

Conflict – Part 2

- We have been studying the book of James (actually a letter) and we are getting towards the end of the letter.
 - James, the half-brother of Jesus, was writing to Jesus-followers about their life and conduct.
 - The whole purpose of his letter is that there is an intimate connection between what we believe and what we do. We cannot disconnect the two, so James focuses on the way they are living as a reflection on what they actually believe, not simply what they say they believe.
 - We described it this way: AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS.
 - Practically speaking, what does this mean?
 - If you are a genuine follower of Jesus, your life will be characterized by:
 - The ability to suffer well – to find joy in trials because of your identity in Christ and his favor on you.
 - Finding victory of temptations – because they are based in our wants which we identify and submit to God's desires.
 - A consistent life – that applies the truths of God internally (what we think and believe) and externally (what we say and do).
 - Lives free of favoritism and discrimination – being inclusive, loving and in living in unity.
 - A radical obedience – that goes beyond good intentions. Moved to action in a good way.
 - A habit of speaking life – not death, into everyone we encounter.
 - Making decisions based on true wisdom – which we saw is right knowledge rightly applied.
 - A follower of Jesus is known by a life that looks like this.
 - It does not mean that we have achieved all of these to their fullest extent. But it does mean that we are moving forward in all of them.
 - There is a kind of strange double truth here. If you are genuinely following Jesus, the things above will be increasing in you. But at the same time, we are to intentionally practice living this way and when we do, it leads us to follow Jesus more completely.
 - In other words, so we follow and believe and then wait to be changed, or do we change and let that impact our life with Jesus? Yes!
 - Think of what we are learning as an indicator – just like the gauges in your car. Pay attention to them. Notice when you are getting out of alignment. Let God bring you back into a life like he desires.
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- Last week we did part 1 of a section on relational conflict. Whether it is within marriage, church, Discipleship Family, work, school, with friends, girlfriend, boyfriend, we looked at the question posed by James:
1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?
- We saw that the source of relational conflict is not a who, it is a what.
 - THE SOURCE OF YOUR ANGER AND CONFLICT IS INSIDE AND NOT OUTSIDE.
 - We saw that to gain victory is to stop pretending that it is other people who are the problem and go humbly to God with your desires and let him work in your heart.
 - This is difficult and takes humility. When everything in you wants justice, fairness, for them to keep their promises, to be treated right, it is hard to turn the spotlight inwards and take our own desires to Jesus.
 - This is the first step in dealing with conflict well – awareness.

- Knowing and understanding your own desires is huge. It puts you ahead of most people who never pause to understand what is going on in their conflicts. It reflects the beginnings of being a wise person.
- But awareness by itself is not enough.
- I have shared before that my achilles heel when it comes to eating are certain foods. Walking into a Wawa and right past those glazed twist donuts that are calling my name (“Eat me. I will make you happy. You know it’s OK. You’ll burn it off later.”) is something I fall prey to way too often. The other thing is good cookies. Yvonne baked some homemade chocolate chip cookies with mint choc chips that were awesome. Then she put them in the freezer to make them a little less accessible. You know what I found out. When they are frozen and crunchy they are delicious!
- Now, I am fully aware that I the 300 calories in one donut are empty calories. I know that taking 3 cookies (and then 3 more twice) is using up 1/3 of my entire day’s caloric intake. The problem is that this doesn’t stop me.
- You know that relationship isn’t good for you. That surfing the computer late at night is damaging. That your physical habit is killing you. Awareness is not the problem.
- So too with conflict in relationships. We need to know and understand our own desires. We need to see them, own them, reflect on them and even talk to God about them. But that doesn’t solve the conflict.
- There is something else, something that changes the equation and brings power into our relationships and can move us from awareness to health and victory.
- It is the next line in James letter.

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God.

- Because of what I just said, submit. To be subject to. To be in obedience.
- The modern mindset, particularly in western culture, hates this word. We value independence, choice and pursuing our own joy and happiness.
- Submission carries with it the idea of weakness and being taken advantage of.
- So as we look into this, let me preface this with two thoughts.
- One, you are in submission now, regardless of what you think. Anyone who has ever gotten up at 3am because their child is crying is submitting what they want to another person.
- Anyone who has gone into work when they didn’t feel like it is submitting.
- Anyone who has paid taxes is submitting.
- The question is not whether you will submit, but to what or who.
- Two, without submission, you will never solve your relational and conflict problems.
- It is fundamentally necessary.
- Submission is nothing more or less than this: **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES, AND RESULTING ACTIONS, WITH GOD.**
- We are faced immediately with a fundamental problem. Our heart’s desires are frequently at odds with God’s.
- We don’t want what God wants. Or we don’t want it the way he wants it. Or we want a different result. And even though we might even “want to want” what God desires, it is a constant struggle.
- And so we quarrel and fight. Relational peace escapes us. Submission, aligning our desires and actions with God, involves three things.

I. Orient yourself toward your heavenly Father.

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- He mentions two things here. Resist the devil. Come near to God.
- What does it mean to come near to God?
- This language is reminiscent of the ritual language of the temple. When someone was coming to encounter God in the temple, there were typically rituals that had to be done to prepare the person to meet their god.
- The entire process pushed the worshiper inwards. Towards the holy place. You did not back in. You turned yourself towards God.
- This is both a mental activity and a practical activity. He uses the picture of hearts (inside) and hands (outside).
- He uses the term double-minded again, same issue we looked at last week. You cannot do what is contrary to God and what God wants at the same time. You cannot divide your loyalty.
- There is a decision. A decision to mentally agree that God knows better than me and then act on it. It is ordering life and behavior in practical ways around the commands of Jesus.
- This is meditating, reflecting, considering, who God really is. What is he like?

