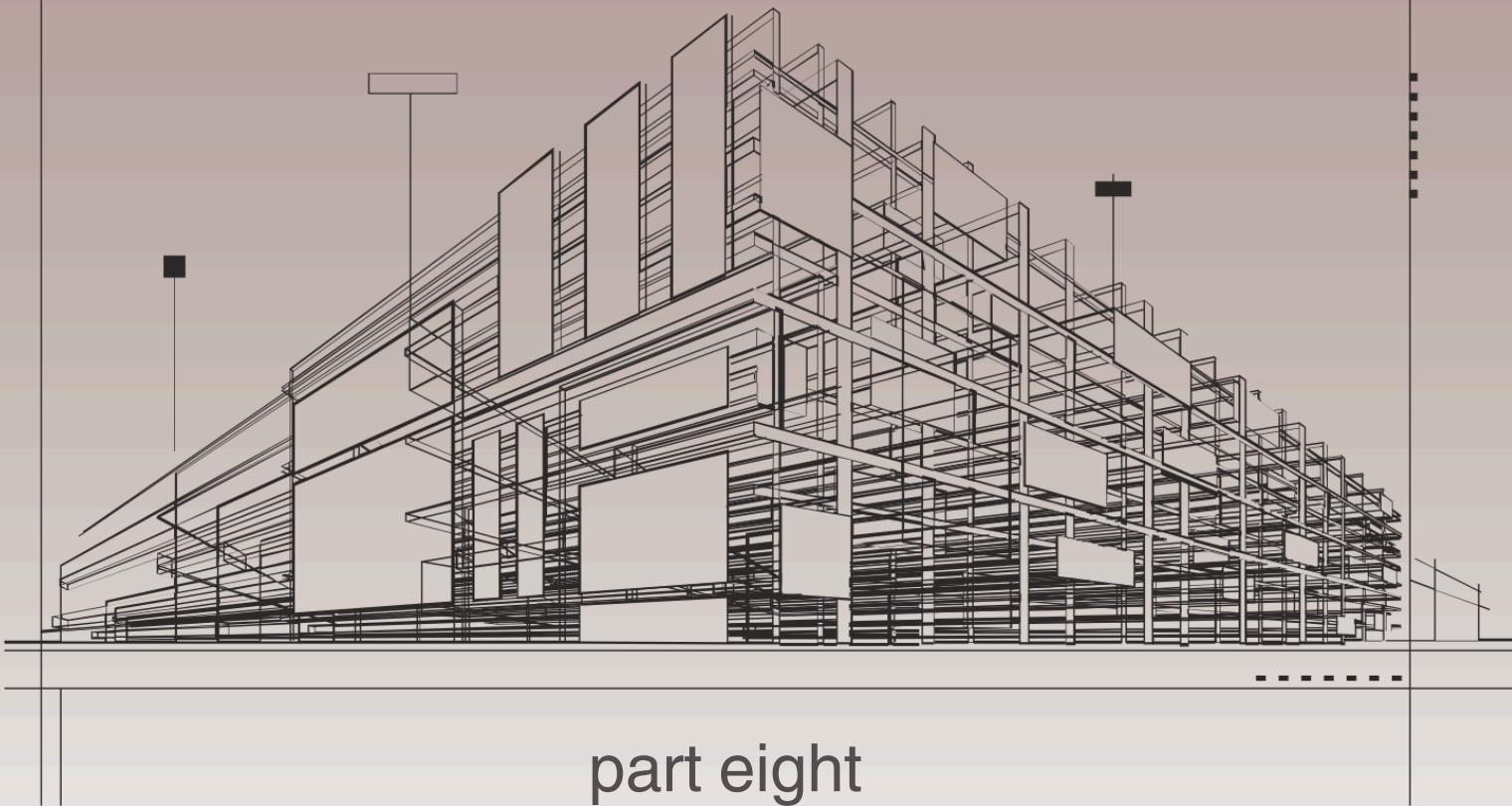


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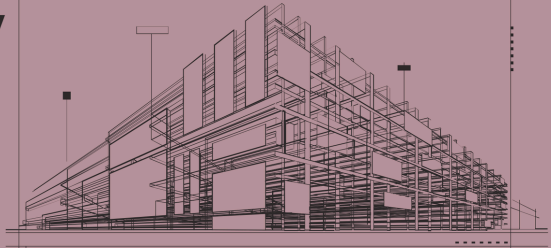
part eight

“The Humility at the Heart of Wisdom”

James 4:1-12



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Part Eight – “The Humility at the Heart of Wisdom”

By Pastor David Fields

James 4:1-12

I. Addressing the Pride

¹“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You 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. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

James 4:1-3

Kill? Really? The communities James writes to were under pressure. The zealot impulse was alive and well in the Jewish community (see Paul before his conversion). Violence may have been seen as a legitimate option.

