

**WORKMAN BIBLE STUDY SERIES:**

# BOOK OF JAMES

THE GUIDE BOOK FOR  
LIVING OUT OUR  
FAITH

WEEK 4 - CHAPTER 4



Pastor Dennis Davis

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week follows a pattern to help guide you in your study of James



The week begins with an introduction to the themes of the week. Throughout each week you'll find scripture readings, devotions, and images to help inspire your thoughts and guide your time.



Each week includes five days of scripture reading along with a short devotional thought and three-five questions to help you process what you've read.



The sixth day contains no reading but should be used to soak up what you've read over the past 5 days and to seek God for wisdom and insight into the text. Don't skip out on using this day!



The seventh day each week offers a list of questions that apply to the passage. You will also start to see call out boxes which are used to provide additional insight and clarity for the passage as well as how it relates to the whole Bible.

## Introduction

James 4 begins with a straight-shooting question: “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” (James 4:1, NKJV). James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, doesn’t dance around the issue—he puts his finger on the root of our conflicts. They aren’t just “out there” in the world or caused by other people; they start inside of us, in our selfish desires and unchecked passions. James wants his readers to see that the struggles and divisions they’re facing in their churches and communities come from the battles raging in their own hearts.

But James doesn’t just expose the problem—he points us to the solution. Right in the middle of the chapter, he reminds us that “God gives more grace” (James 4:6). That’s good news for anyone who feels the weight of pride, envy, or selfish ambition. The call is to humble ourselves before the Lord, resist the devil, and draw near to God. James shows us that peace with God and peace with others come when we surrender our pride and submit to God’s authority. At its heart, this chapter is about a choice: will we live as friends of the world, driven by our own desires, or as friends of God, walking in His grace and peace?

## BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

The theme of Week 4 - Chapter 4 is, "[Living Humbly Before God](#)."

Christian maturity is marked by humility, surrender, and dependence on God rather than selfish desires, worldliness, or prideful self-reliance.

