

# Chapter 4

- LIVING FAITHFULLY THROUGH HUMILITY •

**READ: JAMES 4:1-3 | MATTHEW 3 & JOHN 3:22-30**  
**MORE OF HIM, LESS OF US**

Growing up in the 70s, there was a tradition among many families, and a day that every child looked forward to. The arrival of the Sears Christmas catalog. The catalog, also known as the "Wish Book," was glossy, colorful, full of possibilities, and unlike today's slim flyers, this catalog was hefty! The day it arrived, my sisters and I would grab our pens and take turns flipping through the pages, circling all of the toys we wanted Santa to bring us. Even though our parents rarely bought us what we circled, the joy of dreaming kept us coming back year after year.



While this might seem a bit selfish in hindsight, many of us approach prayer the same way. We present our desires to the Lord, almost like a wish list, hoping He'll fulfill them. James opens this chapter by talking about the desires that battle within us. Whether we're praying or interacting with others, there's this deep-seated desire to get what we want. Why do we fight, gossip, or put others down? Because, let's be real, we think there's something in it for us. It might be protecting our pride or elevating ourselves

to gain the admiration of others. James is pointing out that these desires for pleasure often drive our actions, even our prayer life.

Depending on your Bible translation, you might see the word "desire" or "lust" used a few times in this chapter. The Greek word "hēdonē" translates to "pleasure" or "desire for pleasure." Throughout scripture, this word often carries a negative tone, pointing to pleasures that can lead us into sin.

James highlights two common issues among believers:

**1. Lack of Commitment to Prayer:**

"You do not have because you do not ask God."

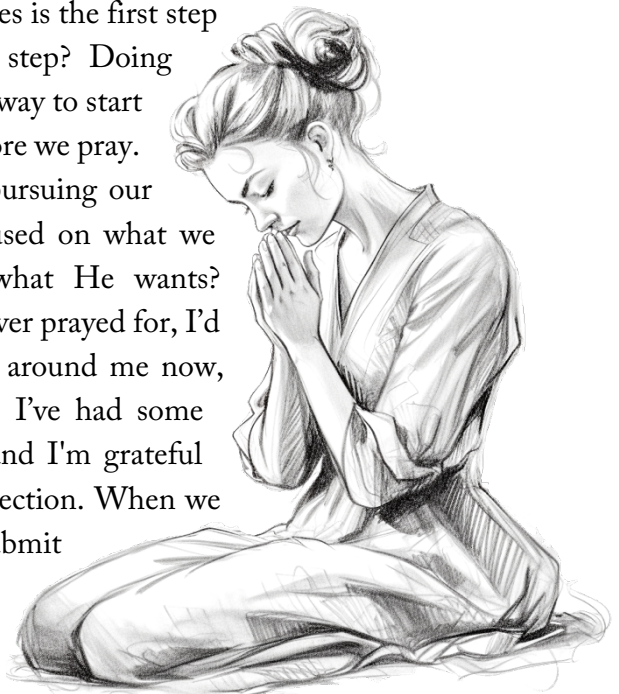
This suggests that we miss out on certain things simply because we're not asking God for His help or provision.

**2. Impure Motives in Prayer:**

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives."

We might be asking for things driven by selfish desires instead of aligning with God's will.

Recognizing these unhealthy desires is the first step to overcoming them. The next step? Doing something about it. One practical way to start is by reflecting on our motives before we pray. Are we seeking His will or just pursuing our own interests? Are we more focused on what we want, or are we asking God what He wants? Honestly, if I got everything I've ever prayed for, I'd have missed out on the blessings around me now, not to mention I'd be miserable. I've had some pretty bad ideas over the years, and I'm grateful that God led me in a different direction. When we pray, we must be willing to submit ourselves to God's will and His plan for our lives, no matter how



challenging it might be. As Jon Courson puts it, “Prayer is not giving orders. It’s reporting for duty.”

