

“Let’s Get Ready To RUMBLE” // James 4:1–12 // The Book of James #7

Introduction

James 4, if you have your Bibles.¹ In James 3 and 4, James discusses conflicts going on in the church. Apparently, these people he was writing to were a piece of work, because he doesn’t pull any punches. In chapter 1 he accused them of being arrogant and weak-kneed and double-minded; in chapter 2 he accused them of prejudice and hypocrisy, and now in chapters 3 and 4 he accuses them of being a bunch of hard-hearted, self-centered, hateful jerks (those are the terms of the original Greek). (We tend to look back on the early church and think, “Oh, it must have been awesome back then, with all the holiness and the all-night prayer, hobnobbing with all the Apostles.” These chapters show you it was not always awesome. People back then were as difficult and thorny as they are today.)

As James opens chapter 4, he poses a very simple thought question: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” (v. 1)

One thing we all have in common is that we experience conflict in relationships. This is what all marriages have in common—conflict. I

¹ Works Consulted: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God’s Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Paige Benton Brown, study of James (Spring 2023)—notes no longer available online; Bryan Loritts, “Getting the Mess Out of Church,” sermon preached at Fellowship Memphis, 2013; CJ Mahaney, “Cravings and Conflicts” (James 4:1-2) Jen Wilkin, “Genuine Faith and Godly Wisdom,” from Flower Mound Women’s Bible Study podcast, March 19, 2014; Joby Martin, “How to Win a Fight,” sermon preached at The Church of Eleven22 on Aug. 13, 2023; Brad Hambrick, “[The Spiritual Warfare Within Conflict](#),” a Counseling Commentary on James, from BradHambrick.com. Andy Stanley, James 4:1–3, [Conflict](#); Elisabeth Elliot, “[Trusting in the Lord and Being Obedient to Him and His Word](#)”; others as noted throughout.

don’t care how perfect that family looks on the outside, they have conflict.

People sometimes look at my beautiful, charming wife and assume that because I’m a pastor and she’s so awesome and friendly that it’s always sunshine, rainbows, and giggles over at our house—or that when we do have a disagreement we discuss the issue calmly, quote some affirming Scripture to each other and then end in prayer and a warm embrace. I can assure you that’s not the case. Veronica and I assumed when we got married that we’d have an essentially friction-free marriage. True story, when we did the session on conflict in our premarital counseling, we actually said to each other later, “That felt irrelevant.” Up to that point, we’d never had a fight. Then we got married, God took us through a deep dive practicum in conflict those first 9 months or so. So, we’ve known conflict.

In fact, y’all know that every week I pray that God will make whatever passage that week *personally* relevant to me—you know, so I’m not up here just sharing information, but really speaking out of what God is teaching me personally. And, y’all, my wife is so in tune with the Spirit, and she loves me so much and she’s so dedicated to my preaching ministry, that she made sure, and I contributed to, that we got to personally experience this week the verses that we are going to study about quarrels and conflicts—and almost all of it happened over text, so you know it was healthy.²

So, “What is the source of your conflict?” James asks. You say, “Easy,” and you point to whomever you are having conflict with “THEY are. *That’s* the source of my conflict.” For those of you that are married, **if I asked you to identify the main cause of your conflict—that would be dangerous.** If I said, “What causes conflict in your marriage?” you’d

² Thanks to Joby Martin for this little riff!

say, “HER.” “HIM.” And then you’d start whispering and shaking your heads and somebody would get up and walk out mad: You’d say:

- “Most of the unhappiness and strife and conflict in my life is there because of YOU, spouse. Because you don’t think about my feelings or my needs.”
- Or, “It’s because of you, boss, because you never think about the implications your decisions have on me. And you never seem to appreciate my efforts.”
- “It’s because of you, child. You ungrateful, think you’re-smarter-than-the-world, think the-world-revolves-around you, child.”
- “It’s because of you, mom or dad, because you try to control me too much.”
- “It’s you, dude who just cut me off in traffic, because you assume that you’re the only person on the road, you and that ridiculous, jacked-up-pick-up truck of yours that you think gives you the right to change lanes whenever you want.” (I may or may not be thinking of an actual event this week.)
- “It’s you, grocery-store-clerk...could you possibly go any slower checking out these items?”
- “It’s you, mom of one of the girls in my daughter’s class, who thinks your kid is better than everyone else and that you’re the only one who knows how to parent...”

Are you catching my drift? “The reason I experience conflict,” we think, “is because of YOU (we say to someone). You’re the problem.” In fact, if you’re married, or with a girlfriend/boyfriend/friend, turn to them and say, “YOU’RE the problem.” See how natural that felt?

James says, “**Think deeper.** Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.**”

Let me try to make that simple: The reason you have conflict, James says, is, “**You’re not getting something that YOU want.**” You’ve got

something that you felt entitled to, some way you wanted your day to go, and that person is keeping you from it.

- This is true in even the most superficial of conflicts. I stayed at a hotel this week and I went to the gym for an early morning workout, which I love (especially when I’m traveling and have to sit in board meetings all day) because not only is it good for the body, it’s a time I can put my headphones in, and listen to a podcast, and just be quiet.
- But there was this guy next to me, an older guy who was wearing all the tight muscle outfits, and the braces for his elbows and knees and sweatband on his head, who was grunting and breathing and straining so loudly that I was genuinely annoyed. It just sounded gross and I could barely hear my podcast. It didn’t turn into anything but I was VERY irritated.
- Now, what was I really mad about? (If he were doing that near someone else, I wouldn’t have been so mad.) But he was keeping me from the vision of how I had seen my morning going, and that’s why I was mad.

So, **you have conflict, James says, because somebody keeps you** from something that you want, and your anger burns at them, you resent them and **even, James says, want to murder them.** See vs 2, again?

“You desire and do not have, so you murder...”

- (Now, some of you are like, ‘Alright, murder... now you are talking about my family.’)
- (BTW, James is writing to church people, not to people in prison, so “murder” here is metaphorical. He’s talking about murder the way that Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, where you rage at someone and desire to hurt them. Like I did the guy in the gym. I really wish this guy would pull a muscle right now. I wish he’d drop

a 45lb plate on his toe. Would serve him right; and, I'd get to finish my workout in peace.

