SHANNON: Well, good morning Mission Hills. Happy Father’s Day, what a special moment that was between Danny and Maggie to share that with us, really great today. My name is Shannon Popp, I’m the high school pastor here and one of the venue hosts in the Mill. So I wanna give a shoutout to the Mill and those watching online today. I’m really excited to have this opportunity to share God’s word with you. Really, in my life, what changed my life and the direction of my life was God’s word. I can point to different people in my life that really were influential, but it was reading God’s word on a daily basis that really started to renew my mind and change the direction of my life. And so, although I’m really excited to teach God’s word, the passage that I have today is not the easiest to listen to, to teach. And what I mean by that is if you came to church here on Father’s Day to hear a very uplifting, light, encouraging message, I’m gonna give you my apologies now. So we are in the book of James, turn with me to James 4. We’re gonna be looking at verses 1 through 12. And what I have to say is this passage is really for a community of believers that James wrote this letter to believers. And so if it’s your first time here, you decided to come to church on Father’s Day to hear a very uplifting, light, encouraging message, I’m gonna give you my apologies now. So we are in the book of James, turn with me to James 4. We’re gonna be looking at verses 1 through 12. And what I have to say is this passage is really for a community of believers that James wrote this letter to believers. And so if it’s your first time here, you decided to come to church on Father’s Day for the first time, or you’re trying to figure out this church thing or Jesus, then I’m going to allow you, I’m gonna give you permission to judge the people sitting around you and if they’re actually living this out in their life because this passage can feel heavy if we don’t see it in the right light. So let’s dive in, James chapter 4, it’s in the back of your Bible, verse 1. “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire, but do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so 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. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.’ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. 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. 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?”

Uplifting verses today for us to go through. So let’s pray together as we unpack what God is saying to us. Father God, we thank you so much for today, day to honor our fathers and this time to honor You. Father, we thank You for gathering us here today that we can create space and time to gather together as one body to worship You. In one spirit, from Your truth. Father, we thank You that Your word is alive, it’s living and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword that goes deep down to the depths of who we are. So Father, over the next few minutes, as we look at Your Word, we give You this time, we give You our lives. Speak to our minds, our hearts, our soul, and body. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I have two brothers, an older brother and a younger brother, so I was kind of sandwiched in the middle and my entire life really felt like I’ve had to be the peacemaker, I don’t know if there are middle children here, where you feel that way. And then our dad, our father, our parents really raised us to be independent and to start taking care of ourselves at a very young age and I remember this one particular morning as I had woken up and gone to the kitchen and started to prepare my own breakfast and eating and I’m realizing that the rest of the house isn’t awake. And so I’m starting to feel this tension inside of me of wanting to keep the peace, but realizing that I’m gonna have to be the one to go around and wake people up. And really, my older brother, and if you know my older brother, to this day he really loves his sleep. And so going in and waking him up brought some trepidation to me. And trying to be the good brother and peacemaker that I was. So I’m sure that when I went down into his room to tell him that we were late.
for school, I’m sure that I did it as lovingly and as caring as any young brother would. And so, my recollection is that I went into his room and I was like, “Sean, it’s time to wake up, we’re gonna be late for school.” And without even opening his eyes, he just rolled over and reached up and grabbed ahold of my neck like any older brother would and said, “It’s Saturday. Go back to sleep.”

And really, that’s what’s going on in this passage here, that’s what James is doing. He’s trying to wake up this community of believers, the baptized body of believers that call themselves Christ followers that are saying, “We love Jesus, we’re following him, we’re walking in line with him.” That’s what he’s trying to do. And so what we’re gonna see, and what we’ve already read is that his language continues to get stronger and stronger. Verse 1 says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” James knows. He knows what’s going on. First of all, this is just coming on the heels of chapter three, which, there were not chapter and verse breaks in the Bible when he wrote this, it was a letter. And he was talking to them about what it is. And he goes on here telling them and he’s painting a picture of a deeply divided Christian community. He’s painting this picture for us of what happens when we allow our desires to get out of control. “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire, but do not have so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want so you quarrel and fight.”

