

HOW TO AVOID CONFLICTS

James 4:1-10

Good morning! We're on part 4 of our series on "Real Faith in the Real World." Today, we're looking at what James has to say on "How to Avoid Conflicts". As you all know, we're all living in a real world with real people with real problems. Problems with others and problems within ourselves. This world is imperfect and it's inevitable we'll have conflicts. There's conflict in marriage, there's conflict between parents and children, between friends, among officemates, in the government and among countries. But it's possible to avoid conflicts. Do you know that? It's possible according to James. And James learned this from his half-brother the Lord Jesus. In James 4:1-10, James talks about how to avoid conflicts by giving us both the causes and the cures -- the reason for argument and the remedy. Let me read these verses and please follow along. (Read James 4:1-10 NLT)

Right now, I want you to think of the person that causes the most conflict in your life. I said think, not look. You're going to get the most out of this message if you think about the person who causes conflict in your life and how to avoid arguments with them.

James doesn't beat around the bush. He gets right to the point. Long before modern psychology came along, he had some profound insights on the cause of conflict. 4:1 "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?" James says that the cause of arguments is conflicting desires. When my wants conflict with your wants the sparks are going to fly.

Conflict starts early in life, little children argue with other kids and even with their parents, right? And until they grow. Now, when you think of marriage, it has built-in conditions for conflict. Think about the things you expected of your spouse before you got married -- how idealistic and unrealistic you were about marriage. You see, all marriages go through three stages: Stage one, happy honeymoon: Stage two, the party's over; Stage three, let's make a deal. At Stage three you have to learn how to handle arguments because they're going to happen. There are going to be conflicting desires. Frustrated feelings cause fights.

What desires? The Bible makes very clear here and other places in Scripture that there are **two basic desires we have that cause conflict.** These desires are legitimate desires unless they're out of control. They are God-given desires. But when you put them above other people, when they become number one in your life, they will cause conflict. What are they?

1. THE DESIRE TO HAVE

We want to have things. We call this materialism. **v. 2 "You want what you don't have ... You are jealous of what others have."** God created things to be used and to enjoy. That's what they're there for. We use things and love people. The problem is when we start loving things. When we start loving things we get the equation backwards. We start loving things and use people -- manipulating them, controlling them, moving them around to get what you want because things become more important in your life.

It's very easy to fall in love with things these days with all the TV commercials. The desire to have becomes number one in your life and that creates conflict. It is not by accident that recent statistics say that almost 41% of all marriages that end in divorce end because of money problems. Things become a battleground. Here in America, we think the constitution says, "Life, liberty and

the purchase of happiness." Someone asked Howard Hughes one time, "How much does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little bit more." The thrill wears off very quickly. We've got to learn to deal with the desire to have. If you decide to base your life on comparing it to other people, you will never be happy no matter how much you get. Just the time you catch up with the Joneses, they refinance. There's always something more.

2. THE DESIRE TO FEEL GOOD.

I want to feel good. I want to be comfortable. I want to have my senses satisfied. v. 3 *"You want only what will give you pleasure"*. It's not wrong to enjoy life. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:17 says that *"God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."* But when pleasure becomes the number one goal in your life -- if it feels good, do it -- you're asking for conflict. It's going to cause problems in your life. When my pleasure takes the place over what is needful, then we're in trouble. The fact is, I'm more interested in my comfort than I am in yours and all I think about is what makes me feel good. The desire to feel good creates conflict.

The desire to have and the desire to feel good are two of the desires that when they are thwarted cause conflict. They are interconnected actually. The reason you desire to have is because you want to feel good.

Now, James is not saying that desiring something is wrong. What is wrong is when we resort to devious schemes to get what we want instead of asking them from God. So, let's say you want a brand-new car to replace an old unreliable car. Nothing wrong with that. However, instead of waiting on God to provide for you at the right time, you buy a lotto ticket or you go to the nearest casino to gamble. Then, since you always lose money, you even take out money from your savings account until your wife discovers it and World War III starts.

James says, "...you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it." (v. 2c) James is stressing the fact that we must ask God to provide for our needs. We must trust him. He'll come through. Maybe not quickly as we expect, but he'll surely come through. In short, pray. Let it be your first resort, not last. Just like a deacon in a church who says to his pastor, "Pastor, people are no longer giving their tithes to the church but we have bills to pay. We need to pray." The pastor says, "Has it come to that?" BTW, I'm not talking about our church. But I think it helps, right?

