

Introduction: About 200 years before the birth of Christ, in 168 B.C the Big, Bad Syrians marched into Egyptian territory in order to lay claim to their growing empire. There was only one major problem. Egypt at that time was under the reign of a Bigger & Badder (kids that's not proper English) empire in that day: Rome. This provoked a fateful meeting on Egyptian soil between the Roman Counsel Popilius and King Antiochus IV of Syria. It was King Antiochus the IV who had led his troops to invade Roman territory in Egypt.

If you are familiar with the Roman empire during this time in history, you know they were not only dominant militarily but also had plenty of arrogance to go along with their dominance. That is why we might be inclined to believe what the leading Roman historian Titus Livy recorded about this meeting. In one of his volumes he says that Popilius took a stick and drew a circle around the feet of Antiochus in the sand with an ultimatum attached. He told him to withdraw his troops from Egypt before he stepped outside of that circle or Rome would unleash it's fury on Syria.

In other words, "Antiochus, if you cross this line, expect trouble, expect conflict." Whether it happened exactly like that or not, that is the possible source for our expressions "drawing a line in the sand."

"A Line in the Sand" **James 4:1-6**

James is going to talk about how we draw lines in the sand with one another and even with God. His recipe for removing the battle lines we draw is simply this:

The Point: Live with godly passions and pursue faithful friendship with God through grace.

T: His first piece of instruction is that for us to ...

I. Address your internal desires to resolve conflict with others (4:1-2b).

Context: Last week we saw how our lives will be characterized by earthly wisdom (full of selfish ambition and bitter jealousy) or heavenly wisdom, which is pure, peace seeking, and produces God's righteousness. The opening words of Chapter 4 show that these believers were not living with heavenly wisdom and consequently, not experiencing peace. Look at verse 1 of ch. 4: *Read 1-2a*

- Immediately, we observe how James is concerned with the source of our conflict. "What *causes this?*" Why are you fighting and feuding with one another? Do you ever ask that question?
- Here's his answer: "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"
- James lays the responsibility at our feet. He says, "YOUR passions . . . within YOU." He goes on to describe this in 2 ways...
 - **Desire > unmet > Murder** (quote Mt. 5:21ff)
 - **Covet > unfulfilled > fight & quarrel**
- These passions that are warring within us are what drives our conflict.

- What does James mean? He is speaking metaphorically to describe what happens in our souls. What happens on the outside of our lives is the result of the internal desires that we carry in our hearts. The conflict is internal.

- We live our lives full of desires. Many of these desires are selfish and sinful. Though many would say our problems are purely biological or primarily environmental or cultural, the Bible tells a different story. It teaches our primary problem is sinful desires rising up from within.
- One scholar said: “[*Our sinful desire*] is the militant cause of all disturbance. . . . **Public problems have private causes.**” – J. A. Motyer
- So . . . *when someone or something disrupts our pursuit of what we desire, we are ready to throw down.*
- Most of the time we engage in conflict by finger pointing. If *they* would just change, if my *circumstances* would improve. Let me encourage you, neither people, nor our circumstances will ever be perfect. Is that what we’re looking for? Never gonna find it.
- James says, resolve conflict by first looking in the mirror. Address your internal desires
- Don’t you love how Christianity cuts to the depths of who we are. It takes our desires and motives into consideration at every step. If you think Christianity is about a set of spiritual behaviors, let me introduce you to the real thing. It is about God calling out the depths of who we are to be brought into all of who he is.

Do you see how this works?

