

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson Sixteen in the Letter of James
Pleasure Dominated Life

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James 4:1-3 NASB

- 1. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is the source, not your pleasures that wage war in your body's parts?**
- 2. You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. And you are envious 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 with the wrong motives, so that you may spend what you request on your pleasures.**

MOTIVE: *That which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition. It may be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly. Some call it a faculty of the mind, by which we pursue good and avoid evil.*

Introduction

My first assigned pastorate was in a little logging town in Orofino, Idaho. Part of my responsibilities was to take part in a monthly meeting of all the pastors, ministers, priests, and preachers. It was called the Orofino Ministerium. All the spiritual leaders would come together to fellowship, and share concerns for our little town of 10,000 with 17 churches – works out to 600 people per church. But no church was bigger than 150 people. We all came to the conclusion that while it was troublesome to each pastor there would always be “Grasshoppers”. Those who would jump between churches. We were not in competition. What goes around comes around. Each of these jumpers had their own reasons for moving along. We as a group acknowledged this migration to and from but came to the conclusion that as long as the movers were being ministered to, after trying to reconcile with them, sometimes it was better to just let go and let God lead.

Every believer, without exception, who has left the church, was for one reason: they were motivated by a perception of a need that was not being met. At their place in life the church they left did not meet expectations. Expectations and perceptions. Each could voice their expectation of the local church and they did not equal the perceptions.

The church was:

- Not spiritual enough.
- It was too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer
- The chairs were not comfortable enough
- The music was too loud
- The preaching was too demanding
- The wrong bible
- Too much ritual
- Not enough ritual
- Too dark
- Too bright
- Too many sinners
- Too many needy
- Not enough holiness of life and dress (hypocrites)
- I can't get along with someone in the church
- The Pastor's preaching was too close to home.
- The Pastor's preaching was not helpful

Every one of these reasons are caused by the church not meeting expectations, of falling short of their own ideal. Each starts with a twinge of uneasiness. Then it becomes irritation. Then it becomes a pain. Then it becomes a reason for discontent. Then it became a choice. Confront the issue, or silently slip away. Then instead of understanding the source they move on to some other place with the hope it will be different.

James the Just

The most basic question from James in this portion of scripture is simply: Why do you do the things you do? Further, this first question brings us to other equally difficult questions.

- What is your basic aim in life?
- What motivates you to do the things you do?
- What is the underlying cause of conflict in the church?
- Why are you here tonight?

The Christian walk is a way of life which can lead to joy, fulfillment, contentment, and peace. But this walk is not an easy trial through a flower filled meadow but a still hill climb. The Christian life is not to make you a better person. It is not so you can cuss less, or give more, or a million other things to make your life better. The Christian walk is less about the now and most about the future. James is pointing out one of the terrible things about a Christian Walk that was going no where. It was all about what the person wanted instead of what God wanted.

In the church in Jerusalem at the time of James there was no other church to go to. They had to put up or shut up. AND IT CAUSED CONFLICT. Let me assure you from all the study done the early church was not a peaceful group of people all marching in the same

direction. Often we have been admonished to go back to the early church and its simplicity. But our expectations overrule our perceptions.

Here are examples of conflict in the early church:

- **Acts 2:44-45** – Accolades for sharing their wealth for the poor. But in **Acts 6:1** it seems they messed it up. The giving became a source of racism. Jews, Greek Widows
- **Galatians 5:15** Biting and devouring each other leading to destruction.
- **I Corinthians 1:10-13** The church divided over leadership leading to quarrels
- **I Corinthians 6:1-8** Taking each other to court, to get their way.
- **Philippians 4:2-3** Two women fighting Paul had to step in.
- **James 2:1-6** Class conflicts rich and the poor
- **James 5:1-3** Business ethics (dishonest gain), (lording over those who work for you.
- **James 5:5** Age division
- **James 3:1** Leadership conflicts, striving for positions of honor
- **James 4:11** Unrestricted conflict causing slander and speaking evil.

The logical and overarching reason for this conflict was wrong motives. A motive is the why behind our decisions which results in actions, deeds, and attitudes. Motives come from the lowest level of the soul. They are more important than anything you do. Motives are objects so deeply a part of our decision-making process that they shade everything we do, say or expect. It affects our preferences, our priorities, our persistence.

Many things enter our lives and these events may well, over time, change or strengthen our motives. It shades all we do. And it may cause us to question our perception of truth.

Motives

Among the first power sources in early America was waterpower. Streams and creeks were used to power grain mills to make flour. Large waterwheels were used to harness the power of water. There are overshot waterwheels and undershot. Overshot waterwheels used the power of falling water from above, the weight of the water was the motivation for power. In the other the water turns the wheel from below a dependence upon the flow of the creek. The first is the more powerful. Men, like wheels, are turned by forces from various sources, and too many move by the undercurrent: mercenary desires and selfish aims drive them; but the good man's driving force falls from above; let him endeavor to prove to all men that this is the mightiest force in existence. The question we must consider is the motive force behind our lives; from above or below.

