

**Text: Acts 4:31; James 4:1-6**

**Title: “Unstoppable Prayer” Pt.2**

Let's open our Bibles to James 4:1-6. I want us to stay focused on the pattern we have seen in the book of Acts and the importance of prayer in the life of the Spirit-empowered church. In Acts 4 we're told that when faced with threatening circumstances the church was moved to desperate prayer. And amazing things happened.

**Acts 4:31 - After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**

Great things happen after we pray. So I want to stay in that vein today, but also see what another New Testament writer teaches the church about prayer. James is the brother of the Lord Jesus. He was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, but here he's writing to believers who come from a Jewish background and are scattered all over that part of the world. He's concerned about the vitality of their faith ... about the dangers of hypocrisy ... and the poison of worldliness that can seep into the lives of believers. As we read let's keep in mind that the focus of our church these days is REVIVAL PRAYING. Next Sunday begins our OneCry Prayer Summit. Dr. Bill Elliff will preach in a combined service. Please do whatever you have to do to make this a priority in your schedule. **Read James 4:1-6.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I heard about a children's Sunday School teacher who was teaching boys and girls about the importance of applying Scriptures to everything they face in life. She placed an apple on the table and asked, “This is my apple. If you see someone take it, what Scripture comes to mind?” One child said, “You shall not steal.” The teacher said, “Excellent. What if you see two boys fighting? What Scripture does that bring to mind?” Another child said, “Be kind to one another.” The teacher said, “Good.” Next she wanted to remind them about the importance of sharing and she asked, “What if those two boys were fighting over a cat? One was pulling on the cat's front legs and the other was pulling on the cat's back legs. What verse comes to mind?” There was a moment of silence then one of the children chimed in, “What God has joined together let no man pull apart.”

We need to apply the truth of Scripture to our everyday life, particularly in our relationships. James is concerned about the quarreling and conflict that goes on among believers, and what causes people to act that way. Quarreling and fighting are so ingrained in our culture. We see it in images like photographs from the rioting that took place in Ferguson, Missouri (PHOTO). What about the quarreling and fighting that sometimes happen at home (PHOTO)?

If we're wise we'll allow the Word of God to diagnose our problems and also to show us how to correct our behavior. So what does the Bible say is at the root of the quarreling and fighting that goes in homes, in society and even among believers? First there is...

### **1. SELFISHNESS (James 4:1-2a)**

Now James 4:1-2 paints an ugly picture of what selfishness does to relationships.

**James 4:1 - What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?**

So the “fights and quarrels among you” come from “desires within you.” These desires are sinful, selfish passions for pleasure. And these desires create an inner battle that rages inside our hearts. When we are saved our flesh ... old sin nature ... isn't eradicated. It's still part of the bodies we inhabit. The Bible says that the Spirit wars against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit. And because there is this inner turmoil in our lives we find ourselves fighting and quarreling with others.

**James 4:2a - You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.**

This internal battle creates restless frustrations. When it says, “*You want* something” again it describes sinful, evil desires. And this is what causes people to kill or covet. He probably doesn't mean physical murder, but the intense hatred that often does lead people to murder others. Coveting means to set your heart on something that belongs to someone else. And when those cravings go unmet the result is quarreling and fighting. Quarrels are ongoing disputes about things. Fights are outbursts of antagonism when it gets really bad.

And what is feeding all of this quarreling and fighting is selfishness ... people thinking only about themselves, wanting to be served rather than to serve others, wanting to control rather than to love.

James continues the diagnosis of the situation with these believers. Selfishness comes from ...

**2. PRAYERLESSNESS (James 4:2b-3)**

**James 4:2b - You do not have, because you do not ask God.**

Here's the deal. You have all these conflicting desires raging inside of you. This selfishness flows out of the fact that you haven't learned to draw your inner sense of well-being from God in prayer. You see, what is supposed to happen in our communion with God is that we lay our whole lives before Him, and He becomes our all-in-all. We get so lost in love with Jesus that we can trust Him to meet every need we have. We don't have to act selfishly or control others or bully others because our souls are satisfied in Jesus.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Sometimes there's a sourness and bitterness about our lives that everyone can see but us. Years ago there was a precious widow in our church named Eunice Teague. We called her E.T. for short. Every year E.T. would have a few of us couples over for dinner at her home. She made the best, sweetest creamed corn I've ever tasted. I could eat a whole bowl of it. She was such a humble saint, that she would serve us, but wait until after we left to eat her own dinner. One year we accepted her invitation to dinner and I couldn't wait to have some of her creamed corn. When the serving bowl came to me, I put an extra spoonful on my plate. Then I took the first bite ... and I was shocked. Instead of the deliciously sweet creamed corn I was accustomed to, I was struggling to swallow this sour, bitter concoction in my mouth. I looked over at Nan and we exchanged bewildered glances. I sort of stirred it around on my plate trying not to offend E.T. because I wasn't eating it. When we got in the car to drive home that evening I asked Nan, “What was up with E.T.'s

creamed corn? Something was terribly wrong.” Later that night we got a call from E.T. She was so embarrassed. Remember that she wouldn’t eat while the rest of us ate; she ate after we left. She took a bite of her creamed corn and was horrified. How had she poisoned her guests? She began to check out the ingredients and realized that the sour cream she used in the recipe was *really* sour ... in fact it was spoiled. She served us something terribly bitter and sour. Everyone knew it but E.T. And she was calling to apologize.

