

**Message #12****James 4:1-6**

Someone once told me that if you can be positive, aggressive and confident you can accomplish anything you want in this world and make it in this world. For the most part, that is probably true. If you are aggressive and self-assertive and goal-oriented, you can climb the ladder of success in this world. **However, the aggressive, self-confident, self-assertive person will go nowhere in God's world.**

What does it take to receive the applause and favor of God? **What it takes is quiet, submissive humility.**

This philosophy is so foreign to what even takes place in most churches. Most churches promote an aggressive, self-assertive action. In most churches, if you are loud and pushy you will go places. But in God's world, those people are nothing. God looks for quiet, humble servants.

God will not shower His blessings on self-centered, loud-mouthed, self-seeking, proud, arrogant people. He looks for the "meek," the "lowly," the "humble," the "poor in spirit" and the "submissive." God will bless people who operate this way and He will bless a church that operates this way.

It is amazing how practical this book of James is to this day. This book was written in AD 45 and you would think it was just written now. Apparently right from the early days of the church there were problems. There were people who went to church who had problems. So what James writes here is this:

**PEOPLE WHO WANT GOD'S FAVOR AND BLESSINGS WILL HUMBLY AND QUIETLY SUBMIT TO GOD AND HIS WORD AND NOT BE LOUD-MOUTHED, PUSHY AND ARROGANT.**

It is encouraging to realize that God gives us time to mature and develop in this direction. It is sad to know that few truly do develop.

There are primarily two main points James makes here about having the favor of God:

**DIVINE FAVOR POINT #1** – God will not give His favor or blessings to those in His family who are pursuing wrong things. **4:1-4**

There are four wrong pursuits that will never lead God's people to the favor and blessings of God:

**Wrong Pursuit #1** - God will not favor or bless people who are quarreling. **4:1-2a**

This text is so realistic it is eerie. God will not shower His grace favor and blessings on people who are constantly in war with each other. What we see here is that a church can be a war zone of quarrels and conflicts. God will not bless a church like that.

The basic reason why He will never do this is because when you have people in constant war with each other, you have people who are selfish, self-centered, egotistical and not humble.

The word “quarrel” that is used often in this context refers to fights and quarrels and disputes that are very contentious (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 280-281). Those quarrels are prompted by some “pleasure” driven objective. That word “pleasure” (ἡδονῶν) the Greek word from which we get our English word “hedonism.” **Quarrels begin with some hedonistic motive, not some heavenly motive.**

**Carefully notice that the fights and quarrels are taking place among the brothers and sisters and membership.** The source of the fights and quarrels between brothers and sisters is self-centered pleasure lust. Constant quarreling and arguing are not caused or produced by God’s Spirit, but by people’s own dark natures.

I actually could name a man who started trouble in a church who was pursuing a hedonistic life of pleasure behind the scenes. When he started the trouble in the church no one knew it, but eventually it came out. This war was started by a sinful pleasure seeker.

Now James really spells out how these things begin. There are four steps grammatically that cause the church fights:

**(Step #1)** - Quarrels start when someone in the church wants something or lusts after something.  
**4:2a**

James does not specify what exactly the lusts are. It could be a lust for power or pleasure or position or it could be just for pride. But quarrels start right here. Big problems start here.

Someone doesn’t have something and they want it. They lust after something in the church. Some have suggested in the immediate context it may mean they want to be up in front in public teaching. Someone in the church wants some position or power or prestige that someone else has. It could even be motivated by money.

But here is what we can know; when you have a quarrel you have someone lusting for something.

**(Step #2)** - Quarrels start when someone in the church does not have what they want. **4:2b**

Notice the verb “you do not have.” Quarrels begin when someone lusts after something and they continually don’t have what they want or don’t get their own way.

The result of this is the person commits murder with their mouths. The word for “murder” means to kill and slaughter people with their mouths. These kinds of people think nothing about using their mouths to destroy another brother or sister in Christ (2:11; 4:11).

**(Step #3)** - Quarrels start when someone in the church is envious of someone. **4:2c**

The word “envious” is one that means to burn with envy and jealousy (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 195). This is an envy that eats at a person.

**(Step #4)** - Quarrels start when someone in the church cannot obtain what they want. **4:2d**

The person cannot obtain the position, the power, the prestige or the prosperity so what they do is use their mouths to quarrel and fight and kill.

When someone follows these steps they start fights and quarrel. They verbally abuse people and they verbally murder people.

A key question that one must be willing to ask when one finds himself in conflict with another brother or sister in Christ is what is my motivation. Is my motivation to do God’s will or is it to accomplish my own selfish desire?

