what the Lord says:

**“Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans,
who rely on human strength
and turn their hearts away from the Lord.**

⁶ They are like stunted shrubs in the desert,
with no hope for the future.

They will live in the barren wilderness,
in an uninhabited salty land.

⁷ **“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord
and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.**

⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank,
with roots that reach deep into the water.

Such trees are not bothered by the heat
or worried by long months of drought.

Their leaves stay green,
and they never stop producing fruit.

⁹ **“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things,
and desperately wicked.**

Who really knows how bad it is?

¹⁰ But I, the Lord, search all hearts
and **examine secret motives.**

I give all people their due rewards,
according to what their actions deserve.”

Let's continue with our study through the book of James.

James 4:1-17 NKJV

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? ² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. ⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns *jealously*”?

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

**“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”**

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

¹¹ Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

¹⁷ Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

The Cure for Worldliness, Dead Faith, and Dead Works — Grace

James 4:4 NKJV

⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

v **4 Adulterers and adulteresses!**: Why does James call them **adulterers and adulteresses!** This is very strong language. How do you like being called an adulterer or an adulteress? Were all these religious, synagogue attending, Jews really being unfaithful to their spouses? Most likely not many of them at all.

We need to remember that James is writing to Jews scattered around the world. They had a very strong tradition of reading the Hebrew or Jewish Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God often used this picture of adultery or marital unfaithfulness to describe the people of God (the Jews or Israelites) turning away from God to worship idols. God used this external picture of marital adultery or unfaithfulness, of a husband or wife turning away from and rejecting their spouse, to describe the internal turning away of their hearts from God when they stopped seeking God and worshipped and trusted in their idols instead. Consider the following verses:

Ezekiel 6:9 NLT

Then when they are exiled among the nations, they will remember me. They will recognise how hurt I am by their unfaithful [adulterous] hearts and lustful eyes that long for their idols. Then at last they will hate themselves for all their detestable sins.

Hosea 3:1 NLT

Then the Lord said to me, “Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them.”

Ezekiel 16:32 NLT

Yes, you are an adulterous wife who takes in strangers instead of her own husband.

Jeremiah 3:6-10 NLT

During the reign of [Godly] King Josiah, the Lord said to me, “Have you seen what fickle Israel [the northern kingdom] has done? Like a wife who commits adultery, Israel has worshiped other gods on every hill and under every green tree. ⁷ I thought, ‘After she has done all this, she will return to me.’ But she did not return, and her faithless sister Judah [the southern kingdom] saw this. ⁸ She saw that I divorced faithless Israel because of her adultery [the northern kingdom of Israel had been defeated and went into captivity]. But that treacherous sister Judah had no fear, and now she, too, has left me and given herself to prostitution [worshipping idols]. ⁹ Israel [the northern kingdom] treated it all so lightly—she thought nothing of committing adultery by worshipping idols made of wood and stone. So now the land has been polluted. ¹⁰ But despite all this, her faithless sister Judah [the southern kingdom] has never sincerely returned to me. She has only pretended to be sorry. I, the Lord, have spoken!”

Ezekiel 33:37-39 NLT

They have committed both adultery and murder—adultery by worshipping idols and murder by burning as sacrifices the children they bore to me. ³⁸ Furthermore, they have defiled my Temple and violated my Sabbath day! ³⁹ **On the very day that they sacrificed their children to their idols, they boldly came into my Temple to worship! They came in and defiled my house.**

This picture is very clear. The people of the southern kingdom of Israel or Judah were in the middle of a revival when Jeremiah was writing, and godly king Josiah was committed to getting rid of all idols in the land and getting back to worshipping only God. On the outside it looked great. But for the majority of the people, it was only pretend. Their hearts were not in it. As soon as godly king Josiah died, most people went back to openly worshipping their idols, as well as pretending to worship God by continuing to go to the temple and offer sacrifices there.

These people were not committed to God, were not seeking God, were not depending on God, were not trusting in God, and, as a result, God rejected their worship and sacrifices. They were all in vain. The sad fact was that, although the people considered themselves to be morally upright and that the temple rituals they were keeping were pleasing to God, they were sadly deceived by their desperately wicked hearts. God saw their hearts, their secret motives, and He was anything but pleased. God eventually used the Babylonians to destroy the city and the temple. Remember we have previously looked at those prayers where we ask God to reveal to us the true intentions of our hearts, what are true motives and desires are. If we don't, we can suffer the judgement or discipline of our loving Heavenly Father.

v 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The New Living Translation says it this way: “You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.”

