

“The Cost of Worldly Wisdom (Part 2): The Breakdown of Prayer” – James 4:1-6

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Grab a Bible and meet me in James 4...

Easter is almost upon us. Today is Palm Sunday, the day that reminds believers of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in advance of His laying down His life on the cross for our salvation. Next Sunday we'll see that His death was not the end. I hope you will join us next week as we celebrate the Resurrection together and consider some of the reasons why it is such good news for us.

This Easter will be a little different than previous Easters, but similar to recent weeks. We are still planning on having three services and they will remain the same times as the services have been during the pandemic. There won't be a meal like we usually have. And there won't be Sunday School. But the following Sunday, April 11, we are planning to go back to two services and Sunday School every week for every class. You'll hear more about that in the announcements.

But for now, let's look at this section of James 4 again. For context I'll read the first six verses and then we will dig deeper into a couple of them. Follow along as I read. Starting in verse 1. Remember, this is God's Word...

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You 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. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You 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. 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’? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” (James 4:1-6)

Last time we considered how the warring passions within us flow from the worldly wisdom that James described at the end of chapter 3. In this new chapter, James is helping us see where that worldly wisdom leads. We noted in the first verse and a half that it leads to the breakdown of peace between people. We contrasted that with the wisdom from above that James speaks of in the previous chapter and that Jesus, James' half-brother, delivers in the Sermon on the Mount, which seeks peace.

Today I want to adopt the same strategy. We will look at what James says—this time not so much about the breakdown of peace between Christians, but the breakdown of prayer—and then we will contrast the fruit of worldly wisdom that James describes with the wisdom from above that Jesus offers. So having just described how worldly wisdom affects our relationship with others, let's consider how this worldly wisdom can affect our relationship with God.

Look at the second half of verse 2. James says, “*You do not have, because you do not ask.*”¹ Evidently, some of the Christians had stopped petitioning the Lord in prayer. Why? James doesn't tell us exactly, but it's easy to imagine a couple possibilities. Their passions start warring within them. Some of those passions and desires are worldly. And very often the Christian may sense this, which in turn can stall their prayer life. Kent Hughes described the process like this:

"The way this works is that, first, the pleasure-mad Christian, who has some spiritual sensitivity, realizes his prayers are inappropriate. Somehow he senses that his desire for a Maserati may not be a spiritual essential. So he asks for nothing. In fact, he doesn't pray much at all because few of the things he wants are high on the divine priority list."²

He's not wrong, is he? There are times when our "pursuit of selfish desires becomes so severe that we find we cannot bring ourselves to pray about them."³ Perhaps this is why some have stopped asking the Lord in prayer. Perhaps, on the other hand, the desires they have are not worldly, but personal, and they can't seem to muster the willingness or humility to bring them to God. Sometimes it is easier to pray for the needs of others, than it is to pray about our own needs. We can feel selfish, so we become prayerless. We wonder if God will be "disappointed or disinterested" with our prayers because they relate to ourselves and so we stop requesting for our personal needs.⁴ But God wants His people to come to Him, which is why James reminds us, just like Jesus did, "*You do not have, because you do not ask*" (4:2).

There are other possibilities too. Given the context, it would be easy to imagine a situation where people were so caught up in their fights and quarrels with one another that they didn't go to God in prayer. This is tragic, because what does Jesus tell His followers in the Sermon on the Mount?

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7-11)

That said, if you reminded James' hearers of these words, some may have pushed back, saying, "James, you don't understand, we have asked, we have prayed, but it wasn't given to us." James sees that objection coming, which is why he adds what he does in verse 3...

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." (James 4:3)

One of the reasons I hate the "prosperity gospel" that is so prevalent in many churches (and many of the biggest churches) is that it always fails a person. It says that God wants you healthy or God wants you wealthy or God wants you to achieve whatever goal you have or be whatever you want to be, you just got to have faith. You just have to believe enough in God or in yourself. Name it. Claim it. Buy my book. Support my ministry. Declare to yourself. Speak it into existence. Stay positive. Whatever. It takes various forms, but it's nonsense. It's not what the Bible teaches. Eventually it will fail a person and when it does usually one of two things happens.