**Wrong Pursuit #2** - God will not favor or bless people who do not pray. **4:2b**

You can mark this point and take it to the bank; argumentative, proud and arrogant people are not privately spending time with God in prayer. The person who is self-seeking is not God-seeking. Since the person is not God-seeking, he is not praying.

A self-centered person may go to public prayer meetings, like a Pharisee, to show off before people, but privately there is no prayer. Instead of being jealous of what someone else has, why not get alone with God and ask God to give you the desires of your heart? Instead of wasting time quarreling, why not invest time praying?

Praying people for the most part are spiritually-minded people. Usually praying people don’t get involved in self-centered egotistical campaigns.

**Wrong Pursuit #3** - God will not favor or bless people who selfishly pray. **4:3**

James knew that there would be someone who was self-centered who would say, well James, I do go to prayer meetings and I do pray and God doesn’t seem to answer My prayer.

Now there are instances when someone does pray and God doesn't answer. God says the reason is because you are asking with wrong motives. You are praying for your own pleasure.

I have been in hundreds and hundreds of prayer meetings over these past 42 years and there have been times when I am convinced that the person praying was praying to inform the other people in the prayer group rather than talk to God. I have heard people pray about how they did this or that because they want everyone else to know they did this or that. God isn't going to answer prayer like that. It is selfish and self-promoting.

Now the word "spend it" is a Greek word that is a financial term which means to spend something. Apparently people were praying for something that would fulfill their own lusts and desires. Apparently some were praying for things so that they could have more pleasure. This had nothing to do with God's will. God says I am not going to answer that.

There are people who will go to any extreme to get what they want, including pray.

The key to the prayer is motivation. When we pray we must examine our motives for the prayer.

Years ago, when I was in school there was a teacher named Ben DeJong. He used an illustration of a mother who prayed for her dying son. He said he did not even know for sure if the woman was a believer, but she prayed and even bordered on demanding that God heal her son. He said she was never interested in the will of God, but she just wanted God to heal her son. Well God did. That mother watched her son grow up and become a murderer and she watched him die in an electric chair. Dr. DeJong said her prayer may have been right but her motive was wrong. She did not get the answer she expected.

God says I will not give people what they want when they pray with wrong motives

**Wrong Pursuit #4** - God will not favor or bless people who pursue world friendships. **4:4**

God says I am not about to favor or bless His people when their primary focus is being friendly with this world. God considers a pleasure-driven person to be on the side of His enemies. The thought that God's people could actually be an adversary of God and more a friend of the world is horrible. The world we are speaking about is the world that leaves God out. The worldliness to which James is referring is a worldliness that is hostile to God and His Word.

James makes a serious statement here. If your pursuit is to become a great friend of this God-mocking world, you are making yourself out to be an enemy of God.

The more you stay away from the godless world with its godless pursuits, the more favor of God you will have.

I am not a legalist, but we live in a godless world that is anti-Bible and anti-God. We live in a world of liars and adulterers and baby killers. We live in a world of TV's, computers, internet.

We live in a world that promotes all kinds of religion. The closer we are to God, the more we will sense this world is not our friend.

Also the text does not say we should not try to reach the world or that if we have some unsaved friend who is in the world we are an enemy of God. What this text says is that pursuing a friendship with this God-mocking, Christ-rejecting, moral lacking world is what makes one an enemy of God.

**DIVINE FAVOR POINT #2** – God will give His favor and blessings to those who demonstrate a Spirit-Produced humility. **4:5-6**

Now **verse 5** opens with a statement about Scripture. People who want God’s grace blessings are people who are very concerned about the Word of God. They want to know what it says.

The point of these verses is that God is a jealous God and His Spirit indwells His people and His Spirit is leading His people to be humble and not proud. God has actually made His Spirit to indwell every believer and He has a jealousy that His Spirit dominates our lives. The Holy Spirit has a jealousy for the people of God and that jealousy is for them to be godly. When His Spirit is dominating our lives, we will be quiet, humble, meek and submissive.

In **verse 6** God makes a promise concerning His grace. God will grant His favor and His grace to those pursuing that.

Look at **verse 6**, God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Charles Spurgeon was once approached by a woman who said, “I pray every day that you may be kept humble.” Spurgeon said the woman was a fine looking woman, very well-dressed so when she said that he said, “Thank you very much; but you remind me of a failure in my duty. I have never prayed for you that you might be kept humble.” Well the woman became upset and said, “there is no need for such prayers, for I am not tempted to be proud.” Spurgeon said, “How proud she was to have obtained to such a delusion” (Cited from Kent Hughes, *James*, p. 180).

So perhaps you have been a hard-hearted and hard-headed person. You never lose an argument and you always get the last word. Maybe you don’t listen to anyone, but you want to change. Ask the Lord to grant you His grace and cry out to Him for His forgiveness. Humble yourself before Him and He will exalt you.