

James Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "How God wants us to behave". To explain, let me begin with where we left off in the last lesson. James was discussing at the end of the last chapter (there are no chapter breaks in the original letter) how to tell if one is receiving God's wisdom. The point is one can tell by how we live our life whether or not we are living as He desires. That leads to the question of are we doing what He desires of us, or doing our own will. That is the focus of this lesson.
 - a) I can see some of you thinking, what's wrong with my behavior? I do go to church, I do put my trust in Him, I do pray and seek Him, I am saved by His grace. So again, what is wrong with my behavior? Of course I am not perfect, but I am not crazy about the idea of being lectured about my behavior either.
 - i) My answer is it is not what I (John) think of your behavior, but what God thinks of your behavior. The issue is not about trying to be perfect all the time. The issue is to live our lives to be the type of person that God desires that we be. That is why our behavior is always an issue as our lives as Christians.
 - b) Remember the main issue with the book of James is not the "how do we get saved" issue, but what should be doing once we are saved. Of course James believes we are only saved by our belief that Jesus is God and He is in charge of our lives. However, since Jesus does not verbally speak to us our loud, my goal in this lesson is to give all of us some biblically based guidelines for our behavior based on principals that Jesus Himself taught.
2. With that convicting introduction completed, let me talk a little about the seventeen verses that make up this chapter. We have a number of topics here that relate to our behavior.
 - a) For the first three verses, James focuses on fights between church members. James talks about why we fight with other people in our own church community. James wants us to think about what is our motivation for such arguments. He mentions the possibility that a lot of the things we pray about go unanswered because our motivation for asking God about those situations are wrong. The point is it is God's desire that we work with other believers in order to make a difference for Him. If we are fighting with believers, or if we are praying for things just to enrich our own lives, we are not using our lives in order to make a difference for God, period.
 - b) Then James moves on to talk about Christian's relationships with nonbelievers. Here he is going to beat the point into us in effect, "Are you going to behave like Christians or not"? This comes back to the issue that if people are to know we are believers, then we should act differently then how nonbelievers act. This does not mean we avoid any contact with nonbelievers. It just means our behavior should be different in a way that people would want to join us not just based on what we say, but how we act.
 - c) Then James reminds us that the secret to living the Christian life is to seek God and at that point, we don't have to fear anything the world or even the devil himself can throw at us. James is saying here is that there is no power source out there strong enough to deal with the power that God is willing to give us to take on any issue we have to face in life.
 - d) After that James returns to the issue of not slandering other believers, because when we do that, we become a bad witness to others. The last few verses then say in effect, what ever it is we do in life, should always be based on seeking His will for our lives.
3. Putting this all together, the main point is our behavior as Christians matter. The specifics that are given here are simply examples of how we are deal with both believers and nonbelievers with our behavior. Hopefully, we will all come out of this lesson more dependent upon His power as we deal with other people and to trust in His power to deal with our own behavior in life.
 - a) I'm not saying we have to be perfect all the time. I'm saying we can be a better witness for God by learning to rely upon His power and nothing more than that.

4. With that convicting introduction stated, we are ready for Verse 1: What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?
- a) The first thing to say here is the issue is not about fights with our neighbors or those we can't stand. This is about arguments among believers. James point is because we put our own needs as priority over others, we argue because we want our way done in a situation.
 - b) A few weeks ago, I was involved in such a situation that could have been handled much better, if everyone involved including myself cared about the lives of others as priority over their own lives. I am still dealing with the damage caused by this problem. Without getting into the specifics, let's just say Verse 1 did convict me of my behavior.
 - c) OK John, too bad for you. ☺ However, I'm not arguing with anyone right now. Why should I care about any of this stuff? Probably to keep in mind that arguments do occur within our own church assemblies. Our job as Christians is not to fix other people. It is to show love to others and help others draw closer to Him. It is also not to resolve problems that we are not personally involved in. If we witness such an argument, we should pray for that situation to be resolved peacefully where God is glorified by their lives.
 - d) There is an old expression that Christians tend to organize their firing squads in circles. The point is we spend a lot of time airing out our dirty laundry in public ways such as on the internet as opposed to just talking amongst those that are involved in the situation. The question is, are we showing love to others by publicly airing out our problems?
