

Hey folks, good to be with y'all this evening. My name is Walker. I'm on staff here at Citizens.

If you've been tracking with us the last few weeks, we have been steadily making our way through the book of James. James writes to a group of believers who are struggling to understand what their faith looks like lived out. Our passage tonight is James 4:1-10, and it deals with the outworking of some of the stuff Tim addressed last week. We looked at the difference in godly wisdom and worldly wisdom and saw why Godly wisdom is better. Now, James is going to push the envelope to address how these two systems not only war over our mind but our hearts too.

In all of this is James's rousing call to repentance. Before we do that, let's pray.

PRAY

The most popular course in the history of Yale University was only taught on campus one time. Psych 157 took place in the spring semester of 2018 in a 1200 person lecture space – the largest on campus.

After that spring, the lectures and class material was made available online for free. To date, 3.3 million people have signed up for the class.

The class was called 'Psychology and the Good Life.' Online you will find it as 'The Science of Well-Being.'

The course description online says: *"In this course you will engage in a series of challenges designed to increase your own happiness and build more productive habits. As preparation for these tasks, Professor Laurie Santos reveals misconceptions about happiness, annoying features of the mind that lead us to think the way we do, and the research that can help us change. You will ultimately be prepared to successfully incorporate a specific wellness activity into your life."*

What do you think has led to the mass appeal of this class? Isn't there an innate pull in us towards happiness and the good life? Do you feel that?

That description seemingly checks all of our American boxes, doesn't it? The success of our lives is determined by how happy or fulfilling we are. This is what the folks at Yale have realized. We want our lives to have meaning; we want our lives to have value. If those things happen, then we think our lives are good. Our culture is hungry for happiness, purpose, and, maybe most so – meaning. We are hungry for 'the good life.'

It's become so ingrained in our culture that Merriam Webster has actually picked it up and defines 'good life' in two ways – 1) the kind of life that people with a lot of money are able to have, or 2) a happy and enjoyable life.

If we were to honestly assess ourselves, that's what we're after, too. We want both of those things. We want the life that money can buy, and we desperately want to be happy.

We Christians are not immune to this problem. Take a look at the best-selling Christian books on Amazon these days. You'll find titles like *Living Fully: Dare to Step into Your Most Vibrant Life* or *Undistracted: Capture Your Purpose. Rediscover Your Joy*.

These ideas of what the good life is have seeped into our Christian culture. We want to reach our potential. We want a vibrant life. Maybe God is the path to make that happen...

Here's the thing, it is not a bad thing for us to want our life to have meaning – in fact, that is a very biblical thing! What our passage gets at, however, is that your vision of the 'good life' matters. It is not a question of whether we have a vision of the good life, but of what that vision is.

And as we will see in James 4, dead faith would say that the good life is in your self-fulfilling vision of the good life, while **James makes the case that living faith humbly submits to God**. The 'good life' is actually found in submission to God.

In making this case, James will answer three questions:

- 1) **Where do we seek the good life? (v. 1-4)**
  - 2) **Why are we wrong in our seeking? (v. 5-6)**
  - 3) **How do we receive this good life? (v. 7-10)**
- 
- 1) **Where do we seek the good life? (v. 1-4)**

Look with me again at verse 1: *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”*

James is in 'yell-at' mode, and he asks back to back rhetorical questions. Quarrels and fights? Passions? It's funny to read this in the original language, there are no verbs! James is connecting these two things. He is saying that Warring passions on the inside, eventually give birth to warring on the outside.

James is showing us that our passions – what we want, what we desire – are directly connected to the outward posture of our lives.

The word for passions in the original language it's the word hedone – our word hedonism meaning 'the pursuit of pleasure or self-indulgence' comes from this word. This word paints a vivid picture. In essence, James is saying that while outwardly, you people claim God, inwardly, you are self-indulgent and pursue pleasure at all cost - and actually, outwardly, you don't look much like the people of God. Your vision for the good life is all the pleasure you could ask for. You claim the label 'Christian' with none of the 'loyalty.'

Their desires have become needs. So when they don't get what they want, it's game on. I've got to get mine, and I'm coming for anything or anybody who stands in my way.

James illustrates this point in v. 2-3: *“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”*

James says these warring passions lead to murder, covetousness, lust, and not asking. While it might be a stretch to think that people were actually committing murder, James is showing that these things are sin, and they should be treated as such. He is saying, “You people can't stand each other! You are killing each other!” These things left unchecked will, ultimately, lead to bigger and badder sins.

Their vision of the 'good life' has driven them to war with one another and has driven them treat God like their puppet. God is helpful in them getting what they want. God has become their vending machine. God is their genie. When they came to God in prayer, they asked for their own gain – they asked wrongly.

