

## Authentic Christians Humbly Submit Themselves to God

Message 5 of 6 in the series: "Authentic: Life Lessons from the Book of James"

### A. James, an early church leader in Jerusalem, wrote a letter of instruction on Christian living to believers whom he could no longer teach in person because they had been scattered all over the Roman Empire by religious persecution.

"This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the 'twelve tribes'—**Jewish believers scattered abroad**. Greetings!" James 1:1 (NLT)

1. These scattered believers had been involved in the first church in Jerusalem where, together with thousands of other believers, they experienced wonderful unity, generosity, love, and devotion to the Lord. "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. **And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had**. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. **They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity**—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)
2. These scattered believers had experienced living in a huge Christian community that handled conflict well under the mature, godly leadership of the apostles. "But **as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent**. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So, the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, 'We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.'" Acts 6:1-4 (NLT)
3. God provisionally allowed these early believers to be scattered all over the place so that the whole world could hear the Good News of Jesus. "But the believers who were scattered **preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went**." Acts 8:4 (NLT)

### B. Scattered believers were now leading new churches that were experiencing all kinds of problems and conflicts because they were foolishly choosing worldliness over godliness.

Worldliness = "A predominant passion for obtaining the good things of this life; covetousness; addictedness to gain and temporal enjoyments." KJV Bible Dictionary

"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the **evil desires at war within you**? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. **Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong**—you want only what will give you pleasure. 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**. Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him (the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy.)" James 4:1-5 (NLT)

1. Our old, sinful flesh still loves the things of this world. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." 1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

**Good News!** By surrendering control of our lives, we can gain victory over the desires of our flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. **Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.**" Galatians 5:22-25 (NLT)

2. God wants us to bring our needs to Him in prayer instead of scheming to get the things we want in our own strength/wisdom.

**Good News!** God knows what we need better than we do, and He will gladly answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. “But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for **your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!**” Matthew 6:6-8 (NLT)

“And we are confident that he hears us **whenever we ask for anything that pleases him**. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that **he will give us what we ask for.**”  
1 John 5:14-15 (NLT)

3. When we chase after the things of this world, we are committing spiritual adultery. “But **you have been unfaithful to me**, you people of Israel! You have been like a faithless wife who leaves her husband.”  
Jeremiah 3:20 (NLT)

**Important!** We are the bride of Christ, and God will not share our affections for any other gods. “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for **I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.**”  
Exodus 20:2-5a (NLT) (*Ephesians 5:22-23*)

### C. James reminded his readers that they needed to humbly submit themselves to God.

“And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, ‘**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**’ **So humble yourselves before God.** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. **Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.” James 4:6-10 (NLT)

**Good News!** If we humble ourselves and repent of our pride and sinful behavior, God will give us grace. “**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**’ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.” 1 Peter 5:5b-6 (NLT) (*Proverbs 3:34*)

**Good News!** If we stay close to the Lord, He will give us the strength we need to resist the devil! “...Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that **you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.**” Ephesians 6:10-11 (NLT)

**Good News!** Sorrow over sin is a good thing if it turns us away from sin and back to God. “For **the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation.** There’s no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.”  
2 Corinthians 7:10 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 6:1-4, James 4:1-2, & Acts 15:36-41. How does it make you feel to hear that conflict and grumbling/complaining have been present in churches from the very beginning?
2. Discuss the following definition of worldliness. “A predominant passion for obtaining the good things of this life; covetousness; addictedness to gain and temporal enjoyments” (KJV Bible Dictionary) Why would friendship with the world make us enemies of God? (James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17)
3. Read James 4:2-3, Matthew 6:5-8, & 1 John 5:15-16. What did James’ readers get wrong about prayer? What do you think it means to pray according to God’s will?
4. What is “spiritual adultery”? Why does God say He is jealous for our affections? (Exodus 20:2-5, Jeremiah 3:20, James 4:4-5, Ephesians 5:22-23)

5. Discuss the following **Good News** statements:

**Good News!** If we humble ourselves and repent of our pride and sinful behavior, God will give us grace.  
(James 4:6 & 10, 1 Peter 5:5-6, Proverbs 3:34)

**Good News!** If we stay close to the Lord, He will give us the strength we need to resist the devil!  
(James 4:7, Ephesians 6:1-11)

**Good News!** Sorrow over sin is a good thing if it turns us away from sin and back to God.  
(James 4:8-9, 2 Corinthians 7:10)

6. Quotations worth considering:

“If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it... Do you know, brothers, what great things are to be had for the asking? Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven lies before the grasp of the asking man; all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer.” Charles H. Spurgeon

“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.’” Hosea 3:1 (NLT)