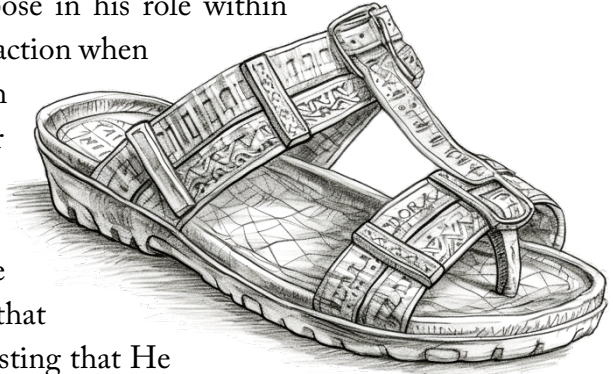
Another practical step is to be mindful of how we treat others. Instead of engaging in fighting, quarreling, or gossiping, let’s aim to be peacemakers. That means being slow to anger, quick to listen, and careful with our words. It’s about choosing to build others up rather than tearing them down. By fostering a spirit of humility and kindness, we not only reflect God’s love but also create a more peaceful environment around us. These small changes can lead to big transformations both within our hearts and in our relationships.

Now, let’s talk about John the Baptist. He’s a remarkable example of humility and pure motives. Even with a large following, John always directed the spotlight away from himself and toward Jesus, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, NIV). The Bible describes him as a man whose "clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4, NIV). Can you imagine? While we’re often searching for the softest, most comfortable fabrics, John willingly wore camel’s hair—a material far from comfortable. This choice wasn’t random; it was intentional. It spoke volumes about his commitment to a life of simplicity, repentance, and detachment from worldly comforts. John wasn’t worried about elevating himself or seeking personal comfort; his focus was on his divine mission to prepare the way for Jesus.

When some of John’s disciples noticed that people were flocking to Jesus, they were concerned. But John, with incredible humility, reminded them, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him’" (John 3:27-28, NIV). And then, in a statement that should challenge us all, he said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30, NIV). John’s entire life was about elevating Jesus while minimizing himself.

## Final Thought:

Just as John found joy and purpose in his role within God's plan, we too can find satisfaction when we focus on serving God with pure motives. So, whether in our prayers, our service, or our daily interactions, let's strive to honor God and uplift others. Let's make sure our actions reflect a heart that seeks His glory above all else, trusting that He will use us in ways we can't even imagine.



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❓ Look at the description of John in Matthew 3:4 and his response in John 3:27-30. What can we learn from John's attitude towards his role and mission?

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What does John 3:30 mean to you in the context of your own life? Are there areas in your life where you need to become less so that Christ can become greater?

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## KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### JAMES 4:1-3

#### **DESIRE:**

In the context of this passage, "desire" refers to a strong longing or craving for something one does not have. These desires, often driven by selfish motives or fleshly cravings, lead to internal conflicts and external strife. They contrast with godly desires, resulting in quarrels and dissatisfaction rather than peace and contentment.

#### **COVET:**

To "covet" means to have an intense and wrongful desire for something that belongs to someone else. In this passage, coveting is associated with jealousy and greed, leading to conflicts and disputes when people cannot obtain what they deeply long for. Coveting goes beyond mere desire; it involves an envious longing that disrupts relationships and leads to destructive behavior.

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**READ: JAMES 4:4-10 | HOSEA 1 & 3**  
**HE IS JEALOUS FOR YOU**

Before we dive into this next portion of Scripture, let's pause and consider a few things. When James refers to "adulterous people," he's not merely talking about physical adultery but rather a spiritual unfaithfulness. He's drawing a parallel to how Jesus views His relationship with the church, His bride. Just like in the Old Testament, the term "adulterous" was used to describe the Israelites when they turned away from God to chase after idols and other gods. This metaphor paints a vivid picture of how spiritual unfaithfulness can be likened to marital infidelity, breaking the covenant we have with God.

Now, let's take a closer look at the word "world" in verse four. The Greek word "kosmos" here is multifaceted. In some contexts, like John 3:16, "kosmos" refers to humanity—God's creation that He loves so much He sent His only Son to save. It's an all-encompassing term that reflects God's expansive love for all people. But "kosmos" also has another side, often pointing to the material and temporal things of life—money, power, possessions—that can distract and lead us away from God.

