

SURRENDER

Week 3 | James 4

Deeper Dive

As we read through the book of James, it's important to understand the context during this time of the New Testament. James was written by Jesus's half-brother. James was leading the early church in Jerusalem at the time. This was a community of Jewish followers that had accepted Jesus as their savior. Of course, this community was heavily persecuted by the Jewish leaders. In addition to the persecution, there was also a famine in the region so they were struggling with severe poverty. James was eventually killed by the Jewish leaders because of his faith in Christ and leadership of the early church.

The book of James starts like a letter, however, it's doesn't address specific "church related" concerns like Paul's letters. Instead, it's an overall practical application of Jesus' teachings largely based on the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5-7) and the book of Proverbs. It's short, direct, and meant to challenge us all. It should serve as a reminder of how we should be living in accordance with God's Word & teachings.

Day 1 - Surrendering desires within

Read: James 4:1-3

The scripture from today can seem rather harsh. Hopefully, we aren't thinking about killing someone, however, we may think badly about someone because of your own jealous desires. Honestly, if we break down every major conflict, battle or war throughout history, we can boil it down to the roots of jealousy, selfish ambition, bitterness and pride. These are the roots of our selfish desires. When our desires are rooted in self verses God, they can be powerfully destructive. They can divide nations, communities, churches, and even families. Envy can kill our joy, resentment can kill our peace and love, and it all leads to discontentment, division, manipulation, criticism and hostility. At their core, our selfish desires are just an inward battle for control.

The world will blame our circumstances or point to others for the reasons for our conflicts. We can often point to stress, misunderstandings, or unmet expectations to explain or justify our challenging relationships. However, God strips down all the worldly excuses and asks us to reflect inwardly. Outward conflict almost always reveals an inward battle between our own selfish desires and surrendering to God's Will. We can't have peace outwardly until we have peace inwardly. The cure isn't for God to give us what we want, but for us to want what God desires. In fact, our prayers become powerless when they are fueled by selfish intent. Only when we allow the Spirit to transform our hearts desires to align with His, can we begin to heal this battle from within.

Take time today to do this quick self-check as we reflect on whether we are following our own desires or God's.

- Prayer posture - Are you praying for success, comfort, or recognition in order to satisfy your own desires for ease or affirmation? OR are you praying for God to shape your hearts desires to align with His, and for any blessing you receive to have the purpose of glorifying and honoring Him, and not self?
- Relational posture - In your relationships, especially those you are experiencing conflict, are you seeking approval, control, retaliation, comfort, or recognition? OR are you humbly putting others needs first, surrendering to Godly wisdom, and acting in love and grace ¹ through His strength?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 6:24** ~No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
- **Revelation 3:15-16** ~I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.
- **James 1:8** ~Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.
- **Matthew 12:30** ~Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.
- **Colossians 2:8** ~See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
- **Isaiah 30:21** ~Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.
- **Colossians 3:2** ~Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Day 2 - Surrendering to WHO?

Read: James 4:4-6

Imagine paying for the best physical trainer and nutritionist in town. They create individual diet plans, workouts, weekly schedules, and all the tools you need to become healthy. Maybe you attend every session, nod in agreement, take all the assessments, BUT you never actually DO any of it. You haven't necessarily rejected the trainer's ideals, however, you are rejecting their leadership. Isn't this exactly what we do with Jesus? We listen to His teachings, read in His word, go to church and check all the boxes, maybe we even see the goodness in what He has to offer. Then we don't actually wholeheartedly follow through and DO it. No matter how much of His goodness we learn about, if we don't put it into action in our lives, then in reality we aren't really following Him. If we are honest, we are still following our own selfish desires. Just like that personal trainer would do, Jesus is going to tell us that we have to actually DO what He says in order to get healthy or receive true life change.

