What Friendship Will You Pursue

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[0:00] Tonight we'll be in verses 1 through 10 of James chapter 4.! Show me your friends and I'll show you your future.

! It's a well-known statement, cliche even, but I like it. I think it's helpful. It's well-known, maybe used too much, but I like it because it's a clear statement about the power of friendship.
Who you spend time with shapes you as a person. Who you spend time with shapes your thoughts, shapes your expectations from life, shapes your desires, your attitudes, your pursuits, and even your hopes.
And when you think about friendship, it's something that's incredibly powerful for shaping you. But friendship is also something that's not exclusive. It's not exclusive to other friends.
And so your friends aren't like, hey, you can be friends with me as long as you're not friends with anyone else. And just a little advice, if you have a friend that says that, they're toxic, get away.
[1:14] But friendship is not exclusive like that. You can have multiple friends and even you can have friends who aren't friends with each other. You can have friends that don't know each other and you can be friends with both of them because friendship isn't exclusive.

But there's a form of friendship that is exclusive. And marriage is really the closest form of friendship and marriage is exclusive.
And so while you can have one friend here and another friend there, you can't do that with spouses. And so a husband can't say to his wife, I love you, boo, and I love her too.
You can't say that as a husband. That doesn't work. A wife can't say to her husband, I'm faithful to you and I like to flirt with other guys as well. You can't say that because marriage is exclusive. Marriage is unique. You can't be married to multiple people. As we think about friendship, as we think about marriage, our relationship with God is described in both of those ways.
[2:20] God describes his relationship to the church as both a friendship and as a marital relationship. And what we see is these two images come together tonight in James 4 verses 1 through 10 is that friendship with God is exclusive.

Friendship with God, marriage to him is exclusive. We must choose between him and the world. There is no middle ground between following God or following this world.
And just like we saw last week that there are two kinds of wisdom, we see tonight that there are two kinds of friendship. There's friendship with the world and there's friendship with God.
Which friendship will you pursue? Which friendship will mark your life? Last week in verses 14 through 16, James said that disorder of all kinds will be unleashed.
There will be chaos in the church if people pursue worldly wisdom, if they possess worldly wisdom. He says there's going to be chaos and disorder. And the first few verses of chapter 4 actually show us some of what that disorder is like.
[3:36] It shows us some of the disorder that's taking place even in the middle of this church. And so as we work through verses 1 through 10 tonight, we're going to break this passage up into three sections.

And the first one is what we'll call church fight club. Church fight club, verses 1 through 3. Maybe that's a new ministry idea. We have one kind of, it's called karate.
But anyway, church fight club. James says in chapter 4 verse 1, He's asking a question, and James is a good preacher.
He's hooking their attention right here. He's baiting this hook because as soon as he asks that question and as soon as people hear it, they're already coming up with a list of reasons that's causing these issues.

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There's drama in this church. And you start asking, what's the cause of this? What's going on? Why are you guys fighting? And people are starting to make lists in their heads. Well, it's him over there. [4:35] It's her that's causing these issues. I can go on and on with what's causing these issues. James has baited the hook. And now he's going to give them the answer to his own question. Is it not this?

That your passions are at war within you. Your desires or your lusts or your pleasures, all good translations of that word, they are at war within you.
And so as soon as James asks that question, what's the cause of your fighting? What's the cause of your drama? People immediately start thinking of names and situations that have caused these issues.
And it's amazing that anytime we have problems in life, we usually look to someone else as the cause of them. Anytime my kids are fighting and I go up, and usually someone is at fault.
But if I talk to the person who's responsible for the issue, they're never like, yeah, this is my fault. They're always like, well, she took this from me or he did that.
[5:39] Or we always blame other people. And James is saying, your desires are at war within you. The source of all fighting, the source of all disagreement, is sinful desires in your heart.

Whatever situation, whatever difficulty you have going on, desires in your heart or desires in someone else's heart cause the issues that we have relationally.
And so we can say it like this, the cause of all external conflict is caused by internal desires. Any difficulty you have in relationships, whether it's your fault or someone else's, is because of internal desires.
That's true whether it's here at church, at your house, at school, with your friends, with your family, as we think about the military level, internationally, between countries, in the government, what causes every issue in the world?
Internal desires. A want for something. Whether it's power or resources or money or popularity or attention.
[6:51] Any problems you have in life with other people are because of sinful desires. Whether it's your heart or their heart. And as I said, the problem never seems to be with us.

