

Conflict is what brings us together today.

Today in our sermon series, “Jim Time”, James tackles conflict and what he sees as the source of conflict. He chalks it up to something that may be missing in someone who constantly seems to be surrounded by conflict. That missing thing? Humility. Today in chapter four James will help us with ways of Finding Humility.

Conflict is a part of life and comes in all different shapes and sizes. Some are loud and some are silent. Conflict can happen at a kitchen table, in a church hallway, in a workplace, in a marriage, among friends, and even inside our own hearts. Whether or not words are exchanged in a conflict, the end result is pretty much the same. Distance grows, resentment settles in, and hearts become hardened.

Instinctually those involved in conflict tend to look outward. “What did the other person do? Why did they say that? Why are they acting this way?” These can be fair questions. Other people can be unreasonable and instigators of conflict. But James doesn’t just leave it there. He won’t just treat visible symptoms. He challenges his readers and us to ask a different question: “What is going on inside of me?” (Repeat)

In our passage today James is not gentle. We’ve come to expect that. But as always, he is polite. James diagnoses the source of our quarrels, exposes the danger of divided loyalty, and then opens the door to hope: James confronts prides, selfish desire, worldliness, and double mindedness. All of this to bring us to the God who gives more grace.

James calls his readers to stop blaming, stop drifting, and stop pretending. James wants to set us on the path that leads us back to God, one that is paved with humility. A path that promises that as we draw near to God, God will draw near to us. This is a path that ends in God’s grace.

James begins in vs 1 with a question: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” It makes me think of those burning eyes that my parents would cast on me when I did something wrong.

This is a question that James is asking of believers. These are people who know God, who gather in Jesus’ name, who hear the word, who pray; who claim to be people of faith. And they are also fighting and quarreling.

What were they quarreling about? You name it. Circumstances, personalities, schedules, money, politics, temperament, pressure. But for all of these outside reasons, James says conflicts actually come from desires that are at war within us. That outside battle begins with an inside battle. Something inside that is fighting for control.

These desires don’t just whisper; they wage a full-blown war. They set up camp in our hearts. They demand attention. They tell us, “You must have this. You cannot be happy without it. You cannot be safe unless you control it. You cannot be respected unless you win.”

Unless these desires are dealt with, anger, bitterness, manipulation, coldness, and insistence will grow.

Now James isn’t saying that every disagreement is sinful. Matters of truth, wisdom, oppression, and injustice, in whatever forms they present themselves must be addressed. Peace at any price has never been the message of scripture. The conflict in this passage is not selfless like that. It is fueled by selfish cravings: “I want, I deserve, I must have, I will not yield.” When desire turns to a demand, people turn into obstacles instead of neighbors.

But did you know that conflict can start with something that isn’t actually evil. A desire to be heard is not wrong. A desire for rest, not wrong. A desire for appreciation, again not wrong.

Desiring security, order, affection, or success are not sinful desires on their own. Good desires like these become dangerous when they become ruling desires. A good thing becomes an idol when the requirement to get that thing is sinning. Sin is the only vehicle to acquire that thing.

James exposes striving without prayer and praying selfishly vs 2-3. “You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly.” This means being too busy to control the outcome to pray. It means praying prayers shaped by a selfish appetite instead of surrendering trust. It involves chasing desires without God or bringing our desires to use God as a means to an end. Such desires are not based in humility.

That’s the issue, so now get ready for some shocking language in vs 4: “You adulterous people!” James doesn’t just see this as bad behavior; he sees this as spiritual unfaithfulness. Multiple times throughout Scripture our relationship with God is described in covenant terms. God is not a distant idea or a religious accessory. God loves us with *hesed*. With steadfast love. With a holy, covenantal love.

When James says that friendship with the world makes us enemies of God, what exactly does he mean? Well for starters, he’s not telling us to hate people or withdraw from them. Jesus did neither of these. He was a friend of sinners and outcasts. Compassion for others isn’t the problem. Allegiance to values that leave God out, that’s the heart of this issue. By Friendship with the world, James means adopting loves, ambitions, measures of success, and promises of satisfaction in a way that competes with devotion to God.

