Sunday Message Notes

Small Group Discussion Questions

- Read James 4:1-7

Kid Questions

- You have probably seen some kids in arguments before either at home or school. What do they seem to be fighting about most often?
- In those examples you just gave, were those people valuing each other or things more? What do you think God values more? (see verse 4)

Group Questions

A bulk of this passage discusses the challenges that arise when our motives are aligned with the values of "the world" and not with God.

- As a group try to identify values of the world (eg: money is of the highest value, it's ok to do bad things as long as no one sees you, etc.)
- Which of those values feels the hardest to not embrace? Will you ask for prayer for that tonight?
- What are the biggest robbers and time wasters in your life that are taking away from your time with God?
- Are there areas in your life where you feel like you're under spiritual attack? As a group spend some time in prayer, submitting to the Lord and resisting the devil.

Day One

Read James 4:1-7 (Focusing on verse 1)

Sometimes I find myself, like James in verse 1, asking basically the same question of my kids, "what are you fighting about?" Just like James, while I might not know the specific reason for that immediate argument, I'm confident that the argument is over someone wanting something and not getting it.

James aggressively confronts the Christian church in this chapter by strongly calling out that their selfish desires are causing fights among them. James starts off this next session with the rhetorical question, "what causes quarrels (literally: "individual disputes and battles:) and what causes fights (literally: "state of war") among you?" James then answers his own question by saying that the source of these quarrels is the "passions that are at within you". The word "passions" is the Greek word "***hēdonē*** " which is where we get the word "Hedonism". The Bible Knowledge Commentary says this about hedonism, "the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure mankind's chief end, still wages battle in people's hearts" Theologian Moo makes an interesting observation about the passage as well, "James seems to be bothered more by the selfish spirit and bitterness of the quarrels than by the rights and wrongs of the various viewpoints."

REFLECT

- Take some time to reflect on the last couple of fights, arguments or quarrels you had. What was the cause of the fighting, beyond the "he said, she said", what desires were at the root of the arguments?

RESPOND

- *Take some time to pray through those arguments with God. Ask Him to reveal anything about your motivations or the motivations of others.*
- *If necessary, take some time to repent of any undealt with sin regarding these particular arguments and if necessary setup a time to resolve them with the other party.*

Lord, you have called me to be a peacemaker. In the verses just before this, you say that wisdom that comes from you is gentle and peaceful. Lord, give me the wisdom and patience to handle hard situations and help me to be a peacemaker. Thank you for forgiving me for the times where my selfish desires lead me to fight with others. Amen

Day two

Read James 4:2-3

Almost daily I find myself in a situation like this: One of my children will get upset because they want something or are trying to do something but are not able to do it themselves and their typical response is to get upset and either whine about it or get discouraged. I find myself saying something like, "Well...would you like to ask for some help?" Upon reading this passage it made me think about those moments where I've wanted things and simply didn't ask God for them. Often He ends up giving them to me anyway and I'm so surprised and blessed that God gave me what I wanted. When I think about it from the perspective of a loving father who wants to bless His kids, it's easier to understand. It's also easier to understand the context of James 4:3. When my children want something that is good for them I want to give it to them. When they want something that is bad for them, I say, "no". For example if my child wanted a kid's Bible that he could understand and read on his own I'd be happy to spend the money and get him one. If he just wanted some candy or in a more severe case, something that would harm him, I would say, "no".

In the passage James says, "you desire and do not have, so you murder". While it's possible some people were actually murdering, it's more likely that James was alluding to the teaching of Jesus about our anger being judged like murder. (see Matthew 5:21-24) This is more likely because if there was murder going on in the church, it seems far more likely that James would have devoted more than just this verse to addressing that subject. Verse 3 focuses on the fact that God is not a vending machine to fulfill our every desire. We have been given great power and authority and can boldly approach God with our requests but we must also remember that God has a plan that is meant to grow us and expand His Kingdom. James 4:3 is almost the exact inverse of Psalm 37:4 which reads, *"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* It's important that when we pray that we remember to seek His Kingdom 1st.

REFLECT

- *Spend some time thinking about the things you desire (house, new car, flatter tummy, etc.) Are the core motives of those desires aligned with God's desires?*

RESPOND

- *Spend time in prayer about your desires and surrender them to the Lord. Ask Him to shape your desires and if necessary spend some time repenting for the envy you may have.*

Lord, align my desires with yours. Show me what I should desire. Amen

Day three

Read James 4:4

Have you ever found yourself praying and you tell God in your prayer that you want to follow Him and submit to His leadership and immediately you feel something in your heart encouraging you to give up something else in your life, maybe something that is a sin or just unwise? One example in my life was a show that I was watching, that I knew wasn't honoring to the Lord, or building me up. The themes in the show weren't great and I didn't even want to tell other people I watched the show. The reality was the Holy Spirit was already convicting me about it, and I was still watching it.

James uses strong words, that seem too intense for the situation I just described but in reality they are not. Often in the Old Testament God used the same language when the Israelites would worship other gods or rebel. (see Jeremiah 3:8-9, Ezekiel 6:9, Ezekiel 16:32, Ezekiel 23:37, and Hosea 3:1).