In James 4:4, we find yet another use of the word. Here, "kosmos" refers to a system of values, beliefs, and practices that are fundamentally at odds with God's ways. It represents the worldly attitudes and pursuits that prioritize self-interest, materialism, and desires over spiritual devotion. James warns us that "friendship with the world is enmity against God." This means aligning ourselves with worldly values puts us at odds with God. It's

not about rejecting the people of the world, but rather the sinful systems and practices that draw us away from our faith.

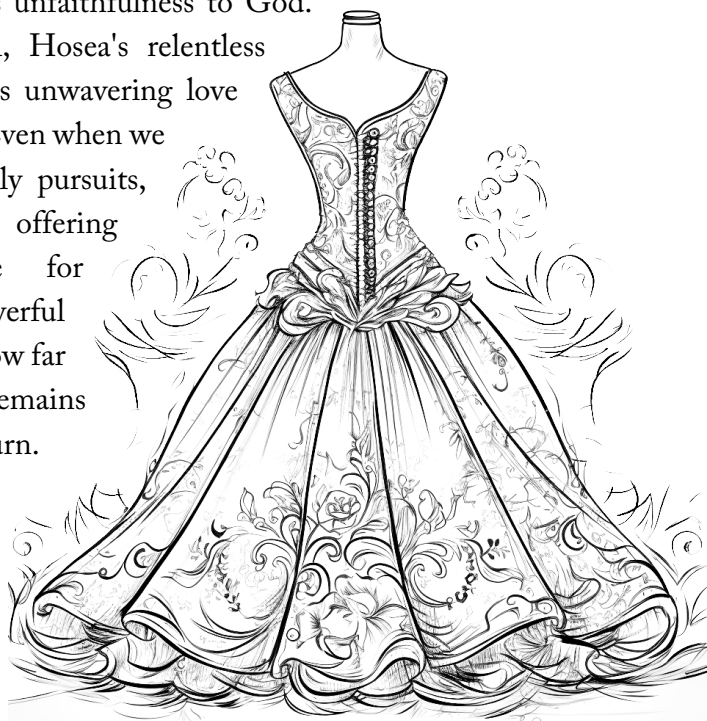
Paul echoes a similar thought in 1 Corinthians 5:10, reminding us not to separate ourselves from people who sin but to guard against the influences that can corrupt our faith. Jesus Himself often sat with those society labeled as sinners and outcasts, engaging with them in love and compassion. He didn't isolate Himself but rather exemplified how to live in the world without being of it. So, James isn't contradicting other scriptures. He's not saying we should isolate ourselves but that we must guard our hearts against adopting values that contradict our faith.

The story of Hosea beautifully illustrates this concept. God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who would be unfaithful to him, as a living metaphor of Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

Despite Gomer's betrayal, Hosea's relentless love for her mirrors God's unwavering love and grace for His people. Even when we stray and prioritize worldly pursuits, God's love calls us back, offering grace and a chance for repentance. It's a powerful reminder that no matter how far we drift, God's love remains constant, inviting us to return.

James 4:6-7 speaks to this grace: "But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'" Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

This grace isn't just a free pass; it's a powerful invitation to humble ourselves, turn away from sin, and draw closer to God. It's about recognizing our need for His mercy and acknowledging that, without Him, we can do nothing.



Imagine a husband waiting at home while his wife spends more and more time with her friends. He loves her, trusts her, but over time, he starts to feel neglected. His desire for her attention isn't about control; it's about a deep, loving commitment to their relationship. This scenario mirrors the relationship God desires with us. The Holy Spirit within us yearns for our devotion and affection, much like a faithful spouse desires the love of their partner. God's jealousy isn't a petty emotion; it's a profound longing for a relationship where we are fully committed to Him, just as He is to us.



But here's the incredible part: God doesn't just leave us in our wanderings. He gives us more grace.

And sometimes, this grace comes through hardships and challenges. These trying times serve as reminders of our dependence on His love and grace. Just like Hosea's love for Gomer, God uses these experiences to strip away the distractions and idols in our lives, drawing us back to Him. It's not always easy

or comfortable, but it's necessary for our growth and spiritual maturity.