So, James says, the rage in your heart comes from the fact that this person kept you from what YOU wanted. Now, I know at this point you're like, "Yeah, but wait a minute, pastor. This person really did do me wrong. My husband really was acting selfishly. Or maybe, he cheated on me. Or, that person genuinely disrespected me. Or stole from me. Or deprived me of something I deserved." James is not denying that. But he is saying that the rage, the conflict came because they kept you from something that you wanted.

And that, James says, points to the presence of 2 things in your heart that have nothing to do with the other person: **idolatry** and **a lack of trust** in God. (**Stay with me here**, because if you get this, it can really unlock a door in your understanding of your own heart and why relationships often go sideways.)

The key is in that word "covet" in **vs 2: You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.** Coveting is where we want something so badly that we think there's no way we can be happy or content without it. It's not that the desires we have are wrong in themselves. The word "passion" in vs 1 does not point to a sinful passion. It's not usually something sinful that you desire. You have a desire for someone to be on time, or to be more thoughtful, to be less selfish, or faithful to you, or more attentive to your needs, and those are legitimate. But those desires have become demands, cravings, which control our whole attitudes and how we feel about others.³

Coveting is a kind of idolatry. (James is going to make that connection in vs 5.) Idolatry is when you require something besides God and his

³ Douglas Moo, "With penetrating insight...James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence or national conflict—the cause of them all can be traced back to the frustrated desire to want more than we have, to be envious of and covet what others have, whether it be their position or their possessions." *The Letter of James*, p. 184.

will to be happy, satisfied and content. You believe you need this thing, or this state of things, to be happy or content and because you think this person is keeping you from it, you rage at them. Or seethe at them and punish them with the silent treatment.

We have all kinds of legitimate desires, but NOTHING is supposed to control our hearts such that without it we despair, or become deeply discontent, or rage or hate at someone else. Our contentment, and our peace, and our joy, is to be dependent on God alone, being in his will, and his presence IN and control OVER our lives.

So, here's the question: **What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect to get?** (x2)

- These things point, James says, to the presence of an idol, and that is the real source of your conflict.
- St. Augustine said that emotions like rage or bitterness function like smoke from a fire--you can follow the trail of smoke back down to the fires in your heart, and they are usually fires you have built in worship of an idol. When you see smoke in your house, the last thing you want to do is just get rid of the smoke! If I come home and my living room is filled with smoke, I don't say, "Shew, kids. Open the windows and turn on the fans!" No, more important than getting the smoke out is figuring out what is causing it. Some of you have mastered techniques on controlling your anger/rage/temper; more important is figuring out what is causing it in the first place.
- **So, ask yourself: Where are you bitter at your spouse?** Where do you rage at a boss or a child or seethe toward a friend?
- They may be at fault, genuinely at fault, but the rage and bitterness point more toward a **deeper** problem in you.⁴

⁴ "One of the joys of biblical ministry comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person's dark room....I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It's not "because my wife/husband..."—it's because of something about you. Couples who see

At the end of vs 2, James says, “You do not have, because you do not ask.”

- Your first problem, he says, is you’ve made the wrong person responsible for your needs. You are looking to someone else to supply something only God can supply.
- Your horizontal conflicts are because of a vertical disruption. You don’t trust here, so you rage here...

OK, this is about to get really deep. You ready? I heard a Christian teacher present this question one time: “Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you’re not getting because you’re trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn’t have it?”⁵

You want control. You want respect. You want significance and satisfaction and approval and belonging. What if the primary source of those things was supposed to be God, and now you are looking to someone else to give you what only God can give you?

“Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you’re not getting because you’re trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn’t have it?”

I’ve told you before... Many approach marriage like a person drowning in a sea of loneliness, despair, or low self-esteem, and they see a marriage partner like a life preserver who can save them from those things.

- Here you got a guy drowning in life with all kinds of emotional problems... he’s completely unhappy being single, miserable, lonely, purposeless, he’s wandering, unhappy--can’t imagine being happy or feeling complete as a single, even if it’s God’s will for him for a while--and along by floats 5’2” life preserver with beautiful

what rules them—cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life—can repent and find God’s grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace.” David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*, p 151.

⁵ Andy Stanley

eyes and a great body. What does he do? He clings to her. And he sucks the life out of her. And when she disappoints him, or lets him down, which she inevitably will, he rages at her.

- What if she wasn’t designed to supply all those things?
- Here’s what I’ve learned after 23 years of observing marriages in this church: Lonely, insecure single people in the Triangle become...
- If you are unhappy as a single person, you will be unhappy as a married person. That spouse can’t make you happy. They can’t give you a sense of identity or security or significance or approval. They can’t meet all your needs. They weren’t designed to.
- And here’s the thing: when something you idolize disappoints you, you demonize it. You rage at it. Remember this: Whatever you idolize, you will inevitably demonize.

“Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you’re not getting because you’re trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn’t have it?”

I’ve sometimes said that I wish when I’m doing a marriage ceremony that I could take a Sharpie and draw on the forehead of both spouses, before they walk down the aisle, a little sign that says, “Will not support the weight of your soul,” like one of those signs you might see in front of a bridge in a rural area that says, “Max 2 tons,” which means, “You can drive your bike across this, or maybe a Prius, but if you try to drive a dump truck across this, it will crumble and you’ll end up in the creek. This bridge was not built to support that kind of weight.” (I also want to write, “Statistically, this is the person most likely to murder you so be careful). Marriage can be a wonderful addition to your life, but it cannot meet the deepest needs of your soul, and if you depend on it for that, it will crumble under you. *“Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you’re not getting because you’re trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn’t have it?”*

This is true not just in marriage but any relationship. So again, ask the first question: **What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect to get?**

That points to the presence of an idol, and that's your real problem, James says. Now that, by itself, would be enough for us to think about—we could just close the Bible and go home, thinking about how terrible we all are and how we're worthy of all these names James calls us. But James, as we'd expect, isn't done. He sees us doubled over in pain, so he decides he wants to twist the knife a little.

