

## Surrender our will? What does that mean?

**James 4 NIVUK** *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

*<sup>4</sup> You adulterous people,<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us<sup>[a]</sup>? <sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:*

*'God opposes the proud  
but shows favour to the humble.'<sup>[a]</sup>*

*<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

*<sup>11</sup> Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?*

### **Boasting about tomorrow**

*<sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

As I write this sermon, Robert and I are living with my brother in North Queensferry due to last minute complications with the English property at the bottom of our buying chain. But as they were hopeful of sorting it out in time for everyone to move on February 10<sup>th</sup>, we felt we had to go ahead with our removals – being packed up on the 8<sup>th</sup> and moved out the next day. The plan was to let the other four parties move on the 10<sup>th</sup> so that we could move into our new house in Kinghorn on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

However, that was not to be, and we have been struggling emotionally, asking God why? Perhaps we did not hear from God correctly about moving? But our house sold quickly so God must have wanted us to move.

So, then, what is He trying to teach us through this delay, this time of no fixed abode like the Israelites wandering in the desert?

The only way to have peace, we have found, is to take our hands off the steering wheel, to stop trying to make it happen in the timing we would like, and to trust in God's perfect timing.

So this leads us into a reflection about our **will** and the impact it has on our thoughts, feelings, behaviour and relationships with God and other people.

## **THE PROBLEM**

**We are called to be loving as ambassadors of Christ. After all Jesus said that the most important commandments are about loving God with every part of us and to love others as ourselves. But often we find that our words, actions, thoughts are far from loving and we can hurt others. We can even get angry at God when things don't go the way we want. Our minds can work overtime – overthinking what other people might be thinking about us or worrying about situations. This in turn can make us irritable or moody, even depressed if we lose hope. We lose our inner peace, our joy and our ability to behave in a loving way to others and even towards ourselves.**

Let's look at our passage.

*V.1 -What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.*

**This pinpoints our innermost desires as the cause of problems in how we relate to other people and the drivers for our behaviour. Let me explain.**

- **Anger**

Why do we get angry? The bottom line is that there is something we want that is being blocked. It causes frustration to build up and develop into an angry outburst. Some examples

*You just want to sit and relax, perhaps in quiet, but other people place demands upon you, or make a lot of noise until you snap.*

*Someone appears not to be listening to you, or ignoring you and you just want to be treated with respect and have your opinion heard, so you get angry.*

*You want something or for something to change, but it just isn't happening or someone appears to be blocking it, making you irritable and difficult to live with.*

*You want to feel safe, so when something happens to threaten your safety, your response may be an angry outburst - even road rage!*

These may be simple enough situations but obviously a lot more serious situations do exist.

- **Anxiety**

Anxiety is rooted in fear, based on the uncertainty of whether what we desire is likely to happen.

*Will I be safe? Will I lose my job? Will my spouse leave me? Is my loved one going to survive their illness? Are there germs?*

The problem with anxiety is that it keeps our body on a heightened state of alert, in case the perceived threat actually happens and if sustained we can over-react to even small things. Long term it can damage our nervous system, heart and other aspects of physical health. Our behaviour can change if our fears cause us to lose confidence and avoid doing things we would normally do. We have no peace and find it difficult to relax.

- **Guilt**

The sense of feeling guilty arises when our deep down desires are actually impossible, so we feel bad about ourselves for not being able to achieve what we would like, resulting in a drive to try even harder, which can be exhausting. The feeling of never being “good enough” often accompanies these thoughts and pleasing people or trying for perfection is an attempt to feel better about ourselves.

Examples of this are those who are perfectionists or people pleasers as it is impossible to maintain perfection in everything or to keep everybody happy all the time.

Avoidance of conflict, trying to anticipate what others want or what we think they need go along with this and we can lose sight of our own needs or opinions – even our own identity.

- **Depression**

This can be the result of lost hope, lost dreams, loss of how one imagines life will be. Often the result of a major change in life, like losing a job, a loved one, moving house, divorce, retirement, coming to the end of something significant – a project, a ministry etc.