 - e) Think of this verse in relevance to the last few. In the last few verses of Chapter 3, James taught us how to tell when we are receiving God's wisdom. To remind us where we left off in the last lesson, James main point is that if we need God's wisdom in order to make a decision, God gives us that wisdom just by asking. That leads to the question, since God does not verbally speak to us, how do we know if the decisions we make are God based?
 - i) The answer was a detailed list of "indicators" that our decisions are God based.
 - ii) The point as it relates to Verse 1 of Chapter 4 is in effect, "here is the danger of not asking for God's wisdom in the first place". The result of ignoring God is that we tend to fight amongst each other as we all want things done our way.
 - f) I read a cute illustration by Jon Curson (whose own lessons on James will be listed in my list of sources in the next lesson). It is about the wives of two pastors who were talking to each other. Both wives were also busy sewing their husband's torn pants. The first wife was complaining about how their church has all sorts of problems and her husband was struggling to deal with those problems. The second wife said they had problems too, but God was giving her husband the wisdom to deal with those issues. The first woman was busy sewing a tear on the rear of the pants where her husband sat. The second wife was busy sewing a tear around both knee areas as her husband wore out that area because he spent a lot of time praying about his situations.
 - i) The point of this illustration is that one person spent a lot of time seeking God for help to deal with problems while the other person sat a lot and just listened to the problems without seeking His help to deal with them in the first place.
 - ii) Am I saying all of our problems will just magically go away if we pray about them hard enough? What I have discovered is time in prayer helps my perspective to deal with the issues of the moment. That is my point as it relates to this first verse: The way we can avoid fights amongst believers is to try to see those issues of the moment from His perspective.
 - g) James is saying that without God guiding our lives, our natural desires to want to control things our way, do surface. That is why we argue not only, say with family or those close to us, but also with those in church settings as well. When we desire that things be done only our way is when arguments and fights break out. The solution to any issue is always to bring the issue to God in prayer and watch Him work give us the wisdom to work out our problems His way and on His timing.

5. Verse 2: You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
- a) I would describe these verses as follows: Without putting God in the middle of any given situation, things go from bad to worse. Even when we do try pray about how to deal with a problem, we often pray for our will to get done and not His. That is why the issue of the moment does not get resolved because we want our will done and not His.
 - b) What popped in my head are some arguments I get in with my young daughter. I would pray in effect for her to see things my way, and things don't get better. That is because I am not seeking His will, but my own. When I let go of a situation and try to let God's will be done for that moment, it is amazing how much better things get in our relationship.
 - c) One thing I considered about these verses is how literal was James when he wrote them. Did people literally kill each other in church over arguments? I doubt that was the case in most situations. However, public debate and desire for things done our way is a common problem that has existed throughout history.
 - i) One can read these verses not about literally killing people, but about killing ideas by saying, "we are not going to do that, whether you like it or not". I can still recall many years ago about a gifted bible teacher friend. He was told he could not teach at our church anymore, because he was getting too popular and that was affecting the ministry work of other people in that church.
 - ii) There is an old expression that Christians often build "Holy Spirit flood control channels" because they want God to work a specific way in their church, and not just letting God work. I am convinced to this day that the teacher who was asked to leave was being ordained by God to make a difference. Others were concerned that his ministry would affect donations that could go to other church causes.
 - iii) I bring up that bit of ancient history as it reminded me of these verses. Did people from my old church "kill and covet"? Not that they wanted that teacher dead, but only that his ministry go away so that others there could continue to do what they wanted to do their own way. In hindsight, it was obvious that people were trying to build those "flood control channels" in order for God to work their way. I find that God never blessed that type of channel and that is James' point here.
 - d) With that speech out of my system, let me now return to these verses. The point here is that James is worried about Christians desiring to do things even within church settings out of their self-centered motivations and not let God be in charge. I don't think believe murder was on James' mind, as much as it was the outcome of letting our own desires go unchecked. Even when one prays when angry, the problem is instead of giving that anger to God, we pray for our will to get done through that prayer. I know I have been guilty of doing that myself at times when I am angry.
 - i) Remember what prayer is, getting our will aligned with His will. We don't know what is His will so it is ok to make requests to Him. At the same time, we have to always remember to let go of a situation and remember that He is in charge. Often I need to let out my desires before God before I can let those desires go.
