



Preached by Neil Smith at King of Kings 15 July 2018, Am & Pm
Book of James: James 4

 **SCRIPTURE READING – JAMES 4 (Mandy Malan)**

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 favor 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.

¹¹ Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Mandy. Today we are looking at James chapter 4. It's such a practical book. Tim Keller describes James in this way, he says;

"If you really believe in Jesus... what kind of life will that create on the ground? What will it look like practically? What kind of community will that create?"

And that's what James really is. Living out your Christian life on the ground, practically.

And today in chapter 4, the focus is on the Christian community, and how we are meant to get on and behave.

Now James is a significant Christian leader, he is essentially the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. It's a big church, it's full of interesting dynamics, young, old, all kinds of different ideas about tradition and faith. And so Pastor James has his hands full! I feel like I can relate!

So Pastor James wants his church to grow as a community of believers, and he wants them to be the kind of community that God wants them to be, and so the first point I want to make today is this...

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

I have been here in the King of Kings community now for the past 16 years. I started serving here in 2002. I met my wife here. My children were born here. I've served in most areas of the church. Youth, Worship, Children, Missions, and now I make the coffee! And over the years I have come to really appreciate our church community. I love it. I mean, if I am honest, if I did not, I would have been gone a long time ago! And yes, I'll be sincere, there have been times... that I have wished that I could have run a million miles away. But... part of loving a family, loving a community, means that you stay committed, you stick around. Even when it's not easy.

And so, as I was preparing this message... I did a lot of thinking about the importance of community. And I was thinking about some of you... some of your families. We've all been through a lot together. We've had new additions to the families... We've lost some loved ones along the way. We've shared some great times together... we've shared some deep lows together. And I am so grateful to each and every one of you. Community is powerful. Community is important.

And so it was good for me to listen to a message by Tim Keller on this subject this week, and I want to share some of that with you today, because I think it will be beneficial to all of us.

One of the reasons, is because by and large, the world in which we live, has become a very individualistic society. But the church, biblically, was never meant to be individualistic. The church is corporate. It's about family. It's about Father's and son's, mother's and daughter's, brother's and sister's, who do life together, journey together through the good and bad, have fun together, and worship Jesus together!

So I really want to appeal to you today... if you have been doing church at King of Kings, but somehow... somehow you are not connecting into the community, fix that. Don't hide from Christian community. Don't be distant! Engage with the community.

And then, for those of you have done that... make sure your engagement with the Christian community is healthy and Godly.

The final verse of James 3, verse 18 set's up the context of chapter 4. And this is what it says;

 **18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**

What does this mean? Well, very simply, this is a metaphor. It's the picture of a crop. If you sow peace, then you will reap a harvest of righteousness.

What does righteousness mean, very simply, in scripture it means to be put right with God, and in some cases, like here in James. It means to be right with God, and to be right with others.

So when it comes to community, when it comes to our church community, in order for us to be the kind of community God wants us to be, a righteous community, we need a lot of people to be sowing lots of peace! Does that make sense?! So the question I would like to ask you is this;

Are you a peacemaker, who is sowing peace into our church community? Or, are you a troublemaker, sowing trouble?

Peacemakers who sow in peace... reap a harvest of righteousness – right with God, and right with others. Community is important. It's very important to James, it's very important to God. I think it's actually a lot more important than many Christians realize.

Do remember John 17:20, that well known prayer, where Jesus prays this;

 **I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**

Here is my point, have you ever noticed, that the number one way Jesus says that the world will believe and know that God sent him, and know that he is real, is through the beauty and the depth of the Christian communities love for one another. That is huge! Our unity, our oneness, our love for each other, is connected to how the world will become convinced of the reality and truth of Jesus.

So how are we doing with this church? Are we living out the kind of community, family, that God wants us to be?

The bible says we are to honour one another, the bible says we are to bear with one another, the bible says we are to forgive one another, even confess our sin to one another? Have you been doing that?

The bible says the Christian church, the community... is meant to encourage one another, inspire one another, share with one another. How are we doing with that King of Kings?

And so it's in this space, that pastor James kicks us off in verse 1 of chapter 4 and he says;

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?

He says, “Hey guys! Come on! What’s up with this fighting among you?” There’s fighting in the church? Yes. There is fighting in the church in Jerusalem. Pastor James is concerned about fights and quarrels in his church! And you know what King of Kings, we are not immune. I am so grateful for the peace and unity that is so evident in our church community, but we have our fair share of fighting and quarrelling from time to time. I think we just dress it up more civilly ☺

These fights and quarrels can pop up for all kinds of reasons... this one, is offended by that one... because of something that happened. This group, is upset with that group because of something they said or did, or never did. Sometimes it’s relational, sometimes it’s theological. Sometimes it’s about personal stuff, sometimes it’s about personal preference and taste. But whatever category it may fall into, it’s a fight, it’s a quarrel.

