

The Reason You're Always Angry



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James 4:1-6

I want to ask a question before we get started. When was the last time you got angry at somebody? Maybe it was this morning...maybe somebody was not getting ready fast enough, maybe it was the car ride, the van. All of a sudden, you find yourself screaming and then as soon as you got here you were smiling and walking into church, right? If we could have seen the van ride, we would think whoa, there is a serious problem! Maybe it was this week while at work. There is a coworker and maybe they said something and it just set you off and you unloaded on them. Maybe you saw something, and the person doesn't even know they made you mad but you stewed on it all week long and they still don't even know you are mad at them. Maybe it was a situation at home, something that you didn't get to do that you really wanted to do. Maybe it is something that you wanted that you didn't get to have, and you are angry about it. When was the last time that you got angry? I want you to think about what exactly caused that. Or maybe after the anger, when you cooled down a little bit and you were embarrassed you had this talk to yourself — why did I do that? Why did I go off? Why did I continue? Why did I not just let it go? Why did I have to say that one more word that set them off? Why do I keep arguing? Why do I keep fighting? Why do I just stay angry? What causes that?

That is really what James is going to try to answer. The title to this message is "The Reason You Are Always Angry," and some of you might be thinking that pretty much sums up your life...*I am pretty much angry all the time. There are moments I am happy, but most of the time I am mad...at the world around, where things are going, the people around me, I am just angry all of the time.* James would ask why is that? I think what James is going to say is the problem is not without; the problem is within. He is going to say there is actually a war going on inside of you. That is what he is going to open up to this church that he is writing to about, these desires that are warring, and the real reason behind these angry fits and fights and quarrels. He is going to ask, why are you fighting? Why are you quarreling? Why are you mad all of the time? He says it really has to do with friendship. When I say friendship, I don't mean the friends you hang out with, but that keystone friendship. Because James is going to say that is the make-or-break deal. Do you have a keystone friendship with the world or with God? If your key friendship is with the world, then that friendship is going to hijack your desires and it will cause you to be angry. It will cause you to fight, to covet, and to destroy all the relationships in your life. But, if your key friendship is God, then you aren't going to be empty; you will be full. You won't be angry; you will be joyful. It won't lead to hate; it will lead to love. So we are going to ask this big question — who is my friend? Is my key friendship with the world or is my key friendship with God?

Scripture

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and don't have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You don't have, because you don't ask. You ask and don't receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do

you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us"? But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.""

The very first thing that James is going to tell us is all of this fighting, all of the quarrels, and all of the anger actually comes from wrong wants. You actually want wrongly. In other words, your 'wanter' that is inside your heart is actually broken and it often wants the wrong things. Look with me in verse 1, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" He is asking this question to a church that obviously has some fights and some problems and James wants to get to the root of it, so he says why are you angry all of the time? Why are you fighting? Then he says, "Is it not this that your passions are at war within you." The assumption for James's readers to why are you angry all the time is, *well...HER...do you know what she does?* Why are you fighting all of the time? *Because of HIM...do you know what it is like to live with him?* James says it is not without; the problem is within. The problem is the war inside of you. The problem is with your desires. James is going to say the problem is going to be your heart. Your heart can actually want wrong things. That word, "passion," is where we get our word, hedonism, and it is the idea of passion in the sense of seeking after things for selfish pleasure and gain. It is not passion directed towards God. It is passion directed towards doing whatever makes you happy and you don't care who it affects. It is self-indulgence. The reason we are fighting and the reason we are angry is because we have these passions that are very selfish, and they are pointed only to self and they end up wrecking all of the relationships we have.

James K. A. Smith wrote a book called "You Are What You Love." He basically says that as human beings we are what we love. The thing we love defines you. You are that which you love, so he argues that primarily we are wanters, we are lovers. All of our actions are because you love things and you want things, and what you want becomes who you are, so it is going to be really important that we actually want the right things.

I think what James would say is we are basically walking wanters. We are wanting all of the time, and when our wanters are broken it leads to broken relationships. So, how is James going to argue this war within us? He actually describes it. He says here is the war that is going on in your heart, "You desire and you don't have, so you murder." That is the war, you desire. Now, desires are good. God created with you desires. You have the desire to eat and that is good. If you didn't you would die. God has created you with desires and your desires are ultimately supposed to lead you to God, the fountain for all of your desires to be satisfied in. The problem is our desires often point us to things that God forbids, to things that God is against, or to things that we think that will give us what God can ultimately give. We desire, we want something, so we go after it, but then we don't have. We want but we don't get. And what happens when we don't get what we want is we end up murdering.

