

The history of the church is full of unresolved arguments leading to hundreds of different denominations and factions within denominations. Some of these stem from important theological or confessional differences, but many of them reflect power struggles, selfish desires, or personalities. God, who calls us to be one in Him, cannot be pleased when Christians argue and fail to show love toward others. We often quarrel because we don't work to understand what the other person is saying or why they are saying it. We argue, instead of listening. Sometimes it is helpful to have a third person mediating between contestants, helping both sides to find common ground and helping both sides to lower the emotional temperature of the argument. Disagreements or different perspectives turn into quarrels when our desire to be right overwhelms our desire to understand, when we want to win the argument rather than reflect critically on our own misunderstanding and ignorance.

3. What do Christians quarrel about in ways that show they are not submitting themselves to God? What about families? See 2 Timothy 2:14 and Titus 3:9 for Paul's insights about quarreling.

When our ultimate goal is to be right and to win the argument, we have crossed the line and made the argument more about ourselves than about acting in love as God commands. Consider some of the "worship wars" that have split congregations as the different sides claim that their approach to worship is more Godly than another's approach. Instead of worshipping God, we spend our time trying to impose our own views on others. The self-centered approach to too many human interactions imperils our ability and willingness to engage in love and mercy toward others, even in our families and our churches. Timothy describes these quarrels as of no value and as something that brings ruin. Titus describes these quarrels as foolish, unprofitable, and useless.

4. Why don't we always get what we ask of God, according to James? How does James' warning about asking of God compare with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:7? What are the keys to effective prayer and petition? (See also James 1:5-6)

Too often we ask because of improper or impure motivations, seeking to advance our own cause rather than being concerned about God or about others. It's not wrong to request things for ourselves, but it becomes wrong when these things are selfish and covetous, and when these things will harm our commitment to God and our relationships with others. Jesus calls us to ask and promises that we will receive, and He also tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. When we move away from selfishness to selflessness, when we move from a quest for more and more things to a quest for righteousness and justice for others, we submit to God. When we seek wisdom instead of wealth, like Solomon, we will live lives of submission.

DAY 3: Read James 4:4

1. What do you think James means when he calls people "adulterous"? What makes people this way? Do you know people like this? What is the antidote for this kind of adultery?

In verse 3, James reminds us that we often ask with the wrong motivations; in a sense, this is a kind of adultery. But verse 4 sheds even more light on the notion of adultery, when James contrasts a love for God and a love for the world. When we love worldly things more than we love God, we are being unfaithful. Such unfaithfulness often stems from our selfishness and our pride in thinking that our desires are more important than others' desires. The antidote is found in the theme for this section of James 3: submission to God.

2. **James write that a “friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” What does it mean to be a friend of the world in this context? How does friendliness toward the world become hatred toward God? Notice how this idea mirrors what James says in verse 27 of chapter 1. For similar warnings about the world, see John 15:18-19 and 1 John 2:15-17.**

In this passage, James uses the term “world” to include our sinful and selfish desires. We seek personal wealth instead of seeking God’s kingdom. We live to fulfill our own pleasures rather than taking delight in God. We reach for power and fame rather than pursuing service or demonstrating humility. What matters is how our actions enrich us rather than how our actions fulfill God’s commands. James 1:27 describes true religion as looking after orphans and widows, rather than looking out for ourselves.

It is interesting to note that some Christian groups have used passages like these to argue for a physical separation from the world, as much as possible. In their view, we keep ourselves from being polluted by the world (James 1:27) by having as little to do with societal values or economic systems that promote selfishness. That may not be possible for many of us, but that kind of cautious attitude toward the values of the world can keep us focused on Godly living. The writings of John often use the term “world” in the same way that James does: the world is short-hand for the evils that ensnare us and distract us from focusing on God and God’s will.

3. **Why should we hate the world when Genesis teaches us that God created the world, when John 3:16 states that God loves the world, and Psalm 50:12 reminds us that the world is God’s? How do you reconcile these perspectives on “the world”?**

Clearly, the term “world” has different meanings in scripture, with both positive and negative connotations. In a sense, this mirrors the two-sided nature of human beings. We are both created in God’s image and, resulting from the fall into sin, pursuers of evil. We are both saints and sinners, just as the world is both God’s and Satan’s. The Bible assures us that the world that God created will be redeemed and restored—a new heaven and a new earth, and it is our privilege and our obligation to work toward that end.

DAY 4: Read James 4:5-6

1. **What do you think verse 5 means? How would you put this in your own words?**

This is a perplexing verse, about which commentators offer diverse perspectives. The NIV Study Bible footnote provides two different wordings: “that the spirit he caused to dwell in us envies intensely” or “that the spirit he caused to dwell in us longs jealously.” Some commentators explain this verse as pointing to the temptation to envy. In this perspective, the key question is which spirit lives within us. Is it the spirit of selfishness or the spirit of service?

2. **Verse 6 presents the contrast between pride and humility, similar to Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 3:34, Matthew 23:11-12, and 1 Peter 5:5. Why and how does God oppose the proud? Why and how does God give grace to the humble? Have you seen examples of God dealing differently with proud and humble people? How has God helped you to become more humble and less prideful?**

Throughout the scriptures, we see the stark contrast between pride and humility, between a perspective that puts ourselves at the center in contrast to a perspective that puts God and others first. Pride ultimately stems from our greed to enrich ourselves (physically, materially, and emotionally), often at the expense of others. Instead of focusing on God, we focus on ourselves. God does not deserve or desire to be in second place in our lives. Pride is broken only when we understand how great God is and how relatively small we are—this is genuine humility.