 - ii) There is nothing wrong with telling God what we are thinking. The key is to learn to let go of those desires once we are done praying about it. I believe James' point about prayer is that we just blurt out what it is we want to accomplish expecting God to solve things our way. The secret is to learn to let go of our will so that His will can be done in any given situation.
 - iii) Remember that goal is resolution to the problem of the moment. The mistake I see way too often is people saying, line up behind me and the problem is over. James wants us to let go of our desires so God's will does get done in any situation.

- e) This leads to another point about these verses. James also brings up the issue of money and praying to God. Way too often, I have seen people try to spend their way out of a problem or wrongly think that just because they have money to spend on an issue, that means God is solving that problem through that spending.
- i) James is implying that when ask God for financial solutions to problems, we make the mistake of spending what we do earn on our own pleasures and not use that money as God desires. So does that mean I can never use my earnings for say a vacation with my family? Of course not. Again, the issue is always about having the desire to do God's will at any given moment. Sometimes it is His will to use part of our earnings to help our local church or community. Sometimes it is for a even a bigger picture such as a national or international ministry. Sometimes it is just for spending time with those close to us such as our own family.
 - ii) The underlying issue is not how we spend our money, but the questions of are we seeking God with the resources He has blessed us with? The way I look at it, is the concept that I never want to give based on guilt. I want to give to Christian causes because I believe that is God's desire for me for that moment in time.
 - iii) I've always held the view that God is not broke. If God wants money or resources for a particular project it will be done. If I believe that God is pulling on my heart to give to a specific project, He usually makes it obvious to me. I want to give as I can't stand not doing it. This comes back to the idea that we give the same way we use our time. God wants to be in charge of what we value. That includes our time and our money. We should want to use the most valuable thing God gives us, our time to make a difference for Him. We should also want to use the other valuable things God gives us, which includes our resources to make a difference for Him.
 - iv) Does that mean I give to everyone who asks? No. Does that mean I automatically give just to my church? No. For those who don't know this, one cannot out give God, period. That doesn't mean one has to give more than one can afford as then He is obligated to give us that money back. It just means that when we learn to trust Him with our resources by giving Him part of what we do earn, He does in His own way and His own timing, bless our lives and provide for our future.
- f) Let's step back and look at the big picture here. James main concern is that if we do say that we believe that Jesus is God and desire that He be in charge of our lives, then our actions should follow that belief in Him. James is focusing on the mistakes we can make when we fail to trust in Jesus as being in charge of our lives. Those mistakes include the idea of desiring our will and not His will. Those mistakes also include the idea of praying with the wrong motivation and even spending money with the wrong motivation.
- i) I (John) am not here to fix all of our individual problems. I am not big enough to handle my own problems let alone anyone else's problems. However, I do believe in a God that is big enough to care about each of our lives individually. He cares how we interact with others and yes, even how we spend our money. The point is God wants to be in charge of each and every aspect of our lives.
 - ii) James is saying there would be a lot less fighting in our lives and within our own church settings and our family situations, if we just trust Him to lead us through whatever it is we have to deal with.
 - iii) Again, James explains in the last part of Chapter 3 how to tell if the decisions we get are God based or not. The short version of that list is that if the solution leads to peace in our relationships not only with God but with other people. It is when we desire to put our own interest first, is when we end up coveting (desiring what is not ours to begin with), praying with the wrong motivation and even murder in the sense of wanting our will done and not His will in any given situation.
 - iv) OK, enough guilt here. Time to move on to the next set of verses.

6. Verse 4: You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.
- a) To explain this verse, first I need to define a few words and terms: First let me explain what James means by "adulterous". This is not about having an affair on one's spouse. It is about in effect having an affair upon God. In the bible the words adultery and idolatry are considered interchangeable words.
 - i) Think about it logically: To commit adultery is about cheating on one's spouse. To commit idolatry is about cheating on our relationship with God.
 - ii) When James accuses his readers of adultery he is not necessarily saying they are cheating on their spouses. He is saying in a colorful way that when we choose to live in a non-Christian way, we are in effect having a relationship with someone other than God.
 - iii) It may help to explain this concept a different way. Christians are nicknamed "the bride of Christ" as implied based on Revelation 22:17. The point is if we give our lives to Jesus, we in effect become married to Him as then we desire that He be in charge of our lives.
