

Audio file

[Study 28 Journeying with James 6326gsm_james_4_v1-3.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

Let us turn now to the word of God to James Chapter 4 and verse 1.

00:00:07

James Chapter 4 and verse 1.

00:00:10

From whence come wars and fightings among you?

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Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

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Ye lust, and have not, ye call, and desire to have, and cannot obtain.

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Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

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Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

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Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?

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Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

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Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

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But he giveth more grace.

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Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble and the Lord will bless his word to our hearts.

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Now this morning we're going to focus particularly on verses 4, chapter 4 of James verses 1 to 3.

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And perhaps you come to this portion of Scripture and maybe there's lots of questions even just from that reading.

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What is James speaking about?

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Who is he speaking to?

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Is he speaking to a congregation?

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Is he speaking even to the Lord's people at all?

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Has he changed tack?

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from his previous address in chapter three.

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Well, we'll see in a moment that he's still speaking to the same congregations, the dispersed, discouraged, struggling believers.

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But as long as this world continues in its downward spiral and in its sinful condition, there will be wars, there will be strife,

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There will be quarrels, there will be fights.

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Sadly, this text is very practical and perhaps even personal.

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You see, James here is giving us the origin of strife in homes, in families, in communities.

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You see, humanly speaking, we look at it from the outward.

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We look at it from the external.

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We look at the situation and we say, well, if we change the circumstances or change the environment or even change the location, then strife and fighting and quarrels and even wars will disappear.

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But James shows us the real origin of strife, the real origin of quarreling, the real origin of

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Sinful outbursts.

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The problem is the problem of the heart.

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And I've given it the title this morning, Why All This Strife?

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And we'll see how it applies to us personally, but also how it applies to the Lord's people, because that's who James is writing to.

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I don't know about you,

00:03:46

But when I read the Word of God and the Lord takes a text and He, by His Spirit, lays it on my heart, I find it hard to take it in, certainly something like this.

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I find it a challenge.

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But I believe it's helpful.

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And I believe there's hope in this.

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Because as

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Any honest physician, any honest surgeon would say, any honest consultant would say, if we can diagnose the problem, there may be a cure, there may be treatment.

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Last time, if you remember, we looked at two kinds of wisdom.

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We looked at the wise believer, this was in chapter 3, and we saw in verse 13 how James began with a question, who is a wise man?

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And then we saw something, secondly, of the earthly knowledge.

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And we saw what earthly knowledge is like.

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It's envious.

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It causes strife.

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Again, that word will come back in chapter 4.

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It's boastful.

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It's deceitful.

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But in contrast, godly wisdom is different.

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And I trust, dear friends, this is what we long for, to grow into grace and knowledge.

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of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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To increase in wisdom and discernment as we read in Proverbs chapter 1 verse 2.

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To discern that which is good and true and godly and Christlike.

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What is the fruit of that wisdom?

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Well, it's pure.

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It's holy.

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It's not impure.

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It's not tainted with sin.

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It's peaceable.

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In other words, there's a peace in the heart and there's a peace in the person's life.

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It's gentle.

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It's not.

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It's not gentle in the sense that there are no convictions in this wisdom, but it's gentle in its expression of it.

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It's easy to be entreated.

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It's full of mercy.

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Oh, when we look at our Saviour's life and earth,

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We find all of these evidences of true wisdom.

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It's full of good fruits.

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It's not partial.

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It's not choosy.

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It's not discriminatory in the sense that, well, that's a poor Christian and that's a rich Christian, so I'd prefer the company of the rich Christian over the poor Christian.

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But the poor Christian may actually have more godliness than the rich Christian, and it's without hypocrisy.

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It's not wearing a mask.

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That literally is what the word means.

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And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

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And so in that conclusion, and this is why I'm linking it back to chapter 3, James shows us here true wisdom and those who are truly wise are those who seek peace.

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So this section, chapter 4, verses 1 to 3,

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He looks at the opposite to peace, to the fruits of righteousness.

