

BEYOND BELIEF "BEYOND COMMITMENT" JAMES 4:1-12

This Week's Core Competency

Self-Control – I have the power, through Christ, to control myself. Titus 2:11-13 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Eat This Not That is a popular book by David Zinczenko, which you may have seen or perhaps heard about. Its subtitle tells it all, *Thousands of Simple Food Swaps that Can Save You 10, 20, 30 Pounds—or More!* So the next time you're out, remember, choosing a Subway turkey club over the Panera version of the same sandwich will save you 510 calories! Simple enough—right? But what if you don't like the ambiance at Subway and prefer dining at Panera? Or, what if your friend invites you to meet for lunch at Panera rather than Subway? No matter how simple the plan, you still have to execute!

I've been listening to sermons for fifty years. I've preached a few over the years, too, and it seems to me that most of the messages, of most of the texts and sermons, I've either heard or preached boil down to, "do this; don't do that." This week's text is no exception. The message of James 4:1-12 can be put like this: "Do this: humbly submit yourself to God so he can answer your prayers; don't do

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

—Proverbs 25:28

that: fight and quarrel with others to get what you want." The statement might call for a wordsmith, but you get the picture. And I, for one, don't object to James' message, and I doubt his readers did either. I want to do what it says. My problem is execution, as, I suspect, was theirs. What's more, in developing his message, James lists a series of eight pairs of commands sandwiched between his opening and closing imperatives, "Submit yourselves, then, to God" in verse 7 and "Humble yourselves before the Lord" in verse 10. The eight include, "resist the devil," "come near to God," "wash your hands," "Purify your hearts," "grieve and mourn," "wail and change." Each of these might be reworded *a la* "do this: resist the devil; don't do that: give in to him." Again I don't object to any of these commands. I want to obey them. My problem is execution.

Analogies have their limits, and they can go astray, but they can also be helpful. When it comes to "eat this not that," I don't have to go it alone. I gain the strength I need to execute my plan from others who encourage me and hold me accountable—especially if I ask them. A friend meets me at Subway not Panera. My wife suggests an alternative to Chili's Awesome Blossom (2710 calories, 203 grams of fat). My son mocks me out of eating the Whopper with cheese (760 calories, 46 grams of fat). Their help not only makes execution possible, it makes it more probable.

When it comes to James' commands, the same kind of thing is true. In fact, James, himself, says in verse 6, "But he gives more grace." Then he quotes Proverbs 3:34, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." In other words, God

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graciously gives strength to those who want to change their worldly ways and to those who want to humbly submit to God—provided they ask for it. So when it comes to any of his eight pairs of commands, I can go to God in prayer and confess my inability to execute on my own, I can ask him for help, and then I can look forward to him enabling me to do what I, otherwise, could not do on my own.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

James 4:1-12

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. 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 is hatred toward God? 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 the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

*"God opposes the proud
but gives grace 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, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him 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?

Cf., another translation

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 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 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline all the words that pertain to conflict in vv. 1, 2.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 2, 6, 11, 12.
- * Circle "kill" in v. 2.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in vv. 2, 3.
- * Box "that" indicating *purpose* in v. 3.
- * Highlight the phrase "friendship with the world" and draw an arrow to "adulterous" in v. 4.
- * Draw a line from "friendship" to "friend" and another from "hatred" to "enemy" in v. 4.

- * Circle "spirit" in v. 5.
- * Circle "envies intensely" in v. 5.
- * Box "then" indicating *result* in v. 7.
- * Number each of the ten imperative verbs—the ten command words—in vv. 7-10.
- * Circle "law" in v. 11.
- * Underline "slander," "speaks against," "judge/s," and "judgment" in v. 11.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What do you infer from 3:13-4:3 about the Christians to whom James wrote?
2. James' readers waged a war on two fronts. Describe them.
3. Explain how their desires might have led to fights and quarrels among them.
4. Verses 1-2 reflect conventional wisdom (cf., 3:13-16) regarding how to get what you want. Put it in your own words.
5. What does James offer as an alternative to conventional wisdom?
6. What do you infer about prayer from your answer to the question, "Why didn't God give them what they asked for in prayer?"
7. In what sense can Christians be adulterous without being immoral?
8. How is "friendship with the world" defined in the immediate context?
9. Explain the point of the quotation from Proverbs 3:34 in verse 6.
10. If you had to put the point of verses 7-10 into a few words, what would they be?
11. **Discussion:** How would you summarize James' argument in verses 11 and 12?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In 4:1-12 James picks up themes he introduced earlier in his letter and develops them further. In 3:13-18 he described two kinds of wisdom that manifest themselves in two very different ways of life. The first kind is characterized by envy and selfish ambition. That kind of wisdom he says, "does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice" (vv. 15, 16). People given to it will stop at nothing to get what they want. The contrasting kind of wisdom is "pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (v.17). It marks the way of life of "peacemakers who sow in peace" and "raise a harvest of righteousness" (v. 18). People given to it submit themselves to God and ask him for what they need. After contrasting these two, it makes sense that James would go on to describe the consequences of preferring the first kind of wisdom to the second. He does this by asking two rhetorical questions having to do with fights and quarrels in their midst.