Our scripture in James 4:4-6 today may sound harsh, however, it's important that we understand what happens when we continue to follow ourselves instead of God. This is very similar to what Jesus says in Matthew 6:24 when He says we cannot serve two masters. We can't pursue God's desires while still chasing our own. These scriptures paint a very black and white picture of following God. There is little room for a gray, lukewarm, fence-sitting faith. In Revelation 3:15-16 God says He will literally spit out someone with a lukewarm faith. While these scriptures may sound strong, they are meant to serve as a warning because we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are following God. When in reality, we only want enough Jesus to feel safe, but still keep enough of the world to feel comfortable. Maybe this sounds like a "win-win", but it's not possible. When we try to have both, we get neither one. It's like driving 1/2 way across a bridge and stopping in the middle. You aren't fully in either destination. We're just sitting in the middle of the bridge doing nothing but blocking traffic.

How do we ensure that we are following God, and not ourselves? It's a daily journey of choosing Jesus over approval, Jesus over comfort, Jesus over convenience, and surrender over being in control. Our desires will only lead us to selfishness, constant striving to get ahead, and desperately trying to control our own outcomes. In contrast, following Jesus will lead you to peace as you trust in Him, joy as you serve others, accepting His grace as you walk humbly, and total transformation as you follow His lead no matter what.

- Make a list of your hearts desires, or your biggest wants and needs. Write "my will" or "God's Will" beside of each. Are your desires shaped more by God, or by yourself? What voices are influencing your desires the most? Where am I seeking approval, security, or provision other than God?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 26:41** ~Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
- **Hebrews 2:18** ~ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.
- **Ephesians 6:10-17** ~Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Day 3 - Surrender leads to action

Read: James 4: 7-10

Putting faith into action requires us to submit to His authority in our lives. In our scripture today, we are given these specific commands:

1. **"Submit yourselves"** - Yield to God's authority.
 - EXAMPLES: apologizing first when they owe you an apology, give generously when you'd rather hold onto it, serve others first over yourself, change your plans because God is changing your course
 - ASK YOURSELF: What decisions am I making on my own, instead of with God's wisdom and direction?
2. **"Resist the devil"** - Oppose the things that tempt YOU! (This is not one-size-fits all - everyone's temptations are different)
 - EXAMPLES: turn off the TV or phone when content becomes tempting, change the subject or walk away when others turn to gossip, speak scripture towards the lies that enter your mind
 - ASK YOURSELF: What am I negotiating with, instead of resisting?
3. **"Come near to God"** - Intentionally pursue a relationship with Him.
 - EXAMPLES: prioritize your daily spiritual practices - read scripture daily, spend time in listening prayer, thank God for all things
 - ASK YOURSELF: What helps me to feel closest to God? - DO IT!
4. **"Wash your hands", "Grieve, mourn & wail", "Turn your laughter into mourning and joy to gloom"** - Take your sin seriously, grieve it, repent, and actively turn away from it.
 - EXAMPLES: don't laugh or joke about the sin in your life, admit you are wrong instead of making excuses, stop saying "this is how I am" or "everyone does it", accept the consequences instead of defending, let conviction lead to repentance not shame
 - ASK YOURSELF: What behavior do I need to stop and turn from? Do I feel sorrow over getting caught, or over grieving God? What have I become comfortable with, that God wants me to confront?
5. **"Purify your heart"** - Address the motives behind your actions.
 - EXAMPLES: serve without telling anyone, celebrate someone's success without sharing your own, choose integrity even in secret
 - ASK YOURSELF: Am I doing this for God or for others approval?
6. **"Humble yourselves"** - Recognize your dependance on God.
 - EXAMPLES: ask for help instead of pretending you have it all together, give credit to others instead of seeking personal recognition, pray BEFORE decisions instead of after things go wrong, accept correction without defending yourself, thank God for every success & blessing instead of taking the credit
 - ASK YOURSELF: Where am I exhausted from relying on myself rather than resting in dependence on God?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 14:12** ~So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.
- **Galatians 6:5** ~For each one should carry their own load.
- **2 Corinthians 5:10** ~For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
- **Hebrews 12:11** ~No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness & peace for those who have been trained by it.
- **Proverbs 19:20** ~Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.
- **Ephesians 4:32** ~Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- **Colossians 3:13** ~Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Day 4 - Surrender to His authority

Read: James 4: 11-12

One of the biggest temptations in our relationships, especially those closest to us, is believing that we can change someone. This can lead us to trying to "fix", control, manage, criticize, or judge others. It's truly only when we learn to trust in God's authority, that we can stop trying to control those around us. In our scripture for today, James reminds us that there is one judge, one lawmaker and one authority that we should be under. Spoiler, it's not us! When we find ourselves trying to fix those around us, we may need to look inward to see if we are truly trusting in God's sole authority and ability to change their heart.

