

The War Within, Part 2

The Battle for the Heart

Text: James 4:4–6

Introduction

We are stepping into a new section of James, and for the next several weeks, we are going to be in James 4. This series is called “The War Within.” And today’s message is titled:

The Battle for the Heart

Let me start with a question:

Whose side are you on?

Because sometimes the most important decisions in life do not feel like decisions at all.

I have never met anyone who woke up one morning and said, “Today I am going to drift away from God. That is my goal.” Nobody plans spiritual decline like that.

But it happens.

It happens quietly.

It happens through small compromises.

It happens through subtle alliances.

It happens through unspoken loyalties that slowly shift the heart.

And that is exactly what James is addressing.

This passage was not written to atheists. He's not preaching to Skid Row.

It was not written to people who openly rejected God.

It was written to people who claimed to follow Jesus, but whose hearts were becoming too comfortable with the world.

Let's read our text.

James 4:4-6

**“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

**Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”**

Let's pray.

These three verses ask us three searching questions.

1. **Do I realize what loving the world does to my heart?**

James 4:4

**“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”**

- There are certain things that can hurt our bodies. Had a guy the other day testify that he hadn't smoked weed since December. I said praise the Lord, because I've never found the brain cells I lost years ago when I did.

Loving the world damages your heart.

Verse 4 is strong language.

James does not ease into this gently. He does not tiptoe around the issue. He kicks the door down with a shocking accusation:

“Adulterers and adulteresses.”

He is not being dramatic for effect. He is using covenant language. He is speaking like a wounded husband confronting unfaithfulness.

If Shawna was unfaithful to me and I found out, and all I said was, it's all good, girl, " it's all good. Rock on. Everyone would think I was crazy.

Remember during our marriage series when we said that marriage isn't a contract but a covenant? It's not just a covenant with your spouse, but with God as well.

James is using this language in this part of the scripture.

To love the world is to cheat on God.

That is how seriously God sees divided affection.

Now, when James says “the world,” he is not talking about sunsets, mountains, coffee, family dinners, or enjoying the beauty of God's creation. He is talking about **a value system that operates independently of God.**

That is worldliness.

It is living every day as if God is not really involved.

It is being religious enough to attend church, but practical enough to call all your own shots the rest of the week.

What does loving the world mean?

John defines it for us in 1 John 2:15–16:

**“Do not love the world or the things in the world... For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”**

Those are the three driving forces of worldliness:

- The lust of the flesh
- The lust of the eyes
- The pride of life

In other words, loving the world means letting:

- What feels good
- What looks good
- What makes you look good governs your life.

These are ancient temptations

You see them in Genesis 3 with Eve.

The fruit was:

- good for food — lust of the flesh
- pleasant to the eyes — lust of the eyes
- desire to make one wise — pride of life

You see them again in Matthew 4 when Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness.

- Turn stones to bread — satisfy the flesh
- Look at all the kingdoms — lust of the eyes
- Throw Yourself down and prove who You are — pride of life

The same three categories show up again and again because this is how the world works.

The world says:

- Indulge yourself
- Enrich yourself

- Exalt yourself

But Christ says:

- Deny yourself
- Take up your cross
- Follow Me

Illustration: Lot

Genesis 13 gives us a perfect picture in Lot.

When Abram and Lot needed to separate, Abram let Lot choose first. **(SHOW LOT PICTURE)** Lot looked toward the plain of Jordan and saw that it was well watered. It made sense financially. It made sense strategically. It looked smart.

But what began as a reasonable decision slowly reshaped his heart.

There is a progression in the text:

- He pitched his tent toward Sodom
- Then he lived in Sodom
- Then he sat at the gate of Sodom

He went from proximity to participation to influence.

By the time judgment came, he was so entangled that he could not even persuade his own family to leave.

And it all started with one phrase:

“Lot chose for himself.”

That is how worldliness works.  
It rarely begins in open rebellion.  
It begins in self-directed living.

**Your heart follows your choices.**

Illustration: Solomon

Solomon loved God, but he also loved what God forbade. Scripture says his wives turned his heart after other gods.

The tragedy is this:

**His affection became his allegiance.**

That is what loving the world does. It takes what you tolerate and turns it into what you treasure.

A clear definition

**Loving the world means adopting a value system that operates independently of God.**

The world says, "Satisfy yourself."

God says, "Deny yourself."

The world says, "Promote yourself."

God says, "Humble yourself."

The world says, "You only live once."

God says, "Prepare for eternity."

This is a heart issue

Proverbs 4:23 says:

**"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."**

The heart is the control center of your life. It is where desires live, where decisions are formed, where loyalties are chosen.

So, when James warns about friendship with the world, he is warning about what is happening inside of us.

There is something about the world that we must all understand.

Worldliness dulls the conscience.  
It makes compromise feel normal.  
It makes holiness feel strange.

Hosea: the picture of spiritual adultery

If you want to understand why James uses such severe language, go back to Hosea.

God told Hosea to marry Gomer, knowing she would be unfaithful.

She pursued other lovers, gave her heart away, and eventually ended up broken and enslaved.