Anyway, another thing that James wants to point out is that if ever we pray, we usually pray with the wrong motive. We ask things in a selfish way. "Lord, please make my boss give me a raise" but in the back of your mind you want a raise so that you can buy an 85" 8K OLED TV that you don't need! The Bible says that God didn't promise to provide what I want just because I desire to have it and to feel good. But it says everything I need God has promised to provide. **Philippians 4:19** *"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* if we'll ask in prayer. But we'd rather fight than pray. We'd rather argue about something than go look to the Lord for the answer. When I'm upset with my wife, the last thing on my mind is prayer. We're not thinking about that. But James says, that's the problem. We look to others instead of looking to God and that causes conflict. We'd rather try to work it out ourselves. Why don't I pray? I don't think I need God. If I really thought I was more dependent upon God and I needed Him more I'd pray more. James says we'd have a lot more peace if we just prayed more. We'd have a lot less to worry about, a lot less to argue about, a lot less to fight over if we just prayed more.

So, verses 1-3 is all about ourselves looking out for no. 1. That no. 1 is us. Not others, not God. It's all about me, my likes, my wants, my desires. George

Harrison of the Beatles wrote the song “I Me Mine” in 1970 and he says he wants to address one of the world’s biggest problems, selfies, I mean, selfishness. That year American society started to become enmeshed with the philosophy of “Meism”. Me first. Apparently, that was the problem also during the time of James.

In verse 4, note that James addresses his audience, and these are Christians, as adulterers. “You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God?” That’s a serious accusation. You see, Christians are bound in marriage to Jesus figuratively since Jesus is the groom and his church is the bride. But by being materialistic, putting their desires first instead of God’s, then they are playing footsies with the world. They are being unfaithful to the one who has brought them into him. What would cause such unfaithfulness? It is pride, the foremost problem of every human being. Pride started in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve desired to live on their own, outside of God’s perfect will for their lives. They disobeyed and they died. But God loves us that despite what our first parents did, he sent his Son Jesus to earth to die for our sins and raised him from the dead. And those who place their trust in him he has saved. And God has given us his Holy Spirit to help us to become faithful to him. Verse 5, “God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him”. However, pride in us rears its ugly head every now and then. Altho’ as Christians, we’re supposed to rely on God, to trust his promises and all that, we forget and do things our own way.

So, now we see that pride is the real reason why we have conflicts with others and even with God. If pride is the cause of conflicts, what's the cure?

II. THE CURE FOR CONFLICTS IS HUMILITY

v. 6 & 10 "God ... gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." What is grace? Grace is unmerited favor or undeserved kindness of God like in the phrase in Eph. 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved". But another meaning in the Greek is the state of being well and thriving or feeling glad and rejoicing like in 2 Cor. 12:9 where God says to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you".

What does James mean then in verse 6? Why does God give grace to the humble? First, let's look at the phrase "God opposes the proud". Here obviously James is saying that God is not pleased with people who are proud. A proud person creates conflicts. Now, when you get into a conflict like heated arguments, that's when our pride really comes into full display. When we're in an argument, we think we're in the right and the other person is in the wrong. Now, that may be true but if we keep arguing that doesn't make us right anymore. Do you see? And pride will really win the day.

So, James is saying, "Although it's hard, withdraw from the conflict, stop arguing, calm down. You can do that because God will make you feel glad and you will be able to tolerate the pain in the midst of unpleasant circumstances".

I remember a long time ago in the Philippines, I was in my early 20's. I invented a board game and I looked for someone who could create the board by silkscreen printing. I went to Quiapo and had hired the services of an older man who owned a printing shop. After a few days, I came back and to my dismay, the end product was not what I expected. I asked for an explanation, and he tried to explain but I wasn't satisfied. I raised my voice and started to berate him. The man didn't say a thing. I angrily kept on with my tirade but when I realized that he was just quiet all along, I finally stopped. Then, he just promised to correct the product which he did a few days later. Afterwards, I realized that the man showed humility

in the midst of a verbal attack from me. It was grace under fire. Maybe the man is a Christian and God's grace was strong on him because he showed humility? But I learned from that experience that I shouldn't meet fire with fire.

There's an important verse in Proverbs 15:18 that can serve as a reminder, "A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel."

This applies to every situation, especially in marriage. I read somewhere, "In the first year of marriage, the man speaks and the woman listens.

