

# What causes fights, and how to change that

Message for Sunday, March 1, 2020  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** James 4:1-10

**Children's Message:** Wanting things can cause conflict.

Arrange with two or three people ahead of time that they are to play a game of keep-away with a ball; but the key is that someone asks, "Can I have the ball, please?" they will immediately hand it to him/her.

I say to the children, "We're going to play a game with this ball. They have the ball. Now all you kids try and get the ball away from them."

Watch and see how vigorous a chase the person will go through, perhaps even shoving, to get what they want. Finally, when they start to see that it's hopeless, whisper to one of them, "Try saying 'Please give me the ball.'" They do, and it works!

Now this was just a game. But sometimes someone really does have something you want. You could just grab it from them, but what will happen then? *Probably a fight.* That's exactly what the Bible tells us: we want things, and it causes fights.

Can you think of a better way? *Sharing things.* I think that's how Jesus wants us to live.

**Message** "What causes fights, and how to change that"

I read of a pastor who was in his study, and he heard a quarrel outside the window. It was his daughter who was playing with her friends. The argument got louder and more heated until he finally had to step in. He pushed the window open and said, "Stop it! Honey, what's wrong?" The daughter replied, "But Daddy, we were just playing church."

Apparently fights in the church go back a long way. In his letter to the churches, James wrote almost a whole chapter on fights among Christians. Now, although what he writes is addressed to the church, the principles that he gives can be applied to all kinds of conflicts.

Of all the people in your life, which person do you have the most trouble with? When you try to talk with this person, it usually ends up in an argument. It could be your wife or husband, someone at work, a neighbour, whatever. You'll get the most out of this message if you keep on thinking of that person, and how to avoid conflict with him or her.

## 1) What causes conflict?

### a) The desire to have more

James 4:2a, New International Version:

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.

When I meet with a couple who are preparing to be married, one of the exercises we do goes like this. I ask each of them to draw a circle which represents how much money they have. I ask them to draw another circle, with the same centre, which represents how much money they absolutely need to live on. This circle is usually a tiny bit smaller than the first circle. Then I ask them to draw a circle, again with the same centre, which represents how much money they would like to have. That third circle is always the largest; sometimes it's much larger. That's often where trouble comes into the marriage: an insatiable desire for more, *more*, MORE!

God created things to be used and to enjoy. The problem comes when we put things before people. We start manipulating and using people because we want things. It causes conflict.

### b) The desire for pleasure

James 4:2b-3, New International Version:

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

We want to feel good. We want to be comfortable. Sexual pleasure comes in here: it's a powerful force in our lives. If we're not getting what we want, we feel resentment, frustration, and it leads to conflict.

Again, the trouble comes when our want for pleasure becomes more important than the people around us.

One other point: this verse suggests that we examine our motives. When you're in a conflict, stop and think, "What's the *real* issue here? Is it this thing, or is my pride? Which leads to the next point.

### c) **The desire to be important**

Other words for this are pride, power, popularity, prestige, being right. We want to be important; but even more, we want to be *seen* as important.

The idea for this item isn't from James, but it's a common thread through the Bible. This verse sums it up:

Proverbs 13:10, New Century Version:  
Pride only leads to arguments.

## 2) **Self-centredness leads to conflict with God**

In the next few verses, we see that this pride not only causes conflict with people, it causes conflict with God.

James 4:4-6, The Message:  
You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover." And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."

I've noted several times in these messages that James uses strong language to warn us of danger. This is another of those. God hates self-centredness and pride. They don't just damage our relationship with God. They turn us into enemies (!!), and this is a battle that we're not going to win.

## 3) **The solution to conflict**

In the next few verses, we have three specific ways to stop conflict from becoming a problem.

### a) **Submit to God**

James 4:7a, New International Version:  
Submit yourselves, then, to God.

The first issue you have to get straight is, "Who or what is going to be Number One in my life?"

The point here is to get us to stop praying like this: "Lord, my spouse is driving me nuts; you've got to change him/her," and instead pray, "Lord, change me. Make me the kind of person you want me to be." That's the first step to peace, putting God first.

### b) **Don't give in ...**

I should clarify that. "Don't give in" sounds like encouragement to fight. You're in a fight alright, but make sure you know who the enemy is.

James 4:7b, New International Version:  
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Your biggest enemy—aside from yourself—is the devil who is always tempting you. Don't give in to him or his lures.

How do you resist him? The same way Jesus did [Matthew 4:1-11]. He quoted Scripture. Read the Bible. When you find a passage that really helps you, learn it by heart. Then use that passage when you face temptation. Use it as a reminder to do the right thing, and a reminder to call on God for strength.

Preacher Rick Warren wrote, "Whatever you resist, persists. It's because whatever gets your attention, gets you. The key to overcoming temptation is to simply refocus on something else." Turn your attention away from the temptation; turn to something positive.

Friends, this verse is one of the greatest promises in the entire Bible! Use it.

### c) **Repent, and receive God**

James 4:8-10, New International Version:  
Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

"Wash your hands" refers to what we do with our hands; it's changing about our behaviour, the way we treat other people.

"Purify your hearts" refers to our attitudes, our values.

The next couple of sentences are a powerful image of what repentance looks and feels like: grief, mourning, wailing, gloom. It's not pleasant to face the wrong in our lives. Our human nature is to see the wrongs in others, but be blind to them in ourselves; so this is a painful thing to do.

**“Humble yourself”** — one of the best ways I know of to humble myself is to admit that I was wrong, and to ask forgiveness. If someone says you hurt them, then accept that you hurt them. Forget the excuses, and ask forgiveness.

This is very opposite of pride, which will *never* admit making a mistake. You probably know someone who is like that: someone who is simply unable to say, “I was wrong, I’m sorry.” Some of you told me one of your parents was like that. Maybe someone you work with. Maybe *you!* We need to humble ourselves; that’s a key part of healthy relationships, of stopping conflict in it’s tracks.

What’s the result of all this? When our desires are put in their proper place, when we follow God’s way, when we replace pride with humility, when we are honest about our mistakes, when we ask forgiveness—well, ask yourself: if your enemy suddenly changed and became like that, how would you respond?

But even if that other person doesn’t respond in the same way, you still do it anyway—because it’s God’s way, and in the long run, that’s the only way to go.

This not only heals relationships with others, it restores your relationship with God. Look back at that last passage.

**Come near to God and he will come near to you. . . .  
Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

This chapter in James began by pointing out that our desires are never satisfied; we always want more. Maybe that describes your life. The secret of satisfaction is in Jesus Christ. Give yourself to him, and you’ll find that he will never let you down.

### Next Steps:

- Pray: Put God first in your life. Instead of fixing other people, ask God to work in you.
- Be content, instead of wanting more and more. That, in itself, will prevent conflict.
- Be humble, instead of proud. You are much more enjoyable that way, and so is life.