"What causes fights and quarrels among you?" he asked, before answering his own question with another question. "Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" James' readers were into indulgence. They were preoccupied with their personal passion for what they desired, and strife resulted from it. And what was it that they wanted? We should perhaps look to the context for the answer. "What is it that James's readers want to have? He nowhere says in these verses, but the context suggests an answer: the kind of wisdom that will enable them to gain recognition as leaders in the community. James has rebuked his readers for wanting to become teachers (3:1) and for priding themselves on being 'wise and understanding' (3:13). They apparently want to lead the church, but don't have the right kind of wisdom to do so. Moreover, James' language here reminds us inevitably of his earlier encouragement: 'If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God' (1:5). James attributes the failure of these people to gain the power and prestige they want to their

failure to do just this: ask God" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, 184). Actually, their failure is twofold. On the one hand, they didn't ask (v. 2), and on the other, when they did, they asked with mixed motives (v. 3); apparently, they wanted to be leaders and teachers for their own benefit as much as for the benefit of others.

But they may have wanted more. It seems the envy and selfish ambition behind their desire to be leaders and teachers encouraged worldliness in general. One author comments, "Selfish living and selfish praying always lead to war." Then he goes on to say, "People who are at war with themselves because of selfish desires are always unhappy people. They never enjoy life. Instead of being thankful for the blessings they do have, they complain about the blessings they do not have. They cannot get along with other people because they are always envying others for what they have and do. They are always looking for that 'magic something' that will change their lives, when the real problem is within their own hearts" (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:368). James readers had a love for worldly pleasures that amounted to unfaithfulness to God and made them adulterous people spiritually speaking. Nevertheless, God is good, and he gives gracious help to enable his people to overcome their sinfulness.

It's no wonder that James called on his readers to repent in verses 7-10. "Submit yourselves, then to God" he says in verse 7, and then in verse 10 he ends on the same note saying, "Humble yourselves before the Lord." In between, he gives a series of commands that flow directly from his quotation of Proverbs 3:34 and his inference from it that opens verse 7 and closes verse 10. They include: "resist," "come near," "wash," "purify," "grieve," "mourn," "wail," and "change." But he didn't stop there. He concluded by reminding them of their obligation to the royal law, which he first mentioned in 2:8, because obedience to the command "Love your neighbor as yourself" would put an end to the fighting and quarreling that threatened them.

The Message of the Passage

Stop striving to indulge in worldly pleasures; instead of fighting and quarreling to get what you want, submit yourself to God so he can give you what you truly need in answer to your prayers.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“Beyond Commitment”

