

JAMES: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

Week 4:
Christ-Centered Humility

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

Every relationship experiences friction. Whether it's a roommate, parent, friend, or co-worker, if you spend any long period of time with someone, friction is bound to come about. James reminds us that the cause of this tension is typically rooted in our own sin. He gives a piece of advice to the church in this regard: humility and repentance. In this lesson, participants will be challenged to identify the areas of their lives where there might be sin, humble themselves in repentance, and seek God as they move forward in relationship.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: We often are quick to point out the faults of others before first identifying the sin in our own lives.
2. WHY: Sin is often the cause of friction in a relationship; we must humble ourselves and submit to God when faced with this tension.
3. HOW: This lesson will encourage participants to humbly evaluate their lives and turn toward repentance.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

James 4:1-12

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 7:1-5 and John 15:9-13

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with participants, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your lesson.



LEADER
TIP

Read James 4:1-12.



Relationships can be messy. The more time you spend with someone, the higher the chance for friction within that relationship. Why? Because we are sinful humans who are constantly looking out for our own best interest.

In his typical fashion, James addresses the issue directly. We learn in James 4 that quarreling and friction are caused by our own sinful and evil desires. James teaches that the remedy to restore relationships is to turn from our sin and align our hearts back to God. But why is this important? And why does James spend time talking about getting along with others?

The answer is quite simple. Jesus calls the church to be the vehicle for reaching the whole world for God's kingdom. It's impossible for the church to do what it was called to do if we Christians are constantly fighting and living in our own selfish ways.

James knew that Jesus wanted to use the church, and so he teaches us to address our own sin and learn to humble ourselves so that we can serve each other. The only way we will be able to reach the world for Christ is to humble ourselves enough to be changed by God and to love each other with such a love that only Christ can give.

This week, continue to keep the "big picture" clear for your college-age participants. The goal is not that we all get along just for the sake of getting along, but to humble ourselves enough to address our own sin and serve each other in love—that way, we can accomplish the work Jesus calls us to do on this earth.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to participants prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Jesus said the world would know Christians by the way we love each other. How do you think we're doing? Let's talk about it at group tonight.
- What causes friction in most relationships? We'll see what James has to say about it as we continue our study through his book tonight.



Continuing the Conversation

We've provided you with some thoughts below that you can post on your blog or a social networking site following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage you and your college-age participants to continue the conversation after the lesson ends. Feel free to edit and customize the content to fit your ministry needs.

Jesus said he would use his church to reach the entire world for God's kingdom. As followers of Christ, we must learn to love and serve each other in order for this to happen. This week, read through James 4 and consider where in your life you have yet to let God work. If we are to love and serve each other, we must first turn to Christ and repent of our own sin. As you go throughout your week, make a conscious effort to spend less time looking at the sin in other people's life, and instead focus on repenting of the sin that you identify in your own life. Ask God to give you the ability to humbly love those around you, so that as part of the church and part of God's kingdom, you might be able to impact the world for God's glory.



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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

As you begin, welcome your participants and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then ASK:

- *Tell us about the last time you felt jealous toward someone over something petty—how did it affect you, and how did it affect the relationship with that person?*
- *Why is it easier to point out other people's flaws and shortcomings, instead of being honest about our own?*
- *What would this world be like if jealousy didn't exist? Give some specific examples.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Most of the friction we experience in relationships comes from us pointing out the flaws we see in someone else. In fact, if we eliminated that reality and only focused on our own sin, we probably wouldn't have any broken relationships. Imagine a world where everyone's goal was to humbly serve someone else. Jesus calls the church to reach the world for his glory. As followers of Christ, if we are to take that call seriously, we must figure out how to humble ourselves so we can love each other and serve together.*



LEADER
TIP

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other small group leaders, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING GUIDE



LEADER
TIP

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help participants capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Identify the true cause of friction within your relationships, (2) Realize that God desires repentance, and (3) Let God be the judge.



LEADER
TIP

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.