They didn't really want God for God, they wanted God for themselves. They wanted the gifts and not the giver. Ultimately, their passions are crowding out their love for God.

All of this comes to a head in v. 4, where James's rebuke is the loudest and most forceful: "*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*"

The gauntlet is being thrown down. If anything rivals your love for God, you're guilty of spiritual adultery. We are called to be singularly devoted to God. You cannot have one foot in the worldly kingdom and one foot in God's kingdom. He has called you to be devoted to Him above all else. So, there is great danger in trying to get the good life apart from God or trying to use God to get the things you want. That's spiritual adultery. You cannot claim the label without all the loyalty.

The truth of the matter is that we are not that different than these folks James is writing to. Our selfish pursuit of the good life is our spiritual adultery. We are gripped by our own visions of the good life. We have our own ideas about what might make us happy or where we might find value. Our culture loves this. Every commercial or instagram ad reinforces this message that we are incomplete without something, somebody, some renown, or some feeling. Their product will make you happy, take you to the next level, finally give your life meaning.

So, we let our passions control ourselves. These passions kick Jesus off of the throne of our hearts and crowd out our love for Him.

For some of us, our passions are visceral:

- I am lonely, and I want to be affirmed. I look for anything that will ease my loneliness, so I end up perusing the internet late at night hoping that somehow those hollow images will satisfy us.
- I want to feel good about myself, so I say that thing I shouldn't to that person I shouldn't and justify my gossip to stroke my ego.
- I want relaxation, but my anxiety won't let me. So, I drink the extra drink to where I numb those feelings and finally get to relax

For others of us, our passions are more in line with the American dream:

- I want the toys, the career, the renown, the fame, so I neglect my family, my spouse, my responsibilities to stack up my resume with achievements and work
- I want the instagrammable life, so I date that person I shouldn't to look cool to other people
- Here's a big one, I want my comfort, so I don't engage with the needs around me so that I can have enough resources to keep my comfort.

Maybe a better diagnostic question for us is: **What is that thing you want that you are willing to sin to get?**

Isn't that the core of idolatry? It may not look like us walking into the pagan temple and worshiping false gods. Instead, it looks more like the worship of self. It looks different, but it's the same thing. Instead of pagan gods, we are worshiping ourselves.

This is the crux of the matter. This passage is saying that you love yourself too much. Your life is about you – your pleasure, your comfort, your fame, your reputation, your success. Your love for yourself rivals your love for God, and your love for yourself shows that you do not love God the way you should.

Here's the thing though: the Bible has no category for a self-seeking Christian. Seeking our own pleasure is a self-defeating exercise:

Simon the magician illustrates this idea in Acts 8. He watches the apostles heal people in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he wants that power. He asks them to share with him, but he is swiftly rebuked. He wanted the power for him, to make him look good; He wanted God, not for God, but for the things God could give Him.

Could you imagine coming to somebody you love - a friend, a parent, a spouse - and only looking at their hands? You never look them in the face because you are only interested in what they can give you, how they can benefit you, how they can make you look good. Like, that's crazy. You would never do that. But, that is what we do with God. We come to Him to serve our own needs, our own vision, or our own passions because those things are more important to us than God Himself.

This is spiritual adultery. James has caught us in the crosshairs of his rebuke. We are called to be singularly devoted to God. The Christian life is not just the label 'Christian' with no loyalty to God. If there is anything crowding out your love for Jesus, get rid of it. Our spiritual adultery is at best indifference to God but at worst openly hostile towards Him. We are not to flirt with other visions of the good life.

## **2) Why are we wrong in our seeking? (v. 5-6)**

Look with me again at v. 5: *"Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?"*

So James has diagnosed the problem, and he's stacked up a pretty good case against us. Our heart's loyalty is split. We cannot serve both our passions and God. We are either friends with the world, or we are friends with God. You cannot have both. So why do we do this? Why do we vainly seek our own glory?

v. 5&6 are put here for a reason. It would have made sense for v. 1-4 to pivot to the practical of v. 7-10. But He pulls our gaze up. Isn't it interesting that James points the finger, and then points up? It's as if he is saying, "Do you realize the God you serve?" You sin the way you do because you view God wrongly.

In a way, James is indicting us on the same charges. You chase your vision of the good life because you view God wrongly. James calls us to repent: to first acknowledge our sin, then remember who our God is.

Our God is a jealous God. He wants all of us, not just part of us. He wants all of your heart, not just part of it.

God wants us to view Him rightly. He is God. He has no rivals. These folks that James is writing to have ignored what the Scriptures said. God is God and should be honored as such. God is God and should be loved as such. God is God and should be treated as such. Yet, these people are presuming on the kindness of God. God has no business playing second fiddle to anybody or anything else.