Sometimes there’s a selfish sourness and bitterness about us that everyone sees but us. Time alone in God’s Word and in prayer allows God to show us things about ourselves that He wants to change. When we are lost in the love of Jesus that sourness and bitterness is cleared away by the all-sufficiency of Christ in our lives. In prayer we experience forgiveness, peace and contentment. We find the grace and mercy of God that we then show to the people around us.

Now someone might say, “Well, I do pray.” And maybe you do, but are you praying properly?

**James 4:3 - When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

Your praying is so riddled with selfishness that you only ask for things for yourself ... to make you feel better ... not to serve God and other people. There’s no true surrender in your praying.

**Psalms 37:4 - Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

How many blessings of God are we missing because we haven’t earnestly prayed about what we need? Oh we may shoot out a little arrow prayer, but we haven’t spent time on our knees fervently seeking God, maybe even fasting to clear our spiritual eyes to see His will better.

How many blessings of God are we missing because we are not fully committed to God’s will when we ask. We want what we want, not what God wants. We haven’t brought ourselves to the point where we can pray like Jesus when He prayed, “Father, not my will but your will be done.”

The needs in our lives and in our families and in our world should drive us to prayer. For example, when we need wisdom, rather than worrying or fretting, or worse, taking matters into our own hands, what are we to do? Turn a few pages back to first chapter of James. **Read James 1:5-7.**

Then at the end of the letter James teaches more about prayer. **Read James 5:13-16.**

When we have needs and we feel that selfishness stirring within us we must turn to God in prayer. So the Bible says that selfishness comes from prayerlessness, and at the root of our prayerlessness is...

### **3. WORLDLINESS (James 4:4-6)**

**James 4:4 - 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.**

Again, this is the diagnosis of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. We will never grow in our walk with God until we can humbly accept the diagnosis of the Spirit and the Word in our lives. The Word of God says that at the root of selfishness is prayerlessness. And at the root of prayerlessness is worldliness. James says, “You’re an adulterer. You’ve committed your life to God, but you’re in love with another ... the world. At the root of our prayerlessness is the fact that we just don’t love God as much as we think we do or say we do.

The “world” James is referring to here means the priorities and pleasures and principles of the culture that surrounds us. When we’re worldly we live as though this present world is all that matters. Eternal things are not as important to us as the things of this world. We think like the world, talk like the world, and act like the world.

And James is blunt here. “To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. To love the world is to hate God.” And we might say, “Oh no, that’s not it at all.” And the Holy Spirit says, “Yes, that’s the accurate, true diagnosis of your life.” Our prayerlessness reveals that we really don’t love God as much as we may think or say we do.

The next verse reveals something very important about us as human beings.

**James 4:5 - Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?**

This is a difficult verse and even various translations differ as to how it is worded. In my opinion the NIV has it right. Our human spirits are filled with envying and cravings. What we don’t understand is that our spirit’s craving is really the desire to worship. We are created to worship. We will either worship and love the One True God, or we will worship and love the little gods of this world. But when we take our cravings, our unmet needs, to God in prayer we will find God to be our all-satisfying supply, we don’t have to act selfishly in quarrelling and fighting.

Now there’s good news. While we don’t think we could change our selfishness, prayerlessness and worldliness, God can, by His grace. That’s why James says...

**James 4:6 - But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

## CONCLUSION

We need God’s grace to overcome. Grace, like water, flows to the lowest point. If we keep ourselves elevated in prideful selfishness we will never find the waters of God’s grace. Grace flows to the lowest point. If want to get in on the grace of God we need to lower ourselves in humility. Humility allows us to be honest before God and confess our sinful selfishness. Humility drives us to cry out to God in prayer rather than try to grab to meet our own needs. Humility causes us to bow before the God of the universe, not the false gods of this world.

God gives grace to the humble. Grace will make us *selfless*, not selfish. Grace will make us *prayerful*, not prayerless. Grace will make us *godly*, not worldly.

Standing in the light of the truth of God's Word, do you need to repent of selfishness?  
Prayerlessness? Worldliness?