

The General Epistle of James

Chapter 4 — Contrite Submission



Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.
Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

— **James 4:8**

James Chapter 4 Orientation

Central burden: Conflict grows where desire rules the heart. James calls a divided people to humble submission: turn from friendship with the world, receive greater grace, submit to God, resist the devil, draw near, guard speech, and place every plan beneath the Lord's will.

Life Application Chapter Summary

Chapter	Movement	Christian Life
Chapter 4	Contrite Submission	What a Christian feels

Chapter summary transcribed from the supplied Life Application Bible table for James 4.

Chapter 4 Emphases

Theme	Importance
Disordered desire	Quarrels and distorted prayer begin with desires that demand control.
Undivided loyalty	Friendship with the world puts the heart at odds with God, but He gives greater grace.
Humble return	Submission, resistance, cleansing, repentance, and humility mark the path back to God.
Dependent living	Speech, judgment, plans, and neglected duty must all remain under the Lord's authority.

Interpretive Guardrails

- James is not condemning every desire, pleasure, plan, or business activity. He confronts desires and plans that exclude God, exploit others, or make self the final authority.
- The command to mourn addresses sincere repentance, not permanent despair. God gives greater grace and promises to draw near to those who humbly return.

Companion Bible Structure — James 4



The Companion Bible marks four broad movements in James 4. The plain-language labels below show how inward desire becomes conflict, how greater grace calls for humble submission, and how pride appears in both judgment and presumptuous planning.

How to read the letters: The letters identify the Companion Bible’s literary movements. The final row is a plain-language subdivision within the last marked movement because no new major letter appears before James 5:1.

Marker	Verses	Movement	Description
C	4:1–5	Conflict, desire, divided loyalty	Desires within produce quarrels, distorted prayer, and friendship with the world.
B–C	4:6–10	Greater grace and humble submission	God gives grace to the humble: submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, repent, and humble yourselves.
D	4:11–12	Speaking evil and judging	Slander puts a person above the law instead of under it; there is one Lawgiver and Judge.
D continued	4:13–17	Planning under God’s will	Presumptuous planning forgets life’s brevity, God’s sovereignty, and the duty to do known good.

Structure adapted from the supplied Companion Bible pages for James 4, with plain-language movement labels added for classroom clarity.

The Movement of the Chapter

Desire → pride → surrender: James traces conflict back to the heart, then answers pride with greater grace. The chapter moves outward again: a humbled heart stops tearing down a brother, stops boasting over tomorrow, and starts doing the good it already knows.

Chapter 4 Study Map



#	Passage	Study Focus
1	4:1–3	Conflict begins with desires at war; prayer can be distorted by selfish motives.
2	4:4–6	Divided loyalty makes friendship with the world enmity with God, yet He gives greater grace.
3	4:7–10	Submit to God, resist the devil, draw near, cleanse, repent, and humble yourselves.
4	4:11–12	Speaking evil and judging a brother places the speaker above the law and the one Lawgiver.
5	4:13–16	Life is a vapour; plans must be held beneath the Lord's will rather than proud certainty.
6	4:17	Knowing the good creates responsibility; neglected obedience is itself sin.

Conflict and Disordered Desire

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you?

- † come they not hence,
- † even of your lusts that war in your members?

2 Ye lust, and have not:

- † ye kill, and desire to have,
- † and cannot obtain:
- † ye fight and war,
- † yet ye have not,
- † because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not,

- † because ye ask amiss,
- † that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

Divided Loyalty and Greater Grace

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses,

- † know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?
- † whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world
- † is the enemy of God.

5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain,

- † The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

6 But he giveth more grace.

- † Wherefore he saith,
- † God resisteth the proud,
- † but giveth grace unto the humble.

Submit, Resist, Draw Near

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.

- † Resist the devil,
- † and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God,

- † and he will draw nigh to you.
- † Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;
- † and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep:

- † let your laughter be turned to mourning,
- † and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,

- † and he shall lift you up.

Speech Against a Brother and the One Lawgiver

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren.

- † He that speaketh evil of his brother,
- † and judgeth his brother,
- † speaketh evil of the law,
- † and judgeth the law:
- † but if thou judge the law,
- † thou art not a doer of the law,
- † but a judge.

