

Grace for the Humble

War & Peace Part 5
James 4:6 7-12-2015

Summary: Grace is supremely valuable, and the way to get it is through humility. Pride is the underlying cause – the soil out of which the bad tree of worldliness grows, which grows the branches of hostile desires, which produce the fruit of fights and quarrels.

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Introduction

Listen very carefully to these words I am about to read because Jesus said your eternal destiny depends on whether you understand them.

Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the

kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

When you think about what the big, important, essential things are in Scripture, it does not get any bigger or more essential than humility. Whether or not you are humble determines whether you will go to heaven or hell, because it determines whether or not you can know God. Jesus started the greatest sermon ever preached by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs (and theirs alone) is the kingdom of heaven." If you haven't been to church in a while you picked a good day to come because there isn't any topic more crucial for knowing God than humility. Why is that? It is because of what James says in verse 6.

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Humility is so incredibly important because that is the way to get grace from God.

Grace

What is Grace? Everything We Need

What is that worth? How much would you pay for an ounce of grace? I think gold goes for about \$1300 per ounce right now - what would an ounce of grace be worth to you? Obviously grace doesn't come in ounces; I just ask the question to get us thinking about how much we value grace. How much would you pay to get more of it than you already have? Do you feel any special need for more grace? Do you feel like your life would be a lot better if you got more? Or that you will be in big trouble if you don't get more? What do we need it for exactly? What does it do? What is it? It is amazing how often we use words every day in church and then when you go to define it you realize, "Wait a second, do I even know what this is?"

God's Favor

So what is grace? The most basic definition of the Greek word is *favor*. God's grace is favor from God. It is the opposite of having God against you.

6 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

So getting grace means having God be on your side – it is God's favor.

The Results of Grace

Now, what happens to you when God favors you? What are the results of grace? If you get some antibiotics, the result might be that it kills an infection. If you get some food, the result might be a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. If you get a raise, the result is more money in the bank. What happens if you get grace?

Salvation

One thing that happens is salvation.

Titus 2:11 the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared

When you get grace from God you become a child of God, your sins are all forgiven, and you go to heaven when you die rather than hell. But that is not the only effect of grace. What else happens when you get God's favor?

Honor

In 2 Corinthians 9:14 we see that grace causes other believers to have a special love for you.

2 Corinthians 9:14 They will have deep affection for you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

People will have a desire to be around you and they will have a high respect for you and a special love for you.

Upbuilding

Another result is you will be built up.

Acts 20:32 Now I commit you ... to the word of his grace, which can build you up

When God favors you and you receive His grace, it makes you more and more what you are supposed to be.

Strengthening

Not only that, but grace also gives you power and strength and enablement to work hard and accomplish great things.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Hebrews 13:9 It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace

Grace gives you strength.

Holiness

What else? In 2 Corinthians 1:12 Paul said that as a result of receiving grace he was able to conduct himself in holiness and sincerity. When God favors you, one of the results is you live a holy life. Your motives become more pure, and you find yourself resisting temptation and choosing God's way over sin more and more.

Joyful Generosity

And that holiness touches every part of life. For example - your finances. In 2 Corinthians 8 God gave grace to the Macedonian churches and the result was incredible generosity. They just gave and gave and gave even out of their extreme poverty and did so with exuberant joy (2 Cor.8:1-9).

Gratitude

It affects your gratitude. In 2 Corinthians 4:15 the effect of grace is it causes thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. When you get grace you feel happier about the blessings in your life. You notice them more and they cause you to have more affection toward God in your heart.

Good Works

In 2 Corinthians 9:8 grace makes you **abound in every good work**. Not only does it enable you to do every kind of righteous, godly thing, but to *abound* in all those things.

Self-Control

Titus 2:12 says that grace teaches us how to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. Grace gives you self-control.

Satisfaction

Grace also has a powerful effect on your soul. It satisfies some of the deepest cravings and longings that you have. So much so that when Paul was crying out to God for relief from suffering in 2 Corinthians 12, God said, "**My grace is sufficient for you**" (2 Cor.12:9). If you experience God's grace, you will be content and happy and satisfied even if the extreme suffering keeps going. God didn't say "My grace ought to be enough for you." He said it actually is.

Encouragement and Hope

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16 it says that through grace you get encouragement (or comfort) and hope.