We can question our meaning and purpose in life and lose confidence and interest in looking after ourselves, or relating to people or taking part in everyday activities. Our view becomes negative and we tend to ignore the positive.

We begin to believe the lies that the devil whispers in our ear about being unworthy of God’s love, unworthy of anyone’s time as our mood and our self-esteem plummet.

So we can see that our innermost desires, whether they are for material things, status, money, power or for life to be different in some way, can have an adverse effect on our own mental or physical health and on our relationships with other people as well as with God.

A fundamental part of this is what it says in verse 2 ***“you covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight”***.

When we compare ourselves with other people, how they look, what they have, where they live, their job, their family, their ministry etc. etc. then we allow the devil to sow seeds of dissatisfaction in us, breeding desires that can lead us down a sinful path.

*<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1:13-15 NIVUK*

When we compare ourselves with other people, it can damage our self-esteem, if our perception is such that other people are better than us in some way and this can develop into depression. If we also worry about what other people might be thinking about us, we might become anxious and stop doing things. If we beat ourselves up because of our perceived failure to be like others in some way then our guilt increases and/or our anger rises towards

ourselves which can lead to some form of self-harm through cutting, over-eating, drinking a lot of alcohol, taking drugs etc.

God designed each of us (Ps 139) and made us unique. We are not meant to be just like anyone else. We have talents and abilities and a plan for our lives to use everything He gives us to glorify Him.

If we want to be like non-Christians and pursue worldly things then our focus shifts away from God and what He wants for us and for our lives. Even our prayers become focussed on what we want because we have become infected by our culture and worldly pursuits. And if enough Christians do the same things then we convince ourselves that our behaviour must be okay!

*You do not have because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

*<sup>4</sup> You adulterous people,<sup>[a]</sup> 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.*

Anything that we prioritise over spending time with the Lord and seeking His will is actually a form of idolatry. We may not make golden calves but we do have our equivalent distractions to guard against. So we must examine our motives and work at becoming more self aware.

## **THE SOLUTION**

*<sup>7</sup> **Submit** yourselves, then, to God. **Resist** the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> **Humble** yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

- **HUMILITY** - we need to take our focus off ourselves and see ourselves as one of God's family, equal to others but no more or less important than anyone else. Our thoughts and behaviour must take account of the potential impact on others and the whole church community. But this also means stepping into whatever role God calls us to perform for the good of the whole community and not for any boost to our ego.
- **SUBMIT** – when we take the time to ask God what He thinks, what He wants then our lives become more peaceful as we stop striving for the things of the world. It doesn't mean that God doesn't want us to have nice things because He loves to bless us as a loving parent loves to give gifts to a child, but we are to pursue God and not the stuff!
- **RESIST** – be aware of the wiles of the devil to whisper lies about ourselves and other people into our ears. We have the authority to command the devil to leave us alone and to replace those negative thoughts with the encouraging truths of how God sees us and others by coming close to Him and listening to what He has to say. When someone offends or hurts you remember that we are in a spiritual battle and that other people may be being used to get at you. So put on all your spiritual armour. (Ephesians 6:10-20)

- COME NEAR TO GOD – quiet time with the Lord is the solution to most of life’s problems as we become like the ones we spend time with, so if we want to become more loving then we must spend time with the God who IS love. There are many ways to come near to God and to hear His voice – different personalities respond to different experiences – Bible study, meditation on a short passage, audio Bible, music, art, walking, sitting still in silence, dance, poetry etc. There is no “one size fits all” – but the more we focus on being with Him in this present moment, the more likely we are to experience His love, to hear Him speak words of encouragement and guidance; and the more peace we have which helps to overcome a lot of the battles within our innermost desires!
- REPENT  
*<sup>11</sup> Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister<sup>[d]</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?*  
 – ask God to show you any negative impact that your anger, guilt, depression or anxiety has had on anyone else, say sorry and ask God to help you to change perhaps by seeking help from someone like a pastor, counsellor, wise friend.