This refining process, though often uncomfortable, is an expression of God's unwavering love and commitment. It's His way of ensuring we stay in relationship with Him, free from worldly entanglements and fully devoted to His purpose. So, when James tells us to “change your laughter to mourning,” it's a call to repentance—a shift from a careless, self-indulgent attitude to one of humility and submission to God. It's a reminder that true joy and fulfillment are found in a life fully committed to Him, not in the fleeting pleasures of this world.

By embracing this call to repentance, we align ourselves with God's will, allowing His grace to transform us from the inside out. It's a journey of shedding the old, worldly ways and embracing a life of holiness, dedicated

to reflecting His love and truth in everything we do. So, let's take this opportunity to examine our hearts, turn away from the things that pull us away from God, and fully commit ourselves to the relationship He desires with us. This is where true peace and joy are found—in the loving arms of our faithful God, who never stops pursuing us with His grace.

### **Final Thought**

The story of Hosea and Gomer beautifully illustrates God's unwavering commitment to us. Like James, it calls us to turn back to Him, despite our failings. True joy and fulfillment aren't found in the fleeting pleasures of this world but in a life anchored in God's truth and grace. Let's stay vigilant, rooted in His love, and fully devoted to our walk with Him.



❓ How does the term “adulterous people” relate to spiritual unfaithfulness, and why is it compared to marital infidelity?

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❓ What does it mean to be a "friend" of the world in this context?  
How can we live in the world without becoming part of it?

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## KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 4:4-10

### **ADULTEROUS PEOPLE:**

In this context, "adulterous people" is a metaphorical term referring to those who are unfaithful to God by pursuing relationships or alliances with worldly values and systems. Just as adultery in marriage is a betrayal of one's spouse, spiritual adultery is a betrayal of one's commitment to God. It indicates a divided loyalty, where individuals are drawn away from their devotion to God in favor of the world.

### **FRIENDSHIP:**

"Friendship" here refers to a close association or alignment with the values, practices, and priorities of the world. In this passage, friendship with the

world means adopting a mindset that prioritizes worldly desires and standards over God's ways. Such friendship indicates a compromised allegiance to God, leading to spiritual enmity with Him.



**ENEMY:**

An "enemy" in this context is someone who opposes or stands in direct conflict with God. When a person chooses to align themselves with the world and its values, they place themselves in opposition to God's will and purposes. Becoming an enemy of God implies a rejection of His authority and a resistance to His ways, leading to spiritual estrangement from Him.

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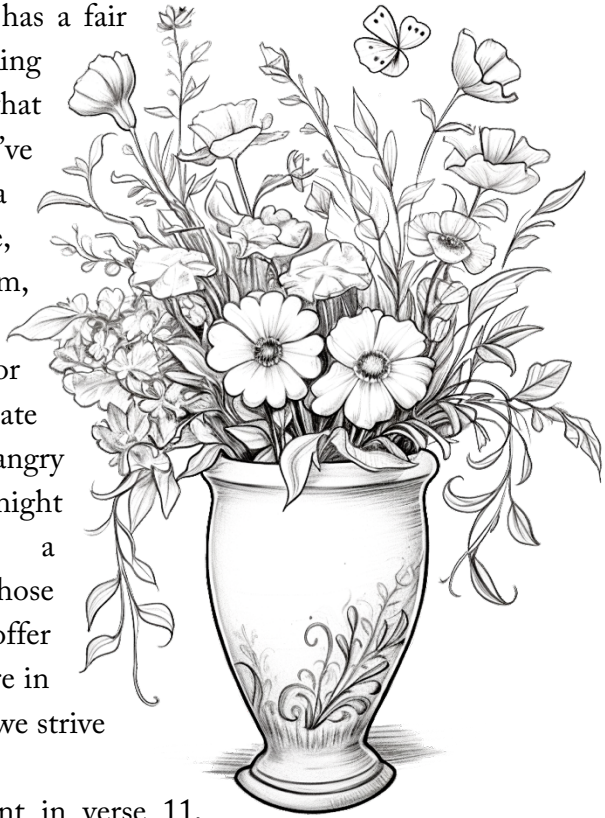
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**READ: JAMES 4:11-12 | LUKE 18:9-14**  
**DON'T SLANDER ONE ANOTHER**

