

**TWENTY-ONE DAYS IN JAMES
STUDY THREE: DAYS FIFTEEN
THROUGH TWENTY-ONE
James 4:1-5:20**

**Day Fifteen
4:1-5**

- 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?

V. 1 – Ouch! This is so true in my own life. I have so many desires and wants and I justify them as needs. But if I am honest, I have just about everything I need. And the things I “want” just aren’t physical or material. They are also things like as approval, success, fame, fortune, compliments, appreciation and promotion. If I don’t receive those things, I get angry, hurt or aggressive.

V. 2 – James was direct: the source of my relational problems is lack of prayer. I don’t have what I want or even need because I don’t ask and trust God for them. I must assume that James heard Jesus teach on pray and also saw Him pray. We are told that James himself was such a man of prayer that he had knees like those of a camel—hardened and calloused because of hours on his knees praying. It would be a good study to look at everything Jesus had to say about prayer, but not with a view to understand prayer but with a view to pray.

When I was pastoring, I did a study on prayer and then taught what I thought I had learned. Afterwards I realized that I had dissected prayer, sort of like a biology class would dissect a frog. At the end of my study, just like at the end of the dissection, all we had were the parts of prayer. People were more confused than when we had started! So if you study prayer, make sure it is with the objective of being a more effective person of prayer.

V. 3 – In addition to lack of prayer, there is the problem of selfish prayer. I can talk to God, but it is with the intent of what I can get, not what I can learn or hear. Many have said that prayer is dialogue, not monologue. Are you praying to hear or praying to be heard? It is not one or the other; it’s both.

There is a line in a song that says, "It's all about you, Lord, and not about me." But often I act like "It's all about me, Lord, and not about You!" Selfishness clings to me like lint to dark fabric. Paul wrote, **"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel"** (Philippians 2:19-22).

Paul only saw one of God's servants who was truly able to overcome self to be genuinely interested in other people and the things of God. If Paul only saw one, how many will you and I see? But the more important question is: Can you and I be one of those selfless people that Paul would have found?

V. 4 – James was blunt and direct: friendship with the world and God is impossible to maintain. James' brother Jesus taught James this principle: **"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.'** The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, **'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight'"** (Luke 16:13-15). Who is your friend? Is there any place where you are trying to maintain a friendship with the world and God at the same time? If so, you are in an impossible position.

V. 5 – The concept in this verse can be a confusing one: the Spirit is "jealous" for us. Human jealousy and envy are weaknesses, even leading to sinful behavior. But such evil intent cannot be attributed to the Spirit of God! The Spirit desires that we belong to God and God alone. In that sense, God is jealous. He wants you and me all to Himself: **"Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God"**(Exodus 34:14). God will pursue you but will not force you to yield to Him. He does this because He loves you and is a holy God. We should be honored that God is jealous for us, for truly we are not worthy.

Day Sixteen 4:6-12

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?

V. 6 – I'm glad that James mentioned grace here, for up to this point, he seemed a bit harsh and, well, like an Old Testament prophet! But now we see that God gives us more grace. Thank you, Lord! There is nothing that I have for which I can be proud or feel like I've earned. No matter how hard I work or what price I pay, what I have or what I've done is by God's grace.

Scripture doesn't say that God doesn't like the proud; it says He **resists** the proud. When God confronts pride, He gets personally involved—He resists! Is some of your lack of success because your time for success hasn't come, or is part of it because God is resisting you? If the latter is true, then you have pride somewhere in your heart or life.

V. 7 – I have heard many teachings on submission, mostly in the context of wives submitting to husbands, church members to pastors and workers to employers. But everyone must submit to God. A husband, pastor or employer is not at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. God is. If that isn't the case, then pride has set in and God resists it. I don't order my wife to submit; she submits to me "as unto the Lord." I am not or should not be the focus of her submission; God is. Her submission (and my authority) only have meaning in the context of our mutual submission to God. Since James introduced this in the context of humility and pride, I wonder if lack of submission in anyone is a pride problem? What do you think?

James instructed us to resist the devil and promised that if we did, the devil would flee. This is once again in the context of his exhortation to and teaching about humility, grace and pride. If the devil understands any vice, it is pride. I try never to taunt or confront the devil. I am no match for him or his wiles. I want to carry out the Old Testament commandment: "**He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God**" (Micah 6:8). If you do what Micah commanded, you can never go wrong and God's grace will be with you.

Vs. 8&9 – I am seeing a list of things that I can do and when I do them, God then responds and good things happen: I humble myself, God gives grace; I submit and resist, the devil will flee; I draw near to God, He draws near to me. Does this strike you as a "works" mentality? James put a lot of responsibility on the believer in their walk with God.

He continued with commands to purify, wash, grieve, mourn, wail and refrain from laughter. I wonder what James was seeing in the lives of the Jewish believers to whom he was writing? It seems that they were in some sort of spiritual malaise or trouble. There seems to be times in our relationship with God when we need to face our wretchedness and need for God's grace.

