**O Brother - Week 4 - Pride**

**Series Big Idea:** James, the half brother of Jesus, shares wisdom on how to overcome challenges that can trip us up as Christ-followers and keep us from from growing to maturity.

**Message Big Idea**: Maturity means humbling ourselves and drawing near to the God who draws near to us.

**Scripture:** James 4:1-10

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**Introduction: Slighted**

A couple Saturdays ago, I went to brunch with my family and experienced what probably many of us have experienced in similar situations. You show up at the restaurant at 10AM on a weekend morning already salivating for eggs and pancakes when what greets you is a sea of humanity smashed into a very tiny waiting space just inside the front door. You put your name on a list and stand there as it seems everyone else in a three mile radius is led to a table before it is your turn, but you try to be understanding.

After 35 minutes you are finally seated at a table. Your irritation level was starting to creep up to dangerous levels, but the promise of coffee is setting it at ease for the moment. But then it happens. As you sit patiently for ten minutes waiting for a server to come to your table, another party is seated next to you, and just sixty seconds into their dining experience, a waiter appears to fill up their mugs while you still sit coffee-less just three feet away.

Has this ever happened to you? How many of you will admit that in these situations your blood pressure begins to rise as a voice inside of you is screaming, “I was here first!”

Most of us get irritated quickly when we feel we’re being slighted.

* When someone cuts in line in front of us at an amusement park.
* When a family member eats that piece of pie we were saving.
* When someone else gets credit for our idea in a business meeting.

These sparks of indignation often seem justified, righteous even; but they just might be a small symptom of a much larger problem…a potential pitfall James addresses in the fourth chapter of the book that bears his name.

**Series Recap**

We are in week 4 of our series “O Brother” where we’ve been journeying together through the book of James. Remember, James was the half-brother of Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary. He wrote this short book to Christ-followers living in the first century who had been scattered all around the region after fleeing persecution in Jerusalem.

James cared deeply about these early Christ-followers. He was a prayer warrior who was constantly on his knees. In fact, we’re told that his nickname was “camel knees.” Do you know why? Well, because he spent so much time on his knees in prayer that they became as callous and hard as a camel’s.

James’ desire was to see every follower of Jesus flourish in his or her faith becoming *(“…so that you might be mature and complete…” –James 1:4)* **“mature and complete.”** Yet, he knew there were a number of potential pitfalls that could trip people up along that journey. So he wrote the book of James to address these various pitfalls, and as we come to chapter 4, he addresses one that is a danger to us all: **Pride**.

Now, when I say the word “pride,” probably a lot of us don’t feel too worried. Pride tends to be one of those sins we brush off. We don’t take it very seriously. After all, it doesn’t seem nearly as dangerous as stealing or adultery or murder, right?

Yet, one thing is for certain: God takes it seriously. Just listen to a few verses from Proverbs:

***“Pride goes before destruction,***

 ***a haughty spirit before a fall.” –Proverbs 16:18***

*(add)* ***“The Lord tears down the house of the proud…” –Proverbs 15:25***

*(add)* ***“The Lord detests all the proud of heart.” –Proverbs 16:5***

Are you getting the sense that pride is a big deal to God? It surely is. And here’s why… As the early Christian theologian Augustine said:

***“Pride is pregnant with all possible sin.” –Augustine***

Pride is pregnant with all possible sin. Pride is dangerous because it is at the root of all kinds of evil and destruction.

* Pride will tarnish reputations.
* Pride will ruin careers.
* Pride will alienate friends.
* Pride will destroy marriages.

In short, pride is the doorway to all the places in life we don’t want to end up. *(pause)* Pride is pregnant with all possible sin. And yet, so often we don’t even recognize pride when it is present in our lives. And that’s why James is sounding the alarm.

**Word: James 4:1-5**

As James looked out on his fellow Christ-followers, he first addresses how pride is leading to all kinds of **Conflict with People**. Relational conflict was ripping the Christian community apart, and so James asks: *(add)*

***“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 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. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” –James 4:1-3***

James says the relational conflict we experience flows from a source within our hearts: *(highlight “your desires that battle within you)* ourdesires.

We all feel the swirl of desires within us, don’t we? Sometimes it feels like there is emptiness inside of us that we long to have filled. These longings are part of what it means to be human; desires are not bad in themselves.

However, the desires James is referring to here are selfish desires. The Greek word translated *(highlight)* **“pleasures”** has the negative connotation of sinful, self-seeking pleasure. This is the part of us that puts ourselves first – that prioritizes our own fulfillment.