In the second year, the woman speaks and the man listens. In the third year, they both speak and the neighbors listen."

In the next few verses, James gives several short sentences. He is so practical. He gives four specific actions that need to be taken in order to stop the fighting. Here's how you diffuse a conflict, whether it's between you and a kid, you and your wife, you and someone at work. You do **four things to diffuse a conflict:**

1. GIVE IN TO GOD

"Submit yourselves, then, to God." v. 7. (NIV) Now, I'm using the NIV version. In short, let God be God in your life. Give Him control. Put Him in charge. Yield yourself to Him. This is the starting point. Quit trying to run your own life. In v. 1 it says *"evil desires at war within you"*. James is saying that conflict that happens with other people happens because you have conflict on the inside. You don't get along with other people because you've got a civil war in your life. This is the real issue. The starting point is getting peace inside before you can have peace outside. Find peace of mind, find peace in your heart. The real conflict is inside of you -- who's in charge of my life. If you're in charge, then anytime somebody comes along that doesn't go the way you want to go, then you get uptight. You get irritable. You get upset. You want things to go just the way

you want them to go and when they don't go that way, it makes you mad. But if God's in charge of your life, it doesn't irritate you as much.

Colossians 3:15 *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart."* When we have the peace of Christ in our heart then we'll be at peace with other people. If we don't have this in our life -- God's peace in our hearts -- then we try to manipulate others, try to control them and try to move them around to get what we want out of life.

Give in to God. This means you learn to say "Thy will be done" instead of saying "Me first". That's the difference. When you can say "Lord, whatever You want that's what I want" then the peace process starts.

2. GET WISE TO SATAN

Be aware, be alert. Realize what he's doing. Realize where the conflict comes from and that he's the source behind it. Don't be dumb. Don't be ignorant. **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** (v7) The word "resist" is a war term. It means to be prepared. To stand against. Withstand an attack. The devil wants to destroy your marriage. He wants to destroy every other good relationship. Why? Because he loves conflict, arguments. He wants to cause confusion, arguments, stress, hurt feelings, disappointment, anger, chaos. He loves to do it. James says you've got to give into God, let Him have control. Then you've got to do some defensive action. You've got to resist the devil and realize what he's doing. If you get up in the morning and you don't run into the devil, head on, it means you're already going in the same direction.

How does the devil operate? He doesn't stand around with a pitchfork and a red suit. How does the devil operate? He plays on our pride. Particularly wounded pride. He tells us what we want to hear. He whispers in our ear. He gives us little thoughts, suggestions, ideas. When you're in the middle of an

argument, he starts whispering in your ear, things like "You don't have to take this kind of stuff. Retaliate. Who do they think they are? Get even. Assert yourself. Don't put up with this kind of stuff. Show 'em who's boss." He tells you all the things your pride would love to hear. You need to say, "Satan, I know that's you." Resist him.

How do you resist the devil? Same way Jesus did it. He quoted Scripture. Memorize **Proverbs 13:10 (NCV) "Pride only leads to arguments."** The next time you get into an argument, that can be brought to mind by the Lord and you stop and think, "How am I being prideful here. What am I not willing to admit? Why am I not willing to compromise? Where am I only thinking of myself and not the other person's needs, desires, attitudes."

There is a great promise here. It says, "*Resist the devil and he will flee.*" You don't have to put up with him. Give in to God and get wise to Satan.

3. GROW CLOSER TO GOD

Verse 8, "Come close to God." How does this affect arguments? First, how do you grow closer? By reading the Bible, by going to church, by getting involved in a Bible study -- all of these kinds of things help you grow closer to God. I have made an amazing discovery that the more time I spend alone with God, the better I get along with other people. Count on it! When the argument level rises in our marriage it means somebody is not spending time with the Lord. It's that simple. Grow closer to God.

Isaiah 26:3 "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." When you spend time with the Lord, you turn your thoughts to Him, then you get along better with others because He keeps perfect peace in your heart and you're not as irritable. Have you noticed some people only draw close to God when they're in trouble? They only pray when they have a

need. You need to spend time with Him. Bible study, Sunday morning, daily quiet time -- make time for these things. You say you're too busy? Then maybe you're too busy. Maybe you need to cut some things out of your schedule to make more time to spend time with the Lord. The more you spend time with the Lord, the more you're going to enjoy the rest of your time. It will be more productive, more beneficial. You'll get along better with others, have fewer arguments, because you're spending time with God. "Draw closer to God, He'll keep you in perfect peace." Get up 15 minutes earlier each morning. Maybe start with the book of John. Read and pray and notice the difference in your attitude and the relationships the rest of the day. I challenge you to do that.