V. 10 – James commanded his readers to be humble. We must be able to achieve some measure of humility on our own or else James would not have ordered us to do it. Humility is something I can do; grace is something God can do. I go down; God lifts up. I confess; God forgives. But in each case, God's response to me is a reflection of how I approach Him. It seems like God is tying His response to whatever I choose to do:

“The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty” (Psalm 18:24-27).

What do you want God to do for you? How do you want God to act toward you? Then you need to determine what **you** need to do to initiate the response that you desire from God.

Vs. 11&12 – I can see why some have referred to this epistle as the Proverbs of the New Testament. James went from topic to topic abruptly and without warning, just like the book of Proverbs does. In these verses, James went from humility to slander and judging the law. I am guilty. I have slandered my brothers. I sat in judgment of God’s servants. I have judged my neighbor as James pointed out. Can you imagine? I have set myself as a judge and I cannot even save or destroy. Yet I act like I am the final judge. I go back to the verse I included above: **“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).**

But there are times when I must make a judgment. I am to do that with an eye toward mercy and grace and not judgment and law. Help me, Lord. I’m not sure I can do this. But wait a minute. Of course, I can’t. James could teach this because He watched his brother Jesus do this! **“Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10).** Where do love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace come together? In only one person: Jesus. But if Christ is in me by the power of the Spirit, then I can be like Him, but not by my decision to be like Him. I humble myself and He gives me grace to do it, grace to be it. Hallelujah!

Day Seventeen

4:13-18

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 and brag. All such boasting is evil.

17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Vs. 13,14,15 – What a great analogy! We are like a mist, here for a little while and then gone. James had a way with words, just like his brother. I wonder if he got that from Joseph or Mary? I don’t think these verses instruct us not to plan? Or do they? My impression is that we are to always keep God in mind when we do plan. As we go about our business, we must keep in mind that we don’t control the conditions and we don’t have perfect knowledge of God’s will. I think Proverbs has many helpful things to help us understand this concept of planning and God’s role in it as we do.

Read Proverbs 12:5, 15:12, 16:1-9, 19:21, 20:18 and 21:5.

V. 16 – I think James was saying that not including the “God element” in our plans is boastful. The more I use the word “I,” the less firm the foundation I am on.

V. 17 – This seems to be another abrupt topic shift in this verse. I usually think of sin as something I do. But the Greek word for sin means “missing the mark.” I can **not** do something I know I am supposed to do and “miss the mark.” But **not** doing something, historically referred to as a sin of omission, is harder to quantify than something that is more public. Are you guilty of knowing that God wants you to do something and not doing it? What are you prepared to do about it?

Day Eighteen

5:1-6

- 1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.
- 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.
- 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.
- 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.
- 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.
- 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Vs. 1,2,3 – If I didn’t know better, I would think that James had a dislike for the rich! With graphic images, he portrayed the reality of their spiritual condition. These verses follow his earlier teaching on not showing favoritism (see 2:1) and teaching example of confronting a hungry man without providing practical aid (2:15-16). James had some hard things to say to rich people. What can learn about the rich and wealth from these verses? 1) Misery will come upon those who don’t use wealth properly. 2) Wealth will eventually rot and moths will destroy clothes, no matter how expensive. 3) Gold and silver will corrode and result in eternal judgment (flesh eaten). 4) Riches are not to be hoarded. It’s time for a reality check in your own life.

What is your current attitude toward wealth and riches? Are you using them as God intends? If not, you need to be careful. Riches not handled properly have eternal consequences.

If you are poor, how do you feel about the rich? Are you angry? What are you going to do about what you feel?

V. 4 – As an employer, I have thought about this verse many times. Have I withheld anyone’s salary or pay? Am I paying the employees fairly? Or have I taken advantage of workers for the sake of money, money that really doesn’t belong to me.

This can be especially prevalent in church work. If someone wants to volunteer to do something, that is their business. If they want paid, that is their business too. Don't ever try to manipulate someone into giving the church something if they want paid for it. When you do that and they complain to God, you may be guilty of violating the principle in this verse and you will be in trouble with God.

On the other hand, if you are an employee and your wages have been withheld or you are not being treated fairly, go to God. Tell Him and let Him take care of it.

Vs. 5&6 – James continued his tirade against the ungodly rich and keep in mind: James was writing to the Jews dispersed abroad. There must have been rich believers whom James believed were not behaving properly with their wealth. Or do you think he was sounding a prophetic warning to the wealthy, whether they were serving God or not?

Day Nineteen

5:7-11

7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Vs. 7&8 – James tone abruptly changed from severe to gentle. Now he urged the brothers to be patient under trial, the theme with which he began his letter. James once again, just like Jesus, borrowed an example from the agricultural life of their times. If you are teaching, how well do you utilize graphic examples, rich in image and meaning? It is something I am always trying to incorporate, but it isn't easy. Good teachers use many tools to help them effectively impart truth and make it interesting to learn.

