

What Causes Fights & Quarrels?

War and Peace Part 2
James 4:1-3 6-21-2015

Summary: Fights are caused not by what provokes them, but by covetous desires (desires that rise out of selfish pride and that seek satisfaction for the thirst of the soul from another source besides God (adultery)). The solution is to draw near to God.

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James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Introduction

Picture this: You're driving home after work, it was an average day – things went fine at work. Maybe you're listening to some worship music or praying. You walk into the house, you greet your family, and then at one point in the evening your wife says something and you snap at her with some bitter, harsh words. She snaps back, or gets real quiet and goes into the bedroom. And you are sitting there thinking, *What in the world - why did I say that? I'm not even in a bad mood. Where in the world did that anger come from?*

Or maybe it's your kids. They do the kinds of things that kids do and you are dealing with it just fine, then all of a sudden they do something and there is just a flash of anger. And things come out of your

mouth that you're ashamed of afterward. And you think, *Why am I screaming in my kids? Yesterday I told myself I'm never going to do this again – I said that yesterday. It didn't even last one day.*

Or maybe for you it happens on the highway or at work. And you think, *What is up with that? There are plenty of situations in life where I don't get what I want or I'm disappointed or mistreated in some way and I handle it just fine. There are plenty of times when someone makes a snide remark or doesn't treat me well, and I don't get all upset. So why are there these certain situations where my emotions can just turn on a dime and I can go from being just fine to being irritable or flat out cruel in one second flat?* We go into a situation thinking, *Okay, I'm going to control my tongue, I'm going to control my tongue.* And we walk out thinking, *What is wrong with me? Why can I control my tongue?*

Why do your kids fight in the back seat all the way to grandma's house? Why are they always yelling at each other? Why are you always yelling at them? Why are you at odds with some of your family members? Why do churches split? Why are we forever getting into conflicts with each other?

Or maybe for you it is more long term. Something happened months ago – or even years ago, and you want to forgive, you try to forgive, but you just can't seem to do it. The anger has a grip on you and no matter how hard you try you can't let it go. You know God calls you to love that person but no matter how hard you try, you just can't seem to do it. And you wonder, *Why is it that I can forgive other people, but not this person? Why can I let some things go, but not other things? This hostility in my heart – I don't even want it. Why can't I get rid of it?* That is the question James asks in verse 1 of chapter 4.

Coveting Causes Conflict

What Causes Fights and Quarrels?

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?

It's the Rodney King question - Why can't we all just get along? How hard could it be? Why is it that it is just a matter of time before you and your spouse get into yet another conflict with each other? Of all the billions of human beings in the world, you picked your favorite one and married that one. And you can't even get along with that person. What's wrong with us?

You would think peace would be the simplest thing in the world – all we have to do is not fight. So why does it seem like such an uphill battle? The lead singer of a popular band was interviewed a while back and he said this: "The hardest thing to do is to stick together. Mates, family, marriage, business, bands. It's like resisting gravity."¹ That's really true. Anyone who tries to be a peacemaker realizes very quickly that you are fighting against a force that is pulling hard in the other direction. The curse that God placed on the soil in Genesis 3 seems to apply just as much to relationships as it does to the ground. Stop tending your garden and in a very short time it will be overrun with weeds. Stop tending your relationships and they fall apart – a gravitational pull toward conflict and hostility and splitting up. Why is that?

James gives us the answer, but his answer points in a very different direction than the answer we would normally give. If someone asks us, "What caused that quarrel?" what do we usually say? We point to whatever provoked the quarrel. We point to something outside us that instigated the conflict. But James says, "No, it's not caused by something outside of you." It is not caused by your big brother who is being annoying, it is not caused by someone treating you unfairly, it is not your crazy sister or your loony mother in law. It is not anything on the outside. It comes from something inside you, namely, desires.

¹ Bono (lead singer of U2) in an interview.

