

## WOMEN OF WISDOM January 2017

Jan. 26 (Australia Day—**NO gathering**)

*Guided “reflection/talk” by Jo Kadlecek-Gilbert*

**James 4 (NIV)** *Read the following chapter aloud so that you go slowly over the verses:*

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so 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 means enmity against God? Therefore, 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 he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor 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.

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

13 Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

*Before you read on, ask yourself: what jumped out at you in the above chapter? Ask God to guide you as you reflect with Jo on His word in the following “talk” on paper.*

*Sing a worship song and quiet your heart to hear from our Lord.*

### **James 4: “The Lure, The Refuge and The Day”**

#### **Introduction:**

As most of you know, the Sydney Harbor Bridge on New Year's Eve in 1999 included the word ETERNITY. Each night for weeks before entering the historic year of 2000, the Bridge would light up from one side to another with that simply but powerful word, ETERNITY.

Chris and I didn't live in Australia then but we were visiting his family during that time. And we happened to be in Sydney when we saw the ETERNITY Bridge. I was intrigued and set out to learn the story behind it:

In the early 1930s until the mid 1960s, people walking throughout Sydney would often come across a strange little piece of ‘graffiti’ on the sidewalks. Written in white or yellow chalk and in perfect copperplate script on streets across the city, people would read the word, ‘Eternity.’ At first, officials assumed the chalk message was the work of a few thugs. But because it never appeared on anything but

public footpaths and always in the same perfect copperplate script, they eventually deduced only one person was responsible for the writings.

For years, no one actually saw the messenger scribbling the word on the sidewalks but around every corner ETERNITY greeted them. Whether hurrying to work or on their way home, people would step on the word, glancing quickly at it as they moved on their way. Speculation and fascination fueled the urban legend and many locals claimed responsibility because of the public attention they would receive. But inevitably the deceivers were proved wrong, and the mystery author remained.

Some 25 years after the first ETERNITY appeared on the sidewalk, the reverend of a small Baptist church wandered in early one morning to his parish. He saw a slight gray haired man, no taller than 5'3", bending over, chalk in hand, and recognized him as his church janitor.

"Why, Arthur," said the minister, "are you Mr. Eternity?"

Startled that he'd been caught, Arthur looked up at his pastor and answered, "Guilty, your honor."

The local newspaper found out and sent a reporter to the minister who identified the true author of Eternity. The puzzle had been solved, though Arthur Stace kept writing his word, probably over half a million times, and trying hard to avoid getting caught. He'd rise early in the morning, before the city crowds would come so as not to be seen; he would pray and then go where he believed God had directed him, writing the word every hundred yards or so on the pavement. He saw his mission as evangelistic but never wanted any publicity. In fact, he feared it.

Then in 1967—two years before Arthur would die at the age of 83—another reporter tracked him down and learned more of his story: Arthur had grown up in a cruel poverty, landed in jail as a teenager and was shipped off to France as a soldier during World War I. He returned to Sydney an alcoholic, partially blind, and without a job. He was desperate, hungry and especially, hopeless. So when he heard a Baptist church was serving meals, he went.

There, he heard a preacher talk about eternity. He told the reporter that when he left the church, that single word—ETERNITY—kept ringing in his brain. He broke down and sobbed. And from that point, his life changed radically. He said he felt,

*"a powerful call from the Lord to write 'Eternity'. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket, and I bent down right there and wrote it. I've been writing it at least 50 times a day ever since, and that's 30 years ago. The funny thing is that before I wrote it I could hardly write my own name. I had no schooling and I couldn't have spelled 'Eternity' for a hundred quid. But it came out smoothly, in a beautiful copperplate script. I couldn't understand it, and I still can't. I've tried and tried, but 'Eternity' is the only word that comes out in copperplate. I think Eternity gets the message across, makes people stop and think."*

It certainly did make people stop and think, so much so that his word—and his story—stayed in the minds of local Aussies; a statue was erected in Arthur's honor, a documentary film made on his life, numerous poems written about his 'chalk' ministry, and even the National Museum of Australia in Canberra named one of its galleries, the Eternity Gallery, chronicling Arthur's life and chalk ministry.