12 There is one lawgiver,

- † who is able to save and to destroy:
- † who art thou that judgest another?

Planning Beneath the Lord's Will

- 13** Go to now, ye that say,
† To day or to morrow we will go into such a city,
† and continue there a year,
† and buy and sell, and get gain:
- 14** Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.
† For what is your life?
† It is even a vapour,
† that appeareth for a little time,
† and then vanisheth away.
- 15** For that ye ought to say,
† If the Lord will,
† we shall live,
† and do this, or that.
- 16** But now ye rejoice in your boastings:
† all such rejoicing is evil.

The Good We Know

- 17** Therefore to him that knoweth to do good,
† and doeth it not,
† to him it is sin.

Biblical Observations

Observation 1

Conflict, Desire, and Disordered Prayer

James 4

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you?

- † come they not hence,
- † even of your lusts that war in your members?

2 Ye lust, and have not:

- † ye kill, and desire to have,
- † and cannot obtain:
- † ye fight and war,
- † yet ye have not,
- † because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not,

- † because ye ask amiss,
- † that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

- *wars and fightings among you...* James does not begin with the other person's faults. He traces outward conflict to inward desires that demand satisfaction and compete for control.
- *lusts that war in your members...* Desire becomes a battlefield within the members. When the heart treats a want as a right, frustration can turn into envy, hostility, manipulation, or strife.
- *ye ask amiss...* Prayer itself can become self-centered. Asking is not enough when the aim is merely to spend God's gifts upon desires that refuse His rule.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Wars — open conflicts; fightings — disputes or battles. James moves from public conflict to the desires beneath it.
- Lusts — pleasures or cravings; the word describes desires that wage a campaign within the person.
- Ask amiss — ask with a wrong or harmful purpose; consume — spend; the issue is motive, not merely wording.
- Cross-reference — James 1:14–15 traces temptation from desire to sin and death.

Personal Application — What desire has become so important that I am willing to quarrel, manipulate, withdraw, or pray selfishly to obtain it?

Biblical Observations

Observation 2

Divided Loyalty and Greater Grace

James 4

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses,

- † know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?
- † whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world
- † is the enemy of God.

5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain,

- † The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

6 But he giveth more grace.

- † Wherefore he saith,
- † God resisteth the proud,
- † but giveth grace unto the humble.

- *friendship of the world is enmity with God...* James uses covenant language to expose spiritual unfaithfulness. Friendship with the world means adopting a system of values that resists God's authority.
-
- *The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy...* Scripture's witness is not empty: fallen desire bends toward envy and self-possession. The divided heart cannot be healed by pretending the rivalry is harmless.
-
- *he giveth more grace...* The decisive answer is not stronger self-effort but greater grace. God opposes pride because pride refuses Him; He gives grace to the humble who receive His rule.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Friendship — close affection or alliance; world — the present order organized apart from God; enmity — active hostility.
- James 4:5 summarizes the general witness of Scripture that fallen human desire bends toward envy and self-interest.
- More grace — greater grace for the new life God gives; the quotation in verse 6 reflects Proverbs 3:34.
- Resisteth — sets Himself against; grace is received in humility, not claimed through pride.

Personal Application — Where have I tried to keep God's friendship while also protecting a loyalty, ambition, or identity shaped by the world?

Biblical Observations

Observation 3

Submit, Resist, Draw Near, and Be Humbled

James 4

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.

- † Resist the devil,
- † and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God,

- † and he will draw nigh to you.
- † Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;
- † and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep:

- † let your laughter be turned to mourning,
- † and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,

- † and he shall lift you up.

- *Submit yourselves therefore to God...* Submission is active alignment beneath God's authority. Resistance to the devil is possible because surrender to God changes whom we obey.
- *Draw nigh to God...* God's nearness is answered by cleansing hands and purifying the heart. Outward action and inward loyalty belong together; double-mindedness must give way to wholeness.
- *Humble yourselves...* Repentance grieves sin honestly but does not end in despair. Those who humble themselves before the Lord are promised that He will lift them up.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Submit — place oneself under; resist — stand against. The order matters: allegiance to God precedes resistance to the devil.
- Draw nigh — approach; cleanse — remove defilement from conduct; purify — make the heart single in loyalty.
- Double minded — divided in allegiance; compare James 1:8.
- Humble yourselves — take the low place before the Lord; lift up — God, not self-promotion, gives true standing.