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He looks at strife.

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He looks at quarrelling.

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And I've just got a few things to share this morning.

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First of all, the origin of strife.

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This word strife, it's been mentioned, as I said earlier, in chapter 3, verse 14, it speaks of trouble, it speaks of conflict.

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It speaks of a grating.

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You could imagine that somebody gets under your skin.

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That happens in so many parts of society today.

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But the strife here is also given some quality.

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He speaks about wars and he speaks about fightings, the wars here.

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We're not thinking here of world war, although sadly there is wars going on even as we sit here this morning.

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But he's speaking here of wars within, wars in your members, in your person, in your personality inside of you.

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Where do these come from?

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They come from the lusts, from the passions.

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from the pleasures, wanting our own way.

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The desires here are not regulated well.

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They're not controlled.

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They're uncontrolled.

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You can imagine, for instance, of a volcano and it's dormant, but over time it begins to become active again.

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And as this active volcano begins to gather momentum, lava begins to come out of the

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cone.

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Gradually, you see the full power of this volcano unleashed.

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Sadly, sometimes it's like that in our hearts.

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And so what James does here is very interesting.

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He speaks of the inner person and he particularly thinks of Christians.

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Because the second thing I want you to notice is not only the origin of strife, but who is it among?

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The identity of those who are at strife.

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He says, Ye lust, ye kill, ye fight, ye have not, because ye ask not, ye ask and receive not, ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

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Has he suddenly, as I said, changed his direction and his application?

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No.

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He's speaking to believers.

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It's quite concerning when you read how many times he uses that little phrase, ye, you, plural.

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Ye lost, ye kill, ye fight, ye war, ye have, ye ask not.

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You know, the saddest thing that I have witnessed as a young Christian

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was a church members meeting where the pastor and elders and the members were at great odds.

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I don't know if you've been in that kind of situation.

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I know it leaves the scars for many years.

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I know that people find it so difficult to join a church afterwards, even though they're committed, even though they're walking with the Lord, even though they know that the Lord is their God and Christ is their Savior and they want to be joined to a local church, they find it so difficult because of the memories of things like this.

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So why were the pastor, elders and

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members at odds with each other.

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Was it over the color of the paint that was used in the sanctuary?

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No, nothing so trivial.

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Was it the color of the carpet in the sanctuary?

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No, friends.

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It wasn't any of those things.

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It was much more serious.

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It was the plan of the pastor and elders to introduce a certain book

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a certain plan, a certain direction that was departing from the Bible.

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Some of you have heard of a man called Rick Warren and his purpose-driven church and his purpose-driven life and his purpose-driven this and his purpose-driven that.

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Sadly, he claims to be an evangelical, to be a Bible-believing Christian, but his

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plan, his purpose-driven life is not actually biblical at all.

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And alas, I saw with my own eyes some godly men and their wives stand up and walk out the door because the pastor and the elders were going to push this through anyway.

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What would you have done?

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You see, we've been taught by our culture and by our education system always to bow down to authority, even if it's not right.

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But I believe those people made a stand that day.

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And I believe the Lord honored them in that stand.

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They didn't leave over something trivial, something so

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easy to solve, a matter of preference or choice, they left over something far more important, the gospel itself.

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You may have friends who are in churches that are influenced by this kind of thinking and teaching.

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What are you going to say to them?

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Rick Warren, read his testimony, read his beliefs, read what he really believes.

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rather than what he claims to believe, or anyone like him.

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And you will find that, sadly, these men and women have left the gospel behind.

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They've departed from the truth.

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Or to borrow the words of John the Apostle, they went out because they were not of us.

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It might sound challenging to you this morning and you think, well, what's that going to affect us?

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Well, sadly, around us there are people who are walking, living, believing, trusting in this kind of teaching.

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And if you take it a little further and you say, well, this is serious,

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Amongst the Lord's people, there is strife, there is a peacelessness, there is a restlessness, there are troubles, there are quarrels, there are fighting.