James urged them to remain patient and firm for the Lord's coming was "near." I made the point in *The Revelation Studies* that near and now don't mean 2,000 later. I think near means, well, it means something is imminent and close at hand. What was James referring to when he said the Lord's coming was "near?" Did he erroneously think that the return of Jesus was at hand? If he did and included that in the inspired word of God, then he was mistaken and his whole teaching is open to error. I don't think that is the case.

I think he expected God's justice to come in this lifetime and quickly. Either those who were suffering were going to meet the Lord in death (that would be soon or nearer than the return of Jesus) or God was going to intervene to establish justice for the oppressed. But even that seems to be a "stretch" as to what James was referring to. What do you think?

Vs. 10&11 – James gave us a clue to his meaning when he referred to Job. Job endured tremendous hardship, but God restored what Job had lost after Job patiently stood fast. I think James was convinced that God's intervention on behalf of His people was and is near, in this lifetime. This should encourage you greatly. Whatever you are going through, whatever you have lost or is taken from you, if you patiently endure it and expect God to move on your behalf, He will do so.

Think of the other “prophets”—Joseph, Moses, David and others—who went through difficult times to prepare them for their promotion. They suffered as God put them through difficult times. But then God exalted them in due season.

The same was true for Jesus, James' brother. He patiently endured suffering and then was exalted to the right hand of the Father. James was raising their faith and expectation that better times were ahead not just in heaven but now. The same is true for you and me.

Allow yourself to believe again and be encouraged that “the Lord is near” to you and your situation, regardless of what it seems like.

Day Twenty

5:12-16

12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear-- not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

V. 12 – Was James referring to using bad language here? I don't think so (although language that is determined by any culture to be obscene and foul should not be used). I think he was asking the believers to keep their oaths and vows simple. Often people try to use strong words to prove their sincerity or veracity. Jesus Himself warned against such talk: "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

Keep your words and commitments simple. Let your integrity come from your ability to follow through on what you promise, not from strong verbal commitments that are soon forgotten.

V. 13 – I have to admit. I am confused by how James “jumped around” from topic to topic. He went from not swearing to anyone in trouble to those who are happy. I guess he had a lot to say in a short amount of time or space. If you’re in trouble, pray. If you’re happy, sing, I guess there’s no hidden meaning in those straightforward phrases.

Vs. 14&15 – If you are sick, it is your duty to call for the elders. It is not their duty to come and seek you out. James seemed to indicate that some but not all sickness may be induced by sin, for he said “if he has sinned.” Sometimes sickness or disease come because we’re human, not because we’re sinners. Do you agree or disagree?

Who are your elders? Do you know? Who would you call if you were sick?

If you are an elder, do you pray and see people recover? Why or why not?

V. 16 – Confession is an important part of healing, it would seem. To whom do you confess your sins? You should at least confess them to God? I mean that. You should pray and ask God to forgive specific sins. That will make it easier to do the same with others if the need arises. I have heard many say that they confess their sins only to God, but then question them and find out that they aren’t really doing that. I try to take time often to confess my sins specifically to God and ask Him to forgive me specifically. Take a moment now and confess your sins to God. Then go confess them to others if there is a need. God will heal you.

Day Twenty-One **5:17-20**

17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,

20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

V. 17 – It is hard to think of any character in the Bible as someone like me, and I don’t think I’m alone in that. I have found that many “romanticize” those in the Bible as some kind of spiritual super hero. Is that true in your thinking? This attitude must be confronted and changed because we cannot receive the encouragement and help that any story is meant to provide unless we see that person in the Bible as someone just like us.

The Bible does tell us some history, but it is not a history book. It is not a collection of stories about good men and women seeking and finding God, but stories of a good God seeking and finding men and women. Paul wrote: **“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).**

V. 18 – James was referring to the story of Elijah of 1 Kings 17. Suddenly Elijah appeared on the scene and declared that there would be no rain except when he said

so. Wow! And James was telling us that Elijah was no one special, except that he was God's weather man. The point here is that prayer is powerful and is a means of communication not just for the prophets but also for everyone, even you and me. Do you pray like God is listening?

Vs. 19&20 – James brought his letter to an abrupt end, changing topics once more before he ended. This time he urged the readers to embrace the important work to bring sinners back from the error of their ways. Then he ended. No closing remarks, no summary, no warm words of love. He just ended. Maybe the end of the letter was lost over time, or maybe James meant it to be like that.

What have you learned from studying this epistle? What kind of man do you think James was? Friendly? Intense? A good teacher? No matter what he was like, God chose and used him. And his insight is invaluable because he probably grew up in the same household as Jesus, so they would have shared the same experiences and came to the same conclusions. And family ministries can be strong and powerful, because of the bonds of tough love, support and confrontation that can serve to correct and direct.

I hope you have enjoyed this study and may the Lord continue to speak to you from the words of James, the brother of Jesus and first leader of the Jewish church. Amen.