### [Day 1 – James 4:1-3](#)

**Theme:** The Source of strife - Conflicts arise from unchecked desires

### [Day 2 – James 4:4-6](#)

**Theme:** Friendship with the world – Divided loyalties lead to spiritual unfaithfulness directions.

### [Day 3 – James 4:7-10](#)

**Theme:** Drawing near to God – Humble repentance is the path to God.

### [Day 4 – James 4:11-12](#)

**Theme:** Judging others - Be careful how you judge one another. God is The Judge.

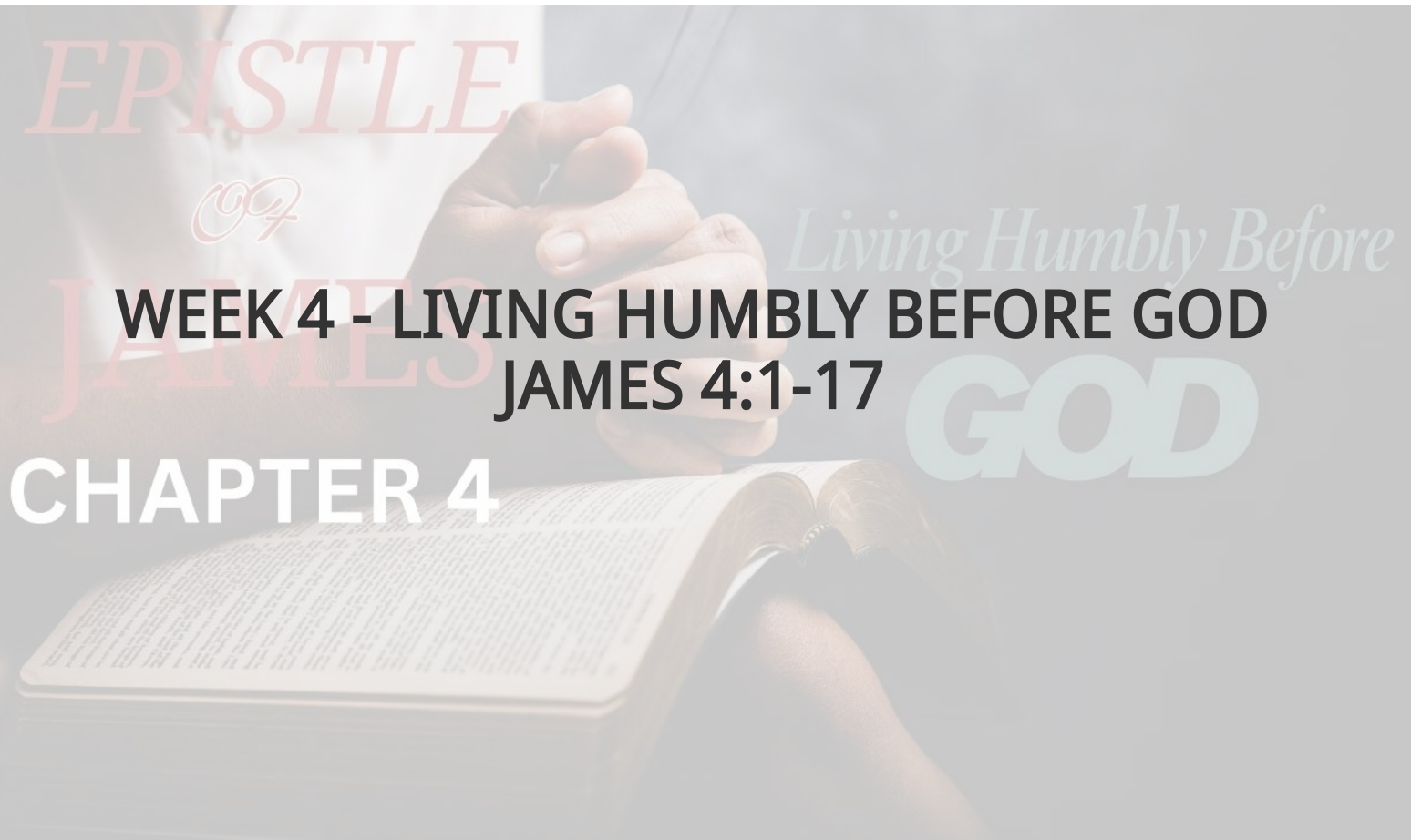
### [Day 5 – James 4:13-17](#)

**Theme:** Life in God's hands – True spiritual maturity acknowledges God's will over our plans.

### [Day 6 – Soaking It In](#)

**Theme:** Humility ties the chapter together—submission to God, grace over pride, and love without rivalry.

### [Day 7 Passage Reflections Reflective Questions on the Full Chapter](#)



## DAY 1 - JAMES 4:1-3

### THE SOURCE OF STRIFE

## Devotional Thought:

Theme: **“The Source of Strife”** – Conflicts arise from unchecked desires.

Have you ever noticed how many conflicts—whether in the home, the church, or the world—trace back to selfish desires? James doesn’t sugarcoat it. He asks, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” (v.1). The answer? They come from within—our passions and cravings that battle for control. We argue, we compete, we even covet, but satisfaction slips through our fingers.

This isn’t just about “big sins.” Even the quiet frustrations we carry—resentment toward a spouse, jealousy of a coworker, or bitterness in church disagreements—spring from the same soil of unchecked desire. James reminds us: when our wants become our master, we will always end up restless and conflicted. Our desires, if left unsubmitted, set us on a path of constant striving but never true peace.

The good news is that God doesn’t leave us trapped in this cycle. James shows us that the answer is not to suppress every desire but to surrender them to God. When we bring our longings into alignment with His will, our prayers gain clarity and power, and our hearts find rest. The war inside us ceases when Christ rules within us. In Him, selfish desire is replaced with holy desire, and conflict is exchanged for peace.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Unchecked desires are one of the biggest threats to unity in the body of Christ and peace in our lives. Learning to submit our desires to God keeps us from praying selfishly, fighting unnecessarily, and living restlessly. True maturity in Christ means aligning what we want with what He wills.

### KEY PASSAGE BREAKDOWN

- James 4:1 – The true battleground is within. Conflicts outside reflect wars raging in the heart.
- James 4:2 – Desire without surrender to God breeds frustration, envy, and even destructive behavior.
- James 4:3 – Selfish motives in prayer go unanswered, because God won't fund our sinful ambitions.

## WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTION

- Genesis 4:3–8 – Cain’s jealousy of Abel illustrates desire turned deadly.
- Psalm 37:4 – God promises to give the desires of our heart, but only when those desires delight in Him.
- 1 John 2:15–17 – The world’s desires are passing away; only doing God’s will endures.

## Going Deeper

**James shows us the anatomy of conflict:**

1. Desire (v.1–2a) – We want something deeply.
2. Frustration (v.2b) – We can’t obtain it, so conflict arises.
3. Distorted Prayer (v.3) – Instead of surrendering our desires, we even try to use God as a means to get them.

This mirrors what Paul teaches in Galatians 5:16–17: the flesh and Spirit are at war. When fleshly desires rule, prayer becomes corrupted. Instead of aligning with God’s will, we ask Him to bless our self-centered plans. James calls this out bluntly: such prayers are ignored, because God is not a vending machine for sinful ambition.

# Reflections

Reflect on the significance of these first 4 verses and how they relate to you during times of trial in your own life.

**After reading today's passage, answer these questions:**

1. How can you tell when your prayers are motivated by self-interest rather than God's glory?  
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2. Where do you see the "battle within" most in your daily walk?  
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3. What would it look like this week to surrender one specific desire to God's will?  
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## James 4:1–3 (KJV)

*1. From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2. Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

## Day 2: James 4:4-6

### FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD

#### Devotional Thought:

**Theme:** “Friendship with the World” – Divided loyalties lead to spiritual unfaithfulness

James doesn’t hold back here—he calls his readers “adulterers and adulteresses” (v.4). It’s strong language, but he’s making a serious point: loving the world’s values while claiming to love God is spiritual adultery. Just like an unfaithful spouse, trying to keep one foot in God’s kingdom and the other in the world shows divided loyalty.

The truth is, we can’t straddle the line. To cozy up with the world’s systems and desires is to put ourselves in opposition to God. Yet James doesn’t leave us hopeless—he reminds us of God’s abundant grace. Even when we drift, God longs for our whole-hearted devotion and gives us the grace to return.

#### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

We live in a culture that constantly pressures us to compromise our loyalty to Christ. James makes it clear: there is no neutral ground. Choosing God’s side may not make us popular, but it will keep us faithful—and when we humble ourselves, His grace meets us right where we are.

## KEY PASSAGE / WORD BREAKDOWN

- James 4:4 – Worldly friendship = enmity with God. You can't serve both.
- James 4:5 – God jealously longs for His Spirit to dwell in us fully.
- James 4:6 – God resists the proud but pours out grace on the humble.

## WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTION

- Exodus 20:3–5 – God's covenant love is exclusive; He is a jealous God.
- Matthew 6:24 – We cannot serve both God and mammon.
- 1 John 2:15–17 – Love of the world pushes out love for the Father.
- 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 – Believers are called to separate from worldly values, because God dwells among them.

### Original Word Study

- Friendship (philia, φιλία) implies affection, loyalty, and alignment. James warns that affection for the world's system puts us at odds with God.
- Jealously in v.5 reflects God's covenant love, echoing Exodus 34:14—He does not share His people's devotion.
- The phrase “resists the proud” (v.6) pictures God actively opposing those who refuse to submit, while eagerly giving grace to the humble.

## GOING DEEPER

James shows us the spiritual tension: believers are called out of the world (John 15:19), yet temptation to blend in is strong. To be “friends” with the world doesn’t mean enjoying creation or friendships with unbelievers—it means adopting the world’s values, priorities, and pursuits. When we chase what the world treasures, we act like unfaithful partners in our relationship with God.

But the good news? God gives more grace (v.6). The proud resist God’s way and try to have it both ways, but the humble bow their hearts and find fresh strength. This is the path back for the Christian who has compromised: humble repentance and renewed devotion.

# Reflections

Think about times in your life when you tried to do something on your own and how much better it would have turned out if you sought the wisdom of God.

**After reading today's passage, answer these questions:**

1. In what area of your life do you need to shift from divided loyalty to full devotion?

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2. Where do you feel the strongest pull toward “friendship with the world”?

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3. What does God’s jealousy teach you about His love for you?

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## James 4:4-6 (KJV)

*4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

*5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*

*6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

## Day 3: James 4:7-10

### DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

#### Devotional Thought:

Theme: “Drawing Near to God” – Humble repentance is the path to closeness with God.