The Amplified Bible says it this way: “You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God.”

Here, James makes the connection between the Old Testament picture of spiritual adultery when the Jews would worship other gods or idols, to their covetousness and friendship with the world at the present time. Nothing has changed. We can be going to church, pretending to be spiritual. However, on the inside, hidden from the view of those around us, we are seeking pleasure or fulfilment from the world. God is not interested in second best, in what's left over. He wants all of us. He is jealous of our affections, our hearts. The question for us all today is, "Who or what do I love the most?" or put another way, "What is most important to me — pleasing God by putting Him first, or, pleasing myself by seeking to be satisfied by what the world offers (**friendship with the world**)?" Here James is rebuking the Christians for their compromise with the world and covetousness or idolatry. Colossians 3:5 makes the link between idolatry and covetousness or friendship with the world.

Colossians 3:5 NLT

So put to death the sinful, earthly things **lurking within you**. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil **desires**. Don't be greedy [covetous], for a greedy [covetous] person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

So here we learn that an idolater is nothing more than a greedy or covetous person who is seeking to be fulfilled by (coveting), the things of this world. This is exactly how it was in the Old Testament, except those lusts and pleasures were represented by various false gods or idols. Today we don't have the physical idols, but we do have many ways of fulfilling our sinful nature in this world — e.g. pornography, gaming, gambling, social media (including seeking acceptance), worldly music, drinking, sex and sexual perversions, wealth, ambition, fame, drugs and violence. Nothing has changed.

v 4 **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?**

David Guzik: "James recognises that we cannot both be friends of this world system in rebellion against God, and friends of God at the same time (Matthew 6:24). Even the *desire* to be a friend (**wants to be a friend**) of the world makes that one an **enemy of God**."

v 4 **wants to be a friend**: this means that we may not actually do the behaviour, but inwardly we would love to. We see the world living in a way that pleases the sinful nature and we long to have that same satisfaction, that same acceptance. However, we don't outwardly perform the act, only because the shame or cost to our reputation that we hold dear is greater than the perceived benefit or pleasure we might get from the sin. The important point here is that even if we are just wanting the things of the world, but not outwardly living in a worldly way, we are still just as bad. Our hearts are still directed to the world and away from God.

Moffatt: "Such **friendship with the world** means that one is on a footing of hostility towards God, for it defies His will and despises His purpose; disguise it as one may, it is an implicit challenge to God."

Matthew 6:24 NLT

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

James 4:5 NKJV

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The [Holy] Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

v 5 The [Holy] Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously:

David Guzik: “The indwelling presence of the Holy **Spirit** has a jealous yearning for our friendship with God. The **Spirit** will convict the Christian who lives in compromise.”

Meyer: “He [James] went so far as to speak of them as adulterers and adulteresses; and then adopting a gentler, pleading tone, he says, ‘You are grieving the Holy Spirit who has come to dwell within you, who yearns with a jealous envy to possess your entire nature for Himself.’ ”

There are many other passages in the Old Testament that tell us God is a jealous God (Deuteronomy 32:16 and 32:21; Exodus 20:5 and 34:14; Zechariah 8:2).

Exodus 34:12-14 NLT

“Be very careful never to make a treaty with the people who live in the land where you are going. If you do, you will follow their evil ways and be trapped. ¹³ Instead, you must break down their pagan altars, smash their sacred pillars, and cut down their Asherah poles. ¹⁴ **You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you.**

Notice here what God is jealous of — it’s His relationship with us.

Deuteronomy 32:16-21 NLT

¹⁶ **They stirred up his jealousy by worshiping foreign gods;**
they provoked his fury with detestable deeds.

¹⁷ They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not God,
to gods they had not known before,
to new gods only recently arrived,
to gods their ancestors had never feared.

¹⁸ **You neglected the Rock who had fathered you;**
you forgot the God who had given you birth.

¹⁹ **“The Lord saw this and drew back,**
provoked to anger by his own sons and daughters.

²⁰ He said, ‘I will abandon them;
then see what becomes of them.

