



SEA CHANGE
CHURCH

THE CURRENT

Storm Proof: A Study in James · S2E2

The War Within

A 7-Day Study

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 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. 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. 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'? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

James 4:1–6 ESV

Pastor Adam Stadtmiller · October 18, 2026

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

James 4:6

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week, The Current walks through a piece of Sunday's passage: a short verse study, encouragement, journal questions, and a daily prayer.

Take one day at a time. There's no need to rush.

DAY 1

What Causes Quarrels?

JAMES 4:1 ESV

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

VERSE STUDY

James wastes no time. Chapter 4 opens with a question aimed straight at the community reading it: what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? His readers were Jewish believers scattered along the Roman roads into cities like Ephesus and Rome. They had left behind the rhythm of Jerusalem, its synagogues and festivals and familiar friendships, and arrived in places where pagan temples set the tone of daily life. What surrounded them had begun to move in with them.

The young church was also living through enormous change. Questions about sacrifice, about the law of Moses, about whether and how Gentiles belonged, had to be worked out again every time new believers arrived. Change brings tumult, and tumult brings quarrels. James had heard the reports, and he goes looking for the source.

His answer is not first about the other people in the room. Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? Outward conflicts often expose inward demands. The fight we can see is usually downstream of a fight we cannot see, the one going on in our own hearts.

That makes the simple word "what" worth holding on to. Many of us start the day by plowing ahead: the news, the inbox, the calendar. James's question invites a pause first. What are we feeling? What is holding on to us? Why might that be? Often the what comes quickly and the why takes longer, and that is where God's help is needed. It is also worth saying at the start of a hard-hitting passage that Scripture written to believers aims to convict, not to crush. Godly grief, Paul writes, produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret (2 Corinthians 7:10).

TAKE HEART

James asks a question before he gives an answer, and that is a kindness. Questions invite us in rather than shut us out. God already knows what is stirring beneath the surface of our lives, and none of it surprises him. Naming what is going on inside is not the first step toward condemnation. It is the first step toward peace, because what has been named can be surrendered.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. When we look at a recent conflict, whether at home, at work, or online, what inward demand might have been driving it?

2. What would a short daily check-in with God look like for us this week: what we are feeling, what is holding on to us, and why?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Psalm 139:1-4, 23-24

ACTION CHALLENGE

Each morning this week, before checking the news or the inbox, take two minutes to ask the question James asks: what is stirring in us today? Write down one word, then bring it to God.

NOTES

DAY 2

Passions at War

JAMES 4:1–2 ESV

"Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel."

VERSE STUDY

The word James uses for passions is *hēdonē*, the root of our word hedonism. It means pleasure, and in verses 1 and 3 he uses its plural form for the self-serving pleasures that drive conflict and shape misguided prayers. His readers lived in a Greco-Roman world that pursued pleasure with real dedication, and its pull had reached the church.

Passion itself is not the enemy. God created us with desire, and the problem is that any good desire can be bent. In the garden, the woman saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise (Genesis 3:6). Wanting wisdom was not wrong; reaching for it on the serpent's terms was. Paul describes the same tension in every believer: the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh (Galatians 5:17).

It is easy to assume the passions James means are only the obvious ones: lust, gluttony, addiction. The message widened the list. There is a passion for control, the need to manage every situation. There is a passion that shows up as manipulation, knowing exactly which topics will steer a spouse or a coworker out of an argument and toward the outcome we want. There is even a passion in unforgiveness, which can feel strangely satisfying because it lets us feel righteous.

James's language is strong: "You desire and do not have, so you murder." Few of us will take it that far, but the progression is real. Unmet desire becomes resentment, resentment becomes conflict, and conflict wounds people. One line from Sunday captures it: it is very hard to walk true north with an inner compass pointing southeast.

TAKE HEART

Discovering a bent passion in our own hearts is not proof that we are beyond help. It is a sign that the Spirit is at work, because the flesh rarely points out its own disorder. The same God who made us with desire is able to straighten what has been bent and to reorder our loves around him. We do not have to fix our passions before coming to him. We bring them as they are.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Beyond the obvious ones, which passion tends to drive our conflicts: control, being right, being understood, comfort, or something else?
2. Where do we see the progression from unmet desire to resentment to conflict playing out in our lives right now?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

ACTION CHALLENGE

Pick one recurring conflict and, the next time it surfaces, pause long enough to name the desire underneath it before responding. Then offer that desire to God in a single sentence of prayer.

NOTES

DAY 3

Because We Do Not Ask

JAMES 4:2 ESV

"You do not have, because you do not ask."