Now, was James saying that the early church is actually cold-blooded, killing one another because they are not getting what they want? Well...perhaps, because if you read the New Testament there are some pretty crazy things going on in the early followers of Jesus, but I think probably he is using this metaphorically to say that you are murdering. In other words, you are angry, hating, and being destructive towards people when you don't get what you want. How it works in our lives is like we want a certain job or a certain career, so in order to get it we harm and destroy other people in our path to get what we want. We become murderers to get the thing that we want, but often times we don't even get that thing. Or you get the thing you want, but it doesn't truly satisfy us. We have this war. We are wanters, and in our wanting, we run over people to get what we want. James says that is a wrong desire.

But not only that, James says, "You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." So, not only do we want things but we also covet things. Notice the difference between wanting and coveting. Wanting is...I want that. Coveting is...I want what you have. Coveting is looking around at what somebody else has and thinking you would be happy if you had what they have, so you want it. In coveting, you try to get what other people

have, because you think if you have their life you will be happy. So with our desires, we want and we covet. Our wants cause us to murder, and our covets cause us to fight and to quarrel.

All of these desires are good desires. God put desires in us, but they get hijacked when our friendship is wrong. When we love the world, our desires get hijacked to want wrong things. We want things ultimately, or we want what other people have ultimately. I think the ability for culture to hijack our desires is ten billion times more compared to how James's day had it. Just think about the culture that we live in. Think about advertisements. How many times are you advertised to every single day? It is constant; nonstop advertisements on billboards as you drive, radio stations as you listen, or that little phone in your pocket. Have you ever noticed it seems to always be screaming, *YOU NEED THIS! GET THIS!* It is kind of a mixed message — be who you are because you are awesome, but not quite, because you need to buy this and if you buy this then you will be great. Constantly, we are bombarded with a message that says, *get this and you will be happy*. Then we click it and order it, it shows up on our doorstep, and it makes us happy for a moment but then ten minutes later you are thinking what else do I need? We want, and we want, and we want. Then we get and it doesn't satisfy us; it leaves us emptier not fuller. We have these wants that are broken and they lead us to covet.

It is not only advertisement, think about how social media works. What does social media let us see? *Here is what everybody else has but you don't!* Some of you thought your snow day was really cool! Your snow day was epic, but then you started scrolling Instagram and you realized your snow day was not nearly as cool as you thought it was. Your hot chocolate was just the mix. That mom did like Joanna Gaines and she made homemade hot chocolate with mints swirling around in it. Their kids had a better snow day. You took your kids sledding behind your house, and that dad took his to a mountain to snowboard and he did a back flip! It is even on video...*If I just had what this dad had or what this mom had or what this kid had then I would be happy!* All of a sudden, our snow day turns into an angry mess because all of the kids were yelling. In everyone else's

house that I see on Instagram, they are all smiling. What is going on? Why is my snow day not like everybody else's? We covet. We see what everyone else has and we want it, then it leads us to be angry, mad, and bitter. Instead of loving people, we turn them into enemies. That person has what I need to be happy so they are no longer a friend; instead, they are an enemy. James is saying you have these wars, desires, and coveting, and it leads to anger, fights, quarrels, murder, and destructing relationships.

He goes on and says but there is also a problem with these wants because they are supposed to direct you to God but they either don't direct you to God or they direct you to God in the wrong ways. Notice what he says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." In other words, you have unmet desires because you are not asking your heavenly Father to meet those desires. You have this group of people who have wants, but they are not going to God, the one who can actually satisfy our souls. These people are not going to God; they are going to other people, other things to give them what only God can give. And there is another group of people who are going to God, but they are going to God for the wrong reasons. Notice what it says, "You ask and you don't receive." This other group is asking God but they are not receiving from God. Why are they not receiving from God? It says, "...because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Here is a group of people who are going to God but they are going to God with a Christmas list that says give me my Christmas list and I will be happy — if you just give me all the things that I want then I will be happy. They are going to God to fill all of their selfish desires, all of those things that you see everybody else has... *God, will you give me that new house, that new car, that new career, that new wife? Will you give me these things? If I had these things, I would be happy.* So we go to God to give us our little gods, and James is saying God is not into that. God is not going to give you the idol you ask for. It's going to go unmet. The prayer isn't going to be answered which is going to lead you to resent God and be angry about God. It's going to lead you to more and more fights and quarrels. He is answering our questions. Why are you angry all the time? Why are you always in a fight with somebody? It's because there is a war within you.

