Humility in Action
James 4:11-17

God gives grace to the humble, not to the proud. But how do we actually resist pride and practice humility in day-to-day life? James gives us two practical ways to practice humility: in how we speak about others and in how we plan for the future. Discover what humility looks like in action so that you can experience and enjoy God's grace.

The problem James left us with in our last passage:
- gave us theory, but didn't tell us how to actually practice it

Review: Read James 4:6,10

Big idea of last passage: God gives grace to the humble, not to the proud

- define proud:
  o English – can be a good thing
    ▪ tell kids I’m “proud” of them – want them to take pride in their accomplishments; become confident adults
  o But that’s not what the Bible means by “proud”
  o Pride in Bible ALWAYS negative - sinful
    ▪ Greek word lit means “to show oneself above other people”
    ▪ in your eyes you stand above others looking down
  o Pride = “to have an exaggerated opinion of yourself”
  o Greeks used *hubris* to describe this attitude
    ▪ thought himself equal to or superior to the gods
    ▪ didn’t recognize proper place in hierarchy of universe
  o Precisely what the biblical idea of “pride” is getting at
    ▪ You don’t have an accurate opinion of yourself
    ▪ Don’t see yourself as a weak, dependent creature
    ▪ “As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.” -C.S. Lewis

- define humble:
  o Lit: to get low – make oneself low before God and others
  o = have an accurate opinion of yourself
    ▪ see God as awesome, holy, great
    ▪ see yourself as small, needy, and sinful
    ▪ respond by bowing & submitting to Him
  o To Greeks: humility was something to avoid – weak, servile
  o But the Bible lifts up humility as an essential character trait
  o James: without humility, don’t get “grace” – it’s that important...

- define grace:
  o grace = undeserved favor from God
  o We receive grace through humility – that’s always true
True of the ultimate gift of grace

- **Ephesians 2:8–9**
  For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- What does it take to be saved? Humble faith
  - Must abandon prideful attempts to earn God’s love – acknowledge your good works are useless
  - Humble yourself and receive it as a free gift
  - Gospel – believe it’s a free gift

Once saved, continue to receive God’s grace through humility

- **the grace of v6** = God’s strength to be faithful to Him
- He graciously gives us the ability to resist sin and obey Him... if we humble ourselves before Him

So if God’s grace comes only to the humble, clearly it’s better to be humble!
- You want God’s grace, so you want to be humble

But how do we actually practice humility?
- Like when I began dating – understood theory, but didn’t know how to actually practice it.
- Humility is tricky!
  - Nebulous character trait we know we should have
  - But hard to figure out exactly what it looks like
  - What does it look like to be a humble student, doctor, real estate agent, mom, dad?

How do we actually practice humility in everyday life?

James gives us two specific ways to resist pride and practice humility
- He’s not exhaustive! Much more the Bible says about humility
- Just focuses on 2 particular areas of life where we need to learn humility...

First, he challenges us to apply humility to our speech...

1) Speak Humbly of Others - Read v11-12
- Two key words to define...
- Define “speak against” – used 3x in v11
  - **katalalew**
  - = to speak negatively about someone to other people
  - to bad-mouth someone
  - Broad word. Includes...
    - **slander** – say something false & damaging about someone
      - an individual or a group
      - either publically or privately
      - e.g. a malicious rumor someone spreads online
    - **gossip** – say something true but damaging behind someone’s back
      - share info with someone who has no business hearing it
      - not your story to share
    - **ridicule** – publically making fun of someone’s faults or limitations
      - High School cafeteria table – do it to make ourselves feel better
      - Adults do too – often baptized in the name of politics or sports!
    - **insubordination** – bad-mouthing those God put in authority over you
- Define “judge”
  - κρίνω – basic idea = “to set apart so as to distinguish, separate”
  - Often a good thing:
    - God distinguishing between the righteous and the unrighteous
    - People choosing which day they’ll worship God on
  - But here it’s clearly bad:
    - = “to publicly point out someone’s faults or sins in order to condemn him”
  - Important to make a distinction here...
    - Read James 5:19-20
      - God doesn’t want us to ignore each others’ sins
        - When we see a brother sin – confront, rebuke, exhort
        - But notice key difference: in ch5 – you go speak to the brother
          - don’t share it with others – keep it private
          - goal is restoration, not condemnation
      - Jesus laid out that process for us in Matthew 18...
        - read Mt 18:15-17
          “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
        - Privately – motivated by love
        - Alone; then just with 1 other witness; then just elders
        - Goal ALWAYS restoration, never condemnation
  - There is a time & place for confrontation & church discipline...
    - ...But that’s not what James is talking about in chapter 4.
      - Go public rather than to your brother
      - Goal = condemnation, exclusion... not restoration

- So James is rebuking 2 related ways that we tend to speak about others:
  - speaking ill of someone to others: true or not, present or not
  - judging someone publically: pointing out faults / sins to condemn

- James forbids both & tells us why...
- Gives us 2 reasons to avoid these sins
  - 1) Makes us law-breakers (pt of v11)
    - Argument hard to follow b/c he leaves a couple steps out
    - Assumes we know that speaking against a brother → is to break God’s law
      - Read 2:8 royal law demands that we love our neighbor
      - Speaking unkindly – that’s not love.
      - So when we do it, we break God’s law (no longer a “doer”)
  - 2) Usurps God’s authority (pt of v12)
    - What James means by becoming “a judge of the Law”
You are choosing to break one command of God’s Law...
...therefore, you’re saying that you get to pick what’s worthy of obedience and what’s not
...therefore, you are claiming to stand in authority over the Law
- You have usurped God’s authority in the universe