Either we will beat ourselves up because we don't feel like we had enough faith and that's why adversity has come into our lives and things didn't play out like we dreamed or we shake our fist at God because we did everything that preacher said we should do and it didn't work out. We still lost that job. We still got cancer. We still were overlooked for that promotion. Our marriage still broke down. Our life is still paycheck-to-paycheck. So what happens? We blame God. We believe that God failed us. The prosperity gospel may fill big churches and sell a lot of books, but what you don't see marketed is how many people it turns away from God in the end. And how many it will lead to hell in the end. We conclude that we failed or God failed, but the failure was in the false-gospel we believed. God didn't fail. That preacher you believed was just lying on God and that will be clear to all one day.

James was no prosperity gospel preacher. He is happy to say, with them, that "*you do not have, because you do not ask.*" But he's quick to add, unlike them, "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*"⁵ What does it mean that they "*ask wrongly*"?⁶ It means they ask with "corrupt intent." It means they ask for those things which worldly wisdom says they need. They ask for those things we ask for when we are marked by "*bitter jealousy and selfish ambition*" (3:14). You ask, James says, "*to spend it on your*

passions” and he doesn’t mean your godly passion here (4:3). “The petitions they have offered are inseparable from their wicked motivation—whether it be pride, greed, lust, or some other sinful inclination.”⁷ But, as Robert Plummer reminds us,

“God graciously invites his children to approach him in prayer, but there is always the condition (stated or implied) that prayer be ‘according to [God’s] will’ (1 John 5:14). A wicked desire to have something so as to compete with (or flauntingly surpass) another member of the Christian community is not a desire according to God’s will. God is not a vending machine who dispenses toys indiscriminately to those who ask. God is a holy Father who relates to his children so as to promote his ultimate glory and our good in conforming us to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:28–29).”⁸

Sometimes our prayers have “no higher aim” than our bellies and these are not prayers that we should expect the Lord to answer. Paul said of the enemies of Christ—who he might call “friends of the world” in James’ language—“*Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*” (Phil. 3:19). You can imagine what their prayers sound like. Hopefully not like ours.

How then should we pray? If we are wanting to pray in accordance with the wisdom from above that James speaks of, how should we pray? Fortunately for us, Jesus answered that question for us through example and on various occasions in His teaching ministry. Perhaps the most famous instance of His teaching on prayer comes in the Sermon on the Mount. Let’s look at it together. Flip to the left in your Bible and find Matthew, chapter 6...

The first verse of Matthew 6 provides us with a thesis statement for the section. Jesus said, “*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*” He then applies that principle to the three prominent acts of piety in first-century Judaism—Giving to the needy (6:2-4), praying (6:5-6), and fasting (6:16-18).

During His discussion on prayer, however, He deviates from the main theme in order to illustrate what a healthy prayer life looks like. I call it a deviation not because it’s completely unrelated; He is still talking about prayer after all. Yet when He begins talking about how the Gentiles pray, in verse 7, He is dealing with a different motivation. It’s no longer, first and foremost, the desire to be noticed and regarded as pious. It’s a manipulation tactic that’s aimed at God. In other words, Jesus has described how worldly wisdom thinks about prayer and how it asks wrongly as a result. But then He tells His followers how they should pray. Let’s pick things up in verse 9...

“Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:9-15)

Instead of adopting a pagan outlook and strategy on prayer, He offers, in verse 9 and following, a model prayer for His followers, which is usually referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” This prayer, though short and simple, is worthy of more reflection than we can give it today. There have been times where I have set aside a couple months to preach through it as many a preacher has. Each of its petitions could (and perhaps should) grip our attention for a sustained period. But this run through, time will allow for merely a bird’s eye perspective. And I want us to see, especially, what is given priority when Jesus teaches us to pray, the first several elements of the prayer.

