

# So You Say You Want Revival

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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**Crossroads Ministries**  
301 S. 8th Street  
Opelika, Alabama 36801

**Website:** [www.fbcopelika.com](http://www.fbcopelika.com)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers)

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of James 4. If you haven't been a part of our Bible reading plan, the book of James is toward the end of your New Testament and today we're going to talk about a word and a concept that you might naturally expect to hear in this environment but maybe not from this particular perspective. We're going to talk about revival.

Now in a "worship service" setting, whether you're online with us or here in person, when we hear the word revival we think of the days of the sawdust trail and the great tents and the D. L. Moody's and the Billy Sunday's and Billy Graham's and such, but the word revival means more than just religious fervor, it means more than just a spiritual renewal, in fact, by just a very simplistic but strict definition from what we know as the dictionary, revival means "to improve the conditions around you; to improve the thing that you are interested in," and based on that definition, you and I today, we live in a culture and we live in a community where everybody is crying for revival, everybody wants the conditions to be improved, everybody wants what they're interested to be better, in fact, we're so interested in revival we passionately promote it on social media, we march about it in the streets, and we show up by the hundreds of millions to vote our opinion on that which would improve the conditions of our communities and our culture. You see, when we hear the word revival, we oftentimes just relegate it to an environment such as this but it's a much bigger term and a much bigger understanding that if we're going to experience revival, if we're going to experience improvement, it's not that which just stays within these walls but it rolls over into our communities and our culture.

So today in James 4, we're going to talk about what does it mean to truly experience revival, what does it mean to have the conditions improved that are around us. We're not going to listen to the opinion of the pundits, we're not going to hear what the latest poll says, we're going to find out what does God say about improving the conditions around us, what does God say about improving the environment that we walk in each and every day, and to do this we're going to look at three very particular things. First, we're going to look at the questions that God addresses as far as that which needs to be improved; secondly, we're going to look at what are the answers he gives for these questions; and finally, there must be a price to pay, what is the price we must pay to see the conditions

improved around us based on what God says the questions that must be addressed and the answers that must be given.

James 4, beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. 4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. 5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? 6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

In this passage of Scripture it shares with us the problems of not just their specific environment but ours as well, and God's answer on how to address them.

So what are the questions that is brought up? Look in verse 1, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" You see, the Lord lays out the things that we're dealing with, that you and I live among people, we live in communities and cultures that are always at war with one another. Now sometimes those wars use actual physical retaliation devices and sometimes we would agree it is a war of the words, but yet even this week we celebrated rightfully so what we know as Veteran's Day. We celebrated those men and women who have served to protect us physically as a sovereign nation, and yet the reason that we celebrate it on the day that we celebrate it is because that was Armistice Day, that was the day that we signed the treaty of World War I. Well, they didn't call it World War I back then, they called it The War to End All Wars, in fact, they even established a very powerful entity known as the League of Nations, "We're not gonna let this happen again. No longer are everybody on planet earth gonna be fighting each other, we're gonna have peace with each other, we're gonna get along, we're gonna be fellow brothers of humanity." It took 20 years for Nazi Germany to become the power that they became. We declared, "We got this. We're gonna have peace." Twenty years later what we now know as World War II broke out. That lasted for an extended period of time, as you well know, and in 1948 at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, California, they said, "Okay, we need 2.0 here. We're now gonna have the United Nations and we're gonna be so united that on our building in New York City we're gonna put a quote from the Bible from the prophet Isaiah, 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares.'" And yet since that fateful day in 1948, both locally and internationally there have been over 250 wars that have been fought.

We as a humanity, we fight each other, we're at war with each other at all times and sometimes it is technical warfare but can we agree with the invention of what we know as social media, there are some weapons that are worse than the weapons of warfare, it's called your tongue. If you don't believe me, flip over two pages to chapter 2. It says, "Oh, we take the largest beast and we bridle them, we take the largest ship, we put a small rudder on them, but the mouth, even the depths and fires of hell cannot contain." I don't know about you but I grew up hearing this little statement, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me." You know whoever came up with that obviously didn't have anybody they interacted with because oftentimes the words people say can leave scars worse than even a physical repercussion.

