

Day 16

God's Great Extension - Read James 4

An Original Poem Inspired By James 4:

Developing friendship requires attention to soul health and focus on God's great extension.

In goodness and grace diffusing hostility – desiring, requiring a unified purity.

And once evil flees 'cause you washed and resisted – repent and prepare, now expect to be lifted!

All glory, all honor – may this kindness be known and with your last breath boast in Christ's name alone!

Day 17

Friendship with God - Read James 4:1-6

To beat the heat earlier this month, our family ran to the refreshing waters of one of Bismarck's public pools. While most of the family chose adventure with slides and spouts in the deep end, my youngest played it safe in the cool, comfortable waters of the kiddie pool. After much play and pretend, my six year old was invited to play with another little swimmer. As they dove into a water-based, make-believe adventure, I could hear the little girl begin, "pretend you are my *best friend*...." Have you ever experienced a good and lasting friendship that began so easily?

James speaks of the dynamics of two very different spiritual friendships in the opening verses of chapter 4. The more we get to know Jesus, the more we will deeply desire to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength – friendship with God is possible. Because of Jesus Christ in our lives, we may stand pure and faultless, refusing to be corrupted by the world. However, when we are driven by the things of this world, when we seek to satisfy our own desires, our own lusts, our own pride – we are a friend of the world. Friendship with the world produces hostility in the human heart toward God. We become his enemy and are left with an empty, worthless friendship with the evil one that might as well be rooted in make-believe.

Father, thank you that by sending Jesus to die on the cross, you created a way for friendship with God. I give you praise that although I am unworthy of the goodness and grace of Christ, by believing in Him and seeking forgiveness, restoration is mine. Show me what it means to remain pure and faultless in you. Even though I am tempted each day and the evil one attempts to lure me away from you, I refuse to be corrupted by the things of this world. Today I choose to set my mind on the things above. I will think about that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy! Amen.

For deeper study: 1 John 2:15-16, Romans 8:1-17, Colossians 3:1-17, Philippians 4:8

Day 18

Humble Resistance

"So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor."

James 4:7-10 NLT

1. What are the active commands found in these verses which combat a prideful attitude?
2. What does a life look like that is humbled before God?
3. In what ways can we resist the devil (actively and passively)?
4. Why will the devil flee from you when resisted?
5. What will God's presence produce in your life?

Lord, I come to you today laying all that I have and all that I am at your feet. You are all that I desire. You are worthy of my highest praise and unwavering devotion. Amen.

Day 19

A Word on Slander - “Don’t bad-mouth each other, friends. It’s God’s Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You’re supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?”

James 4:11-12 MSG

“Getting the wind knocked out of you” is an expression used to explain something that happens when you experience a sudden blow to your abdomen, or even fall onto your back. Such an impact can cause the diaphragm to spasm and empty all of the air out of your lungs. For a few moments, the muscle is paralyzed, the lungs are unable to inflate, and you cannot breathe. Thankfully, most people fully recover within a few minutes and are able to breathe normally.

Although the involuntary action of “getting the wind knocked out of you” is not what James refers to in his letter to the early church, a central theme in the book is what we voluntarily allow to come out in our speech. Every chapter of the book includes words of instruction and encouragement on why, when, and how to speak. Today’s passage warns against slander. In addition to potentially negatively affecting those around us, bad-mouthing other people tarnishes the gospel. In such instances, it is as if the message of Christ is paralyzed in our lives. Christ is not glorified and those affected are not edified.

God, forgive me when I have spoken words that have not honored the message of Christ. I recognize that you alone are God and that I have no right to cast judgment on others. Fill me with your words today. Amen.

Day 20

A Lasting Last Thing - Read James 4:13-17

The move to North Dakota for me and my children began in Walnut, Illinois. After driving all day, we approached stormy weather in northeast Nebraska. I turned onto the country highway that would bring us to my brother’s home and was thankful we only had thirty minutes to go. While enjoying the picturesque drive through this lush farmland, something caught my attention. I gasped at the sudden sight of a tornado on the ground. Without knowing the path or speed of the funnel cloud, I quickly decided to stop at the next farmhouse. Leaving my frightened children in the van, I ran up to the front door of this well-kept home and began knocking frantically. When the old farmer opened the door, it quickly became apparent from his wet hair and the disheveled shirt that he had just taken a shower. I alerted him to the tornado, and he reluctantly agreed to let me bring my family into his tidy home. In a few moments of rushed conversation, he and I debated the need to take shelter in his basement. While considering our next steps, my daughter threw up on this kind gentleman’s couch. As I cleaned up the couch and tried to console my terrified children, he informed me that he would *not* be going downstairs, but he would mercifully allow us to go to the basement.

Our move was supposed to include a long drive and layover in Nebraska to visit family. Little did I know, the plans would also include highly destructive twin tornadoes, a minivan totaled by tornado debris, as well as my apparent attempt to break **ALL** rules of “stranger danger!”

In today’s Scripture, James has a reminder for us about plans. Our all-knowing, all-seeing God controls time and space. He knows something about what tomorrow holds. “We humans keep brainstorming options and plans, but God’s purpose prevails.” (Proverbs 19:21 MSG) Let’s intentionally align ourselves with God’s word, expecting to encounter God, giving generously of ourselves, risking choices with eternal consequence for our lives and others.

Lord, thank you for being my helper and sustainer. Show me your will and how to walk in it and help us to live in such a way that our last thing is lasting. Amen.