You want and you don't get, you covet and you can't obtain, so it leads you to fighting and quarreling and hating everyone around you.

James is going to say those wants that war within you reveal you. The things you want reveal who you are. The things that you desire show who you really want to be. What does James say about what these people are? Verse 4 says, "You adulterous people!" That is a pretty hard line. He has called these people friends and brothers, he has called these people sisters and beloved, and now he is calling them adulterers, you adulterous people! Wanting these passions that are not for God but are against God are actually an act of spiritual adultery. How exactly is that? I think the reason James says this is because they would be familiar with that. Think about the Old Testament. The imagery of adultery is all over the Old Testament where God will say to His people, I am your husband, you are my bride, yet you go after another lover, you go after idols, you go after Baal. They are supposed to be in covenant with God, but they are cozy with the culture that they live in. He says that is spiritual adultery. They were not faithful to God; they were going after someone else to give them what only God can give. If you will look in the New Testament, we see that same picture of Jesus who says I am your groom and the church is my bride. Yet so often what does the church do? The church in James, what were they doing? They were going after other loves. They were following other passions to lead them to the world rather than leading them to God. They are supposed to be in covenant with the Lord Jesus and they are trying to go after the idols of their culture. So, James calls them out. He says, you adulterous people. You were made with a one flesh relationship with one and you are going after others. This is the reason your desires are warring within you. It is because you are not staying faithful to the one who made you.

James compares spiritual adultery to friendship, and he says the problem is you have the wrong friend. You are friends with the wrong being. Notice what he says in the next verse. He says, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" That is a powerful line. Now, friendship in James's culture was a bigger deal than it is in our culture. I mean, you

have Facebook friends that you don't even know, but they are your friends, right? In James day, friendship was very big. It was about commitment. It was about loyalty. You shared a table together. You shared experiences together. You bound yourself to that person. There was affection and interests, things you did together. When you called someone your friend, it meant something. James says if you have friendship with the world, if you share a bond, interests, love, and affection with the world, then by doing so you are at enmity with God. Enmity means to have opposition, to be in hatred to. If you love the world, if you are friends with the world then you actually hate God; you are actually in opposition to God.

Another thing to notice about friendship is desire fuels friendship and friendship fuels desire. For me, when I was in grade school most of my friends wore jerseys — baseball jerseys, football jerseys, and basketball jerseys. That is just what we wore because I was into sports. Because I was into sports, I found myself leaning to pick friends who were also into sports. As I hung around the friends who loved sports, guess what? I loved sports all the more and I would have more jerseys because of the friends I hung out with. Then in middle school, I found myself wearing cowboy hats, boots, and spurs. The reason is because I loved horses and I loved rodeos, so then I began to lean towards friends who loved horses and rodeos. My desires led me to friends and those friends cultivated and fueled my desire to like the things that I was doing even more so. In high school, I found myself wearing motocross boots and a motocross jerseys. All of my friends, guess what they did? The same thing because my interests led me to my friends and my friends fueled my interest. What James is trying to say is your friends fuel your interests, and who your friend is, is going to show your desires. If you are friends with the world, you will desire the world. If you are a friend of God, you are going to desire God.

We have to ask that big question before we go any further because there could be some confusion. We have to ask, what does James mean when he says the world? What does it mean not to be friends with the world? When he says world, is James meaning creation, or is he meaning the cosmos? In other words, is he talking about all the stuff God made? Is he

saying don't be friends with God's creations? Is he telling dads never to take their families to a national park because God is against national parks? I don't think James is saying that. Instead, what I think he is meaning is cosmos, the arrangement of the world's system that is against God. Bruce Ashford would say that when God created the world He made it structurally and directionally. Structurally means it is a certain way. What we would say is that even after the fall, the structure of the world still remains good. The problem is that the direction of the world changed. See, God created the world to have a certain direction. It was supposed to point to Him. The whole creation was supposed to glorify and point to Him. You were supposed to point yourself to God in worship. But then, because of the fall, the direction of the world changed. Now the world points to man, not God. When James is talking about world, he is meaning that pointing direction that is away from God towards self and mankind rather than the glory of God. That is what he is meaning when he says world.

