

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
James 1:13-15; 4:1-12

According to an article in *The Atlantic*, research shows that if you want a happy and lasting marriage, you should treat your spouse with the same kindness that you want in any friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Tim Keller has said that if both spouses approach the relationship saying “My character and behavior is the reason for most of our problems,” they’re probably going to have a great marriage.<sup>2</sup>

We’re walking with Saint James. He’s coaching us on the challenges of the pilgrim path. He’s said that our challenges are not so much with our circumstances, but with our relationships.

What if we used Keller’s marriage advice for our other relationships? With colleagues, friends, teammates, church folks? What if we really believed, “it’s not *you*, it’s *me*”? Not that we ignore the character flaws of others. But what if we are so focused on renewing our own character that we have no time to criticize others?

Easy, right? I’ll just assume *I’m* the one who’s got a lot of work to do.

It’s not easy. Because you and I are icebergs. The stuff that others see; the stuff we see in ourselves, is just the tip of a huge iceberg of complex motivations and desires.

Today James puts us in a submarine. And below the surface, I can see that my problem is not me vs the economy or me vs my poor health. It’s not even between me vs other people. The real problem is me versus *me*!

Take your bulletin insert, and maybe a pen if you’ve got one.

On top of the iceberg on the right, write “ME.” What’s going on with the iceberg that is “me”?

James starts with what everyone can see, above the surface: (4:1) You’re **fighting** and **quarreling**. (4:11) You’re slandering one another. **Speaking evil** against one another.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/happily-ever-after/372573/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/1010545619595866118?lang=en>

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
James 1:13-15; 4:1-12

So, at the tip of the iceberg, in all caps, write the word “ABUSE.” Next to that, you can write quarreling, fighting, slander.

When you have a conflict that turns into a quarrel or a gossip session, you are abusing sisters, brothers, friends, colleagues, neighbors, teammates, bosses, employees, opponents, *humans*.

But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. And actually, just below the surface, is (4:2) **murder**. You probably won’t kill people literally—though we’ve been doing it forever. You kill people a thousand times in little ways.

Then James takes us down under the surface, and we find more iceberg there than we imagined possible. What’s underneath our ABUSE—our fights, quarrels, gossip, murder? In the middle of the bottom part of the iceberg you can write “USE.”

We are willing to ABUSE people because we’ve already decided that it’s ok to USE them. James says we USE people because (4:2) we **covet** what they have.

And James says we won’t just use *people*; we’ll also use God. (4:3) If we ever pray, we mostly just ask God for things. Usually good things. A new job. Better pay. A girlfriend. A husband.

But our motivations are all messed up. We are focused on our own pleasures. Instead of “how can I glorify and enjoy God?” I’m asking “What can I get from God, that I can enjoy?”

A little further down the iceberg, it’s colder, darker. We are (4:11) **judgmental**. We make ourselves into judges, and act like we are **above the Law**. We hold everyone accountable but ourselves.

Further down — (4:1) our **warring passions**. Every desire in me is fighting the other desires in me for attention. ESPECIALLY if a desire to love God and my neighbor tries to speak up. My other desires shout it down. So James says again that I am **double minded** (4:8).

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
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What is at the bottom of all this?

Almost at the bottom: (4:4) **friendship with the world**. We simply want money, pleasure, and power more than we want to live lives of love for God and neighbor.

And there's one more thing we do. We put ABUSE at the top of the iceberg, and USE in the middle, what do we put at the bottom? ACCUSE.

Flip back to James 1. Verse 13 makes it clear. We are tempted to use and abuse God and others. But when we use and abuse God and others, guess who we blame? God and others.

We've done this since the beginning.

Adam ABUSES his position as the head of creation by and rebels against God. He USES God's creation—the fruit—to get what he wants: power, pleasure. God comes looking for him. And Adam ACCUSES: "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some of the fruit, and I ate it" (Gen 3:12).

God *didn't* give me every single tree! God didn't give me absolute authority. But he did give me this *woman!*

A user and abuser will always be an accuser.

Why would we accuse others and God for what we've done; for who we are?

Well, at the very bottom of the iceberg, way underneath the surface, is (4:6) **pride**.

All of this sounds very judgmental, huh? Like I'm trying to tell you that God is against you. Like he opposes you.