As we think through our issues, we are so quick to point fingers at someone else. We're so quick to blame others and we're so slow to question ourselves and to question our own heart.
But again, the shocking thing about this section is James isn't talking about a problem that's out in the world. He's not critiquing a government. He's not critiquing a school system. He's talking to this church.
He's talking to the people who are believers and gathering themselves weekly to worship with each other. This is the church that James is addressing these issues in.
And some of you and probably all of you have experienced this at church. Someone saying something rude about you. You sinning against someone else. We've experienced all of these kinds of things at church.
[7:54] And I think it's important to recognize that this is incredibly common. And so it's easy to feel like if you're being sinned against, it's easy to feel like you're all alone and you're the only person that's ever happened to.

This is very common. So I think it's important to acknowledge that. I think it's also important to recognize that this is not what Christ wants. Christ does not want a church that's constantly bickering, constantly fighting.
He wants a church that's unified and loving and united around the truth. Jesus prayed for this in John 17. He said, he prayed before he died that the church would be one.
The church would be unified. And in Ephesians 4.3, Paul calls that church to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Christ wants churches to love each other and not constantly be bogged down by fighting and bickering and drama taking place.
But what does this look like in real life? James has diagnosed the problem. The thing that's causing these issues is because your hearts aren't right. There's all kinds of stuff going on in your hearts.
[9:11] But what does this look like in flesh and blood? Well, he says in verse 2, you desire. So that's the first passion. And then skip down a little bit in verse 2. He says, you covet.

So desire and coveting. These are the two things that James is talking about. But let's read verse 2. He says, you desire and do not have so you murder.

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You covet that means desire something that's not yours and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel. James starts this off with an incredibly shocking statement.
He says, you desire and do not have so you murder. It's a shocking example that he gives here. He says, you're wanting stuff and you don't have that stuff and so you're killing the people who have it. Now, I think James is using exaggeration here. I don't think they're actually killing each other. So we could call this hyperbole or exaggeration. James is trying to prove a point. And one of the reasons I think that is because if they truly were killing each other, one, that would be so wild.
[10:23] But anyway, if they were actually doing that, this is not the only way James would address it. Okay? He wouldn't just kind of mention it in passing and then move on. And so what is he saying here? Well, he's saying exactly what Jesus said back in Matthew 5.

He says, you've heard it said that you shall not murder, but I say to you, if anyone is angry with his brother, he's liable to judgment. And what Jesus is saying is that one of the causes of murder is anger or jealousy and if that desire is in your heart, all the equipment is there to actually kill someone, to actually physically harm someone.
And you think about a fight. What is it? You're angry with them and so you're trying to physically harm them. And so I don't think they're actually physically murdering each other, but what James is saying is that these desires in your heart are dangerous.
Sinful desires are dangerous because they don't stop. The desire for sin in your heart never says, I'm full. It always wants more. It always presses on.
It always gets more aggressive and tenacious and dangerous. They will consume your life if you let them. And James is saying, you desire and don't have and so you murder.
[11:41] He gets their attention with this. And he says, you covet and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel.

There's those two words again, fighting and quarreling. He says, you want what others have but you can't get it and so you just pick fights with the people that do have it. You just try to make their life miserable.
You're like, if I can't have their money, I'm just going to try to ruin their life. If I can't have their stuff and their house and their clothes, I'm just going to try to make their life miserable because I can't get what they have and I want it.
And James is actually going to trace the problem back even further here. So he's talked about they're having fights. What's the reason for the fighting? It's their own sinful hearts. And now he's going to take it a step further and say, you desire things and don't have them but why don't you have the stuff that you want?
That's the problem he's going to address next. He says, you don't have into verse 2 because you do not ask.
[12:52] The reason they don't have this stuff is because they have not asked for it. And so what they're doing is that they're fighting with each other, they're arguing with each other but they won't talk to God about what they need or what they want.

They've used their words to argue with each other rather than pray to God. And so many of us are complainers.
We will complain about our church or school or family or our life and we will never pray to God about any of it. You'll use your words to talk about your problems with others but you'll never take your problems to God.
And James is saying, you guys are causing all kinds of problems internally. You're causing all kinds of problems against each other but you haven't asked God for anything. You haven't taken anything to God. You talk about your problems but do you talk to God about your problems?
And here's something that will always be convicting to us but prayerlessness is a sign of pridefulness.
[14:07] Prayerlessness is a sign of pridefulness. prayerfulness. And if at any point throughout the year you went around any church and asked people do you pray as much as you should the answer is always going to be no.