 - a) Even in Judaism there is a view that Jewish people are the "bride of God" in the sense that they belong to Him and they should do what He desires.
 - b) That leads to my second point: What does James mean by the world? In other words, what does James mean when he says that to be a friend of the world means that we are enemies of God? To state the obvious, we can still care about those close to us who are not saved, so that is not the issue.
 - i) Think of the world as anything and everything that can draw us away from worshipping God Himself. This comes back to desiring things for our lives that are not His will. It is much more than turning to other religions. It is about doing things that we instinctively know are not pleasing to Him.
 - a) If we are not sure whether or not a certain activity is pleasing to God, it is a simple matter of praying it through. I am convinced that God is more than willing to make it obvious to us at any given time if what we are doing is, or is not, His will for our lives for that moment. Often the answers to that question are simply to watch the results of what we are trying to do.
 - b) To put it another way, God loves us way too much to leave us alone. If we spend too much time doing things that are not His will, He usually makes it obvious to us His way and on His timing.
 - c) All of that lecturing does lead me back to this verse. Once we understand what James means by the term "adulterous" (turning from God) and the term "the world" (which is turning from things that are not pleasing to God) the verse becomes more obvious.
 - i) James' point is that God desires that close relationship with Him and He desires that we do turn back to Him in those times when we do turn away from Him.
 - ii) Let me also add the point that God never gives up on us. God never accepts the excuse that we have sinned too much to turn back to Him. He always desires that we turn back to Him no matter what we have done with our lives. We may have to live with the damage done. At the same time, God is saying to us, the best way for us to live out our lives is with Him guiding us as to just how to live it. That is James' point not only in this verse, but in effect in the whole book.
7. Verse 5: Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- a) The first thing I want us to notice here is the word "Scripture" in Verse 5. Verse 6 seems to quote somewhere else in the bible that says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The problem is one cannot find that verse anywhere else in the bible.

- b) So did James misspeak when he called that quote Scripture? That has been a classical debate among scholars for two millennia. The closest one can find to James quoting the bible is in Proverbs 3:34 where the second line says God gives grace to the humble.
 - i) I believe James point is that even though he is not quoting the bible directly, he is giving a principal that is taught throughout the bible.
 - ii) The idea of pride is trusting in oneself and not God to guide one through life. One can find lots of negative references to pride throughout the bible. The point here is that even though it is a stretch to find a direct quote of the principal that James is stating here, one can make a good biblical argument that God does not care for when people have a lot of self-pride (as opposed to trusting Him) and at the same time God helps those who humble themselves before Him to trust in Him.
 - c) OK, now that we have our definitions set, what is the point of this verse? Remember the secret to reading any bible verse is always to look at in context of the surrounding verses. In the previous verse, James was saying that we as people and even as believers do argue a lot because we want our own way and we don't put the needs of others before our own needs. James is then saying here that the way to end that bad habit is to humble ourselves before God in order to seek His will in any given situation and not our own will.
 - i) Let me talk for a quick moment about humbling ourselves before God. I think it is a lot more than say our standing or sitting position when we pray. It is the idea of sincerely praying for God to be in charge of our lives. The idea of humility before God is when we focus on the fact of who He is and who we are. It is realizing not only that He is real, but that He is in charge of our lives and wants to guide us.
 - d) Assuming we do humble ourselves in prayer, what is the point of doing that? Notice the verse says God gives grace to the humble. The idea of grace is getting something positive that we don't deserve. It is like receiving a wonderful gift for no special occasion.
 - i) I am reminded of a time when Paul was complaining about some problem that he had. When Paul complained to God about whatever was bothering him, God's response was in effect, "My grace is sufficient". That is from 2nd Corinthians 12:9.
 - ii) Paul's point and I believe James point is not that say, we should not avoid a doctor when we get sick. The point is that God loves us too much to ever leave us alone. When we humble ourselves before Him, He promises that He will guide and help us through whatever problem we are dealing with at that moment. That is what both James and Paul mean by God's grace.
 - iii) I remember many years ago, a friend of mine whose daughter had to live with a lifelong disease. My friend taught a bible study class on how to depend upon His grace. I know it helped him and his family as they dealt with that issue.
