

**A Study in James**  
**Part 11 – “When Pleasure Is the Goal”**  
**James 4:1-5**

TAKE YOUR BIBLES PLEASE...

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).

The quality of life reflected in reflected in this passage of Scripture is appallingly low. The readers are charged with wars and fighting, self-indulgence, prayerlessness, lust, adultery, envy, pride, slander, and murder. In fact, James uses such dark strokes in depicting conditions among his readers that many interpreters have questioned whether he was addressing a Christian audience or an audience of unbelieving Jews! The whole passage is an in-depth treatment of the havoc brought about when worldly wisdom rather than heavenly wisdom dominates the life of an individual. It is a timely message for us as well. Bill Rittenhouse tells a great story that illustrates this truth.

“In the summer of 1960, my family and I were driving on the turnpike between Kansas City and Topeka. Coming toward us on the other side of the highway was a station wagon loaded with luggage on top. As our cars passed on opposite sides of the highway, a suitcase from the top of the station wagon broke loose. The owner must not have known of the loss for they never slowed. I stopped my car and ran to pick up the lost luggage. In Topeka, we opened the suitcase to see if there was any way to determine the owner’s address or name. It contained the usual personal items and one item that provided a faint clue. It was a white box with a rubber band around it and a twenty dollar gold piece in it. It was carefully wrapped between two pieces of cotton and tucked for safe-keeping in the box. Inscribed on one side of the coin were the words: *Twenty Years of Faithful Service*. The other side read: *Presented to Otis Sampson by Northwestern States Portland Cement Company*.

“After returning home, I mailed letters to the Portland Cement Company in seventy-five different cities in the Northwest! Many were returned because the cities no longer had a Portland Cement Company office located in their area. But, one letter did inform me that an Otis Sampson was formerly in their employ and had recently retired. Immediately I wrote to him at the address given me. He wrote back and identified the contents with great relief that his *prized possession* had been found. He used that exact phrase, “prized possession.” In fact, he told me to discard all the other contents, but the gold piece was his most prized possession. It meant more to him than anything else he had ever had. Of course I answered the letter and returned the gold piece. I took the opportunity to tell him of my most precious possession. I told him of my family and how God had reunited them with me after being a prisoner of war in Rumania in World War

II. Further, I told him that as precious as my family was, my most precious possession was Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. "A year later I received a present at Christmas. Inside was that same gold piece with the following note: 'Last Sunday my wife and I were baptized in a little church here in Colorado. We want you to have the gold piece to carry with you at all times. We are two old people. I'm seventy-four and my wife is seventy. No one ever told us about Jesus before. Now he is our most precious possession also.'"

For many of us pleasure has become our most precious possession. Pleasure has become a central industry in America today. It produces billions of dollars of income every year! We are a nation of pleasure seekers. Now, hear me very clearly, pleasure is not evil in itself. There is wrong with having joy in our lives and feeling a sense of personal pleasure. It is only when the finding of pleasure for self becomes the primary goal for your life that you get into trouble. God gave us our desires, including our desire to be happy and joyful. He wants us to enjoy ourselves, but he also knows that only His way to pleasure will produce a pleasure that builds instead of destroys.

The consequences of making pleasure your primary goal are set before us in the text. All of your life will be affected by the choice you make. If you choose to follow pleasure your relationship to God, to others, even yourself will never be the same. **So, the next time you are tempted to go for it, since you only go around once there are three truths you should remember:**

### **First, When Pleasure Is the Goal, Conflicts With Others Will Follow (v. 1).**

James writes: *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* While some interpreters of this passage point to the word "war" and indicate this is a community, or national reference, the context would point to the individual and his relationship to others. "Among you" would point to the fact that James has in mind the conflict that was already present in the Christian fellowship. It is interesting that the word "war" is a different word altogether from the two used in the first question, "quarrels" and "conflict." War has with it a reference to the longer struggle of many battles. Anyone who has been involved in a church struggle knows this is the best word to describe the conflict. Everyday there are those who "go to war" with others at work, in the home, in the church. James says that at least in part, the reason for these wars is rooted in the people seeking their own pleasure.

We know this to be true. When a man sets his heart on God, making Him the primary thing in his life, he will be drawn into closer relationship with others. Peace just follows that kind of commitment. If you are facing conflicts in your life with others, you should ask: *About whom am I most concerned in this situation? Am I more concerned about the will of God being done, or about my will being done?*

### **Second, When Pleasure Is the Goal, Disappointment to Self Is Inevitable (vv. 2-3).**

It is a strange thing, never-the-less it is true: *The man who makes pleasure his goal in life never finds it!* Look at these verses again:

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. (James 4:2-3 ESV).

Clearly James says they have tried to get it, but just couldn't obtain it. They were willing to kill for happiness, but still couldn't obtain it. They were willing to kill for happiness, but still could not find it. **There are two primary reasons for their inability to find happiness:**

1. ***Things in themselves can never bring pleasure.*** If we have learned anything at all from our study in Ecclesiastes, we have certainly learned this!
2. ***Making pleasure the goal of your life puts God into such a position that God cannot give you the things that satisfy.*** The pleasure oriented man cannot pray effectively. His desire for pleasure gets mixed with his prayers and they are motivated out of selfish desire. That kind of prayer is not answered affirmatively. There is a vast difference between the man seeking God's will and his own.

Some of us are like the little boy who was overheard one day praying, "Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo." He said those words over and over again. Curiosity aroused from the listeners and they asked him why he kept repeating those words in his prayers? The little boy replied, "Well, I have just finished my geography exam, and I have been praying for God to make Tokyo the capital of France."

**As powerful as prayer is, there are simply some things that we just can't ask for and expect to receive!** How sad for some that they have asked God for the wrong things and then not understood why God didn't grant their request.

### **Third, When Pleasure Is the Goal, God Is Jealous (v. 4).**

**God created man for Himself. We are not our own. In fact, we are told by the Scripture we are bought with a price. God laid claim to the believer redemptively with the price of His only begotten Son. We are his.**

The illustration chosen in the Scripture is that of the relationship between a husband and wife. How many of you husbands wouldn't mind sharing your wife with another man? Or, how many of you wives wouldn't mind sharing your husband with another woman? It is a ridiculous question to even ask. So it is with God. He cannot tolerate our attention being divided between him and pleasure. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that one of the characteristics of the last days would be that men would become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This certainly seems to be such a time!

Jerome, Arizona, is built on the side of a mountain. The foundations of the streets, the buildings, and walkways often rest on solid rock. You couldn't ask for a more solid foundation on which to build a town. Yet looks can often be deceiving. What cannot be seen with the eye are the hundreds of tunnels from the copper mines bored beneath the city. Even though these tunnels are sometimes hundreds of feet beneath the surface, they have so weakened the structure of the facing rock that it has begun to give way. The surface of the mountain has shifted. Cracks have opened up, some several feet wide, causing buildings to collapse and pavement to buckle.

We often put our trust in things that appear on the surface to be solid – bank accounts, securities, land, or position. They seem so solid that we are blind to the fact that they are often no more than hollow shells, undermined and ready to collapse.

What is first in your life? About which are you most concerned, pleasing God or pleasing yourself? If it is the latter, you are on the wrong road. It is time for you to repent before the anger of God is felt in its full fury in your life. He will forgive you, but only if you ask. Won't you ask Him today?