- Secondly, we are to resist the devil.
- The devil wants you in conflict. He wants you pursuing your own desires. He wants you oriented towards yourself or anything other than God. If he can keep your attention on the other person and their problems, he is quite pleased with that.
- We play an active role in stopping behaviors that cause conflicts and problems.
- The more we align our lives to God, the greater our resistance to the temptations of the devil.
- We resist the devil when we recognize the truth of God and the lies of our enemy.
- Submission is in itself an action of resistance to the devil.
- When it says the devil will flee from us, it does not mean the devil will leave us entirely alone after he has fled from us. Our lives are not guaranteed smoothness. However, when we resist he will have no true power over us.
- **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES WITH GOD'S.**
- This begins by orienting towards God. Picture physical turning towards.

II. Admit your selfishness in light of the gospel.

9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

- What is going on here?
- This is a recognition of the seriousness of the sinfulness we are bringing into this conflict. James is encouraging us to examine our own selfishness and not dismiss it.
- “I didn’t do right BUT they . . .”
- “I may not be perfect, but really . . .”
- “Oh, it’s not such a big deal. They’ll get over it.”
- We will never gain the kind of relationships we desire as long as we justify or blame our way out of it. We have to own our selfishness in light of Jesus.
- It is not good enough to just feel bad about something. We must specifically, and if necessary, verbally, confess our selfishness.

- There is something about drawing near to God that makes this more natural.
- In Isaiah 6 we read of the curtain of heaven being pulled back and Isaiah getting a glimpse of God. His response is startling. 5 *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”*
- Drawing near to God reveals to us the seriousness of our part in conflict.
- We need to mourn the arrogance that has led to anger, conflict and sin.
- It doesn’t sound very appealing does it? That is why James, on the heels of this kind of confession, says that when we humble ourselves this way before the Lord, he will lift us up.
- There is a problem with swinging to either extreme on how we see our selfishness and sin.
- On one side we have the legalist who is a woe-is-me person. They confess. They are convicted. But they live in this space. In fact, they are convinced they are where God wants them to be because they are constantly miserable and feel guilty.
- On the other side we have those who think, “God loves to forgive sin and I love to sin. It’s all good.
- The good news of Jesus is so much better. *“The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”* (Tim Keller)
- Jesus invites us to see our selfishness and sinfulness for what it is. For as bad as it is. To see what we have done. But he invites us to do this in light of the gospel, where we respond in confidence in his love and grace to us.
- When we humbly confess in light of the gospel, it will utterly change our relationships.
- A humble heart is not a passive heart, it is a receptive heart.
- **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES WITH GOD’S.**
- This begins by orienting towards God. Picture physical turning towards.
- Consider the process so far. We are in conflict. We admit we have desires that are at the root of the conflict or our response to it. We take these to God and orient ourselves in his direction, owning our part in this with great seriousness knowing that our identity in Jesus is secure.
- Then we must act on it. We must let all this impact how we speak to and about each other.

III. Treat others in line with God’s desires.

- **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES, AND RESULTING ACTIONS, WITH GOD.**
- *11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?*
- To clarify, James is not calling us to never analyze others behavior or beliefs. Part of loving each other is to not let harmful and sinful actions or attitudes go unchallenged.
- What he is rebuking is a judgmental spirit. When you are in a conflict and you talk about them negatively to others or speak in angry and judgmental ways directly to them, you have put yourself in a position that is not yours.
- This is our natural inclination. We see what they did wrong. We see their sin. We see all their errors, both the real ones and the imagined ones. Then we make an assessment of their motives, character and identity based on that.
- They did this, they are so thoughtless. They are a leader out of control. They only care about themselves. They don’t care about this marriage like I do. They are so immature.

- James says that the second we move into this role, we have stepped into the role that only God is qualified to have.
- Stop being that person. You don't do it well, because you are predisposed to selectively apply God's words in your situation.
- Instead, since you are drawing near to God and are truly owning your own sinfulness in light of God's grace, you can now submit to the other person. You can serve them. You can confess. You can admit your wrongs.
- That is the path to peace.
- **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES, AND RESULTING ACTIONS, WITH GOD.**
- Since the root of all conflict is selfishness, the antidote is humility and submission, first to God and then to each other.
- We must move things from an intellectual acknowledgement of my inner desires to a willingness to walk out any change that comes as a result of aligning myself with God.
- My friends, this is so counter cultural. It is opposite of everything you see in the news. It is never reflected in the TV shows you watch. It's not what your friends are telling you. It's not how we are told to get ahead.
- But it IS how we find relational peace. It is the height of arrogance for me to be so sure of my agenda and that I know everything that God wants such that I cannot be corrected.
- **YOU MUST ALIGN YOUR DESIRES, AND RESULTING ACTIONS, WITH GOD.**
- This is an active, ongoing, daily process.
- The greatest opportunities, the places where this has the most potential to change your life and the lives of those around you is in the midst of conflict.
- In light of all we have said this morning, during our final worship song, ask God what actions he is inviting you to align with him. Is there a way of behaving in that relationship that needs to change? Is there someone you need to speak with and confess to? Is there someone you need to forgive? Resist the devil in this. He wants you to stay angry or fearful. But Jesus death and resurrection offers freedom. Orient yourself to him. Accept his love that is greater than you could ever dare hope. Then act on it.