James says sometimes our desires take over and in our quest for fulfillment, we begin to push and shove those around us in an effort to get the best and the most for ourselves. *(highlight “You desire but do not have, so you kill”)* We desire, but we don’t have, so we kill. James doesn’t mean that we literally kill one another, but…

* We kill with our words.
* We kill with our silence.
* We kill with our outbursts.
* We kill with our withdrawal.

And, James is trying to help us see, there is a catalyst for this fighting game we play. It’s called pride.

Pride is the arrogance that says my desires come first, my cause is most important...so much so that it’s worth fighting and killing for.

Stop and think for a minute about a relationship in your life that is experiencing tension. Now, no throwing elbows to the person sitting next to you, OK? I think I saw someone in the back do one of these *(humorously stretch and mimic discreetly pointing to the person next to you).* Everyone keep your eyes looking straight ahead.

Who are you experiencing tension with? *(Pause)* Often it is with the people we care the most about. Maybe you are in open verbal conflict with that person. Maybe the tension manifests itself more in distance. Can you step back from it for a moment and recognize that at the heart of the conflict is some kind of unfulfilled desire?

I am not proud to admit that I play this fighting game. Recently, I got upset at a friend when she didn’t show up for something I wanted her to attend. When she wrote to say she was sorry it didn’t work out, I found myself wanting to give her the cold shoulder. I didn’t even bother to find out if there was a reason she wasn’t able to make it. I wanted her to be there, and she wasn’t there so I got upset. Too often the truth is I want my desires to come first, for my cause to be most important. And at the heart of that “me first” attitude is pride.

James says, “Your pride is causing all kinds of conflict with the people in your life.” It’s tripping you up on your path to maturity as a Christ-follower.

But our pride doesn’t just cause conflict with one another; it also causes **Conflict with God**. James continues :

*(add)* ***“You adulterous people!” –James 4:4-5***

James isn’t pulling any punches here. He’s not holding back. But why this charge of “adultery”?

Because, James says, you could have a relationship with God that would fulfill your desires, a relationship that would fill every corner of the emptiness inside of you, and yet in your pride you think you can find something better…so you turn your back on God in order to chase after pleasure. And he calls that adultery.

***“You adulterous people,*** James says ***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. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?” –James 4:4-5***

Think about what James is saying here. God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty, the most powerful Being in the entire universe is jealous for YOU. *(pause)* He wants to be the most important relationship in your life and in my life. He wants to bring us the fulfillment we long for.

Yet, instead of turning to God and saying, “Yes! You are the One I want! You are the One I long for!” Many of us say, “Actually, God, you’re not enough. I know more about what I need than you do…so can you give me this and give me this and give me this…”

*(James 4:4-5 with “a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” highlighted)* It’s like we’re pursuing friendship with the world instead of a friendship with God, and James says once we start chasing after all these other things we become an enemy of God. That’s a strong phrase, isn’t it? I think James wants to shake us up so that we’ll ask ourselves, “Wait, is that me?”

* Have I become so enthralled with the pleasures of this world that I have turned my back on the One who truly loves me?
* Am I chasing after everything but him?
* Am I looking for fulfillment outside of a relationship with him?

God wants to be the most important relationship in our lives. He wants to bring the fulfillment we long for. Yet in our pride, so often we think we have a better plan. We look to fulfill our desires in other things and in other people.

So let’s pause for a minute and ask ourselves: **Where have I been looking for fulfillment?** Who or what have I been giving the place in my life that only God deserves?

**More Grace (James 1:6)**

Everyone feeling pretty happy right now? ☺ Chances are James original readers felt exactly like many of us feel right now…convicted, sorrowful, maybe even ashamed. But just when James cuts us down at the knees, he turns and says what may be the most important words in this entire passage:

***“But he gives us more grace.” –James 4:6***

Grace. Unmerited favor. Unearned acceptance. Unlimited love. This is one of the most incredibly realities about this God who is jealous for you and for me. We can never exhaust the limits of his grace. He is always ready to give *more* grace.

* Grace for our shortcomings.
* Grace for our wanderings.
* Grace for our mistakes.
* Grace for our betrayals.

He gives us more grace.

Do you want his grace? Would you receive his grace today?

James reminds us:

***“God opposes the proud***

 ***but shows favor to the humble.” –James 4:6***

If you recognize that God has not been at the center of your life…that you’ve been chasing after all kinds of selfish desires apart from him…would you receive his grace today?

**Receive Grace for the First Time**

Maybe you need to receive his grace for the first time. Your whole life you’ve been chasing fulfillment, looking for something to fill the empty desires within you. Understand, you were made to find your fulfillment in God.

* He loves you more than anyone could ever love you.
* He has a place of belonging for you that is deeper than you ever expected to find.
* He has purposes for your life that are more significant than you could ever dream.

