

HOMEGROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give your group wisdom and understanding and then

Read James 4:7-12

- **Kid's question:**

1) *Besides God, who are the people in your life that have the authority to tell you what to do?*

2) *Is it always easy to do what they say?*

3) *If it isn't always easy, what do you think makes it hard to follow directions?*

(Talk about how God always has our best in mind when He instructs us. His heart is to spare us the damage that sin causes so we can trust His instruction.)

- **For the whole group:**

1) *What reaction do you have internally when you hear the word "submit". What does it look like for you personally to submit to God in your daily life?*

2) *Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and discuss what you feel this teaches us about the topic of spiritual warfare. Do you feel like you currently engage in standing your ground and resisting the enemy at the level Paul is describing in this passage? If so what has been the effect?*

**Please be considerate and encouraging of others if they are not in the same place as you on this subject. We are all on a journey of discovering what it means to live as God's children in the truth of His Word.*

3) *Discuss what you see as the main difference between "judgment" and "admonishment". (See the verses given on day 6 of the study guide for more input to this topic.)*

4) *Talk about how motives can be important in determining whether you are judging someone or encouraging them away from sin?*

5) *For practice, come up with a fictional situation and as a group act out what it might look like to judge the person. Then act out admonishing and encouraging the person away from that sin.*

DAY ONE

Submission

Read James 4:7

Submit - What emotions or feelings rise up in you when you hear that word? The word submit, as James is using it here, means “be subject”. That means obedience, and taking directives from God. There is a humility required in laying down our own leadership and being subject, or submitted to God in all things. What is it in us that resists sometimes? Why do we feel so bent toward leading our lives apart from God? Do you really believe we can do a better job of leading our lives than God can? Verse 7 contains two commands. We will first explore the command to submit.

REFLECT

- *On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being total submission and 1 being no submission. How do you grade yourself in regards to submitting to directives He gives you through His word and Spirit?*
- *Can you think of a time when you knew God was leading you to do something, or stop doing something and you submitted to His leading? What did you feel like after stepping into obedience in that situation?*

RESPOND

- *Together with resisting the devil, submission puts us in the right place to truly be lead by God and live the life He most desires for us, life to the full. Without submission there is a vacuum in our life that is searching for leadership, we will lead ourselves or be lead by the pressures of the world around us. Take some time and invite God to speak into your life in this area. If you are willing, open your hands before God and tell Him, in your own words, that you desire to submit to His leadership, that you want to go where He wants to lead you. Write down any area of your life or decision you are facing that you feel God wants you to bring under His leadership. What step can you take today to submit that area to God?*

DAY TWO

Submission

Read James 4:8-10

Grieve? Mourn? Wail? Wait a minute James I thought the Christian life was all about joy? These verses bring up an important aspect of submission, namely repentance. As we repent and truly recognize that sin in our lives represents areas that we have not submitted to God, we will be able to turn 180 degrees from those unsubmitted areas and move toward Him. Verse 10 calls us to draw near to God. The more we humble ourselves and allow ourselves to grieve our choices to sin, the more our heart will be in a place where God can lift us up and allow us to truly see the righteous life He has invited us into. Repentance is an important part of living a life that aligns with the righteousness He has clothed us with. When we can get to the point where sin in our own lives truly grieves us then we will indeed draw close to God, for we will then see sin and it's destructive nature as He does. Today's passage brings much encouragement; as we humble ourselves, repent, and draw close to God we learn that He will both draw near to us and lift us up. We need to see that God isn't angry and distant, He has our best in mind and He is ready to draw near to us as we move toward Him. What an amazing plan God has for you and I if we are willing to truly submit to Him!

REFLECT

- *Throughout your life how have you experienced discipline or correction from parents, teachers, employers? How was that discipline given and how did you receive it? Did you tend to receive correction and make changes or was your tendency to resist it?*
- *Repentance is acknowledging something you are doing that is outside of God's will and character, asking for and receiving God's forgiveness and then turning away from that thing and moving toward God and His way. When you recognize that you have strayed from righteousness in an area do you tend to experience conviction from the Holy Spirit (which leads to fruitful repentance and closeness to God) or condemnation (which leads to feeling guilty, like God is angry at you and distant)?*