Personal Application — Which movement is God calling for now—submission, resistance, drawing near, cleansing, sincere grief, or humility?

Biblical Observations

Observation 3 — Continued

10 Commands for Backsliders



1	Submit yourselves to God (v 7)
2	Resist the devil (v 7)
3	Draw nigh to God (v 8)
4	Cleanse your hands, you sinners (v 8)
5	Purify your hearts, you doubters (v 8)
6	Be afflicted, mourn, and weep (v 9)
7	Let your laughter be turned to mourning (v 9)
8	Let your joy be turned to heaviness (v 9)
9	Humble yourself before God (v 10)
10	Speak not evil of one another (v 11)

Discuss: Which command most clearly speaks to you today? What specific response would put it into practice?

Biblical Observations

Observation 3 — Continued

4 Promises to Backsliders



1	God giveth more grace to the humble
2	He (the devil) will flee from you
3	He (God) will draw nigh to you
4	He (God) shall lift you up

Discuss: Which promise gives you courage to return, resist, draw near, or humble yourself before God?

Biblical Observations

Observation 4

Speaking Evil, Judging, and the One Lawgiver

James 4

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren.

- † He that speaketh evil of his brother,
- † and judgeth his brother,
- † speaketh evil of the law,
- † and judgeth the law:
- † but if thou judge the law,
- † thou art not a doer of the law,
- † but a judge.

12 There is one lawgiver,

- † who is able to save and to destroy:
- † who art thou that judgest another?

- *Speak not evil one of another...* Speaking against a brother is not a harmless release of frustration. It tears down a person within the family James repeatedly addresses as brethren.
- *speaketh evil of the law...* When we condemn a brother as though we possess final authority, we stop obeying the law of love and place ourselves above the law as its judge.
- *There is one lawgiver...* There is one Lawgiver and Judge, able to save and destroy. Remembering His seat restores humility to our speech, correction, and discernment.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Speak evil — speak against, slander, or backbite; the command concerns destructive speech about another person.
- Judgeth — assumes the place of final condemnation; compare Matthew 7:1–5 and Romans 14:4.
- Lawgiver — one who establishes the law; God alone possesses final authority to save and destroy.
- The issue is not abandoning discernment but refusing the proud posture that tears down a brother and usurps God's judgment.

Personal Application — Whose reputation have I harmed through accusation, ridicule, selective facts, or repeated criticism? How can I repair what my words damaged?

Biblical Observations

Observation 5

Planning Beneath the Lord's Will

James 4

13 Go to now, ye that say,

- † To day or to morrow we will go into such a city,
- † and continue there a year,
- † and buy and sell, and get gain:

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.

- † For what is your life?
- † It is even a vapour,
- † that appeareth for a little time,
- † and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say,

- † If the Lord will,
- † we shall live,
- † and do this, or that.

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings:

- † all such rejoicing is evil.
- *To day or to morrow...* The merchants speak with confidence about destination, duration, activity, and profit. Their error is not planning ahead but planning as though tomorrow belongs to them.
- *what is your life? It is even a vapour...* Life is a vapour—real but brief, visible for a moment and then gone. Human limitation should produce humility, urgency, and dependence rather than fear.
- *If the Lord will...* If the Lord will is more than a phrase added to a schedule. It is the posture that receives life, opportunity, and outcome as gifts beneath God's authority.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Go to now — come now, a direct summons to listen; buy and sell — conduct trade or business.
- Vapour — a mist that appears briefly and vanishes; compare Psalm 39:5 and Proverbs 27:1.
- For that ye ought to say — instead of confident boasting, acknowledge the Lord's will and the gift of continued life.
- Boastings — arrogant claims that presume control; such rejoicing is evil because it excludes God.

Personal Application — Do my plans reveal prayerful dependence or confident control? What would it mean to hold one important plan openly before the Lord?

Biblical Observations

Observation 6

The Good We Know and Do Not Do

James 4

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good,

† and doeth it not,

† to him it is sin.

