

**Sermon Series:** Pressure Points  
**To be used with:** Session Five; The Pressure of Conflict  
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**  
 Why We Fight  
 Why Don't We All Just Get Along?  
**Scripture:** James 4:1-10

**Connection to Unit Theme:** We all face conflict. Most of us hate it. James is blunt about the source of our conflict. This is both painful and helpful. We can overcome the pressure of conflict by identifying its source and pursuing the humility which sets pleasing God as its chief aim.

**Introduction:** I usually start at the same place when doing marriage counseling. I begin by asking the couples to express the greatest source of their difficulties together. Their answers are diverse. Usually it has something to do with money, sex, children, or some other outside stressors on their relationship. Occasionally it will be more specific things like a lack of trust, spiritual differences, or extended family issues.

Most couples counseling spends a majority of the time attempting to iron out these differences. While there is value in doing this, James seems to take a different route. He gets straight to the heart of conflict. We like to blame things like our anger on something else. We think to ourselves, “If *this* would change then I would no longer be angry”. James would have us look at the source of our conflict instead of merely focusing on the triggers of conflict. Conflict is a result of the fall. Therefore, it—like the fall—touches every aspect of our lives. It is not only marriages that are wracked by conflict. It is every human relationship and institution. Therefore what James has to say to us is vital to everyday living. In James 4:1-10 we see the source of our conflict with man, our conflict with God, and the source of our conflict resolution.

- I. The source of our conflict with our fellow man:** In 4:1 James shows the source of our conflict is in the “cravings that are at war within you”.
- a. The source of all relational conflict is a failure to please God
    - As seen in our inordinate desires (4:2)
    - As seen in our lack of asking (4:2)
    - As seen in our asking with the wrong motives (4:3)
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  - b. Quote from Robert D. Jones, Pursuing Peace, page 49
    - “Failure to please God—our failure or the other person’s or both—is the ultimate cause of all relational conflict. Bank on it: whenever there is conflict, one or both parties are not pleasing God.”

This is actually really good news. Conflict is confusing. We could spend our entire lives attempting to unravel the specifics of relational conflict. Thankfully, the Scriptures make it simple. At the heart of all relational conflict is a failure to please God. This truth can redirect us to focus on what really matters; namely, pleasing God.

- II. The source of our conflict with God:** In 4:4 James quickly moves into our conflict with the Lord. This helps us to see that the lines between conflict with God and man are often quite blurry.
- a. God is in conflict with the world system
    - Here “world” refers to the fallen world system
    - God is opposed to the fallen and idolatrous desire of the world
  - b. God is in conflict with us when we make friendship with the world

- He calls it adultery
- God is to be our lover and not the fallen world system
- c. God is jealous for our affections

The same disordered affections that cause our conflict with our fellow man also cause conflict with our Husband. We cannot have hearts that ask of God in order to “spend it on [our] evil desires” and still expect to be a friend of God. Scripture is clear “the world’s friend becomes God’s enemy.”

**III. The source of our conflict resolution:** James outlines a few heart attitudes that will lead to conflict resolution between us, our fellow man, and God. These heart attitudes may not resolve every conflict but they will certainly put us in the favorable position of pleasing God.

- a. It all begins with grace
  - Grace is never received by the proud
  - Grace is the balm the humble long for
- b. Grace-drenched humility
  - Submits to God
  - Resists the devil
  - Seek purity
  - Directs our emotions
  - Leads to exaltation

Humility is the path to resolving conflict. Humility will rightly value God above self and therefore the pull of the world system will lose its luster. Humility will also cause us to pursue godliness in the midst of conflict. It will help us confess our sin before men and God and will also assist us as we strive to continue pleasing God in the midst of inevitable human conflict.

**Conclusion:** In his book, *Seeing With New Eyes*, author and biblical counselor David Powlison reflects upon the hope of James 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 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.

The bluntness of James’ diagnosis can be hard to swallow, but it is also filled with grace. May we acknowledge our role in conflict and pursue pleasing God in the midst of conflict whether we are at fault or not.

*Mike Leake is associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Jasper, IN. He and his wife, Nikki have 2 children (Isaiah and Hannah). Follow Mike on Twitter @mikeleake, or his blog at <http://mikeleake.net>*