RESPOND

- *James speaks of washing our hands and purifying our hearts. We know that ultimately Jesus has done this work on the cross in regard to our standing with God. Now as we walk with God we too have a responsibility in drawing close to God and allowing the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work to align our actions with our status of righteousness through Christ. Spend some time with God allowing Him to surface anything currently in your life that may not align with the righteousness He has clothed you with. Remember to not approach God as if He were distant and angry but rather as your loving Father who desires for you to be close to Him and therefore wants you to lay down anything that is not of Him. In prayer repent of what ever you see not aligning with God, allow yourself to feel how God feels toward that thing. Tell God that you choose to turn away from it and to run toward Him. Remember He is running toward you as well!*

DAY THREE

Resist the devil

Read James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:8-9

Equally important to humility, repentance and submission is the act of resisting the devil. Some people live with the understanding that there is no enemy actively opposing them or God's plan for their life. With this perspective one can feel the need to either blame the world, themselves or God for all the struggle and difficulty they might face or witness in this world. Indeed I do not believe all difficulty comes from the devil but we would need to ignore scripture outright if we are not willing to accept the fact that the devil is actively opposed to you and I. Both Peter and James make it clear that it is REQUIRED of us to resist the devil. So with the instruction to submit James includes the necessity for us to also resist the devil. The good news is we are encouraged that when we do resist, the devil will flee from us! For the purpose of having a term of reference, we will call resisting the devil and standing our ground—spiritual warfare. Let's spend today taking a look at what you personally believe about spiritual warfare and how your beliefs line up with James instruction.

REFLECT

- *On a scale of 1-10, 1 being no awareness and 10 being highly aware, how attuned would you say you are to the fact that you have an enemy that is set against God and His plans for your life and that you are called to resist him?*
- *What would you say have been the major influencers in shaping your perspective on spiritual warfare? Friends, family, church leaders, God's Word?*
- *In your daily life with God, how do your actions align with the perspective you have expressed from the above questions?*

RESPOND

- *Tomorrow we will look at some practical teaching from Paul in Ephesians on the nature of and the strategy for spiritual warfare. Today I would encourage you to bring your answers to the reflection questions before God. This is where we get to put into practice submission. Regardless of what we have settled into believing regarding spiritual warfare it is important to be submitted to God and what He is telling us in His word. It is clear from scripture that the devil is real, that he wants to interfere with our life with God, and that we need to actively resist him. Take some time to submit your thoughts and perspective about this to God and ask Him to lead you by His Holy Spirit into a life of victory in standing your ground against the enemies schemes.*

DAY FOUR

Resist the devil

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

Here Paul sheds even more light on James instruction to “resist the devil” . It is made clear that we are struggling against spiritual forces of evil. When you align yourself with God you align yourself against God’s enemy, the devil. Warfare is unavoidable, your choices are to stand your ground in the power of God or to allow the enemy a foothold in your life in which case he will plunder and pillage as he desires. Paul beautifully instructs us in suiting up for battle. I can’t think of a better way for Paul to communicate the fact that we are at war and desperately needed in the fight then to describe our spiritual reality in terms of a soldiers battle equipment. There is no denying it, we are to take our stand against the devil and every spiritual force of evil that is aligned with him. But we are to do that having first suited up with the full armor of God so that we will be victorious and able to stand.

REFLECT

- *As you see in God’s word that our spiritual reality includes an enemy that is set against us, is there an area of your life that comes to mind that you believe the enemy is trying to attack or interfere with? (Examples: your relationship with someone, a sinful behavior you are wrestling with letting go of, your desire to step out in your giftings in ministry, the way you view yourself)*

RESPOND

- *Open up Ephesians 6:10-18 again. Now read through the armor of God as a prayer, actively putting on the armor in a spiritual sense. Pause with each piece of armor and allow time for the Holy Spirit to give you deeper understanding of the significance of that piece of armor. After “suiting up” address the issue that came to your heart and mind from the reflection question above. Identify what is not true and declare out loud that it is not true. Silence the devil’s lies and then identify and declare out loud the truth of that situation. This is taking action to resist the devil. If you would like some guidance you can pray something like this example:*

“Lord I recognize that the enemy has been telling me that I am worthless and have nothing to offer this world. I reject that as a lie from the devil. The devil is the father of lies. I command you satan and any of your servants speaking this message to me to be silenced and I send you away from me and my sphere of influence in the authority of Jesus and forbid you to speak further, now go! As I stand in the armor of God I resist those lies and I declare the truth of God’s word that I am a child of God, that I am a part of the body of Christ and there is no unimportant part of Christ’s body. I have purpose and great worth. God saw me precious enough to die and then conquer death in order to get me back. I stand my ground in this truth and reject any other message that would try to sway me from it. In Jesus name. Amen.”