Vs. 3: Remember, he ended vs 2 by saying, "You do not have because you do not ask. Now he says, vs. **3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.** (You've turned God into a genie who exists to fulfill your covetous passions! Then, he says...) **4 You adulterous people!**

Now, this is an interesting--and disturbing--metaphor. James says, "Some of you do ask God to meet your needs, but he won't answer you, because you are praying like an adulterer! **So, praytell, how does one pray like an adulterer?**

Well, think about it--what is adultery? Adultery is when one spouse finds certain delights in someone else they should be finding in their spouse. It's not that a desire for romantic and sexual intimacy is wrong; it's that desiring those with THIS other person is wrong because I've already covenanted with someone else. You are not enough for me romantically and sexually. I need someone else. Spiritual adultery is when you find the happiness and security that you ought to find in God in something or someone else. Adultery, in the Bible, is a metaphor for idolatry. Spiritual adultery is when we look to something or someone else for what we should be finding in God.

Praying like an adulterer means asking God to be complicit in your idolatry. It means praying with the conviction that unless God supplies this thing you're asking for you can't be happy or content in life. God says, "You are supposed to be happy and content--just trusting in me and resting in my presence and in my will for your life."

- Imagine if a man said to his wife one night, over dinner during their date night: "Hey, when we got married and we said our vows, you promised to fulfill my romantic and sexual needs and so I have a request." And she's nervous, but she says, "OK?" So he proceeds to tell her that he's determined that what he needs to be romantically and sexually fulfilled is for her to arrange a sexual liaison with her friend so-and-so."
- That date night is not going to end well. If a man actually did that, it would be heartbreaking to his wife, right? She would say, "When I made that vow, I meant I (myself) would be your romantic and sexual fulfillment, and not that I would be your pimp to arrange that with other people."

When we ask God for something, and our happiness and contentment and emotional equilibrium are dependent on him giving us the answer--that is, we couldn't imagine being happy without that thing--we pray like an adulterer." Do you see that? We are seeking a happiness, contentment and security is someTHING that we ought to be finding in GOD.

- "God, I **need this raise.**" (Nothing wrong with the desire for the raise; what's wrong is you think that without this financial raise, you think, I can't be happy or satisfied. There's nothing wrong with the request; the problem is that your happiness and contentment are dependent on it.)
- Or, "God, **please fix my spouse.** Make them more attentive to my needs" (Nothing wrong with that... but you think, I'll never live a full, happy life until they're different.)
- "God, I **NEED to make this team** or **get this award** or get into this school" (because I can't feel good about myself unless I do)

- **“God, I need a boyfriend or girlfriend”** or “I need to get married” (because, without marriage, I won’t feel complete in life.)

And **God says, “You adulterer! You are asking me to supply** in someone else what you should be finding in me. You should be able to be happy, and content, and complete, with me.” **It’s not that you shouldn’t have those other desires. It’s that you should still be able to be content with me and not covet those things.**

Your anger--at others and even at God, James says, ultimately goes down to idolatry. Your conflict and rage are like smoke from a fire that you can trace back to the altars you have erected in worship of an idol. **Your intimate conflicts ultimately come from idolatrous cravings.**

So, what’s the solution? (x2)

Before I tell you what it is, could I just point out--one of the things I **love about James:** he does **more than just tell you** that you have a problem and call you a bunch of nasty names and then tell you to go fix yourself. **He diagnoses the problem--**showing you **the problem behind the problem,** and then shows you how to fix *that*.

Which is so much more helpful than a lot of the other diagnostic instruments in my life. Like the little check engine light in my car. **My 2nd daughter just left for college (she’s a freshman at NC State),** so I inherited her car back, and when I got into it to drive it, I immediately noticed the check engine light was on with a little illuminated wrench underneath. Which prompted two questions, “One: How long has that been on?” And two: “Check **WHAT** about the engine?” Clearly it is telling me to take a wrench to something, but what?” So, being obedient, I dutifully pulled the car over, opened the hood, and stood in front of the engine, and my first thought standing there was, “Wow, there’s a lot of stuff in here.” But here was the frustrating part--there were no tiny flags waving with little arrows pointing to something

saying “Twist wrench here.” Within moments I had determined beyond any reasonable doubt that the level of the windshield wiper fluid was fine... I even glanced around for dead animals; checked the fans for dead rats--even sniffed a little. And then, well... that’s all I knew to do. It said “check engine,” I ‘checked engine,’ then got back into the car and went on my way.⁶

James is much more helpful. In vv 6–10 he gives you a number of instructions about how to deal with your idolatrous heart, but I think I can summarize them in two basic categories.

1. Humble Yourself (vs 10)

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

IN CONTEXT, ‘humble yourselves’ means 2 things:

(A) “Humble yourselves” by acknowledging that there may be good reasons God is withholding from you something you desire.

- Psalm 84:11 promises that “no good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly before him.” Which means, if it’s truly good for me, God will supply it. “No good thing will he withhold.” And if he does withhold it, that can only mean it must not ultimately be good for me!
- You’re mad because you thought you needed this and that person is not giving it to you.. But humble yourselves that you may not know what’s best for your life and a sovereign God is guiding your life who promises that no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. “I thought I needed the marriage,” “I thought I needed the win, the raise, the acceptance, the healed body, but you didn’t give it to me, God, so you must have a better plan!”
 - This week I was listening to an old talk by Elisabeth Elliot--she was the missionary whose husband, along with 4 other young

⁶ This and the computer one following adapted from CJ Mahaney

missionaries, was speared to death along on the beaches of Ecuador in the 1950's.