What Causes Fights and Quarrels? Unfulfilled Desires

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that wage war within you? **2** You covet something but don't get it so you murder. And you envy, but you cannot have what you want so you quarrel and fight.

Our natural response is to say, "The reason I'm irritable is because the kids' arguing or disobeying."

"My wife being disrespectful."

"My husband being insensitive."

"I lost this valuable thing."

"I suffered this pain, or that hardship."

And James says, "No, those things are not the cause. The cause is you want something, you don't get it, so you get mad at whomever or whatever is blocking your desire." You want peace and quiet in the home, and your kids block that desire, so you get mad. You want to be treated with respect, and someone is disrespectful. You want to hang on to your money, and someone takes it away. You want your plans to work out without a hitch, but someone messes that up, and so you become irritable, or some ungodly words come out of your mouth, or a bad attitude starts to form, or you get into an argument. When we fall into sins like that, James is showing us the cause – the sin beneath the sin – unfulfilled desire.

Why Do Some Unfulfilled Desires Cause Anger But Not Others?

And you might hear that and say, "Ok James, I can see that – except there's just one problem. How do you explain all the times I want something, I don't get it, and I'm just fine? If it were just a matter of unfulfilled desire, I would be angry every time things don't go my way. But most of the time, when I don't get what I want, I don't get upset." Why is it that certain unfulfilled desires set us off, but others don't? You spill something or you drop a bolt and it falls down inside your engine and you are instantly angry. Your kids do something to embarrass you, somebody lies to you or about you, you hit your funny bone on the counter, and you drop into a bad mood. But then there are other things that you desire, and you don't get those, and it doesn't make you mad at all. Someone rolls by in some amazing car and you think, *I sure would love to have one of those...*, or you see some amazing mansion and think, *I wouldn't mind living in a place like that.* Those are desires. And yet you're not pounding your steering wheel: "Why can't I live in that house?!!" You would love to win the lottery, but you're not snapping at your spouse and kicking the dog and getting into a bad mood every time you don't win it. Why?

What Causes Fights and Quarrels? Coveting

James says the culprit in our conflicts – the thing that causes fights and quarrels and that messes up relationships and makes us irritable or angry or easily offended - is our desires, which is true – but why is it only certain desires and not others? The answer is in verse 2.

2 You want something...

That word translated **want** (or your Bible might say, **desire**) – that is the normal Greek word for coveting. Whenever the 10 Commandments are quoted in the New Testament, Commandment #10 (Thou shalt not covet) uses this Greek word.² So you could translate verse 2, **You covet something...** When you have a desire that makes you angry or irritable when you don't get it – it is because that particular desire has crossed the line into covetousness. The reason you don't always get mad when you don't get what you want is because not all of your desires are covetous ones. Only the covetous ones make you mad.

² The same word can be used in some contexts for good desires, but in a context where it is used to describe a sinful kind of desire, it refers to coveteousness.

What is Coveting?

And not only do those desires cause us to sin in our relationships, but it is sinful for us to even have those desires at all. God was very clear: Thou shalt not covet. That means it is ok for me to want food, but it is sin to covet food. It is ok for me to want a new car, but it is sin for me to covet a new car. It is ok for me to desire peace and quiet in the house, but it is sin for me to covet a quiet home. It is ok for me to want to be treated with respect or love, or to be comfortable, or to get my way and have my plans work out well; but it is sin for me to covet those things.

Not a Matter of Intensity

So what is the difference? How do I know when I have gone beyond just wanting and started coveting? Some people teach that it has to do with how strong the desire is. They say coveting is when you want something too much. They say it's ok to have weak desire, just not strong desire. Is that the definition of coveting? If I really, really want something and don't get it, that causes anger and fights, but if I only want it a little bit, then I can handle being disappointed? That sounds logical at first, but it doesn't really match reality. Isn't it true that there are some things you had a very strong, powerful desire for, but you don't get mad when it goes unfulfilled? And aren't there other times when you want some piddly little thing, you don't get it, and it makes you irritable or grumpy? The question of whether it is going to make me mad has nothing to do with it being a strong desire or weak desire. Strong desire is not a bad thing.

