

# A 4-year-old's theology

James 4:1-3

o7.12.o9

We exist for God. God does not exist for us.

We exist for God's purposes. He does not exist for our purposes.

We exist for God's glory, and not our own.

A couple of weeks ago, on Father's Day, my family had planned an afternoon meal with the 4 of us after church. It was a celebration in honor of dad. I got the red "You are special today" plate, my wife made one of my some of my favorite things, and she and the kids took turns sharing "what we love about daddy."

- Kate said wonderful things that were too generous and blessed me immensely
- Isaiah (my eight year old) said really cool and meaningful things
- Then, my four year old, Daisy Love...
  - Four year olds just see the world (and other people) a certain way:
    - "I love daddy because:
      - He buys *me* toys
      - He gives *me* presents
      - He takes *me* on bike rides

A completely egocentric perspective

- I love daddy because of what he does *for me*
  - totally self-centered
- Typical (developmentally normal) for a four year old

When it comes to God—many of us are 4-year-olds.

- We love God because...
  - He gives us this
  - He provides for us that
  - He is taking us there
  
- I love God because of what he does *for me*
- A 4-year-old's theology

This is not what Jesus meant when encouraging us to "receive the kingdom of God like a child"<sup>1</sup> (or, as it is popularly translated: *have childlike faith*)

But this is how many of us relate to God

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 19:14; Mk 10:15; Lk 18:17

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There are certain ways to discern what a person's theology (understanding of God) is

- One way is their prayer life

Many Christians are, in fact, **practical atheists**:

- They would never claim this of course
- This is not their *confessed theology*
- But it is their *practiced theology*—they are practical atheists (God does not exist)
  - When it comes to daily (practical) living—God is not in the equation
  - Our prayer lives reveal this

Then there is the other end of the spectrum

Many Christians are **practical 4-year-olds**

- Instead of being in danger of atheism, we are in danger of idolatry
  - Self-idolatry
  - We act as though God exists for us
  - Our prayer lives reveal this
  - We have a four year old's theology

James 4:1-3 (NLT)

**1** What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

**2** You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. **Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.**

**3** And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

Here is a revealing passage

- Verse 1 reveals why we have so many conflicts with others
- Verse 2<sup>a-b</sup> reveals why we act out in certain ways
- Verse 2<sup>c</sup> reveals **practical atheism**
- Verse 3 reveals a major hindrance to effective prayer

What has gone wrong?

The word translated *evil desires* here in verse 1 and pleasure in verse 3

- Is the Greek word ἡδονή
  - *pleasure, enjoyment*; in the NT in a bad sense, as indulgence and lack of control of natural appetites (*sensual*) *pleasure, passion, lust*<sup>2</sup>
- It is where we get our word **hedonism** (which we understand)
  - As a **noun** it means: the pursuit of pleasure; sensual self-indulgence<sup>3</sup>
  - It is also an **ethical theory** that says pleasure (in the sense of satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of life.<sup>4</sup>
    - It sees pleasure as man's chief end

But pleasure is not man's chief end

The Christian understanding is that “**man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.**”<sup>5</sup>

The disconnect is that when we live for our own pleasures and the pursuit of them, we end up miserable

- They don't last
- They are illusive
  - **They don't bring ultimate life**

Matthew 16:26

**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**

The truth is that only God satisfies and brings ultimate life—through Jesus

The problem with the audience James was addressing is often ours as well:

- They either forgot to go to God to meet their needs (4:2)
- or they tried to use God as a celestial shopping center for worldly goods (4:3).
  - **They either forgot the source or tried to manipulate the source.**<sup>6</sup>

They are not seeking God's will or God's wisdom, but their will: ‘**God bless my plans.**’

- Their motive is their desires or *pleasures*.
- Their relationship with God is based on what He gives them
- God's goal is not to give human beings what their own impulses demand;
  - **His goal is that human beings will learn to love what he loves.**

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<sup>2</sup>Timothy. Friberg, Barbara. Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 189.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford American Dictionary

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 1

<sup>6</sup>Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary, The Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 683.

- It is not that God does not want people to have pleasure,
  - but that he wants to train them to take pleasure in what he knows is truly good.<sup>7</sup>
  - As with Christ, crucifixion comes before resurrection for God's people
    - Galatians 5:24  
Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Prayers are often not answered *because you ask wrongly/amiss*.

- Our motives are all wrong
- We want our will, our way, our pleasure—not God's or simply God for that matter
- This is the exact opposite of
- 1 John 5:14  
This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

James 4:2<sup>c</sup>-3 (NASB)

You do not have because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, so that you may **spend** it on your pleasures.

**spend** it on your pleasures.

- The sense is not lay out expense upon your pleasures, but spend in the exercise of; under the dominion of your pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

Your pursuit of pleasure is ruling you instead of your pursuit of God

- You see God as a means to your ends
- A 4-year-old's theology
  - I love God because...
    - "Feed me, take me, buy me"

## We were created for God's glory

Isaiah 43:7

Everyone who is called by My name,  
And whom I have **created for My glory**,  
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

## We are predestined for God's glory

Ephesians 1:11-14

11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ **would be to the praise of His glory**.

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, **to the praise of His glory**.

<sup>7</sup>D. A. Carson, New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Jas 4:1.

<sup>8</sup>Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002), 1:755.

## **We are saved for God's glory**

Isaiah 43:25

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions **for My own sake**, and I will not remember your sins.

All that is left it to **live for God's glory, God's pleasure**

1 Corinthians 6:20 and 10:31

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Revelation 4:11

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, **and for thy pleasure they are and were created.**

All that is lefts it to **live for God's glory, God's pleasure**

And a good place to start is where we are at

- Asking Jesus to teach us how to pray

Moving from "Feed me, take me, buy me"

- To "**nevertheless, not my will be done, but thine will be done**"
- From 4-year-old prayers to Gethsemane prayers

The 4-year-old prayers don't necessarily stop all together, but they do begin to transition...

Psalms 86:1-12

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