Well, James says "God opposes the proud."

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
James 1:13-15; 4:1-12

Look, friends: too often I quarrel and fight and gossip; I have murdered people in my heart; I have made myself the judge of others, acting like I'm above the law; I have warring passions; I know double-mindedness.

And when that's true, yes — then God stands opposed to me and all my ugliness.

All this makes me mad at James. What a lousy submarine ride. I want my money back.

But I know it's true. And I know he's telling me the truth in love. Because he wants me (4:7) **to submit myself to the Lord**. He wants to see me (4:8) **draw near to God**.

That iceberg on the left is GOD. You can write that at the top.

James says, let's get in our submarine and take a look at the God iceberg. What's it like? What's God like?

Above the surface, as we saw, is (4:6) **opposition**. Sometimes this is all some people ever see in God. Yes, God opposes us when pride is our center of gravity. When we're floating through his creation with our warring passions and our hatred and gossip and quarrelsome spirit.

But God's opposition to our pride is meant to *humble us*. And why humble us? Verse 6 tells us: so that he can give us **grace**.

Above the surface we might see God's opposition. But when we look closely, just at the surface: **GRACE**. God is against us *for us*. We'll never even think to open our arms to his grace until our pride gets humbled.

Friends, if God comes to you and shows you your pride, and all the ugly things that come with it, you need to know this: when he comes to you, even when it's to rebuke and correct you, it's because he loves you and is gracious to you. If he didn't love you, he wouldn't oppose you in your pride. He'd let you self-destruct. With God, no news is not good news. And bad news is the beginning of really good news. Above the surface: opposition. Just below the surface: grace.

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
James 1:13-15; 4:1-12

And what's at the bottom of this? James tells us: *passionate, loving jealousy*. 4:5 tells us that God *longs* for our complete and unreserved loyalty and love. He's given us—if we belong to Jesus Christ—his Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is at work in our spirits to win our undivided, single-minded, pure love and loyalty.

Now, look at these 3 icebergs. See how complex we are? We're the complicated ones. Not God. God is simple. He loves and longs for us. He opposes our self-destructive pride. He invites us to humble repentance. He (4:6) gives grace. More and more and more grace.

And in this grace of God's, he invites us to experience a cease-fire in our hearts. The end of our warring ambitions within us. He invites us to move toward him.

< Clincher Jesus part. >

Because actually he has already moved toward us in grace.

How?

Even though the law is an expression of Jesus' own heart, Jesus submitted himself to the law, while we were busy standing above it.

Jesus could not be accused of any of the ugliness beneath the surface of our icebergs. He moved through the world with perfect simplicity: jealousy for God's heart and for ours; grace; opposition to all of the using and abusing and accusing that he saw.

Jesus had a single-minded love for God and his neighbor.

A true *love* for the world, without ever trying to become friends with the world.

Never coveting the things people enjoyed that he didn't have.

Always speaking the truth in love.

And Jesus could not take Tim Keller's advice in his relationships. He couldn't assume that the fundamental problem was *him*. He was sinless. So he did something even better. He

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 4):  
The Temptation and the Tempter  
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submitted himself to God's opposing judgment against our sin. We use, abuse, and accuse. Jesus went to the cross carrying all this and was glad to be judged for it, so that we wouldn't be.

When James says "But God gives more grace," he's thinking of Jesus. While we were still sinners, God gave Jesus. While we are still recovering users, abusers, accusers, God continues to oppose that pride in us, even while he humbles us and gives us more grace. More Jesus. Just like he does at the Lord's Table today.

And when God gives more grace—forgiveness at the cross of Jesus Christ; renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit—he draws near to us to transform us.

Where we're tempted to ACCUSE, we CONFESS. Our pride is melted away and we are ready to admit that we are wrong. We learn to ASSESS (middle of our renewed iceberg) our warring internal desires—to see them for what they are. And when we become people, near to God, who CONFESS and ASSESS, what shows up in our lives? We become people who BLESS. The quarreling, fighting, and gossip turn to blessing. We don't kill with our words; we use them to *heal*.

In other words, when we draw near to God, and God draws near to us by grace, we become a lot like Jesus. The author and the perfecter of our lives of faith. The one who walked the way before Saint James ever did. The one who is glad to walk the way with us now, all the way home. To the end of our pilgrimage.