

Text: James 4:1-6

Title: "God's Way"

Introduction: How many of you have ever been lost? Being lost is a weird thing because most of us do not intend to get lost. Most of us, especially men, have confidence and a certain amount of swagger when we leave our homes to go somewhere, even if we have never driven to that part of the state or country before. We pack what we think we need. We get out a map or get directions on "MapQuest" or pull out the old GPS and work the strategy. We've got a plan for how far to get before lunch, how long to spend at that exit before hitting the road again ... getting gas at the same stop so that you don't have to stop again even if your 8 year old is crying about having to go to the bathroom...

There are three reasons why we get lost:

1. Bad Map – someone gave us the wrong directions to get us where we want to go.
2. Good Map – Choose not to follow it. We might have the right directions, but we choose a new destination.
3. We Get Distracted – We have a good map, but somewhere on the road, we quit looking at the road because someone in the vehicle distracts us or something outside the vehicle catches our eye or whatever...

A few years ago, we had a group that was headed on a mission trip and we were flying out of the Quad Cities. Now, I pride myself as having a pretty good inner GPS. I don't get lost very often. I was leading the caravan down to the airport and I missed an exit. I missed that exit and knew it right then! I yelled all the non-curse words I could come up with as I looked at the exit ramp I had just missed. I wasted us valuable time. Even though I could see where I wanted to go, I couldn't go there. Why? Because I missed the exit ... by milliseconds! I got distracted by whatever it was... In that moment, I was *lost!* I didn't need to be *found*; I just needed to get back on the right track!

That's different than most 'lost' experiences. Do you know why? Because most of the time when we get lost, we don't know when we got lost, we just know that we're lost. In most instances, there are not indicators to let us know the moment that we got lost. Suddenly, you are way out in the middle of nowhere and you wonder how you got there. That was not in the plan. This place was not on the map. How did I get here?

Do you have different areas of your life that you feel that way? In relationships or dating or in your marriage ... "This is not the way I had it planned". "I did not plan on having this many failed relationships." "I planned on being married before now", etc.

Some of you are working jobs that were not part of the dream when you started out. You wanted to be something else and now you are looking at your life and saying, "This was not even on the map!"

Some of you are looking at your finances and wondering how you got where you are. Some of you don't even know where you are in your finances. OPTIONAL: Here are a couple of indicators on if you are *lost* financially:

1. If you spend more annually than you bring in, you are lost.
2. If you don't know if you spend more annually than you bring in, you are lost.

3. If you think that paying the minimum on your credit cards is good financial planning, you are lost. (Maybe a bad map...)
4. If you are making financial decisions that you hope your spouse does not find out about, you are REALLY LOST.
5. If you are making financial decisions that you hope the IRS does not find out about, you are LOST.

### **LET'S PRAY!**

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other you will see a brief outline to guide us to where we are going. You will see that there are some blanks to fill in. I hope you will fill in those blanks and jot down whatever you hear or see today that affects you in your life and faith journey. Remember, writing it down helps us remember better what we have heard. Then, I hope you will take this home and hang it on your refrigerator to be reminded of what we've learned today. Take time to read the Scripture again, etc. For those of you who are listening on line or IPODING, our program is available online to download. Then, you too can fill in the blanks.

Now, as we talk about this the next few weeks, the opposite of "Lost" is *not* going to be "Found". What we are looking for as LOST people in different areas of our lives is a RESCUE! We are in trouble in our relationships, our workplace, our emotions, our faith and/or our finances and we need to be RESCUED! We need Someone to Rescue us/ Save us from the path that we are following.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to use the Book of James to help us in, specifically, the area of personal finances and loosely, in other areas of our lives. The people that James was writing to were dealing with difficult economic times (sound familiar?) and great persecution for their faith (sound familiar?).

Many people, when they think about God, have the sense that God really doesn't care about us in this life (why would all these bad things happen?), but only cares about our eternity. Please understand that it's not so. Our God is the God of the "there and then", but also the God of the "here and now". God cares about the details of your life here on earth and wants the best for you. I believe that God has better plans for you in this life than you could possibly come up with yourself.

I took just enough Greek in college to be dangerous. The New Testament books in our Bibles were originally written in the ancient Greek language. They have been translated many times to get to what we read today, but there is a word in the Greek that I think is worth us knowing. It's the word for "Salvation". The Greek is "S-O-Z-O", pronounced "sowdzow".