Luke 22:15 I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Jesus had strong desires, and so should we.

Not a Matter of the Object

Some other people say, "Maybe it has to do not with the *strength* of my desire, but with the *object* of my desire. They say, "If I desire a good thing or a neutral thing, that's ok, but if I desire a sinful thing, then that's coveting." But that definition won't work in this context either. Think of what they were desiring in chapter 3. They wanted a leadership position in the church. Is that a bad thing to desire?

1 Timothy 3:1 ...If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

That same desire is a good thing in 1 Timothy 3 and a bad thing in James 3.

Definition of Coveting

"Ok, if the definition of coveting is not determined by the intensity of the desire or by the object of the desire - what is it?"

1) Desire that Causes Anger when Unfulfilled

The one marker we have already seen is that you know a desire is a covetous one if you have anger or fighting when you don't get it.

2) Desire Born Out Of Selfish Pride

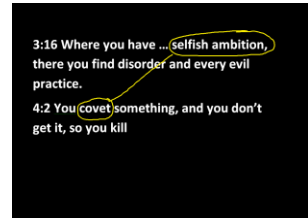
But there are two more clues James gives us in the surrounding context. One of them we learn from what James just said right before this, and the other one we learn from what James says right after this. So let's start by reminding ourselves what he just got done saying in chapter 3. Right at the end of that chapter, he put his finger on the root problem behind our sinful, hostile speech?

James 3:16 Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

The root cause of our disorder and conflicts with each other is **selfish ambition**. Selfish, me first, I'm more important than you are kind of pride. The kind of pride that thinks my preferences and my immediate comforts are the priority. So he just got done saying the cause of our hostilities is selfish pride. And now he is saying the cause of our hostilities is covetous desires.

So if you want to know, "What is the definition of a covetous desire?" – here's a clue. A covetous desire is a desire that is born out of a selfish, prideful, me-first heart. I know a desire is covetous when its goal is to satisfy my selfishness. A covetous desire is a desire that goes along with my attitude that life must go according to my plans. The people and circumstances around me must line up with my preferences. Any desire that rises up out of that attitude is going to be a covetous desire.

So that's part 2 of the definition of covetousness. A covetous desire results in anger when you don't get it, and a covetous desire rises out of selfish pride. But that, by itself, isn't enough. If James would have stopped right here, that would be a simple, psychological, trivial analysis. We would understand that hostility and anger and quarrels come when selfish desires go unfulfilled, but that principle, by itself, is trivial. It is trivial because it doesn't tell us anything about God. So what if people have selfish desires? Why is that a big deal? It is a big deal because of what it says about your relationship with God. Look how he describes them in verse 4.



3) Desire That Belongs to God Alone

4 You adulterous people!

He accuses them of committing spiritual adultery against God. What is adultery? Adultery is when you seek from someone else that which you are only supposed to get from your spouse. So what does it mean to commit adultery against God? We commit adultery against God anytime we seek something from another source that we should only seek from God.

So that is clue #3 for how to spot a covetous desire. When you desire something that must only be sought from God, and you seek that thing from some other source besides God – that is a covetous desire.

So what is that thing that we are only allowed to seek from God and no other source? We know what it is in a marriage. We all know what that thing is in a marriage relationship that you are not allowed to seek from anyone except your spouse. But what is the thing that we're not allowed to seek from any other source besides God? And if we seek that thing from any other source besides God, we are guilty of committing adultery against God? What is it? I can answer that in one word – *water*.

Water for the Soul

Jeremiah 2:12 Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. 13 "My people have committed two sins:

They committed two sins, and those two sins were so egregious and horrific that God calls upon the entire creation to shutter in horror over it. What are these two terrible sins? Sin #1:

13 ...They have forsaken me, the spring of living water...