- It can be tough sometimes to notice these things in ourselves. Carefully read through these and ask yourself ~*"Am I trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit in my relationship, or am I trusting in His authority over their lives?"*

Trying to "fix" on our own	Trusting God's authority
Trying to manipulate or guilt someone into feeling convicted or to change	Speaking truth in love, then allowing the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts over time
Constantly reminding or protecting someone from their consequences	Communicate clearly, then establish healthy boundaries - allow God to work through any consequences they receive
Taking responsibility for someone else's actions or emotions	Trust that each person is responsible and held accountable for their own actions and emotions before God
Trying to help someone with every decision and/or solve all their problems for them	Offering advice only if asked, and remembering it is their choice to obey God & to follow His wisdom in their lives

- As we compare God's responsibility to our own, ask yourself ~ *"What responsibilities have I been trying to carry that I need to surrender to God today?"*

My responsibility	God's responsibility
Love	Convict
Pray	Change hearts
Speak truth in love	Produce repentance
Set healthy boundaries	Transform desires
Be faithful in trusting God	Bring lasting spiritual growth & maturity

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Psalms 139:23-24** ~Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
- **2 Corinthians 9:8** ~And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.
- **Ephesians 5:17** ~Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.
- **Matthew 6:34** ~Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
- **Isaiah 43:2** ~When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.
- **Philippians 4:19** ~And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.
- **Proverbs 16:3** ~Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.

Day 5 - Surrender it all, even the future

Read: James 4: 13-17

FUN fact for today: the calendar and planner industry in the US topped \$800 million last year and is expected to hit 3.7 billion in the next few years. Let's be honest, we really like to be in control. We love to plan our future goals, to calendar, to budget, to meal plan, to have a saving and retirement plan. Within this multimillion dollar industry, there is always some new trendy way we are supposed to accomplish it - Mind maps, OKR's, SMART goals, time blocking, habit stacking, and don't get too comfortable because there will be some other new and improved way tomorrow. While some of these may be good and helpful, we need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves how tightly we are clinging to them. The world around us would tell us that these are wise, important, and absolutely necessary to ensure success in life. However, God might be saying something very different.

In our scripture for today, James says that fully surrendering to God means holding our plans loosely and following HIS leading, even if it doesn't make sense to us. The real issue isn't with planning technique, it's when we make our plan without God. Faith isn't necessarily living without a plan, it's living with plans that *remain* open & surrendered to God. Anyone that has ever lost a job, had a sudden illness, or had a tragedy that resulted in a complete lifestyle change knows that controlling your future is just an illusion. Life can change in a matter of mere seconds. James poetically writes that our life is like a mist. It's here and then it's gone. The only permanence we can count on is God's goodness, presence & promises in our lives. This is why He calls us to surrender ALL of our desires & plans to align ourselves with His desires & plans for our lives.

Here are a few practical steps to surrendering it all, even your future. Are you masking or justifying your desire to control with your calendar, plans & goals? Which of these is the hardest for you right now?

1. **Pray + Follow + Hold Open** - Before making a plan, stop & pray. Ask God what He wants for you, wait to hear His voice, and follow what He says. Allow your plans to remain open, fluid, and surrendered to Him!
2. **Replace control with trust** - Examine your heart, filter with God's priorities, and trust that He is in control of the outcome. When God says "not now, wait, or a new season is coming", instead of clinging to what was, trust God's goodness in the change.
3. **One day at a time** - Instead of obsessing over 5 year plans, choose to be present & do the good you know to do today! Focus on daily obedience, instead of getting stuck waiting on God's next BIG direction for your life. God calls us to be faithful today in the small things, rather than worrying endlessly about our futures.