James lays out a series of powerful commands here: submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, humble yourself. These aren’t abstract ideas—they’re steps toward real transformation. Submission to God is where it all begins. It’s like waving the white flag and saying, “Lord, You’re in charge.”

And notice the promise: when we resist the devil, he will flee. When we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. That’s not just hopeful thinking—it’s a guaranteed response from our faithful Father. But the way forward isn’t through pride or self-sufficiency. James reminds us it’s through brokenness, repentance, and humility. When we come low, God lifts us up.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

It's easy to drift into casual Christianity—going through motions without drawing near to God. James shakes us awake with these verses. God wants more than surface-level devotion; He calls us to humble, repentant hearts that chase after Him. And when we do, He promises to meet us with His presence.

## KEY PASSAGE / WORD BREAKDOWN

- James 4:7 – Submission to God and resistance to the devil go hand in hand.
- James 4:8 – Drawing near to God requires clean hands (actions) and a pure heart (inner life).
- James 4:9 – Repentance isn't casual; it's marked by godly sorrow over sin.
- James 4:10 – Humility is the path to exaltation—God Himself lifts the humble.

### Original Word Study

- Submit (hypotagēte, ὑποτάγητε) means to place oneself under authority—yielding completely.
- Resist (antistēte, ἀντίστητε) is a military term meaning to stand firm against an enemy. To oppose, to be against, to set oneself in opposition to the devil.

- Draw near (engizo, ἐγγίσατε) to move towards or approach. How do we move towards God? By confessing our sins and asking for cleansing.
- The imagery of clean hands and pure hearts (v.8) echoes Psalm 24:3–4, pointing to integrity both outward and inward.

Warren Wiersbe cites a powerful quote from A W Tozer who once said, "Nearness is Likeness. The more we are like God, the nearer we are to God." "I may be sitting in my living room with my Siamese cat on my lap, and my wife may be twenty feet away in the kitchen; yet I am nearer to my wife than to the cat because the cat is unlike me." (as cited in The Bible Exposition Commentary, 1989, ch. 9).

## WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTION

- Psalm 24:3–4 – Only those with clean hands and pure hearts can stand before God.
- Micah 6:8 – Walking humbly with God is part of His requirement for His people.
- Matthew 5:3–4 – The poor in spirit and those who mourn are blessed and comforted.
- 1 Peter 5:6–9 – Humble yourself under God's hand; resist the devil by standing firm in faith.

## GOING DEEPER

James is drawing on a long line of biblical teaching about repentance and closeness with God. Psalm 51 shows us that a broken and contrite heart is what God delights in. Here, James connects that same heart posture with God's presence. True revival—whether personal or corporate—always begins with humility and repentance.

Notice also the balanced perspective: resisting the devil isn't about using our own strength; it's about standing firm in God's authority. Drawing near isn't a one-time event but a lifestyle of intimacy with the Lord. The paradox is striking—when we go low before God, He raises us up.

# Reflections

Feel free to write down any after-reading insights and thoughts

**After reading today's passage, answer these questions:**

1. How do you actively “resist the devil” in daily life?

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2. What steps help you draw near to God consistently?

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3. What area of your life is hardest to fully submit to God?

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## James 4:7-10

*7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

## Day 4: James 4:11-12

### JUDGING OTHERS

#### Devotional Thought:

Theme: “Judging Others” – Speaking against a brother places us in the wrong seat—God’s.

James takes aim at something we’ve all struggled with—speaking against one another. Critical words don’t just damage relationships; they reveal a heart that’s forgotten who the true Judge is. When we slander, we’re not just putting down our brother or sister—we’re putting ourselves above God’s law of love.

The reminder is sharp but freeing: there’s only one Lawgiver and Judge. That means it’s not our job to sit in judgment of others—it’s our job to love, encourage, and speak truth with grace. Keeping our words aligned with God’s purposes protects the unity of the body and keeps us humble under His authority.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Our words reveal the operating system we're running—heaven's wisdom or earth's. When rivalry fuels our counsel, teaching, or posting, we shouldn't be surprised by confusion and conflict.

## KEY PASSAGES / WORD BREAKDOWN

James 4:11 – Slandering a brother equals speaking against God's law itself.