**<sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. Hebrews 10:36 NIVUK**

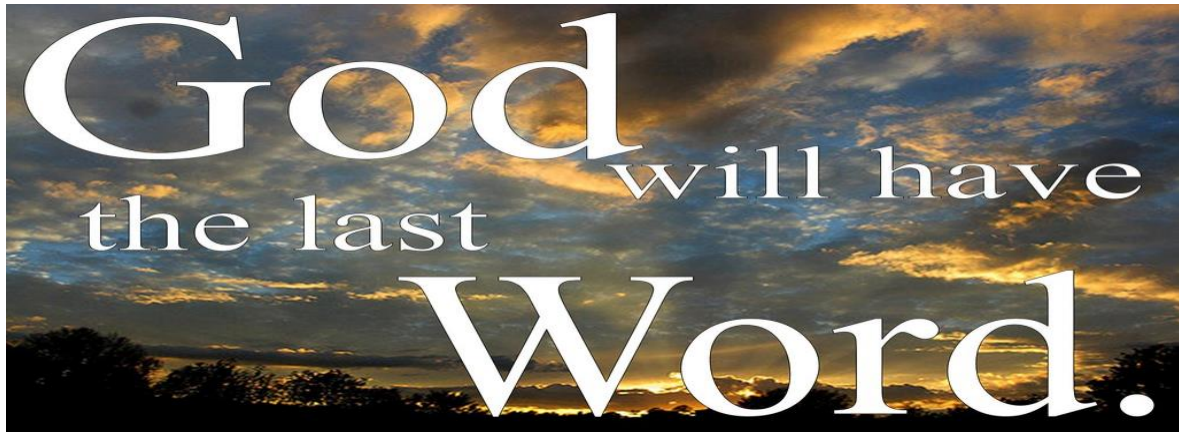
## FINALLY

*<sup>13</sup> 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.’ <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.*

The pandemic has taught us many things, but one of the main things – and one that confronts our sense of self determination – is that we cannot make concrete plans for the future or say what we will do, or where we will go or even if we will be able to work because of the restrictions placed upon us in the world.

All we can do, which has always been the case, is to seek God’s will, surrender our own desires until they come into line with His and then our prayers will be answered especially when we join with the prayer of Jesus, “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Matthew 26:39 NIVUK.

So next time I bring you a sermon it will be from our new house – GOD WILLING!!



Sermon reflection song Surrender <https://youtu.be/A4N2ausO6Sw>

## In the waiting

In the waiting  
Between the old and the new  
The way it was and the way it will be  
The past and the future  
Wanting what we want  
Frustrated at what we do not have  
Or what we cannot do  
Grieving for what is no longer  
Or people we have lost  
Striving for things to be the way we would like

In the waiting  
There is a voice that speaks in this present moment  
The voice of love  
God  
Who always was, who is and always will be  
Who encourages us to come and be still  
To know Him better  
As a loving Father  
To listen  
And trust that He knows the future  
And that it will be better

In the waiting for things to return to “normal”  
Are we asking the impossible?  
For a pandemic has changed us  
Has changed our world  
And the way we are able to live and to show love  
People search for meaning  
For answers to deep questions  
About life and death  
Often looking in strange places  
Not finding any comfort

God is waiting  
In this moment for people to come to Him  
To ask Him for the answers  
Meaning to life here and now  
Guidance for the future  
Loving relationship  
For each of us is dearly loved by God  
And accepted just as we are  
Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay for the sins of every human being  
So that we can say sorry and know that we are forgiven  
Able to start over  
New life  
In this world and the next

For Jesus came back to life  
Giving us victory over death

This is the love of God  
Unchanging  
Unconditional  
Constant

This is the love of God  
Which cannot be locked down

So come to Him  
And find peace and security  
Love in the present moment  
Every moment  
What are you waiting for?

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