Others around us see us by our actions and not by the motives behind them. If other men cannot read our motives, we ought at least to examine them carefully for ourselves. Day by day with extreme rigor we must search into our hearts. Motivation is vital to the goodness of an action. He who should give his body to be burned might yet lose his soul if his ruling passion were obstinacy, and not desire for God's glory. The most often motive substituted for God's will is self.

Self may be sought under many disguises, and a man may be unaware that he is losing all acceptance with God. Losing our grasp upon God is never a once and gone event. The motive of our life slowly changes and it is, more often than not, an imperceptible change. In as much as we must not judge bad motives to others, we must be equally clear of another more fascinating habit, namely, that of imputing good motives to ourselves. Severity in estimating our own personal character very seldom becomes excessive; our partiality is usually more or less blinding to our judgment. We will not suspect ourselves if we can help it; evidence must be very powerful before it can convince us of being governed by selfish aims.

Actions directed my moral motives

This is a list of motives by which we can categorize our motives:

- Achievement
- Curiosity
- Autonomy
- Growth
- Social connection
- Fear
- Self-worth
- Avoidance
- Health
- Security
- Affiliation
- Financial gain
- Power
- Spirituality
- Eternality

Eight thoughts for this lesson – Pronouns

Even a quick read of James 4:1-4 reveals the use of pronouns. So who is James specifically calling out in the church? Who is “you”?

1. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among **you**?
2. Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in **your** members?
3. **You** lust and do not have; so **you** commit murder.
4. **You** are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.
5. **You** do not have because **you** do not ask.
6. **You** ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.
7. **You** adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?
8. Therefore, **whoever** wishes to be a friend of the world makes **himself** an enemy of God.

Pronoun identification

- “YOU” does not include James. He is pointing out the issues pointed out here are not caused by James. It is not his early Church leadership, it is not his theology, it is not his personal relationships. James does not include himself in this litany of pronouns
- The “YOU” have problems: Quarrels, wars, lust, want, assassination, envy, asking and not receiving, not asking, have wrong motives, lack of commitment to God, friendship with the world, enemy of God.
- The “YOU” are still in the church. He is not speaking of an outside force beating at the doors to destroy the body of believers. It is an internal problem.
- The “YOU” is a group within a group. Not every Christian in the early church was taking part in the turmoil. The entire church was not on the side of the world or an enemy of God. What proportion of the Good guys and the Bad guys can not be determined from James writings.
- The “YOU” have made a choice in their lives to please themselves and not pleasing God.
- The “YOU” are walking in their spiritual lives with a pleasure motive as the driving force.

The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing yourself and pleasing God.

The Consequences of the pleasure motivated life.

The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing oneself and pleasing God; and a world in which men's first aim is to please themselves is a battleground of savagery and division.

A pleasure motivated life has inevitable consequences:

1. It sets men at each other's throats
2. The motivation of pleasure drives men to shameful deeds
3. The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer.

1. **It sets men at each other's throats.**

Motives, as James sees it, are inherently warring powers. A case can be made that we all have fighting motives within ourselves. What James was pointing out these internal motives can and do cause conflict. He does not mean that they war within a man--although that is also true--but that they set men warring against each other. The basic motives are for the same things--for money, for power, for prestige, for worldly possessions, for the gratification of bodily lusts. James was revealing when all men are striving to possess the same things, life inevitably becomes a competitive arena. They trample each other down in

the rush to grasp them. They will do anything to eliminate a rival. Obedience to the will of God draws men together, for it is that will that they should love and serve one another; obedience to the craving for pleasure drives men apart, for it drives them to internal rivalry for the same things.

2. The craving for pleasure drives men to shameful deeds.

Pleasure motives drives the "YOU" envy and to enmity; and even to murder. Before a man can arrive at a deed there must be a certain driving emotion in his heart. He may restrain himself from the things that the desire for pleasure incites him to do; but so long as that desire is in his heart he is not safe. It may at any time explode into ruinous action.

The steps of the process are simple and terrible. A man allows himself to desire something. That thing begins to dominate his thoughts; he finds himself involuntarily thinking about it in his waking hours and dreaming of it when he sleeps. It begins to be what is aptly called a ruling passion. He begins to form imaginary schemes to obtain it; and these schemes may well involve ways of eliminating those who stand in his way. For long enough all this may go on in his mind. Then one day the imaginings may blaze into action; and he may find himself taking the terrible steps necessary to obtain his desire. Every crime in this world has come from desire which was first only a feeling in the heart but which, being nourished long enough, came in the end to action.

3. The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer.

If a man's prayers are simply for the things which will gratify his desires, they are essentially selfish and, therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them. The true end of prayer is to say to God, "Thy will be done." The prayer of the man who is pleasure-dominated is: "My desires be satisfied." It is one of the grim facts of life that a selfish man can hardly ever pray aright; no one can ever pray aright until he removes self from the center of his life and puts God there.