- In our hearts we say, “I WANT x, y, z...” What do you want? What is your X, Y, Z?
- This changes from moment to moment because we are creatures of desire.
 - It can be something as major: I want that job. I want that girlfriend/boyfriend. I want respect, recognition (applause), loyalty. I want you to say you’re sorry.
 - It can be as something small as Sleep (ok, that’s not small; confession time. . . Jordyn) or a material possession (she just bought those shoes I had my eye on). Women? Dudes? Don’t cop my Vans.
 - Conflict arises even over stupid stuff like what we prefer to eat, watch on tv. do on the weekend, play with... (Anybody have kids? I know some of you still feel this way as adults.)
- When something or *someone* opposes that which set our hearts on, friction is going to happen.
- Who had a thought or said something like this recently? “Seriously, bro.” “Oh, no she didn’t.” Anyone? Don’t lie. Did anyone have any conflict this week? At work? At home? At play? Of course, you did. 100% probably can identify a conflict, however great or small.
- If you can pinpoint your selfish desires, you will uncover sources of conflict in your life...
- Now, some of you are thinking, James words sound so extreme. Surely he isn’t referring to our everyday conflicts. Of course he is. Murder, anger, envy, insulting word, evil looks all start at the level of selfish ambition. If looks could kill... I’ve been murdered a time or two, mostly by my ex-girlfriend’s grandmothers. No joke! 😊
- Here’s the point: Jesus & James do not “shrug their shoulders” at our sinful conflict. “Ah, that’s not a big deal.” They take it extremely seriously.
- We draw lines in the sand and take up arms against one another, when we should be putting our arms around one another.

So how should we work to resolve conflict? **When Conflict Arises** (*A few practical encouragements*)

- 1) **Pause.** Take a deep breath. We get so worked up. Chill Pill. Watch your tone. Allow God to bring calm and peace. Prayer helps!
- 2) **Recognize your Sin.** Realize there is something happening below the surface. See how your selfish desires are contributing to the conflict. Understand that you are capable of the same person’s sin if you have not already been guilty of it at some point in your life.

- 3) **Apply the love test (1 Cor. 13).** Am I being patient, kind, not self-seeking, not easily angered, bearing all things, enduring all things?
- 4) **Go to your brother & speak the truth in love.** Humbly confess your sin *first!* Then humbly share how you have been offended or wronged.
- 5) **Display the gospel in your conflict.** Not only does the gospel bring reconciliation, the gospel also frees us from having to win the argument or conflict. Why? *We've already won. If I have God's approval, we have it all.*

[What if they are unwilling to resolve to conflict? You've done everything you can do. Pray. Ask for wisdom. Don't give up. Approach them again. Keep putting the ball in their court. Take someone else with you (a la Matthew 18). If after multiple attempts, pray for them and continue to entrust them to God.]

T: It would be one thing if we only took up arms against one another, but James tells us we have been much more audacious than we know. We have taken up arms against God. So not only must we address our internal desires to resolve conflict with others. We must do the same with God. That is our second point.

II. Address your internal desires to resolve your conflict with God (4:2c-4).

- Look at the end of verse 2 (*Read 2c-3*). Our sinful passions affect our relationship with God.
- “You do not have because you do not ask...” God is our Father. He delights to give us good gifts (James 1:17).
- But some will say: “Hey, I ask, but I still don’t receive.” Well James continues... “You do not receive because you ask wrongly *to spend it on your passions.*” We often pray with impure motives.
- Do you see how Christianity once again cuts to the heart?
- We pray, but our prayers are really about what’s in it for us! Here’s a safe conclusion: Many of our unanswered prayers are the result of our own impure motives.
- ***God is too holy to answer unholy prayer.***
- It is amazing how our sinfulness can taint even the most holy things we do. We must not assume our apparent spiritual acts are truly practices of devotion.
- Let me encourage you to put a two-word question against everything you do. **“For who?”**
 - You prayed. Great. *For who?* You served. Nice. *For who?* You came to church today. *For who?*
 - That good deed. That encouraging word. *For who?*

T: James tells us to check our twisted desires when we go to God in prayer, but he is only warming up in describing our capacity for wrong towards God. Verse 4 comes like a spiritual bomb. (Read verse 4) James finds the strongest imagery possible: ***Adultery!*** & ***Rebellion!***

- God’s relationship with his people throughout history has been portrayed as a marriage. In the NT, we see the church called the bride of Christ. This is the backdrop for why the OT would describe the rebellion of God’s people like this . . .
 - **“How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores.” (Jeremiah 5:7)**
- Some are thinking, but that’s the OT, Jesus is so nice... **“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” (Mt. 12:39)**
- If this makes Jesus unpleasant to you, let me ask you: who is upset with the doctor who says “The blood tests reveal you are extremely sick.” Nobody! Then why do we balk at Jesus’ words when

gives his true diagnosis. Let God be God. Let's receive his Word rather than stand in judgment when he speaks.