Read James 4:1-12 together as a group. Consider having one or more of the participants read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In this passage, James encourages us to focus on ourselves instead of focusing on others. Instead of giving advice on how to handle other people, he encourages us to handle our own sinful ways. Let's dig deeper to discover some important truths he addresses.*

1. Identify the true cause of friction within your relationships

ASK:

- *You've likely asked the very question James poses in the first line of Chapter 4. But even if you've asked it, how often do you search for the source of the problems?*
- *Why is jealousy such a powerfully destructive force?*
- *When faced with a tough situation in a relationship, is your first reaction to evaluate your own sin and selfish desires? Why or why not?*
- *Does it require more energy to evaluate your own sin or the sin of others? Why?*
- *If our sin is a true cause of friction within our relationships, what are some false causes or sources that we often try to blame?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *It seems counterintuitive to investigate our own lives when faced with friction in a relationship. We are quick to point the finger but slow to examine our own hearts. James teaches us that the cause of our bickering is rooted in our own sin. The path to restored relationships begins with honest self-examination.*

2. Realize that God desires repentance

ASK:

- *How does humility open the door to repentance and living differently?*
- *Look at verses 7-8. Do you believe James is talking about a one-time event or an ongoing way of living? Why?*
- *In verse 9, James talks about replacing laughter with sadness and joy with gloom. How does repentance cause this transformation?*



- *If your desire is to gain worldly things, instead of advancing God's kingdom, then it will be easy for you to cause quarrels and fall into the trap of envy. When thinking of your own desires, do they align with the desire of Jesus or with the desire of the world?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *It's difficult to evaluate our own lives when faced with relationship friction. The world tells us to stand on our own two feet, be independent, and not let anyone walk all over us. God is teaching us, through James, that we shouldn't do things according to the world's standards. To be a disciple focused on the mission of Jesus, we have to humble ourselves before the Lord, turn from our own selfish desires, and serve those around us. This is countercultural and counterintuitive, but it's the standard of the kingdom of God. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we realize how broken we truly are. As James 4:8 tells us, God draws close to us as we draw close to God.*

3. Let God be the judge

ASK:

- *When Christians criticize and judge each other, as James talks about in verse 11, what are some of the consequences?*
- *Do we judge people that we genuinely love? Why or why not?*
- *When do you find yourself most tempted to judge others?*
- *How can it be freeing to realize that God is the ultimate judge and you are not?*
- *Are there certain times or situations in your life that you find yourself judging others more quickly?*
- *Do you think there is any correlation between the amount of time you spend repenting for your sin and the amount of time you spend judging others? Why or why not?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We are not called to point out the sin in everyone else's life. We are called to submit ourselves before God, humble ourselves, and repent for our sin. Let God be the judge. Let's focus our time, thoughts, and energy on becoming more like Christ so that we can serve each other in humility.*



ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

ASK:

- Read Matthew 7:1-5. In your own words, what was Jesus saying? How does this apply to our relationships today?
- What correlations do you see between James 4:12 and Matthew 7:1-5?
- Read John 15:9-13. Jesus said that the world would know Christians by the way we love each other. How is the church doing in this area?
- Is there currently friction in a relationship you are in? What do you believe is the cause? Are there areas of your life that need to be humbled in order for the relationship to be resolved?



APPLICATION

Ask participants to form groups of two or three for these questions.

ASK:

- Has repenting and turning from your sin become a normal spiritual discipline? How can you start making it a normal discipline to evaluate your own selfish desires and turn your heart back to God?
- Talk honestly about where you have spent more time judging others than serving others. Pray for one another, that God would give you the ability to love beyond your own capacity.
- Write down three areas of your life where you have yet to humble yourself and submit to the Lord. Keep the piece of paper in a place that will constantly remind you to become more like Jesus.

SUMMARY

End your lesson here. Provide participants with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles individuals are facing, and (4) the big picture of your ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



LIVE



LEADER
TIP

SCRIPTURE TO PROCESS

Encourage and/or challenge participants to engage with the passage below. We encourage you to return to these passages throughout the series to illustrate their point of connection to God's story.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you (James 4:7-10).