Successful Ministry

It is the secret to every good thing. If you ever wonder how Paul could do the things he did and have such incredible godliness and willingness to suffer and so much love and wisdom and perseverance and unbounded joy all the time, and how he could have such an unbelievably fruitful and successful ministry - he gives the secret in 1 Timothy 1:14.

1 Timothy 1:14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly

His secret was not reading tips from the latest mega church pastor's book on how to have success. The secret was very simple - lots and lots of grace. And that's the secret he passed on to Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

That's all you need. If you want to train up a great man of God, teach him how to get grace.

When we need something from God - anything, what does Hebrews 4:16 tell us to do? Approach the throne of what? Grace. When we get to the end of 1 Peter we are going to see that the entire book was all about grace.

1 Peter 5:12 I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

And in Hebrews 12:15 we are told, **See to it that no one misses the grace of God.** That's one thing you can *not* afford to miss out on. That is why over and over the writers of the New Testament keep saying, "Grace to you" in their letters.

Grace to you, grace and peace to you, the grace of Christ be with your spirit - you know how many times that is repeated in the New Testament? I counted 34. How many things can you think of that are repeated 34 times in the New Testament? Paul says it; Peter says it; John; the writer of Hebrews; it is in the book of Revelation. It is not just one writer's style - you see it in 17 different New Testament books. I think God is trying to make a point, don't you think?

So how valuable is grace? We have been learning in James about hostile, selfish desires, and some of you may be discouraged after the past few weeks because you have found the problem, but you can't seem to find the solution. Now you know *why* you're yelling at your kids all the time, but you're still yelling at your kids all the time.

Now you know why you can't seem to control your tongue, but even though you know the cause of the problem, the problem is still there. What is the medicine that can actually *solve* the problem? Grace. If you had a little more grace, you would have a lot more victory.

What about the problem of worldliness? Your heart has a love affair with certain worldly pleasures. And after last Sunday you now understand why that is, but the problem is still there? What can be done to get your heart off of loving the world and onto loving God more? Grace. Some of you have a massive struggle with lust. You tried everything; nothing works. You know what will work? Grace.

Some of you have a problem with worry or anxiety - grace will solve that. Maybe your marriage is in shambles. Grace will heal that and transform your marriage into one where you have deep delight in

each other and your home is full of joy. Some of you are enslaved to some behavior – smoking, drinking, pornography, overeating – nothing is going to be powerful enough to break that bondage except grace.

Some of you can struggle with obsessive thoughts – you just cannot get control of your thought life. Grace will enable you to get control. There are probably people in this church who are destroying themselves by hanging onto a grudge because they just can't seem to forgive. They want to forgive but it seems impossible. That's because they don't have enough grace. If they had enough grace they would be able to gladly and happily and completely forgive. Did you know that grace can overcome even the deepest depression and replace it with joy? It can transform an angry, hateful heart to a rejoicing, loving heart.

Maybe you are just going through a desert. You can't seem to draw near to God. No matter how much you read your Bible or pray it seems like he's a million miles away and you can't find your way out of the pit that you're in spiritually. Grace would do it.

Is your ministry lacking fruit? Your efforts aren't accomplishing anything? Or the work isn't fulfilling? Grace would change that. Grace is pretty valuable stuff isn't it? But you can't buy an ounce of grace even with \$1300 or \$13,000 not even \$13 million. It's not for sale. So how do you get it? How could you ever get your hands on some of this priceless stuff?

The answer is in verse 6 – **God ... gives grace to the humble**. James 4:6 is actually a quotation of Proverbs 3:34, but it is a principle that appears many, many times in Scripture. God's grace goes to the lowly. It is like the rain that falls on the earth – it comes down on all the mountains and high places, and where does it go? It all runs down to the lowest valleys. That is a perfect picture of God's grace. Kent Hughes calls that principle the gravity of grace. It always makes its way down to the lowest hearts. And the proud miss out.

Fruit, Branch, Tree, Soil

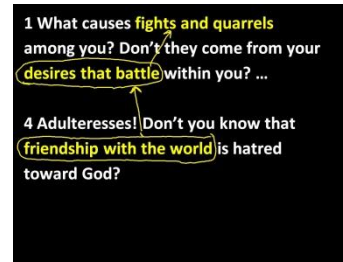
In our ongoing study of James, the past few weeks we have been in this fascinating section in chapters 3 and 4 where James is answering this question, **what causes fights and quarrels among you?** James is a brilliant psychologist. I give you a lot of warnings about modern, secular psychology because it mixes in so much human wisdom. But true psychology is a fascinating and supremely valuable study. And if you want to study true psychology and really get a handle on how the human soul works, there's no better place than the book of James. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he has insights into the human soul that have enabled us to diagnose all kinds of problems deep down in our motives and desires and appetites and inclinations. And nowhere does James dig deeper than in this passage where he presents us with the external behavior problem (which is fights and quarrels and conflicts in relationships), then he traces that fruit back to the branches that are producing it. Those branches are hostile desires.