- Judging your brother is a coup d’état against God!
- **And that’s the pinnacle of pride**
  - pride = not recognizing your place in the universe

- That pride cuts us off from God’s grace and help in life

- Get practical: 3 suggestions for how to avoid this sin
  - 1) **Go to the person, not to others**
    - Someone frustrates you, hurts you... go straight to them!
    - Don’t complain about your boss or your professor to others
    - Don’t gossip about something bad someone did – go to them
  - 2) **Be careful when getting advice**
    - If you need help processing & figuring out what to do...
    - ...be careful who you get advice from
      - 1-2 people; not 10
      - safe, mature, wise, discreet, uninvolved in the situation.
  - 3) **Golden rule**: if you have nothing nice to say about someone, then say nothing at all!!

2) Plan humbly for the Future
- Read 4:13-16
- **Begin by making clear: this is NOT...**
  - a **condemnation of planning**
    - Julie and I are planners... spontaneity stresses us out! Can’t do that with twin 3-yr olds.
    - Planning’s only thing keeping us afloat
    - **Prov 21:5**
      *The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*
  - a **condemnation of making a profit**
    - Not anti-capitalism
    - Jesus used financial profit as a basis for some of his most famous parables – assumed it was good for business
    - Profit is good as long as...
      - not gained through immoral means
      - doesn’t distract you from what’s far more important

- **This IS a condemnation of presumptuous planning**
  - planning as if you control your future
    - Merchant – plans as if he controls everything
      - time, location, activity, success
  - planning that leaves God out of the equation
    - God doesn’t factor into his planning at all
    - He’s a believer – knows God
    - But God is superfluous, on the bench – no place in his plan
- **His motive: v16 – pride, arrogance**
“in your arrogances” = in all the things you pride yourself on
- your intellect, skill, experience, cleverness, luck, strength
- rather than trust God to provide, you trust these things to provide
- I can identify with this merchant!
  - My plan: study automotive engineering; get MBA; project manager by 30; run company by 40; multimillionaire by 45
    - Confident; Dedicated to the plan
    - God got Sunday; but the plan got the rest of the week
  - That was arrogance
    - lived as if my future was in my hands
    - Do ABC and I’ll get XYZ.
    - God got lip service – but I was in charge
  - Lived by the A-Team motto: “I love it when a plan comes together”
    - The plan was everything

- James rebukes such arrogant planning that leaves God out
- It’s foolish for 2 reasons...
  - 1) We don’t know what the future holds (v14a)
    - How can this merchant be so certain of his plans when he doesn’t know the future?
      - could get robbed, lost, flooded, sick, bankrupt...
    - Prov 27:1
      *Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*
  - End of my story...
    - 1997 Asian financial crisis – hiring practically shut down
    - I put in all the required work, but it didn’t work out.
    - Why? Because we do not know what the future holds.
  - 2) Our lives are fleeting (v14b)
    - Not only could our circumstances change tomorrow, but our lives could end tomorrow!
    - Dad’s friend – very healthy, running on treadmill – aneurism
    - Foolish to act as if you control the future when you don’t even know if you’ll be alive tomorrow to enjoy it!
    - Read Luke 12:16-21
      *And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods... \... And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*
      - Foolish because he lived only to accumulate wealth which, it turns out, he never lived to enjoy!

- James rebukes the arrogant, presumptuous planning of v13
- Then he tells us the right way to plan for the future in v15... read
  - clarify: the words “If the Lord wills” are not magic words!
    - tacking to beginning of plan doesn’t sanctify it
    - doesn’t guarantee success
  - It’s not about the words... it’s about the attitude...
  - DO plan...
...But entrust your plans & your future to God
  - Recognize: your future is NOT dependent on your intellect, skill, strength...
  - It’s dependent on God – your future is in His hands
  - Acknowledge His sovereignty – let Him call the shots
  - Plan – but then submit your plans to God

Practical: hold your plans with a LOOSE grip!
  - Corrie Ten Boom... “Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open.”
  - Be ready for God to change things
  - Why? Because He’s a much better planner than you!
    - Knows the future; knows what’s best
    - Don’t worry when things go “off-plan” – you can trust Him
  - Save money for retirement – but don’t trust in that money
    - if market tanks... that’s okay – He’ll take care of you
  - He’ll saturate your life with grace... IF you humbly trust Him

I’ve learned to do that a little better... Epilogue of my story
  - failure to get job I wanted led me to ministry
  - right before I came here to be an intern, GM called with my dream job
  - I turned them down – God had changed my heart
  - Now: no job in world I’d rather have! No place I’d rather be!
  - God had a better plan.
  - I would have saved myself a lot of pain and wasted time if I had simply acknowledged that from the beginning!

Summary:
  - God gives grace to the humble, not the proud.
  - So if you want His grace / strength / blessing, you must walk in humility.

To help us do that, I want to give you a couple questions to reflect on today...
  - How have I spoken of others lately?
    - slander, gossip, ridicule, fault-finding
  - How have I planned for the future?
    - Do I trust my future to God and hold my plans loosely?
    - Or do I trust my future to my skill, intellect, experience, strength – and then when things off plan, get angry, frustrated, anxious.

Finally, let’s end by reading v17
  - James’ exclamation point on the passage
  - Now that we know how to humbly speak and humbly plan – if we don’t do it, it’s not just foolishness, it’s sin.