I’m not exactly sure if James is using metaphors here or if this is really happening, that their evil desires are leading to death, are leading to people dying. Or he could be using metaphors, Jesus used metaphors to help us learn and understand. He’s the shepherd, we’re the sheep, he’s the gatekeeper, he’s the bread of life. Either way, what he’s trying to get this community to understand is that the problem is me. And to stop pointing our fingers at other people and to realize that there’s a war within us as individuals. That individually, we struggle to be in community and to be in Christ-centered community. Paul talks about this in Galatians, and he says there’s a war within him between the flesh and the spirit, and in Romans, he talks about this that he does what he doesn’t wanna do, and he doesn’t do what he wants to do. And that there’s a war going on inside of us. And individually, what we’re striving for is wholeness. We’re looking for peace in our life. And last week we learned, at the end of James 3, that there’s a difference between worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom. And that they’re at war with one another. And that God has wisdom for us and that wisdom brings peace into our heart. And that when we’re looking for peace what we need to be doing is asking for wisdom. And then God allows that peace to be perfected in our heart.

Thankfully, he gives us the answer to finding peace in our current situation, for finding peace beyond our circumstances. He says, “You do not have because you do not ask God.” And so many times, even as believers, we see prayer as like a last resort. That we can’t do anything else, and I don’t know what to do, so I guess all I have to do is pray. We have some friends that have older kids who are in their 20s and 30s and walking away from God. And they say, well-meaningly, that there’s nothing they can do now except pray. But what James is saying and what God is saying is that what we should be doing, what the first thing we should be doing is going to Him in prayer, not just saying, “Hey, I’ll pray for you.” But actually praying. And then if you’ve been paying attention to the series, what he’s really saying is that God has a storehouse of wisdom that he’s just waiting, he’s yearning for us to come near to him and ask for it. And that he takes this storehouse and he’s willing to pour it into our life when we ask. He goes on and says, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your own pleasures.” James is saying that we have a problem with our desires, a problem with how we’re seeing reality.

I have two daughters, a six-year-old and one that’ll be four next Sunday, and they play really well together, surprisingly for sisters of that age, but that’s really because my older daughter, Mikayah, runs the narrative in our house. And what I mean by that is when they play Barbie’s together, she does her lines and what she wants to say and then she tells her little sister what she should say and what she should do. So Naomi goes along with it. And this last week she was telling Naomi, her little sister, that her own Barbie was the best, it has the best hair, and the best dress, and the best shoes, and then she was saying, “Do you want my Barbie?” Because really what she wanted was her little sister’s Barbie, so she was tricking her into switching Barbie’s, right? And I think it’s silly and it’s silly when we’re six, but I think that we do this in our lives. And that we spiritualize things based on our desires and say that we’re looking for the betterment of other people when, in reality, we want the best for ourselves. And I can’t speak for you, but I can speak for myself, and I do this. Even when preparing a message from God’s word. I’m tempted, my desires lead me down a road of saying, “I really want it to be an awesome message.” But it goes deeper than that. There’s something in me that wants you to
believe that I’m awesome. And really what I have to do is fight that every step of the way and say, “No, this is to glorify God, I need
to die to self. And it’s not about me, it’s about God, it’s about His Word, it’s about His character in our life so it’s good for all of us.”

James goes on to use even stronger language. He says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world
means enmity against God?” This is strong language, even for us today. Because if somebody in our culture commits adultery, we
never say that. We say they’ve cheated or they had an affair. And he’s using this strong language to wake us up. It’s been said it’s
better to wake the church up angry than to not wake the church up at all. So James is trying to help us understand that when our
desires are out of control it’s leading to death. It’s leading to divided community. It’s leading to division. Therefore, anyone who
chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Now, he’s just stopped teaching and he is full-out Southern Baptist
preaching at this point. He is letting them have it in this letter and really letting us have it as well. Jesus says this too. In Matthew
16 he says, “You can’t have two masters. You’ll either love the one or hate the other. Or you’ll hate the one and love the other.”
And he says, “You can’t go at this in both directions.” Pastor Craig last week was talking about this worldly wisdom and this Godly
wisdom and that they’re the antithesis of one another, they’re at war with each other. That what the world says is good, and what
the world says is right isn’t always what God is saying is right and righteous. And His wisdom...Danny and Maggie said it well up
here. You cannot be a Bronco fan and love the Patriots at the same time.

