

Christ Community Covenant Church
Street Level Christianity – Street advice that will save your life
James 4:1-17
Pastor Dave Scherrer - November 8, 2015

We are closing in on our series finale on the book of James. He has been pretty confrontational. He is going to continue in that form today. Today we are looking for some good street advice, life-saving advice, especially regarding relationships. This morning I have brought out this stool to represent the spiritual control center of our lives. It is a bit like the driver's seat of a car (wheel). And there is always good driving advice.

Life Saving Advice

[Buckle up, hands at 10 and 2, don't drink and drive, don't text and drive, be watchful when you ride along with a one-eyed driver, just saying . . .]

Whoever sits in this seat controls the car – when it starts and when it stops and what direction it goes and how fast – it is a really scary and difficult thing to give that seat over to your teenage kid. I have done it now two times and each one has been a traumatic experience. I was often tempted and on occasion I grabbed the wheel because I wanted control back.

Well this stool kind of represents that for a human life. Each of us has a spiritual control center or a spiritual driver's seat in our lives. And in a sense we decide who sits in that place and whoever does controls the direction and the speed of our lives.

Now, at its most basic level there really are two primary options - us or God - and whoever sits in that place controls life. This person controls their destiny for better or worse. They control:

- **Our Feeler – the Heart** - what we might consider our passions or our dreams, our expectations,
- **Our Thinker – the Mind** - the direction and content of our thoughts, our life agenda or bucket list - our worldview as philosophers call it,
- **Our Chooser – the Will** - the various hundreds of millions of choices or non-choices we make in our lifetime, Not only what will serve as true north, but also what kind of road we will travel and what kind of timetable we will be on. It's a lot!

We all know God is supposed to sit in this place but the reality is - often He does not. In fact in our lives I would say, most often He does not for most of us. If he does not *that does not mean he is not a part of our lives* it just means *he is not in control of our lives*. We often relegate him to a side position. Can I say something? Jesus never calls shotgun. Never. He always wants to drive. But he will never demand to drive. He is not like that either. And when he is not sitting here in the driver seat - the 'self' is.

In the last 70's a book was published named the *Culture of Narcissism* (You will remember Narcissus is the beautiful Greek youth who sees his own reflection in a pool and falls in love with himself.) Christopher Lasch argues in this NYT best seller that we live in a culture where we have fallen in love with ourselves. *We live in a time of the cult of the self.*

Marjorie Thompson describes the self-centered life in her book "*Soul Feast*": We are directed by self-centered desires, chained to unmet needs, compelled by illusions about who we are and what makes us acceptable or important. We strive to be in control of our lives. In the process, we manipulate those who seem to get in the way, as well as those who appear to be stepping stones to our goals. Our state of misdirection makes us blind. Even if we think we believe in God, we effectively stand in God's place.
~ Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*

Then what happens is that the conflicts on the inside causes battles on the outside –

The battle on the inside leaks out and causes battles on the outside.

There are huge problems in living a life where we sit on the stool of control rather than God. James talks about this in **James 4:1-10**

James 4:1-10

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James is giving us examples of what happens when we fail to yield the spiritual control of our lives. When we are self-centered we 'play God' and sit in his rightful place of authority as our Maker and Lord. You can see that it destroys relationships; Quarrels, arguments, mean disagreements, unchecked passions, covetousness and jealousy. When people simply seek to satisfy their desires they generate huge relational conflicts.

When people simply seek to satisfy their desires they generate huge relational conflicts

A self-directed life impacts our horizontal relationships with others and our vertical relationship with God. As long as we are turned in on ourselves, we deny our essential dependence on God. We do not see how compulsively we try to manufacture our own security and significance in life. God calls it spiritual 'adultery' when we let ourselves or another person control our lives. Faithlessness toward God and looking to another to satisfy the deep longings and hopes of our lives is called 'adultery. That is a strong word! We should pay attention!

The key word here in verse 1 that is usually translated into English as either 'desires' or 'passions'; in Greek it is *hedonai* - the same word from which we get hedonism. A hedonist is someone who is living life strictly for personal pleasure. The word denotes the craving for selfish pleasure.

