

JAMES

MARK IT UP

James 4:1-3 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 4/24/22

Icebreaker: Where do you see hostility or quarrels in our society today?
What do you think causes it?

Getting Started: Read James 4:1-3 as a group.

Select 2-3 questions that you think will be most helpful for your discussion.

1. According to James, what was causing fights and quarrels among the believers he was addressing?

James says that it's their passions and desires that produce a "war within you." These are so strong that even their prayer life is impacted.

Application: Passion and desire are not necessarily wrong. From your experience, what makes a passion or desire a source of conflict with others? How have you seen this happen in the church?

Passions can go wrong in at least a couple ways. First, a passion or desire could be sinful (e.g., coveting something or someone). Second, we might pursue a passion or desire in an ungodly way. We could become obsessed and seek to fulfill the desire at any cost. Life can become very competitive and relationships adversarial at this point as we see our pursuit as a zero-sum game—your gain is my loss, and vice versa. In the church, we might become envious of another's gifting or opportunity. We might be jealous of the attention another seems to be receiving while our contributions go unnoticed or uncelebrated.

2. In verse 2, James uses the words, "murder," "fight," and "quarrel" to describe the fruit of these misguided passions and desires. These could be taken literally, but likely are figurative. What can we learn from Matthew 5:21-22 about the connection between anger, words, and murder?

These out-of-bounds passions and desires lead to a kind of anger that Jesus equated with murder ("...whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment..."). Our words can cause great harm, but we also see that the consequence of unbridled anger is great.

Application: If actual murder is the unjust taking of another's life, how can our words cause similar damage and call for a similar consequence?

Sadly, we can all probably think of how the words of one person can “cut like a knife” and “hit like a punch to the gut.” James has been talking a lot throughout this book about the power and problem of our tongue, so this is a continuation of the topic. An actual wound can heal, but sometimes we can remember words lobbed at us long after they were spoken...even after the offending person has died. In all, words really can take life from us as they damage relationships, steal away confidence, and cause lasting hurt.

3. At the end of verse 2, James says to his listeners that “You do not have, because you do not ask.” Why is it a problem that these believers are deeply desiring things but they’re not asking God?

The fact that they’re not asking God reveals that they may lack faith that God is the source of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (1:17). They are instead looking for good apart from God. Also, they may be motivated to look for these things elsewhere because they know that their passions and desires are not aligned with God’s will. (See also Matthew 7:7-11 on the need to ask God.)

Application: The issue this verse raises should make us think of our own prayer life. One of Calvary’s *Shaping Values* is “Prayer in Faith.” How could our prayer life reveal whether we’re walking by faith, trusting God to supply what we need?

Our prayer life can be a kind of barometer for how well we’re trusting God. A life of complete dependence on God will coincide with an active and regular engagement in prayer. Conversely, a life that’s being lived in one’s own strength and independence will usually coincide with prayer that is infrequent and sporadic.

4. Right after James has addressed their lack of asking, he notes in verse 3 that when they do ask, they “ask wrongly, to spend it on [their] own passions.” What’s the problem with self-centered prayer?

When they do pray (i.e., ask God), they’re asking with selfish motivations and hoping for some kind of self-advancing benefit. This contradicts the teaching of Jesus, for example, in Matthew 6:25-33. There, Jesus instructs His followers to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” rather than material blessings. This approach toward prayer helps combat the tendency within us to approach God as if He is a kind of genie in a bottle, present to grant whatever our wishes happen to be.

Application: Think about the things you’ve been asking God for in prayer recently. How consistent do you think they are with seeking first God’s kingdom and righteousness?

This is a self-evaluation question and not one where we are trying to scrutinize another’s prayer requests. As the facilitator and leader, it could be helpful for you to remind people that this is a question for each person to answer for him/herself, and you might consider going first in answering this.

5. Read Matthew 6:5-15. What do you see in these words from Jesus that help reinforce the value of prioritizing God's kingdom and his righteousness over material needs?

Jesus tells us in verse 8 that “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” We also see in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus models for us how to acknowledge the holiness of God, the coming of God's Kingdom on earth, and that the request is for “daily bread” (what we truly need for our immediate circumstances). The desire to live a holy life is also reflected in verse 13.

Application: How does this attitude toward and practice of prayer help guard us against the kind of quarrels, fights, and passions that James confronts in 4:1-3?

An active prayer life can protect us from desiring the wrong things in the first place. It can also keep us grounded in the fact that every truly good thing comes from God. It affirms that we need God to supply what we need rather than looking to other people to give us what only God can give. When we look to people to provide, we often adopt a scarcity mindset, where we think others' gain is our loss. Prayer, though, anchors our hope to Christ and His unlimited resources. Misguided desires fuel all kinds of strife and discord, but a vibrant prayer life can lead us to trust in God's good provision. See also Matthew 7:7-11.