

Session 7 – Questions

James 4:1-10 – Wisdom in Relationship

JAMES
Pearls for Wise Living



A. Review the Context

In the last lesson, James drew our attention to the contrasts between godly and earthly wisdom. Which do we want to do: Obey God and submit to his will, or follow our own desires? We cannot do both. Earthly wisdom springs from the devil. It turns our focus inward so that decisions spring from and are fueled by selfish desire. It seeks to make us god, the one who determines right and wrong. It is the choice put before Adam and Eve in the garden, the choice that led to the Fall, and it is the choice that continues to lead to disorder and jealousy and untruth and “vile practice” in our lives today.

Godly wisdom, in contrast, comes from God and is directed outward. The purest example of it was God’s decision to conquer evil by becoming a man and dying on the Cross. What folly! exclaims the worldly mind. What kind of a god would do that? Only One whose love and wisdom so far surpasses all other wisdom that nothing is impossible. He used the “wisest” tactics of the devil to accomplish his own ends and bring about an even greater—and everlasting—glory. This wisdom can be understood only by the one who has God’s spirit within, and it leads to peace and righteousness and other good fruits.

One might expect such godly wisdom to be the hallmark of the early Christian community, but James now takes a turn that suggests things were otherwise. The “wars” and “fighting” among them show they are not practicing what they believe. James examines the root of the problem and proposes a solution.

As you read from James 4 for this lesson, pay particular attention to the words that indicate a focus on *relationships*. Wars and fighting. Coveting. Infidelity. Enmity. Friendship. Jealousy. Drawing near. After the previous lesson, it might be easy to think it all comes down to choice: to choosing which wisdom to apply in a particular situation. But how many of us are able to do, always, what we want or think we should? The ultimate solution is found in a right relationship with God.

B. Read the Story

Now carefully read James 4:1-10.

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of James’ message. If you don’t understand something, make a note to bring it up in the discussion.

Causes of Division (James 4:1-3)

1. The cause of division and infighting in Christian churches is the same as that of wars and fighting generally. In verses 1-2a, what does James say that cause is, and why?

2. a. What reason does James go on to give for desires not being fulfilled?

b. **Think about it:** Why is asking for something only to “spend it on your passions” ineffective? Or to ask another way, why does that kind of asking not lead to fulfillment? Read also *Catechism* No. 2536.

3. a. James implies that there is a right way to ask, in order to receive. What do you learn from these other New Testament passages about asking rightly?
 - **Matthew 21:22**
 - **John 15:7-8**
 - **Philippians 4:6**
 - **1 John 3:22**
 - **1 John 5:14-15**b. It is good to bring our requests to God. Yet He knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8)! Read Matthew 6:31-33. What is the most important thing to do if we want our needs and desires fulfilled, even more important than asking correctly?

Infidelity Rebuked (James 4:4-6)

4. a. James begins his next section with “Unfaithful creatures!” Or, as the Greek has it, “Adulteresses!” **Think about it:** In what way might “friendship with the world” be considered committing “adultery” against God?

- b. To understand that better, imagine trying to fulfill your needs for love and intimacy outside of your marriage. What would that do to your relationship with your spouse? How would it affect you inside? Now apply that image to satisfying your needs outside of your covenant relationship with the Lord. What would that do to your prayer life? To your experience at mass? To your ability to hear God’s voice and discern His will? To your sense of peace in times of trouble?

How can God be jealous?

The jealousy described of God in James 4:5 is not the same thing as the jealousy James spoke against in chapter 3, which might be more aptly called envy (envy wants what others have and seeks to take those things, even at the expense or harm of the other). God’s “jealousy” is something else entirely. It is not a disorder, it is His intense pursuit of our good. God loves us with a limitless, undying love and He longs for our undivided faithfulness, love, and devotion in return. This is entirely appropriate in the context of His covenant relationship with us. We are in one sense His beloved children, in another sense His precious Bride. He created us and gave everything for us, even his life. His “jealousy” is a sign of the strength of His love.

- 5. Maintaining fidelity to God can be hard amid the attractions of the world. What hope of help is in verse 6? (For a definition of “grace,” see *Catechism* No. 1996 ff.)

The solution (James 4:7-10)

- 6. Instead of yielding to the warring passions within us, what does James tell us to do? List them below along with the effects James says will follow.

Steps to take	Results to expect

7. The devil can tempt you but he cannot make you sin. Resist! And he will flee from you, James says. Jesus himself demonstrated how to do this when he faced the Devil in the desert (cf Matthew 4; we looked at this in Session 1). Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and record additional ways to stand against the devil.

8. What are some ways you can draw near to God? How can you cleanse your hands and purify your heart? (See also Psalm 24:3-4.)

9. Verses 9 and 10 hone in on the root issue and solution. What is it?

10. **Think about it:** It may seem that being humble and submitting to God would make one a “doormat,” that it leaves no room for any type of fulfillment. How does James counter this false idea?