But really, the imagery that he’s really showing us is much deeper than that. It’s really saying is that I can’t say that I love my wife
and love other women at the same time. The imagery is of a bride. And I don’t call my wife my bride because I call her Ginger, that’s
her name, it’d be weird if it wasn’t. But I love that imagery that he’s showing us of this bride. That...I remember when I say that
she’s my bride, that my wedding day and the thoughts that I had and the feelings, the emotions, what was going through my mind
and how I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. And what he’s showing us here is that we’re hurting the bride of Christ. That
we can serve God on our own. And I would make an argument that we can’t, but listen to what I’m gonna say. You cannot be the
bride of Christ without the person sitting next to you. And when we’re continually thinking about ourself and letting our desires take
control in our life, we’re hurting the people around us. We’re breaking the bride. We’re breaking apart what God has called one and
called together.

So I have a confession. This may be a weird place though, to stand and give this confession, but I wanna be honest with you. I love
fake cheese. Absolutely love fake cheese. Really because I love nachos. And I call it fake cheese because I really like the cheese that
comes in the jar in the store. And if you eat that don’t read the ingredients on that because you will realize why I call it fake cheese.
Because there’s barely any cheese in there. So I love nachos, I love the fake cheese, but what I can’t stand are the bag of chips.
And this is what I mean. I’m old enough to understand and to know that I used to go to the store and I would pay full price and I
would get a full bag of chips. Some of you know where I’m going with this, but I’ll continue. That now I go to the store, and I still
pay full price, but then I open up the bag of chips and it’s full of air. I get very little bit of chips. And what James is saying is that
Jesus Christ paid full price for my life and I only give him half my life. So he’s using this language to show us this imagery of what’s
happening and that we’re cheating on our first love.

So he goes on to talk to us about what the Scripture says, verse 5 he says, “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he
jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?” Depending on which translation you look at, you can get confused on
what this is saying, but really what he’s saying to us is that God deeply desires to work inside of us to accomplish what we could
never do on our own. That what God is wanting, more than anything else, is he’s wanting to work in us, he’s yearning, he’s jealous
for the spirit that he’s placed inside of you as a believer. Because he wants to work inside of you to accomplish what we could never
do on our own. And up to this point, this can seem really heavy, these words that he’s using, this language is really strong language.
Because he’s trying to wake us up, but he holds out a life preserver in verse 6. He says, “But he gives us more grace.” He gives us
more grace. I love that, I love the adjective there. More grace, grace is quantifiable? He can give us more grace? I love that. More of
a good thing is always better. Ice cream? More? Yes, please. Nachos? More? Yes, please. More of a good thing is always better and
he’s offering more grace, but I think that this word “grace” has become a bit of a buzz word. And that we hear grace, and we think,
“Yes, that’s for sin and that’s for sinners.” And that it’s through faith by His grace that we’re able to have a relationship with God.
But what we need to understand and what this is saying and James is trying to get this community to understand is that what he’s
saying, these heavy words shouldn’t be so heavy because it’s not us living this out. That it’s God, His Spirit in us that bring unity to
His body, to His bride, to His community, to the church. And that what he’s saying is that he deeply desires to work in you to help you
accomplish what you could never do on your own.