00:15:02

There is someone far more important, sorry, more powerful at work.

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Satan himself.

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Because where Christ's gospel is preached, there will be opposition, of course there will.

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But where Christ is held high and the Word of God is expounded and explained to the people of God, the Spirit of God is present.

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What did Christ say?

00:15:32

I will build my church despite opposition, despite quarreling and fighting.

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He'll build his church.

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But isn't it much more wonderful when you come to a members meeting and there's a unity of purpose and of heart?

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There's one mind in the things that matter most.

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There's a focus on the gospel and a fixated look to Christ.

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Isn't that much more wonderful than having strife and quarrels?

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I trust that pastors

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even myself, if I can put it like this, will be approachable.

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I may not agree with exactly what you believe or what you hold to, especially if it's concerning certain things.

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But I trust that you will find that most pastors are approachable and they are peaceable, even if they have convictions.

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It's not wrong to have convictions concerning the word of God and the gospel and the doctrines

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that God has revealed to us in his word.

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But it is wrong to spend our time causing strife and quarrels.

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One other thing I'll say on this, the greatest heartache for most pastors is quarrelling believers.

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Either they're quarrelling with the pastor or they're quarrelling amongst themselves and the pastor is supposed to be the peacemaker.

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We're a small congregation.

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If we were to grow and increase, we will face some of these things, but I trust that we will be united in the most important things.

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So what's the cause?

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We've seen the origin, we've seen the identity.

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Thirdly, what about the cause, the cause of this problem?

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Well, James puts his finger on it.

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James is so perceptive here.

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And as I said before, I believe James heard and retained and recorded the very words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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He may not have been a believer till later on,

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We believe that he's not James the Apostle, but he's one of those who is James of the family of Jesus Christ.

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James and the Lord Jesus had the same mother, not the same, but weren't conceived in the same way.

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The Lord Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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James was conceived in the natural way.

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But nonetheless,

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As you read through this, you see his directness.

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I can hear the echoes of the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to the religious leaders and ye do this, ye do that, ye do the other.

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And so James here shows us the cause of the problem.

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The first thing I want us to notice is the selfish desires, the selfish desires.

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What does this mean?

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Well, even believers still have that indwelling sin and some of us were more selfish than others.

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Some of us were selfless even as unbelievers.

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We were willing to go that extra mile even before we knew Christ.

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But here the selfish desires is that we grasp at things.

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We don't wait for God to grant them.

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We don't ask God for guidance.

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We don't depend on the Lord for help.

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We're DIY Christians.

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We'll do it ourselves or DIO Christians do it ourselves.

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And this causes great strife.

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Selfish desires comes from the inner heart.

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The Lord Jesus Christ tells us where sin comes really from.

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And he speaks about adulteries and lusts and passions and murders and hatred, and it all comes from selfish desires.

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This unfortunately can cause great havoc in the Christian church.

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An inherent, innate, unsuppressed selfishness.

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I want and I will get, and sadly that's caused quarrels and strife.

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Second part of this origin or another source of this origin is selfish efforts.

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It's linked with selfish desires, but it goes one more.

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It says, I will get my way no matter what.

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It doesn't matter who's in my way, I will trample them.

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You find this in business.

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You find some of the most successful CEOs are the most oppressive, suppressive individuals.

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They're oppressive on their staff, but they're also suppressive to anyone who dares to challenge them.

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You see it in sport.

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You see it in various aspects of life.

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I'll do it my way and I want my way.

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This is not someone following biblical convictions.

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This is not someone following biblical teaching or biblical patterns or biblical precepts.

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This is somebody who says, I will get what I want now.

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Another aspect, if selfish desires and selfish efforts is not challenging enough, then James moves a little further on in verse 3 and he speaks about selfish prayers.

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And perhaps this is the most convicting of all.

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And this also hinders our walk with the Lord as well as affecting our fellowship and our friendship of other believers.

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Ye ask and ye receive not, because ye ask amidst.