The implication is that when we put our self in charge of our lives then our lives become dominated and controlled by our desires and our cravings. We become consumed with seeking to satisfy our pleasures when we are in control of our life and the "self" is in charge and sitting on the chair. When self is on the chair we are obsessed with the yearning of self-love - the search for self-satisfaction.

In our society . . . we have made the quest to satisfy our desires the foundation on which we build our lives. We are consumers. No longer are we producers. The creation mandate was be fruitful but we have made it shop till you drop. The end result is a battle within us. It is as if we have been invaded by an alien army which is always at war within. The conflicting cravings throw us into inner turmoil.

We become filled with all kinds of conflicting desires:

- On the one hand we want to be skinny and healthy but on the other we want to eat whatever we like and never have to exercise.
- On the one hand we want a job filled with responsibility and significance but on the other we want to escape to a beach in Tahiti.
- On the one hand we want to be known for who we really are but on the other we are scared to death for anyone to truly know our deepest selves.
- On the one hand we want to be independently wealthy so we don't have a care in the world, but on the other we want to be so good at being content we don't really need money at all.

- On the one hand we want to be safe and secure but on the other we want life to be filled with excitement and adventure.

This all may sound very familiar to you and you may be feeling a bit downhearted. I have comfort for you this morning if misery loves comfort . . .

“Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it. His bottle, his mother’s attention, his playmates, his toy, his uncle’s watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous if he was not so helpless. He is in fact dirty. He has no knowledge, no morals, no skills. This means that all children are born delinquent.” *Minnesota Crime Commission January 1927*

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

So all of us struggle with this old self. Remember in the Colossians series this summer, we are commanded to put to death the old self. He or she can’t even ride in the car with us much less have authority to drive it! Here is the really dangerous truth, when we give into that old self we become a friend of the world.

So here is the bottom line, when we give into that old self we become a friend of the world

When we give into that old self we become a friend of the world

And whoever makes themselves a friend of the world makes themselves an enemy of God.

“Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”

Who is the enemy of God? (Satan)



Satan in front of God. Corrado Giaquinto. Ca. 1750. Vatican Museum

Our study of James’ little letter tells us that we have places where we can look to see if we are making any progress in yielding the spiritual headship of our lives. James says “It is easy to tell how you are doing, just check your tongue, your time and your treasures.” Do this and you can tell who is in charge of your life . . . too often with friends like these who needs enemies . . .

Tongue, Time and Treasure – With Friends like these . . .

Tongue – 3:1-5ff
 Time - 4:13, 14
 Treasure - 5:1-6

So when we sit on the stool and we live a life that is self-centered it damages the relational and the spiritual fabric of our lives. And all of that raises a question: **How does God respond?** He responds with Jealous Grace.

God's response . . . ? "Jealous Grace"

What do we expect God will do? Does he turn his back? Does he get angry? Does he move into judgment mode? Does he fire up his wrath and his punishment? Does he just give us the cold shoulder? Because we ignore him does he begin ignoring us? Does he hand out doses of rejection?

God's amazing response is He becomes jealous. Look at verse 5, ***Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?*** This is a difficult verse but the spirit here I believe is God's Spirit – the Holy Spirit that he put in us when we believed. It is amazing to think that he would be jealous – **God's emotional response to spiritual adultery is jealousy.**

God is not willing to share our affections with the world or anything else. This powerful emotion is why He uses the word adultery. Jealousy is an element of love. We become jealous because we want someone's undivided loyalty and allegiance. We become jealous over those we love. If they are not important to us we do not become jealous. It is a scary thing to think that we may cause God to be jealous. But when He does, His response is unhuman! He showers us with even more grace.

Look again at 4:6 – ***"But he gives us more grace."*** That is why Scripture says: **"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** Literally ***greater grace*** - greater than what? Greater than the strength of depravity, greater than the power of the spirit of darkness, greater than the driver that is not Christ. Grace is unmerited favor, contra-merited favor. We don't deserve it, but God submerges us with it.

There is a strange notion in religious circles that we have to be perfect and all together for God to respond to us. But that is not the case. God does not disengage when we decide to run our own lives and turn our back on him. ***The text says we become his enemy – it does not say he becomes ours!*** Let's look again at our passage because we have to respond to this jealous grace! There is a process of renewal we are to follow . . . let's keep reading . . .