D. Application

- **Memory verse: James 4:7**

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Think about the various parts of your life: your home and family, your school or workplace, your neighborhood, your parish. Are there signs of division in any of them? What have you learned from James that can help you heal division and avoid further damage, and how can you put it into practice this week?

- What “pearl” of wisdom spoke to you most in this lesson from James, and how? Write it here and on the back of your *Pearls for Wise Living* card as a reminder to put it into practice this week.

Ask our heavenly Father, “who gives to all men generously and without reproaching” (1:5), to give you the wisdom and steadfastness you need to become a “doer of the word.”

Dear Lord,

Sample

Sample

Session 7 – Responses

James 4:1-10 – Wisdom in Relationship

JAMES
Pearls for Wise Living

A. Review the Context

Discussion Leaders: Take some time to review briefly what was learned in the previous lesson. As a group, recite the memory verse that was recommended. Those who did not memorize it may use their *Pearls of Wise Living* cards. Don't forget to repeat the reference before and after saying the verse:

James 3:13 – “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” (James 3:13).

Before continuing, summarize or have someone read the introduction to this lesson (“Review the Context” in the Questions).

B. Read the Story

Discussion Leaders: Rather than reading the entire passage at the start of the discussion, read it in sections as you proceed through the questions. Begin your group discussion time with a brief prayer.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Discussion Leaders: Take your group through the questions, encouraging participation. Try to make sure the points covered in the Responses are brought up, even though discussion will often go beyond them.

Causes of division (James 4:1-3)

1. *The cause of division and infighting in Christian churches is the same as that of wars and fighting generally. In verses 1-2a, what does James say that cause is, and why?*

Division and fighting result from “passions at war in [our] members,” or a conflict of competing desires, James says. They result from unfulfilled desires, greed, and envy. Those who don't get what they want, get angry—and fight and war and even kill.

In an earlier lesson, we learned about the internal “civil war” between flesh and spirit called *concupiscence* that reigns in each of us since the Fall. As James makes clear here, if you cannot control what is going on inside of yourself, it will work its way out and affect the community as well. If you would like to know more about concupiscence, read *Catechism* Nos. 405, 418, and 1264, as well as the sections pertaining to the Ninth and Tenth Commandments (Nos. 2514-2543)

2. a. *What reason does James go on to give for desires not being fulfilled?*

“You do not have, because you do not ask,” James says. Presumably they try to obtain things for themselves instead of depending on God to provide. Or if they do ask, they don't receive because they merely want things so they can spend them on their passions.

Facilitators: Desire is not bad in itself. In fact, it is good to desire good things and to ask rightly for them. Prepare for questions regarding legitimate vs. disordered desire by reading *Catechism* Nos. 2535 and 2537.

- b. **Think about it:** Why is asking for something only to “spend it on your passions” ineffective? Or to ask another way, why does that kind of asking not lead to fulfillment? Read also Catechism No. 2536.

Answers will vary. When you spend something instead of investing it, you consume it and it is soon gone. Temporary fulfillment is all that is gained and the hole one sought to fill is soon empty again. As the *Catechism* says, “Our thirst for another’s goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: ‘He who loves money never has money enough.’” This principle is easily illustrated from life. Everyone has seen appetite increase in those who don’t control their eating. In the same way, sexual indulgence increases lust while never satisfying a longing for intimacy. “Easy” partners are quickly spent or “used up” and discarded, while the search for love continues.

3. a. *James implies that there is a right way to ask, in order to receive. What do you learn from these other New Testament passages about asking rightly?*

- **Matthew 21:22:** Asking in prayer, with faith (as opposed to grasping on one’s own), is all-important! To be in this attitude is to recognize that God is the source of all good things (James 1:17) and that he rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).
- **John 15:7-8:** When you abide in Christ and his words abide in you, your petitions will bear fruit. As James said earlier, what is in the heart comes forth in action; in this case, the disposition of the heart influences the desires themselves. As the Psalmist wrote, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (37:4). Surely this applies to the desires themselves as well as to their fulfillment.
- **Philippians 4:6:** It is “prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*” that bears fruit. Inherent in that thanksgiving is an appreciation of God’s blessings, and an acknowledgement of their source, that is pleasing to God.
- **1 John 3:22:** The obedience and good works that James has stressed are pleasing to God and put us in a position to receive that for which we ask.
- **1 John 5:14-15:** Asking “according to His will”—again, a result of abiding in God and delighting in Him—will invariably bear fruit because we have aligned our wills with that of the Giver. [In contrast, can you imagine asking for something that is against God’s will? Would you expect the One who desires your best to give you that thing?]