- In this talk she said the hardest thing to do is to trust God when his plan goes opposite the way you think it should. Have you been there? She and Jim had trusted God with their relationship--when they graduated from Wheaton College, they were in love, but they both felt led to serve God on the mission field in 2 different places--she in Africa and he in South America, and they sensed this so strongly they knew it meant they had to wait on getting married, if at all.
- So, they waited 5 years. Eventually God led them back together, and they got married. They were married two years when Jim was speared to death taking the gospel to this remote tribe there in Ecuador. She said that the night before Jim and the other men left to make the initial contact with this very hostile tribe, they had all knelt down, prayed, and they ended by singing a hymn with the words, *"We rest on thee, our Shield and our defender."* And then the next day Jim left and God, his shield and defender, let him be speared to death. Elisabeth Elliot asked this group of college students (in this talk I was listening to), "Will you trust God when he leads you *there*? Will you trust your shield and defender when he lets the spears penetrate your chest?"
- She then said, **"Because God is God, he is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in his holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to."**
- Humility. God has a different plan than me, and when his plan goes 180 degrees opposite of what I want, I'll trust him! And when it doesn't make sense, I'll still trust that Ps 84:11 is true--that no good thing will he withhold, and if he's withholding it, it must not ultimately be good for me.
- **"Humble yourselves" by admitting that there may be good reasons God is withholding from you something you desire.**
V. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God, and trust him.

That's the **first way** you humble yourselves. **The second way** is this:

(B) "Humble yourselves" by admitting your idolatrous desires are a major contributor to this conflict. (x2) That other person may be at fault, but the reason that you are so angry--the reason you rage and seethe and struggle with bitterness--is because your idolatrous heart has latched onto something other than God you think is for happiness and contentment.

- **Admit that to yourself**, and then confess it to God. This is what James is getting at in vs **8: Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."** James is clearly an Enneagram 8, right? I get in trouble for saying overly direct things sometimes, but I'm a kitten compared to James. But I imagine we're going to meet James in heaven and say, "Dude, what the heck?" And he's gonna say, "Where was I wrong?"
- Before you confront that other person about anything, look in the mirror and say, 'It's me. Hi. I'm the problem, it's me. At tea time, everybody agrees.'" *Humble yourself.*
- And then, if appropriate, confess your idolatry to the other person, too. Acknowledge to them that your anger, at least in part, arises from your own messed up heart.
- And that will be hard, because you want to excuse yourself and blame all of your anger on them, and if you confess your part in the conflict you'll feel like you're letting them off the hook and they'll use your confession against you. But that's not true.
- I know a marriage counselor who says that during marriage counseling he will often draw a circle on a piece of paper and say this circle represents marriage problems, all their conflicts, etc. "Now take this pencil," he tells them, "and draw a slice in this that represents your part of the conflict. Maybe you just have a little bit. Maybe 1%."

- He says there has never been a time when the husband or wife wouldn't draw even a teensy slice in the circle
- He would say, "Well, if you take a slice, you have to be nice!" Cuz you're part of the problem.
- He said that whenever they would do that, the temperature in the room changes. When both sides take some ownership, we're usually ready to move forward.
- **But!** We are hesitant to do that--to admit our part of the conflict, because when you admit you are part of the problem, you feel like you lose your leverage... If I admit I'm at fault in any way, I'll lose my lofty platform from which I can rail against you about your issues.
- Well, **first, you've got to trust God with that.** God tells you to deal with your junk first and trust him with your spouse or whomever else you're in conflict with. Don't worry about being vindicated or losing your leverage. See how it says, **vs. 10, "Humble yourself and God will exalt you?"** If I humble myself by confessing my sin, God will exalt, or *vindicate* me. I don't need to worry about vindicating myself or you exalting me by acknowledging my rightness. God will handle that. So I can just admit where I'm wrong and trust God.
- **Second, why are you worried about losing your leverage? Think about it, have you ever really won an argument at home?** I don't mean have you ever out-debated your spouse or your sibling, but have you ever really been in a big-finger pointing argument and *really* won in a way that brought peace and resolution?
- **Most importantly, I've seen** this approach of "humbling yourself" resolve more conflict than any other. It's like a key that unlocks a door. When one partner in a conflict admits their part, rather than reducing leverage, that humility usually opens up the other person to admit theirs.
- (Now, one very important caveat: There are certain kinds of people who are skilled manipulators, who can, through gaslighting and victim-shaming, cover up their abusive and manipulative behavior by always making you feel like their abuse--their sin--is your fault. I'm not talking about that. If you're in that kind of relationship, or think you might be, go see a Christian counselor immediately.) I'm talking about this in the context of the normal rumble-tumble of conflict.
- Imagine if, the next time you're fighting with somebody, right in the middle of it, you went, "Whoa, you know what the problem is? The reason I'm upset is because I crave something really bad, and I'm not getting it." What would happen?
- BTW, I got a giggle thinking about how James must have processed all of this. Maybe this will make you more sympathetic with how blunt James is. I've never read this in a commentary, but it just makes sense. Think about this: James was Jesus' half-brother. He probably grew up sharing a room with Jesus—Can you imagine? You might think it would be awesome if your brother was the Son of God, but it meant that in any conflict, you were wrong. Every single time there's screaming coming from the back bedroom, Joseph just walks in, ignores Jesus and goes right at James because there's no way it could be Jesus' fault. Right?⁷
- So, James is like, "Listen, I learned whenever I had conflict with my big brother, it was always me. But I learned a lot through that. And maybe you should do the same."

⁷ I owe this great little insight to Joby Martin!

So here's my question: Are you willing to try that? Anytime you're mad, to say, "I'm going to ask what these angry emotions indicate about what I am yearning for, coveting over?"

Here's how it went down for me not long ago.. I got home from a business trip. I'm tired, I'm trying to be a good dad and focus on the kids. My wife, of course, has been single-parenting for a couple of days, and she slips in something about a commitment I had made for both of us the next night that I haven't told her about. There's nothing outrageous about what she said, she's just surprised by something she thinks I've sprung on her. My response was swift and decisive: "I did tell you about it." She says, "No, you didn't." At this point, still calmly but now a bit more firmly, I insisted that I had indeed told her, as I do every time. At this point there was a little chill in the air and we dropped it. Then later, after the kids had gone to bed, she brought it back up and said, "I just feel like lately you've not been telling me your plans or checking with me to consider what is best for the family."

I wish I could tell you that I was humble, that I had been skeptical of my own heart and communicated eagerness to understand things from her point of view and learn from her observations.