So sin #1 was they stopped looking to God as their water. What was sin #2?

13 ... and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Sin #1 was they stopped looking to God as their water, and sin #2 was they looked to some other source besides God as their water. So there it is. There is the thing we are not allowed to seek from any other source besides God - water.

Now, obviously this isn't talking about literal water. God is not some physical fluid. It is a metaphor. And a metaphor is a comparison. God is the source of something, and that thing is similar, in certain ways, to water.

This is a comparison you will see many, many times in Scripture. God calls Himself water, wine, milk, food, a banquet, a feast, select cuts of meat, delicacies – over and over, comparing Himself to food and drink. It is a huge emphasis in biblical theology. If you make a list of the attributes of God, and you don't have in your list the fact that God is like food and drink to the human soul, then you are missing one of the attributes that Scripture emphasizes most often. Why is that such a big emphasis?

Let's think for a second about the meaning of the metaphor. In what sense does God resemble water? What does water do? It quenches our thirst. What is thirst? Thirst is an unpleasant feeling that compels you to find a way to quench it. What is hunger? Hunger is an unpleasant feeling that compels you to find a way to satisfy it. These passages are teaching us that just as your body gets empty and hungry, and dry and thirsty, so does your soul. What does the hunger and thirst of the soul feel like? In a word - unhappiness. It is the way you feel when there's something you think you need to be happy, and you don't get it. It is the way you feel when you say, "I can't be happy unless that person likes me," and that person doesn't like you. It's the way you feel when you say, "I have to have a better marriage in order to be happy," and your marriage doesn't improve. When you say, "In order to be happy I need to be treated with respect," or... "In order to be happy, I need enough income to pay the bills," or... "In order to be happy I need to be married," or "I need to be in control," or... "I need to understand why this happening," or "I need this suffering to stop"... - anytime you think you need a certain thing in order to be happy and you don't get it – when that happens, how do you feel? That feeling is the thirst of the soul. And it can come in a lot of forms – sadness, emptiness, boredom, anxiety, despair, self-pity, discouragement, moodiness, irritability, lethargy – all of those are the thirst pangs that come when the soul doesn't get what it needs to be happy.

And that is by God's design. Why? Why does God allow physical thirst and hunger? To keep us alive. If you never got thirsty, you would never drink enough water and you die. Or if God made thirst a pleasant sensation instead of an unpleasant sensation, it wouldn't force you to drink, and you would never drink enough and you would die. There is no way we would have enough discipline to get ourselves to drink enough without thirst. So God's design is we get thirsty, we drink, then we get thirsty again so that we drink again – over and over and over. And that is His design for the soul as well. Over and over we dry out and feel lethargy and boredom and sadness and discouragement and all the various kinds of soul thirst. Why? So that we will go to the spring and drink.

And God keeps on telling us over and over, "The water is Me." God is the only food and drink that can satisfy the appetites of the soul.

Psalm 103:5 [He] satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

It is vitally important that when we think about God, we think of Him as a being who, if we experienced nearness to Him, that experience would satisfy the cravings of our soul. Do you think of God that way? Do you believe with all your heart that if you could somehow manage to experience the nearness of His presence, that there is a 100% chance that you would walk away satisfied and full of joy? Do you believe that if you were to succeed in drawing near to Him your soul would go from being dried up to being refreshed and renewed? It would go from being sad and discouraged to being joyful and motivated? Your soul would go from being bored and empty to being full and passionate? You would go from feeling restless and lost to feeling secure and safe and healthy and strong? Do you believe that? It's true.

And it is not true of anything in this world. Video games can't do that. Music can't do it, friends can't do it, family can't do it, work can't do it, sex can't do it, food can't do it – but God's presence not only can, but always, always, always does 100% of the time. And God really, really wants us to understand that about Him and to think about Him that way, and so he keeps repeating it in His Word.