It was natural, then, for Ignatius Jones, the key producer of Sydney's 2000 New Year's Eve celebration, to honor his legacy. Jones was impressed that Arthur had come back from the war so despairing and yet somehow able to 'reinvent' himself by bringing joy and meaning into people's lives. Not only did the word symbolize the mystery and magic of the city, but Jones called it the ideal word for New Year's Eve: *"On this night of fellowship and good cheer, it shouldn't just be about one night. The word says that this celebration should be eternal in human life."*

And so at the end of one century, in a daunting moment of modern history, God's reminder of unending life burst surprisingly across a beautiful bridge to usher in a new millennia. All because of an unlikely messenger whose life had been changed by a solitary encounter many years before.

#### **The Wisdom of James 4**

My husband took a photograph that night we saw Eternity light up the Sydney Harbor Bridge. It hangs now on our living room wall and reminds me daily not only of a wonderful trip but of the faithful witness of a broken man whose love for Jesus had literally been written across the city where he lived. I

believe his testimony continued around the world when it was televised on New Year's Eve and continues still, whenever someone looks at that photo in our living room or visits the Eternity Gallery in Canberra, because it reveals the story of a desperately hungry alcoholic who discovered something he never thought possible: hope. And who then could not stop telling others!

As we've heard so far from Di, Adele and Ruth during our WOW gatherings this month, James, too, had a message to tell, a compelling, wise word of compassionate encouragement to his Christian sisters and brothers spread across the Middle East—and beyond. He encouraged them to count it all joy when they experienced suffering, to remember the integrity of the Gospel in their lives, and to speak well of others as we reflect Christ's grace and hope to others. We are to seek the wisdom of above, and to walk the walk because Christ took on our suffering of sin when He went to the cross for each of us.

Now we come to this fourth chapter of James' letter and we see the same themes reinforced. Like Arthur Stace, James was concerned about the *world's impact and lure*, and like Arthur, he recognized true freedom and *refuge* could be found only in the God of the Bible. When that happens, as it did for Arthur, *each day becomes a gift* to be used for His purposes in pointing others to the Eternal life Jesus offers!

So let's divide James 4 into three sections: **1. The Lure of the World, 2. The Refuge of God, and 3. The Gift of Today.**

#### **The Lure of The World: James 4:1-4**

James is troubled by the worldliness that has crept into his fellow believers' lives together. Their "selfish ambition" (from James 3:15) has caused fights and quarrels and deceptive lifestyles. So James challenges the people—actually, chastises them—that they don't have the things they want because they're asking for the wrong reasons—themselves! He even gets so bold as to call them "*adulterous people*", as if anything in the world could fill the hole in their hearts for meaning and purpose.

That's exactly what Arthur did when he came back from the war, isn't it? He was so broken he turned to alcohol to medicate his pain, became homeless and angry and in James' language, became a "friend of the world" but consequently an enemy of God. Peace and joy and hope were foreign to him; instead, he believed the easy and seductive things of the world could satisfy him.

Certainly, we live in an age and a culture where many around us—and we ourselves—seek everything BUT God to provide meaning and purpose. We think better holidays, or bigger homes and higher positions in work can bring us joy or meaning. And so we're lured easily by the world's empty promises, the things that all fade away like the grass (James 1:11). And each step we take on this slippery slope produces only quarrels and fights, conflicts, greed and ultimately chaos and evil. We want more and more and more for ourselves because the lure sometimes feels too great, too hard to resist, that we give in.

And it is too hard to resist! That is exactly why we need the very thing Arthur discovered in that church when he thought he was getting a meal and instead discovered the eternal refuge of God Almighty! He understood in that moment that he could not save himself from his despair and hopelessness, nor could he break the friendship he'd made with the world on his own strength or determination. He suddenly realized that the lure of the world was indeed enticing and strong and sometimes too "sexy" to ignore. But the Light of Truth came to Arthur—as it does to us—and he realized that the world pales in comparison to the amazing life and refuge God provides for us in the Person of Jesus, through His work on the cross and as he rose from the dead to offer all the Arthurs of the world new life in His Resurrection.

