

My Way (II)

Brother James

James 4:1-8

The worst thing is to be alone and not connected with God and each other. People who insist on “MY WAY” will put themselves in big trouble. Eventually they will be alone, and not connecting with God or anyone else. A California Mental Health study gives us some numbers: If you are disconnected from the other, and there is nobody who understands you:

You are 2 or 3 times more likely die from early death.

You are 4 times more likely you will suffer emotional burn out

You are 5 times more likely suffer from clinical depression

You are 10 times more likely hospitalized mental or emotional disorder

Human connection is good medicine.

How strange are the values of the world.

Illustration: Bachelor or Bachelorette.

Is this how God intended for humans to be connected to each other? Alas, we missed it.

In the end, it is MY WAY. That is exactly what the Devil wanted for humanity. Starting from Genesis we see how the Evil deceived humanity.

Last week we started talking about this topic as James raising important question: “**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?**”

Let me quote from chapter 3:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic...

(James 3:14-15ESV)

Then he adds,

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (James 3:16b ESV)

Evidence of earthly wisdom:

Bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder and every vile practice.

In chapter 4, James introduces another word **Passion** that brings disorder, conflicts and wars:

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You 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. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1-3 ESV)

1. Passions, Pleasures, and Desires:¹

Passion is in Greek *hedone*. From this word we do have the word *Hedonism*. In philosophy, hedonism means the pursuit of pleasure as a purpose. Hedonism is pleasure-seeking as a way of life. God created in us all these feelings and desires. We distorted them by sinning. You see, pleasure becomes unlawful when we steal a watermelon, and we lose the enjoyment of eating it.

-King David stole Bathsheba from her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11,12).

2. Asking with the Wrong Motivation:

You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:2b-3 ESV)

The root of our conflicts is our preoccupation with pleasing ourselves. James is not condemning the things we ask for, but he is questioning the motives behind our prayers. He says a lot of time our motives are self-serving.

If we do not ask God, it means we are asking someone else, or finding our satisfactions in something else. I guess one should ask, what am I asking? Whom am I asking? What do I want? What is my motivation?

3. In the World but not of the World

Here come some tough words that describe us. When we lose our focus and again our own self is the center and not God.

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. 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”? (James 4:4-5 ESV)

Being unfaithful to God makes us “adulterous.” Making friends with unbelievers is not wrong. Let us be careful what we read here. Having an intimate relationship with “world” is wrong. (marriage, business partnership...)

Our God is a God of love and relationships.

-He wants us to have an intimate relationship with Him to the point that this relationship has been described as a marriage. **He “married” us.**

-**He is a jealous God**, like when you love someone, you do not want to lose him/her. You care and you want the best relationship.

-God created mankind with a “spirit,” and he deeply desires that our spirits worship him.

“If we as God’s people, his bride, imitate the world by seeking to satisfy our deepest desires apart from him, then we are, says James, adulterers and enemies of God.”²

Let me give you some examples from the Bible:

God told Hosea to marry Gomer, who was unfaithful to her husband. Hosea was experiencing what God would experience with His people who were not faithful to Him:

**“Their mother has been unfaithful
and has conceived them in disgrace.
She said, ‘I will go after my lovers,
who give me my food and my water.’”** (Hosea 2:5 NIV)

How about Moses, who had a tough journey with the Israelites, who had seen God's hand in rescuing them from Egypt.

“And the LORD said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. (Deuteronomy 31:16 NIV)

God wanted to make a “marriage commitment” with His people. Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments (marriage vows). He comes down to find out the “bride” is worshipping a **golden calf**. Can you see how God felt when He saw His creation breaking their commitment? We should be careful what motivates us in school, graduation, business, marriage, friendship, Bible study, worship band, sport... you name it. We cannot remain faithful to God when our passions and desires are self-serving (My WAY). Jesus was very clear not to have two masters; either you will hate one or love the other. (Matthew 6:24)

God is saying, “Choose with whom you want to make friendship and marriage vows? You cannot choose two masters.” God does not give up from us.

4. Choose Grace

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:6-7 ESV)

Brother James is using harsh words (*adulterous*) describing the human condition of being alienated from God, and choosing other “gods”. That is not the end of the story. Although James rebukes the early church, but he is not in the condemnation business. Like Jesus who loves us so much, James wants to restore our relationship with God the Father.

James is practical and gives solution:

-**God gives us MORE GRACE**. God responds to our betrayal not with rejection but with grace.

Grace is free but not cheap. Someone paid the price so we can have God's grace in our lives. Christ paid the price; because of his love, because he was crucified and raised from the dead we can have God's Grace passed to us.

-James brings the topic of pride again. **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34). We see this topic comes again and again, PRIDE (My WAY).

Therefore, if we enjoying God's love and grace towards us, we should make a choice, make a commitment about whom we should serve:

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

This is the only way to restore our relationship with God: resist the devil and submit to Him. Jesus said many time, **remain in me, abide in me, remain in my Word.** To remain in Him, I should obey and submit. Those words we don't use or like. **““Submission” is a military word. It means giving our allegiance and active service to a superior in order to engage in a battle under his leadership.”**³

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

How do we resist the devil?

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, (1 Peter 5:8,9a ESV)

To be alert and watchful means to focus on God's Word and intentionally follow His path. “Resist the devil” deliberate decisions what to read, what to watch, with whom to spend time, how to spend time and so on. Choices and choices. But then James says:

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”(v8)

Let me clarify here a point James is writing to Christians who already are saved and have accepted Jesus as their Savior. This reminds me the

prodigal son who came to himself, repented, and came back to his father. Whoever in church is being diverted, becoming double-minded, feels lukewarm with God, changed priorities, lost the first love towards Jesus... draw to God, He is waiting with open hand to embrace you.

And even if you never had experienced God's love and grace, today Jesus is calling you to open your heart to receive his salvation.

Choose Grace. Why because He chose us first place.

“but he (Jesus) holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:24-25 ESV)

I choose Grace. I choose Jesus. I choose to draw near to the only High Priest who intercedes for me. But this is not only for me. It is open invitation to all of you, to allow Jesus to wash your hands, feet, and most important wash your heart in repentance.

Amen

1. a term that means simply 'pleasure', but which often carries the negative connotations of sinful, self-indulgent pleasure (we get our word 'hedonism' from it). It consistently has this negative meaning in the New Testament (Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:13).

2. Andrew Drake, Series: Faith That Works, 8th message, July 22, 2007

3. ibid