

The Life of Faith, Part 9, A Study in James: Faith demands humility

In a world filled with selfish desires and passions, we contend with all kinds of wars, disputes, strifes, quarrels, and fights. The life of faith requires believers to submit to God regardless of the instinct or urge of the flesh, world, or the devil. James 4 confronts the personal passionate desires of the flesh that war against the Spirit controlled life.

James 4:1 NIV84 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

What is the source of all of the quarrels and battles? James says they come from the desires that are within us. The desires of the flesh have certain demands or passions. These passions are the source of struggles, conflicts, and bad relationships.

The next two verses should be considered together.

James 4:2-3 NIV84 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

We are looking at the difference between a life that is at peace with God and a life that is self-controlled and self-absorbed. Many people want God's blessing but are not willing to humble themselves under God's mighty hands. If we want to have answers to our prayers and live in peace, we must be humble before God. What happens when we ask God for things that purely fulfill the desires for pleasure or to satisfy the drive of the flesh.

James says you lust and do not have, even if you become obsessed and passionate in your pursuit. This is a source of frustration and strife in many people. They are not satisfied. When we surrender to the passionate desires of the flesh, we have become friends with the world and are unfaithful to God.

1 John 2:15-16 NKJV Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Motives are very important if we want answers to our prayers. When we are in perfect alignment and harmony with God and live humbly before Him, we can ask whatever we desire and it will be given. This reminds me of the relationship of the vine and branch, the head and the body, and the cornerstone and the temple. We cannot properly abide in Christ if our lives are out of sync with God. To receive the flow of God's blessing, we must learn to humbly submit to His mind and will. The door to blessing and favor come from remaining in sync with Him. The Psalmist said: "I delight to do thy will."

James 4:4 NIV84 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

This verse is referring to our attitude toward God and not His point of view toward us. When anyone is in harmony with or is a friend of the "world," they become an enemy of God. This is why they are called adulterous people. Friendship with the world is living with the values, desires, and passions of the unregenerate mind. Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. When we are out of harmony with God, our spiritual life becomes distant and estranged from God. It is important for us to remember that James is speaking to believers who have become carnal or worldly. We need to know that although God loves the sinner, He will not condone or bless us when we are living in sin. God is jealous for His

people.

James 4:5 NIV84 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that, “The Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely”?

James 4:5 NKJV “...The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

There are at least three correct ways to interpret this verse.

- First, God jealously desires our full devotion, love and loyalty.
- Second, the Holy Spirit Who lives in us yearns for our full devotion to God.
- Third, God loves us with such passion that He cannot accept anything but full love from us.

When the Holy Spirit freely lives and loves from within us, He draws us toward God. God has every right to expect full devotion and obedience. Consider what God has done to redeem us from destruction. He has loved us with everlasting love and has fully given His Son to redeem our souls from hell. Jesus has suffered, bled and died for your transgressions.

The same God Who convicts us of compromise offers abundant grace.

James 4:6 NIV84 But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

“More grace” is indicative of God’s willingness to accept us in Christ. He has already given grace to save us, but now, God is giving “more grace.” Think of the numbers of times that God has given more grace. We sinned, but God gave grace and mercy to forgive. We were weak and were drawn away by our passions and desires, but God gave more grace. We were filled with pride and resisted His guidance, but when we returned, God gave more grace.

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Pride is the refusal to walk in the light as He is in the light. It is refusal to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit Who tells us, “This is the way, walk in it.” Pride wants God’s blessings without obedience. Pride is the stubborn determination to do our own thing and go our own way.

“God gives grace to the humble.”

Humility is willingness to submit to God. Humility says, “Not my will but Your will be done.” It puts us in a position to receive God’s abundant grace.

James 4:7 NIV84 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Here are two responses to the grace that God gives.

We are told to submit to God and to resist the devil.

To submit to God means to give up your rights and yield to God.

Why should we submit to God?