#### **The Refuge of God: James 4:5-12**

James says that God, "jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us." We are made to worship Him, to find our all our longings and desires fulfilled ONLY in Him. We are wired to worship God our Maker, Christ our King through the power of His Holy Spirit. And the amazing promise that James gives us next is that in spite of our silly pride, in spite of thinking we can save ourselves if we just have enough determination, He "gives us more grace." That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

We do not want to be an enemy of God, but rather we are called to be Friends of God, as Abraham was, and as Christ called His disciples friends in John 15:15. And friendship with God means

we live in His grace, we submit ourselves to Him, daily, drawing near to Him as our refuge. As we do, two things happen: 1. we learn to resist the devil and the lure of the world, because 2. God draws near to US! We mourn the things of this world, the false idols and arrogance and greed we see around us, and we weep for others who have not yet come into this place of Refuge with Christ.

As Arthur received Christ's deliverance, he was also given a whole new role—not to speak evil against his new brothers or to judge them—because he now knew personally the Great Judge and Lawgiver, God Almighty. Instead, he was given the new task of pointing others to Grace, through his simple but faithful ministry of writing ETERNITY around the streets of his home, to remind people that one day they'd meet their Judge and Maker, and so . . .

Because the Son of God resisted the devil in the wilderness (Luke 4) and at the end of His life, He could willingly endure the suffering of the cross, to take on the stain of our sins so that we could purify our hearts (as James writes in 4:8) in His new life. That humble act of Christ's invites us as well to admit we're weak and need a Savior. When we—like Arthur—are captivated by the love of Christ, we're given a new reason each day to live in that love! We don't serve others or clean up our lives first to get to God; no, we come as we are broken, knowing His grace meets our deepest longings,. His eternal work in the Cross and Resurrection changes everything. From there, we long to express His love in service to others.

### **The Gift of Today: James 4:13-16**

Such newness of life sent Arthur all over Sydney—and the legacy of his faithfulness came on the Sydney Harbor Bridge and continues to this day. But that happened because each day he got up and said, “Lord, where shall I go today?”

This final section of James 4 reminds us of the great gift we have *each day* to walk with Him, to start over in His forgiveness, to seek His guidance, and to ask where and how He might want to use us in loving others. Sure, we can make our plans, i.e., “this year I’m going to Europe” or “next week I’ll start that project”, and plans and goals *are* good. BUT James tells us that wisdom starts when we realize God is behind every step, every plan, every goal and every desire, when we realize our life is but a mist that “appears for a time and then vanishes.” So, we have the amazingly miraculous privilege of saying, “IF the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

I have always loved the verse from Psalm 37:4 that says, “Take delight in the Lord and he’ll give you the desires of your heart.” Sometimes folks can misinterpret that by emphasizing the second half more than the first. Meaning, if we just pray enough, we’ll get that new car, or fancier house. Obviously, that’s not what the psalmist means, and though I do believe the verse implies that the more we make God our refuge, delighting in His character and grace, the more we’ll see Him meet our needs.

But I also wonder if the verse could be interpreted like this: that *as* we delight in Jesus, He will literally give to us, or *birth* in us HIS desires. He’ll change us more and more into His image. So that, like the old hymn says, *the things of this world will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!*

So let’s delight today in this gift called *today*, in His presence, together. Let’s pray for opportunities to do the right thing to—and for—others, to serve our region with such extravagant love, unity and sacrifice that all of the Sunshine Coast will be glad our church is here!

And may we not ‘*live Christianly*’ out of guilt, or to look like good religious people. Instead, may God genuinely help us to love others, and to pursue justice BECAUSE *we know that we know that we know* Christ first loved us and took the injustice on the cross for our sake.

This day, this week, this month and this year, may the Lord lead us to write ETERNITY across each opportunity we’re given as faithful friends of God!

### **Reflection:**

1. Which part of James 4 most resonates with you right now?
2. What specific *lures of the world* do you struggle to resist? Confess them now to Christ and ask for His strength and freedom.
3. What does it mean for you to see God as your refuge? (Think about that word *refuge* for a bit.)
4. How are you sensing God’s leading you this year? What would it look like for you and for our community to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live or do this or that”?