DAY FIVE

Judgement

Read James 4:11-12

James addresses the problem of slander and judgment in these two verses. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart soul mind and strength and the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Mark 12:28-31) It is impossible to engage in slandering others and not break the commandment to love our neighbor as our self. In addition, it is a serious problem to step into “God’s shoes” so to speak and cast judgment on another, holding someone to the letter of the law that you yourself are not able to keep perfectly. Today let’s spend some time really looking at how we are doing in this area. Do we have a tendency in certain situations to judge others? I encourage you to not skip tomorrow’s study as we will explore the important point that helping a brother or sister see the sin in their life and helping them find freedom from it is not what James is talking about here. We have a responsibility to our fellow believers to encourage each other away from sin.

REFLECT

- Before I was a parent myself it was easy for me to internally criticize others and how I saw them parenting their kids. After walking the road and realizing I struggle with many of the same things I have found much more grace for parents as I know first hand some of the difficulties of parenting. What about you? Is there an area of life that you tend to be critical or judgmental of others because they are not perfect at it? If you are honest with yourself, are you able to apply the same level of criticism to yourself?

RESPOND

I encourage you to take the situation you identified above and give it over to the Lord:

Father, Thank you for your grace for me. I can not even see all the ways that I fall short of perfection and yet you delight in me and in my journey of becoming more like you through the work of the Holy Spirit within me. So I recognize this area where I am judging others, and holding them to a standard of perfection. Forgive me God, I want to have the same grace for them as you have for me. I want to delight in your journey of pursuing that person, just as you delight in the journey of growth that you have me on. Help me to see that person through your eyes of Grace. Grow my love for them. Amen

Now take some time to pray for the situation or people that came to mind in the “Reflect” section above. Bless them in prayer and watch your attitude change from judgment to grace and love!

DAY SIX

Judgement verses encouragement

Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-12, Matthew 7:3-5, James 5:19-20, Galatians 6:1

All of these verses help bring the full picture of our responsibility and calling as believers and followers of Christ. If we take out of context James instruction to not judge others we may want to build a case for never speaking up when we see a fellow believer living in sin. The passage in 1 Corinthians can at first seem very harsh. It is not popular in our culture to admonish someone who is heading in a destructive path. It seems to be more the trend now to keep quiet or support others desire to be and act as they see fit. When it comes to our relationship with each other inside the church we see that, though we first have a responsibility to repent of our own wayward tendencies we are at the same time called to love our brothers and sisters in Christ enough to support them in aligning their life with God's commands. This is the only way any of us will experience the life to the full that Jesus came to give. This doesn't mean we jump right to casting people out of the church for sinning. Note the tone of Galatians 6:1, "gentleness". Motives are of greatest importance. The motivation should be to come along side others and also be willing for others to come along side us so we can support one another in the continuing work of laying down sinful ways and living more and more like Christ. It is only when a believer is defiant in their sin and refusing to turn from their ways, even making excuses for why they are allowed to continue in sin that greater levels of intervention may be required. And even at that point the heart motivation is to see them freed from the sin that has them in bondage.

REFLECT

- *What about you, have you observed a pattern of sin in a fellow believers life that you have chosen to stay quiet about because you have not wanted to come across as judgmental? Reading the verses for today, do you feel there might be application in this?*
- *Has someone ever addressed a behavior in your life and you have dismissed it as being judged?*
- *How open are you to the input of a fellow believer who may want to address a blind spot in your life that is clearly not in line with God's character?*

RESPOND

- *Depending on your answers above, you may need to take to heart some input you have received and seek God to help you make changes where a sin has been brought to light in your life through someone elses input. Pray now and let God speak to you through the input you have received, what do you sense God would have you do to move in the direction of change, to turn from that sin and move toward God's design in that area? Reach out for help from brothers and sisters around you. We want to encourage, support and celebrate the choice to be humble and turn from sinful ways.*
- *Or, Perhaps you are feeling on the other side of that, where you have been observing a fellow believers destructive behavior and you desire to help and encourage them to find freedom from that path. Not to judge but to love enough to say something. Before saying anything to them it is important to pray and ask God for direction. Some good questions to bring to the Lord are:*
 - 1) What are my motives?
 - 2) How can I best address this with gentleness and communicate love and encouragement for this brother or sister? (If you would like help navigating this topic please feel free to contact me to talk through some good ways to lovingly approach this. Jeffh@adventureduvall.com)