For they are a twisted generation,
children without integrity.

²¹ **They have roused my jealousy by worshiping things that are not God;**
they have provoked my anger with their useless idols.

So what does it mean when the bible says that God is jealous of our affections?

Barclay: “The idea is that God loves men with such a passion that he cannot bear any other love within the hearts of men.”

Imagine that you have been happily married for over 20 years. You have a deep love for your spouse and enjoy doing everything together with them. Then, one day, your husband or wife decides that they don't love you anymore. An intruder has stolen their heart, their affections. This new person doesn't love them and is only using them, deceiving them. You know that your precious spouse will end up used and abused, their life wasted and empty.

If you really love them, how would you feel? Jealous, hurt, heart-broken, angry, grieved? Of course! Would you be longing for that relationship to be restored? Yes. It would be difficult, but if you really love the other person you will be willing to forgive them. If we are jealous in a good way, we will do everything we can to protect our relationship with that person, so that it won't be broken.

Now think about our relationship with God. If I turn my back on God and desire friendship with the world; if I start to desire the things and pleasures that the world offers, then how does God feel? The same. Jealous, hurt, heart-broken, angry, grieved. Also, because God is jealous of my relationship with Him, He does everything He can to protect our relationship — He disciplines us. Yes that's right. God disciplines us because He loves us, and wants us back in relationship with Him.

When we do walk away from God, does God long for the relationship to be restored? Absolutely! No matter how much we hurt God, God is always ready forgives us and cleans us — it's a promise (1 John 1:9).

1 John 1:9 AMP

If we [freely] admit that we have sinned *and* confess our sins, He is faithful and just (true to His own nature and promises) and will forgive our sins [dismiss our lawlessness] and [continuously] cleanse us from all unrighteousness [everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action].

But we need to realise that our turning away from God grieves God like an unfaithful spouse grieves us. Sin hurts God more than it hurts us. True repentance is based on us starting to understand and recognise that sin hurts God deeply. I'm not just talking about the punishment or wrath of God that Jesus suffered on the cross for every sin ever committed. I'm talking about how God is grieved when we choose to love something more than we love Him *now*, since we committed ourselves to Him in marriage.

In a human relationship where one person loves more than the other, the person who loves more will be more deeply hurt. The deeper or greater the love, the deeper or greater the hurt, grief, and sadness that results from the separation or broken relationship. It is the same with our relationship with God. Sin or unfaithfulness hurts or grieves God more than us because God loves us so much more than we love Him, and therefore He is more affected by the broken relationship.

We must remember that what we do really does affect God. We either bring joy to our loving Heavenly Father's heart — like the prodigal son returning home; or grief to our Father — like the prodigal son demanding his share of the inheritance and leaving home so he could live a worldly lifestyle, satisfying the desires of his sinful nature.

Ephesians 4:30 NKJV

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30 NLT

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

The Greek word translated “grieve” or “bring sorrow” in Ephesians 4:30 means to: grieve; vex; offend; insult; become sad, distressed, or sorrowful; to harm; causing or marked by grief or pain.

Now, why do we feel jealous of those other loves, the people or things that have seduced or turned away our previously loyal friends or family? Because we long to continue to love them and enjoy fellowship with them. We long to continue to be a blessing to them, to still be able to help them — not because we have to, but because we want to. Think of how a parent feels when they are disowned by their child. The pain is immense. The parent isn't seeking the relationship with the child for what they can get, but rather for what they can give.

This is how it is with God. You see, godly jealousy is not based on what I can get, but rather what I can give. When I love someone, I am hurt, angry and jealous because that other person or thing is stopping me from being able to be a blessing to the one I love. That other love has broken the relationship we once enjoyed. Just like I am grieved or saddened when my spouse or child is no longer able to receive and enjoy the love and blessings we once shared, so God is grieved or saddened or pained when I choose not to receive and enjoy the love and blessings He wants to lavish on me.

David Guzik: “Think of the inner pain and torture inside the person who is betrayed by an unfaithful spouse; who must reckon with the truth, *I am faithful to them, but they are not faithful to me.* This is what the Spirit of God feels regarding our world-loving hearts.”