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This is the language of prayer.

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You remember what the Lord Jesus says, ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you.

00:22:01

What a wonderful,

00:22:03

Encouragement to prayer.

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You ask, not because you want something you're done for yourself, but you want God's glory to be seen.

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You ask, Lord, save my friend, save my family member, my wife, my daughters, my children, my sons, whoever it may be.

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Lord, I want to see your church built.

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That's not an unselfish desire.

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Lord, I want to see your people grow.

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We grow downwardly as well as outwardly.

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We grow spiritually and we grow numerically.

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These are not selfish prayers.

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Lord, I want to see

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The gospel calls grow not only in our own local church, but in the country itself.

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But the selfish prayers are like this.

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I want this.

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I'm asking Lord that you will give me this and I'll get one over someone else.

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That's a selfish prayer.

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I'm sure none of us would pray a prayer like that.

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we might be tempted to Lord he'd he or she take that away make it clear that I'm better than them this is even in the church and this can hinder close fellowship with God firstly but it also as the old writers will speak about it will also affect us amongst the congregation

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These kind of selfish prayers can affect our horizontal fellowship with Almighty God through Jesus Christ, but they can also affect our vertical fellowship with Jesus Christ and our horizontal fellowship with one another.

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So we've seen something of the origin.

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We've seen something of the identity or the individuals.

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Thirdly, we've seen something of the cause.

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And fourth, I just want to focus now on prayer itself, because the language here is so rich.

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And I just want to encourage us this morning.

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Sometimes the Holy Spirit wants us to look at something in a text that's not necessarily the focus or the general thought or the one main ideas as common today.

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And I believe it will be profitable for us to ask ourselves, how should we pray?

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If James here is speaking about asking and receiving not, asking and amiss because we consume it upon our lust, that's the selfish prayers, then how should we pray?

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Why should we pray?

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Well, first of all, we need to remember who we're praying to, who we're praying to.

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We're praying to almighty God.

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God of all glory, of all majesty, of all power, the Creator of all living things, the Creator of all things themselves, the God who upholds the whole world by the word of His power, the God who is holy and just and righteous and pure, the God who can do what He wills with His world, His sovereignty,

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is in a word.

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But we need to remember who this God has revealed Himself to as a people of God, as the Christians, as the believers.

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He has revealed Himself to them as gracious and kind and merciful.

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What does that mean?

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Gracious.

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We're not treated as we deserve.

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We're treated far better than that.

00:26:18

God's favor is upon those whom he's gracious to.

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God's mercy is revealed to those that he is gracious to.

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His grace is the source of his mercy and his love.

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The Bible says God is love.

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And this God is the God whom we pray to.

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But how can we approach this God?

00:26:44

He's so righteous and pure and holy.

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He's so merciful and kind and gracious, but we can't just approach Him without due respect.

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We must go to Him, we must seek Him, we must ask of Him in the way that He has appointed to be asked.

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And the only way He will hear our prayers is through His Son Jesus Christ.

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Some people think that they can

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waltz into God's presence.

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I heard this a few years ago.

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Waltz into God's presence.

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That's a dance, by the way, if you don't know what a waltz is.

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They can just parade into God's presence.

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They can just appear as they are and with no due respect.

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They treat God with such disrespect.

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Will God hear their prayers?

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Well, I believe God hears everything, but I don't believe He has to answer those prayers.

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No, we come humbly, we come on our knees if we can kneel and we come through Christ.

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We come by faith.

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And as we come, then we can ask.

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And do you notice the posture here?

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We're not demanding, we're asking.

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The Bible tells us to ask of God great things, great things.

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Not just small things, not things that we could hope to be answered, but great things.

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Ask of God because He delights to hear our requests.

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The Psalmist says, I love the Lord because He hath heard me and answered me.

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But in that Psalm 116, the Psalmist obviously had to ask because otherwise the Lord wouldn't answer.

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So it is with us.

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We need to ask, but we need to approach God in Christ.

