

Ask Correctly

1-4-26

James 4:2b–3 (ESV)

You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (hedonism).

We know the importance of prayer. Jesus and James both speak of the absolute truth about the power of prayer. Jesus says:

John 14:14 (ESV)

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Here, James shows us what hinders our prayers. Of course, it is perfectly logical that God would evaluate our prayers. Once he told John and James, “You do not know what you are asking.” In Chapters 1-3, James taught us that our behavior including our prayer life should be based on the Royal Law of Love. Unfortunately, sometimes our attitudes are less than godly.

James 4:1(ESV)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions (hedonism) are at war within you?

Jesus is not pleased when believers live in an atmosphere of “fights and quarrels.” God identifies these conflicts as “our passions at war” within us. The term passions (NIV, “desires”) means “selfish pleasures.” This Greek word is the source of the English word “hedonism,” the designation of the philosophy that views pleasure as the chief goal of life. **When selfish passions dominate, the peace of God is destroyed. The Royal Law of Love is nonexistent. To show the devastating impact of these godless attitudes within the church, James continues with an appropriate hyperbole.**

James 4:2 (ESV)

You desire and do not have, so you murder (hyperbole for hatred). You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

Instead of coveting and fighting over our desires, we should ask God. God is our provider, and sustainer. This goes back to what Jesus said: If you ask me anything, I will do it. But also true, when we fight and quarrel, our eyes are not on God, but on our sinful desires.

Our attitude and behavior have a direct correlation to our prayers being answered.

James 4:3 (ESV)

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (hedonism).

The Gospels contain many promises about prayer, but each makes the central assumption, that our heart is in tune with God. This why we say, “Thy will be done” in the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer is not magic. We cannot manipulate God or impose our will on God. We pray from a trust relationship with Jesus whose “will” is supreme.

James, thus, points out that those who do not receive are those who are not in tune with God.

The Bible tells us that God loves to provide for us. God gives us all things to enjoy. The point James is making is that we should not be motivated by selfish desires and ask simply to gratify ourselves. We know that we are forgiven and eternally secure when we trust Jesus as our Savior. However, it is also true that answered prayer is directly related to our behavior. Bad behavior can hinder God from acting on our behalf on earth.

This motivates me to behave. I do not want to clutter up my communication with God. This is stated in both the OT and NT.

Isaiah 59:1–2 (ESV)

¹ Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; ² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

This also is true of the husband wife relationship.

1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way,, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

In order to hear God and see HIM move mightily within the family, the husband and wife need to be in tune not only with God, but with each other.

For 2026, Be in tune with Jesus! Remember:

James 4:2 (ESV)

You do not have, because you do not ask.