**TIME ALONE WITH GOD**

Ingredients:

* Half an hour, every day.
* Quiet, so you focus on yourself and on God;
* Prayer, worship, thanksgiving, as your response to God
* Word, so you can ponder His truth
* Life, people and events, so you are aware of Him in these situations

Method:

* Time – a fixed time when you are unlikely to be interrupted is best but more important is to actually start having such a time with God.
* Quiet – A simple method is to be quiet until you are aware you are in God’s presence before you start to respond to Him.
* Word – Read and be familiar with what is said. Meditate on the Word: “What does it say?” “What does it mean?” “How should I respond?” You may use the questions to help you or set them aside.
* Life – Use the time to also be aware of the things that are happening, inside you and around you. Bring these before God and speak to Him.

# Monday and Tuesday

[**JAMES 4:1-5**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV)

Remember this is your time alone with God. It is a time to tell God what is on your mind (thinking back over the past day), listen to him speak to you (reading and meditating on a bible passage), and finally, to respond to him (prayer). The questions are there to help you do this. Ignore them if they do not help. If your time is limited, I suggest that you don’t do everything in one go but spread them over the two days.

1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [JAMES 4:1-5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.”* While this broadly described the disunity in the church, the language used (kill, quarrel, fight) reflects the way the world has acted since time immemorial. However, outwardly, wars and other fights and quarrels usually are attributed to more broadly acceptable reasons (like self-defence or historical rights). Do you think the analysis, that it boils down to uncontrolled desires in man, is accurate? Do you think that divisions and disunity in the church stem from the same source (even though the reasons given may be more “spiritual or theological”)?
2. “*You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”* Why wouldn’t those Christians ask God for what they want/need (the clue is in what James says about when they do ask God)? Could it also be that they think they can get what they want by themselves?
3. Either way—ask wrongly or don’t ask—the church is then starved of God’s blessing. Do you think that God would withhold his blessing from such a disunited and selfish church, or he answers or refuses on the merit of each prayer, regardless of the state of the church?
4. *“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”* In this context, “friendship with the world” is not about making friends, or even entering into partnerships, with non-Christians, or getting involved in social activities. James is saying that when we adopt the (sinful) values and ways of the world we are essentially standing on the side of the world and putting ourselves in conflict with God. Is this specific to the worldly attitude of acting on self-interest, or generally, to disunity among God’s people, or more broadly, as James wrote, “your desires that battle within you”? In other words, what are we doing that will cause James to accuse us of friendship with the world? On the other hand, wouldn’t we already be saints if we have conquered our desires? How can we express our allegiance to God over our sinful desires?
5. *“Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?”* James tells us that the state of our spirit really matters to God. How would you describe the state of your spirit?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**JAMES 4:6-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [JAMES 4:6-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *“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. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”* In the matter of “friendship with the world” where we are confronted with the prospect of being on the opposite side of God, we saw that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for us to escape capitulation to the onslaught of the desires that battle within us, what would God’s grace mean? How can we shelter under God’s grace? What does James promise us when we do so?
2. *“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”* Here is a general statement of the attitude of God towards the proud and the humble. What is the lesson to be learned here?
3. *“Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”* Slander is saying something untrue and damaging to the reputation of another. Do you think James is restricting his comments to untrue statements? What do you think is the problem that James is describing here? Is it a problem if Christians are sitting in judgement of fellow Christians over something true? What does it mean to judge or sit in judgement insofar as who you regard yourself to be? How does pride figure in this scenario?
4. In the context of chapter 4, which began with a description of fights and quarrels and now slander and sitting in judgement over others. What do you think was happening and what was James concerned about?
5. What is the remedy?

# Friday and Saturday

[**JAMES 4:13-5:6**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [JAMES 4:13-5:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. James 4:13 addresses a specific group of people: *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.”* James 5:1 also addresses a specific group of people: *“Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.”* Do you think he is addressing the same people? Also he calls on these people to “weep and wail” in 5:1 and in 4:9 he calls on people to “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.” Is it possible that this is the group of people that he was specifically addressing even though his earlier comments were more general in context? If it is so, how would you now understand what was going on in chapter 4?
2. What were these people saying about themselves and what were they saying about others (who are probably poor)? In what ways could they be not praying or praying selfishly? In what ways were they showing that they were indeed having “friendship with the world”? How else have they sinned (see 5:3-6. Kill and murder could possibly be figures of speech rather than actual)? At the end of the day, these are a natural progression when you think you are better than others, even to the point of literally killing and murdering them.
3. Do you think such issues and attitudes are confined to rich people arising from the power of their wealth? How else can such pride, conceit, judgement, greed, selfishness be manifested in other (perhaps less wealthy) people?
4. Are there groups of people you habitually look down upon, suspect of crime or laziness and regard as liabilities? What is at the heart of such views? What is the remedy?

# Sunday

**PRIDE AND ASSOCIATES**

*“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill.”*

The first image that comes to mind reading James 4 is that of a person torn within, with different desires vying to be satisfied. But it does not match with the next sentence, that you desire and you kill.

The ultimate desire, that leads us to fight, quarrel, wage war and even kill, is the desire to be pre-eminent, to dominate, to have everyone bending to your will. It even fights to be the dominant desire in us.

This, of course, is the original sin of man, when Satan tempted man with the promise that “you will be like God”.

We have several words to describe this desire and James covers the gamut of them: fights and quarrels, kill, selfishness and self-centredness, slander, judgemental, self-confidence and presumption, boasting, hoarding, cheating especially those weak and helpless, self-indulgent, murder. You can examine these and trace the thread to the desire to elevate self over others—pride.

The rich, the powerful, the elite, those in authority or born to such families, the talented and skilled—those that possess something that places them ahead of others—all are susceptible to the seductive lie that they are special as a result.

But even those on the other side of the equation may not escape the sin of pride, taking hold of their position as victims and using that to damage, castigate and condemn those who have victimised them. In our anger we pray that God will unleash his wrath upon these wicked people who have been the source of our suffering.

James tells us that friendship with the world—when we are no different and succumb to the temptation of the devil to be superior—is enmity with God. The proper position of man is to be humble. Only God can lift us up.

*“Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 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. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

1. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down in the past week. Read the short sharing above. Does it add anything to your own thoughts?
2. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.