And through that marriage, God was preaching a sermon to Israel:

This is what you have done to me.

The children's names reinforced the message:

- Jezreel — judgment
- Lo-Ruhamah — no mercy
- Lo-Ammi — not My people

But then comes the astonishing grace of God.

God tells Hosea not to abandon her, but to go after her, redeem her, and bring her home.

What a picture.

Israel had been unfaithful.  
But God remained faithful.

That is the weight behind James calling believers adulterers and adulteresses.

Heart test: Do I love the world?

Let's make it practical.

Ask yourself:

- Is my happiness tied to approval, success, comfort, pleasure, or reputation?
- Do I need constant affirmation to feel secure?
- Do I spend more time feeding my cravings than feeding my soul?
- Do I choose screens over Scripture?
- Have I organized my life around comfort instead of holiness?
- Do I talk more passionately about sports, politics, money, and entertainment than I do about Jesus?
- Am I more stirred up by cultural issues than by Christlikeness?
- Do I let consumerism quietly guide my decisions?

If some of those questions sting, that does not mean God is done with you.

It means He is calling your heart back.

## 2. **Do I realize how deeply God wants my heart?**

James 4:5

**“Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?’”**

God is not passive.

He yearns.

That means He longs.

He aches.

He pursues.

This is not petty jealousy. This is covenant jealousy.

This is the passion of a God who has bound Himself to His people in love and refuses to treat that covenant lightly.

Exodus 34:14 says:

**“The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”**

That means God does not want part of your heart.

He wants all of it.

He will not settle for being added to a crowded list of loves.

He will not be your side piece.

He will not do open relationships.

He will not share you with the world.

God’s jealousy is for your good

God is not jealous of you the way a sinful human might be jealous.

He is jealous for you.

He knows where the world leads.

The world promises freedom, but produces bondage.

It promises pleasure, but leaves emptiness.

It promises identity, but ends in slavery.

**God’s jealousy is His holy determination to pull your heart back from destruction.**

Even after betrayal, He pursues

That is what makes this so beautiful.

Even after wandering, God still yearns.

Even after compromise, God still calls.

Even after betrayal, God still pursues.

God’s love is not sentimental.

It is stubborn.

He comes after wandering people.

He does not cancel them.

He calls them home.

That ought to encourage somebody today.

Maybe you have not openly denied Christ, but your heart has cooled.

Maybe you are not in a scandal, but you have become distracted.

Maybe no one around you even knows, but you know your affection has drifted.

Hear me:

The fact that God is confronting you is proof that He still wants you.

### **3. Do I realize how pride is shaping my heart?**

James 4:6

**“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”**

What a phrase:

But He gives more grace.

After spiritual adultery—more grace.

After compromise—more grace.

After pride—more grace.

After wandering—more grace.

You may not need more law today.

You may not need more information.

You may need more grace.

And God gives it.

But there is also a warning:

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

The word resists is a military term. It means to set oneself in battle formation against.

Think about that.

Pride does not merely displease God.  
Pride places you in opposition to Him.

Pride shapes the heart

Pride hardens the heart.  
It closes the heart.  
It trains the heart to reject correction.

Illustration: King Uzziah

King Uzziah started well.

2 Chronicles says, **“As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper.”**

But success began to distort him. He began to think that because he was blessed, he was beyond boundaries.

Eventually, Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense—something God had reserved only for priests.

When the priests confronted him, he did not repent.

He raged.

That is what pride does.

Pride trains the heart to reject correction.

And in that moment, God struck him with leprosy. His inner condition became publicly visible.

His pride cost him access, influence, and fellowship.

Pride sounds like this

- “No one can tell me what to do.”
- “I know better.”
- “I have earned the right.”
- “I do not need correction.”
- “I do not need accountability.”
- “I do not need Christian community.”

That is the voice of pride.

And James says God resists it.

Humility opens the heart to grace

Pride says, “I’ve got this.”

Humility says, “God, I cannot fix this without You.”

Pride says, “I will direct my own life.”

Humility says, “Lord, I surrender.”

Pride keeps grace out.

Humility welcomes grace in.

And this is the hope of the gospel:

You do not have to win this battle by strength.

You win it by surrender.

Conclusion

So what has James shown us?

- Loving the world pulls your heart away from God
- God jealously calls your heart back

- Humility opens your heart to grace

This is the battle for the heart.

And the question today is not just, “Do you believe in God?”  
The question is:

Who has your heart?

Not just your Sunday attendance.  
Not just your language.  
Not just your image.

Who has your heart?

Maybe your heart has been captured by comfort.  
Maybe by success.  
Maybe by politics.  
Maybe by approval.  
Maybe by pleasure.  
Maybe by pride.

But here is the good news:

He gives more grace.

You can come back.  
You can repent.  
You can return.  
You can surrender again.

God is not done with you.  
But He is calling for all of you.

Closing Challenge

So let me leave you with three closing questions:

1. Where has my heart been drifting?
2. What worldly loyalty have I tolerated?

3. What pride do I need to humble before God today?

The battle within is real.  
But the grace of God is greater.

Let's pray.

Closing Prayer