Believers are often referred to as the "Bride of Christ" (see Ephesians 5:25, 2 Corinthians 11:2, John 3:29). So when James uses the word adultery, it is just that. When we rebel against God, hold onto the world, make things our idols, we are sharing our hearts with things other than the Bridegroom. Just as a man is called to "leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife" as described in Matthew 19:5, so we are called to leave behind the influences of the world and cling to Jesus.

The 2nd half of the verse talks about desiring to be a friend of the world. In Matthew 6:24 we see this concept described with a practical application of money. This verse however refers also to the broader subject of the "world's systems". The world's system is one that was born in the Garden of Eden; it is at it's core, rebellion against God. Therefore, we cannot hold the values of the world and still claim to follow Christ.

REFLECT

- *Take some time to consider what things have come between your relationship with God?*

- *Take some time to consider what values of the world you have befriended? (eg: money is of the highest value, it's ok to do bad things as long as no one sees you, etc.)*

RESPOND

- *Take some time consider any areas that you need to repent of or any next steps you can take to press into a deeper relationship with God.*

Day Four

Read James 4:5

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

Jealousy has always been a hard word for me to fully understand in a Biblical context. It has such negative connotations in our culture, yet over and over, the Bible says that God is Jealous for us. Within the context of marriage though it is easier for me to understand. Because if my wife were showing interest in another man, I would be jealous, and rightfully so. I would be jealous because we have made a covenant with each other and God to remain faithful to each other. It is in this same way that we have a covenant with God through Jesus Christ.

In verse 5 James says, "*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he made to dwell in us"*. Because of the wording and structure of this verse in the original Greek, this verse is a well known difficult verse to translate into English. Regardless of the difficulties of the exact wording though, what is clear is that God longs for true, unhindered fellowship with us. This point is more than evident given the context of multiple verses within the chapter and book.

However, theologian David Guzik, explains the passage this way: "The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit has a jealous yearning for our friendship with God. The Christian who lives in compromise can't help but be convicted by it.

When James says, in verse 5 that "*scripture says*", he is not quoting a specific verse but more a known concept of scripture. Similar concepts are shown in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 2 Corinthians 6:16.

REFLECT

- *What are the biggest robbers and time wasters in your life that are taking away from your time with God?*

RESPOND

- *Ask the Lord to reveal where He is trying to draw you into deeper relationship with Him. Ask Him to reveal barriers in your life.*

Lord, help me to be sensitive to your Spirit in me. Help me to respond to the moments you are trying to draw me deeper. Amen

Day Five

Read James 4:6

Sometimes I make mistakes in my marriage and end up hurting my wife's feelings. Now, she is awesome and usually forgives me, long before I ask for it but I don't usually feel that forgiveness until I humble myself and ask for it. It's as if I have placed this invisible barrier between her and me, which exists until I soften my heart. This passage makes me think of a similar kind of experience with God. As believers, we never have to earn grace. By it's very nature, grace cannot be earned, it's freely given even when undeserved. However, the full beauty of that grace and forgiveness in relationship with God is hindered by our pride and lack of humility. However, when we surrender to God, we can experience it fully in the intimacy of relationship with Him.

"But He gives more grace": The same Holy Spirit convicting us of our compromise will also grant us the grace to serve God as we should. But this grace only comes to the humble.

"God resists the proud": 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.

"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. (Guzik)

REFLECT

- *Spend some time reflecting on the role that pride takes in your life.*

RESPOND

- *Spend some time seeking the Lord about areas of your life that need more humility.*

- *Spend some time surrendering those areas to the Lord.*

Lord, thank you for grace. Thank you for loving me even when my pride gets in the way. Help me to humble myself and submit to your word. Amen

Day Six

Read James 4:7

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Therefore submit to God: In light of the grace offered to the humble, there is only one thing to do: submit to God. This means to order yourself under God, to surrender to Him as a conquering King, and start receiving the benefits of His reign.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you: To solve the problems of carnality and the strife it causes, we must also resist the devil. This means to stand against devil's deceptions and his efforts to intimidate. As we resist the devil, we are promised that he will flee from you.

Significantly, James does not recommend that demons should be cast out of believers by a third party. Instead, James simply challenges individual Christians to deal with Satan as a conquered foe who can and must be personally resisted.

Resist comes from two Greek words: stand and against. James tells us to stand against the devil. Satan can be set running by the resistance of the lowliest believer who comes in the authority of what Jesus did on the cross. (Guzik)

REFLECT

- *Take some time to consider some areas in your life where you need to submit to God*

- *Take some time to consider areas in your life where you need to resist the devil.*

RESPOND

- *Take some time now to take actions on the reflections above. Submit those areas to the Lord and resist the Devil. (sometimes we get caught up in what to say to "resist the devil" but the power doesn't come from a special set of words. The authority comes from the power of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.*

Lord, I choose now to submit these areas _____of my life to you. Forgive me for holding them too closely. In your name Jesus and through your power I resist the work of the devil in these areas_____. Lord help me to stand strong in your authority. Amen