

Steps for Spiritual Growth

James 4:1-10 (NIV)

^(4:1) What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ⁽²⁾ You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ⁽³⁾ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁽⁴⁾ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁽⁵⁾ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁽⁶⁾ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁽⁷⁾ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁽⁸⁾ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁽⁹⁾ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

1. What do families and friends commonly fight about?
2. What are the battles going on inside a person? (4:1-2)
3. What is the root cause of fights and quarrels between people? (4:1-3)

To grow alone spiritual lines, we must not be engaged in fighting other people. On page 84, of the Big Book, we read, "This thought brings us to *Step Ten*, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code. And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone, even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame."

On page 103 of the Big Book, we read, "Some day we hope that Alcoholics Anonymous will help the public to a better realization of the gravity of the alcoholic problem, but we shall be of little use if our attitude is one of bitterness or hostility. Drinkers will not stand for it. After all, our problems were of our own making. Bottles were only a symbol. Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. We have to!"

4. Why don't people have what they want? (4:2)
5. What do most people think God wants from them?
6. Why doesn't God give some people what they ask for? (4:3)

When we pray, we must have the right motives. In the Big Book, page 87, we read, "We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only. We may ask for ourselves, however, if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that and it doesn't work. You can easily see why."

7. What does friendship with the world do to our relationship with God? (4:4)
8. How has your belief about what God wants from you changed over the years?

9. Whom does God oppose and favor? (4:6)
10. How does pride show up in our work? home? church? community?
11. Why does God oppose people who are proud?
12. What is the difference between pride and a sense of accomplishment?
13. How can we reduce or remove the pride from our lives?

If we are to improve our conscious contact with God, pride must go. In the Big Book, page 12, we read, "It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would! Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.

And on page 116, we read, "We have elsewhere remarked how much better life is when lived on a spiritual plane. If God can solve the age-old riddle of alcoholism, He can solve your problems too. We wives found that, like everybody else, we were afflicted with pride, self-pity, vanity and all the things which go to make up the self-centered person; and we were not above selfishness or dishonesty. As our husbands began to apply spiritual principles in their lives, we began to see the desirability of doing so too."

14. When does God give us grace? (4:6)
15. How did James describe the way we should come to God? (4:7-10)

In most AA meetings, we begin with the "Serenity Prayer". It says, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. (here is the rest of the prayer) Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen." Reinhold Niebuhr

Step 3 calls for a surrender of our wills and lives to God. It reads, "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

16. Why do we hesitate to give our lives to God?
17. What sins of action and attitude do you need to confess to God today?
18. How does the devil react when a person resists him? (4:7)
19. In what situations do you need to resist the devil this week?
20. What does God do to us when we have an attitude of humility before Him? (4:10)

Humility is necessary if we are to walk with God. In the Big Book, page 12-13, we read, "The real significance of my experience in the Cathedral burst upon me. For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted God. There had been a humble willingness to have Him with me--and He came. But soon the sense of His presence had been blotted out by worldly clamors, mostly those within myself. And so it had been ever since. How blind I had been."