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**Friendship with God**  
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James 4:1–12

Today we're looking at the theme of friendship.

When I was getting ready to leave for my deployment, my daughter and my husband told me not to be surprised at how fast deep friendships are formed in the field setting.

And of course they were right, something happens in that setting that's like hitting a fast forward button on a relationship remote control.

Whether sitting in a defensive position or sitting in the chow hall, people were quick to share their life stories.

Part of it is because we all shared important things in common like the mission.

Everyone is essential to the mission and therefore essential to you.

Being aware of our need for each other probably fueled the quick bonding process.

These friendships were real and necessary. Think about your personal friendships and how many things have your friends seen you through.

Today, we're looking at the theme of friendship in James chapter 4 and specifically what it means to be friends with God.

We've heard James draw a contrast between two lifestyles;

- A lifestyle led without wisdom from God is earthly & unspiritual, (3:15)
- A lifestyle of the double minded is unstable (1:8)
- Friendship with the world leads to quarrels and fighting and hostility towards God. (4:1-3).

Most of us hate conflict and fighting and sometimes avoid folks who cause fights. We may even avoid someone in our family or avoid family gatherings because we know we're bound to wind up in a fight.

James talks about different kinds of conflicts in the church;

- Class wars (2:1-9)
- Employment wars (5:1-6)
- Personal disputes
- And inner struggles and wars (4:11-12)
- Church fights (1:19-20; 3:13-18)

What if there was a way to put an end to conflict and prevent those fights in the first place, would you try it?

James says there is a way to deal with it but first we have to understand what causes it.

**Listen to his words - James 4:1-12 (NLT)**

*What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*

*You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy? But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say,*

*"God opposes the proud  
but favors the humble.*

*So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.*

*Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.*

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*

So, these quarrels stem from jealousy & envy, wrong motives & selfishness.

ILLUSTRATION: Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business.

If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival.

One night an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much.

Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy.

Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier.

What is your desire?"

The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, "Here is my request:

Strike me blind in one eye!"

One sign of jealousy is when it's easier to show sympathy and "weep with those who weep" than it is to exhibit joy and "rejoice with those who rejoice."

James links both the problem and the solution to our friendships.

He contrasts the difference between friendship with the world (meaning anything that opposes God) and friendship with God.

It's an interesting concept to be talking about having a friendship with God who you cannot see, hear or speak with...at least not in the same way we do each other.

Have you thought about God as a friend? Not just about God being a friend to you, but what kind of friend you are to God?

Verse 4 tells us our friendship matters to God because it demonstrates our loyalty.

It says; *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity or hostility against God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."*

It's an act of hostile aggression. We can't do both be friends with the world and friends with God.

Friendship with the world is showing loyalty to anything that stands for or represents the things God opposes.

He says look at the world, it wants the wrong things, it's competitive, fueling jealousy and envy, bickering, fighting and waging war, even killing.

ILLUSTRATION: Perhaps because I'm a mother and I think in story, but when I heard envy and jealousy I couldn't help but think of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Snow White's nemesis the Wicked Queen

At the beginning of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, a scroll reveals that the wicked queen looks at her magic mirror everyday asking, "Magic mirror on the wall, who's the fairest one of all?"

And the scroll reveals that as long as the mirror names the queen, Snow White is safe.

As the queen approaches the mirror to get her daily dose of affirmation, she asks, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest one of all?"

The mirror responds, "Vain is your beauty, majesty. But, oh, a lovely maid I see. Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. Alas, she is more fair than thee."

The queen's face contorts and her eyes burn with anger. How could a maid, dressed only in rags, compare to the regal beauty of the queen?

"Reveal her name!" demands the queen. The mirror tells the queen the name of Snow White.

Her envy of Snow White consumes her. From that moment forward the queen seeks to destroy Snow White.

Of course her attempts fail and wicked queen is ultimately the one destroyed by her own envy.

James says, the world is motivated by envy but it should be different with believers.

The fight starts on the inside, in our heart when we want what we want even if it's not what God wants for us.

Friendship with God is born in a heart that is completely sold out on God. A heart that wants the what God wants.

God wants friends who are loyal in the way they think and act.

As an example, James says look at, Abraham, he was the only person in Bible that God calls his friend.

**James 2:21-23 (NLT)**

**21** Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. **23** And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God.

James listeners knew all about Abraham – so I want to look again at his story.

**Abraham:**

Abraham was going about his life and then one day God spoke to him and told him to leave the country where he was living and go to a land that God would show him. So...Abraham did what the Lord told him to do and at the age of seventy-five, he set out for a new land.

He brought his nephew Lot with him but soon fighting broke out among their herdsmen over land and resources.

Abraham gave Lot first pick of land and he chose the whole plain of the Jordan and headed toward Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abraham lived near the land of Canaan.

Then one day when God is preparing to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham and told him that he's going to destroy the cities.

Sodom and Gomorrah symbolize the "world" in opposition to God.

But Abraham intervened and asked God to spare his nephew and his wife and two daughters. So some angels went in to lead Lot and his family out of there, and on the way out (Gen 19:16) says they hesitated to leave and Lot's wife turned back and lost her life.

It says that "when God destroyed the cities, he remembered Abraham and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived." (v29)

It was because of Abraham's friendship with God that Lot was saved.