Fights and quarrels come from covetous, hostile desires. Then James traces that back one more level and shows us the tree that's producing these bad branches.

The tree is worldliness - thinking like the world and falling in love with the world's pleasures and treasures. That's what causes the hostile desires. But James still isn't content even there. He still hasn't dug down deep enough and got to the bottom of it. So he takes us down one more level and shows us the soil that is producing this bad tree. The soil is selfish pride.

That is the core of the problem. You have the soil of pride, and out of that grows the tree of worldliness, and that produces branches of hostile desires, and those desires produce the fruit of fights and quarrels and conflicts in our relationships.

This is why peacemaking is so difficult. Very often our efforts at peacemaking don't work very well because they are superficial. At the most superficial level, we try to solve the problem at the level of the conflict itself. We just try to get rid of the bad fruit. We yell at our kids, "Stop fighting!" That won't get you anywhere. We find that when we try to pick the rotten fruit off the branches it just keeps producing



more and more of that bad fruit. So then we take it a level deeper and go after the branches. We try to satisfy those hostile desires. A husband and wife come in for counseling because they're fighting and the counselor says, "What's the problem?"

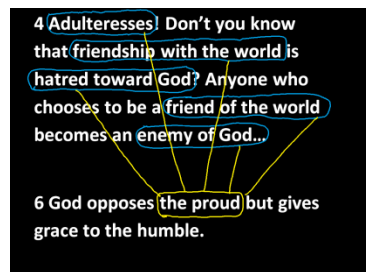
"He doesn't care about me! He comes home late every night without even calling. He never helps me around the house, he never helps with the kids..."

And he says, "She's constantly nagging me. I'm lucky if we have physical intimacy once a month. The house is a huge mess..."

And so the counselor just gives them a bunch of tips on how to satisfy each other's hostile desires. "You, start coming home on time and help her around the house."

"And you, make sure you're not withholding intimacy and don't nag him."

But that never works. Why? Because those bad branches that you keep trying to cut off will keep growing back because they are the product of a bad tree. What is the tree? Worldly attitudes, worldly reasoning, worldly values, and getting your happiness from worldly pleasures. And as long as all that is present, no amount of arbitration or satisfaction of your desires will solve the problem of conflict. If two kids are fighting over a toy, if you step in and get one kid distracted with another toy, so they are both happy – that's great, for about five minutes. But it's just a matter of time before they start fighting over something else. Why? Because worldly attitudes that say, "My happiness comes from earthly things" will inevitably keep running into conflict with people who get in the way. That worldliness is the bad tree and it will keep producing bad branches.



So what's the cause of the bad tree? Selfish pride. That's the bad soil that grows the bad tree. I get that from verse 6. James describes all these problems - our out-of-control tongues, selfish attitudes, fights and quarrels, worldly thinking, addiction to the world's pleasures – then sums all of that up in verse 6 with a single word – pride.

That is the contaminated soul that grows the bad tree that has the bad branches that produce the bad fruit. And so until something is done about that selfish pride, no matter what you try to do, you are always going to have that worldly tree producing those branches of hostile desires and the fruit of fights and quarrels. That's why, whenever Scripture calls us to peaceful relationships, it also calls us to humility.

Ephesians 4:1 live a life worthy of the calling you have received 2 with patience, bearing with one another in love with all humility and meekness

We'll never get to patience and love until we have meekness and humility.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

The harmony won't come until the pride goes. Why? Because...

Proverbs 13:10 Pride breeds quarrels

Pride is the source of the whole problem.

Pride and Worldly Thinking

Now, at first that might seem a little counter-intuitive. How is worldliness a symptom of pride? That idea isn't unique to James. When John describes worldliness in 1 John 2:16, he includes **the pride of life** in his description. So pride is definitely connected to worldliness, but what's the connection? Well, remember there are two parts to worldliness – adopting their way of thinking in their values, and falling in love with their pleasures so that you get your happiness from earthly things.