We are a people at war with each other. We have been battling each other since Cain and Abel on the backside of the garden of Eden and we're continuing with it this day. That is unfortunately what we do as humanity, but we have to address why do we do it? Well, notice what it says here in verse 2, it says, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war." Why is it that we're always at each other? Why is it that we're always competing for the ground, for the money, for the recognition, for whatever it may be? Because we are lustful people and much like the word revival, let's look at that in a bigger scope. To lust after something is to desire it, to want it more than anything else. We have those among us and ourselves, we desire power, we desire authority, we desire financial security. In fact, I'm reminded of Rockefeller years ago, the original Rockefeller. They asked him, they said, "How much money is enough?" He said, "Just a little bit more." The same can be said for power, right? As soon as we say, "Oh, as long as this treaty is signed and we have this much land, we'll be done." Oh, we want a little more dirt, do we not? We want a little more authority. We want a little more control. We want a little. That's one of the problems, is once we as humanity begin to give others or we ourselves take over something, we're never satisfied with that which we possess. We always want a little more money. We always want a little more control. We always want a little more power. We always want a little more of "fill in the blank."

Why do we war with each other? Because we lust after the things that feed our flesh. Why do we say what we say on social media? Because we want to be number 1. Why do we belittle people who have differing opinions with us? Because we want to be in charge. We want to control the playground of our lives, do we not? In fact, we discover that we fight among each other not just sovereign state against sovereign state but person against person, group against group, entity against entity because at the end of the day we may have ideals, we may have philosophies, we may have adages and slogans, but at the end of the day humanity has a problem: we want to be in control, we want to be in charge, we want to call the shots.

So many years after the United Nations, thousands of years after Cain and Abel, we're still fighting wars, we're still at each other's throat, we can't yet say there's peace, and nobody is singing Kumbayah. So how do we fix it? How do we solve this problem, these questions that arise about the fighting among us? Notice what it says at the end of verse 2 and 3, you have not Now not enough money, not enough resources, not enough power.

You have not peace is what he's saying because you ask not. You ask and you receive not because you ask amiss that you may consume it upon your own lusts. Now let me address the how and to.

1. We have not because we ask not. When is the last time you saw a major player in the world when there is global conflict saying, "We're just gonna pause for 24 hours and I want everybody to fast and pray"? You see, we love to get this opinion and that opinion and this poll and this idea, but what the Lord is saying is, "If you want peace and if you want people to quit fighting each other, you've got to put me in the middle." The problem is we're the church at Laodicea. If you haven't read that passage in Revelation 3, oh, they're having church but Jesus is on the outside saying, "Ah, excuse me, I thought this was supposed to be about me?" And we fight among each other and we fight on a global society because we want to consume it on our lusts and not allow God to be in control because as you're about to see, when you put God in control, I've got news for you, that means you're not. When you put God in the middle, then it's not your opinion or your position that is center, it is what he says.

Now I understand that today this is the proverbial preaching to the choir. Here we are in person and online and I know there's many of you that say, "Well, with all the conflict that's going on in the world, with all the disagreement with everybody on edge with everybody else, everybody having tension both corporately and individually, I have prayed about it and I just don't see it getting any better." You see, here's where I want to make an interesting observation. I don't know if you have noticed but when it comes to social media and public platforms like that, I don't say a whole lot but I do listen. In fact, one of the things that people are surprised to find out about me because of my personality and such, is I'm a pretty good listener. I see and I watch and I observe. I'm that person if we can go there, I'm the one at the corner in the mall wearing the sunglasses watching what y'all are doing. I like to people watch. I like to people watch.

Allow me to share something I have observed in recent days, and I'm gonna go the route, I'm not going the political route, it's a political illustration, this is a prayer route. Four years ago we had half of America after a national election saying, "God answered our prayers." A few days ago we got half of America saying, "God answered our prayers." Do you find it interesting that we've got tens of millions of people both claiming God answered their prayer on two completely different things and, guys, it's called the law of non-contradiction. You cannot have both things that are completely in opposition to each other be right, and yet both sides are saying, "Oh, God answered our prayer. Oh, we need to pray hard." Everybody's crying. What does he say? "Oh, you pray but you're not praying right. You're praying amiss." You're praying, listen, what has he said? "You're praying for more power. You're praying for more authority. You're praying for more finances. You're praying for more comfort. You're praying for this. You're praying for that." I've got news for you: when's the last time when it comes to all the tension in the world you just said, "God, I want you to be in control and you be the center of all attention no matter how that impacts or affects me"?