 - iv) My point here is simply that humbling ourselves before God does help. It usually does not make our problems instantly go away, but what He does do is give us the right perspective to deal with what we have to deal with and teach us how to rely upon God's wisdom to deal with our problems.
 - v) Meanwhile, back to James.
8. Verse 7: Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- a) I'll make this one quick. When we mess up, we can blame ourselves, the world around us or the devil himself. Since we can't always know what were the underlying reasons why we messed up all we can do is to seek His help to get us through that situation. The point to remember here is that we are not powerful enough to deal with Satan. That is why the bible teaches that if we seek God, Satan and his minions have to flee from us.
 - i) The short version is that God's power is greater than Satan's power.
 - b) Time for a reminder of Satan's goal. He can't take away our salvation, but he does try to make us a bad witness for Jesus. Satan's main concern is delaying Jesus' return as long as possible in order to extend his time on earth.

- c) The point as it relates to this verse is that we need not fear the devil if we are humbling ourselves before God and regularly seeking Him to guide our lives.
 - d) Remember the illustration I gave earlier about two women who were busy sewing tears in their husband's pants? The pair of pants torn around the seat belonged to a man who was complaining about how difficult his life was. The pair of pants torn around the knees was the one where he prayed so much about his situation it tore his pants. Remember that the one who was mending those pants was saying how good their life was.
 - i) I would argue that both sets of people had the same amount of problems. It was only own pant owner that did spend a lot of time in prayer that did receive His grace to help him have the right perspective to deal with life's problems.
 - ii) The point as it relates to this verse is simply that we don't have to fear the source of whoever is behind whatever problems we have to face. God is far greater than whatever Satan can throw at us and give us the proper perspective and His grace in order to deal with that situation.
 - iii) On that happy note, let us move on again.
9. Verse 8: Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
- a) I stated earlier the importance of always reading bible verses in the context of the verses that surround them. Let me explain by using Verse 9 as an example. That verse tells us to grieve, mourn and wail and change our laughter into gloom. Does that verse imply that we are never to be happy or have joy in our life? Of course not. James is not saying that we are to walk around gloomy all day. That is why one always has to read bible verses in context of the surrounding verses.
 - b) The issue of the moment is about humbling ourselves before God. James point is when we just laugh about our sins as if they are no big deal is when we need to seek God with a humble attitude. The point is God does not change, but we need to. When we do mess up like the early verses of this chapter imply, we need to seek God in effect with a broken heart as if to say, we messed up and we realize it now.
 - c) So is this some sort of specific time thing? Do these verses imply that if we mess up and we do have to humbly seek God, we have to say grieve and mourn for exactly say twenty minutes or 10 hours and then God forgives us? No. God forgives us the first moment we are willing to realize we were wrong and He was right. The point of spending some time grieving about our sins is about helping us to realize how much we need Him in order to guide our lives.
 - i) With that said, how long do we grieve? The answer is as long as it takes for us to realize how much we messed up and need Him to guide our lives. Think of the amount of time needed to remind ourselves that He is in charge of our lives and we are not. Does that mean our problems go away if we pray like that? Doubt it. What does happen is God gives us the wisdom to deal with what we have to deal with and the proper perspective about the issue.
 - ii) In summary, spending some time grieving about our sins is good for our soul, but it is not an every moment command to be down all the time.
 - d) With that said, let me come back to these verses. I've already discussed the fact that we can come to God anytime not only for confession of sin but just to get wisdom from Him. For example, notice the "washing your hands" reference. I don't believe James is being literal here. Let's face it we can't be clean from sin by washing our hands. For a religious Jew, washing one's hands is a symbolic gesture of cleansing from sin.
 - i) Remember James' issue here is about speaking with a "me first" attitude. The idea of change here is when we mess up the secret is to repent of that sin and even to make the effort to realize we had the wrong attitude about how we have acted.

10. Verse 11: Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?
- a) Just in case you didn't believe me when I said the issue of the moment is still about when we say the wrong thing to Christians, the next verse comes along to make my case.
 - b) Before I get into a discussion of the Jewish law, which is the main focus of these verses, let us start with the first sentence in Verse 11, "Brothers don't slander one another".
 - i) Let's be honest, it is always tempting to chew out someone else. We see someone else do something that we think is wrong and our first inclination is to make them aware of what they have done.
