

DEVOTIONALS FOR JAMES 4

THE WAR'S WITHIN

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at war within you?

JAMES 4:1

Quarrels and fights are external expressions of something that happens *within* a person. The root issue is the uncontrolled passion within us. It's the war we fight within ourselves with our desires. We desire to do good but there is another desire as well—a desire to do bad. This is born from a vengeful spirit resulting from sin and injustice that becomes violent toward others. The cycle repeats unless by the Spirit we call an end to the war within and thus end the war without.

ASK THIS: What war are you fighting within?

DO THIS: Make peace with God and end the war.

PRAY THIS: God, bring peace to my spirit so that I will not wound the spirit of others.

HAVE YOU ASKED?

*You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.
You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do
not receive, because you ask wrongly,
to spend it on your passions.*

JAMES 4:2-3

If you thought James was challenging yesterday, well, he gets even more challenging today. But honestly, he's right. Most of the time, we do not have because we do not ask—that's just the truth. I cannot tell you how many times I thought about something, complained about something, or talked about something—yet failed to ask for something! But when I do ask, I find that God and others are willing to give.

So today, when you are prompted with any need, how about just asking God?

- *Do you want a closer relationship with your wife, kids, and God? Ask him!*
- *Do you need income and provision? Ask him!*
- *Do you need saving from a repetitive sin? Ask him!*
- *Do you need hope in despair? Ask him!*
- *Do you need meaningful relationships in loneliness? Ask him!*

ASK THIS: What is it you need?

DO THIS: Ask him.

PRAY THIS: God, please meet my need for _____.

NOT OPPOSED

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

JAMES 4:6

I think some think God is opposed to them. But this is a misunderstanding. The God of the Bible has been in active pursuit of fallen people since our very first sin. It is mankind who has been in opposition to God. It's pride that stands in the way. Yet our arrogant opposition does not stop God. His eternal grace reaches farther than our temporal disobedience. So resist opposition and pride and enjoy union with God. Be humble and discover a God who gives more grace.

ASK THIS: What form of pride do you need to lay down?

DO THIS: Replace pride with humility.

PRAY THIS: God, receive the offering of my pride, and shower me with your grace. I need it today!

THE RESISTANCE

*Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*

JAMES 4:7

This is the one-two punch. It's a jab of submission with an uppercut of resistance. Remember resistance is not enough, but submission with resistance is, because it's a full effort. So don't just stop a negative behavior, start a positive one. Submit all of who you are to God and then resist and watch how rapidly the Devil flees. In this way it is not just your behavioral resistance but a supernatural and spiritual effort backed by God. In this way God's counterforce becomes a spiritual force through you.

ASK THIS: What issue do you need to submit to God today?

DO THIS: Submit the issue and resist the Devil.

PRAY THIS: God, I need a supernatural effort today. I submit my desires, thoughts, and actions to you. Give me supernatural strength to resist the Devil; in Jesus's name may he flee.

A RESPONSIVE GOD

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

JAMES 4:8

There are moments in life that we conclude that God isn't working. These moments almost exclusively happen when we experience a setback, tragedy, or injustice that we believe is undeserved. And here's the deal: in these moments we want God to respond to us most! Sometimes, we fail to hear the response we so desperately expect, and we conclude God's not there. But we forget God has been drawing near to man since the beginning of time. He is working out a great divine plan, and sometimes this plan eludes us. Our response should be to keep drawing near. Draw near despite the enemy's illusion that God isn't doing his part, for the truth is there is nothing that's going to stop God from loving his finest creation—that's you!

ASK THIS: Does God feel far?

DO THIS: Don't believe the illusion; keep drawing near.

PRAY THIS: God, I need you. Today I come only because I need you. Guide me. Help me. Save me.

THE UP DOWN LIFE

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

JAMES 4:9-10

James has been trying to sear this thought into our thick heads: that there is a way about our desires and actions, that leads to mourning, weeping, and gloom. It all begins with something wretched within each of us. A simple desire that has miserable outcomes. This brings us all down.

But there is another way, one that brings the desires before the Lord. It requires us to do something that calls for the greatest of strength—humbling ourselves. But here's the best part: the humble is the one who is laughing, joyful, and exalted. It's a little counterintuitive, but the outcomes are better. And the action is simple—go low before God and let him lift you up.

ASK THIS: Do you feel down?

DO THIS: Go humble, and let God bring you up.

PRAY THIS: God, accept my humility and fragility as a sacrifice today. I come low and ask you to lift me.

GOD'S PLANTS VS. OUR PLANS

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

JAMES 4:13-14

Some of us are planners and others of us are not. This admonition of James is not merely about planning. It has more to do with how our plans compete with God's plans. It addresses the intentional exclusion of God from our plans.

Most won't admit that we exclude God, but there is something about a person when they get a dream, idea, or vision in their head. They tend to move toward self-interest rather than God's interests. This results in thinking that forgets one thing—the brevity of life. That this life is but a mist. That this life and all our grandiose plans will soon vanish.

This is our reminder today: make plans—but don't forget to plan for the one thing that really matters. Eternity! Eternity is a very long time, and tomorrow is not, for it will soon become yesterday.

ASK THIS: Do you tend to leave God out of your plans?

DO THIS: Make a decision today that has an eternal impact—learn today to make plans daily for eternity.

PRAY THIS: God, today I lay my plans down for your plans. I pray you will accomplish your will in my life. Help me focus on eternity, and not just today and tomorrow.

DO THE RIGHT THING

*So whoever knows the right thing to do
and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

JAMES 4:17

This is one of the great axioms of James. His concern is that Christians sometimes choose to lose consciousness when it comes to doing the right thing. In other words, we make proud proclamations about our Christian title, our belief in the birth and resurrection of Jesus, and that the Bible is our rule for right living. But then we do things that act in contradiction with these claims, beliefs, and rules. These actions are our sins. These actions reveal our willful loss of consciousness.

But . . .

This makes the axiom simple. Just do the right thing—all the time—and then you'll not need to worry about the axiom.

ASK THIS: Is there any inconsistency you know of, that you need to address this year?

DO THIS: Bring that issue to God and leave it with him.

PRAY THIS: God, help my knowing and doing to be fused together.