You see, that's the tough pill to swallow because I would say most of us today, we say, "Oh, we're praying folk. We pray." Yeah, but do we pray amiss? Do we pray just to please our personal agendas? Do we pray that God will bless our personal desires or do we truly do as he taught us, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? You see, when Jesus taught us to pray, he said, "You don't pray for what you want, you pray for what honors the Lord." And we're still fighting, we're still arguing, but yet everybody says, "Oh, I want things to improve. I want things to be better."

Okay, so how does God answer this predicament? Notice what it says in verse 4. It's about to become real politically incorrect, folks. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses," how's that for positive preaching? How's that for your best life now? The Lord says, "You want to know what the problem is? You want to know what the answer to the problem is? You've cheated on me." That's what God says. He calls us adulterers and adulteresses. Why? Because we have made friends with the world. We have decided we want to receive what the world is promising. We want their accolades. We want their possessions. We want whatever it is that they're selling to us at the moment.

Notice what he calls us: adulterers. That's a strong word, but I want you to think about what it means. You see, when somebody commits adultery on somebody, they've cheated on them and they have received from somebody else that which they should have received from their spouse. Now I don't find it odd at all that in the Old Testament, you know what Israel is called in relationship to the Lord? Israel is called his wife. You know what the church is called to Jesus? His bride. And when we got out in the world and do it the world's way, guess what the Lord is saying? "You're cheating on me."

Now we've been doing this from day 1. Oh, this all started in the garden of Eden. You think about Adam and Eve, the Lord comes, everything's great, everything's wonderful, the tree of life, it couldn't get any better. Ah, but let's go eat of that other tree. Let's go to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What did Adam and Eve do? Essentially they cheated on God. They said, "We'd rather get it somewhere else than from you." What did Cain do with Abel? He cheated on God. He said, "Rather than being in a right relationship with you, God, I want to do it another way." And so he "cheated" on him. The tower of Babel. God said, "Go out." We said, "Nah, we'd rather come together." What did we do? We did it our way, not his way. We "cheated" on him.

Let me make it a little more personal. The day they put Jesus Christ on the cross, humanity had a decision to make: Jesus or Barabbas. We chose a man who walked on water and healed people, we put him to death and we chose the mass murderer to be set free. What did we do? We cheated on God. We would rather have it according to our layout than what he has communicated to us.

What are we? We are adulterers. Why? Why do we do this? Notice what it says in verse 5, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Why is it that we cheat on God? Why is it that we go to the world? Why is it that we don't allow him to be the center of our life? It's because within us is a spirit that craves the things of the flesh. In fact, the Bible says in Ephesians 2 that you and I, we're born

with a propensity and a gravity away from the things of God. We do not come into this world singing, "This is my story, this is my song." We come into this world saying, "Whatever you've got is mine and I want it." We have a propensity against the things of God. There is a spirit within humanity that says, "It's all about me."

Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Well, time out. I'm saved. Years ago, I recognized I had a sin problem. I asked Jesus to save me. This can't be talking about me." Can I tell you what the Apostle Paul said? Romans 7, he said, "Within my flesh dwells nothing good." Nothing. He says, "The things I want to do, I don't do them. The things I don't want to do, I end up doing them." And if the Apostle Paul struggled with sin, I've got news for you: so do we. And what does he say? He said, "There's a spirit, it lusts."

You know, three chapters earlier in chapter 1, beginning in verse 13, the book of James says do not think that when we are tempted to sin that God is behind that. Do you know when sin takes place in our life? It says when lust builds up in our flesh and, listen, it is enticed by the world. The world offers success, the world offers comfort, the world offers whatever it may be, and all of a sudden we crave it, we desire it, we need it, but here's the problem and we addressed this in the first part: no matter how much of that we get, we want just a little bit more.