The reason that's important is because we think of "Salvation" as a way to eternity with God, right?!? True, BUT, the Greek "SOZO" can also be translated as "restored to health", "wellness", "saved" or "rescued". In the original Greek it was clear that God not only wanted you and I to experience eternity in Paradise, but a "wholeness" or "wellness" in every area of our lives here on earth, including our FINANCES!... Don't believe me?!? Stick around...

Our Scripture for today comes from the Book of James, chapter 4:

**READ JAMES 4:1-6 NOW!**

## **I. God's Character**

- A. If we are going to trust God for important areas of our lives, like our finances, there has to be some trust built up. I don't know about you, but I don't want just anybody poking around my personal finances. I have to trust that person to the limits to share that personal information.
- B. If we are going to trust God with our finances in these difficult economic times, we should have a grasp on Who God Really Is.
  - 1. Lord's Prayer = "Our Father..." What a great start! God is a loving Father-figure who cares about each of us as a child.
  - 2. Matthew 7:9-11 = "You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him?"
  - 3. Wow! Our Heavenly Father, who is way better than any of us earthly fathers, will give us all that we need and more ... and WANTS TO!
  - 4. There are continuous promises from God through our Scriptures that God will care for our needs ... Philippians 4 = "My God will meet all your needs..." Romans 8 = He will "graciously give us all things."
- C. Back to the Lord's Prayer ... "Our Father in HEAVEN..." God is in charge of Heaven and Earth and all that is in it! God can keep those promises of meeting all our needs!
- D. Please know that I *do not* believe in "Prosperity Theology" – Jesus will make us rich if we believe in Him. That is self-centered and not focused on the Kingdom. BUT, I do believe that God wants what is best for each of us.
- E. If my child had a chance to make \$30,000 or \$60,000; guess which one I would pick?!? If I know that my kid is in a right relationship with God, I would want her to have the \$60,000. Why?!? Because I know that God's Kingdom will benefit from her tithe and gifts!!!

## II. **God's Viewpoint**

- A. Not only do we find out WHO God is in the Bible, we find out what God's viewpoint is about everything from morality to salvation to ... you guessed it—money.
  - 1. Did you know that if we combined all that Jesus said about salvation, heaven and hell, it would not even come close to how many times Jesus talked about money and possessions?
  - 2. Jesus knew that the one thing that people would put their trust in, if it wasn't him, would be money. Jesus knew that the #1 competition for loyalty and devotion was money.

3. There are a whole lot of financial wisdoms in our Scriptures. But, they all play off of the number one wisdom, and that is that when it comes to our finances, we have to keep God first. “Oh, sure. Here we go. There goes the church asking for money again ... that’s all they do is ask for money!”
  4. I understand ... that is a stereotype of the church, but here’s what I want you to know: Yes, it takes money to run a church, but I don’t want you to give to this church unless you see something worth giving to (100 children; 50+ teenagers; missions; food pantries; teaching other churches; etc.).
  5. The other thing that I want you to know, as we go through this series, is that I’m not near as concerned about getting your money as I am about your money getting you! Do you know what I mean?!?
- B. Jesus says in Matthew 6 that we are to “Seek first the Kingdom of God ... and all these things will be added unto you.” In other words, if we keep God’s Kingdom our life priority, we will never be in need.
1. Here’s the problem: If we choose to serve money, then we will be a slave to that. We will be working for our finances and possessions instead of working for God.
  2. This is exactly what James is writing about to the Christians that are scattered around the Gentile world in 49 AD. He’s reminding them not to get caught up in what the world says is the right way to do things.
  3. Where do fights and quarrels come from? Where do wars come from? The desires inside of us.
  4. “You want what you don’t have ... You are jealous of what others have...” (v.2).
  5. This is what happens when we do not put God first in our lives. Life becomes “all about me.” I want what other people have and if I cannot get it, I have to find a way to get it.
  6. When life is not all about God, we are consumed with our need for stuff!