Would you receive his grace today?

From the first Christ-followers in James’ day all the way to you and me on this day, people have made the decision to receive God’s grace for the first time by being baptized. When a person is baptized, they are accepting the grace offered to them through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. As they go under the water, they, too, are dying a death of sorts. They are dying to their old way of life – to the person who proudly chased after his or her own desires. And as they are raised up out of the water, they are reborn to a new way of life – a life given wholly and completely to a love relationship with Jesus.

If you’ve never made the decision to follow Jesus, would you receive his grace today? We’re actually planning to have baptisms right here in our services in a few weeks on Sunday, August 12. If you are ready to take this step in your journey, I want to encourage you right now to go to *(Baptism Slide)* communitychristian.org/baptism and fill out a simple form. Someone will follow up with you, invite you to our Baptism Class, and walk alongside you as you take this very important step in your spiritual journey.

Some of us need to decide today to receive God’s grace for the very first time.

**Receive Grace Again (James 4:7-8)**

For others of us, maybe today we need to receive God’s grace again.

Perhaps you recognize that although you’ve already made the decision to follow Jesus, you’ve drifted. Intentional or not, you got caught up in the ways of the world and have been chasing fulfillment in anything and everything but the one who is jealous for you.

Let’s face it… All of us, at one time or another, get tripped up by our pride that says, “My desires come first, my cause is most important.” And off we go fighting and clawing our way to fulfillment. Yet, the emptiness remains because we were made to find our fulfillment in God.

For those who need to receive grace again, James has these instructions:

***“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.” –James 4:7-8***

In essence, repent. Turn away from all you’ve been chasing, and come back to God.

* In repentance, we **submit ourselves to God**. We lay down our pride and once again give our whole selves to him.
* In repentance, **we resist the evil one**. He has no power over us if we don’t give it to him. If we resist him and all the temptations he puts before us, he has no choice but to flee.
* And in repentance, **we come near to God**. Do you see the amazing promise there? If you come near to God, he will come near to you.

The Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty, the most powerful Being in the entire universe will give us more grace. He will never turn his back on us. He will never abandon us. When we come near to him, he will always come to us with grace.

**Prayer of Repentance**

Today, I want to invite us to submit ourselves to God in a symbolic and meaningful way…a way I think James, old camel knees himself, would probably model for us if he were here today.

The act of getting on our knees before God is a way to humble not just our bodies, but our hearts and minds as well. I wonder if that’s why James spent so much time down on his knees – a way to regularly submit to God, resist the devil, and come near.

So this morning, if you would like to receive more grace and are physically able, I’m going to invite you to get on your knees. I’m going to pray a prayer of repentance for us as a community. If you need more room, feel free to move out to the aisle. If you aren’t physically able to kneel, I invite you to bow your head where you are seated. So join me if you want to pray this prayer of repentance… *(Get on knees)*

God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble so let’s humble ourselves before him in repentance and receive his grace.

*Lord, here on our knees, we humble ourselves before you. We confess how prone we are to wander from you – to drift into the ways of this world chasing after its desires. Lord, you are the one we need. On our knees we submit ourselves to you.*

*In the name of Jesus, we pray against the schemes of the evil one. We resist his influence in our relationships. We resist the temptations he puts in our way. By your power and in your name, Jesus, we demand that he flee.*

*Lord, we want to be close to you. We draw near to you in repentance and thank you for your grace. Your love, your presence is all we really need. Thank you for drawing near to us.*

*May our lives be wholly yours. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

**Conclusion**

*(Stand up)* As I conclude today, let me share with you a precious promise we can claim when we lay down our pride. James writes:

***“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” –James 4:10***

He will lift you up to know the greatest love.

He will lift you up to experience true belonging.

He will lift you up to live for the greatest purpose.

In him, you will find your greatest desires. In him you will find true fulfillment.

May we live every day humbly with the one who is jealous for us and always gives us more grace.

**Communion Idea**

In Jesus, we find the extreme example of humility. In Philippians 2, the Apostle Paul writes:

***“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:***

***Who, being in very nature God,***

 ***did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;***

***rather, he made himself nothing***

 ***by taking the very nature of a servant,***

 ***being made in human likeness.***

***And being found in appearance as a man,***

 ***he humbled himself***

 ***by becoming obedient to death—***

 ***even death on a cross!” –Philippians 2:5-8***

In this time of Communion, we remember the humility of our Savior. For the love of you and me, he lowered himself to be born as a human baby and endured the humiliation of the cross. Through this sacrament, the bread representing his broken body and the juice representing his shed blood, we receive his grace again and again and again. Let’s celebrate Jesus as we remember.