There's a certain kind of magic that envelops our family when we gather around the table for game night. Trivial Pursuit is our game of choice, and it's been that way since the children were little. We've always played in

teams, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to win. Amidst the clinking of plates and the laughter that leaves us breathless, we've unknowingly discovered a powerful lesson in love. You see, when we're united as a team, patience and kindness flow naturally. There's no room for jealousy or envy when a teammate scores a point, and we're never angry when they miss one. Sure, we might tease our opponents in a lighthearted manner, but for those on our team, we offer encouragement, cheer, and share in their triumphs. Hand in hand, we strive for the prize.



James echoes this sentiment in verse 11, urging believers to speak well of each other. He reminds us that when we slander our brothers and sisters in Christ, we're not just hurting fellow believers; we're also challenging God's law. In doing this, we put ourselves above the law, which clearly instructs us to love our neighbors as ourselves

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:  
"Love your neighbor as yourself. (Galatians 5:14, NIV)*

Instead of honoring the law, we act as if we're the judges, a position only God can hold. This is a powerful reminder that our true calling is to live humbly, love others, and leave judgment to God.

With that said, when are we to judge others, if ever? The judgment called for in passages like Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1 is meant to be constructive. It's about holding one another accountable within the church community—not to condemn, but to restore and guide. This type of judgment is exercised with humility, recognizing that all believers are

under God's authority and are called to encourage each other toward righteousness. We're also called to be discerning and rightly divide the truth of God's word.

The judgement that James refers to in this chapter is destructive. This kind of judgment often stems from pride and self-righteousness, where individuals assume the role of judge—a role that belongs to God alone. It's about condemning others or speaking ill of them, thereby challenging God's law of love. The Apostle Paul also touches on this in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, emphasizing that it is the Lord who judges and that we should not judge prematurely, as only God can reveal what is hidden and expose the true motives of the heart.

Jesus illustrated this contrast in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee, confident in his own righteousness, judged the tax collector, boasting of his own deeds. Meanwhile, the tax collector, aware of his own sinfulness, humbly asked for God's mercy. Jesus declared that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified before God. This parable vividly demonstrates that God values a humble and repentant heart over self-righteousness and judgment.

When I'm reading the Bible, I catch myself pointing the finger at times. I think, "Yeah, she does this, and yes, he does that," forgetting that I'm the one that needs to be changed by God's word. One thing that's helped me break this habit is remembering something an old man at our church used to say: "When you point a finger at someone, there are three fingers pointing back at yourself." This simple yet profound reminder encourages me to examine my own heart and actions before judging others. It helps me to focus on the grace I've received and to extend that same grace to others.

## **Final Thought**

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31) and to approach others with a spirit of humility and grace. Let us remember that our role is not to condemn one another but to love and uplift one another, leaving judgment in the hands of God, who alone is righteous and just.

❓ What is the difference between constructive judgment (as seen in Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1) and destructive judgment (as warned against in James)?

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❓ As you study this section, what is one key takeaway that you can apply to your spiritual growth this week?

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# KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 4:11-12

## **SLANDER:**

In this passage, slander refers to making false or malicious statements about a brother or sister in Christ, which not only harms them, but also disrupts the unity and love that should characterize the Christian community.

## **JUDGE:**

To judge in this context means to criticize or condemn someone, assuming a position of moral superiority. When one judges another, they place themselves in a position reserved for God alone, who is the ultimate Lawgiver and Judge. The passage warns against taking on this role, as it reflects a failure to recognize God's authority and undermines the principle of mercy and humility.

## **LAW:**

The "law" in this passage refers to God's commandments, particularly the command to love one another, as Jesus taught. When someone judges another, they are, in effect, judging the law itself—suggesting that they are above the law. This is a form of arrogance, as the passage emphasizes that only God, the true Lawgiver, has the authority to judge. The law calls for love, mercy, and humility, and judging others contradicts these principles.