What you’ll notice is that the first several petitions are God-oriented. They’re about God and His glory. That certainly has implications for us (as we will see), but pride of place is given to asking for Him to make much of Himself and accomplish His purposes in this world. Thus, Jesus says, “*pray then like this...*”

“Our Father In Heaven”

What an amazing way to begin the prayer! And what a good illustration of how our familiarity with the prayer so often keeps us from marveling on what is being stated. Jesus invites us to call on God as our Father. This is incredible. Like any loving father, His actions toward His children are always honorable and full of grace. Like a good father, He watches over His children, protecting and providing for them. If you are a Christian, God is your Father. That doctrine should be a warm blanket for your soul.⁹ I will show you why the Fatherhood of God is comforting and helpful for us in a little bit. But we first must remind ourselves why we have the privilege of calling God our Father.

God is our Father because we have been adopted as His children through faith in Christ. Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, reminded those under his care that God could “rightly and properly be a severe judge over us.”¹⁰ We could relate to God in this way. But instead, because Jesus died for our sins and rose for our justification before God, we have not only been forgiven of all our hostility but we have been adopted as God’s children (e.g., Romans 8:14). He looks upon the believer with the same affection that He looks upon Jesus because we are in Christ. This is incredible Gospel truth, that we too often lose sight of. To pray to God as our “Father” is to pray in Jesus’ name because apart from Jesus we would have no such familial relationship with God.¹¹ So never forget, “When we say, ‘Our Father who is in heaven,’ we are not uttering a formal address but celebrating a relationship.”¹²

“Hallowed Be Your Name”

“*Hallowed*” is probably not a word that you use at all apart from reciting this prayer. When you “hallow” something you make it holy or you treat it as holy. In this case, we are told to ask God for His name to be hallowed, which cannot mean to become holy. His name stands for who He is. He is holy. He can’t be made any holier than He already is in His very nature.

Jesus then is not telling us to pray that God would become holy, but rather that He would be treated as holy. He must be regarded as holy by us (cf. HCSB, NLT). Do our lives, which bare the name of God as Christians, convey the holiness of God? When we pray for His name to be hallowed, we have to be mindful of the way our lifestyles and choices may not reflect His holiness. We know the world certainly cares little for God’s holiness and even despises it. We should be asking God in our prayers to make this not so, both in our lives and in the nations. Jesus gives this petition priority. Do we?

“Your Kingdom Come”

In Matthew, God’s “Kingdom” refers to His “reign.” God reigns as sovereign over history. We have a tendency to forget this. It is quite common for people to ask Christians condescendingly whenever they disagree with any stance we take on any moral issue, “Surely you don’t want to be on the wrong side of history, do you?” Well, that depends on what we mean.

2 Thessalonians 2, for example, describes a man of lawlessness who rises up and deceives countless people. I guarantee you, those deceived will have considered themselves on the “right side of history” and, in that instance, I *do* indeed want to be on the wrong side of *that* history. On the other hand, we must remember that God’s reign is seen in the reigning of Christ, who is the Lord of history. The events of history are unfolding at the discretion and direction of the Lord Himself as He sovereignly brings His will to pass. So, absolutely, I don’t want to be on the wrong side of history. I want to be on the same side of history as Jesus. Since Jesus Christ is coming again, the only way ultimately to be on the right side of history is to belong to Him. As

Christians, we belong to Christ, and thereby we will in time be shown to be on the right side of history.¹³ His Kingdom comes.

When we ask for God's kingdom to come, we are asking for that history to unfold. And since His kingdom stands for His reign, we are asking for His reign to be acknowledged and manifest in the world, both in the lives of His people and increasingly in the nations among those whom He will bring into His people. In that sense, this petition is akin to us asking for His name to be hallowed. Just as He is already holy and we want that to be acknowledged, so also He reigns and we want people to acknowledge that reality and submit to His Lordship.¹⁴ No one will be saved who refuses to acknowledge Christ as Lord in this life.

