



Study Series

James: Week Eight

Bible

James 4:1-10 (NIV)

Submit Yourselves to God

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? **2** You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. **3** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone

who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. **5** Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? **6** But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud, but shows favour to the humble."

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Grieve,

mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Sermon Summary

You may want to consider this section as pre-reading.

In 4:1-10 James continues to confront the community of faith to whom he is writing, about the consequences of their internal divisions. The strong language that he has employed in the previous sections – their hellish language, and demonic actions – culminates in the charge that they have become enemies of God! Remember, this is a community of faith that he is writing to. The language of their internal divisions – figurative or literal (and there's a chance it was literal) – points to a community so taken up with internal issues that they have no energy for the work that the church is actually called to; the mission of God to make disciples of all nations. This all important work has been ignored in the quest for control, influence, power, and status in the community. And the teachers are not the only ones implicated, for the community has been fractured by the motivations of their teaching and has empowered it by playing along; following one teacher over another and contributing to the divisions among them.

The question is, are we like this community in any way? It's easy to feel that we're doing pretty good in comparison to this community of faith. We may not be perfect, but we are not torn apart by internal divisions and infighting.

However, is it possible that we have become so focused on the internal function of the church that we are in danger of forgetting the mission that God has invited us to participate in? It is easier to do than you might think. So much of what we do in church is good, but is only really good when it prepares us for mission. But it is very easy to stop at the good and not press on to the very good. We can begin to see what we do together as the people of God as the goal of church rather than looking to the mission God has given us. Ultimately, we want to invite people to follow Jesus and be changed by Him. If this isn't happening, the church is not doing what God has called them to.

And if we find ourselves in the same position as James' community then we need to take seriously his call to repentance in 4:7-10. This call to repentance is preceded by a quotation of Proverbs 3:24 which states that God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble. To not hear the challenge of James is to remain in our pride, but to recognise this leads to repentance. Repentance begins and ends for James with submission to God and humility before Him, but also includes resisting the devil and purposefully drawing near to

God as part of unifying our hearts (rather than being double-minded). It is also a corporate repentance rather than a personal, internal, repentance. James urges the community to wipe the smug smile off its face and recognise the danger that they are in. Danger of becoming the enemies of God himself. This is as much a challenge for us today as it was for the community of faith that James was addressing. How will we respond?

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Marc spoke of the dangers of an internal focus for a community of faith. In what ways have you observed this, and what might contribute to it? Take some time to share your reflections with the group.
2. Pause to read James chapter 4:1-10. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain *why* it jumped out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Share what you've been lead to.
3. What are the implications for a community of faith that is focussed internally rather than towards those who don't yet believe?
4. How can the common practices of the church, like groups, services, and events, be reframed to focus on our external community?
5. James continually returns to challenge double-mindedness; wanting the kingdom of God and the things of the world. What practices can we begin to engage with to unify or purify our hearts, so that we are more whole-hearted?
6. Often at the centre of a divided heart is the sin of pride, but other sins can also foster disengagement with the missional purposes of God. Take some time to reflect on the sins we see at work in our own lives, keeping us from living our faith out loud, then consider how we can begin to repent corporately for allowing this to dictate an internal focus for our church.

(James' '**10 Commandments**' vs 7-10 will help with this.)

Prayer

Take some time now to reflect on your answers to questions 6. Pray for each other, that the Holy Spirit would reveal to us not just our own individual sins, but those of our community of faith, and that God would teach us to how repent together corporately.