

# JAMES

MARK IT UP

## James 4:4-10 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 5/1/22

**Icebreaker:** On a scale of 1-10, how humble are you? 😊

**Getting Started:** Read James 4:4-10 as a group.

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

**1.** James makes a sharp distinction in verse 4 between being a friend of the world or a friend of God. Why can't we befriend both?

If we flip just a few pages to the right, we see a similar idea in 1 John 2:15-17. It's important to point out that "the world" does not mean the earth or the creation. Commentator Dan McCartney describes it, rather, as "the sphere of desires, influences, and structures that draw a person's attention away from God...[it's] the ethos of life in opposition to, or disregard of, God and his kingdom." When we think of it this way, we can see how this is indeed an "either/or" kind of choice! If we try to be a friend of the world, we are spiritually unfaithful (i.e., adulterous) toward God.

*Application:* What are some examples of how we might be a friend of the world?

It's good to look back to what James has said previously. We can become friends of the world when we exhibit the desires and coveting and unchecked passions of 4:1-3. The potential examples of these problems are endless as we are immersed in or surrounded by the temptation to pursue the temporary over the eternal.

**2.** What do you think James means by calling God "jealous" in verse 5? (See Exodus 20:5 for another reference to God's jealousy.)

First off, this verse has multiple challenges and different English translations (ESV, NIV, NASB, etc.) reflect some of these difficulties. It's likely that James' line of thinking has to do with the spiritual unfaithfulness or covenant disloyalty we see so often in God's people in Scripture. Passages like Jhn 3:29, Eph 5:28-32, and Rev 21:2 present the relationship between God and His people as a marriage. Spiritual unfaithfulness, then, is like the unfaithfulness of a bride to her husband. The appropriate response in such a case is jealousy! The OT book of Hosea famously carries out this same imagery. Douglas Moo states, "God has a claim on us by virtue of his work in our lives." Jealousy is so often thought of negatively, but in this case, God is the Creator who made us for what's best for us—an unhindered relationship

with Himself. Our substitute of that purpose for something lesser is what makes God “jealous.”

*Application:* How could God’s jealousy toward us be a reassurance of His love for us?

It’s helpful to consider what it would be like for God to not be jealous when we live contrary to His ways. What if God was indifferent or unconcerned? What if God was apathetic whenever we decided to flirt with sin and the ways of our world? God loves us too much to be unconcerned like this! Think of those you love most in life. How would you respond if they made decisions that you knew were harmful and that stole their hearts away from loving you?

**3.** God’s grace is needed for people who provoke God’s jealousy. Why do you think pride keeps people from receiving grace?

Pride keeps people from acknowledging their need for God. Pride drives people to seek good out of their own ability, strength, or wisdom. This puts people at odds with God since pride in-effect denies a need for God.

*Application:* What are some major differences we can observe between the life of a person who’s proud and one who’s humble? If we struggle with pride, is there anything we can do to become more humble?

A proud person may be fiercely independent and self-sufficient. A proud person may have difficulty taking interest in another’s life. A proud person may be easily offended or overly sensitive to criticism. Humility, on the other hand, leads to a willingness to know and embrace one’s limitations. A humble person is likely to take interest in another’s life and is able to consider the critiques of others, not getting too inflated by another’s praise or too deflated by another’s criticism. Humility isn’t something we can simply will ourselves to obtain; however, we can seek it out by asking the Giver “of every good and perfect gift” (1:17) and surround ourselves with people who will encourage us to live with humility.

**4.** Humility may be a posture of our heart, but it leads to action. According to verses 7-10, what should humility look like in a person’s life?

We could include submission to God, resisting the devil, confessing and repenting (i.e., turning away from) of sin and unbelief, mourning or being sorrowful over how easily we stray from God’s ways, and relying on God to exalt us rather than exalting ourselves. As in other places in this book, we might think of Jesus’ “Blessed are...” statements in Matthew 5 that present ideas similar to what James prescribes here.

*Application:* Think about these actions in light of your life. What stands in the way of our pursuit of humility?

Each person can wrestle with this, but the answer likely boils down to a persistent desire inside us to live self-sufficient, self-focused lives. These

actions don't come easily or naturally to most (or all?) of us. For example, our first impulse may not be to confess and repent as much as it is to justify or minimize sin.

**5.** Read Luke 18:9-14. What traits of pride and humility do you see in Jesus' parable?

This should not require much explanation! Note that the two men are both engaged in the same activity but with very different motivations, words, and postures.

*Application:* Both this passage in Luke and James 4:10 tell us that it is possible for us to humble ourselves. As a group, discuss actions you could take this next week to facilitate a greater humility in our lives.

There are a lot of ways this could be answered, but one of the most powerful weapons against pride is a commitment to what some refer to as spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, generosity, service, etc. These kinds of practices help us acknowledge our dependence on God rather than ourselves. They also help us adopt a more kingdom-advancing outlook on life rather than accumulating as much as possible for ourselves.