You see, God makes it very clear the answer to the problem is that we've cheated on him because in our flesh is this desire for the things of the world. So how do we fix it? I love what it says in verse 7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Now we love the second part of that verse, we don't like the first part much. We'd all like the devil to flee. We'd all like him to be out of the equation but when it says, "Submit yourselves to God," let me tell you what we really want to hear, we want to hear, "Commit yourself to God." You see, when you commit to something, you get to control your agenda and your schedule.

Allow me to illustrate. How many of you have signed up in days past for the PTO and decided, "I'm not going to a meeting"? That's commitment. How many of you decided, "I'm gonna be a part of this, or I'm gonna do," whatever it may be and you say, "You know what? I've got something better on my schedule"? You see, commitment means if there's anything that will please your flesh more than what you "signed up for," you choose what you want to do. When you submit to something, you're saying whatever or whomever you submit to, they're in charge and you must do as they say. Now we're making some ground here. If we really want to have peace, if we really want people to get along, not only do we need God in the middle but we need to do whatever he says and not justify our own carnal wishes, not rationalize our own opinions or agendas.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is based on this, it's found in 1 Kings 20. We have a king of Israel who finds himself surrounded by the king of Syria, Ben-hadad, and 32 countries total. Now when you're surrounded by 32 countries and they have chariots and you don't, they have weapons and you don't, can you admit you're in a mess? And so he comes to him and says, "Alright, King, what do you want to do?" I want you to hear what the king of Israel says. He says, "Okay, Ben-hadad, my silver and my gold is yours, my

wife and my children are yours, even the best things that I own, I give them to you. I give myself to you." It's the perfect picture of submission in the Bible.

You say, "Well, I don't know, do I really have this submission thing down?" Let me ask you a question: is your silver and gold God's or is it yours? It's a tough question to answer, isn't it? You see, when we say, "God, I submit to you," then all that we own and all that we possess and all that is the material in our lives we do with as he desires and we don't rationalize or justify to do something contrary to.

How about your wives and your kids? Some of you guys are saying, "Amen to that." That's not what it means. It means your relationships. That means you do relationships the way God orchestrated relationships and you don't justify what your carnal nature wants to be right even when the Bible says that it's wrong.

And how about even the best of things? It's almost as if he said, "Even if I just left anything out, I am yours and all that I have." You see, when we talk about the answer to the question, if we want the wars and the fighting and the tension both on a macro and a micro level to cease, if we want revival, if we want an improvement in things in our community, in our culture, in our families, then guess what? We've got to put God at the center and we've got to do whatever he tells us to do without arguing because guess what? When you submit and surrender, you don't get to make the terms. You don't get to say, "Well, except for this occasion." You see, submitting is a whole lot different than committing.

So what's the price to pay? If we really want people to get along, if we really want revival in our land, if we truly desire for what James 4 is talking about to happen, notice what it says in verse 9, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." What's gotta happen? You and I have got to understand the gravity and the weight of our rebellion and our sin against God.

You know, when we talk about revival, it's hard for us in this context not to talk about it from a spiritual perspective. Let me take you back to the month of July, 1741. It's probably the event that spurred what you and I know as the First Great Awakening. There was a man by the name of Jonathan Edwards, preached a sermon that most of us read in English class called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." That day he preached that sermon like he had preached sermons in the past, and he came expecting what he had seen in the past, nothing. In fact, in those churches in those days, the sermons were long, they were drawn out, they were boring, they purposely made the pews as uncomfortable as possible so people would stay awake. I mean, it was bad, folks. It was dry. He began to preach that message out of Deuteronomy talking about how we have violated God's principles, we have transgressed his standards for life. There were about 250 people in that room but on that day, mostly adults because of the context, about 200 folks toward the end of the message began just to weep. They began to cry. They began to moan not because the sermon was bad but because they realized their own condition before God. Ladies and gentlemen, we're never going to see improvement in what's happening around

us until we, the people of God, take seriously our own sin condition and repent thereof. How can we expect those outside of here to be right with God if we are not ourselves?