Alas, but that's not what I did. **I don't like being called thoughtless and definitely don't like being called irresponsible**, especially when I feel like I busted my tail to get home from this trip early to spend time with the kids. I deserve to be commended, not criticized! So, instead I turned into "Lawyer J.D.," proving that my client, which was myself, was innocent of all charges and should be swiftly acquitted. My wife is, of course, frustrated because, for whatever reason, she feels left out and isn't being communicated to, but my pride is hurt, and I really want to be honored as a thoughtful husband.

So, pretty soon I had moved beyond litigation to cheerleader: since she was not honoring me, I started to honor myself. I actually said something like, "I don't see how we wouldn't default to me in this situation. After all, I'm a professional communicator." And somehow that led to me pointing out that I'd never be able to effectively run a staff of 300 people if I don't know how to communicate and thus the size of our church proves that I'm right, and somehow that led to my college GPA (which, I'm still not quite certain how we got there), and then I shifted from cheerleader to historian and took us on a brief journey through our marriage, highlighting a number of cogent illustrations that prove that I am the most communicative husband of all time.)

At which point she said, "You're right, babe. I just hadn't considered the bigger picture. Thank you for patiently correcting me." No, this ended with me in the other room on my iPad watching a show, wishing my hard work as a husband were more acknowledged.⁸

Wouldn't it be so much better to not depend on Veronica, or anyone else, for vindication, and just acknowledge how frustrating it is for her to not be aware of something, to give her the benefit of the doubt, listen to her frustrations and promise to do my best to keep her in the loop? **It's because I crave vindication that this conflict ended with me seething in the other room, rather than being a simple discussion between loving partners about how to better communicate.** My pride, and my idolatry made this conflict 10x worse than it needed to be.

⁸ While this story is my own, I do owe CJ Mahaney for telling a similar one that inspired and shaped how I presented this.

One Christian counselor said this: **No matter its duration, intensity, severity, or subject matter, the solution is found in James 4:10:** “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

And always remember this, vs. 6: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

If you want God on your side in a conflict, humble yourselves before him and others. If you want him as your enemy, exalt and vindicate yourselves. He opposes the proud, but he gives grace to, exalts, the humble. And so, when my wife and I have conflicts now, I always want to be the first one to apologize so then I can be like, “God’s on my side now. You better get yourself together.”

2. Draw Near to God

Vs. 8 says, **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.**

You know, as harsh as James is, you should recognize behind these words he’s pointing you to the tender, compassionate love of God drawing you back. After James unloads on you, calling you “adulterers, wretched, double-minded, unstable sinners who should be mourning not laughing,” he says, **6 But he gives more grace...**

VAMP

No matter how bad your sin is, he gives MORE grace.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” evokes the image of the Father in the Prodigal Son story... just waiting, longing for his child to come home. Who, when he sees his son far off coming back, lifts up the corners of his robe and runs toward him! You have run to

the far country of anger and it has wrecked your life. And he wants to restore you to peace and joy.

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” evokes images of a God who so loved the world that he came to die on a cross for our sins. Who would go through literally hell itself to bring us back to himself. He didn’t want heaven without us, so he brought heaven near, even though it meant enduring hell in our place—so he could bring us to heaven and bring heaven to us. This is the God who yearns for us to come back to him.

In fact, he even USES conflicts in our lives to do that. It might be a radically thing to think, but what if, through that conflict, he is saying to you, “The security you are looking for, the significance you crave, the assurance that everything is going to work out for good you want so badly--that’s not in that person, it’s in ME! I am the comfort you are looking for. I am the security. I am the significance. I am the God who can sustain you and satisfy you. I loved you when you were running away from me; I sacrificed my life to make you my child, and now I promise to sovereignly control all things for your good and my plan in your life.” That’s what he’s doing IN YOU during conflict.

So WHAT IF??? ... THIS week, whenever you feel anger, rage or bitterness--you humble yourself and ask yourself:

Where does this point to idolatry in my heart?

What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect (or be bitter at someone for years) to get?

Then draw near to a God who had drawn near to you. Find that satisfaction and contentment and security and safety in the arms of a God who can fulfill you and sustain you more than any friend, parent, spouse, teammate or coach ever could.

For some of you, this bitterness goes back for years! This--humbling yourself and finding your contentment and identity and happiness in God--can set you free!

For some of you, this will set you free like nothing else has ever been able to?

Bullpen:

Ultimately, as we've seen throughout this series, your horizontal conflicts arise because of a vertical disruption. But just humble yourself before God, admit your need to him, confess your brokenness and idolatry, and he will run to you.

Or, maybe even more relevant for some of you, it's like that dreaded message that pops up every once in a while on your computer, "Error has occurred." I always ask: What error? Is it me, or does the message itself seem to carry an attitude? I can almost hear a mocking Silicon Valley nerd from deep within my computer: "Ha ha! An error has occurred! Your work is lost and your day is ruined!" Thank you for telling me an error has occurred! But what should I DO? Do I immediately save my work? Reboot? Back up my hard drive? Copy everything on the screen down by hand? (Have you ever done that? Take pictures of the screen?) Do I put on rubber gloves and take it down to the Genius Bar?

- Can you be humble enough to admit, like John Piper says, that at any moment God is up to 10,000 good things in your life, and you're aware of 3 of them?
- But you should at least admit that part of the problem is your idolatrous cravings.
 - Can you be humble enough to admit, like John Piper says, that at any given point in your life God is up to 10,000 good things in your life and you are aware, at most, of 3 of them?

What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect to get?

"What if what you crave you're not getting because you're trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn't have it?"

Conflict and anger and rage are all like smoke from a fire, and you can follow that smoke down to the fires you've built at altars you have set up in the worship of false gods--respect and honor and creature comforts that you demand from other people. Horizontal conflicts come from vertical disruptions.