“As James’s readers have given themselves over to earthly wisdom that prizes zealotry and political ambition, their community has come to be more and more characterized by disorder and malice (1:21).” – Jeffery Meyers, *Wisdom for Dissidents*¹

Under the oppression they have faced, the community is not adopting the tactics of their oppressors. This is exactly what James means by what he says next:

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. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?” – James 4:4

Friendship with the World

Friendship with the world means to adopt the attitudes and patterns of life, of this system that is run in opposition to God and His ways. This is living by the so-called wisdom of the world that he (James) says is fueled by envy and selfish ambition (see James 3:13-18).

1. **Coveting.** Wanting what others have and being willing to do whatever it takes to get it.

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¹ Meyers, Jeffrey. (28 March 2022). *Wisdom for Dissidents: The Epistle of James Through New Eyes*. Athanasius Press ISBN-13 978-1735169095

This is why Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, says in Matthew 6:24b,

“...*You cannot serve both God and money/mammon.*”

The writer, Matthew, preserves the Aramaic word ‘mammon’ here instead of using the common Greek word for money. Why?

“By the first centuries of the Christian church, teachers and bishops had concluded that in using the name Mammon, Jesus had in mind not just a concept but a demonic power. Money, for Jesus, was not a neutral tool but something that could master a person every bit as completely as the true God. Mammon is not simply money but the anti-God impetus that finds its power in money.” – Andy Crouch, *The Life We’re Looking For*²

2. **Prayerless.** Friends of the world don’t seek God’s direction because the aim isn’t God’s name being honoured, His kingdom coming, His will being done. My aim is my own pleasure. Friendship with the world leaves us prayerless and self-focused.

3. **Contending for Political Power.** To benefit my ‘in group.’

“If North American Christians were half as active in evangelism and discipleship as they were politically, we’d be looking at a different landscape regarding our churches, I think.” – Ricky Stephen³

II. The Antidote to Arrogance: Humility

Pride

“.. ⁶*But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”* – James 4:6 (NRSV)

The first use of ‘humble’ in Scripture:

“So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’”

Exodus 10:3

“Theologically, vertically, pride is always contending for supremacy with God...Socially, or horizontally, pride is always contending for supremacy with others.” – Chris Price⁴

As Ben quoted C.S. Lewis last week: “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others.”– C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*⁵

Psychologically, pride is always a distorted view of ourselves. It’s being out of touch with reality.

⁴ Price, Chris (Speaker/Pastor). 4 May 2025). Humility (James 4:1-10) [Video Podcast Episode]. In The Way Church Podcast. . <https://canadian-podcasts.com/podcast/the-way-church-podcast/humility-james-4-1-10-chris-price-may-4-2025> at 06:55

⁵ Lewis, C.S. (2001). *Mere Christianity*. HarperOne. 122.

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² Crouch, Andy. (19 Apr 2022). *The Life We’re Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*. Convergent Books.

³ Stephen, Ricky. *Communication*.

“...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement...”
Romans 12:3b

Humility

- The humble are not self-seeking but aimed at the good of the other.
- “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself. It’s thinking of yourself less.” - Timothy Keller⁶
- The humble don’t dominate the conversation or feel the need to draw everything back to themselves.
- The humble pay close attention to others, listen well and seek the good of those around them.
- The humble aim to serve those around them, not to be served.
- The humble aren’t in competition with others. They can publicly praise and honour their peers and have a sense of humour about themselves.
- The humble are looking for God’s name to be seen as great, not their own.

Turning Back to God

“...‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’
⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God...”
James 4:6b-7a (NRSV)

God gives grace to those who know they need grace.

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” says Jesus, “*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” - Matthew 5:3. Poor in spirit means, ‘I know I need God.’