 - ii) Remember what slander is: Making a false accusation against someone. I recall a recent exchange between a woman from my church and my wife. The last thing that this woman heard about my wife was a slanderous accusation. I remember how the first thing that woman did was give my wife a big hug and say how much she hoped things have improved since that incident took place. I bring this up just because I believe this woman reacted well to that false accusation. That is a great example of showing love as God intended and not showing any slander.
 - iii) My point is we are at our greatest weakness when it comes to slander when we do hear stories about others and want to jump in and get involved. The problem is that we want to fix things that God does not intend us to fix.
 - iv) One of the greatest lessons I have had to learn in my own marriage is to resist the urge to fix my wife. Most of the time when my wife wants to tell me something, it is not a case where she wants me to fix it, but just to listen. If she actually wants my advice on something, she will say so. I'm saying all of this because I believe I am like most men, who want to fix things. When she does something that I do not agree with, I've had to learn the hard way to just keep quiet. In other words, it is about giving a situation to God and not trying to fix the issue myself.
 - v) The reason I am going on and on about the danger of "slander", it is because I have seen so much damage caused by it. This comes back my opening point of the last lesson where I said I am convinced there is more damage done in our churches by gossip, which includes slander than any other sin I can think of.
 - vi) My goal is not to make us all feel guilty about situations when we have said the wrong things. My goal is to help each of us realize to see situations from God's perspective and not our own. God's perspective is in effect, "See that person over there? I love them far more than you may care about them. You just show them love and let me deal with any changes I want to their lives".
 - a) It is always important to add the cases where for example, a person who is physically threatening someone with a weapon, is the exception to the rule, and not the case I am focusing upon here.
 - c) All of that leads me into a hopefully, quick discussion about the Old Testament law and the issue of committing slander against other people. The idea here is if we tell someone that they are wrong in that situation, in effect we are becoming a judge in their situation.
 - i) I believe James point is simply that when a problem occurs, we resist the urge to go fix that problem and let God deal with their hearts. A few weeks ago, a good friend from my church who is also one of the elders there came over to our home to discuss a problem with my wife and I were having at church. He didn't force his way in, but simply asked if he could talk to us about the situation. We agreed and prayed our way through it. This elder has a wonderful gift of counseling and his advice was helpful to us both. That is a proper way to deal with a problem as opposed to just blurting out our opinion on any given situation.

- ii) If you can't tell by now, I'm purposely being vague about the specific issue that I was dealing with at church when I wrote this lesson. Hopefully by the time that you read this lesson, the issue will be settled. It is to protect the people that are involved with this situation that I am not slandering anyone or bringing up the specifics of what happened. I'm just saying that when there is a situation where slander or gossip is involved, there is a proper way to deal with that situation.
- d) With that said, let me get back to the issue of "the law" and slander. The point is that we should not get involved in situations that God does not call us to get involved in. When we do witness potential problems we have to resist the urge to fix it or get involved but simply pray for resolution. To state the obvious, violent situations can be an exception.
 - i) It is always a matter of thinking, "Is God big enough to fix this? If He is, then why should I meddle in the situation?"
 - ii) I am convinced that a lot of slander can be avoided and situations work out much better simply when we resist the urge to fix what God does not call us to fix. I've had to learn that the hard way in my own marriage and my own life. This is the classic case where I realized God was right and I was wrong and it is better to let things play out His way and not my way.
- e) The issue comes back to a willingness to be humble before God. That is a willingness to submit ourselves to His will and change our lives based on what is taught in the bible. That is what repenting does mean, to be willing to change our ways to do things God's way and not our own way. That is what James means by the idea of not taking the law into our own hands.
 - i) A good example might be when a vigilante mob forms to take the law into their own hands. I believe that in effect is James' point about God's law. If we believe the Old Testament is the word of God, shouldn't we also believe that God is big enough to do the right thing? If someone steals something, is it our job or God's job to convict them, assuming we are not a policeman working that case?
 - ii) My point is that God is big enough to enforce His laws His way and on His timing and we don't need to take matters into our own hands, and to state the obvious again, assuming we are not the police ourselves.
- f) This leads me to the last line of Verse 12. It says, "Who are you to judge your neighbor?"