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**READ: JAMES 4:13-17 | 2 SAMUEL 7**  
**SEEKING GOD'S DESIRE FOR US**

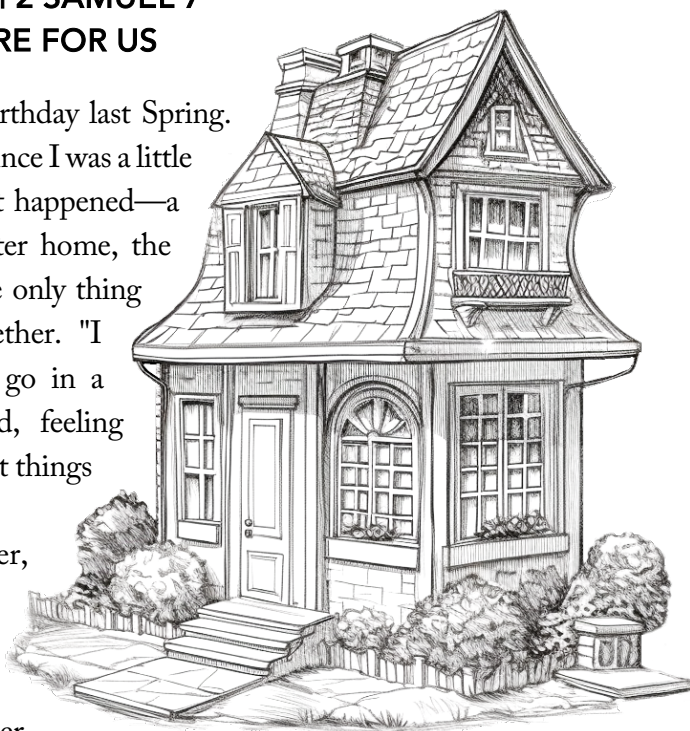
I got a dollhouse for my birthday last Spring. Now, I've wanted one ever since I was a little girl, and finally, this year, it happened—a two-story Victorian character home, the kind you dream about. The only thing was, I had to put it together. "I should have this ready to go in a week, maybe two," I said, feeling confident in my ability to get things done quick.

But four months later, I'm still knee-deep in paint, stain, and glue, trying to bring this little house to life. Just the other

day, I told my sisters that it's probably going to take me a year to finish. I'm not nearly as confident as I was four months ago because I've learned something along the way: Even the simplest projects can take more time and patience than we expect. And isn't that just like life? We think we've got it all figured out, but then the unexpected happens, and suddenly, we're reminded that our plans aren't always as straightforward as we'd hoped. It's in those moments that we realize how much we need to approach our plans with humility, trusting that God's timing and guidance are what truly matter.

James writes, "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.' 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." (James 4:13-14, NIV)

James brings us back to the importance of prayer and the attitude we must have when seeking God's guidance. He's addressing that subtle but dangerous presumption that we know what's best for ourselves. The truth is, we don't even know what will happen five minutes from now—let alone



tomorrow or next year. So how can we possibly determine the best path to take without God? This realization should humble us, reminding us of our deep and daily dependence on Him.

Earlier in James chapter 4, we talked about examining our motives before we come to God in prayer. Are we genuinely seeking His will, or are we just chasing after the things that we want? Are we more focused on our desires, or are we asking God what He desires for us? These are the questions that help us align our hearts with His purpose.

Whenever we're making decisions that shape our future, we need to consider God's will first and bring our concerns to Him in prayer. By doing this, we acknowledge His sovereignty and trust that He knows what's best for us, even when we can't see the full picture. It's this humble approach that ensures we're not leaning on our own understanding, but rather, we're submitting to God's wisdom and guidance, allowing Him to direct our paths.

Look at 2 Samuel chapter 7. David had plans—good ones. He wanted to honor God with a permanent dwelling place. But God had different plans. Through the prophet Nathan, God told David that he wouldn't be the one to build the temple; instead, his son Solomon would fulfill that role.

David's response to God's decision is just as noteworthy as his original desire to build the temple. Instead of reacting with disappointment or frustration, David praised God for His goodness and sovereignty. He expressed deep gratitude for all that God had done for him and his family, acknowledging that God's plans were far greater than his own.