The conflict in your life is in direct proportion to the time you're spending with God. There is a great promise here too. When I in genuineness draw close to God, *"God will come close to you."* He doesn't back off. He draws close to you. When you move toward Him, God moves toward you.

You give in to God, get wise to Satan, draw close to God and then...

4. BE WILLING TO ASK FORGIVENESS

If you want to stop the conflicts in your life, if you want to get along with other people, avoid arguments, learn to ask forgiveness from God and from those you hurt. v. 8 *"Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts."* Our hands represent our conduct and hearts represent attitudes. He's saying, clean up your act. v. 9, *"Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief."* Don't minimize what's happened. Take it seriously. Be sorry for your self-centeredness. It is a big deal when your wife's feelings are hurt. Take it seriously. If someone says you've hurt them, you've hurt them. It may not be a big deal to you, but it was to them. Be willing to ask forgiveness.

Now... go back to that person I asked you to think about a few minutes ago. Would you like to begin to resolve the conflict with that person? How do you do it? Are you willing to go and apologize for your part? Maybe they are 95% wrong and you're only 5% at fault, but you take care of your 5% and let God handle the other 95% in their life. Their response is their response. "I know we've had our differences and I know I haven't always been thoughtful. A lot of times I've thought more about myself than your needs." How humbling that would be! Right! Because God gives grace to the humble! If you want to change, the only way you're going to change is to be humble, and the only way to be humble is to go and ask forgiveness. It's hard but do you want to change? Do you want to reduce the conflict? Maybe the way you do it is by cracking the door open by you taking the first step even if they are primarily at fault.

Admit what you've brought into the relationship that was wrong. It's humbling, sure, but God gives grace to the humble. Maybe this week you need to write a letter, make a call, make some restitution even to that person who's irritated you -- those heavenly sandpapers that irritate you. Take the first step.

Finally, v. 10 "*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*" God doesn't want to keep you down on the ground. The way to honor is humility. I used to think the way to be honored by my wife and my kids was to never admit that I was wrong. If my kids thought I was wrong they wouldn't respect me anymore. What kind of dad is he if he's not perfect. It wasn't a surprise when I found out they already knew I wasn't perfect. I found that the way I rose in honor before my kids and my wife was to admit I was wrong, I was selfish, I was thinking about only my own needs. The Bible says that God lifts up the humble and the more honest we are about our weaknesses and our faults, the more God honors us. If you want to be honored by your husband/wife/the Lord, it

means humility. Coming and saying "God, I give up. I can't do it all on my own. I need Your power to resist the devil when he says, Live for yourself." I grow closer to God and spend time with Him and I'm willing to ask forgiveness.

Philippians 2:3-5 *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, [Why? because pride causes arguments] but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also the interest of the others."* [He doesn't say don't look about your own interest -- you've got needs. He's not saying to lay down and be a doormat. But look out also for the interest of others] ***In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*** How do you get that attitude? Let Jesus Christ live through your life. When Jesus Christ lives in me and Jesus Christ lives in you, Jesus isn't going to argue with Jesus. There is no ego there.

Which of these desires cause the most conflict in your life? Maybe it's the desire to have and you're so busy out there making a living that you forget to make a life, hustling, day in and day out, to make a buck so much that your relationships are falling apart. The desire to have is greater than the relationships you have around you. It means that the kids suffer, your wife suffers, your husband suffers, your friends suffer because the desire to have has taken preeminence in your life. That causes conflict. I've noticed kids don't want things as much as they want our time.

Maybe it's the desire to feel good. "I have my rights!" That's something the devil likes to say an awfully lot. That's the exact opposite of what the Scriptures are saying, "Think about other people, not just yourself. What are their needs?" The desire for my feelings, my comfort... Does that cause conflict? "I'd really rather think about what I need right now than what the family needs."

In the first three verses of this chapter, four times it says you're unsatisfied -- "you want but you don't get", "you strive for but you can't have". You're unsatisfied. Many people in life are unsatisfied with the way they are living. The secret of satisfaction is in Jesus Christ. Give yourself to Him and find your needs met in Him rather than in other people. He will never let you down.