When the world says, “Assert yourself.” God says, “Humble yourself.” When the world says, “Take what you can.” God says, “Ask and trust Me.” When the world says, “Win the fight.” God says, “Seek peace and pursue holiness.” When the world says, “Curate your image.” God says, “Purify your heart.” And when the world says, “You are the center.” God says, “I am the Lord.”

Our passage is about to become deeply personal. Because no one wants to think of themselves as a worldly creature. I mean, don't we do a good job at avoiding all of those obvious sins? But worldliness is not just what shows on the outside. What we love, what we envy, what we fear losing, what we believe uncovers who we are. It's our total package that matters. So yes, a person can sit in church and still be disciplined by the world's desires. We can sit in church and still be disciplined by the world's desires. I can sit in church and still be disciplined by the world's desires. Let's say those humbling words together.

Then we arrive at vs 6 and the turning point of this passage.: "But He gives more grace." Again, shocking words. After all that James exposed he doesn't say, "Sorry, sucks to be you because there's no hope." That's not God. God doesn't just expose our pride. Instead, God offers grace greater than our pride.

God opposes the proud, not out of cruelty, but because pride destroys. Pride says, "I don't need God. I can justify myself. I can rule myself. I can save myself." Humility opens empty hands to receive the grace that only God can give.

We aren't asked to clean ourselves up and then come near." It's so much simpler. "Come near, and I will give grace." More grace than our compromise, more grace than our pride, more grace than our failure, and more grace than our wandering.

Next James offers ten urgent directives. Some call these the ten commandments of repentance. submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, grieve over sin, mourn, weep, turn laughter to mourning, and humble yourselves before the Lord. These directives are shot out in rapid fire mode. James is calling for decisive repentance.

These commands of repentance are for people who are ready to stop pretending they can save themselves. But don't think of them as a payment. As if God's mercy is something we can buy. Grace is free and repentance means to turn around. Because mercy finds us and mercy calls us home.

In vs 7 James says “Submit yourselves therefore to God”. This is a submission that says, “Lord, You are right, even when my desires argue. Your Word is true, even when my feelings are loud. Your will is good, even when obedience costs me”

“Resist the devil”. This is a refusal to accept the lie that says that pride, bitterness, envy, and compromise are harmless. These lies may disguise themselves. Take self-justification. This is a self-justifying lie you might hear. “You have every right to be bitter. You deserve to get even. You won’t be happy unless you get your way. God is holding out on you friend.” Resist church family! Resist, resist, resist.

“Draw near to God”. This is a reminder that God is not far from a repentant heart. God is not reluctant to receive the humble. God is not waiting with crossed arms for the repentant to crawl back in shame. When we draw near to God, God comes near with grace.

Then James says, “Cleanse your hands” and “purify your hearts.” Hands point to our actions; hearts point to our motives. God wants both. This isn’t a call to show up with polished appearances while our desires remain divided. This is a call for wholehearted repentance. The question is not only, “What did I do?” but also, “What did I love? What did I trust? What did I serve?”

James adds, “Be wretched and mourn and weep.” That may sound strange in a culture that treats sorrow and sadness as something to be avoided. But sin should make us sorrowful. Sin should make us sad. Sin grieves God, harms others, and damages our own souls. Repentance should include honest sorrow that turns toward God.

James winds this topic up with a call for humility. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.” God lifts the humble by grace. The way up is down on our knees. (Repeat) My way up is down on my knees. (Say that with me) The way home is repentance. The way to peace starts with drawing near to God.

So yes, once again James confronts us. But he also doesn't leave us condemned. James tells the truth about our fights, our desires, our worldliness, our pride, and our double-mindedness. And then we hear an even greater truth: God gives more grace. That is our promise. This is our hope because we have a God who is more gracious than we could ever imagined.

Bring God the conflict. Bring God the craving. Bring the divided heart and the prayerlessness, and the selfish prayers, and the envy, and the bitterness, and the pride, and the compromise, and any secret love of the world. Stop clinging to what pulls you away from God. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

Finding humility is really quite simple. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you.