



One Easy Step to Live Better

Why Can't People Get Along?

I have never owned a new car. I have had more than eight cars over the course of my life but all of them have been used. There was a time when our young family didn't have much money and the used car I bought from a friend several years before became undrivable. Someone heard of my plight and gave me her used car but after six months it wore out also. Soon someone else gave me his used car and it too died within a year. For the next four years this cycle repeated itself. A friend gave me a used car because my old one died and in a year or two it stopped running and someone else handed me the keys to his used car. Several months at a time I had to walk the four miles to my office because I didn't have a way to get there otherwise. This for obvious reasons became a bit wearisome and so I prayed once more for the Lord to provide me a replacement car. Once more a friend offered me his used car because he was getting a new one. This gift turned out to be a great blessing as I continue to drive the car after 60,000 miles. Whenever I prayed, needing a car, the Lord worked in someone who offered me his or hers and every time I was blessed by it. What did I learn from all of this? I discovered something important about myself and also God and James summarizes perfectly how we should approach these times in life when we feel like we need something we don't have.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4: 1-3 NIV) There is in James's statement here a descending ladder in his teaching. It is the digression he sees in many of us that reveals the cause of most quarrels and fights. Certainly it isn't always the case but most of the time this is exactly what happens when we don't get along. 1. It starts with desires that warp your thinking, creating a tension in you that makes you uncomfortable, perhaps even irritable, and emotionally unstable. 2. You want something that you have been unable so far to attain. It could be that you just want your way, want something done how you want it, feel neglected, ignored, unappreciated. 3. You make a crucial mistake. Rather than asking God to deal with your desire, you let it fester within you or sometimes worse, you act in an undisciplined, unchristian way to get what you want. 4. If you do ask God, the Lord denies your request, at least for a while, because your heart is not right, you have become self-centered or self-absorbed and your connection to God has been overridden by your desires.

Let's take a closer look at the phrase in the last part of the passage, "spend what you get on your pleasures". You may be like many who sometimes wonder if God is always against us having a good time, enjoying life. The Greek term translated "pleasure", means pleasure, gratification, and especially sexual pleasure. It isn't necessarily bad although it can be if the pleasure drags you away from your life with God and leads others astray. The key to grasping what is wrong here is the tern translated "spend". It is not just the idea of going to the grocery and buying something you need. The Greek verb *dapanaow* implies that one is wasting what is being used, not making wise use of it. James is noting that the reason many don't have the answers they expect from God is that He knows it will not be good for them if they get it. Something is wrong in the soul of the one making the request, or in some cases, the demand. Not always is this so. Sometimes God just will not grant the request right away for one reason or another. It may be that the result of the prayer being

granted is some unforeseen by us damage it could cause. God reminds us and sometimes we fail to accept or grasp this just as it was hard for Job to see, **"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** (Isaiah 55:9 NIV) God sees the ramifications for us getting what we ask and for our good He may not grant us our requests.

I am intrigued by an account of ancient Israel before the Hebrews made it into the Promised Land, but at the end of their wandering in the wilderness. Israel was about to conquer the nations living where God had chosen for them to settle and there was at least one king scared to death of what was coming. He tried to get a prophet living nearby to voice a curse against the people of Israel, but the prophet declined. The prophet Balaam heard from the Lord directly that he wasn't to curse Israel because the nation had God's blessing. Once more the king made the same request of Balaam to curse Israel and once more the Lord spoke to him, but the order was different this time. **That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you."** (Numbers 22:20 NIV) As Balaam got up to go meet with the king of Moab as God directed, it turned out the Lord was angry with him. The Lord sent an angel to confront him on the way. The account of this is a bit humorous as the Lord used Balaam's own donkey to reveal the angel to him. What followed was stranger than fiction. The angel of the Lord was invisible to Balaam, but the donkey saw it and refused to go any further. Balaam became furious with the donkey's seeming insolence, and it is then Balaam became the source of a million jokes told at his expense. **Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said.** (Numbers 22:28-30 NIV)

It turned out that an angel of the Lord was holding a sword of death and when Balaam was allowed to see him, the prophet fell to the ground in fear. Balaam was issued a dire warning. **The angel of the Lord asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her."** (Numbers 22:32-33 NIV) The angel reminded Balaam to say to the king only what the Lord told him to say. On the outside, Balaam seemed perfectly loyal to God and full of faith but inside, in the deep places only God sees, Balaam was a traitor to God. It is a fine line between faith and unbelief, being loyal and being a defector. The Lord knows your heart and where you really stand with Him. Many Christians have an outward faith that seems to be great but inwardly they have grown cold to God and at some level an enemy of His. When God senses this happening, when He knows that we have become insubordinate and unfaithful, He shuts down our relationship with Him and makes our praying fruitless. Many complain that God isn't hearing their prayers when in fact He is; the Lord just is ignoring them until those who have stopped living wholeheartedly for Christ return.

Our role model for life is one particular king who faced a great crisis. His nation was being invaded by a coalition of three nations whose combined armies were a vast number, an overwhelming force. Israel had no hope; or so it seemed. Jehoshaphat went to the Lord for the rescue of his country. Both Balaam and Jehoshaphat wanted the Lord to direct them. Something was quite different though in the two. God happily gave Jehoshaphat what he asked. The Lord wrecked the invading armies and Israel was kept safe. When prayers don't go the way you think they should and you wonder why God has seemingly abandoned you, pause and bring your heart to God. Ask Him to examine it and see if there is anything wrong within you. Give God time. You may not be ready to hear what He has to say. He will get through to you though and when He does, keep a humble heart and let Him change the way you are. Don't give up on the answer to your prayers. Sometimes you have to wait for reasons God chooses not to share with you. Other times, something must change in you before He will grant it. Most importantly, if you want a happy life, be contented with what God gives you and trust God to make everything right for you in the end.