I think when it comes to interacting with the world there is a road we can go down and there are two ditches on either side that we can fall into. The first ditch, when it comes to the world or when it comes to culture if you would think about it like that, is we as Christians can be *of* the world, and that is what James is arguing against — don't be of the world. Of the world means that we uncritically assume all of culture, all progress, is good. Everything culture does is good, whatever culture says, that is what I am going to do. As a Christian, you can't uncritically be of the world because you aren't going to look like Jesus; you will look like an enemy of Jesus. At the same time, there is another ditch that we as Christians can fall into and that is being *against* the world. We are not supposed to be against the world either. We cannot be against culture. That is like having the bomb shelter mentality — everything is bad, culture is bad, all of the world is bad and I hate everything. I only love me and my family. Everything is terrible, let's just blow it all up, because all I want is me and my little way.

We cannot be against the world or of the world, so what do we do? We are *in* and for the world. Do you notice that is what Jesus did? In His

incarnation, He came into the world and walked among us. He was not against culture or of culture. Instead, He was for culture. He would walk into situations and redeem, love, and serve. He would call things out but also celebrate the things that were good. That is what we must do as believers, not be against or of, but be in and for the world. Think about this. What are the things in culture that are actually good things? How can I celebrate those? What are the things that need redeeming? What are the ways that I can go into the world that exists and make it a better place?

What James is dealing with is that 'of culture' group of people. He says you cannot be of the culture. You cannot be friends with the world. You cannot uncritically have friendship with the world and also be friends with God. He is not only going to say that you can't do it, but he is going to say you cannot even *want* to do it. This is not just getting at actions, but at motivation. He is going to use this word "wish." I think this word, wish, really gets to motivation. Notice what he says in the next line, "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." That is getting a little bit deeper. It is not just, whoever becomes a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, it is whoever wishes they were. It is whoever longs for it, whoever desires it. You can be in here and look a lot like the church but secretly really wish you were of the world. That is just as bad because even desiring to be like the world and the world system that is pointed only to self, only to man and nothing of God, even wishing for that sets you in opposite of God, an enemy of God. Why is that? It is because wishing gets to what you want, and if you want the world system that is pointed towards self instead of God, then what you want is the story of the fall rather than the story of creation and redemption. You actually love the fallen world more than the Kingdom of Christ to come. If you secretly like the world when it points to you better than when it points to God, if in your heart you act like you love God yet desire a world all about you, James says if you do that you are an enemy of God — because what you desire, what you want, actually matters. Just wishing for it makes you an enemy of God. That is why Jiminy Cricket should have put a warning label on When You Wish Upon a Star. Be careful because when you wish upon a star and those little desires that you have

they just might actually come true. You just might actually get what you wished for. You just might actually get the world, but it is going to leave you empty rather than full. It is going to lead to anger, jealousy, and fighting. It is also going to break those good relationships that you are supposed to have. It is not just, don't be friends with the world; it is don't even wish you were friends with the world. Again, when we talk about the world we are not talking about the people God created or the creation; we are talking about the world system that points itself towards man and self rather than the glory of God. If you want that then you ultimately want yourself more than you want God, and that is going to be a problem. It is going to make a war in your desires.

What we are going to see is even though we are adulterous people and even though we go after other gods and other passions, God still comes after us. This is the glorious news of the gospel! This is one of the great things about the gospel — God is jealous. What we are going to see is God's jealous nature is actually good. Jealousy is a good thing when it comes to God. This was actually a beef when Oprah did an interview. One of the problems with the God of the Bible is that He is jealous and she cannot love a jealous God because, "Why would God be jealous of me?" She saw jealousy as an insecurity in God. As David Platt says in his commentary, God's jealousy is not an insecure jealousy. God is not insecure. He is not afraid that the sin you are going after or the thing you want more than Him is actually going to turn out better than Him. He is not worried. He knows He is the best thing going. He knows He is the treasure of the universe. He is not insecure, He is not jealous like that. Instead, He has a secure jealousy.

What does God's secure jealousy do? It actually runs after us. Notice what James says in the text, "Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says..." So, there is a purpose. What is the purpose of the Scripture saying, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us"? It is that God has a yearning for us, a jealous yearning for us. He yearns jealously for the spirit that He put within us. He yearns jealously for you. Why? It is because you belong to Him. You are in a covenant

relationship with Him. Much like a marriage, a husband is jealous over his wife or a wife jealous over her husband, because they belong to one another. They have committed to one another. There is covenant there. God is jealous over us.