The Lord said to Abraham, "lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

That's a pretty big promise and pretty unbelievable because he and Sarah had no kids and way past child bearing years.

But, the text says, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Gen 15:6)

He believed the Word of the Lord even though it seemed so unlikely. There was no evidence, nothing in his life that could make this promise seem possible.

Ten years later when He was 85 and they still had no children, things didn't look good for the promise God had made to them.

So Sarah came up with her own plan for them.

Maybe they weren't supposed to sit around waiting for God to answer their prayers, maybe they were supposed to take the initiative.

They arranged to use Sarah's maid Hagar as a sort of surrogate. A practice that was as common in those days as adoptions is today, and that is how they have Ishmael.

However, that's not what God had in mind and he said "no...the child through whom all your descendants will come will be born to you and Sarah."

Then one day when Abraham was 99, he and Sarah were sitting in their tent when the angel of the Lord came to Abraham to tell him to expect a child that same time next year.

Abraham fell facedown and laughed and said to himself, "will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah have a child at the age of ninety? (Gen 17:17-18)

Sarah heard what they said and laughed out loud as well...wouldn't you if someone told you you're going to have a baby at the age of 90?

Abraham's friendship with God led to a lot of laughing but probably none greater than the day he and Sarah laughed with joy when she gave birth to their son Isaac.

A few years later however, God spoke to Abraham again and told him to take his son, his only son Isaac, the son he had waited a lifetime for, up to a mountain and offer him to God as a sacrifice there.

He did this to test Abraham to see if he would withhold Isaac from him and whether his loyalties had changed now that he had what he wanted.

Sort of like God giving you that house, that job or whatever you were praying for and then asking you to give it up.

At first light the next day Father and son set out for the mountain with the firewood and tools to build the altar and sacrifice.

Isaac can clearly see that they have everything they need . . . except the sacrifice.

So he asked his dad where the animal was for the offering and Abraham told him that God would provide.

There was nothing in his life that meant more to him than his son. This act would end not only the life of his son, but also his whole future and all the promises God had made to him as well.

After building the altar, he tied up his son, put him on the altar and lifted his knife. But God intervened and stopped him.

He told him that now he knew that Abraham was still loyal and he would keep nothing from God.

All the promises that God spoke to him revolved around this child.

Now there's a test of loyalty. How would you have handled that one?

James is essentially saying to his listeners, you bicker and fight because you don't have what you want and you want what everyone else has and you are believers?

Look at one who was a believer, who God called a friend...you fight for what you want, but he offered all that he had to God, can you see the difference.

Abraham could do what he did because he believed God! He believed in the promise God made to him and that if he was obedient somehow God would intervene.

Maybe the problem starts when we don't really believe God. Or we don't really believe he cares about us.

Pretty soon we can get caught up in stuff we shouldn't.

And then the war starts on the inside, the war between the flesh and the spirit. The sinful side of us wants one thing and the spirit in us wants the other. James says we face three enemies, the flesh, the world and the devil.

Friendship with the world encourages unhealthy competition, values that are opposed to God's will, a distorted view of oneself, jealousy and envy of those around us, greedy, prideful, unnatural desires.

We have situations all the time that require us to make a choice.

These choices reveal our loyalty, and every choice will lead us farther away from God or closer to God.

Being a friend to God begins with what we believe about God and whether we believe his word and how we act on that belief.

Genuine friendship with God is the most effective way to prevent and to end conflicts and fights.

**It starts;**

- With humility. We have to ask what role pride may be playing in our situation and - submit ourselves and our desires to God.
- Then, resist jealousy and envy
- Get closer to God in prayer & devotions,
- Don't do what we know is wrong,
- purify our hearts,
- and watch out for double-mindedness / we can't have it both ways, friendship with the world when it's suits us, and friendship with God when it's convenient.

**Here are three ways we can show our friendship to God;**

- Seek God's will when you pray. And he knows when we really mean it. So get alone, and focus in prayer until you can really feel peaceful about submitting whatever the thing is your praying about.
- Be humble – putting others needs and interests ahead of your own
- Be a loyal friend. Resist and avoid things that you know God would oppose.
- Draw near, he will draw near to us and lift us up.

If we do this, we like Abraham will hear God call us friend as well.

Jesus said, "You are my friends if you love one another!"

**John 15:11-15 (TNIV)**

**11** I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. **12** My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

**LET'S PRAY:**

Dear God, it helps us to take a look at the cause of our conflict and struggles from within. Help us to recognize when we get caught up thinking like the world, or wanting what we shouldn't or valuing things that you don't approve of. Help us to look to you for the things that we want and help us to desire what you want for us. Help us to be at peace within ourselves and to resist envy and jealousy. Lord, we want to get closer to you and we want to be a better friend to you. Help us to be loyal and faithful and to believe the words of hope and promise that you offer us. In Jesus name. Amen.

**OFFERING PRAYER:**

Dear Lord, thank you for all that you've given us. Bless these offerings that we bring before you. May they be used for your glory, helping us to help others and demonstrate our loyalty to you. In Jesus name. Amen.

(8:30 – Song – Yielding)

(11:00 – Hymn - #571 Trust & Obey)

**BLESSING:**

Go from here in the peace, and joy, and friendship of the Lord. Amen.