When it says God yearns jealously over the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us, it's saying if you are a believer, you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the third person of the Trinity who lives in the hearts of believers. He is the One who reminds us of the Gospel and leads us to repentance.

When James says God yearns jealously over the Spirit He has made to dwell in us, he is saying that God has given us the Spirit to bring us back to a right view of God.

I have a friend who recently got married to a woman he met at a wedding. They were both in the wedding party together, and he talks about how he almost instantly knew that he was going to marry this woman. Within 10 minutes he is telling all of the other groomsman how it is going to go down. Well, fast forward through the night, and he is pulling out all the stops. He's talking, he's on top of his game, but she's not really reciprocating. Finally he jokes that he is going to fly to Chattanooga to take her on a date (He lived in Oklahoma City). She didn't believe him, so he takes off his watch and put it on her wrist. She looks up at him in disbelief and says, "What are you doing?" He responds, "I'll get that back from you when I see you in Chattanooga next weekend." Sure enough, he flew to Chattanooga and got his watch and 10 months later got a fiancé.

The Holy Spirit is like the watch. Just like the watch was the seal that was the promise that my friend would go see that girl, the Holy Spirit is the seal God has given to ensure you of your salvation. The watch is the proof that he is going to buy the plane ticket. The watch is the proof that he is going to make the travel arrangements. The watch is the proof that He is actually going to visit her in Chattanooga. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He is the One who is sanctifying you, leading you in repentance, and forming you in to the image of Jesus. God promises to work through His Spirit to bring us back to Him. He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus!

Not only is He a jealous God who demands to be honored appropriately, He actually gives the grace needed to do just that.

Look with me again at v. 6: *"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

God calls us back to Himself. He wants us to singularly pursue Him, so He gives us more grace to release our selfish visions of the good life. What He requires of us, He gives to us.

It's not like an Ikea package where it is a total roll of the dice what pieces you will get and if those pieces are even relevant for your furniture. Some of you feel that on a deep level... God demands your loyalty, but He gives you His grace through His Spirit to do it.

He cares enough about us to give us grace when we need it most - to meet us in our time of need. Maybe we need to remember this God we serve. God, the Creator of the universe, who by the power of his voice, creates, and by His strength upholds all creation, numbers the hairs of your head. He is the only One who could have accomplished your salvation. He is the One who makes the sun to rise, but He is also the One who wills your sanctification, your continual growth as a Christian. He is the One who knows everything and establishes His purpose, but He is also the One who loves you enough to give you more grace in your time of need. He wants more than just the label, He wants your loyalty.

This should encourage us! When our hearts fail, when we chase our own visions of the good life, when we are too enticed by the world, God is greater. He will not leave us in our sin. He yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us. Even if you take inventory of your life, and you realize that you are trying to love both God and the world – if you are trying to pursue your own version of the good life and God, look up - humble yourself before Him, recognize the passions at war within you that are crowding out your love for Him. He has promised to meet you in that place.

When our gaze is turned up to view God rightly, the answer is easy: The good life is with God. Living faith submits. We won't want anything else. We want Him. It makes our relationship with Him go from being only about the label to being all about our loyalty. It makes what James details in verses 7-10 go from our burden to our delight.

### 3) How do we receive this good life? (v. 7-10)

V. 7-10 gives the recipe for how a living faith submits to God. In light of our gazes up to be reminded of the grandness and the beauty of God, everything else fades away. Nothing else can compare with the goodness of God. In light of that goodness are the commands that come in v. 7-10.

A pastor I respect helpfully summarized these four verses with four words – Fight, Fellowship, Focus, and Forgiveness.

Fight – v. 7 – *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

Submission in the Bible is actually an active, military term. It means to arrange under one's authority out of love and respect. Picture troops rallying around a leader – that is what our passage is getting at here. We are to be active in arranging ourselves under our leader, Jesus, out of our love and respect for Him.

Now, our culture cringes at the idea of submission, doesn't it? It has taken on a cultural definition that the Bible never intended for it to mean. There are images of passivity that are conjured up as we think about submission, but that is not what the Bible means. It is an active, noble, righteous thing to do to submit to God.

And we are to be active in resisting the devil. Think about the fights you have over temptation. The fights are good things! They are proof of the Spirit's work in you! Keep fighting! Our passage is proof that the fight is not the problem. The lack of fight is the problem! If we just yield time and again to sin, that's not good. If that's you, and you find yourself continually yielding, come talk to one of us about it. We'd love to wade into that with you. If you are fighting your sin, keep fighting! He calls us to fight, but He gives us the grace to do it.

