

February 17/18, 2024

“Faith & Desires”

Pastor Aaron Buer



Beyond the
Weekend

SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2024 Challenge: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament

FEBRUARY: Read Genesis to see how people, situations and events point to Jesus

Day 1 James 4:1-10 | Faith & Desires

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:1

Fighting and quarreling. Apparently, Christians struggled with them in the first century too. In fact, it's a serious enough issue that James brings it up in his letter. As is his way, James gets right to the point about these fights and quarrels. He helps his readers see that their fights and quarrels come from the desires that battle inside of them. He talks about both good and bad desires, the pull of the world and the need to rely upon God's grace and power to overcome.

This week, we will come face-to-face with the desires in our hearts. Desires battle in us and sometimes the battle pours out of our hearts and affects those around us. We have much to learn from James and his advice to these quarreling first-century believers. James offers us a life-changing truth that has the potential to lead us to a better way to live. So may God give us the humility and wisdom to listen and respond this week.

TODAY: Go to your heavenly Father today in prayer. With your hands outstretched and your palms up, invite God to work on your heart this week. Ask him to reveal in you the desires that need to be reformed by him and pray for the courage to listen and respond.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read **Genesis 26-27**. Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the promise given to Isaac.

Day 2 James 4:1 | Battling Wrong Desires

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:1

When James writes about the desires that battle within, he is referring to bad desires. He points to things which go against God and his way. Even though his readers are Christians, they still battle these desires in their hearts. However, believers in Jesus don't have to battle alone. The Holy Spirit encourages, empowers and equips followers of Jesus as they seek to follow God.

Because we're all born with a sin nature, there is a battle in our hearts too. Our sin causes us to be selfish and want to do the wrong things. But the Holy Spirit lives in us, calling us to the right things. It might be a bad relationship we want to pursue, hurtful words we want to say or a harmful decision we want to make. Yet, there is a battle because we hear the Holy Spirit inside of us, convicting us and pointing us to the right decisions. May we listen to the Holy Spirit within us today.

TODAY: Consider where you find yourself regularly facing a battle inside. Things you shouldn't be pursuing and feel the Holy Spirit challenging you to stop doing. Bring each of those things to God in prayer and invite God to empower you to follow him.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read Genesis 28-30. Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the promise now given to Jacob. Consider how the stairway points to Jesus and note any cross-references.

Day 3 James 4:2 | Not getting what we want

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. James 4:2

James returns to the concept of desire, but this time it's a different form of desire. James uses a different Greek word in describing desire, a word that can include good desires. He seems to be telling his readers that even good desires can lead them to do wrong things. All people experience desires that are good and desires that are bad. When these desires are unmet things can go sideways quickly. James tells his readers that unmet desires often lead to bad actions. He even points out extreme responses to the desires in their hearts.

When we don't get what we want, it's easy for us to get nasty. For some of us, it has to do with money and security. We begin to cut corners or manipulate to get what we want. For others of us it has to do with reputation or respect from others. When we don't get it, we cut others down to move up ourselves. It's ok to want security or to be respected, but there's a wrong way to pursue a right desire. Even with good desires, we need to watch our hearts and invite God to help us to pursue them in healthy ways.

TODAY: Using a journal or your phone, ask yourself, "How do I respond when I don't get what I want?" or "Why do I do what I do?" Spend some time thinking about these questions and answer them honestly. Then finish by thanking God for loving you, convicting you and giving you grace.

Learn about this passage in this week's Beyond the Weekend podcast with Pastor Aaron Buer and other staff. Listen [HERE](#).

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read Genesis 31-32. Highlight anything that points to Jesus.

Day 4 James 4:4-6 | The World

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. James 4:4

Why does James call his readers adulterous people? When God called Israel to be his chosen people, their relationship was presented in marriage language. When the Israelites repeatedly fell into worshipping the gods of other nations, he would use adultery language. It was like they were cheating on him, their husband. In the New Testament, a similar theme emerges as the church is called the Bride of Christ. Here, James is telling his readers they are cheating on God when they live by the beliefs of the world that are opposed to God's way of living. It's an intimate betrayal.

God jealously longs for our faithfulness to him in the same way a spouse jealously longs for the faithfulness of their spouse. He wants our heart, our love. He doesn't want us to adopt the world's belief systems. Like the pain and destruction that comes with unfaithfulness in a marriage relationship, unfaithfulness to God brings pain and destruction to our lives. His ways bring life, and God desires for us to experience life and have it to the full ([John 10:10](#)).

TODAY: Worship God for his love and jealous pursuit of you today. Listen to the song, "[Through it All](#)" and pay attention to the theme of his pursuit of you throughout your life.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read Genesis 33-34. Highlight anything that points to Jesus.

Day 5 James 4:6-10 | Engaging

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:7-8

In today's passage, James writes about habits we can do to engage with the grace of God. This is not a magic formula that guarantees success. But these activities invite God's grace to work in our hearts and transform us to be more like Jesus. The first is to **submit** our lives to God's leadership. To accept his authority and subject our desires to him.

The second is to **resist**. The word used here is a military term. In this context, resistance is like holding the line in a battle. We recognize that we have a sin nature and that some of our desires will need to be faced and prayerfully fought.

The third is to **pursue**. When we pursue God in humility, he will move toward us and meet us with grace. We come near to him through prayer, reading his word and interacting with his people. Come near to God, and he will come near to you.

Finally, the last is to **repent**. The word repent is not used directly in this verse, but James seems to be referring to the process of repentance. Repentance is turning from our sinful desires and toward God in humility. It's to stop going one way and to go another.

TODAY: Consider these four habits: submit, resist, pursue and repent. Write them down on a note, a 3x5 card, your lock screen or somewhere else you'll see over and over. When you see them, ask God to reveal which one you need to do at that moment and to give you the strength to do it. Pick one right now that you want to improve on today.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read Genesis 35-37. Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the brothers' betrayal and rejection of Joseph and how this points to Jesus.