Therefore, the request—"your kingdom come"—is a missional request. God does reign. But we want people to see that and submit to His Kingship. We are seeing God's kingdom come every time we see a conversion. That's a new child of God, a new kingdom citizen. And we are seeing God's kingdom come every time we see a deepening of commitment to Jesus and His way.¹⁵ The more He reigns in our hearts the more the fullness of His reign may be felt in this world, which will lead to true justice and peace. We can experience this in some measure as those kingdom realities shape our lives and wills. But we will experience it ultimately when the Lord Jesus comes back.

In the meantime, I think R. C. Sproul makes a good point,

“...it is the task of the church to make the invisible kingdom visible, but how do we bear witness to the reality of a kingdom that already exists? We live in such a way as to bear witness to the reality of the kingship of Christ, at work, within our family, in our school, and with our checkbook, because God in Christ is King over every one of these spheres of our life. The only way the kingdom of God is going to manifest in this world before Christ comes is if we manifest it in our lives.”¹⁶

So if we are not seeing some reflection of God's reign in this world, it can only be because we are not seeing it in the lives of His children and in our personal lives. We may not be seeing it in our lives because we are not praying for His kingdom to come in this sense. Imagine if we were. What implications would it have in our world?

One of my favorite books on prayer is called *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, by Paul E. Miller. He does such a wonderful job synthesizing the biblical wisdom and instruction and offering practical suggestions for our prayer lives. I highly recommend the book, if you're seeking to grow in your prayer life. He has a chapter where he explores how seldom we pray “your kingdom come” prayers, because of how those prayers involve us in change and we tend to resist change. He gives three examples of kingdom prayers that we seldom pray.

The first one is praying for “change in others,” which we are reluctant to pray because it is viewed as being either “too controlling” or “too helpless.” So we don't pray for God's kingdom purposes in others enough.¹⁷

The second example is praying for change in ourselves, which we avoid because it's “too scary” to pray for that. We're afraid to ask God to change us because deep down we don't want to change at the moment and we know that, if we sincerely pray for God to change us, He probably will. We also don't pray for God to change our character because to do so requires us admitting our character flaws. Miller gives a good example of this:

“Look at how difficult this prayer is—*Lord, this morning I feel irritable. Would you help me to be kind?* In order to pray this, I have to stop being irritable long enough to admit my grumpiness to myself. It's difficult to see my attitude because the problem isn't me; it's all those other idiots.”¹⁸

You see his point. So we don't pray for God's Kingdom to come because we don't like the inevitable implications it has for our character.

Finally, he argues that we don't pray the "kingdom come" prayers that involve requesting God to bring change to the things we don't like in our culture. We don't pray for that because we have functionally adopted the stance that such things are impossible. But nothing is impossible for God. If we fail to pray because we think the change we want to see in society is impossible it is only because we have too low a view of God.¹⁹

If God's people would sincerely pray for God's kingdom to come, God will answer and His answer will have implications for all of these spheres. He will bring change in the hearts of others. He will bring change in our own hearts. And he will bring change in society.²⁰ Until that sounds like "good news" to us, we won't pray "thy kingdom come."

"Your Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is In Heaven"

"Your will be done" can be a difficult prayer to pray because of how strongly our own will enthrones itself in our heart. But God's not establishing your kingdom, He's unveiling His by revealing the King and dethroning you. In a book called, *Dangerous Calling*, Paul David Tripp addresses the dangerous temptations to "self-glory" in ministry. The chapter ends with the author's own personal reflections.