3. How does our society, our politics, and our world of business deal with people who are proud? How do they deal with people who are humble? What is the reward for humility in our society, when the clear risk for humble people is that they will be humiliated?

Consider this quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Devil's Thoughts*: "And the devil did grin, for his darling sin is pride that apes humility." Far too often, people who are genuinely humble are seen as doormats over which others can walk. Far too often, our social systems reward prideful people with positions of leadership. Celebrities in all walks of life from sports to politics to business to entertainment are too often those who seek power, wealth, and fame, rather than seeking God's kingdom first, rather than seeking to serve. But Jesus taught us powerful lessons when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:2-11), when he rebuked the devil who offered him power and dominion (Matthew 4:8-10), and when he said that the greatest among us will be the one who is least (Luke 9:48). Think about the people you most admire. They are probably not those who are seeking power, prestige, and fame; instead they have a heart of service and a passion for the welfare of others. Each day we face a choice of what kind of person we want to be. May God help us to be humble, not prideful.

To Dig Deeper: Humility – a Biblical Study

There is no doubt that the Bible calls us to be humble, rather than proud or arrogant. Proverbs 11:2 suggests that humility leads to wisdom. Zephaniah 2:3 says that we should seek humility, and 1 Peter 5:5 goes even farther when it says we should "clothe" ourselves with humility, because "God gives grace to the humble." Luke agrees with Peter when he promises twice that the humble will be exalted (14:11 and 18:14). Paul goes to the next level in inviting us to be "completely" humble as we live a life that is worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:2). Paul points to Christ as the greatest example of humility: "Who, being in very nature God...he humbled himself and became obedient to death..." and notes that when Christ did this, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..." (Philippians 2:5-11).

The antithesis of humility—pride or arrogance—is frequently condemned in scripture. Proverbs, the Old Testament book that most closely resembles the book of James, tells us to "hate pride and arrogance," (Proverbs 8:13), warns us that "pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18), and claims that "God detests" those who are proud (Proverbs 16:5).

Yet, we must dig even deeper into the concepts of humility and pride. The Bible also warns us about false humility. For example, Colossians 2:18 and 22 caution against being led astray by those who are falsely humble, those who put on the appearance of humility in order to lure us into temptation. Biblical humility is not a ruse or a strategy to get what we want; instead it is a genuine recognition our God's greatness and our fallibility as we desire to serve God and others.

Furthermore, just as there are imperfect kinds of humility, there are also legitimate kinds of pride. Consider 2 Corinthians 7:4, where Paul writes that he takes "great pride" in the people in the Corinthian church (see also 8:24). Christians can rightfully be proud of their children or their parents or their role models. The key to biblical pride is its recognition that all good gifts come from the hand of God.

It's not easy to be humble and it's much too easy to have pride. In part, this is because we fear that humility will lead to humiliation; we don't want to be the doormat of others' successes. In part, this is because our culture prizes individualism and praises celebrities, which can lead too easily to narcissism. So each day we need to pray that God will help us to be truly humble, recognizing God's omnipotence and our unworthiness, and committed to putting the interests of others ahead of our own interests.

DAY 5: Read James 4:7-10

1. **James concludes this passage by calling us to submit to God and resist the devil. Recall those times in your life when you struggled with submission to God. Why did you struggle with submission? What led you to submit? How can you, and how can our church, help rebellious people to submit in humility to God?**

Everyone is tempted by idols of one kind or another, and each idol seeks to replace God in our lives. Submission is a conscious decision—and a daily decision—that God deserves to rule in our lives. Maybe you have struggled with temptations, with various lusts and addictions, with impure motivations, with selfish actions that don't reflect what God desires for you. We are too inclined to put ourselves first, when the God of creation and redemption deserve first place. Sometimes the consequences of our actions and intentions get us into real trouble and then we realize that we must repent and follow God's will. Sometimes others around us can help us see what is trapping us and keeping us from being a disciple of Jesus. In Matthew 18, Jesus describes a process for confronting sinful people.

2. **What instructions does James give in verses 8-10? Some of these make sense—washing our hands and purifying our hearts, for example. But why does James call us to “change your laughter into mourning and your joy to gloom”? Why are we to “grieve, mourn, and wail”? What's the benefit of submission if it requires mourning, gloom, grieving, and wailing?**

Unlike some of Paul's writings, the book of James is not heavy on theology but is instead focused on how we act as Christ's disciples. James offers practical advice for daily living. In this passage, he calls us to come near to God, to confess our sins, to grieve about evil and its consequences, and to be humble. Remember, though, that grieving and mourning are not the final step in the process of submitting to God. We grieve about the evil in ourselves and in God's world, but we know in the end that God will redeem and restore his creation.

DAY 6: Reread James 4:1-10

1. **Identify a verse or two in this passage that is particularly significant or meaningful to you and memorize it. (perhaps verse 6, or 7, or 10)**
2. **Write down two or three things that this passage teaches us about what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.**
3. **Think about a song or hymn that relates to the ideas in this passage.**

*The strife is o're, the battle done,
The victory of life is won;
The song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!*

*O let me feel Thee near me! The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
But Jesus draw me nearer and shield my soul from sin.*