That is why Scripture says, “God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.” Last week we learned about humility and
that there’s a difference between humility and humility. Humility is just the ability to be humble, but not to be humble. And what
he’s saying here is that there’s a difference between self-deprecating and saying, “Oh yeah, humility is making sure that other
people are better than myself.” And that’s not what it means, that’s not what he’s saying here, but that we value people because
God values people. People matter to God, therefore people matter to me. And that I should have that same attitude. And so up to
this point in this chapter, James has been talking about this theology, about these ideas and he’s ready to jump off this cascade of
theology into this waterfall of practicality. That he has these ten imperatives, these ten commands that he’s gonna talk about when
he talks about the grace of God and what it looks like to love the people around you.

Verse 7, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.
Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning
and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” Now, the problem with a list like this is that we can see
this as a recipe for humility. That we can see this as some sort of checklist in our life that, “Okay, I wanna be a humble person so here
are the ten things that James says that you have or that you do if you’re a humble person and so as long as I can check off six out of
the ten, then that’s better than not, and so I must be a humble person.” And that’s not what he’s trying to say here. What he’s trying to
show us is that it’s not really about these actions that you’re doing, but that it starts in your heart. And he uses this word, the first word
here in verse seven is “submit yourselves.” And really, this word carries with it a couple different meanings.

First, it means repent. And we’ve all seen on a stage like this that repenting is when you’re going the wrong direction, and you’re
going and doing the wrong things in the wrong way, repentance is turning and going the other direction. But this word that he uses
here has a deeper meaning because it comes with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. That there’s something going on beneath the
surface that we see and what we hear. And that there’s something more going on. And so write this down. What matters most to
God is not the hand’s action, but the heart’s affection. What matters most to God is not the hand’s action, but the heart’s affection.
But the reality is that James is making an argument that if your heart is really fully in love with Jesus, you’re enamored, head-over-
heels with Him, that you’re working together with the bride of Christ and that you’re a part of a Christ-centered community, then
it’s seen and it’s heard. Real religion is seen and heard by the people around us. And so he’s showing us that it starts in the heart,
but that it’s much more than that. It’s not a grocery list that you can check off, but it’s a heart that must be checked daily. That the
way that we do that is that renewing our mind in God’s word. And allowing Him to transform the way that we think. Which starts to
transform our heart. Which starts to rein in these wild desires that are tearing us apart.

The problem is that we get comfortable. We get comfortable with grace. We get comfortable with mercy. We get comfortable with
being forgiven. So the way that we can overcome complacency is by giving full commitment. That Jesus paid full price for our full
life. And the way that we can overcome that is by committing daily, it’s not just a decision that you made one day and that now
you’re past that and you’re living your life, but that you need to be filled by Him each and every day. And then he goes a little bit
deeper. He says, “This is what it’s actually gonna look like and play out in your life if your heart is turned towards God and your
words and your actions are starting to follow.”

Verse 11, “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. 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?” James is saying a couple things here,
he’s saying a lot of things. I’ll speak into two of them. I’ll do the second one first. What he’s saying is that we’re not supposed to be
judging each other. We’re not supposed to be looking around at the actions and the words of other people and judging them. And what
I mean by that is that, sure, we can be discerning and we can see things that are happening in our brothers’ and our sisters’ lives, and
we can say, “Wow, that’s kind of concerning.” But in no way are we supposed to judge their heart and their story and what’s going on
and what’s behind the scenes. When we see those things going on, the reason why we’re able to see that and why God allows us to see that is to step into their life and to walk life with them. Say, “Hey, I’m seeing some things and I’m hearing some things and I just wanna listen, to understand so I can know what’s going on in your life.” Because what it’s saying here is that this community, they were judging the hearts and they were saying, “Well you’re a believer, you’re a believer, you’re not a believer, believer, believer, not a believer.” And when we do that, what he’s saying is that you’re taking a chair that’s not yours. You’re actually taking the throne of God and saying that you’re God and that you’re the Judge. He says, “There’s only one Judge.”