James 4:12 – Only God has the authority to save or destroy; judging others is overstepping our place.

### Original Word Study

- Speak evil (katalaleite, καταλαλεῖτε) means to slander or speak maliciously against someone. It's not just honest critique but destructive speech.
- Lawgiver (nomothetēs, νομοθέτης) is rare in Scripture, emphasizing God's unique position as the one who gives and enforces the law.
- James highlights the danger of usurping God's authority by becoming critics instead of servants.

## WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTION

- Leviticus 19:16–18 – Don’t slander your neighbor; instead, love them as yourself.
- Matthew 7:1–5 – Judge not, lest you be judged; remove the plank from your own eye first.
- Romans 14:10–13 – Stop passing judgment on one another; God alone is Judge.
- 1 Corinthians 4:5 – Leave judgment to the Lord, who will bring all things to light.

## GOING DEEPER

James connects this teaching back to the “royal law” (2:8): love your neighbor as yourself. When we slander or judge, we essentially say, “That law doesn’t apply to me.” In practice, this undermines both love for our neighbor and submission to God.

This passage doesn’t mean believers should never make discernments about right and wrong—that’s part of faithfulness (see Galatians 6:1). But it warns against a critical spirit that elevates us to God’s seat. When we criticize others in order to feel superior, we step out of humility and into pride—the very thing James has been warning against in this chapter.

# Reflections

Feel free to write down any after-reading insights and thoughts

**After reading today's passage, answer these questions:**

1. What's the difference between discernment and destructive judgment?

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2. Why do you think we're so quick to judge or criticize others?

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3. What step can you take to hand back "the judge's seat" to God in your life?

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## James 4:11-12

*11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*

## Day 5: James 4:13-17

### LIFE IN GOD'S HANDS

#### Devotional Thought:

Theme: “**Life in God’s Hands**” – True maturity acknowledges God’s will over our plans.

James closes this chapter by confronting a mindset we all wrestle with—living as though we’re in charge of our own lives. He paints the picture of a businessman confidently planning tomorrow’s profits, forgetting how fragile life really is. James reminds us that our life is like a vapor—here for a little while, then gone.

This isn’t about never making plans, but about how we make them. The mature believer doesn’t leave God out of the process but learns to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” It’s about humble dependence, recognizing that every heartbeat and every tomorrow is a gift from God.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

We live in a culture that prizes independence and control, but James calls us back to humble surrender. Recognizing life as a vapor isn't meant to scare us but to anchor us in reality. Every plan, every step, every tomorrow belongs to God. Living this way isn't weakness—it's maturity.

As believers, we need this reminder because it's easy to slip into self-driven decision making—relying on cleverness, pride, or personal gain. But when we pursue wisdom from above, we invite God's Spirit to direct our choices and temper our words. That wisdom may not make us the loudest voice in the room, but it will make us a steady presence that points others toward Christ. And in the long run, that's the kind of influence that leaves a legacy.

## KEY PASSAGE / WORD BREAKDOWN

- James 4:13 – Planning without God in the equation is self-reliance.
- James 4:14 – Life is a vapor, fleeting and fragile.
- James 4:15 – The right posture is humble planning: “If the Lord wills.”
- James 4:16 – Boasting in self-sufficiency is arrogant and evil.
- James 4:17 – Knowing the right thing to do and ignoring it is sin.

## WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTION

- Proverbs 27:1 – Do not boast about tomorrow; you don't know what a day may bring.
- Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:13–14 – Life is vanity apart from fearing God and keeping His commands.
- Luke 12:16–21 – The parable of the rich fool warns against self-reliant planning.
- Acts 18:21 – Paul modeled saying, “I will return... if God wills.”

## GOING DEEPER

James isn't condemning thoughtful planning but prideful presumption. In the Greco-Roman world, merchants often boasted about their ventures, seeing themselves as masters of their destiny. James flips that cultural script. By calling life a vapor, he echoes Ecclesiastes, where life apart from God's perspective is fleeting and empty.

The closing verse (v.17) is striking. It broadens sin beyond just doing wrong—it includes failing to do the right we already know. This challenges believers to not just avoid sin but actively live in obedience to God's revealed will. Maturity, then, is not passive—it's active dependence on God in both action and intention.