- To be unfaithful to God in open, unrepentant rebellion, is to commit spiritual adultery.

T: Another radical picture . . . not only spiritual adultery, **Spiritual rebellion.**

- God made us for friendship with himself. That's good news.
- We do not always desire friendship with him. That's the bad news.
- In fact, before a person trusts Christ to be their Savior & Lord, they are not a friend of God, but a friend of the world, which refers to the values of the world apart from and contrary to God.
- Anyone who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God.
- In his final interview **C. S. Lewis** described coming to faith in this way: **"at the conversion moment, what I heard was God saying, 'Put down your gun and we'll talk'."**
- There can be times in the Christian life, where we go back to seeking friendship with the world. *This is what James is referring to here.*

- He says, that's like enmity. To have enmity in our hearts is to hold deep-rooted hostility toward God and his ways. [Genesis 3:15 tells us there is enmity between the serpent (Satan) and the offspring of the woman (Jesus). Does that help put this into perspective?]
- App: Please listen to me: unless you have sided with the Son, you are at enmity with God. That may sound harsh, but it's real. We have to see how bleak life is apart from Christ, in order to see how bright God desires for it to be with him!
- Christ died for rebels, like you and me. (Romans 5:8)

- God wants us to be 100 percent on his side. How frequent are husbands supposed to love their wives? How consistently are wives to love their husbands? All day. Every day.
- It is sooo worth it. Jesus calls all who follow him "friends." **"I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)**
- *Man, I have a lot of great friends. [I could tell you about J. Greene. I could tell you about my boy Fish. Bo. Seth, Zach, Joddy, My parents. Marsha... They're all great,] but no greater friend than God.*

- And let me say this: the most dreadful part of having impurity and rebellion in our hearts is that it hinders our sight of God. It hinders our friendship with God. **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8)**
- Do you see the connection: purity, sight, knowledge, relationship? What we need the most is disrupted. So the call is to draw near to God.

T: James puts forth such strong language because he wants them to wake up and be drawn back to friendship with God. The Bible calls that repentance. Is there any hope for them? Any hope for us? His solution comes in verses 5-6 where he says:

III. Receive grace from our jealous God (4:5-6).

Read 5-6. What's the solution? It is two-fold..

1) Recognize the jealousy of God for your devotion. He wants our total devotion! God is jealous for our 100% of our allegiance. Your thoughts. Your decisions. Your actions when no one else sees.

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

- Even the thought of a spouse committing adultery is enough to spark a holy rage in our hearts. How much more so is this true of the heart of God?
- James backs up his strong claim about the nature of infidelity by quoting Scripture. It seems that he is referring to the overall message of the Old Testament rather than pointing to a specific verse.
- *God is jealous for us. He yearns jealously.* How awesome is that?! He made us for himself.

2) Receive his grace.

Verse 6: "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"

- Wow! Memorize these five words... "But he gives more grace." Medimemo this week (pull out worship guide). Just think on these 5 words...
- We all need grace. And we all need "more grace." These are some of the most comforting words in Scripture. In spite of my unfaithfulness, in spite of my rebellion, "he gives more grace."
- Grace leads us back to God. Grace gives us the strength to follow God. Grace empowers us to make peace and seek deeper experiences of friendship with God.
- How can you live an "All day. Every day." kind of life? "More grace!"
- We have been talking drawing lines in the sand: God has drawn his line in the sand, and he pulls us back into the territory of grace!

Conclusion:

- So here's the challenge, to live with godly passions and pursue friendship with God, we must humble ourselves in order to receive Grace...
- You will never receive grace, for the first time or the ten thousandth time, unless you are poor in spirit.
- **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3**
- You have to see your spiritual poverty before God. We are bankrupt. This is applicable in everything. How can you love? How can you forgive? How can you seek restoration with God and one another? Humility. Poverty of spirit.
- **"What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7)**
- **"A person cannot receive one thing unless it is given him from heaven." (John 3:27)**
- God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Recognize your pride and lay down your arms. It is time to raise the white flag and surrender to God.

As we move into a time of Prayer . . . – Give people one minute...