James 4:7-10

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

This takes us back to our seat . . . We have three things to do . . .

Submit to God – Get off the stool
Resist the devil – Don't listen to the voice
Come near to God – "Recalculating"

First, we must deal with God; we must submit to God – Get off the stool. We must ***willingly*** yield to the perfectly reasonable demand of Jesus Christ that we accept our proper station with God as our captain. God does not want forced obedience. (Living Faith vs Dead Faith!)

Second, we must resist the devil. It is a struggle to get off the stool. The devil is going to be trying to keep you there. Resist - stand against him - there is no middle ground. Finally we come near to God (***"recalculating"***). The term was used in the Septuagint of the priests in the tabernacle. The phrase conveys the thought of entering into communion with God as acceptable worshipers. Verses 8, 9 and 10 challenge us to deal with sin. We wash, we are purified and we lament our sin. It is just a description of repentance.

Wash your hands – change your behavior. **Purify your heart** - change the inside. **Grieve, mourn and wail** – understand the devastating impact and gravity of your sin.

I love the order here. We don't have to get our sin stuff together before we come to God. The truth is as we get closer and closer to Christ, the bigger and bigger the Cross is!

So what do we know? Self-centered living damages the relational and spiritual fabric of our lives - yet God responds with jealousy and grace and shows us that we must be spiritually renewed - deal with God and deal with sin and run to His arms!

Once there was a preacher in London who was a rather famous man. One night he was in his comfortable home actually studying and reading. It was raining hard outside and the wind was blowing and it was cold. He hears a pounding on the door and when he answers he discovers there is a little girl dressed in rags. "My mum's dying. I told her I would get the best preacher of the largest church - in London - to come see her."
The pastor was very reluctant. "I know a man at the rescue mission who could help. But the little girl was insistent. "No I told her I would get you." The famous pastor finally gives in. and the little girl takes him to the red light district of the city - and he is a bit worried he will be seen. She leads him into a filthy run down tenement and there in a dark room with just a bit of light - he sees a woman in bed obviously dying. A woman of the street?
She looks at him in shame, and he thinks, "What can I tell a woman like this?" He was an intellectual, concerned about social reform, and education, a moral reformer. This woman was the epitome of everything he was working against. And he did not know what to say. But verses began coming to his mind.

Rom. 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

II Cor 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus became sin on our behalf.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

And then she said "But that cannot be true for me."

And with tears in his eyes he remembered **1 Tim 1:15** - Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the chief. And the woman smiled faintly and said, "Well, if he let in the chief of sinners he will let me in." And the pastor was convicted. Pastor knelt down next to that dying woman and took her hands and they prayed and two sinners got in to heaven that night - a prostitute and an arrogant pastor.

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up!"

Discussion Questions:

What is the best practical advice you have ever been given? If you had one word of advice for a young man headed off to college what would it be? How about for an about to be married couple? How about for a mom and dad wrestling with their teens?

What makes "good advice" in fact . . . good advice?

Do you agree with Dave that there is a so called belief in God that does not save you? James' advice is that we should look hard within ourselves as kind of a spiritual 'gut check' to see if our faith is a living faith. Do you think we can take that for granted? What do you think that gut check looks like for you?

Dave talked about getting out of the driver's seat. Do you think that is a once in a lifetime decision or is it more day by day? Or somehow both?

How does it happen that you crawl back into the driver's seat when you have said to yourself 'never again'? Do you slowly crawl over there slowly hoping Jesus doesn't notice, or more just push him out of the way? Or do you hardly even notice that you have moved in?

What kinds of things do you tend to try to control in your life? God would say that things of this world can be influenced by us for a period of time, but even that is under his sovereign control. Why do we keep falling into the same old trap?

Dave said one of the main consequences of not giving Jesus the driver's seat is in relationships? How do you see this working out?

Dave talked about the Jealous Grace of God. He is jealous for our devoted love, but instead of punishing us when we fail, he showers us with even more grace. How should we respond to this kind of love?

Re-read James 4:1-7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

His answer is to draw near to God. What does that look like to you? Drawing near to God is an act of your will. How will you draw near to God this week?