Turn the joy into mourning. Why do we need to do this? Look at the last statement in verse 10, "the Lord, he shall lift you up." You see, one of the problems is here we are in Western civilization and because of where I grew up, we have a statement there that I know has gone to the east of the Mississippi as well, we love to pride ourselves that we are people who pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, are we not? "God, I got this." Let's see how that works out for you. And so what does he say? He says, "Here's how you know that the joy is turned into mourning, the laughter is turned into tears, when you say, 'Lord, I need you to lift me up.'" Essentially you realize that you're at the bottom of the barrel. Essentially you realize that no amount of your effort and your energy can solve this.

So the question about a lack of peace and getting along and that which needs to be improved is we need to pray and not pray amiss, we need to put God at the center. The answer that God gives is we need to submit to him, we need to do it his way and not according to our own rationalization and our justification. But how do we pay this price? How do we turn joy into mourning? How do we turn laughter into weeping? How do we allow him to be lifted up instead of ourselves? Notice what it says in verse 10, "Humble yourself."

Recent days, one of country music's most well-known artists passed away, a guy by the name of Mac Davis. Some of you may be familiar with one of his best-selling songs, "It's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way. Lord, I get up and I look in the mirror and I get better looking each day." Humble. Humility. It's tough, isn't it? In fact, if somebody tells you they're humble, they're not because humility is lowering yourself so that he might be lifted up.

Let me remind you of what John the Baptist said in John 3, "He must increase and I must decrease." You see, when we talk about humility and we talk about allowing ourselves to be in a position of humbleness, it literally means to lower ourselves, to allow others, in this case the Lord, to be lifted up among us. You say, "How do we do this?" Allow me to illustrate with one of my favorite pastors and preachers of days gone by. As a young man, he was good in many sports but particularly football, but the Lord had called him into ministry and he and his wife, this was years ago, they found themselves at Bible college, they found themselves in very meager means, they found themselves barely able to get along with the financial things of life, and yet he wasn't satisfied, the fruit wasn't being born, he just did not sense that what was happening not only in the local church but his own life was honoring to the Lord. And so he did what he knew to do, he went out to a football field and he cried out to God. Now I don't know if you've ever had one of these moments, I call them Job moments, where you ever just go out and, I mean, you just let God have it. Now if you've never done that, it's very therapeutic but it's very humbling because when you get done it's like chapter 38 in the book of Job, God says, "Now, son, are you done?" And I mean, he let God have it. "Look what I've given up for you. Look what I've done for you. Look how I've served you. Look at all this and what do I get in



return?" Does that sound like a conversation you've had with God anytime in your life? He said that in the middle of that football field in the middle of the night the Lord said, "Son, get lower. Get lower." He said, "Okay." So he got on his knees. He said, "God, is this low enough for you? I mean, come on, is this enough?" He said he heard God say, "Get lower. Get lower." So he lie prostrate right there on the 50 yard line of the football field. I mean, he's spread-eagle on all fours. He says, "God, is this low enough for you? Come on, I can't go any lower." He said he heard God say, "Get lower. Get lower." He said, "God, I can't get any lower." He said he heard God say, "Get lower. Get lower." And he says in his memoirs, he said, "The only thing I could think to do is I reached out and I dug a hole in the dirt and I stuck my nose in it." And he said he heard God say, "That's low enough." Folks, that's humility where we're so low in the sight of God that our nose is below ground level.

Why do we have wars and fighting? Why do we have animosity? Why do we have people who can't get along? 1. We don't put God in the middle. 2. If we do, we rationalize our behavior instead of his. 3. We want the credit. We want the accolades. We want the promotion. Until you and I are willing to make it all about Jesus and not about us, don't expect on earth peace. Don't expect people to get along. Don't expect there to be "Kumbayah." We're gonna still have fighting. We're still gonna have wars and we're not gonna have revival. You see, revival and improvement of things doesn't happen just because two groups get together in the room and talk about it. It doesn't happen just because we sign a treaty or a policy. It happens when the people of God humble themselves and say, "God, it doesn't matter what I want or what I think, it's what do you want and what do you think."