 - i) John's loose translation: Who made you God? Remember why James is going on and on about this. The issue is not salvation, but how we should act as Christians. Specifically James is focusing on what we say to people. There is a proper way to deal with justice and that is why we have a court system. When it comes to issues where slander is involved, God does not call on us to fix the situation. He calls on us to pray for others and show love to others, period.
 - ii) As I've beaten to death by now, the issue is about avoiding getting involved in the situations that God never called us to get involved with. That is the issue that my wife and I have been dealing with at church for awhile with other people. There was the issue that caused the potential slander in the first place, and that issue is being dealt with properly and under the authority of the church elders. The issue of the moment is the potential slander and gossip that goes with that issue. That is what James is calling us to avoid. If we want to know more about what happened, the correct answer is to approach the person in a loving way and talk to them, and not judge them without knowing all the facts about any given situation.
- g) Bottom line is we can't fix what God never calls us to fix in the first place. If I have been going on and on about this too much, it is only because I am dealing with the effects of that issue currently in my life. It is another example of how God intertwines the events of our lives with what He wants us to focus upon at any given moment. With that said, both James and myself are ready to put this topic to bed and move on to something else.

11. Verse 13: Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."
- a) When most people read or comment about this section, they think the main issue is about how we should or should not make money. That is the example, but not the issue. What James is focusing upon here is about the desire to do God's will. That is why James spent so much time on the issue of gossip and slander, because he understood how much pain is caused by that issue even among Christian believers. God's will is about letting Him be in charge of what we say. That leads to Verse 13. God not only wants to be in charge of what comes out of our mouths, but how we live out our lives in the first place.
 - b) In effect, this whole lesson is about letting God be in charge of our lives and not ourselves. The enter letter of James is often compared to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (The Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 5-7), where Jesus gives a long speech that says in effect, take this and that aspect of our lives and let God and not us be in charge of that aspect of our life.
 - i) The previous section was all about letting God be in charge of what we say. Now James is switching to the related topic of letting God be in charge of what we do.
 - c) The example that James gives of letting God be in charge, is the common example of how we go about making money. Neither James nor the bible in general is against the idea of going out to earn a living. The issue is always about what is God's will for our lives.
 - i) To focus on the specific example, I believe God calls many of us into the business world not just to support their family but to be a good witness to those we meet in that working environment. Others God calls in the professional ministry.
 - d) So how do we know whether or not to "go into that city and start a business" like James is implying in these verses? All I know is that God does not have a big hook that that pulls me in this direction or that direction. So how do we know what is His will in any given situation?
 - i) Let's start with the obvious: Praying for His will. The next obvious thing to state is whether or not what we want to do is biblically based. Then the obvious thing to ask is it logical? Do I have the resources and the skills to do what I believe God is calling me to do in that situation?
 - ii) With that said, I am convinced that God often leads us best by trial and error. I know of many success stories that included a lot of failures along the way before that person or group succeeded at what they believe God called them to do.
 - iii) Years ago, I heard a wonderful sermon from a man who literally rose to the top of the business world, and then lost it all. He then believed He was called by God to go around not to discuss the business world, but to lead people closer to Jesus. My point is we don't always know why God calls us to do what we can't stand "not doing" as I love to say. When it comes to discerning God's will for my life, it starts with the obvious of praying about it and making sure that what I want to do does not violate any biblical principal, and then I just go forward. If something is not God's will, I find He makes it obvious to me over time.
 - a) It is important to mention that failure at say, a business opportunity as these verses use as an example, does not necessarily mean that what we believe God called us to do, was not his will.
 - iv) Think about Paul's life as a missionary. Many times he was probably yelled at for preaching the Gospel message. His letters and the book of Acts teach he suffered terribly for preaching that message. My point is simply that God does not say that life will be this wonderful all will go smoothly trail if we are doing His will.
 - a) I'm preaching this hopefully to encourage us despite whatever hardships we have to face in doing what we believe God is calling us to do.

- e) Let me sort of bring all of this back home. If we are trying to do God's will and want Him to be in charge of our lives, how do we know if we are doing His will, since we can't tell by saying looking at the state of our business as James's uses in this text?
 - i) There is no standard answer for this question. What may be the right thing for me to do may be the wrong thing for you to do. I am convinced that if we are willing to tell God in effect, "I am Your servant and I want to do Your will", then He will guide us to do His will. My point is one's circumstances are not always the way to tell if we are doing God's will. He never promises life goes smoothly all the time. He just promises that if we seek Him regularly (daily), He does promise to guide us to go through what is His will for our lives.