In Psalm 36 He is the storehouse of food and river of delights that satisfies both high and low among men.

In Isaiah 58 He is the feast that satisfies those who call His holy day a delight instead of doing as they please.

In John 6 He is the real bread and real drink that satisfies the souls of all who come to Him.

In Isaiah 55 He is the milk, wine, and bread offered for free that satisfies so much more than the bread that is not bread.

In Proverbs 9 He is wisdom's banquet that is so superior to folly's banquet.

In Psalm 63 He is the richest of foods that thrills the soul of David.

In Psalm 34 He is the delicacy that our souls will crave if we just taste and see.

In Psalm 42 He is the stream of water that David panted for like a thirsty deer.

In John 4 He is the source of living water that satisfies forever and that wells up to eternal life.

Whenever you feel those down emotions, that's your soul saying, "I need a drink!" And what do you do when your soul needs a drink? You run to whatever your soul thinks is water.

Two Great Sins

Sin #1: Forsaking God as Water

Now, with all that background, let's look again at sin #1.

13 ...They have forsaken me, the spring of living water...

Their souls got thirsty - they had desires and cravings to fulfill their appetite for happiness, and they didn't look to God as the water. That's sin #1. They didn't look to God as the water that would satisfy that appetite.

Sin #2: Looking to Another Source for Water

What did they do instead? That's sin #2.

13 ... and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

A cistern is a holding tank for water. So interpret the metaphor - what does the cistern represent? It represents any water source other than God. Anything you look to to satisfy the cravings of your soul, if it's not God, it's a broken cistern that cannot hold water. It will non't satisfy. But when you look to it as something that would satisfy your thirst, that is a massive, universe-rattling sin. The context of Jeremiah 2 is a discussion of idolatry. Looking to something besides God for your happiness is idolatry. Why? Because this kind of desire is an act of worship. God alone is the water that can satisfy the cravings of the soul, and so to put anything else in that place is to put something in place of God. Looking to something to satisfy the thirst of the soul is an act of worship.

Lots of people claim to worship Jesus Christ as God, but the true god in your life is whatever that thing is that you run to when your soul gets thirsty. It is great for me to enjoy my wife. It is great for me to desire my wife. But if I go to her when my soul gets thirsty - I've just turned her into an idol, I have committed adultery against God, and I've set myself up for a whole lot of anger and conflict when she turns out to be a broken cistern that cannot hold water. It is perfectly ok for you to enjoy entertainment - movies, music, video games, vacations - but if you go to those things to get your joy back when you are discouraged or bored or sad or empty or dry, then you are looking to those things as water for the thirst of your soul and that is adultery against God. And here is what is going to happen: You are going to feel empty and dry, you'll play Halo 5, it won't satisfy the thirst of your soul, and you'll walk away as grumpy as can be. Why are you in such a grumpy mood after playing your favorite game? Because you went to that game for water, and it's not water. And when your soul is thirsty, and you drink something that's not water, that makes your soul mad.

Okay, so do you feel like you understand how to spot a covetous desire?

- 1) It's any desire that results in sinful anger or irritability when it goes unfulfilled.
- 2) It's any desire that grows up out of the soil of a "me first, everything should go according to my preferences" kind of attitude.
- 3) It's any desire that commits adultery against God by looking to something in this world rather than God to satisfy the cravings of my soul.

And it is absolutely crucial that we understand not just the first two, but also that third part. If all we do is look at the first two, and leave God out of the picture, we are not going to come up with the right solution.

How to Conquer Coveting: Drink Real Water!