"In love, [God] has worked to dent and deface my glory so that his glory would be my delight. He has plundered my kingdom so that his kingdom would be my joy. And he has crushed my crown under his feet so that I would quest to be a good ambassador and not crave to be king. In this violent mercy there is hope for every person in ministry. Your Lord is not just after the success or your ministry; he is working to dethrone you as well. It is only when his throne is more important than yours that you will find joy in the hard and humbling task of gospel ministry. And his face will not relent until our hearts have been fully captured by his glory. Now, that's good news!"²¹

I share that with you as a reminder that seeking first God's Kingdom and not our personal kingdom is something that every minister struggles with as well. This is the fight of faith. We are all involved in the same sanctifying work of God's Spirit and His work is not always painless. In fact, it's often a "violent mercy." But in the end we will find it infinitely more satisfying to see God on the throne, than to fight to sit there ourselves.²² That's really the heart of this petition of the Lord's prayer—"Your will be done."

In a way the entire Sermon on the Mount is a description of what it means to be a child of our heavenly Father and accept and walk in God's will for our life, at the expense of our own will. He begins by describing his followers as poor, mourning, meek, hungry, thirsty, mercy-giving, peacemaking, and persecuted. Who would, on their own accord, choose for themselves that lot in life? Then, as Matthew 5 continues, we are told to lay down our anger. We are told to pursue peace with those that are irritated by us, even when they do not. We're told to no longer seek revenge or retaliation. We are told to serve, love, and pray for our enemies. We are told to stop objectifying the opposite sex in our lust. We are told to give up lying. We are told to not seek divorce. In chapter 6, we are told to hide our most commendable actions from the public eye, like our generosity. Don't try to impress people with your prayer lives. When you fast, try to keep people from noticing. Don't use spirituality as a means of glorifying self. Later He tells us to stop living for all the treasures of this world. We are told to cease our anxious tendencies in light of who God is. In chapter 7, He will push us to notice the sin and hypocritical tendencies in our life. He calls us to be dependent on God for our needs. We are to treat others like we would want to be treated, which will probably involve a lot of sacrifice since that's what we so often expect of them. And we could keep going.

What is all this? It's Jesus crucifying our self-will. It's Him issuing a death sentence to the will of self and calling us to pick up a cross and follow Him until He is done dealing with our selfish will. It's Jesus saying there is a better way. And until we see that we will not be able to pray, "*Your will be done.*" With each unfolding step in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is asking us to cease doing what our sinful wills are inclined to

do and to long instead for God's will to be done. As Miller writes, "at the center of self-will is me, carving a world in my image, but at the center of prayer is God, carving me in his Son's image."²³ That's what God is doing in our lives when we pray for His will to be done. It leads to a glorious life. But not before a painful death of "my way."

In commenting on this request for God's will to be done, Luther offers the following paraphrase: "Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will."²⁴ Luther realized that in praying for God's will to be accomplished, it might mean that his (i.e., Luther's) will, at any particular moment, must be left on the altar.

This, friends, is why it is vital for us to view God as "Father." We can't say with integrity, "*your will be done*," unless we have a deep conviction that God is our loving Father. That's what "frees us from all distrust" as John Calvin put it. That's what frees us from the anxiety of sacrificing self on the altar of "thy will be done." Joe Thorn describes this comforting implication of God's Fatherhood like this: "Your anxieties are alleviated in the fatherhood of God. He cares for you with such love and precision that nothing befalls you that isn't offered through his parental purposes for your good."²⁵

A child doesn't usually understand the "why" of his father's instructions, but when he obeys properly it's because he trusts him. This is what the heavenly Father expects of us. We are to trust Him. Even when it doesn't make sense, we are to trust that He is a loving Father who is working all things together for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). This is why we can say, "*Your will be done*." And notice, we are being taught to ask for His will to be done "*on earth as it is in heaven*." How is God's will done by those in heaven? With absolute joy and without reservation! We are not to settle for uttering "your will be done" in a spirit of resentment or resignation. "Oh fine, whatever you want God." That's not what God is after. He's after willing and joyful obedience and submission. Even when it hurts, we can count it all joy (James 1:2) like Jesus, "*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross*" (Hebrews 12:2). We willingly, not begrudgingly, trust the Lord, because He is our loving Father.