We always know we can pray more. We always think we can pray more. And so my goal isn't just to heap on the guilt that you feel but truly how do you use your words? How freely will you talk about your problems with your friends?

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Do you take your problems to God? Do you pray to God about things you need or things you would like to see happen in your life? Do you pray and what do those prayers sound like?
And I said that prayerlessness is a sign of pridefulness because prayer takes humility. You have to be willing to go to God and say I don't have what I need.
I need your help. I need you to be with me God. God is a sign It requires humility to admit your weaknesses and what you need and where you've come short.
[15:12] And James has opened up the invitation for them to pray several times throughout this letter. In chapter 1 verse 5 he says if any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God.

And then in James 1 17 he says every good and every perfect gift comes down from above from the father of lights with whom there is no shadow or variation due to change. But these people that James is writing to are acting pridefully.
They'll argue they'll complain they'll fight but they won't pray. What we see is that some of them actually were praying but they were just praying with bad motives.
And that's where James goes next in verse 3 he says you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions and so the reason you don't have what you want is because you don't pray and when you pray your motives are all over the place your motives are not pure your motives are not glorifying to the Lord you ask wrongly and he defines what that means to spend it on your passions there's that word again passions or desires and so when they did pray they weren't praying for God's will to be done they were praying for their own desires to be satisfied they weren't praying and saying God I submit to you please give me what you want me to have they were saying they wanted their will to be done they wanted God to conform to their agenda to their plan for their lives and that word for spend to spend it on your passions that's the same word that's used of the prodigal son in Luke 15 he squandered his inheritance he spent he spent his inheritance and so James is saying you're asking for stuff just so you can spend money on whatever you want just so you can buy what you want you have these sinful desires and you want enough money to fund your lifestyle and James point is that
God doesn't listen to prayers like this God does not listen to prayers like that God is not a vending machine you can't just say well I prayed I took it to him he needs to give me what I want God doesn't hear prayers like that and so prayer that's pleasing to God seeks his will seeks his glory even when you're taking needs and wants to him even when you're asking him for things it's always seeking his glory even above our wants and our needs and so they had this church fight club going on they were known for their warring and their fighting and their arguing and James is saying you don't pray and even when you do pray you're just asking to further the problem of giving in to your sinful desires and so that leads to secondly number two cheating on God cheating on God we see this in verses four and five
[18:16] James says in verse four you adulterous people and it's actually a female term that he uses here so he's saying adulterous you adulterous they were obsessed with fulfilling their own desires they were running around on God they were cheating on him and this is a shocking shift in how he's addressing them up to this point when he speaks to these Christians he calls them brothers my beloved brothers here he addresses them as adulteresses as people who are cheating on God why does he call them this why does he change to such harsh and direct language here well this comes from a rich Old Testament image that Yahweh is Israel's husband and Israel is Yahweh's wife and that pattern continues to go out to the extent that

God would say idolatry is basically a spiritual version of adultery adultery is cheating on your spouse idolatry is cheating on God idolatry is taking something that's not God and putting it in God's place it's worshipping something that's not God that could be a physical idol that could be a false god or that could be something that you want to center your life around like sports or money or a job or school anything that takes God's place is an idol in your life and to that God says adulteresses God is and love the life the is the God is described as the bride of Christ and so it's a shocking picture here but the more we give in to sin the more we're conformed to this world the less faithful we're being to
God the more idolatrously we're living and God says, that's adultery. You're not being faithful to me. And there's a thorough and deep repentance that's needed from a sin like this. If you imagine a wife who has cheated on her husband and is apologizing to him and she just says, yeah, I'm sorry. Like, I get why you're upset by that.

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I'll try not to do that again. My bad. That's not a fitting apology for what sin has taken place. James is calling for a much deeper friendship here. And he says, verse four, 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. Friendship with the world or friendship with God? Which one will you pursue? These things are pulling you in opposite directions. You can't do both. You can't love the world and you can't love God at the same time. Now, when James says the world, what does he mean here? Well, he's not talking about just creation in general. God created all things good. And so it's not wrong to love the planet or to love creatures. The way the New Testament sometimes uses the word world is to describe the world system, the sinful direction that people are going in this world, the sinful direction that individuals and groups of people are taking as they rebel against God.

And so you get statements like John and first John says, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. So people in the world lie under the power of Satan. Also, John says, do not love the world or the things in the world. And he describes those things as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. So he says, do you not know that friendship with the world, a love for sin, sin is enmity with God. And I think James is focusing in here specifically on this sin of wanting to have a lot of money and wanting to just spend it on whatever you want to do.