David's willingness to set aside his own aspirations in favor of God's will teaches us invaluable lessons about humility and obedience. It reminds us that God's plans are not just different—they are always better, always good.

## **Final Thought**

This chapter reminds us that even our most sincere and well-meaning plans must be submitted to God's will. It encourages us to let go of pride and presumptions and trust that God's wisdom surpasses our own.

When God redirects your plans, as He did with David, how do you respond? What steps can you take to trust and follow God's guidance, even when it leads you down an unexpected path?

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How does acknowledging the uncertainty of life (as mentioned in James 4:14) help you rely more on God's wisdom rather than your own understanding?

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# KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 4:13-17

## **BOAST:**

In the context of this passage, to boast means to speak with excessive pride or self-satisfaction about one's own achievements, plans, or abilities. It reflects an attitude of self-reliance and arrogance, particularly in making plans without acknowledging God's sovereignty. James criticizes this kind of boasting because it disregards the uncertainty of life and the need to submit to God's will. Boasting in this manner is seen as sinful because it elevates human pride over humility and trust in God.

For example, someone might say, "Next year, I'm going to start a business, expand it across multiple cities, and make a lot of money. Nothing can stop me!"

This statement reflects boasting because it confidently assumes control over the future without considering the uncertainty of life or acknowledging that success ultimately depends on God's will. The person speaks with pride, relying solely on their own plans and abilities, rather than submitting their plans to God's guidance and recognizing His sovereignty.

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# ANSWER KEY

Please note that the answers provided are intended to guide your understanding, but they may vary depending on personal perspectives. Many of these questions invite thoughtful reflection, and your responses might differ from the ones given here. My goal is to encourage you to consider the teachings and how they apply to your own life and faith journey.

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## CHAPTER 4

Look at the description of John in Matthew 3:4 and his response in John 3:27-30. What can we learn from John's attitude towards his role and mission?

John's attitude demonstrates humility and clarity of purpose. He understood that his role was to point others to Christ, not to seek his own comfort and glory. John's willingness to decrease so that Christ could increase teaches us the importance of recognizing our place in God's plan and being content with the mission God has given us, without seeking recognition or comparison.

What does John 3:30 mean to you in the context of your own life? Are there areas in your life where you need to become less so that Christ can become greater?

This answer will be different for everyone.

How does the term "adulterous people" relate to spiritual unfaithfulness, and why is it compared to marital infidelity?

The term "adulterous people" relates to spiritual unfaithfulness by depicting a betrayal of our commitment to God. Just as marital infidelity involves breaking a sacred trust between spouses, spiritual adultery involves breaking our covenant relationship with God by turning to the world or other idols. This comparison emphasizes the seriousness of placing anything above our devotion to God.

**What does it mean to be a "friend" of the world in this context? How can we live in the world without becoming part of it?**

Being a "friend" of the world means aligning ourselves with worldly values, desires, and practices that are opposed to God's will.

To live in the world without becoming part of it, we must remain rooted in God's Word, seek His guidance in our decisions, and prioritize our relationship with Him above all else. This involves making conscious choices to avoid compromising our faith and values, even when pressured by the culture around us.

**What is the difference between constructive judgment (as seen in Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1) and destructive judgment (as warned against in James)?**

Constructive judgment involves lovingly correcting someone with the goal of restoring them to a right relationship with God and others. It's done with humility and a desire for the person's well-being, as seen in Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1. Destructive judgment, as warned against in James, is critical and condemning, often rooted in self-righteousness or pride, and it tears others down rather than building them up.

**As you study this section, what is one key takeaway that you can apply to your spiritual growth this week?**

This answer will be different for everyone.

**When God redirects your plans, as He did with David, how do you respond? What steps can you take to trust and follow God's guidance, even when it leads you down an unexpected path?**

This answer will be different for everyone.

**How does acknowledging the uncertainty of life (as mentioned in James 4:14) help you rely more on God's wisdom rather than your own understanding?**

Acknowledging the uncertainty of life reminds us of our limited control and the need to depend on God, who knows all things. This awareness encourages us to seek His guidance in all our plans and decisions, trusting in His wisdom rather than leaning on our own limited understanding or assumptions about the future.