- Here's another jewel, vs. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?
- A lot of **think of jealousy as a negative word, because we associate things with it like** possessiveness and obsession: the husband who wants his wife at home, never talking to another man. **But then there's also healthy jealousy.** Healthy jealousy is when you love someone and want the best for them and don't want to see them taken away into something that will hurt them. For example, I want my wife to love me more than any other man—for her sake *and* for mine. And for the sake of our kids.
- Right now I am jealous for my kids' trust: As their father, I want them to love the right things and trust mine and their mom's wisdom. I'm jealous, for example, to have them trust me when it comes to learning about relationships more than they do *Why Don't We* or *Katy Perry*. Same with God.
- Or, here's **another way to look at it**: The earth rotates around the sun, right? And as long as it does, earth is healthy. If the earth wandered off, then it would die. If the sun were a person, and it loved the earth, it would be jealous to keep it in orbit. That's not selfish, that's loving. In the same way, **God is jealous for our worship.**
- He cares enough about you to be jealous? What a privilege!
- "He gives more grace." Even after adulterating ourselves and leaving him for other gods, he wants us back!

- Submit to his rule in your life. Trust what he's doing! Psalm 84:11. You don't know what you need. At any given point, God is up to 10,000 things.
- Listening to Elisabeth Elliot... we knew to trust God was to obey him. The night before Jim was speared to death with 4 other young men, they sang the song, "We rest on thee, our Shield and our defender." And then Jim left in obedience and was speared to death. Do you trust God when he leads you there? Do you trust him as your defender when he lets the spears penetrate your chest?
- She then said, "Because God is God, he is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in His holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to."
- She recounted a convo she had with Corrie Ten Boom, who had spent years in a concentration camp. Watched her sister tortured and killed.

*My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.*

*Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.*

A believer is supposed to look to God as the ultimate supplier of all needs. I am supposed to trust that he never ignores my prayers, is always fully in control, and "no good thing will he withhold from those

who walk uprightly." Which means, whatever it is, if I am without it right now, it is part of God's good plan, I can trust him, and I can be content even without this thing I desire.

So, this is James' basic answer: Stop blaming others for your anger by making them responsible to meet all your needs. Trust in God for your needs, even if that means you don't always have what you desire. That doesn't resolve the other person of any wrong that they did--they very well might be wrong; it just means that your anger and murderous spirit have less to do with them than it does with the fact that you don't trust God.

- Example: One of my many idols... Me **fuming** at the table. Rage. What I want is control, at least in that area. My wife's lateness has kept me from going what I wanted. Now, it is right to be unhappy with her, and express that, but the rage points back to an idol.
- This could be true of not getting the **respect, or affection, or support, or tenderness, or sex anything** you think you deserve.

How much different would our conflict be if this is how we lived? I can still confront you for your wrong, or for where you are being really self-centered, but not because my happiness or contentment depends on it.

But James is not done. He wants to take this deeper.

Many marriages fall apart because one spouse makes the other the source of everything--you are my self-esteem; you are the one who has to make me feel good, special, important, loved. YOU are responsible for my convenience and comfort and to make all my expectations and desires for life come true. **I'm going to ask this question a few times today--I borrow it from another marriage counselor:** *"Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you're not*

getting because you're trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn't have it?"

I've often said this: Lonely, insecure people become... I sometimes wish I could take a Sharpie and write on the forehead of both spouses in a marriage a little sign that says, "Will not support the weight of your soul," like one of those signs in front of a bridge in a rural area, "Max 5 tons." It means, "You can drive your car across this, but if you try to drive something heavy, like a dump truck, it will crumble." Marriage can be a wonderful addition to your life, but if you depend on someone else to meet voids that only God can fill, it will crumble under you. *"Has it ever occurred to you that what you crave you're not getting because you're trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn't have it?"*

I'm mad at you because there's something I want that you can't give to me. James says the problem in most of our conflicts is our own idolatry. I can't be happy unless I have this and you are the one to give to me.

But the reason I am angry is that your actions are keeping me from something I want. And James says, "Before you go off on this person about what's wrong with them, acknowledge where the conflict originates in you."

You might deserve this consideration or to be treated with more respect or whatever it is you're mad about, but the problem is that your desire for those things has become controlling on you and your emotional equilibrium is dependent on that.

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Humble yourself

James uses phrases to indicate your awareness of your own sin. "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." That's pretty direct. Be wretched and mourn, like Jesus said in the SotM, because of your sin.

Acknowledge your part of this conflict--to God (I don't trust you; I'm an idolater") and to the person that you are having conflict with. Even if you feel like they are more at fault than you!

I know of a marriage counselor who says that during marriage counseling he will often draw a circle on a piece of paper and say this circle represents marriage problems, all conflict, etc. Now take this pencil, he tells them, and draw a slice in this that represents your part of the conflict. Maybe you just have a little bit, 1%

- There was never a time when a man or woman would draw even a teensy slice in the circle
- He would say, "If you take a slice, you have to be nice!"
- Why? As soon as you own even part of the problem, the tension decreases, but you lose your leverage and ability to convince the other person.
- **But think about it, you never win an argument at home anyway!**

But that almost always leads to resolution. James, who is speaking in chapters 3-4 about conflict in the church, says, "What if you owned

that conflict, at least in some part, was due to your own idolatry and sin?”

- Imagine if, the next time you’re fighting with somebody, right in the middle of it, you went, “Whoa, you know what the problem is? The reason I’m upset is because I want something and I’m not getting it.”
- I know the other person, perhaps, did wrong--and there may be a time and place to confront them with patience and love. But the anger, frustration--I know Christians don’t get angry, they get frustrated—the frustration, the rage, that was you and you were wrong.

BTW, something interesting here: In vs 1 when James asks the question. “Where do wars come from...,” he answers it (which is a rare thing in the Bible. Usually the Bible writer wants you to consider it and answer it yourself). But James gives the answer, and that’s because there’s only one answer, and, go with me here, that’s probably because of his own experience: think about it. James grew up with Jesus. He grew up sharing a room with Jesus—can you imagine? You might think it would be awesome if your brother was the Savior of the world, but it’s probably a little pressure, isn’t it? I mean, every single time there’s screaming coming from the back bedroom, Joseph just walks in and starts wearing out James because it can’t be Jesus’ fault.⁹

James said, what if, in all this conflict, you acknowledged that in large part it was your sin and idolatry and coveting and refusal to trust and be satisfied with God that was the fuel of conflict, at least on your side.