[22:49] Being rich is not a sin, but wanting to be rich so that you can have fun and spend it on yourself is a sinful temptation and it is a dangerous thing. The world encourages you to buy stuff. That's why there's commercials. People are wanting you to buy stuff. I hate commercials, by the way. One time we were watching TV and we were watching a football game and there's a Bob Mills commercial that came on and Charlie, and he was three at the time, he goes, no, it's Bob. But I feel the same way. I hate commercials. But the world wants you to buy stuff. The world wants you to be comfortable. The world wants you to spend things that you don't need to. The world wants you to acquire stuff.

And the world wants you to ignore being generous and sacrificial. The world wants you to follow its path and not follow God. But this also applies more broadly to just the whole direction that this world is headed and the sins that they love and the sins that you're tempted to commit.

You can be a friend of this world or you can be a friend of God, but there's no middle ground. And he says, therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. If you love this world, God is your enemy. If you love God, the world is your enemy. It's black and white. There's choice one or choice two. You cannot pursue both paths.

These two friendships are mutually exclusive. And I want you to save your spot there in James. Go back with me to the book of John. Back to your left a few books. John chapter 15.

[24:36] And interestingly, we'll pick up in John 15 verse 18. In the paragraph right before this, Jesus is talking to his disciples and he describes their relationship as a friendship. He says, I'm laying my life down for my friends. These men are friends of Jesus. And now he's going to talk about how the world's going to hate them because of that. Okay, so John 15 verse 18.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. You can go back with me to the book of James. What Jesus is saying there is that because you're my friends, because you follow me, the world will hate you. You cannot love the world and God at the same time.

And the language of being an enemy is strong and it's shocking. I think most unbelievers would not describe themselves as an enemy of God. They might not believe in him, but they're like, well, I don't hate him. I just don't believe in him. I might not follow him, but I don't hate him. I'm not his enemy.

So why is it the case that God speaks so strongly here? It's because God is a jealous God. God is a jealous God. And you might kind of be taken aback by the language of God being a jealous God. That might strike you as odd, but look at what he says in verse 5. He says, do you suppose that it is to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us? Now, that's not a direct quote from the Old Testament. I think James is summarizing what the Old Testament teaches, that God is a jealous God who desires our attention and desires our affection.

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And it may be weird to you to be able to say that God is jealous and that's a good thing. But again, thinking of the imagery of marriage is helpful. It's good for a husband to be jealous for his wife's affection. It's good for him to be jealous over her attention and for him to not want her to give that to someone else. And so it's right for God to be jealous over the people that he has made and the people that he has saved. And there's a couple of different ways to be jealous. You can be jealous in like an insecure way, like I don't want you hang out with other people because I'm insecure about myself and I want you to find someone better. There's also a right jealousy that says, you belong with me and I'm not willing to share that with others.
[27:58] Now, as we think about this, I hope you're convicted by it. This passage is convicting to me as I think about my own sin, my own temptation to be distracted by this world. And very frequently, if we're honest, we have been sidetracked by a distraction with the world, a love for the world. So what do we do?

How do we respond? Well, James number three gives a call to humility. A call to humility in verses six through ten. Verse six says, but he gives more grace. God is jealous. God is consuming fire. God is angry with the wicked. God is an enemy of those who love the world, but he is also gracious. And it says here that he gives more grace or he gives greater grace. His grace never comes to an end. He always gives more grace to cover our sin. He gives grace that's greater than all of our sin. If you guys remember back in August, we went to the Comets game downtown. It was a bunch of fun. I took Charlie with us. He's four now. And he and I went and got some Dippin' Dots, which is, I just love Dippin' Dots. The people who came up with that idea are my people. Dippin' Dots are great. And if I admit, like even as a 30-year-old man,
I was kind of sad when we ran out of Dippin' Dots. We shared them. I was a little bit sad when we ate the last of them. I wish they were bottomless. I wish there was like chips and salsa at Chili's. They just kept those things coming. But God's grace never runs out. But we never get to the bottom of God's grace. He always has more grace. He always has greater grace to cover all of our sin. And so James goes on and says he gives more grace. Therefore, it says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. God is dressed for battle against the proud. He's an enemy of the proud, but he is gracious to those who are humble. God opposes the proud. And James is going to shift gears here. This letter is incredibly practical. It's incredibly down to earth. But here he's going to give about 10 commands in four verses. So he's going to stack these commands up pretty deeply here in these next two verses. He wants us to do certain things. And as you look, these commands are kind of bookended by statements about humility, statements about grace even. So verse 6, he says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. If you look with me at verse 10, he says humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. So verse 6 and verse 10 are statements about humility. Verses 7 through 9 are how to be humble. What does a humble life look like? How do you know if you're living in a humble way? Look with me at verse 7. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.
[31:28] Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. So he says submit yourselves to God. This means to line yourselves up under God. Submit yourself to him. Bow down to him. He says resist the devil and he will flee from you. As we think about Satan, he's incredibly powerful. He's incredibly evil. He's incredibly enslaving. But through the Holy Spirit, we actually have power over him because of God's grace. And so because he is powerful and tempting and enslaving and evil, he can do some scary things, but he should not be feared by believers. And so in 1 John 4.4 it says, he who is in you, referencing the Holy Spirit, is greater than he who is in the world. And so we have the power through the Spirit to resist Satan. And James says he will flee from you when you resist him. And he says draw near to God and he will draw near to you. This language is used in the Old Testament to describe priests drawing near to God, approaching