Having prayed to the Father, for His name to be hallowed, and His kingdom to come, and His will to be done, then (and only then) Jesus turns to our own petitions. You see what gets priority? Sam Allberry spells it out for us:

"When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he pointed them to pray for God's concerns (his name, his kingdom, his will) before our own (of provision, pardon and protection). The purpose of prayer is not to try to get God to do what we want; it is actually a means by which we align ourselves to his priorities. Part of the point of prayer is to remind ourselves of what God wants."²⁶

That's the exact opposite of what many of James readers, evidently, were doing with their prayers. They were using prayer as "a means of co-opting God into their plans—of using him to further their purposes."²⁷ We are turning God into, what Rico Tice calls, "a divine waiter."

"He is there to deliver our daydream to us. We touch base with him on a Sunday; we put our order in via prayer; we might give a decent tip in the collection plate. But God is essentially there to give us what we feel we need ... and we get furious with him if he doesn't deliver."²⁸

But James makes it clear that this approach is not going to fly with God—"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3). This is not meant to discourage us from asking. It's meant to lead us to ask in a manner shaped by wisdom from above, not the wisdom of this world. When we do this, as James points out, we will receive. His will for us, may not always be comfortable and pleasant. But it is good. And in the end God's people will be satisfied by it. How do we know? Because God is our Father. Our loving Father.

How can we be sure that we can trust the Father and set aside our own will? The answer comes from a garden in Gethsemane. In that moment preceding Jesus' suffering and execution, a set of circumstances far more crushing than anything you presently endure (or will ever endure), the one part of the Lord's Prayer that we hear on His lips is "*not my will, but yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42). What is that? That's Him submitting to His Father's will and thereby saving us. This is why we can trust Jesus and pray for God's will to be done. As Keller writes, "Jesus is not asking us to do anything for him that he hasn't already done for us, under conditions of difficulty beyond our comprehension."²⁹

For those of you in Christ, those of you who have trusted in Jesus alone for your salvation and hope, let me invite you to take those Lord Supper elements and prepare them by peeling back the two tabs on the top.

This ordinance is meant to remind us of what Christ has done to accomplish our salvation. He died for us on the cross. His body, signified by the bread, was broken. His blood, pictured by the wine, was shed. This is why our sins can be atoned for. This is why we, through faith, are forgiven and counted right before God. This is why we can call God our Father and be received as His children. Christ's work, not ours.

There has been no greater display of "thy will be done," than the resolve displayed by Jesus Christ as He endured the cross as our substitute. Jesus demonstrates God's love for us. Knowing the filth and wretchedness of our condition, He willingly took every speck of it upon Himself and died the death that we deserved for it. That is love. There is no greater example of love than what was displayed on the cross of Christ. And that is what we remember when we gather at the table and share the Lord's Supper. That is why we can submit ourselves to God's will. We look at the cross and we see He has our best interests at heart. We see that Him seeking His glory amounts to our good. We see that a cross borne in this life, will be emptied in the next. And we trust God. We embrace the sufficiency of His work. And we remember Christ, upon whom our salvation rests as we take, eat, drink, and remember...

Let's pray...

¹ "It is interesting that James uses the middle form of αἰτέω, which could well be intensive, in order to express the idea that 'you don't have because you yourselves don't really ask.' It is possible again that James is echoing his brother's teaching in Mt 7:7-8 and expanding on the theme of asking. Jesus taught his followers that those who asked from God would receive, and it seems reasonable to envision that twenty years later some are upset because they are not obtaining what they want. First, James reminds them, they need to ask in order to receive! Moreover, the present tense of the verb may suggest that at times they must ask continuously or persistently. We may often need to persevere in our prayer in order to receive (cf. Lk. 18:1-8)." Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 188-189.

² R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 169-170.