- God is our Creator.
- God knows what is best for us.
- God is going to achieve His purpose and will.
- We cannot be saved unless and until we submit to God.
- Peace only comes from submission to God.

Since God has given more grace, we should resist the devil.

What does resisting the devil have to do with receiving God’s grace? When we submit to God, we are going up against what the devil wants us to do. The god of this world is the

devil. Either we will submit to the devil and follow the passion and desire of the worldly mind, or we will submit to God.

Here is some good news. When we resist the devil, he will flee from us. This idea of resisting the devil comes from two Greek words that mean to “*stand against.*”

Notice that resisting is not a one time event. This is a position we enter that is against Satan. This is taking a stand in the blood of Christ and in the grace that we have received against the devil and his passionate temptations. We put on the whole armor of God that has been provided and stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might. We take in all of the strength and vitality that is in Christ.

James 4:8-9 NIV84 Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

God’s cure is found in these words: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” This is an invitation and a promise. When we are facing Satan’s attack, don’t just focus on the devil and the evil. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. If you are wanting relief from persistent attacks and uncontrollable passions and lusts, draw near to God. This process takes us out of the field of Satan’s realm.

How can we draw near to God?

- Draw near to God in prayer, praise, and worship.
- Draw near by seeking God’s will and counsel.
- Draw near by fellowship and communion with God.
- Draw near to God by meditating on God’s Word.
- Draw near by resisting the evil and coming near to God.
- Draw near to God by cleansing our heart and mind.
- Draw near by listening to and obeying the voice of the Spirit.

In the Old Testament, people were not able to come near to God.

Moses was told to not come any closer but to take off his shoes for he was on holy ground. A barrier was put around the mountain so no one could come near to God. God required a curtain to be placed around the Tabernacle to prevent worshippers from getting near to God. Access to God’s presence and the mercy seat was restricted.

Now through the blood of Jesus Christ we can enter boldly into God’s presence to find mercy and grace.

What happens when we come near to God? In God’s presence we find mercy, grace and fullness of joy. When we come close to God we are made pure and clean. When we come near to God, we are made conquerors over our temptations and are given power over the devil. As we come near to God, we are transformed into His likeness and image.

James 4:10 NIV84 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

These words follow the expression: “lament, mourn and weep.” Humbling ourselves before the Lord is rightfully understanding Who God is and our total dependence upon Him. When we humble ourselves, it is a sign of submission and surrender to Him.

When we humble ourselves before God, He will lift us up.

In Luke 18, Jesus spoke of two individuals who were praying. One individual came before God and confessed all of the good things he had done and how much better he was at obeying God than others. The second man would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” Jesus said the man who humbly

came to God would be exalted, but the man who exalted himself would be humbled.

How can we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord?

You should know that God sees us as we really are. When we humble ourselves before God, we are admitting our need for His help, cleaning, and grace. We humble ourselves by surrendering to God's will and Spirit. God does not despise our frailty or weakness when we come near to Him in humility.

Look at those words: "He will lift you up." "Lift up" comes from the word hupsōō. It signifies to lift or raise up. This word is used literally, figuratively, spiritually and eternally.

- Literally, when we humbly come before God, He reaches down to our low estate and picks us up.
- Figuratively and spiritually, when we humble ourselves in the sight of God, He comes and fills us with His Spirit, peace, joy, and power.
- Eternally, when we humble ourselves in the sight of God, He prepares a place for us in heaven.

God knows how to lift you up.

Have you ever come before God with a broken heart? With tears, sorrow, and deep grief you cried out to God. In those moments of deep prayer and intercession, God comes to us and lifts us up. This is the assurance that we have in Him, that God is able to lift us up and supply the necessary grace and mercy to help and sustain us.

Humility before God recognizes His ability to help us.

Psalm 121:1-3 NKJV I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved...

This is a visual image of our drawing near to God. I am down and looking up to the place where my help comes from. The God Who made heaven and earth is able to help. He will lift you up.