

James 4:1-12 ~ Submit Yourself to God ~ Leader's Guide

Memory verse James 4:7-8a

1. In Verse 4:1, who is fighting and quarreling?

The Jewish Christians to who he is writing. But also to all of us today.

2. What do families and friends commonly fight about? How often?

Some people say that fighting was a way of life when they were growing up. Others say it happened from time to time. Still others say they never saw it going on. In reality, it is an extremely rare family or fraternity or camp or living group where there are not occasional (or frequent) fights and quarrels.

3. What does James say is the root cause of fights and quarrels between people? (4:2)

James says that most fighting stems from envy, from jealousy, and from wanting something you don't have. There are probably other reasons too; what do you and the people in your group think?

4. What are the two main behaviors that James criticizes in Verses 4:2-3?

James criticizes us for expressing our envy in unspiritual, aggressive, and cruel ways rather than praying to the Lord to meet our needs. But he also criticizes praying to the Lord to meet our selfish desires.

5. Why doesn't God give some people what they ask for? (James 4:3, Isaiah 55:89, 2 Peter 3:8, Philippians 4:6-7, John 15:7)

James says in 4:3 that people pray to God with the wrong motive. But there are other reasons that God doesn't answer our prayers too. Some of them: God's way are not our ways. (Is 55:89) God's time is not our time. (2 Peter 3:8) God promises peace, not necessarily what you ask for. (Phil 4:6-7) Are you praying without having the word truly in you? (John 15:7) Or perhaps God's answer to a prayer is "wait" or "no."

Isaiah 55:89 – ⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

2 Peter 3:8 – But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Philippians 4:6-7 – ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

John 15:7 – If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

6. James says that “anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” What did Jesus say about God and the world? (Matthew 6:24, John 15:18-19)

First, you cannot serve two masters: God and money (the world). Second, if you belong to the world, the people of the world will love you, but if you don’t belong to the world, its people will hate you. Since we, as humans, want to be liked by our friends, we often choose the ways of the world, going along with the crowd.

Matthew 6:24 – No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

John 15:18-19 – ¹⁸“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

7. Can we love both God and the world? What happens if we try to love both? (1 John 2:15-16, also Matthew 6:24)

NO! Foolish pride and selfish desires prevent us from loving God and receiving his grace. James says that if we try to embrace both God and worldly values, we actually become an enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-16 – ¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

8. How can we avoid loving the world? (James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34)

By being humble and praying to God in our humility. We must admit that we don’t have the strength on our own to turn away from earthly values. We must completely surrender to God and put ourselves in His hands.

James 4:6 – ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Proverbs 3:34 – He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

9. James now offers ten commands. Let's name them:

1. Submit (or surrender) yourselves (to God)
2. Resist the devil
3. Come near to God
4. Wash your hands (or clean up your lives)
5. Purify your hearts
6. Grieve
7. Mourn (or be sorry)
8. Wail
9. Change your laughter (to mourning)
10. Humble yourselves (before the Lord).

10. Jesus summed all this up in two commandments. What are they? (Matthew 22:37-39)

Matthew 22:37-39 – ³⁷ Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ [a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [b]

- a. Matthew 22:37 – Deuteronomy 6:5
- b. Matthew 22:39 – Leviticus 19:18

11. What is James saying in Verses 4:11-12? (Matthew 7:1-5)

Do not judge one another. By judging others, we are not keeping the law, we are breaking it. Only God can judge. Matthew 7:1-5 is the story of seeing a speck in someone else's eye and missing the log in your own.

Small Group Questions

Questions 1 and 2 are about verses that are potentially very confusing and difficult. Many pages of books and web pages are devoted to “answering” and discussing those verses. Go to them. I'm not going to add to it.

3. What sins are we guilty of when we judge others? (Psalm 94:1-2, Proverbs 6:16-19, 8:13, 11:2, 13:10, 16:18)

Pride and arrogance.