Maybe that does not seem too serious to you... but let’s look at what God’s word says about this fighting a little further on in verse 4; James says;

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.

This is very strong language. You adulterous people! Pastor James is picking up on a major theme in scripture, that the church, believers, are the bride of Christ. And that he is our husband, and that our sin, our fighting, is like spiritual adultery. And James says, church, when you fight with each other, you’re acting just like the world!

What is friendship with the world? It’s fighting with each other. What is hatred toward God? It’s fighting with each other. Pastor James says his church, is looking and behaving just like the world, and that means they have chosen to be a friend of the world more than a friend of God.

So how are we dealing with this in our community church? Are we sowing peace, in order to reap the kind of community that God wants us to be. Or are we sowing trouble. What are you to this spiritual community? A peacemaker, or a troublemaker? Let’s all aim to be the former.

So firstly today, community is very important. Here’s the second thing...

WHAT KEEPS US FROM GODLY COMMUNITY?

I want to take a look here at the cause of breakdowns in community. The thing that prevents us from experiencing Godly community **James 4:1-3;**

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.

Crumbs – these are some really harsh words. This is one of those passages where we can probably identify the symptoms better in other people’s lives, than our own –

You know, maybe you are sitting here thinking; *“Oh I wish so hard that so and so was here to hear this!”*

But... God calls us... to honestly examine ourselves... and to find the thing that kills community inside of us. So, what is this community killer? Verse 2 says;

 **you covet but you cannot get what you want**

Just like Alan shared last week, that the real problem with the tongue, is that it is connected to the heart, well, the real hindrance to creating Godly community, is that we all want it to be all about us. That word want, where it says, you cannot get what you want, is actually the word Hedone which might sound familiar to some of you, it's the word from which we get the word – Hedonism.

And Hedonism is all about the pleasure of self. It's the pursuit of pleasure, the pursuit of our desires above all else in life. Back in the day they called it “Sex, drugs and...” You got it! It's actually just Hedonism. The pursuit of pleasure being the highest good. Verse 3 brings it out further, James says;

 **When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

Your pleasures. Now please don't misunderstand me here everyone. I'm not saying that pleasure is evil. There are many wonderful things that God has given us to enjoy. I'm not suggesting a life of celibacy, and stoic, no fun, unpleasantness. But, when our focus... is just on what we want, when our focus is just on our pleasures and passions, when we behave more like Hedonists than Christians, our relationship with others and our relationship with God is affected negatively.

You see, when we put ourselves first, we will always find ourselves bumping heads with others and with God. God takes this so seriously, that he says the result of this kind of thinking only about about yourself and your pleasures is unanswered prayer. Did you catch that part of verse 3? It says;

 **When you ask, you do not receive...**

Because of our wrong motives and self-seeking, God does not give us what we ask for.

Too often we can be like over grown toddlers – wanting what we want, when we want it, no matter what. You see friends, there is this thinking in the world today that everything is about me. My comfort, my convenience, my needs. It is a religion. And it is the religion of hell. The subtitle is, “my life is about me.” My life is my own.

There is a Christian writer by the name of Thomas Howland who said that there are basically two ways to choose to live;

-  **Two ways to choose to live:**
- 1. My life is for me**
 - 2. My life is for God and others**

My life for me, or, my life for God and others. You will face that decision hundreds of times every single day. When you choose to forgive an offence, when you choose to volunteer your precious time, when you're on a team and you don't insist on your way, these are the little things that lead to community life. Or, you focus on your comfort, your desires, your control, your pleasure, your needs, and these become

more important than everyone else's, and you've become like an enemy suicide bomber within our spiritual home.

So how do you choose to live? My life is for me? Or, My life is for God and others?

I think many of you will be familiar with Jonathan Edwards. A man who God used in a mighty way in history. He was privileged to be used by God in some incredible revivals. Revivals are when many people come to salvation, the church grows dramatically, and there is incredible love and community amongst believers. And Jonathan Edwards wrote a book in which he described the thing which he felt was most responsible to ending those incredible revivals. You know what it was? Fighting amongst believers.

Revival broke out, and God was moving in such a mighty way, and then as true as bob, the one thing that brought these incredible moves of God to an end each time, was when fighting broke out among the believers. Fights and quarrels quenched what the Holy Spirit was doing, two or three times. So sad. So Jonathan Edwards wrote a book, and he said fighting killed those revivals, killed that incredible community amongst believers, and all had its roots in spiritual pride. Spiritual pride.