VERSE STUDY

In the middle of a hard passage, James drops a line that is almost tender: you do not have, because you do not ask. Taken on its own, before he qualifies it in verse 3, it is an invitation. Some things are missing from our lives simply because we have never brought them to God, or brought them once and quietly stopped.

God does not need to be informed. Jesus said our Father knows what we need before we ask him (Matthew 6:8). Yet he still invites us to ask, because prayer is participation. God chooses to involve his people in what he is doing, to give us a real share in the work. The sermon also commended fasting alongside prayer for the things we have carried a long time, as a way of giving that asking our full attention.

Asking does not guarantee receiving the specific thing asked for. Sometimes what God wants to give is not the answer we imagined but something that forms us. Paul traces the chain: suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope (Romans 5:3-4). The road to hope runs through endurance, and hope is what allows a heart to rest.

That reframes what we ask for. In a culture that has made personal purpose almost an object of worship, it is freeing to remember that our purpose is simple: to serve Jesus Christ. Everything else follows from that. So we can pray boldly for the things on our hearts, and pray just as boldly that if God wants to give us something, he would give us his purpose and the endurance to walk in it.

TAKE HEART

God is not annoyed by our asking. Earlier in this same letter, James says that God gives generously to all without reproach (James 1:5), which means without scolding us for coming back again. Whatever we have stopped praying about because it felt too small, too big, or too long unanswered, the door is still open. The invitation to ask has not expired.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What have we stopped asking God for, and why did we stop?
2. Where might God be offering endurance in a season when we have been asking only for relief?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them."

Psalms 145:15–19

ACTION CHALLENGE

Write down one thing we have never really asked God for, or have stopped asking for. Bring it to him by name each day this week, and, where health allows, set aside one meal on one of those days to fast and pray instead.

NOTES

DAY 4

Asking Wrongly

JAMES 4:3 ESV

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

VERSE STUDY

Verse 3 completes the thought: you ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. The word passions returns, the same *hēdonē* from verse 1. The problem is not asking. It is asking from a heart that wants God to serve its desires.

Consider the world James's readers lived in. In the temples of cities like Ephesus, worship was a transaction: offer the right sacrifice, perform the right rite, and the god owes something in return. Some believers seem to have carried that logic into their faith, treating prayer as a formula for getting what they wanted. That is closer to magic than to prayer. Magic says: perform the ritual and the result is guaranteed. Prayer says: here is our request, and we trust a good Father to answer as he knows best.

Jesus himself modeled the difference. In Gethsemane he asked plainly for the cup to be removed, and then yielded his will to the Father's (Luke 22:42). That is surrender inside a request. God's first aim is not to grant every prayer but to form us into people who look like his Son, and the Son did not receive the thing he asked for in that garden.

The harder question is our motives, and we are poor judges of them. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, Proverbs says, but the LORD weighs the spirit (Proverbs 16:2). Paul admits that we do not know what to pray for as we ought, and that the Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). So we invite God to search our motives rather than assuming we already understand them. One image from Sunday is hard to forget: too often we keep asking for chicken nuggets when God wants to give us a farm.

TAKE HEART

None of us prays with perfectly pure motives, and God does not wait for that before he listens. The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Our clumsy, mixed, half-understood prayers are carried by someone who knows exactly what we need. That frees us to keep praying honestly while we let God sort out our motives.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Looking at our recent prayers, which ones might be more about getting God to serve our plans than about seeking him?
2. Which request that we care about deeply could we hold with open hands, the way Jesus did in the garden?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking. Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, Collect for Proper 11

ACTION CHALLENGE

Take one prayer request that matters to us and pray it each day this week with an added line of surrender, asking God to show us our motives and to answer in the way that forms us most.

NOTES

DAY 5

A Divided Heart

JAMES 4:4 ESV

"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."

VERSE STUDY

You adulterous people. James reaches for the most personal language he can find. The issue is not mainly a literal affair. It is divided loyalty: a people bound to God by covenant who keep slipping away to other loves. Friendship with the world, in this sense, means adopting values that compete with loyalty to God.

Sunday's picture was vivid. Many of us recently saw footage of oceanfront homes collapsing into the surf, beautiful houses built where it once seemed perfectly reasonable to build. Jesus told a parable about exactly this: the wise man built his house on the rock, the foolish man on the sand, and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24-27). James's readers wanted a foundation in Christ, but they also wanted a little accessory dwelling unit in the world, a getaway out back they could visit whenever they liked and leave when push came to shove.

It is an honest picture of a temptation most of us know: give God enough to quiet the guilt, then slip away to our own distractions as often as we can. Adam was frank that living with a foot in each place is miserable. A half-committed faith delivers neither the pleasures of the world nor the peace of God.