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## Reflections

Feel free to write down any after-reading insights and thoughts

**After reading today's passage, answer these questions:**

1. How can you practically apply the phrase “if the Lord wills” in your daily decisions?

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2. Why do you think James connects boasting with evil in this passage?

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3. What’s one area where you know the right thing to do but need to act on it?

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## DAY 6 - Scripture Reference: James 4:1-17

(Summarizing the readings from Days 1-5)

### Re-read James 4:1-17

## SOAKING IT IN

James 4 has walked us through some of the most practical—and piercing—marks of Christian maturity. It began with the source of our conflicts (vv.1–3), reminding us that unchecked desires lead to strife. Then James warned us about “friendship with the world” (vv.4–6), showing that divided loyalties put us in opposition to God.

From there, James gave us a roadmap back to intimacy with the Lord: humble submission, resisting the devil, drawing near, and genuine repentance (vv.7–10). He then reminded us that judging others is never our role—God alone is Judge (vv.11–12). Finally, he closed by exposing our tendency to make plans as if we control tomorrow, when in reality, our lives are like a vapor (vv.13–17).

The thread tying it all together is humility. Maturity in Christ means we stop living for our own pride, our own judgments, and our own plans. Instead, we surrender to God’s grace, trust His will, and love others without rivalry. When we live this way, we’re freed from the heavy burden of self-rule and carried by the sustaining hand of God.

## Spiritual Themes This Week

**The Battle Within** (vv.1–3) Theme: Conflicts outside are rooted in desires inside. James teaches that wars, quarrels, and frustrations spring from unchecked passions (hēdonōn, ἡδονῶν – pleasures, lusts). It's a reminder that true spiritual warfare begins in the heart.

**Worldliness vs. Godliness** (vv.4–6) Theme: Divided loyalty is spiritual adultery. To be a “friend” of the world is to oppose God. James stresses that God demands exclusive devotion, echoing covenant imagery from the OT (Exodus 34:14).

**Humility as the Path to Grace** (vv.6, 10) Theme: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Pride closes the door to God's blessing, while humility opens it wide. This is one of James' central lessons: true maturity is marked by lowliness before God.

**Repentance and Drawing Near** (vv.7–10) Theme: Intimacy with God comes through submission and cleansing. James outlines the process: submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, mourn, and humble yourself. Revival begins with repentance and brokenness.

**God as the Only Judge** (vv.11–12) Theme: Speaking against others is usurping God's role. James rebukes the sin of judgmental speech. Only God is Lawgiver and Judge; believers are called to love, not condemn.

**Life's Brevity and God's Sovereignty** (vv.13–17) Theme: Life is a vapor, and our plans must rest in God's will. Presuming on tomorrow without God is arrogance. Maturity acknowledges, "If the Lord wills." Every day is a gift, and every decision should reflect dependence on Him.

**The Sin of Omission** (v.17) Theme: Sin is not just doing wrong, but failing to do right. James closes by broadening sin's definition: knowing the good but refusing to act is rebellion. Spiritual maturity is proactive obedience.

# WHAT ARE SOME INSIGHTS THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER?

Don't skip this step. Write down your thoughts below:

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## DAY 7

## PASSAGE REFLECTIONS

This week James has given us a clear picture of what spiritual maturity looks like when tested by pride, conflict, and self-sufficiency. In chapter 4, he warned us of the dangers of worldliness—how friendship with the world puts us at odds with God. He called us to humility, to resist the devil, and to draw near to the Lord with sincere repentance.

James reminded us that life is fragile and short, like a vapor, so we must avoid arrogance in our plans and instead live in daily dependence on God's will. He also confronted the sin of judging others harshly, reminding us that there is only one Lawgiver and Judge.

In short, James 4 calls us to humility, surrender, and reliance on God's grace. When we live this way, we not only resist the pull of pride and the world but also walk in the freedom and strength that come from God alone.

*Week 4 - Chapter 4 is one of those chapters that is key to how we grow in Christ. God urges us to submit to Him, resist the devil, draw closer to Him daily, to cleanse our hands and to purify our hearts. These are all action words that must occur daily if we're to mature in Christ. May God continue to work in us so that what comes out of us show the love of Christ wherever we may go. Be blessed! -Pastor Davis*