Worldliness:

- *Adopting the World's Way of Thinking*
- *Seeking Your Happiness from Earthly Pleasures*

What's the connection between those things and pride? Well, adopting the world's way of thinking is prideful because it elevates human reasoning above God's Word. Any time you elevate your own logic and what seems right to you above what God says – that is the epitome of pride. Any time you say, "I realize the Bible says this, but I just can't accept that. Here's what I think is right..." – that is the epitome of arrogance and unchecked pride. You know better than God?

"It just doesn't make sense to me why there would be anything wrong with two consenting adults of the same sex getting married."

"It doesn't make sense to me – this thing the Bible says is wrong."

So God says one thing, your sensibilities say the opposite, and you are going with your ideas over God's? Really? You are going to put your mind up against the mind of the Creator? How long have you been alive? Of all the information that exists in the universe, what percentage is in your head again? One hundred percent is in God's mind. But you know better than Him? So is it prideful to adopt worldly attitudes? Yes.

Pride and Earthly Pleasures

And what about the other side of worldliness - seeking your happiness from earthly pleasures? How is that connected to pride? That is prideful in a couple ways.

Self-Importance

First it's prideful because it puts my preferences in the desires of my flesh as the supreme priority – even above what God says is best. God says trials and suffering are good for you. He says that all the trials that He brings in your life are carefully designed to bring about His perfect, eternal purposes. And I say, "Me feeling good right now is more important than all of that." That's pride. Any time I am wearing the "My comfort is more important than God's purposes" badge – that's monumentally prideful.

Control

Secondly, getting my happiness from this world is an act of pride because it puts me in control. I can be in charge of when I get what I want – at least to some degree. If I feel depressed or empty or sad, and I decide to make myself feel better through food, I can go to the refrigerator whenever I please. I can turn on the TV whenever I please. I can play golf or turn on my music or exercise or play a video game when I decide. I don't have to wait for God and His timing. I don't have to seek Him in prayer and then wait until He decides the time is right. I don't have to pray, "Nevertheless, Your will, not mine be done." When I get a craving for satisfaction, I can act. If I decide to medicate the emptiness of my soul through family or friends or music or pornography or pot or a couple glasses of wine or shopping or gambling - those things are somewhat within my control. But God - dealing with Him requires total humility. He calls all the shots; I call none of them. He does absolutely everything on His schedule; I have to submit to that. I am 100% at His mercy. I have zero control over Him.

He promises to satisfy our souls, but in His timing, and in His way, and on His terms. Why would our ridiculous, insane souls look at the infinite treasures and delights that God offers on one hand, and the dung heap of this world on the other hand, and say, "I think I'll try to satisfy my desires in the dung heap"? Why do we do that? Because in the dung heap I get to pretend I'm king of the heap. And pride

would rather have dung that it can control than eternal delights that it can't control and has to trust God for.

The DNA of all Sin

Pride isn't just one in a list of sins. Pride is the DNA of all sin. Every sin rebels against the will of God. Every time we sin we are essentially saying, "God, my plan is better than Yours. My desires are more important than Yours. My comfort is more important than Your glory." And that is the essence of pride. So all sin grows out of the soil of pride. The sins of coveting and stealing – that's just pride saying, "My pleasures are more important than your pleasures." Sins of anger and hostility – that's pride saying, "My desires must be fulfilled!" Sins of gluttony or immorality – that's pride saying, "My appetites are more important than God's way." Lying and dishonesty, that's pride saying, "The outcome I want here is more important than truth." Every sin we commit is rooted in pride.

Any kind of unfaithfulness to God is prideful because it places my will above God's. Think of the arrogance of siding with the world against God, and joining our hearts with those who lives as though God didn't exist. He is the Almighty Creator of the Universe. He speaks galaxies into existence. He will judge the living and the dead. He is over all, in all, and through all. All things exist for His pleasure and His glory, and His will is the measure and standard of all goodness and all this is right. He is awesome!

And what am I? I am a creature. I'm a speck of dust on a speck of dust that would instantly go out of existence if God stopped sustaining me for even one second. Who am I to resist His will? Who am I to stand up and say, "My desire is more important than God's will right now"? What indescribable arrogance and pride does it take to make a created being like me ever say, "I know God said not to do this, but I'm going to do it anyway"? Such pride!

God Resists the Proud

It is pride, but that is not the main thing James wants to tell us. The main thing he wants us to understand is what God will do toward proud people.