In this life we have to choose whether to make our main motive our own desires or the will of God. And, if we choose our own desires, we have thereby separated ourselves from our fellow-men and from God.

When we look at human society we so often see a seething mass of hatred and strife. When we consider the continual war among men between nations and countries and cities, we must also consider the war between private houses, or, I might rather say, is present with every individual man; observe the unspeakable raging storm in men's souls that is excited by the violent rush of the affairs of life; and you may well wonder whether anyone can enjoy tranquility in such a storm, and maintain calm amidst the surge of this billowing sea. (Philio)

The New Testament is clear that this overmastering desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to the spiritual life. It is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life which combine to choke the good seed (Luke 8:14). A man can become a slave to passions and pleasures and when he does malice and envy and hatred enter into life (Titus 3:3).

Conclusion

We all know the long list of things we desire and ask the Lord about them, and if it is right, if it is within God's will, God will give it to us. Conversely if he thinks we make petition to God is not if it is not right he won't. There for there are two criteria of answered prayer: God's best will for your life and a right motive. You see, people misunderstand the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is never to get your will done upon the earth. And yet, how often we think of prayer as just that, the agency by which I can get my whims and wishes accomplished. "Now Lord I want you to do this and I want you to do that and I've got this list of things I want you to do before Friday." And we think of prayer as a marvelous agency by which I can get all my wishes and all my desires accomplished.

Early in my stumbling walk with Jesus, I thought of prayer in that light for years. I was always trying to make deals with God. Now you do this and I will do this. How can you lose, trying to strike a bargain with the Lord? And I used prayer, or sought to use prayer, as a means by which I could fulfill my desires. I know a lot about this verse in James, "you ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, to consume it upon your own lusts (James 4:3).

I prayed for a better car telling God that the one I had was always breaking down and I needed to get to church. New cars were being sold on many corners in my town. Oh I wanted so much I reluctantly asked God. Actually I tried to strike a deal with God. I told him I would pick up kids and bring them to Sunday school. "You know Lord, I will give you the use of it a couple hours a week, after all." Boy, did my mind have plans for the rest of the week, looking cool and affluent in my little town.

So many of our prayers have selfish motivation behind them, and many times the selfish motivation is actually hid from us. But if I really begin to probe I find that behind the prayer there is a strong selfish motivation.

My kids are not and never were perfect angels. They were doing things I didn't approve of, I wish they were not doing these things. I'm becoming concerned. There were many times I had to go to my knees to ask God for Mercy. Yet down in my heart there was a twinge of selfishness. Pastor's son arrested for shoplifting in local store, was a possibility. "Lord can you straighten him out?" In the deep depths of my heart, I'm thinking what if he should get in trouble, be arrested. Boy, what kind of headlines would that make. It would be a disgrace to the family. Selfish desire in a pretty red ribbon of prayer.

Prayer is not an agency by which my will is to be accomplished upon the earth.

The purpose of prayer is to get God's will to be accomplished upon the earth, and so many times we ask and receive not because the motive behind our asking is really that of

accomplishing my will rather than God's will. And if my will is in conflict with God's will, God is not going to change His will to accommodate me, for God is not subservient to me, I am subservient to Him. And the purpose of prayer is never to change the mind of God to see things my way. It isn't to persuade a reluctant God to do things my way. The real thrust and purpose of prayer is to get God's will done. That's why many times we ask and receive not because we ask amiss. Our own desires are too much entwined into it.

It is all Greek to me

Verse	English	Greek Transliteration	Definition
4:1	Quarrels	pólemos	A war. a fight, a battle, a dispute, strife, quarrel
4:1	Conflicts	máchē	A fight or combat of those in arms, a battle of persons at variance, disputants etc., strife, contention a quarrel
4:1	Pleasures	hēdoné	To have pleasure, desires for pleasure, enjoyment, usually with a negative sense
4:1	War	strateúomai	To serve as a soldier; to wage war, fight, battle
4:1	Parts	mélos	A member, limb: a member of the human body
4:2	Lust	epithyméō	To turn upon a thing, to have a desire for, long for, to desire to lust after, covet of those who seek things forbidden
4:2	Murder	phoneúō	To kill, do murder, slay
4:2	Envious	zēlóō	To desire, eagerly desire, show zeal, feel an attitude or emotion of deep concern; to be jealous, envious, to experience morally corrupt zealous ill will; covet, as a negative attitude of lust and desire for another's possessions
4:2	Fight	máchomai	To fight, of armed combatants, or those who engage in a hand to hand struggle. Of those who engage in a war of words, to quarrel, wrangle, dispute. Of those who contend at law for property and privileges
4:2	Ask	aitéō	To ask, beg, call for, crave, desire, require
4:3	Motives	Kakōs aitéō	improperly, wrongly question or ask. A perversion of what pertains to goodness, moral wrong.