³ Daniel M. Doriani, *James* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 133.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Is James speaking here of some particular prayer, or of all prayer? If he has a particular prayer in mind it will be the request for wisdom mentioned in 1:5. A Christian faced with unsatisfactory or broken relationships—or the threat of such—remembers that anyone who lacks wisdom can ask for it. But as there, so here, God (as Calvin remarks on Jn. 15:7) does not permit us undisciplined asking. James wanted to know, in 1:5-8, if our hearts are solidly loyal to the Lord from whom we seek wisdom; here he simply charges that the one thing our hearts are solidly loyal to is our personal satisfactions. Therefore the prayer for peace-making wisdom seems to fall on deaf ears. Interestingly, however, James does not say that God does not hear, but that we do not receive (3). He always hears; there is no such thing as unheard prayer or, for that matter, unanswered prayer. But time and again the answer has to be 'no' or 'not yet', because we are incapable of receiving the heavenly gift. Most commentators, however, make the reference to prayer general rather than specific. Prayer itself, not just prayer for wisdom, is defiled by the insistent self-centered heart, so that 'we must either cleanse our hearts or stop our prayers'." J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James* (BST; Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1985), 143-144.

⁶ "Here the issue involves evil motives—asking "wrongly" (κακῶς). James makes another interesting switch in voice from active (αἰτεῖτε) to middle (αἰτεῖσθε), possibly in order to draw out the selfishness involved in their requests. They do not pray altruistically, but rather pray emphatically (intensively) but wrongly for their own wants and desires." Blomberg and Kamell, 189.

⁷ Robert L. Plummer, “James,” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 268.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Joe Thorn, *Experiencing the Trinity: The Grace of God for the People of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 57.

¹⁰ Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” 29. For the interesting story related to this, see R. C. Sproul, *Matthew* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 138-139.

¹¹ Keller, 110.

¹² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 232.

¹³ These insights were picked up from a very helpful roundtable discussion between D. A. Carson, Timothy Keller, and John Piper. They offer some additional wisdom on the matter for those interested. The fuller discussion can be viewed, as of July 3, 2015, here: <https://vimeo.com/100309195>.

¹⁴ John Stott makes the same point: “As He is already holy so He is already King, reigning in absolute sovereignty over both nature and history.” John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 147; cf. Psalm 24:1.

¹⁵ John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 381.

¹⁶ Sproul, 152. He credits these insights to John Calvin.

¹⁷ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2017), 149-153.

¹⁸ Ibid., 153-154.

¹⁹ Ibid., 154.

²⁰ “Our vision for society should be the kingdom of God, and that is what we strive for. To be sure, we will never succeed in establishing a perfect kingdom as was supposed by some of our forebears. However, kingdom living has made and does make a difference in the world. Virtually all the great social reforms in history had their roots in kingdom living. The abolition of slavery came through the kingdom living of Christians such as William Wilberforce. Prison reform came from the kingdom living of Elizabeth Fry. Great advances in compassion and medical care came through Florence Nightingale. We do make a difference when we pray ‘your kingdom come.’” Hughes, 171-172.

²¹ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 181.

²² Keller writes, “If we can’t say, ‘thy will be done’ from the bottom of our hearts, we will never know any peace. We will feel compelled to try to control people and control our environment and make things the way we believe they ought to be. Yet to control life like this is beyond our abilities, and we will just dash ourselves upon the rocks.” Keller, 113.

²³ Miller, 160.

²⁴ Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” 32.

²⁵ Thorn, 57-58. He continues: “This is gospel confidence: In Jesus Christ God welcomes you as his child, and he watches over you and cares for you with not only good intentions, but also with successful actions. He even numbers the hairs of your head. This means that no detail of your life and existence escapes God’s attention, just as the life and death of each individual sparrow is accounted for in the sovereign care of the Lord. But you are no bird. You have far greater value as a person both made in God’s image and adopted as a child through Jesus. The Lord is your Father, and as such his eyes are fixed on you in the midst of all you must go through.” Ibid., 58.

²⁶ Sam Allberry, *James for You* (Good Book Company, 2016), 107.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even When It’s Tough* (Good Book Company, 2015), 43. Also cited by Allberry, 107-108.

²⁹ Keller, 112-113.