- b. *It is good to bring our requests to God. Yet He knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8)! Read Matthew 6:31-33. What is the most important thing to do if we want our needs and desires fulfilled, even more important than asking correctly?*

The most important thing to do is to order our desires so they are directed at God’s kingdom and His righteousness. If we seek Him above all else, we will find Him and will also find in Him the fulfillment of all we desire.

Infidelity Rebuked (James 4:4-6)

4. a. *James begins his next section with “Unfaithful creatures!” Or as the Greek has it, “Adulteresses!” **Think about it:** In what way might “friendship with the world” be considered committing “adultery” against God?*

“Friendship with the world” doesn’t mean loving or appreciating creation; it means aligning our desires with those of the world, over and against God and the good He desires for us, and finding fulfillment there. This is spiritual adultery in the way that seeking to fulfill desire in someone other

than a spouse is physical adultery. You can be friends with the world or with God but not both, because allegiance to one turns you away from the other.

- b. *To understand that better, imagine trying to fulfill your needs for love and intimacy outside of your marriage. What would that do to your relationship with your spouse? How would it affect you inside? Now apply that image to satisfying your needs outside of your covenant relationship with the Lord. What would that do to your prayer life? To your experience at mass? To your ability to hear God’s voice and discern His will? To your sense of peace in times of trouble?*

Answers will be personal and will vary. Many people easily see the dangers of marital infidelity while they fail to recognize acts of infidelity to God or the way that seeking satisfaction in other “gods” separates us from Him and is a deep betrayal of our covenant relationship. This is a call to recognize the warning signs in our lives.

- 5. *Maintaining fidelity to God can be hard amid the attractions of the world. What hope of help is in verse 6? (For a definition of “grace,” see Catechism No. 1996 ff.)*

God gives us the grace we need to avoid friendship with the world and remain faithful to Him. (Not only that, He gives us “more grace” as we need it!) God opposes the proud, sending them tumbling from a platform that could lead to envy and destruction, and gives grace to those who are humble. This grace is “the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God” (Catechism No. 1996). It is the gift of God’s own life in our souls, enabling us to live and act by his love. It is the power that makes it possible for us to act on the response we long to make to His love.

The solution (James 4:7-10)

- 6. *Instead of yielding to the warring passions within us, what does James tell us to do? List them below along with the effects James says will follow.*

Steps to take	Results to expect
Submit yourself to God	
Resist the devil	The devil will flee from you
Draw near to God	God will draw near to you
Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts	
Be wretched, mourn and weep; let laughter turn to mourning and joy to dejection	
Humble yourself before the Lord	The Lord will exalt you

- 7. *The devil can tempt you but he cannot make you sin. Resist! And he will flee from you, James says. Jesus himself demonstrated how to do this when he faced the devil in the desert (see Matthew 4; we looked at this in Session 1). Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and record additional ways to stand against the devil.*

Paul encourages the Ephesians to “put on the whole armor of God” including the weapon Jesus himself used, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (vs. 17). The other weapons that provide a defense against the devil are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation. Several battle tactics are also mentioned: constant prayer in the Spirit, keeping alert, and perseverance. The battle cannot be ignored. As St Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:8, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.”

8. *What are some ways you can draw near to God? How can you cleanse your hands and purify your heart? (See also Psalm 24:3-4.)*

Answers will vary but may include things like private prayer, reading Scripture, Eucharistic adoration, performing acts of charity in order to love Him in others, living chastely, and so on. “Cleansing hands” should not be taken literally. The ritual purification required by Mosaic law was a sign pointing to the need for internal cleansing. Such purity, manifested in truth and in a soul raised to God, is necessary to draw close to God, as Psalm 24 makes clear. Today we have the benefit of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist to cleanse us from sin and double-mindedness.

9. *Verses 9 and 10 hone in on the root issue and solution. What is it?*

The heart attitude that defeats pride, heads off division, and binds people together and to God is *humility*. James instructs us to “be wretched and mourn and weep” —in other words, to recognize that we are sinners and turn to God in penitent sorrow.

10. **Think about it:** *It may seem that being humble and submitting to God would make one a “doormat,” that it leaves no room for any type of fulfillment. How does James counter this false idea?*

One example of a passion people experience (and one that very often leads to discord!) is the desire for self-exaltation. Submitting to God and humbling one’s self may seem at first glance to be completely opposed to self-exaltation. And indeed they are; but paradoxically they lead to that which was desired in the first place: a true exaltation, exaltation by God and not by self, an exaltation that is pure and lasting.

D. Application

Discussion Leaders: Recite the memory verse together as a group and discuss ways they found to put it into practice:

James 4:7 – *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

From time to time, go back and recite previous verses learned as well.

If time allows, have group members share the “pearls” of wisdom from Session 7 that meant the most to them and why. Remind them to continue writing them on their *Pearls for Wise Living* cards and using those as a reminder during the week.

As a follow-up to this discussion, listen to or watch Jeff Cavins’ talk on Session 7: James 4:1-10 – “Wisdom in Relationship.”