

The War Within

Every moment of every day, a war is waged within us.

There's a war for control of your soul. Something will control it.

Romans 7:15 (NLT) I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

If you are a Christ – follower there is a battle, a war waged inside us. Sin & our flesh which is out to *destroy us* & leads to spiritual death. Submission to the Holy Spirit which leads to spiritual life & freedom. Fighting against each other. Sin steals life; God gives it.

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another way, and I do things I absolutely despise. Sound familiar?

James is absolutely aware of what is going on in the church and he wants his readers to understand that part of peacemaking involves a grasp on the underlying causes of conflict. The “why” (reason) behind the “what” that is happening.

****James 4:1 (ESV)** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Desires often lead to arguments & fights b/c they are so self -centered.

Selfish passions (or desires) causes Christ – followers to wage war within themselves, as their desire to serve Jesus and serve others conflicts with the desire to serve self.

“Sticks and stones may only break our bones, but words can absolutely devastate someone's life”.

Husband/Wife: \$\$, communication, kids, intimacy, time (All-Pro Dad statistics)

We get angry a chemical called epinephrine is released, our brain shrinks & we get irrational. We say or do things we wouldn't normally say or do, and we regret it. “Pea – brain”.

“You spent that much \$\$ on what?” “You never listen/talk to me!” “You're never home for me or the kids”! Flip the script: Can we talk about this? I need your help understanding this. Can we sit down & work through this week's calendar together? *Every moment of every day, a war is waged within us.* Selfishness versus godliness. *Who will win control?*

Conflict resolution in a marriage brings intimacy. Question is, “how fast can we resolve the conflict?”.

Parents: Ever said: “You make me so mad?”. Me too. Who has control in that situation? Ever said something to your kids you wish you had not? Me too. Our kids will be confused if we are inconsistent, especially in the area of discipline. Discipline is training to elicit a certain pattern or behavior. No consistent consequences, no consistent discipline. Stick with what you say, so be careful & consistent in what you say!

Every moment of every day, a war is waged within us. Selfishness versus godliness. Who will win control? Out?

Friends arguing. Siblings. Kids deal with this too. They are watching us. How do we deal with it? When we mess up to we “own up” to it? I did it. I was wrong. I am sorry. Will you forgive me? Permission to hold me accountable (dad, you’re assuming) Anything else?

James 4:2 (ESV) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

Internal conflict comes out in external conflict. When selfish ambition and bitter envy create this battle within us, they disrupt relationships outside us. Arguments & fights break out in our marriages, our families and *in the church*.

I think we should do this! I don’t like the new platform location. I demand to know all the details. I, I, I. “I” is a powerful thing, but I is all alone. “We” is a stronger thing and it has company. God is about unity, not disunity. He will reveal his message & direction to more than just you. Or me.

We don’t ask sometimes b/c we know our motives aren’t right. We wrestle with our desires, so we can wrongly think, “if I don’t ask, God won’t know my selfish desires”.

James 4:3 (ESV) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Let’s be honest; sometimes we just go for it anyway! If our requests center on ourselves, our wants, our desires rather than on God’s purpose for us, don’t expect God to answer them. That would compromise his integrity and would not help our spiritual well – being.

Why would God answer the prayer of a believer who wants to live like an enemy of Jesus Christ? Pursuing selfish ambition over godliness?

James 4:4 (ESV) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

You adulterous people! Yikes. James reaches back and uses language to remind them of when Israel was unfaithful to God. When she was a spiritual adulteress. The people of Israel sought to worship both God and the Canaanite gods of fertility and prosperity. Asherah & Baal.

God told Israel to love him and be consecrated as holy to him, rather than following the pagan values of the nations around them.

James is saying that it’s like a Christ – Follower attempting to pursue both God and the world. When we accept the gift that Jesus paid for all our sins and we begin a

relationship with him, the Bible says we are the “Bride of Christ”. James is saying, we shouldn’t be running after other gods and lovers if we are married to Jesus!

Enmity means hostility. So, friendship with the world is *hostility* with God.

What is friendship with the world? Can we not have friends who aren’t Christ – followers? James is *not saying* that we shouldn’t have friends who aren’t yet believers in Jesus. Quite the contrary. Not commanding us to just stay in our church bubble and hope those who don’t know Jesus come and hear about him here.

If we profess to love Jesus on Sunday we should live as if he’s real, present and who he says he is on Monday. And Tuesday. And Wednesday. That’s when we will start to see God work in the lives of our friends, neighbors, co-workers, friends at school, our spouse or our extended family.

How we consistently live our lives will make those around us want to run to the Jesus we claim to serve or run from him. Run to the church or away from the church.

The way we live speaks louder than the words from our lips. Every interaction has the potential to either push people farther away from God or draw them closer to Him.