6 That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

He opposes the proud – fights against them. And it's no wonder. Of course God will resist me and fight against me if I set myself up against Him. What else could He do – turn the keys of the universe over to me? The entire Old Testament is the story of God lifting up the humble and bringing down the proud. It doesn't matter who it is either – everyone from Nebuchadnezzar or Herod to the man after God's own heart – King David. Wherever there is pride, God is going to bring it down.

Why is pride such a big deal in God's eyes? It is a big deal because God loves us, and in His love He protects us from harm, and nothing harms the human race more than pride. The best thing that can happen for everyone is when God is in His place and man is in his place. When God is honored, and His glory is clearly seen – nothing is healthier for mankind. Just as a household runs best when the dad acts like a dad, the mom acts like a mom, and the kids act like kids. But when the kids start thinking they are dad, or dad is treated like one of the kids, the whole household is messed up. Cars run best when the engine is in its place and the transmission is in its place and the driver is in the driver's seat. If the transmission gets into the driver's seat – nothing good is going to come of that. This universe runs beautifully when God is seen as God, and the creatures keep their place as creatures. But when man tries to step up into God's place, that does nothing but harm for everyone.

God Brings Down the Proud

And so when some created being tries to climb up into God's place, the most loving thing God can do is put him back down where he belongs. Whatever it is that's puffed you up with pride – whether it be your intelligence or your good looks or your spiritual gift or your skills, do you realize that God can take

it away at any moment? And the more you puff yourself up with pride over it, the more likely God is to do just that? Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his kingdom and greatness; God took away his sanity. Peter was proud of his faithfulness to Christ; God let him fall into the worst possible sin – publicly. Herod took credit for his glory and God struck him dead and he was eaten by worms. Satan is trying to exalt himself against God, and God has already written it in stone that Satan is going to be cast forever into the lake of fire. God will bring down the proud – no matter who they are. Even if they are pastors. In 1 Timothy 3 it warns us not to ordain men who are recent converts – not because they might not do a good job as elders, but because they might become proud and fall under the same judgment as the devil. Anyone who exalts himself will be brought down.

When you lift yourself up in pride, those stairs you are ascending – they are the stairs of the gallows. And so any price is worth paying to avoid pride – any price. God gave Paul a horrible, excruciating thorn in the flesh – just for the sake of keeping him from pride (2 Cor.12:7). And it was worth it. As excruciating as that thorn was, if the only good that ever came out of it was that it prevented pride in Paul’s heart, it was worth it. Why? Because God gives grace to the humble. And Paul needed grace a lot more than he needed relief from his suffering. And he got that grace, and that grace was sufficient for him.

Some of you are suffering under the mighty hand of God right now. And I don’t pretend to know all the various reasons and purposes God has for that particular form of suffering you’re going through right now. But I can tell you this – if you allow it to humble you, and that is the only thing that comes of it, it would be worth it. That’s why Peter says to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

Symptoms of Pride

Pride Blinds

Pride is a hard sin to deal with, because it short-circuits your ability to even acknowledge that it exists. If you go up to a drunk and tell him that his behavior is sinful, he’ll probably hang his head and say, “Yeah, I know. I need to change.” But if you tell a proud man that he is sinful, he will probably just point out 10 things that are wrong with you. Pride has this strange characteristic that it can’t see itself in the mirror. Pride looks in the mirror and sees greatness. It looks in the mirror and sees wisdom and beauty. Sometimes it looks in the mirror and sees humility. But the one thing it never sees is itself. Pride will blind you.

And then it will put your conscience to sleep. Then it will awaken a hundred different sins. I think pride may be the spiritual disease that has the widest variety of symptoms. I’ll give you a sampling of them.

Some of them we’ve already seen in James: anger, irritability, hostility, fights, and quarrels. Proud people are always in some conflict – always getting offended or irritated. He also mentioned **bitter envy**. Pride envies because love does not envy, and pride is the opposite of love. Love rejoices with those who rejoice. Pride is bitter and envious toward those who rejoice because they have what it wishes it had. Another symptom from back in chapter 3 – prideful speech, talking too much. You find yourself throwing in your two cents more often than everyone else, because your input just seems so important for everyone to hear.

Another one is belittling others. Look again at verse 6

6 That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

That’s a loose quotation of Proverbs 3:34. But the word-for-word quotation is this:

Proverbs 3:34 He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

Proud people are very often known for their sarcasm. Even if their sarcasm is just joking around, and everyone knows they aren’t serious – still, it is always in the direction of a put-down. They are experts in

thinking of clever put-downs, but their skill level at building people up is nowhere close to their skill level at sarcastic put-downs.