Now, what would the purpose of God's jealousy be? What is the purpose? What does His jealousy do? Verse 6, says, "But He gives more grace." He gives more grace! This is the really bad problem...we belong to God but we go after other lovers, and God is jealous. That is a bad problem. God is jealous when we go after other lovers, but we often do so. So this is bad news, but then it turns to good news. Why? It is because God's jealousy doesn't push us away, it runs to us, it says God gives more grace! His purpose in being jealous of us is to give us more Grace. It is to continue to go after us even though we are so often wayward sons. God continues to run after us. It's that story of Hosea in the Old Testament where Hosea marries a girl, Gomer. Gomer continues to go after other loves. She continues to walk away. She continues to be wayward. What does Hosea do? Though her life wrecks her, though she ends up falling into slavery, Hosea goes after her and buys her back for fifteen shekels. He buys what belongs to him. He buys her back and loves her in that covenant love. He loves her as her husband, and God is says that is what He like. He is our good husband who keeps coming after us, though we belong to Him He will buy us back. We see that happening beautifully at the cross. Though we belong to God we ran from God, and God actually bought us back. He paid the price of His only Son. Christ would die on our behalf so that God could show His love and grace to us. Even in our waywardness, God can say, but I give more grace. Through the cross, God buys us back. Our wayward desires that lead us away from God, God crucifies them at the cross of Christ — and by faith, when we repent and believe in Him, we get bought back and our desires find their rightful place back in the loving arms of God.

This week when you mess up, I want that line to stick into your brain... but he gives more grace! **BUT HE GIVES MORE GRACE!** This is who our God is! He is a jealous God who comes after us and gives more grace. Why? It is

so that we would turn and find our love and affection in Him. When our desires find their place in God, it changes our lives because our desires are now correct and now our relationships are correct. Everything we do in our life becomes a picture of how we love God; therefore, our desires follow that love. So, how do we get that? There might be some of you, right now, in this room and you have said I am angry a lot. I am constantly fighting. I am constantly mad. I am constantly bitter. I have no joy, no love. People don't like to be around me. I am just always mad and angry, and because of the Word of God, I realize the problem is my friendship — my best friend is the world. Because I have loved the world, I have chased a me-centered existence, and the more I get the more I want. The more I don't have the more I covet what you have. The more I get what you have the more I destroy all of my relationships, and I am just empty. I am just angry. I just don't know what to do. Maybe that is you right now and you are thinking what do you do? You look to God who, in His jealousy, is coming after you. He is pouring His grace out to you.

Ok, so how do you receive that grace? Look what James says. He says, "Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."" What do you do if you are in a moment where you realize that you are friends with the world and you don't know what to do? You humbly repent and turn to God. You can't say I am going to fix this myself — I will try harder and do better. No, that is pride. That is you saying I can save myself. God opposes the proud. He has nothing to give to the proud because He only gives grace to the humble. So, those who humbly say I have gotten it all wrong, I have become cozy and friends with the world, and what I want is friendship with God. I want to know God and love God. I want God to be the one who cultivates my desires. I want God to be the one who affects my life. I want to be best friends with God, not the world. So, how do you get that? You humble yourself before the Lord because in humility God gives grace. You say to God, I have blown it. I confess that. I have loved the world, and by loving the world, I have desires that are only for my destruction and emptiness. What I need is friendship with you.

See, when you have friendship with God you find the fullness of God, the pleasure of God. Those desires get met. They get fulfilled which turns to joy which cultivates into love to your neighbor, not coveting your neighbor. In friendship with God, you actually learn to want the right things. What we want shows what we love, and who we love influences what we want. When it comes to wanting, James says what is really important is that you love rightly, that you have the right friend, not friendship with the world but friendship with God. Friendship with the world will only lead to desires that cannot be met and they will be empty and lead you to hate everyone. But if you have friendship with God then it will lead those desires to be fulfilled and you will have joy, love, and peace. Which one describes you? Full or empty? Angry or joyful? Love or hate? Whichever list you find yourself in, it reveals who your true friend is. You either have friendship with the world or you have friendship with God. If you find yourself in friendship with the world, what do you do? You repent because God gives more grace.