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We need to approach God through Christ.

00:28:56

Christ is not only the Savior of our sins, He is the mediator for His people.

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He is the intercessor.

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He is the go-between.

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He is the one who stands between us and God and God and us.

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This is the whole body of prayer.

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Do you know there was a famous bishop of Liverpool back in the time of the Victorian era, might sound a long time ago, a contemporary of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and he wrote a little tract.

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I smile because it's a lot longer than a modern tract.

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It had a very simple title, Do You Pray?

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His name was Bishop Charles J.C.

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Ryle.

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And so I summarized his little tract, or his booklet we'd call it, in seven ways.

00:30:02

He starts with this, Prayer is essential for salvation.

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It's essential for salvation.

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Secondly, it's the sure mark of real Christians.

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Thirdly, private prayer is neglected by so many Christians.

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Private prayer here, of course, is speaking about us on our own with the Lord, as you read in Matthew chapter 6, when we shut the door and enter the closet and seek our Heavenly Father, and the Father who seeth in secret will reward us openly.

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Fourthly, private prayer has so much encouragement.

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So much encouragement in private prayer when we shut the door and seek the Lord and ask the Lord to help us to pray.

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It's amazing how the Lord helps us in our praying.

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Fifthly, private, diligent, heartfelt prayer leads to a life of holiness and being like Jesus Christ.

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Sixthly, a prayer is neglected as a sign of

00:31:06

and can lead to backsliding as a Christian.

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And seventhly, true prayer leads to the blessing of Christian happiness and contentment and preparation for glory.

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You see, when you think about it, if there is peace in the congregation of God's people, then the prayers of God's people

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are not hindered.

00:31:38

But if there is strife, if there is trouble, if there is quarreling and fighting even within the hearts of God's people, and there is, as it were, strife between one believer and another, then prayers are hindered.

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And so with those seven points about prayer, I wonder,

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Will we take this text and say, as it were, you could put it in the opposite way, We have not because we ask not, we ask and receive not.

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Ah, we ask because we are not at war.

00:32:23

We ask because there is no strife.

00:32:26

And we begin to see the Lord answering our prayers regarding this congregation.

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regarding the building up of His people, regarding the strengthening of the ministry, regarding the emboldening of our witnessing.

00:32:42

As we pray together, the Lord will maintain and He will build His church.

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And nothing can prevail against that.

00:32:55

So let there not be disunity amongst the congregation, but may there be unity in spirit in the bond of peace.

00:33:03

And may we go forward and see the Lord's blessing as we press on in the life of grace for the glory of Jesus Christ.

00:33:15

Let us pray.

00:33:16

Almighty and gracious God, thy word indeed, O Lord, is true and dependable and reliable.

00:33:25

And there are times that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through thy word that helps us and encourages us

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and sometimes He convicts us.

00:33:35

We pray, O Lord, that Thou would help us, that Thou would encourage us in our prayer life, that Thou would help us to deal with any strife or quarrelling within our own hearts, that Thou would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and that we would grow in the spirit and the unity of the bond of peace, that gospel peace would reign in this place, and that gospel truth would be preached from this pulpit,

00:34:01

and Christ will be exalted.

00:34:03

And as we pray, we would see God at work, God in his great grace and mercy and love.

00:34:10

Oh Lord, we pray for Annie this morning who are still without Christ.

00:34:13

We pray draw near to them and draw them to thyself.

00:34:17

Oh, that thou would open the eyes and hearts and minds of many in this area, that they would come to Christ and trust in him.

00:34:26

that their prayers would be heard for mercy and our prayers will be heard for their salvation.

00:34:33

We ask, O Lord, hear our prayers.

00:34:35

Go before us now.

00:34:37

Prepare us, O Lord, for all that is ahead of us.

00:34:40

Forgive us our every sin.

00:34:41

Encourage us in the life of grace.

00:34:44

For we ask these prayers in Jesus' name.

00:34:47

Amen.