When the humble get in touch with reality, they respond appropriately. James goes on to borrow language and imagery of Temple worship:

“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
James 4:8-10

Our confession of sin and guilt is not ‘just for show,’ it’s not just a ‘hoop we jump through,’ with no heart desire for a new way of being. The ‘humbling ourselves’ is a true longing for a whole new way of life.

How do we humble ourselves before God? Just a few brief thoughts:

1. **Fasting.** Like, going without food for a day if you are able, or missing a meal. Or if you’re not able with food, going without something that is a regular part of your life - like screens: your phone, social media, the shows. Fasting is a way to make yourself, your body, feel discomfort, to remind yourself that you are reliant on food from outside yourself, and for God’s grace outside yourself. You are not self-sufficient. Fasting reminds us of that.

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⁶ Keller, Timothy. Quotes.

2. **Mark a moment of rededication.** If you've walked away from God and into friendship with the world, and you need to come back, mark that by coming forward for prayer and recognizing that moment for what it is. Pray with a pastor. Tell someone near you or a friend that you're turning back. The community is here to help us keep moving forward with God.
3. **Join a group that can help you.** Might be an anonymous group if you're struggling with an addiction or an area that you want greater freedom in. Might be a small group of others to help you grow deeper.

Resist the Devil

In the center of this humility, we need to notice the astounding, two-fold promise. So astounding that, as N.T. Wright notes, "...most of us never really take it seriously."⁷ But here it is - and what if we did take it seriously?

*“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
Come near to God, and he will come near to you.”
James 4:7b-8a*

“The devil is a coward; when he is resisted, with the prayer that claims the victory of Jesus on the cross, he knows he is beaten. His trick is to whisper that we know we can’t resist; he’s got us before and he’ll get us again, so why not just give in straight away and save all that bother?” - N.T. Wright, *James for Everyone*⁸

This is where we learn to do what James says: ‘Resist him! It’s a lie! Resist him and he’ll run like the coward he is.’ Jesus’ victory has him beat and will one day lock him away forever.

Draw Near to God

In Jesus, God has moved heaven and earth for you. Our Father is the Father waiting with bated breath to see you and I, like the prodigal son, turn back toward Him. Ours is the Father who runs – Who embraces – Kisses our neck; and, once again, bestows all those signs of sonship – of belonging to Him.

Sometimes it's just as simple as: Pray - Spend time with God - Ask God for help - He'll help. This is about relating to God. It is just 'draw near' to God. Give Him your attention, your time and your commitment. Talk to him.

III. The Way of Peace

Those fights and quarrels are quelled by a heart that is turned back to God; and that ushers in changed behaviour. ‘Those lips you just used to grieve and mourn over your sin...and to express your love for God, don’t use those same lips for running others down.’

Because those who experience grace now dispense grace. Those who have experienced reconciliation seek to be agents of reconciliation in their community and world.

May we be those who put aside pride and arrogance and come to rightly understand who we are before the living God. May we be those who humble ourselves, submit to God, resist the devil and draw near. May we be those who function from a place of graciousness - the kind of grace we've received as we relate to each other.

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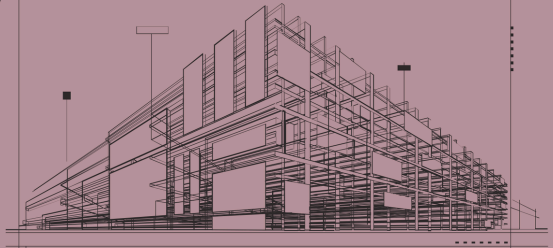
This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings visible.

⁷ Wright, N.T. (2012). James for Everyone, Part of the Series NT Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides. IVP Connect. ISBN-13: 9780830821969

⁸ *Supra.*

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Discussion



Open Up

Over what and with whom did you quarrel the most with when you were a kid?

Dig In

Read James 4:1-12.

1. What is your usual response when your desires are frustrated - when you can't get what you were hoping for?
2. How might this text speak to those impulses?
3. How is the world trying to get you to be a 'friend' with it at this moment? (Remember, 'world' doesn't refer to the physical earth, or even the people of this world, but a system of living that is opposed to God).
4. What's the 'good news' of this text? (Hint: look at vv.6-10)
5. Why is it 'good' for you in this season of life?
6. Are there ways your group can support you at this time in your commitment to Jesus?

Pray

Give thanks to God that, "He gives us more grace," and that He will come near to us, as we come near to Him. Ask Him for His help with the things you discussed. Share any additional prayer requests.