And James understood that too. That's why he says in Verse 6;

 **“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”**

You see friends, humility, genuine humility builds community, and what breaks it down is just the opposite of humility, pride.

And Tim Keller has done a great job in paraphrasing Jonathan Edwards's old school language. Let me take you through it;

1. Spiritual pride makes you more aware of others faults than you are of your own. Humility disposes you to be far more aware of your own faults than others. Therefore...
2. Pride leads you when you speak of others faults to have an air of contempt, but humility, or a humble person, means whenever you do speak of others faults, you do it with grief and mercy.
3. Pride leads you to quickly separate from people. People you have criticised or who criticise you that means you're cold to them or you avoid them. But humility means you stick with people even through difficult relationships.
4. A proud person is dogmatic and sure about every point of belief. Proud people cannot distinguish between major and minor points of belief, because everything the proud person believes is major.
5. A proud person either loves to confront because you love winning, or you don't want to confront because you don't want criticism or controversy. A humble person confronts necessarily, when it's necessary.
6. A proud person is often unhappy and sorry for themselves because a) they are so sure they know how light ought to go. B) they are sure they deserve a good life. But humble people say – I deserved to be cast off, and it's only by God's grace that I am here.

So let's do a quick inventory... Are you humble? Humble people...

Are slow to speak of others faults, and when they do, they always speak gently, and kindly, never disdainfully or proudly.

They stick with people through hard relationships, they don't give up.

They are very flexible, rather than being dogmatic.

They are not afraid of confronting, but they don't like it, but when they do, they are persuasive because they are not out to win, they're out to heal.

They are not full of self-pity – they rarely complain.

So, how are you doing? Humility, it's such an important character trait to develop in our lives, in our community. So, how do we build this kind of humility in our lives, and build the kind of community that God wants us to have?

HOW TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Let me share a few things with you here... here is the first, and this one is big.

Accept God's BIG love for you

Verse 5 is this verse that a lot of people don't get; it says;

 **5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?**

It seems a little confusing at first, especially if you think of jealousy in the negative sin sense, but with God, when scripture says God is jealous, it means he is longing for our love. The way a husband longs for the love of his wife. Just think about how amazing that is! God is longing for your love. He loves you so much.

Now how does this build community? Well, very simply, when you accept God's love for you, his grace, his kindness, his graciousness, it changes you. When his love gets hold of a person. It undoes you. I mean. After a few minutes in God's presence, I find it nearly impossible to get mad with someone! Because I realize how kind and loving God has been to me.

Verse 6 goes on.

 **6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."**

The cure for these bad relationships – between each other and with God is two sided – from God and from ourselves. We need more grace! How amazing God is – when faced with our bad behaviour, our selfishness, our fighting – He gives us more grace. It is not what we deserve, but what we need. But then the next step is ours – He gives us grace, He does not condemn us, He forgives us. But we need to submit to Him...

Submit to God

By submitting to God we find the cure to our problem. Verse 7 says;

 **7 Submit yourselves, then, to God.**

Our problem is caused by seeking our own will which is damaged by our sin nature. When we submit to God and His will... our relationships will be better, our walk with Him will be better and our prayer life will be better too. We need to take those steps towards God in submission and repentance. Remember these are James' instructions to Christians, not to unbelievers.

And so Pastor James says submit yourself to God. But not only submit to God, the next part is this...

 **Resist the devil**

Verse 7;

 **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

I know that there are many people who have a hard time believing in the Devil. But it's true, he is very much alive. And consider what James is saying. The Devil loves to instigate division and conflict in our lives. When we fight among ourselves we do his work for him. We become a useless witness for Jesus, we stop growing and lose strength in our faith.

Some of the conflict we are in is generated by our sin, but also because of the stirring and lies of the devil. He whispers lies and stirs up hatred and jealousy. He has no authority over you, so resist him – he is powerless unless you give him power by buying into his lies.

I picked up on some great advice once about marriage. If you're newish, and don't know me so well. Shelley is my wife, and my best friend. And she and I have been married for 13 years!

And I read some great advice about conflict in marriage that's really helped me, and here it is... *"the key to dealing with fights in your marriage, is to remember that they're your family, and not your enemy. There are times that that they are going to feel like your enemy, but they are not your enemy. But you do have an enemy, and the enemy wants to turn your family into a bunch of enemies. That's the Devils tactic and trick for the family – to cause you to think that your family is your enemy. But family is not enemy. You have a family, and there's an enemy, and the enemy will attack your family, and your family needs to resist your enemy, and he'll fee from you."*

So if you're married, I want you to turn to your spouse sitting next to you, and say to them, "You're family! Not enemy!" And you know what friends, church is also family, So turn to one of your brothers and sisters around you, and say to them. "We're family! Not enemy!" Amen! Pastor James is speaking here, and here is what he is saying; Church is a family, and the family has a enemy. And if you forget that, you will end up fighting your family, thinking they are the enemy! But they are not.