 - f) This leads me to the next point James is making in these verses. Life is short. In Verse 14, James compares our life to a mist. If one notices the breath that come out of our mouths on a cold day, one understands how fast that mist disappears.
 - i) One of my favorite scriptures on this point is Psalm 90:12. That is where Moses, tells us to number our days. One of my favorite bible teachers likes to joke that his interpretation of that verse is "To number our nanoseconds". That is a term used by computer programmers to describe one billionth of a second. The point is our time is the most valuable thing we own. As I like to preach a lot, God wants us to use the most valuable thing we own, our time, in order to make a difference for Him with our lives. That is what Psalm 90:12 and James 4:14 is teaching us.
 - ii) Since our life is short, God desires that we turn our will over to Him and live it the way He desires that we live. That is why James' is lecturing us about what we say and how we spend our time. That is a summary of this lesson. It is not that God is forcing us to live this way, but simply that this is the best way for us to live.
 - iii) With that said, I can move on to the next verse.
12. Verse 16: As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.
- a) OK, what is it we are bragging about and how do we stop? To understand, one always has to read a bible verse in context. The previous set of verses was about going into a city and making money. Again, James is not condemning the basic concept making money or working for a living. His condemnation is about bragging about our successes.
 - i) Even during the days of the Roman Empire there were merchants who would go from town to town selling goods for the purpose of making a profit. James' point is that people wrongly thought to look at what I have accomplished as opposed to the idea of what God has accomplished through us. James is not condemning the idea of being a merchant, but just the idea of doing it without seeking His will and then bragging about how much money one made in such a business venture.
 - b) This leads me to the question of can we brag about what God is doing in our lives? My answer is yes, but we have to be careful about it. If our motivation is to just to show how God is using us to make a difference for Him that is boasting. If our goal is to encourage others to use their lives to make a difference for God, that is ok. The point is God cares about our motivation for doing things which is why bragging is condemned here.
13. Verse 17: Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.
- a) James is bringing up a type of lying called "omission". This is when you state the truth but say it in a deceiving way. A classical biblical example is when Jesus was on trial right before he died. His accusers correctly said that Jesus would destroy the temple and then rebuild it in three days.
 - b) Jesus' accusers did quote Him accurately, but they committed the sin of omission. Jesus was referring to his own body being resurrected in three days time. This had nothing to do with the destruction of the actual temple that stood at that time. All his accusers had to do was ask Jesus about that, and He would have stated the complete truth.

- c) My simple point here is that it is a sin not only to lie, but even to tell the truth in a way that it can be perceived as a lie. That is James' point in this verse.
 - d) What about context? The previous verse was about the dangers of bragging. How does that connect with the idea of telling the truth in a deceiving way? I believe what James is trying to get across is that if we are bragging about our lives, even if we are saying it in a way of exactly what happened, we are doing it in a way to glorify ourselves and not give God the credit for what we have done. That is the point here.
14. With that said, let me back up even further and put all of this in context. James main point in this whole lesson is about turning over to God how we live our lives. It is to be careful what we say to others and careful how we act. To state the obvious by now, there is a God and He cares how we live out our lives. Our lives are short, and we should use the time we have in order to make a difference for Him in this world. How we do that is going to be different for every person.
- a) God not only wants us to make a difference, but He is the one who gives us the power in the first place to make that difference. He promises not only to guide us and but also to protect us from demonic forces we can't sense. The idea is such forces do exist, but since God created them in the first place, He is greater than those sources and our trust in Him gives us the ability to succeed over whatever obstacles come our way.
 - b) Does that mean that life will always go smoothly? Of course not. Does that mean we will never fail at times if we are trusting in God? Of course not. It just means He does desire to guide us through our lives if we are willing to commit our lives to serving Him and use the most valuable asset we own our time, to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - c) On that positive note, it is a good time to end in prayer.
15. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You give us the opportunity that we can use our time and our resources to make a difference for You in this world. We don't know what you have planned for us today or in the future, we just know that we can depend upon You to guide us and help us to make decisions so that we can make a difference for You in this world. Help us to show love to others and put the needs of other before ourselves, as that is how we rely upon Your power in order to make a difference in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.