And the second thing, which he said first, is that you can’t say that you love God, but not God’s people. You can’t come up to me and say, “Shannon, I really love you, you and I are bros. Let’s hang out. But I really can’t stand your kids, don’t bring your kids.” Right? But yet we do this in our lives. And it’s because we’re not asking God for wisdom in the struggles, and the pain, and the seasons of life. We’re not asking Him for the wisdom of what’s going on. And we learned last week that when we ask God for wisdom, we get wisdom, but we also get peace. Peace in our hearts, that God perfects in our hearts, that we can be peacemakers. And that we receive the wisdom and the peace from God so that we can walk in humility.

So final thought, write this down. Humility breeds intimacy. And what James is saying is, and he hinges this entire passage on humility. That he talks about the things that we’re doing, that our evil desires are leading us astray. And there’s no way that we can say we love God, but we’re not in love with his people. And when we do that, we’re acting as if we don’t love God. Jesus would say that if you’re in a place like this, if you come to the altar to offer your gift and you have a problem or there’s a problem between you and a brother and a sister that you need to leave your gift here at the altar and go and make it right with them before you can come and worship God in a place like this. Because when we’re deeply dividing Christian community we’re breaking apart the bride of Christ. And when we’re not humble that means we’re arrogant, and when we’re arrogant we’re continuing to slander people behind their back. When we’re prideful we are finding ourself in precarious positions, being adulteress. And when we allow pride and the arrogance of our hearts and our desires, then we’re speaking bad and causing quarrels and fights among those in our life.

It was Father’s Day a few years ago. I think I was like fifteen or sixteen, so more than a few years ago. My older brother was in college, my younger brother was in middle school or elementary, and we were playing basketball and, well, we were kind of playing basketball. It was really antagonizing my little brother at this point, so not being the peacemaker that I told you that I am. And I was really giving him a hard time and my little brother, he has always been so ticklish. So every time that he tried to go by me, I would just kind of reach out my hand and jab it into his stomach and he would just start laughing. Well, as I did and often did, I took it too far. I pushed him to the edge and I did it one more time and when I went to reach in to tickle him, he took a step back and kicked me right in the face. Thing was, I guess it was trendy to wear combat boots at that time even to play basketball. And so he had his combat boots on, and there was this moment where time froze. My aunts, uncles, grandparents, mom, dad, brothers, cousins, everyone were around. And there was this feeling that I had this opportunity that I could really do whatever I wanted to my brother because he just kicked me in the face. And they’re like, “Well, you pretty much have the right to do whatever you want to him now because he kicked you with his combat boots on.” And this grace, this more grace that God desires to work in us to accomplish what we could never do on our own happened. And I took a step back and I said that I was sorry. That I pushed him too far. And that changed our relationship to this day.

And really, the way that we love an invisible God is by loving His visible kids. And the way that we do that is we step forward in humility. James says here, when you step forward in humility, God steps towards you. And we’re not talking about salvation, we’re not talking about working your way to Christ. These are believers. But that within God’s sovereignty, we have this responsibility and that we can ask for wisdom, He perfects this peace in our heart, to make us peacemakers. And the way that that looks is valuing people through humility. That the way that we take a step closer to God is humbling ourself and moving towards Him and its the same for His kids. That we humble ourself, see the value in the people around us, and step towards them.

So one question for you. What are you gonna do this week, specifically in your life, to walk humbly before God and before His people? What are the changes that you need to make this week to be humble? Let’s pray.
Father God, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for this time. We thank You for who You are and that we’re able to understand Your character. That it’s not unclear what You’re saying to us, but the hard part is obedience. Father, I’m thankful that it’s not up to us to do this. That this can feel heavy and like rules, more like religion than a relationship. Father, we’re thankful for Your grace and that You offer more grace that when we humble ourselves before You. You actively work in our life to accomplish what we could never do on our own. So Father, we’re thankful for that. And as we remember our earthly fathers, let us be reminded of You as our heavenly Father and that we’re able to cry out to You in those times of need and ask for wisdom and insight. To call you Abba, Daddy, and that our relationship with You is through Your son and what he did. Father, we thank You for this time. We pray this to You through the power of Your Spirit, and in the name of Jesus. Amen.