So, submit to God, resist the Devil. Next...

 **Become people of His presence**

Verse 8;

 **⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.**

 **Take purity seriously**

Verse 8 goes on;

 **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**

Get yourself cleaned up! Come near to God. Whenever there is fighting, find the Lord quick, and stay near to him. Wash your hands. Look at your own life, ask yourself the question; “Hey, did I do anything wrong here? Did I say anything wrong here? Is there anything I need to fix here? Apologize for, get right, or do different next time? You see, its only through God’s grace and humility that you can do this, because when there is fighting, often there’s a lot of mud. And James says, hey. Look at your hands, are they are covered in mud? If yes, it’s time to put the mud down. Wash your hands. If you’ve been in the wrong. Own it, submit to God. Fix it. But here’s the next thing we see.

Submit to God’s authority in your relationships

James 4.11-12;

 **Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?**

Pastor James starts with a great question: What causes fights and quarrels among you? I mean, that is a great question. And then he ends here with another really good question. Who are you to judge?

Refrain from judging one another. We dealt with the issue of judging one another when we did our Breaking Barriers series. We, who are sinners, like everyone else, are in no position to judge another. Only God has authority to do that. So, to cure the problem of fighting we need to remember to submit to God and stop taking His job from Him thinking we can do it better! When we remember our position, as loved children of God, who have received His grace and forgiveness, we will reflect that in the way that we interact with others. Do not speak evil against your brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re family.

But it takes humility. We have such funny ideas about humility. Humility is not putting yourself down, thinking less of yourself, it’s simply thinking of yourself less. Putting others first. It’s not being so focussed on your rights.

Do you know what cowardice is? Cowardice is just looking at yourself all the time. Do you know what courage is? Courage is forgetting about yourself.

Humility takes a lot of courage. Humility takes a lot of confidence in knowing who you really are.

But not only do we need to submit to God in our relationships, but also in our futures.

Submit your future to God

James 4.13-17

 **Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.**

 **¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such**

boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

We live in anxious and fearful times. There are an increasing number of people in South Africa who are not just worried and stressed sometimes but have developed anxiety disorders – according to The South African Depression and Anxiety Group up to 20% of the population will suffer from an Anxiety disorder each year. Many of the Christians I meet are living fearful and anxious lives and that is such a stressful way to live. I don't want to minimize the environment we live in – it is a tough out there, bad things do happen, so I am not going to suggest burying our heads in the sand. But we need to keep proper prospective – what can we add to our lives with worry? There is nothing we can do through worry and anxiety. God is in control and we need to submit to His authority. Through worry it is like we don't trust Him and want to take the control back from Him thinking we can do a better job.

So much of the trouble we face – in our relationships, in our walk with God and in our thinking about the future comes when we do not let God be in charge and Lord. It is not that our circumstances will magically change, but having His perspective and knowing that He is in control help us face the toughest of situations.

RESPONSE

So there is Pastor James' message to his church in Jerusalem. Do you think they got it? Do you think you got it? You know, to this day, there is still a lot of conflict around Jerusalem. Everyone fighting with everyone. It's one of the most conflicted places on the earth, and it's been that way for a long time.

What is heart breaking about the church in Jerusalem... is that James ultimately would die because of the fighting in his church. History tells us... that he was a pastor... and there were some who rose up against him... and they wanted him to stop preaching and teaching about Jesus... they wanted him to stop leading the church. And historians tell us, that they took James... to the top of the temple in Jerusalem... and they threw him off. It's crazy... they threw him off... but after the fall to the ground, he didn't die, so then the group encircled him, and beat him to death.

They never understood his message. Not one bit. They never understood Jesus. Not one bit. They never understood humility, not one bit. They never understood family, not one bit. And this one particular group never got the message.

So not everyone in Pastor James's community got this message. I pray that won't be the case with us! And with me! For my sake!

So, what we're going to do together now is we're going to respond as a family. And I want to bring this all back to Jesus. Because Jesus is the reason we can be a family. Jesus is the one who saved us, and he gives us his peace, he reconciles us, and he makes us family. And I would say, if you're here, and there's someone that you're with and you're fighting with, this is a wonderful opportunity for you to begin that process of reconciling, apologizing, loving, and being family and not enemy.

Then we're going to sing, OK? This is our way of submitting ourselves to God. This is our way of looking up and seeing the Lord Jesus on the throne, high and exalted,

he has risen for us all, he has forgiven us all, he has loved us all, he has embraced us all.