Just as important is who James has in view. Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world describes someone who has deliberately chosen to walk away from God, like a believer leaving worship and heading straight to another temple down the street. That is different from a believer who is struggling with a habit or an addiction, confessing it, and longing to do better. A real fight against sin is not enmity with God. It is evidence of a heart that wants him.

TAKE HEART

If this verse stings, the sting is not a verdict. It is an invitation home. God does not ask us to tear down the getaway in our own strength; he asks us to hand him the keys. The very next verses show a God who yearns for us and keeps giving more grace. A divided heart is exactly the kind of heart he knows how to make whole.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What is our accessory dwelling unit, the place we slip away to when we would rather not give God everything?

2. What would it cost to hand that place over to God this week, and what might it give back?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol."

Psalms 86:5–7, 11–13

ACTION CHALLENGE

Name the getaway honestly, in writing or to a trusted friend. Then take one concrete step this week to close it down, whether that means deleting an app, ending a habit, or changing a routine.

NOTES

DAY 6

He Yearns Jealously

JAMES 4:5 ESV

"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'?"

VERSE STUDY

Right after the hardest words in the passage comes a small word, or, and everything turns on it. 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? Having exposed the divided heart, James shows us the heart of God.

Jealousy usually sounds like a flaw, and in chapter 3 James warned against bitter jealousy. But God's jealousy is a different thing. It is the protective, zealous love of a faithful husband for his bride, a love that refuses to share what belongs to him with anything that would destroy it. God is not indifferent to where our hearts go, precisely because he loves us.

What God yearns for is not first our productivity. It is our presence. He wants to be with us, to abide with us, to meet us in the morning. We do not have to arrive with a polished prayer list or a sense of having earned the time. Psalm 23 pictures the shepherd who makes his sheep lie down in green pastures and leads them beside still waters, a picture of rest in his company rather than a list of tasks.

The sermon had some fun imagining heaven as a construction site, with new arrivals asked to hang drywall so the mansions are ready on time. Eternity will not be a to-do list. It will be complete, unhurried abiding with God, and the time we spend with him now is a foretaste of it. The God who yearns jealously over us is not waiting for our output. He is waiting for us.

TAKE HEART

We are wanted. Not tolerated, not merely forgiven, but yearned for by the God who has made his Spirit to dwell in us. On days when our devotion feels thin, his love does not. That jealous love is the ground we stand on, and it does not depend on how well we showed up yesterday.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. How does it change our picture of God to know that he yearns jealously over us rather than simply putting up with us?
2. What would it look like to spend time with God this week without an agenda, simply to be with him?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Psalms 23

ACTION CHALLENGE

Set aside ten minutes on one day this week to sit with God with no list and no agenda. Read Psalm 23 slowly, then simply rest in his company.

NOTES

DAY 7

More Grace

JAMES 4:6 ESV

"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

VERSE STUDY

Here is the antidote to everything that came before: but he gives more grace. Whatever quarrels, bent passions, wrong asking, or divided loyalty James has exposed, God's grace is greater. There was nothing James's scattered readers had done that the blood of Jesus could not cover, and the same is true of us.

James backs it up with Scripture: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. He is quoting Proverbs 3:34 as it read in the Greek Old Testament, and Peter quotes the very same line (1 Peter 5:5). Two apostles reaching for the same proverb shows how central it was to the early church's understanding of how God meets us.

Humility, in James's sense, looks a great deal like surrender. It is the posture of someone who stops defending the getaway, stops bargaining with God, and opens both hands. Grace flows toward that posture. Pride, the insistence on running our own lives, puts us in the one position Scripture says God opposes.

The week's practical takeaway is to add a time of surrender into our daily time with God, letting go of the things we are holding on to. It might mean checking in honestly, naming what is behind the fear or the anger or the anxiety, and asking God for understanding. James has already promised that God gives generously to those who ask (James 1:5). Surrender is not a one-time event. It is a daily practice, and every day it is met with more grace.

TAKE HEART

Grace is the theme of James, not scolding. The letter is not finally about wayward believers but about a God who loves them enough to call them home. Peace does not come from finally getting everything we want. It comes when we let go, and every time we let go, we find more grace waiting than we expected.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What are we holding on to most tightly right now, and what makes it hard to surrender?
2. Where have we seen God meet our humility with grace in the past?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, A Prayer of Self-Dedication

ACTION CHALLENGE

Add a time of surrender to each day this week. Name one thing to release, open our hands in prayer, and give it to God. Then notice what happens to our peace.

NOTES

MEMORY VERSE

*"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.'"*

James 4:6

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