(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **fights and quarrels** "Wars and fights," NKJV, "conflicts and quarrels," the NET Bible. The first word [*polemoi*] connotes physical violence, the second [*machai*] angry verbal disputes. Some take it that James is deploring actual violence among members of the community but probably not. "And while it is true that the Greek words translated 'fights' and 'kill' [v. 2] in the NIV normally refer to physical violence, the word *machai* [quarrels] points in a different direction. It, too can refer to violent conflicts (e.g., Josh. 4:13), but most of its occurrences in the LXX and all three of its other occurrences in the NT (2 Cor. 7:5; 2 Tim. 2:23; Tit. 3:9) denote verbal quarrels or inward anxiety . . . Both words, then, resemble their English counterparts, 'battle,' 'fight,' in that they can refer to verbal disputes as well as armed conflicts . . . We think that this metaphorical meaning is likely here, despite the presence of the word 'kill' in v. 2" (Moo, 180; cf., Ralph P Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 48, *James*, 144, who leans toward a literal meaning).
- v. 1 **desires** "Desires for pleasure" (NKJV). Our word hedonism, which alludes to pleasure, is derived from this Greek word. "James pictures these pleasures as residing within his readers, there carrying on a bitter campaign to gain satisfaction. Pleasure is the overriding desire for their lives. Nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of its realization" (Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:192).
- v. 1 **within you** Lit., "in your members." "The 'members' (Gk. *mele*) might be the 'parts' of the individual human body or the 'parts' of the Christian church: believers. The former is a bit more likely when we consider the close parallel to this language in 1 Pet. 2:11" (Moo, 181; cf., Martin, 144, who thinks it refers to church members).
- v. 2 **You want . . .** This verse can be punctuated two ways resulting in either a three-clause structure (NIV, KJV), or a two-clause structure, (ESV, NRSV, NLT, TEV, NJB). Commentators are divided (Martin, 140, 42 argues for three clauses; Moo, 182, argues for two).
- v. 2 **kill** Commentators debate whether the word "kill" ("murder") should be taken literally or not. If it should be taken figuratively, it is *hyperbole* for hatred (Mt 5:21-26; 1Jn 2:15). At least one commentator believes it can be taken literally since James' readers were Christian Jews some of whom may formerly have been political activists. He explains, "To say that all James means here is 'hate' (Matt 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15) overlooks the fact that the letter of James was most likely written in a period when murder was accepted as a 'religious' way to solve disagreements. It is possible that if some of the Christians James wrote to were former Zealots, they might not have been willing too quickly to renounce violence as a way of securing religions freedom" (Martin, 146). The fact that the "killing" was within the Christian community makes this unlikely (Moo, 183, takes the word literally in a hypothetical way).
- v. 4 **adulterous** James readers were "adulterous" in that those who chose to be friends with the world were unfaithful to God. The concept of spiritual adultery is found in the OT (cf., Hos 2:2-5; 3:1-5; 9:1).
- v. 5 **Scripture says** The citation of Pr. 3:34 in 4:6 is obvious, but what text is cited in 4:5? James is not quoting directly any OT text or any non-biblical Jewish text. Perhaps he is simply referring to a theme found in OT scripture (Moo, 191; Martin, 149).
- v. 5 **spirit** Verse 5 is probably the most difficult verse in the entire letter, perhaps "one of the most difficult verses in the NT" (188; see Moo's thorough analysis of this complex interpretive problem, 188-91). The NIV reflects one possible translation. "Spirit" is taken to refer to the human spirit, which God caused to live in us from creation. This spirit envies intensely, which means that James is reminding his readers that human nature tends toward envy and jealousy, the source of conflicts among them. The NASB (NIV margin) reflects another possible translation, which reads "He jealously desires the spirit, which he has made to dwell in us." In this case James is reminding his readers that God jealously desires them to belong wholeheartedly to him.
- v. 7 **then** Gk. *oun* ["therefore"]. This word is a logical connective that has the inferential meaning "therefore." The command to submit to God logically results from the quotation from Proverbs 3:34. Since God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, we should submit to him.
- v. 7 **resist** Don't give in to the devil; instead, stand your ground (cf., Eph 6:13).
- v. 8 **come near** "The coming to God is not the act of contrition involving conversion, but the act of contrition involving renouncing evil practices referred to in 4:1-4 for those who are already Christians" (Martin, 153).
- v. 10 **humble yourselves** Cf., v. 10 "submit yourselves." The two commands form an *inclusio*. Between these two is a series of couplets—"all these imperatives are aorist, and this implies the urgency of the message" (Martin, 152).
- v. 11 **slander** "Do not speak evil of one another," NKJV. "The grammatical construction used here usually forbids the continuation of a practice already in progress," (i.e., "Stop speaking evil of one another"). "James' readers had fallen into the habit of criticizing one another" (Burdick, 196).
- v. 11 **the law** Not the law of Moses but the royal law (cf., 2:8).
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Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Describe a time that you were faced with two choices. How did you decide what to do? Storytell Daniel 6 to the family. Daniel knew praying and trusting God was always the best choice.

Pray it!

As a parent you can teach your child to pray by using actual scriptures as a guide. Pray this scripture with them this week..

Lord, I submit myself to you. Help me to resist the devil so he will flee from me.
Jas 4:7

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Self-Control – Taking charge of myself with Jesus' help

Memory verse – "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Jas 4:7

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *What words describe Daniel's work?
- *Describe the Satrap's plan to bring charges against Daniel.
- *What did the king say to Daniel as he was thrown into the lions den.
- *Who rescued Daniel from the lions?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

When others make you mad, it's easy to lose control and say things you really don't mean. Jesus wants to help you use self control. The next time you are about to say something out of anger, write it on paper. Ask yourself, "Would I ask God to read it to the person?"

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
 Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
 Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
 Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.