The Solution for Worldliness: in Humility, Get Right With God (Repent)

James 4:6 NKJV

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

**“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”**

v 6 **But:** “Note that contrast; note it always. Observe how weak we are, how strong he is; how proud we are, how condescending he is; how erring we are, and how infallible he is; how changing we are, and how immutable he is; how provoking we are, and how forgiving he is. Observe how in us there is only ill, and how in him there is only good. Yet our ill but draws his goodness forth, and still he blesseth. Oh! What a rich contrast!” (Spurgeon)

v 6 **But He gives more grace:** The Holy Spirit convicts us of our compromise and sin, but, also grants us or **gives us more grace** to serve God as we should. Let's take the time to quickly look at the grace of God; what it is and how much we need it.

Acts 20:24 NLT

But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others **the Good News [Gospel] about the wonderful grace of God.**

Acts 13:43 NLT

Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, and the two men urged them **to continue to rely on the grace of God.**

Romans 5:15 NLT

But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. **But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.**

Romans 5:20-21 NLT

God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. **But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant.** ²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, **now God's wonderful grace rules instead**, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Spurgeon: "Sin seeks to enter, grace shuts the door; sin tries to get the mastery, but grace, which is stronger than sin, resists, and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times, and puts its foot on our neck; grace comes to the rescue ... Sin comes up like Noah's flood, but grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the ark."

Spurgeon: "Do you suffer from spiritual poverty? It is your own fault, for he giveth more grace. If you have not got it, it is not because it is not to be had, but because you have not gone for it."

Remember that this grace is something that is given, and so it must be received. How do we receive God's grace?

v 6 **God resists the proud: Grace only comes to the humble.**

David Guzik: "Grace and pride are eternal enemies. Pride demands that God bless me in light of my merits, whether real or imagined. But grace will not deal with me on the basis of anything in me—good or bad—but only on the basis of who God is."

Simply put, God loves me because it's in His nature to love people. God chooses to love and bless mankind simply and only because He wants to, not because of anything that we have done or can do. If it was, then it wouldn't be by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

v 6 **resists the proud:** the word **resists** is a powerful word. It means to; oppose, set in opposition to, to range in battle against, be opposite to, in opposition to, to be hostile toward, to show hostility, to set oneself against, to take away, to meet in battle.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to find myself pitted against God as His enemy, for God to be hostile towards me. But this is exactly what pride makes us — enemies of God. God hates pride and will do whatever it takes to destroy in in our lives. If we refuse to humble ourselves, then God will humble us. We are either positioning

ourselves to receive the help from God we need to live a life that pleases God, or we are putting ourselves in a place where God will have to treat us as an enemy. God will resist us if we are proud. He will treat us like an enemy if we refuse to humble ourselves before Him, just like He did the children of Israel so many times.

v 6 **But gives grace to the humble:** “It isn’t as if our humility *earns* the grace of God. Humility merely puts us in a position to receive the gift He freely **gives.**” (David Guzik)

Ephesians 2:4-10 NLT

But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by **God’s grace** that you have been saved!) ⁶ For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of **His grace** and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸ God saved you by **His grace** when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.

Conclusion and Application for James 4:4 “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”

James 4:5 AMP

Or do you suppose that the Scripture is speaking to no purpose that says, The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us *and* He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love? [Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:19ff.]

From Jon Courson’s Application Commentary: “Yearns jealously” means “guards jealously.” In other words, the Spirit of God that dwells within us wants the very best for us. When we talk about grieving the Holy Spirit, we must understand the Spirit is grieved not because we’ve hurt Him, but because—seeing what’s ahead for us if we continue on the path we’re on—He hurts for us. If you’re a dad, you can understand this....

Your sixteen-year-old daughter can’t stop talking about him. So finally a week or two later, he shows up on his Harley in black leathers, a marijuana joint hanging out of his mouth, a swastika tattooed on his arm, a patch over his eye, a flask of whiskey in his pocket, a Playboy bunny on his shirt, saying, “I like your daughter.”

Although your daughter says, “Isn’t he dreamy?” you know he’s nothing but a nightmare—and that she’ll be hurt badly if she gets on his Harley and goes down the road of life with him.

That’s how the Holy Spirit feels when He sees us getting on the back of some Harley we think is dreamy. He’s not mad *at* us, not disappointed *in* us, not hurt *by* us, but jealous *for* us as a dad is for his daughter.’