In the context of this verse, James gives us a warning that we shouldn’t be chasing after worldly desires. He is reminding us that we shouldn’t be friends with the world, not people who are being swayed & beat up by the world.

1 John 2:15 – 17 (NLT) Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

Why would we give ourselves to shallow, superficial things that can never satisfy us the way Jesus can? Things like defining our happiness by what we have: \$\$, cars, a boat, house in the right neighborhood. These things fade away. God’s kingdom is forever!

Achievements. When we define ourselves by worldly desires, here’s what we know but don’t like to admit: It *always* negatively affects our relationship with God.

We can’t be loyal to the culture and to God’s kingdom. James would say, what starts as a desire, can lead to destruction when it’s misguided.

James 4:5 (ESV) Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

God is not jealous *about you*, he is jealous *for you*, for his own glory.

The sin nature is that aspect in man that makes him *rebellious against God*. When we speak of the sin nature, we refer to the fact that we have a natural inclination, a natural

bent toward sin. Given the choice to do God's will or our own, we will naturally choose to do our own thing.

In other words, sin affects all areas of our being including who we are and what we do. It's a universal epidemic!!

Every moment of every day, a war is waged within us. Selfishness versus godliness. Who will win control?

How do we get free of this? What can we do win the war that is moment by moment waged within us? Do we try harder to not sin? Do we attempt in our strength to fight the desires and passions that war within us? Or are we just sunk. Do we just give in and think, "if we can't beat 'em, join 'em?"

No! We are not hopeless. There is *so much* **HOPE** in this next verse! Don't miss this!

James 4:6 (ESV) But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

God gives grace. We need to hear that. We have a problem. God provides the solution.

God Gives Grace That is Greater

What is Grace? Greater than what? Grace is:

God's undeserved, unearned favor. It's a gift to us (we have to take it). Grace saves us from the penalty of every sin we have, are or will commit. Doesn't stop there. Grace places God's Spirit (Holy Spirit) in us to fight for us & allow us the possibility to win victory over sin, which is rebellion towards God. God Gives grace that is:

Greater than the war within us.

To win over selfish ambition & desires being in control & calling the shots in our lives. If we don't get this we will continue to engage in arguments, quarrels & fights. Continue to say words in frustration & anger that can devastate someone's life. It will spill over from our personal lives into God's church. With the power of God's Grace in us, we can make progress. Grow more self-control. Experience more wins in our relationships.

Greater than the worldly war around us.

Grace gives us God's power to fight the urge & desire to chase after what is temporary pleasure & temporary happiness and instead, pursue what God says will be eternal and never taken away from you & me.

Sin rewards for a season, which is why it is so tempting. But its happiness is short lived.

But here's the catch. *God only gives grace to those who are willing to admit their sin of chasing after other things and cheating on God.* Those who are willing to admit that their selfish desires and passions have led to quarrels and fights and arguments with others.

Those willing to admit their complete dependence on God & not on themselves. What's that look like?

Recognize our Rebellion and Humbly Repent.

Grace is only given to those who admit their need for it. It requires humility. True humility involves courage. With it, we seek not only to be understood but also to understand others. We listen to each other and value other people's viewpoints in our marriage, as parents, children, teenagers, friends, neighbors and in God's Church.

The question is, who do we want to please? We can please God or someone else (including ourselves). We were created for God's pleasure and purpose and created with a purpose. But we will sink into selfish behavior if we don't humbly bow before God.

Because, every moment of every day, a war is waged within us. Selfishness versus godliness. Who will win control? Out? The war is real, and so are the consequences.

Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?
2. Read Romans 7:15. What is Paul struggling with? Steve said, "Every moment of every day, a war is waged within us." Where does this war come from?
3. Read James 4:1 – 6. According to verse 1, where do fights and quarrels come from in your relationships? What quarrels have you had recently? When are you most likely to fight? What are you most likely to fight or quarrel about?
4. What do verses 2 – 3 tell us about the spiritual life of James's audience? When they did ask, what do you think they were asking for? What does James say are some reasons why God may not grant our requests?
5. Is verse 4 saying that we shouldn't be friends with non - Christians? What is it saying? Read 1 John 2:15 – 17. Summarize the relationship between godliness & friendship with the world.
6. What does God offer us in verse 6? How would you describe God's Grace? How does God's Grace help us fight "the war within" and the "worldly war" around us?
7. According to verse 6, how do we access God's grace? What does it look like in real life to "humble ourselves"?
8. Who does God oppose? What are some potential consequences of not humbling ourselves?
9. How can you apply what you heard and discussed to your daily life? In what area do you most need to rely on God's grace to fight for you this week?

Close in prayer, humbly admitting your dependence on God, and expressing your love for His grace that is greater than our struggles and the war within.