The Solution is Not to Learn to Live with Thirst

We will plan on looking at verses 2-3 in more depth next time, but for now I just want to point out how unexpected and surprising is the direction he goes. If your kids throw a tantrum because they didn't get what they wanted, what would you do? The natural thing to do is to teach them the right way to respond to disappointment. And given James' big emphasis on trials and the right way to respond to suffering, I would expect him to take that approach. I would expect James to say, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? They come from your unfulfilled desires. You don't get what you want, so you get upset. So let me teach you the right way to respond to disappointment..." I would expect James to say things like, "Look, you don't always get what you want. You have to learn to be content. Things aren't always going to go your way – you need to learn how to handle disappointment." That would be a good message, but that's not the direction James goes. Instead of teaching them how to respond when they don't get what they want, James wants to teach them why it is that they are not getting what they want.

The Solution is to Drink Real Water

2 ...You do not have, because you do not ask.

You see, when it comes to the thirst of the soul, God does not want us to just learn to live with it. Do we have to learn to live with suffering? Yes. Do we have to learn to live with disappointment? Yes. But does God call us to just learn to live with a dry, thirsty soul? No. God does not want us to be dry. He wants us to be full and satisfied and happy and filled with joy – even in the midst of our suffering. So instead of saying, "Just learn to live with lack of satisfaction," he says, "Let me show you why you're not getting satisfaction." It's not a bad thing to seek happiness and joy and satisfaction for the appetites of your soul. God designed us to do that and commands us to do it.

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters... 2 Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

God commands us to seek satisfaction. He commands us to quench our thirst. His only requirement is that we don't try to do it from a dry well.

Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

It's good to seek satisfaction – as long as you seek it from intimacy with God. It's like a husband telling his wife – "I'm not saying no physical intimacy. I'm just saying not with another man."

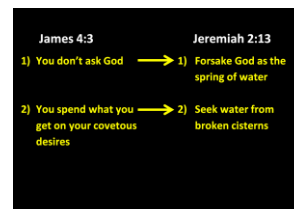
James is writing to people who had a lot of desires, and those desires were going unfulfilled because when they had a desire, they would do one of two things:

2 ...You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your desires.

If you think about it, those two responses are the same as the two great sins of Jeremiah 2.

Sin #1 – failure to look to God as a spring of water – that is what these people did in verse 2 when they didn’t ask. They didn’t go to God as their water. Instead, they committed sin #2 – they looked to some other source. And to add insult to injury, they asked God to give them that other thing.

3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your desires.



For some reason the NIV translates that word **pleasures**, but it is the same word used back in verse 1 translated **desires**. He is still talking about covetous desire. That kind of desire that rises out of a selfish, prideful heart and causes anger when it goes unfulfilled. He says, “You either don’t pray, or you pray and ask God to fulfill your covetous desires.” And guess what the answer to that prayer is always going to be. James says when you pray like that, **you ask and do not receive**. No way is God ever going to say yes to that kind of prayer. That’s like a wife coming to her husband and saying, “Can you please give me \$100 so I can get a hotel room for me and my boyfriend tonight?” Not only is the answer no, but it is an incredible insult and offense that you would even ask. God will never help you commit adultery against Him.

1 What causes wars and battles among you? Don't they come from your desires that wage war within you? ... 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your desires.

And it’s really a shame too, because a lot of times the things we are praying for could be really good things.

“God, please help my kids learn to obey!”

That would be a great thing to ask God for, but if my desire for them to obey is a covetous desire – I *have* to have obedient children in order to be happy in life – then I’m looking to a nice, ordered, quiet household and easy parenting as my water for my dried up soul – now I have just taken a good thing and turned it into a covetous desire so that God has to say no to the prayer. This is probably the #1 way we torpedo our own prayer life – turning good gifts from God into idols that we look to for our happiness, which puts God into a position where He can’t say yes to the prayer because it would be unloving for Him to assist us in our adultery against Him.

Draw Near to God

So let’s answer James’ question – what causes fights and quarrels? Why can’t we all just get along? Why do I have those flashes of anger toward my wife or kids? Why do the kids fight in the back seat? Why is there fighting and disharmony in the church? It is because of covetous desires.