- *knoweth to do good...* Knowledge creates responsibility. James refuses a faith that recognizes the right action but leaves it undone.
- *doeth it not...* Sin includes both wrongful action and neglected obedience. A person may avoid an obvious evil while still refusing mercy, reconciliation, generosity, truth, or courage.
- *to him it is sin...* To him it is sin makes the warning personal. The good God has made clear cannot be postponed indefinitely without becoming deliberate disobedience.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Knoweth — has recognized what is right; doeth it not — withholds the action that knowledge requires.
- This verse names sins of omission: failing to do the good that duty, love, and opportunity have made plain.
- Cross-references — Luke 12:47–48; John 13:17; Galatians 6:10.

Personal Application — What good action do I already know to take? What would faithful obedience look like before this week ends?

How the Study Notes Were Prepared



The study notes are not copied wholesale from one Bible. The chart below identifies what came directly from the supplied sources and what was written as classroom synthesis.

Material	How It Was Used
Companion Bible	King James Version text, the James 4 structure, word meanings, translation details, and cross-references. On observation pages, the base terms come from the Companion Bible; the wording after each dash gives a concise plain-language explanation for classroom use.
Dake Bible	The two numbered James 4 lists are transcribed from the supplied photographs: Ten Commands for Backsliders and Four Promises to Backsliders.
Life Application Bible	The chapter summary—Contrite Submission: What a Christian Feels—is transcribed from the supplied table. Its practical emphasis informs discussion of conflict, prayer, humility, slander, planning, life’s brevity, and neglected obedience.
Biblical Observations	The explanatory paragraphs are original study synthesis based on James 4, the supplied notes, and cited Scripture cross-references. They are not verbatim commentary from one source.

Source Pages

- The Companion Bible, James pages 1848–1854.
- Dake Annotated Reference Bible, supplied James 4 topical-list photographs.
- Life Application Bible, supplied James 4 pages and chapter-summary table.

Chapter 4 Review



Summary

James chapter 4 teaches contrite submission—what a Christian feels when pride, conflict, and presumption are exposed by God’s Word. Quarrels are traced to desires at war within, and even prayer can become distorted when it is governed by selfish motives.

God gives greater grace. James calls believers to submit, resist, draw near, cleanse their hands, purify their hearts, grieve sin, and humble themselves before the Lord. The humbled heart stops tearing down a brother, stops claiming control of tomorrow, and begins doing the good it already knows.

Key Movements in the Text

- 4:1–3 — Conflict and disordered prayer reveal desires at war within.
- 4:4–6 — Friendship with the world divides loyalty, but God gives greater grace to the humble.
- 4:7–10 — Submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, repent, and humble yourselves before the Lord.
- 4:11–12 — Speaking evil and condemning a brother usurps the place of the one Lawgiver.
- 4:13–16 — Life is a vapour, so every plan must remain beneath the Lord’s will.
- 4:17 — Knowing the good creates responsibility to do it.

Chapter 4 Review



Questions for Reflection

- What desire has become a demand that fuels conflict in me?
- Where might my prayers be shaped more by self-gratification than by God's will?
- What worldly loyalty is competing with wholehearted friendship with God?
- Which command in James 4:7–10 most clearly describes my next step?
- Whose reputation have I damaged through careless or condemning speech?
- Which plan am I holding as though tomorrow and its outcome belong to me?
- What good action do I already know to take but continue to postpone?

One Memory Verse

James 4:8

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.
Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;
and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Closing Prayer



Father, You give greater grace to the humble. We confess that our desires have often ruled us, our pride has divided us, and our prayers and plans have sometimes centered on ourselves rather than Your will.

Teach us to submit to You and resist the devil. Draw us near as we cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. Give us sincere repentance without despair, and free us from double-minded loyalty to the world.

Guard our speech toward our brothers. Keep us from slander, contempt, and the proud assumption that we belong in Your judgment seat. Where our words have wounded fellowship, give us courage to confess, repair, and reconcile.

Remind us that our lives are a vapour and tomorrow rests in Your hands. Let every plan remain open to Your will, and give us prompt obedience to the good we already know. Make this fellowship humble, steadfast, and rich in grace. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.