### III. Your Motives

- A. Now we know Who God is and God’s viewpoint. Next we have to figure out what *OUR* Motives are.
1. James 4:3 = You ask God for things, but don’t get them. “Well, I thought the Bible said, ‘Ask and you shall receive’!”
  2. It does, but James explains that “you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you only want what will give YOU pleasure.”
  3. Jesus says that once we become more like God in our thoughts and actions, THEN, ask and you will receive. Why?
  4. Then, our motives will be right ... then, we are asking with the Kingdom of God in mind.

5. James says that we know that our motives are wrong when we are just after whatever will give us pleasure.
- B. Verse 4 = You cannot have God as a priority in your life if you are trying to keep your friendship with what the world says is good.
1. If you are trying to be friends with the world and seeking pleasures for yourself, *this comes at the expense of other people in your life or at the expense of obeying God*. You cannot be friends with both God and the world.
  2. This is why James calls those people who are trying to love both God and the world, “adulterers”.
- C. The world says, “Minimize pain and maximize pleasure”, right?!? That doesn’t really line up with Jesus saying, “Pick up your cross daily and follow me.”
1. We will NEVER experience all that God has planned for us in our lives—in our marriages, our relationships, our workplace and/or our finances—unless we are willing to go through the discipline of following Jesus, His way!
  2. We don’t like hearing: No pain, no gain. We still want a pleasurable experience in every arena of our lives.
  3. There have been people who have attended worship here for awhile and then quit. One reason is that worship is kind of fun and helpful in our lives ... UNTIL, we start talking about the things that God wants us to change to be right with Him!
  4. Then, worship is not so fun anymore. “If I quit going to church, then I can still feel good about how I’m living ... I’m going to seek my own personal pleasure, not God’s Kingdom.”
- D. Please understand that I’m not saying (and neither is Scripture) that having money is bad, we just have to make sure that we are in control of our money and our money is not in control of us.

#### IV. **The Source of Your Motivation**

- A. Motivation is the ongoing force or energy that propels each action toward our next accomplishment.
- B. Have you ever started something new (New Year’s Resolution exercise program / diet / get out of debt plan / etc.), and you get frustrated and quit?
1. Do you know what the problem is?
  2. You were probably properly motivated, the problem is that we get tired and then ... Unmotivated.
  3. How do we get motivated again? GRACE!
- C. James says that God gives us more Grace. God knows that we fail ... usually multiple times ... and offers us, again, something that we don’t deserve.
1. I love to run. I know that physically I need to run. I had an injury that has prevented me from running.

2. But, that's not an excuse anymore. Now, I'm just not motivated to do it.
3. When I start running, it will probably take me a few weeks to get into a regular habit of running. I will start, quit, start, quit, etc.
4. We do the same thing with our finances ... tithing, debt, savings, etc. I hope we remember that we serve a God of second chances.
5. When we lose motivation, remember that God offers us many things that we don't deserve (GRACE) and does not give up on us living the way He wants us to!

V. **Who Are You Listening To?**

- A. I try to say this to other pastors who might be struggling. I ask the question: Who are you listening to? The statistics that say that the church is dying, the community you live in is dying, OR are you listening to Scriptures that teach: "nothing is impossible with God."
- B. I also ask if they are listening to pastors that are growing churches and discipling people and changing the world. They are motivators.
- C. Same thing with our finances ... you can listen to the news and how our economy has fallen / is falling apart OR you can listen to Scripture (which has many wisdoms to offer in the area of finances and possessions) and financial experts who have the "know how" to help you get out of debt etc.
- D. I love the way that James finishes up this section ... he quotes from the Book of Proverbs: "God opposes the proud, but favors the humble."
  1. One reason people struggle in different areas of their lives is because they are TOO PROUD to seek wise counsel ... to take their problems to someone who could actually HELP!
  2. God favors the HUMBLE, because the HUMBLE are willing to admit where they have screwed up and where they are not very wise and in what areas of their life they need "HELP!"
  3. Then God favors the HUMBLE, because when we are full of PRIDE, we are unwilling to change. If we are HUMBLE, we will do whatever it takes ... even if it's a little embarrassing ... to get all of the areas of our lives saved (Sozo).
  4. You know what it is, don't you?!? You know what area of your life you are proud about. You know what area of your life you are not willing to live God's Way! As we come forward for COMMUNION, I challenge you to HUMBLY ask for that SOZO / Salvation / Rescue in whatever area it is for you ... relationships ... personal finances ... work ... etc.

Let's Pray!