I heard another pastor tell a story about conflict between him and his life that illustrated all this--this is not my story, but I’m telling you that

it so easily could be. I could have written this story and swapped out a few details. See how much you relate.

I arrived home one evening from work. My family was gathering for dinner, and hugs and kisses and “I love yous” were given all around. My wife walked by me on her way to the table with some food and kindly mentioned in passing that I had failed to tell her about a calendar commitment I made for both of us. There was nothing sinful, either in her words or tone, but my response was immediate: “I did tell you about it.” Walking past me back into the kitchen, she said, with a smile, “I don’t think so.” Still civil, but a bit more firmly, I insisted that I had indeed informed her of this commitment. After dinner, when my wife and I were alone, she humbly appealed: “Lately, I feel as if you have not been keeping me informed of various plans like you usually do.”

I wish I could tell you that I responded with humility. I wish I had heard her out and then humbly evaluated her critique, appropriately suspicious of my own heart and eager to learn from her observations. But I did not. Instead I began to question her, and rather quickly my approach came to resemble that of a prosecuting attorney. I was being misrepresented and this injustice must be righted. Carolyn was merely trying to preserve intimacy and communication in our marriage, but in my pride I quickly became angry. Before long I had moved beyond disagreement and (since no one else was honoring me) began to honor myself. I actually said something like, “Dear, it’s tough not to admire how effective a communicator I have been in our marriage.” I followed this up with A Brief History of Our Marriage according to me, featuring a number of illustrations portraying me as possibly the most communicative husband of all time. And although

⁹ I owe this great little insight to Joby Martin!

she expressed appreciation for what I had done in the past, my wife was not persuaded.

No matter its duration, intensity, severity, or subject matter, the solution is found in James 4:10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

NOTE: This is spiritual warfare!

“Resist the devil.” If I asked you to describe spiritual warfare, many of you would think acts of power and deliverance... This is mundane spiritual warfare. It’s in exalted passions and refusal to acknowledge your part in a conflict.

This is how conflicts will end! When you are at peace. AS: “As long as you blame others for your unhappiness, you will always be unhappy.”

And, great news--God stands ready for you. He gives more grace.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you! Like the prodigal Father in Luke 15, he is ready to run to you before you are even back if you’ll make the slightest overture toward him. Are you ready to do that this weekend?

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

He diagnoses where all our conflict comes from and tells us how to fix it. Your conflicts come from idolatrous passions that control you, and because you demand from other people things you should depend on God for and trust him with.)

BTW, I love this about James. He is diagnosing exactly where our conflicts come from. Unlike other diagnostic things. My 2nd daughter left for college so I took her car back. I immediately noticed the check engine light. You know the one—the little illuminated wrench on the dashboard. Two questions, “How long has that been on?” 2nd question: “What do I need to check?” Clearly it is telling me to take a wrench to something, but what?” So, I dutifully pulled over, opened the hood, and stood in front of the engine, thinking, Wow, there’s a lot of stuff in here. But there were no blinking lights, no tiny flags waving, no flashing cursor saying, “Twist wrench here.” Within moments I had determined beyond any doubt that the level of the windshield wiper fluid was just fine, and I tightened on the cap extra tight... and having now exhausted my checking abilities, I got back in the car and continued on my way, clinging to the hope that I had fulfilled what the little indicator light was asking.¹⁰

Or it’s like that dreaded message that pops up every once in a while on your computer, “Error has occurred.” What error? The message itself seems to carry an attitude. I can almost hear a mocking voice from deep within my computer: “Ha ha, ha! An error has occurred! Your work is lost and your day is ruined!” And what should I DO? Immediately save my work? Give it a break? Copy everything on the screen down by hand? Reboot the machine? Back up my hard drive? Purchase an entire IT department?

James is much more helpful. He diagnoses where all our conflict comes from and tells us how to fix it. Your conflicts come from idolatrous passions that control you, and because you demand from other people things you should depend on God for and trust him with.)

All of James 3–4 is about conflict and strained relationships. Apparently, James’ church was a piece of work—which is a comfort to me, that people were as difficult back then as they are today. In ch 3, that we looked at last week, James warned them about how they were killing each other with their words.

NOTES:

J.D.

James 4:1–3, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?”

According to this passage, “where does your conflict come from?” **If I asked you to turn to your spouse right now and identify the source of your conflict—that would be dangerous.** Most of you would have one answer: you! Most of the unhappiness and strife and conflict in my life is there because of YOU.

James says, **“Think deeper.”** *Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”*

¹⁰ This and the computer one following adapted from CJ Mahaney

The reason we have conflict is, **"I'm not getting what I want."**

I've got a set of things I want, and you are keeping me from them... and so your anger burns at them, and you resent them and **even, James says**, want to murder them. (*Some of you are like, 'Alright... now you are describing my marriage.'*)

- (BTW, James is writing to church people, not a prison, so murder is not just literal here but also metaphorical.)
- You are keeping me from what I want so I despise you.
- This is what Paul calls '*malice, bitterness, wrath, anger and clamor*')

The problem, James says, is found in how controlling your desires are on you. Your desires have become so important to you, and so you hate anyone who keeps them from you.

An idol is anything you have to have to have happiness or peace, and you hate anything or anyone that keeps you from it.

- Example: One of my many idols... Me **fuming** at the table. Rage. What I want is control, at least in that area. My wife's lateness has kept me from going what I wanted. Now, it is right to be unhappy with her, and express that, but the rage points back to an idol.
- This could be true of not getting the **respect, or affection, or support, or tenderness, or sex** you deserve.

Nothing in you is supposed to be so important to you that it produces malice, wrath, or hatred, and when you miss out on it, and when those things are there, they point to the fact that something has become an idol.

- They are, as I have pointed out before, like smoke from a fire....
- **They should function in your life like overreaction alarms.**
- Ask: ***What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect to get?***

- **Where are you bitter at your spouse?** They may be at fault, but the rage and bitterness point more toward a **deeper** problem in you.

What you should do with these passions, James says, is **pray about them**. "You have not because you ask not." Trust God with these things and leave it with him.

I love **Isa 26:3**, "I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed upon you." The state of the peace in my heart reveals whether or not my mind is fixed on God.

