

James 4

Week 5 - Defriending The World

Learning Objectives

- Consider how our worldly desires conflict with God's design and impact our daily mindsets and actions.
- Seek ways to humbly align our desires with God's.

Pray for your time together as a group.

? If someone were to ask you, "where do you see yourself in five years?" what would you say?

Read Out Loud: James 4:1-17 (NIV)

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.

⁴You 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? ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

¹¹Brothers 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. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

¹³Now 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." ¹⁴Why, 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. ¹⁵Instead, 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.

? In verse 1, James talks about the conflicting desires we all have. What do these look like and where do these conflicting desires come from?

Possible Answer: Pride, selfish desires, sin issues, harmful thoughts, false truths. These desires bubble up from our sinful urge to focus on ourselves first.

? How do your own conflicting desires affect your relationships with other people and God?

Possible Answer: They create a divide, cause frustration or anger with others, and build jealousy, etc.

? What do vv. 2-3 tell us about how our human desires push us towards sin? How do you sometimes respond to your desires in this way? What do these verses say about God's desire for us in those moments?

Possible Answer: We kill, covet, or fight when we don't get what we desire. We either don't ask or ask with wrong motives. God's desire for us is sometimes different from ours. He is an all-knowing and loving God. Sometimes this is enough for us to trust Him when he says "no" or "not yet" to prayers.

Read Out Loud: 1 John 2:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

*God will either give us what we ask
or give us what we would have asked
if we knew everything he knows.
—Tim Keller*

? Where do you see examples of "love for" and "friendship with" the world in our culture today?

Possible Answer: Lust, pride, materialism, self-centeredness, attachment to comfort and/or entertainment, etc.

? Where are you personally wrestling with "love for" or "friendship with" the world right now?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary.

? How can we better love our friends and family who don't hold a biblical worldview?

Possible Answer: God calls us to worship him alone. When we place anything above God (even good things), we're not worshiping him, we're exchanging the Creator for the creation (Romans 1:25) Ultimately we should want to see things as God does - and loving those around us is a clear command.

Leader's note: There may be tension and/or another conversation in finding the balance of loving people, caring for creation, not loving the world, etc.

Read Out Loud: Romans 12:2 (NIV)

²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

? Look at all the verbs in James 4:7-10: submit, resist, come near, wash your hands, purify (your hearts), grieve, mourn, wail, change (your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom), humble yourself. Which, if any, of these come naturally to you? Which take more work?

? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us live out these verbs? How can we strengthen that bond?

Possible Answer: Role of the Holy Spirit – Counselor (John 14:16 - encourage us); to help us understand God's Word (John 16:3 - guide us into all truth); reveal Jesus to us (John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 12:23)

? Why does James say we shouldn't judge our brothers and sisters in vv 11-12? What does this look like? (Reference: Romans 2:1-5)

Possible Answer: Slandering (making a false statement against someone) or speaking against them - when we're "against" someone we're not for them; James also says that when we do this, we're placing ourselves above the law - and by doing this, we're not keeping the law! Only God can save and destroy - he created the Law and only he can judge fairly.

? Verse 11 states, "When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it." What does judging the law look like and why is this wrong?

Possible Answer: Judging the law would put us in the place of the lawgiver or judge - rather than the one who is the lawgiver and judge - God. Again, our selfish or prideful desires would overtake God's desires for us, and we surely couldn't be loving or caring for others well with this posture, could we?

? How can we as a small group practice discernment and accountability without being judgmental?

(Reference: Matthew 7:1-5 and Matthew 22:36-40)

Possible Answer: Discernment: Spend time in prayer, God's word, and community to grow in our understanding of what's true vs. what's a lie - seek to apply this to our lives first. Accountability: Look at the condition of our own hearts before we point out the wrong we see in others. If we feel like we need to confront someone about a sinful behavior, follow the example we see in Scripture - check our motives first (1 Corinthians 4:14); go to that person directly (avoid gossip) - Matthew 18:15-16; confront them in a loving way (Ephesians 4:15), letting them know that you are for them and care about their well-being. Ask questions to understand.

? In James 4:14, James refers to our life as "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

What do you find encouraging and/or challenging about this?

Possible Answer: All of the suffering we face in this life is temporary - loneliness, loss, sickness, mourning, waiting - we have an eternity with God to look forward to (Rev. 21); Challenging because there are good things in this life that we fear losing - i.e. the people we love - it's hard to imagine eternity - fear of the unknown; can also be hard to wait for eternity - our lives are short but some days/seasons feel very long depending on what we're facing.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Do the desires and plans that you hold onto tightly also align with God's desires? How should we, as your small group, challenge and encourage you to act out of the desires God has placed on your heart?