Fellowship – v. 8a *“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”*

Do you regularly spend time with God? Do you pray and read the Bible? It is a wonderful act of divine grace that this God James is reminding us of, the God we have been talking about, has revealed Himself to us in Scripture. Isn't it humbling to think of how God wants to intimately know you? He invites you to come to Him. He invites you to pray. Prayer is the most intimate thing you can do with God because it requires you to humble yourself to admit you don't have it all figured out. The best news in all of that? He promises to meet you there. He calls us to draw near to Him, but He has shown us grace, in that He first drew near to us in Jesus.

Focus – v. 8b *“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*

Focus on God. Don't be double minded. Don't let your self-serving passions get in the way of your love for God. If they do, repent! Ask God for grace in the face of the struggle. That is a prayer He loves to answer.

My grandparents have this row of crepe myrtles in the front of their yard. They're absolutely beautiful when they bloom, but there is a process of pruning that has to happen before the blooming. The excess has to be cut away to make room for the blossoms that come in early June. This is the same thing God is calling to us here. What do you need to prune in your life for there to be growth? Where are you double-minded - trying to love both God and something else?

Notice, too, that the command is first to draw near to God, then to prune, not the other way around. God wants you to come to because He gives the grace needed for you to focus and prune.

Forgiveness – v. 9 *“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”*

Part and parcel to the life of a Christian is repentance. This involves your willful acknowledgement of your sin and the ways you have not lived up to the standard of God, which, news flash, that is all of us, and coming to God to acknowledge that. But it is not just coming to acknowledge your sin, it is also paired with a desire to trust the Lord more, to believe what He says.

Now, just to clarify, God is not a fun sucker. He does not come to take away your joy and make you a stoic. There is a painting – you have probably seen it – of the wedding feast at Cana from John 2. Right in the middle of the picture is Jesus. Everybody in the painting is talking, drinking, dancing, laughing, but Jesus is stoic. I have a real problem with that. That is not what we see in the Bible.

Instead, in this section, God is calling us to take our sin seriously. Have you ever confronted somebody or pointed out something they did wrong, and they laughed? That is what God is referring to here. He is saying that the proper response to your sin is your remorse. You should mourn. You should feel conviction. You should want to change. A godly person is sorrowful for their sin! A godly person recognizes that it is only by the grace of God that forgiveness can be found.

## **Conclusion**

These three verses bring us to the end of ourselves. This is what repentance looks like - recognizing that I have nothing before the Lord. And it is precisely in the depths of that where He has promised to meet us.

Look with me again at v. 10: *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*

A lifetime of humble submission before the Lord will end in eternal exaltation with Him. In reality, our passions that crowd out our love for God are too small. They don't make promises like this. It would be like saying no to a four course meal at Supperland to instead eat a twinkie from Dollar General. Our passions promise pleasure or fulfillment in the moment, but only God can both promise and accomplish your exaltation.

Here's what's better: This is not just a future promise. Our goal as Christians is not just to grit our teeth till we meet Jesus. No, He actually promises to meet us in the here and now, give us more grace in our struggle, and exalt and lift us up over our sin. In all of that, James is saying that this is the good life - a life of living faith that humbly submits to God - this is fulfilling.

Pastor John Piper is quoted as saying that the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

Let that sink in...The good life that we are searching for is actually found when we resolve that our main goal in life is to live for God by enjoying Him forever.

I hope you catch that word 'enjoy.' Our pursuit of our passions is really just our pursuit of joy. Those feelings you are chasing, the pleasures you crave, the desires you have don't hold a finger to Jesus. God's passion to be glorified in you, and your passion to be happy actually come to fulfillment in the act of humble submission to God. The Bible says that God satisfies the desires of every living thing. It also says that at the right hand of God there are pleasures forevermore. Do you hear that?

Our passage points to the fact that the grace of God is better than anything else you can find in this world. The grace of God satisfies your deepest desires. He has given you enough grace to live in this fallen world because He has given you Himself! He has not abandoned you in this life, but promises there will be grace to endure.

- Is your life just not working? Each new idea, each new vision seems to crash and burn. Do you feel like you are grasping at straws for what the next step is? Humbly submit to Him. He gives more grace.
- Are you constantly bummed out by the season of life you find yourself in? Did you think you'd be farther along by now? Are you frustrated because you thought you should have accomplished more by now? Humbly submit to Him. He gives more grace.
- Are you tired of your two-face life? You are one way on Sundays and at group and another way when you are not? Are you worn out of keeping up the act? Humbly submit to Him. He gives more grace.
- Do you feel hopeless in your fight with sin? Does that same sin seem to have a stronghold in your life and you can't seem to shake loose? Humbly submit to Him. He gives more grace.

If that's you, He has promised to meet you in your time of need with more grace. He doesn't just give us grace for our sin, He gives us grace for our suffering and frustration that is brought on by our own sin. That's how much He loves us and how much He wants to show us that the good life really is a life that humbly submits to God. Humble yourself before Him, and He will exalt you.

PRAY.