

Sermon: James: Inside / Out: When We Play God

## **IN** Opportunities to connect and pray as a group (choose one)

1. Tell of a time when you / your family made plans for an event, and something went wrong. What reaction to all of this did you have?
2. How do you respond to the statement that your life is a 'mist'? What impact does it have on the way you live?

## **UP** Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Pastor Schorr begins this sermon by saying, "James has been teaching that the greatest temptation we face as humans is the temptation that 'you can be like God,' you can be in charge, and you can be the center of your universe." How do Genesis 2:15 -17 and Genesis 3:1-7 illustrate that humanity's problems of identity and significance began in the Garden of Eden?
2. What is the definition of 'slander'? (4:11) (Note his use of the word in 2:7) Why did James include this strong injunction in his letter to the Jerusalem church (v.11b, 12)? How important is the 'law' to the Jews? (2:8) How do Psalm 15:1-3; Prov 10:18 and 1 Peter 2:1 show God's hatred for this behaviour?
3. (Optional question) What Scripture verses suggest correct ways to interact with another person? (ex. Matt 18:15)
4. Explain how the story of Luke 12:13-21 illustrates what James says in 4:13-15. How do you react to God's calling him a 'fool'?
5. How is the person who slanders / judges similar to the one who makes plans without including God?
6. Why is v. 17 a good summary verse to end this section? How does it relate to the context of the passage?

## **OUT** Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. Which of the temptations to play God mentioned in this section:
  - slandering / judging others,
  - planning without consulting Him and
  - not doing what He asks of you... is the one that challenges you most?
2. What specific way will Psalm 39:4 and Psalm 90:12 impact your plans this week? Which verse is a good one for you to memorize? How about both 😊
3. What past nudges from God do you need to obey this week (v.17)? Prepare to share your story next week.
4. How can the group pray for you as you walk through this coming week?

**UP – IN – OUT** reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

## **THE WORD (NIV)**

### **Psalm 15:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? <sup>2</sup> The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; <sup>3</sup> whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others.

### **Proverbs 10:18**

Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips and spreads slander is a fool.

### **1 Peter 2:1**

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

### **Luke 12:13-21**

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup>Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" <sup>15</sup>Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." <sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'" <sup>18</sup>Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" <sup>20</sup>"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup>"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

### **James 4:11-17**

<sup>11</sup>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. <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 neighbor? <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.

# Sermon Study Summary

James teaches that the greatest temptation humanity faces is the same as Adam and Eve faced in the Garden of Eden — that you can 'be like God' (the center of your universe). They had the freedom to enjoy everything but for the fruit of one tree. Satan had them question God's goodness and trustworthiness, and to think that God didn't have their best interests at heart with His one restriction (Gen 3:4). In short, they could live a more fulfilled life by calling their own shots. They believed Satan, ate, and their world (and ours) were fractured from that time. Their choice, like ours is this: Whom will we trust in this life? Will it be God, and will we walk in His truth and wisdom, basing our identity and significance on who we are in the Lord and who He says we are, following His lead? Or will it be ourselves, and walk in the wisdom of the world around us — essentially being our own god — basing our identity and significance on the approval of others and how we compare with them, playing god and doing what we want to do? In a world without God we must compare and compete and always keep score. Conflict inevitably happens when we perceive our position is threatened. Yet there are more ramifications to playing God rather than submitting to Him.

1. **When we play God we are tempted to hurt the reputation of others (James 4:11).** Slander is the sin of deliberately passing on to others malicious information about someone else with the intent of diminishing or destroying their reputation. Even if it is true, if the intent is to hurt the other person, it is slander. If our position feels threatened, we may be tempted to intentionally discredit the other so that listeners will think more highly of us than of the other person. This is not an uncommon strategy in the political arena with the goal less on the issues as on discrediting opponents. What of us? If what we said about others this past year was aired on television would we be embarrassed? God despises slander because we are attacking and judging a person He created and loves. (1 Peter 2:1, Ps 15:3, James 4:11) It maligns His own handiwork and puts ourselves above the 'royal law' (James 2:8). It puts us in God's place where we imply that 'we know better' even though we don't know the whole story or the thoughts and motivations of someone's heart. (James 4:12). Only God is qualified to judge. Yes, we can speak about other people — positively. Sharing stories of God's activity in others keeps us focused on His Kingdom and what really matters. Yes, we may also lovingly confront a fellow Christian who is unrepentant in a sin (Matt 18:15) with the motive to restore and heal them. Love should compel us to pray for others, walk with them, extend grace and encouragement to them, and do all we can to restore them. If our trust is in God, and our identity is found in Him, we are freed from the necessity to compete. Then we can put others' interests ahead of ourselves. Conversely, if we are playing God, our inclination is not to restore them but to hurt their reputation.
2. **When we play God we are tempted to be self-sufficient (James 4:13-14).** James is not saying it is wrong to plan, for Scripture speaks much of the importance of planning (Luke 14:28). The issue is not in the planning. The issue is in failing to include God in those plans and believing ourselves to be the final authority. For example, when life is good we can easily marginalize God in our planning. James warns us of this by stating the obvious: We don't even know what will happen tomorrow. Life could change dramatically in a flash. In the parable of the rich 'fool' (Luke 12:13-21), God gives a tragically accurate diagnosis of the man's life. He had not accounted for the possibility of his death, nor given much thought to God. In the end, we may believe that God exists, yet we are still a 'fool' in living as though He doesn't exist. James speaks of our life as a mist. The Psalms also speak of this (Ps 39:4; 90:12). Our days will run out. Our mortality can teach us wisdom and clarify for us what really matters in life. It can show us not to take important things for granted and show us where to invest the time, talent and resources that God has given us. What is most important to you? Is it what our culture says is important? Or what God says? Remember: Our life is temporary (James 4:15), and God is the only true foundation and guarantee that we have in this life. He must not be taken for granted. He wants to have a real friendship with us. He wants to be involved in our daily lives and to be regularly included by asking for His help, wisdom, and guidance in issues we are struggling with. God is blessed when we come to Him with these things.
3. **When we play God we are tempted to not do what God is calling us to do (James 4:17).** When we pick and choose what God is calling us to do we will stagnate in our relationship with Him, and miss the faith adventure He has laid out for us. Discipleship — walking in and being filled with the Spirit — is to daily read His Word and listen to the promptings of His Spirit. It is to ask what the Lord is saying to us and what He wants us to do about it. It is, when led, praying, listening to someone, serving, being generous, forgiving or asking for forgiveness, sharing your story, exercising compassion, and more. How different would our world be if Christians faithfully read God's Word and then obediently did what God was calling us to do? How different would our workplaces and churches be? Our homes and relationships? Through our faithfulness, God's Kingdom would come, and God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.