Why are there are some things you can forgive but other things you can’t seem to forgive? The reason you can’t forgive some things is that those are the offenses where someone touched one of your covetous desires. And you can’t forgive because your heart is still coveting that thing. Your heart thinks, “In order to be happy in life, I have to have had a normal childhood. My parents ruined that, therefore I can’t forgive them.” Having a normal childhood has gone from being a normal desire to being a covetous desire – something your soul thinks is water. And so you can’t forgive, because one thing your heart will never forgive is when someone takes away your water.

So now we have the answer to the question. We know what the problem is and that gives us hope. There is hope in verse 2, because when James says you don’t receive because your desire for that thing is a covetous desire, the implication is that if you stopped coveting that thing, then God would say yes to your prayer. All you have to do is desire it with a godly desire instead of a covetous desire, and then God is eager to say yes. If the wife asks for \$100 and the husband says, “What for?” and she says, “To get a hotel room for *us* – I’ve got a surprise planned, and I’m going to make you the happiest man in the world tonight,”... – then he says, “Here – here’s \$200.” If the purpose of the request is to pursue intimacy with him, then the answer is going to tend to be yes.

Maybe you're sitting there thinking, "Oh great. I thought I was just fine when I walked in here this morning, now I realize I'm guilty of committing adultery against God, and my heart is plagued with idolatrous, covetous desires, which means there is a bunch of selfish, prideful, earthly wisdom in my heart... Now what? I've diagnosed the problem, the tests came up positive for malignant pride – now what do I do? James isn't going to give us the solution until verse 8 where he describes the process of repentance. And the very first thing he says in that verse is **Come near to God and he will come near to you**. And if you have selfish pride:

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

This is one of those sin problems that, once you get it diagnosed right, it is obvious what the solution is. The problem is this particular kind of sin almost always gets misdiagnosed. When we get angry, or we get into fights with each other, we have disunity in the church, or we get into a grumpy mood – when those things happen we will point to 100 other things as the cause. We point to sins other people committed, hard circumstances, hormones, our upbringing – all these different things, and James is saying, "Every one of those is a misdiagnosis." Before my father died, the doctor he was seeing misdiagnosed his problem and gave him a treatment that was the exact opposite of what he really needed. That is one of the things that led to his death. Misdiagnosis can be lethal, because you end up with the wrong treatment for the disease. So Dr. James tells us, "Stick out your tongue and say, 'Ah.' Open up your mouth and say something." And he listens to what we say, and he hears some harsh, angry, contentious words, and says, "Ah – I see your problem. Earthly wisdom, selfish pride, and covetous desires."

Once I have that accurate diagnosis, I am in great shape because I happen to be close, personal friends with the Great Physician. And He has medicine for this particular disease. The medicine is humble repentance and coming near to God – looking to Him instead of earthly things as the satisfier of my soul. What a delightful cure! The sorrow and brokenness over the sin is a bitter pill. But once you get that down, the rest of the medicine is to sit down at a full, satisfying banquet table and eating and drinking until your heart is happy and full. We will have more unity in the church, and more peace in our homes – with our kids and in our marriages, and we will have harmony in our relationships – all of that will happen when we have more satisfaction in God.

How is that done? And what are the implications of all this for my prayer life? And where does grace fit in, and how do I get that grace? That is where we will pick it up next time.

Benediction: Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. 3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Consider the three clues for how to spot a covetous desire:
 - Any desire that results in sinful anger or irritability when it goes unfulfilled.
 - Any desire that grows up out of the soil of a "me first, everything should go according to my preferences" kind of attitude.
 - Any desire that commits adultery against God by looking to something in this world rather than God to satisfy the cravings of my soul.By those criteria, can you spot any covetous desires that tend to rise up in your soul?
2. When your soul gets dry and thirsty, what broken cisterns are you most prone to run to?