God on behalf of the people of Israel. And now in the New Testament, all of us as believers are able to draw near to God. We can come to him with our requests and with our prayers. We can draw near to him and he promises to draw near to us. Now he says, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. There's a reference to hands and heart, external actions, internal motives.
We sin in both ways. We sin in what we do and we sin in what we think. And so we need to cleanse both aspects of our lives. And if you ever start a hand soap company, please make James 4.8 your

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slogan.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Anyway, that's my business idea. We need cleansing in both our actions and in our heart motivations. And it may be easy for us to think about cleaning up our external actions.
How do we clean our hearts? Well, that's something you can't do. That's something you don't have the power to do. You have to be born again. You have to be saved. You have to be cleansed by the God who made you. And the way he does this, James is calling these people to repentance. And he's calling all of us to repentance as well. And for us as believers, we need to continually go to him and confess our sins and ask him for forgiveness. If you're an unbeliever, you need to be forgiven for the very first time.
[34:11] And if you draw near to him, he will draw near to you. God has sent his son to pay for our sins, to cleanse us of all of our sins. And if you draw near to him, he is faithful to forgive you your sins.

And he continues this call to humility. He says, be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James is not against all laughter.
What James is saying here is that repentance is a messy business. Repentance requires sorrow. Repentance requires regret and shame over what you've done. And so what he's against is this kind of shallow laughter. The picture here is you telling someone, hey, you're living in sin.
And then I'm just kind of sure. James is saying, get rid of your laughter. Let that laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Repentance before the Lord is a serious business. It's not a laughing matter. And so in this call to humility, he's asking us to turn from our sin, to turn from our love of this world and follow Christ. Are you grieved by your sin? Do you hate your sin? Does your sin at some level make you sad? Does it make you feel ashamed of what you've done? I think all those things are biblical feelings that accompany this humility. On Sunday night, Sam was at the Thunder game. Maybe some of you also are at the Thunder game. And as you know, J-Dub got hurt. And it was gruesome. It was not a pretty sight. And for like days after, I'm not even like the best and biggest Thunder fan, but for days after,
I would kind of just come back to mind and be like, man, that's just sad. Like it's just, thunder season is over. It just feels awful. And that kind of sorrow is just kind of a small example of I think how we should feel about our sin. When our sin comes to mind, there should just kind of be a baseline like regret and some pain that's involved there. I think that's what James is calling for here. He's like, this isn't a time to laugh. This isn't a time for jokes. Mourn and weep over your sin. Mourn and weep over all the times you've befriended the world and followed the course and path of this world. And he concludes in verse 10, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. If you lower yourself before the Lord now, you'll be exalted for all eternity.
[37:01] But if you exalt yourself before the Lord now, you'll be humbled for all eternity. And so James sets before us the choice of two friendships here. You can choose friendship with this world or you can choose friendship with God. James would call you and I want you to repent of your friendship with the world and follow Christ. Humble yourself before God and he will exalt you. James' question in this passage is which friendship will you pursue? Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you so much for our time together this evening. Thank you for your grace in our lives. You've sent your Son to pay for all of our worldliness, to pay for all of our sins against you. And so the best gift you've given us is Christ. And I pray that even as we go to you in prayer and ask for things that we need or things that we want in our life, that we don't forget that you have provided so much for us in Christ. Everything we need for life and godliness is found in your Son. So I pray we'd be grateful. I pray we'd be marked by a friendship with you and not worldliness. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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