

Fourth Week of Lent

(this week's devotionals are from James 4:1-10)

Monday – *Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.*

In the passage for this week, James confronts conflict head-on and ultimately ends by talking about submitting to God.

In these verses, he is talking about covetousness – wanting something we do not have. We've all heard the phrase "green with envy." When we covet, when we envy, our eyes are not on what God has given us or even what He may want to give us, but only on what we do not have.

When we are always looking at what we wish we had, we live in a constant state of discontent. That leaves us feeling unfulfilled and unhappy. Yet there is a good chance that someone else is looking at everything we have and envying us!

Is there anything in your life right now that you are coveting? Your eyes are always on that prize, and you are completely ignoring everything God *has* given you? Take time to repent for that today.

Tuesday – *You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Sometimes we do not get what we pray for because God has something better for us, or because it is simply not in keeping with His will. We do not like to hear a "no" in prayer, but sometimes the answer is no.

The answer is always "no" when we ask for something with selfish motives. Warren Weirsbe says this, "Sometimes we use prayer as a cloak to hide our true desires. 'But I prayed about it!' can be one of the biggest excuses a Christian can use. Instead of seeking God's will, we tell God what He is supposed to do, and we get angry at Him if He does not obey."

Are you angry at God because He did not answer a prayer, but in retrospect realize your motives were not pure? Confess that to Him today.

Wednesday – *⁴ Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

What does it mean to have friendship with the world? It does *not* mean that we should shun people in the world. We are supposed to be kind to others and be a witness to Christ wherever we go.

But James says we become an enemy of God when we have friendship with the world. The “world” means society without God. We should not become enamored with living outside of God’s will. While we are called to go into the world to share Christ, we do so while maintaining our faith in God. The phrase “but everyone is doing it” does not apply to Christians. God wants us to be in the world but not of the world.

In what ways have you become a friend of the world? What are you dabbling in that you know is not Biblical, but you’ve excused it because “everyone is doing it” and therefore you can, too? Repent of those things today.

Thursday – *⁵ Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, ‘God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’? ⁶ But he gives all the more grace; therefore, it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’*

Pride is a tricky thing. Is it sinful if we are proud of our children’s accomplishments? Is it sinful to be proud that our hard work paid off and we accomplished some kind of goal we were trying to reach? No, as long as we do not think we (or our children) are better than other people.

Pride is defined as an “inordinate love of one’s own excellence” or “self-importance with a lack of humility.”¹ Puffing ourselves up, believing we are superior to others, filling our conversations with “I” statements, detailing all of the amazing things we’ve done. Years ago there was a pastor at our Presbytery meetings who loved to stand up and ask obscure questions. When no one knew the answers, he gleefully answered. No doubt he wanted us all to think he was extremely intelligent. Instead, there was a lot of eye-rolling.

We all have pride. For most of us, it is more subtle than the pastor I just mentioned. Since the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit out of a desire to be like God (pride) rather than submit to God (humility), humankind has struggled. Ask God to reveal your pride to you—don’t just ask today, but keep asking, so you can repent. A humble heart can bear amazing fruit for the Lord.

¹ www.jesusleadershiptraining.com, excellent article on pride

Friday – ⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* ⁹ *Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection.*

What is the opposite of pride? Humility. Submitting to God.

In the Greek, submit is a military term that means “get into your proper rank.” When someone fresh out of boot camp walks around acting like a general, there will be problems. Our proper rank is servant. We are servants. God is the master. He calls the shots.

James also wants us to resist the devil. We have talked about this in recent weeks. It is not enough simply to repent of our sins. Sometimes we find ourselves repenting and repenting of the same exact thing, and then falling back into the same sin at the same level as before. What are we missing?

We need to resist. We need to actively work to keep that sin out of our lives. Whether it’s getting an accountability partner or getting temptation out of our sight, we do what we have to so we won’t go back to that sin. (Or if we do fall back into it, it won’t be as much or as big as before.)

What sins are lingering in your life not because you haven’t repented, but because you are not resisting? What can you do when that temptation comes calling?

Saturday – ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

Ironically, “down” equals “up” here. When we submit to God, when we confess that He is almighty and we are not, that He is master and we are servant, then He will lift us up. Rather than lifting ourselves up by pride, standing on our own accomplishments and inflated egos, God lifts us up and sets us firmly on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

So how do we humble ourselves? It is possible to look humble on the outside but be prideful on the inside. Remember the Pharisees, who looked pious and righteous. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs.

Humbling ourselves means we treat our sin seriously, admit our sins have grieved God’s heart, and repent. It means we seek His will in our lives. From our Ash Wednesday text, Psalm 51: *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise* (v. 17).

Ask God how you can humble yourself before Him. Ask Him to continue to reveal His will for your life.