So where do bitterness, anger, and malice come from? A. Desires that have become idolatrous.

Joby:

- ~~What is it that you do want? There are legitimate desires (love, respect, for spouse to clean up after themselves).~~
 - ~~The problem is when we begin to move desire onto somebody else and we are looking for them to meet all of our desires. What started out as maybe a legitimate desire has become a demand—now you've created a debt-debtor relationship and there is no space for genuine acts of service and unconditional love.~~
- The place that will resolve our conflicts and quarrels is when we learn that he, and he alone, is the one that meets our deepest desires and needs. Putting our deepest desires and needs on others makes them our functional savior; they cannot bear the weight of that. **Whoever you idolize, when you let them down, you will demonize them.**
- C.S. Lewis: We're satisfied with too little. We're playing in a mud puddle when our dad wants to take us on a vacation to the ocean.

- Many examples in my life where I have failed - ex: at flag football game and I screamed at the poor ref, "You had one job!" and someone from the other team says, "Hey Pastor Joby!" ... and I murdered her in my heart.

CJ Mahaney

David Powlison: One of the joys of biblical ministry comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person's dark room....I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It's not "because my wife/husband..."—it's because of something about you. Couples who see what rules them—cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life—can repent and find God's grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace. (*Seeing With New Eyes*, p 151)

~~By contrast, we often live in a world of unhelpful generalities. For example, you're driving along and a light appears on the dashboard: "Check Engine." That's all it says. What are you supposed to make of that? The first time it happened to me, I dutifully complied. I pulled over, opened the hood, and stood in front of the engine, thinking, Wow, there's a lot of stuff in here. But there were no blinking lights, no tiny flags waving, nothing at all to tell me what exactly I should be checking. Within moments I had determined beyond any doubt that the level of the windshield wiper fluid was just fine. Having exhausted my checking abilities, I got back in the car and continued on my way, clinging to the vague hope that such checking had been sufficient.~~

~~My computer is another example. One day I'm typing. It's a simple document, and I'm just naïve enough to think that basic word processing is something my computer was made to handle. Suddenly a message pops up: "Error has occurred." The message itself seems to carry an attitude. I can almost hear a mocking voice from deep within my computer: "Ha ha, ha! An error has occurred. This document is dead. Your computer is dead. You're dead. It's an ERROR!" If you were nearby, you might have heard me talking back to my computer (don't tell me you never have...), as I commented on the overall unhelpfulness of this message. "OK, an error. So I should...what? Save the document? Not save it? Print it out? Copy it all by hand? Reboot the machine? Back up my hard drive? Purchase an entire IT department?" In the end, I employed the most sophisticated technical solution of which I am capable: Ctrl-Alt-Del.~~

~~Douglas Moo, "With penetrating insight...James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence or national conflict—the cause of them all can be traced back to the frustrated desire to want more than we have, to be envious of and covet what others have, whether it be their position or their possessions" (The Letter of James, p. 184).~~

The truth that "**cravings underlie conflicts**" was vividly displayed in my own life, when I arrived home one evening from work. My family was gathering for dinner, and hugs and kisses and "I love you" were given all around. Carolyn walked by me on her way to the table with some food and kindly mentioned in passing that I had failed to tell her about a calendar commitment I made for both of us. There was nothing sinful, either in her words or tone, but my response was immediate: "I did tell you about it." Walking past me back into the kitchen, she said, with a smile, "I don't think so." Still civil, but a bit

more firmly, I insisted that I had indeed informed her of this commitment. After dinner, when Carolyn and I were alone, she humbly appealed: “Lately, I feel as if you have not been keeping me informed of various plans like you usually do.” I wish I could tell you that I responded with humility. I wish I had heard her out and then humbly evaluated her critique, appropriately suspicious of my own heart and eager to learn from her observations. But I did not. Instead I began to question her, and rather quickly my approach came to resemble that of a prosecuting attorney. I was being misrepresented and this injustice must be righted. Carolyn was merely trying to preserve intimacy and communication in our marriage, but in my pride I quickly became angry. Before long I had moved beyond disagreement and (since no one else was honoring me) begun to honor myself. I actually said something like, “Dear, it’s tough not to admire how effective a communicator I have been in our marriage.” I followed this up with A Brief History of Our Marriage According to C.J., featuring a number of illustrations portraying me as possibly the most communicative husband of all time. And although she expressed appreciation for what I had done in the past, Carolyn was not persuaded.

No matter its duration, intensity, severity, or subject matter, the solution is found in James 4:10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” This non-negotiable divine command is accompanied by a promise. How can we humble ourselves before God? We find the motivation right here in this passage. James 4:1-2 reminds us that relational conflict is first and foremost conflict with God. When I quarrel and fight, I have a more serious opponent than my spouse, or any one else. In James 4:6 God reveals himself as actively opposed to the proud. When I’m in conflict, God is opposed to me.

Andy Stanley:

~~“The only thing we all have in common when it comes to family is conflict.”~~

~~If I asked, “Why?” You’d always point your finger at other people. “As long as you blame others for your unhappiness, you will always be unhappy.”~~

Andy said his best play is to take the blame for everything that happens in the family. **Joke:** If nothing else ever comes to mind then he goes to, “If I had never asked you (his wife) out, none of this would have ever happened!”

“Has it ever occurred to you that what you want you aren’t getting because you’re trying to squeeze it out of someone who doesn’t have it to give you?”

Joke: If you say, “I wish my husband or middle school kid was here to hear this,” that’s exactly what I’m talking about!

Joke: There are no marriage problems, there are single people problems, and then you get married. You could change apartment, housing, roommates, but then you got stuck.

I used to try this exercise during marriage counseling. I would draw a circle on piece of paper and say this circle represents marriage problems, all conflict, etc. Now take this pencil and draw slice in this

that represents your part of the conflict. Maybe you just have a little bit, 1%

- There was never a time when a man or woman would draw even a teensy slice in the circle
- Joke: “If you own a slice, you have to be nice!”
- Why? As soon as you own even part of the problem, the tension decreases, but you lose your leverage and ability to convince the other person.
- **But you never win an argument at home anyway!**