And in many cases, they aren't joking at all. Proud people are really good at finding what's wrong with everything and everyone around them. They can tell you everything the government is doing wrong, everything the church is doing wrong, everything you're doing wrong - they find fault, and they mock. And if you're not around, they gossip about you. Psalm 101:5 connects gossip with pride.

Some other symptoms of pride: lack of compassion (1 Pe.3:8), people pleasing, thin skin (you can't handle criticism), blame-shifting and making excuses. Pride says, "I'm really sorry I did that, but..." It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a proud person to just say, "I was wrong," and leave it at that. Dishonesty – Proverbs 31:18 says that's a pride problem. Being unteachable (Pr.13:10). Being wise in their own eyes (Pr.26:12). Lack of a servant's heart. Greed. Attention-getting tactics. Those are symptoms of the side of pride that faces toward people – what about the part that faces toward God? Some symptoms of that are:

Disobedience (**Psalm 119:21 ... the proud ... stray from your commands.**) God says, "You are not permitted to go there," and we say, "I'll go there if I please."

Reliance on human wisdom.

Self-sufficiency (which is seen in prayerlessness or passionless prayer, and lack of interest in Scripture). "I've got it covered, God. I don't need You much. I don't need Your Spirit, I don't need guidance from Your Word, I don't need help from Your people – I'm good."

Another one is self-condemnation. "God, You say I'm forgiven, my heart says I'm guilty – my heart wins."

Over-indulgence in earthly pleasures. (**James 5:5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.**)

Lack of submissiveness to authority.

Unforgiveness.

Demanding to know the hidden things of God.

Pride is the essence of sin, and it weaves its tentacles into every corner of our lives.

Humility

So what is humility? The opposite of all that. Humility looks at others and says, "They are more important than me."

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

In a conflict, they think more about compassion for the other person and how they are feeling than they do about winning the debate. When they talk they draw attention to God and to others, not to themselves. They are givers, not greedy. They promote unity rather than discord. They are honest and easy to get along with. They accept correction and confess their sins without excuses. They are teachable - by anyone. And if they come out looking silly, or they don't get the credit they deserve, or they end up with blame they don't deserve – that's not a big issue for them. Small price to pay for peace.

And when humility looks at God, it bows the knee.

"Your will, Lord, not mine be done."

"You want to give me that blessing instead of the one I prayed for? That's good."

"Oh, Your timing isn't right now – You're saying wait? I'll wait."

"You took that thing away from me? The Lord gives, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

"You want me to drop my laptop on Thursday night and lose my entire sermon? Really? You know what You're doing – I don't."

"You're saying no to this fleshly impulse? You say it's sin against You? That's the end of the discussion. No arguing, soul – God said no, the answer's no."

That is the lowly soul. And when you bring yourself down to that lowly place, what happens? The streams and rivers of God's grace come flooding down and fill every hole, every dry canyon, your life flourishes and explodes with life and spiritual strength, and spiritual fruit, and find yourself on the receiving end of all the beatitudes.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ... 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God...

You get all of it, because God give grace to the humble.

That's the general idea. But James isn't going to leave us with generalities. He is going to give us some very, very specific instructions on how to humble ourselves with no less than 10 commands in verses 7-10. We are going to see exactly what it looks like to humble ourselves before God, and, in the process, He is going to give us three more amazing promises. On top of the general promise that we will get grace, three more: He will lift you up, the devil will run away from you, and God will draw near to you. How's that for three heavy-hitters? How would you like to see the back side of Satan as he runs away, and the face of God as He draws near, and the experience of having Him reach out His hand and lift you up? That's next week.

Benediction: Micah 6:7-8 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

1:25 Questions

- 1) Can you think of an example in your life where you tend to go after the fruit, branches, or tree without going after the problem in the soil?
- 2) Which of the symptoms of pride toward God are most evident in your life? (Disobedience, human wisdom, self-sufficiency, self-condemnation, over-indulgence, unsubmitiveness to authority, demanding to know the hidden things, anxiety)
- 3) Which of the marks of pride toward people are the biggest threats in your spiritual life? (Anger, talking too much, talking about yourself, belittling people, envy, lack of compassion, people pleasing, defensive when criticized, making excuses for sin, deceit, being unteachable, causing discord, lack of servanthood, greed, attention-getting tactics).