

### Discussion Starter

If you had the opportunity to drop all responsibilities and go to live in a monastery or convent for a period of time, would you be tempted? What, if anything, would you enjoy about being in such an environment?

### Worship Together

We are going to meditate for a few minutes on what it means for us to be holy. You may want to have some quiet worship music in the background or you may prefer to have quiet.

Read 1 Peter 1:14-16

Slowly read this meditation by Derek Osborne:  
*Holiness of life is living to the glory of God.  
Holiness can conjure up, rightly or wrongly, a picture of a predictable pattern of behaviour, a boring picture of do's and don'ts, which Christians must conform to.  
It may suggest a sort of 'group character' and to be 'out of step' is to put a question mark on your own personal holiness.  
We have been conditioned to think from the wrong end. Holiness must take its meaning from the 'glory of God'.*

*It is the product of indomitable, jealous, glad, reckless concern for God's glory.  
I will find my highest personal holiness when I lose myself in a desire to extol the worth, reputation, honour and splendour of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.*

Read Ezekiel 1:4-28

Read the last sentence of the meditation again. *I will find my highest personal holiness...*

Allow a few minutes of quiet and then invite people to respond to God in prayer.

### Bible Study

"Those who have known what it is to be... brought out again into light and joy by God, lose all desire to pass judgement and bear grudges."  
*Ladislav Boros. Jesuit writer on spirituality.*

**Read James 4:1-12 and discuss the following questions...**

- There are a number of references in this chapter to having divided loyalties when it comes to God. James's writing is reminiscent of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21 or Joshua in Joshua 24:15. Pick out all the places where James talks about the way other things vie with God for first place in our priority list, and what he says to us about this.
- How do we go about resisting the devil? Can anyone share experiences of resisting him and finding that he does indeed flee away?
- What would it mean for us to "humble ourselves before God" in our group meetings? Do you think we get anywhere close to doing this in our times together?
- Verses 7-10 offer a set of commands which is perhaps surprising; after all, aren't we meant to be a people characterised by joy? Why the call to mourning? Is there a place for such lament in the church today? If so, how should it be expressed?
- Consider the quote above in the light of verses 11 and 12. Basically, he is saying that if we *really* understood what God had done for us we would no longer have any desire to be judgemental towards others. How do you respond to this thought?

### Pray Together

Unless we become monks or nuns and remove ourselves from all contact with the outside world, there is always going to be a pressure on us to become friends with the world. Get into twos or threes and talk a little about your own situation at home, work or wherever. Where are the pressures the strongest for each of you? Take some time to pray for each other, that you would each be able to resist the devil and submit yourselves to God, whatever that means in practical terms in your own situation.

## Meditations

A few things to consider before your group discussion.

### **Read James 4-4-5**

In what areas of life are you most tempted to become a “friend of the world”? Do you share James’s black and white view of what this could mean to your relationship with God or do you find ways of excusing yourself and living with compromise? Ask God to speak to you about any ways in which you are choosing to be a friend of the world.

### **Read James 4:5 and Exodus 34:14**

In the last study we looked at human envy, which is almost always sinful, and yet here James describes God as intensely envious! God’s jealousy is a constant theme of the Bible, whenever people give the worship or honour that should rightly be His to anyone or anything else. How do you respond to the idea that the Holy Spirit who lives in you is an intensely envious Spirit? Does it change your perception of God’s love for you in any way? Spend a few minutes talking to God about this.

### **Read James 4:6-7**

In the last study we considered what it means to be submissive to others, now James calls us to be submissive to God. To what extent would you describe your relationship with God as “submissive”? Do you find this easier or harder than being submissive to others?

### **Read James 4:7**

It is often said that there are two equal and opposite errors that we can slip into with regards to the devil. One is to give him too much credit and see demons everywhere, the other is to forget how real he is and

to become complacent towards him. Which of these errors do you tend towards more? Are you aware of areas in your life where you need to be actively resisting the devil (or his minions)? How are you going about this? Are there ways in which you could ask others in your group to support you in this resistance?

### **Read James 4:8-10**

These verses are like a sandwich. The filling is a call to full and genuine repentance over our sins, and the bread contains two beautiful promises about how the Lord will treat those who do repent. Meditate for a while on those two promises. No matter how far you may have wandered from the Lord, the moment you genuinely desire to come near to Him He *will* draw near to you. No matter the depths of your sin, if you humble yourself in repentance He *will* lift you up. Respond to Him in prayer or praise.

### **Read James 4:11-12 and Matthew 7:1-5**

Here James returns to one of his favourite topics: the way we speak about and even think about one another. “Judging” someone, in this context, means more than just recognising that someone has done something wrong – we are never called to be blind to sin, our own or that of others. It refers to an attitude of heart which looks at the wrongdoing of others and either writes those people off or considers them to be inferior to ourselves. Ask God to search your thoughts and show you if you harbour that kind of attitude towards anyone.