

**Today, I'd like to talk to you about conflict...unhealthy, unresolved Conflict...Specifically, Conflict with others and with God...**

**Listen to this quote**, “Mankind must change for all human conflict... To gain a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation...the foundation of such a method is love...”

**Or listen to this one...**”Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it...that factor is attitude...”

**For just a second, Let us all be honest...**Every single one of us in here experiences unhealthy conflict, Right?...Conflict in our marriage, conflict with our children, conflict in our friendships, conflict at work and even conflict with God...

**Yet today, in our American culture, is a day that we actually celebrate and glorify** conflict...Today is a day where conflict is met with conflict...For this afternoon, the conflict of conflicts will be displayed around the world to 100s of millions of people...Today is a day where the team that imposes their conflicting will the greatest wins the valued prize...

**If someone hasn't informed you...Today is Super Bowl Sunday...**Today the NFL will crown its champion...

**And yet if you think about it...Football or any sport for that matter is a facilitator of conflict...**You have two opposing sides dedicated to their own personal selfish agenda to win...And whomever imposes their selfish will more becomes victorious...

**WE:**

**Yet if you think about it, We in our basic human nature enjoy watching conflict...**We enjoy watching two different sports teams collide on the field...We love watching when the underdog battles back against all the odds to overcome the will of another....

**Yet Our enjoyment of conflict is not just limited to sports** but it is throughout TV and movies...In fact, a show without great conflict is called “boring”...Every good movie or show contains conflict...a show typically introduces a conflict in the beginning to only be resolved later restoring symmetry to our lives...

**Yet friends.....For just a second allow me to have a basic insight into life.....**We love watching conflict when it is someone else...But we absolutely hate conflict in our own life...Conflict is great when it is someone else...But when conflict is in our own lives it is

dreadful...

**- We hate conflict in a marriage...** I imagine many of you have had times in your marriage where marriage is just plain “work”... Where the only twig of connection is the mutual dedication to each other found in the phrase “till death do you part”...

**- We hate conflict in the family...** I imagine if you have brothers or sisters or even children that it is the pits to have conflict with them... It is a dark hole to be in a contentious relationship... To see your years and years of relationship and dedication be put on the rocks... To tip toe around one another hoping to resolve it one day...

**- Yet friends, We also hate conflict.....with God...** I imagine everyone of you in this room has been in conflict with God... Conflict when God didn't seem to answer a prayer... When God failed to give you what you hoped... When God “Let you down”... or when God allowed tragedy...

**Conflict with God can cause us to** question the very foundation which you stand... One can question the promises of the scripture... One questions the sovereignty of God... One can even question God's Love...

**When one is in conflict with God, one** often asks, “How could a loving God allow this to happen?”

**Transition: Well today, James discusses** conflict... James discusses both conflict with God and conflict with others...

**And today, we will specifically answer the** question through James 4, “How do we reduce conflict in our lives? How do we reduce conflict in our lives with others and with God?”

**In his attempt to answer the question,** James dives into the source of conflict in verse 1... as well as instruction to reduce conflict found in verses 2-6...

**Transition: So, come with me to James 4,**

**GOD:**

**Transition: As you turn there to James 4, I find it helpful for the vast majority of us here today... To do a bit of review...** We are a little over half way through our verse by verse exegesis of James and many of us might find it helpful to do a bit of review...

**Because James here in Chapter 4 turns the tables...** He flips the script... James actually

changes his audience in Chapters 4-5...In James chapters 1-3, James is primarily targeting the individual believers...But then, In James 4-5, James is targeting primarily groups of believers...Either the entire group of a church or smaller groups such as Christian merchants and landowners...

### **In James Chapter 1-3, James first exhorts believers to...**

- Endure in the Face of Trials Chapters 1:1-12
- To Overcome Lies About God due to trials 1:13-18
- To Respond to the Word of God properly 1:19-27

### **Then in Chapter 2: James urges the Christians as individuals to...**

- **To overcome favoritism**...James 2:1-13
- **Then, in James 2:14-26, James continue to exhort believers to Justify Themselves** before Man by works Because **they are Justified** before God by faith....

**Then James continues to urge the individual believer** in Chapter 3...Chapter 3 Verses 1-12 James exhorts believers to control their tongue...then in James 3:13-18 James commands all believers to be truly wise...to value true wisdom...that true wisdom is displayed by their dictation, demeanor and deed and then abhor false wisdom rooted in bitter jealousy and selfish ambition...

**James now** in Chapter 4 turns the tables to address groups of believers...

**Today...James in James 4:1-6 addresses something every Christian** struggles with...He addresses conflict...Specifically, the cause and consequence of our conflict with God and our conflict with one another...

**Transition: With all this in mind, let us begin in James 4** with verse 1...

**Read verse 1**, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? <sup>[b]</sup>Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”

**Point #1: Reduce conflict by Recognizing its source verse 1-2...by recognizing its source...**

**Notice here once again James asks a question to introduce the new subject**...What subject does James introduce first? He asks, “What is the “source” of quarrels and conflicts among you?” Or more literally the Greek construction reads... “From where do wars and from where do fightings come from?” What is the source of your unhealthy wars, arguments and conflicts?

**What is the source of unhealthy conflict in your marriage?** What is the source of conflict in your relationships, family life, work...? What is the root cause of it ALL?

**Look at the rest of verse 1...**“Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members... You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”

**What is the source of all conflict?** “the source your pleasures that wage war in your members...” Or in other words...

**The source of all conflict is selfishness.....Innate selfishness...**It is your broken innate sinful human nature...to desire what “I” want over what anyone else wants...

**Friends, most conflicts with your spouse...boils down to one thing....Most conflict** with your friends boils down to one things, most conflicts with loved ones and most conflicts with God boil down to one thing...that someone someone wants their way...

**Think about conflict with a spouse...Most conflicts are rooted in at** least one spouse being innately selfish...Yet friends, conflict in marriage can be even deeper than that...conflict is often a misunderstanding...Yet misunderstandings lead to conflict when both spouses are not willing to bend or come around to the other side of the mountain and see things differently...Conflict can often be avoided in all settings by setting aside selfishness and realizing that a spouse or person is different and sees things differently...Once that is realized conflict can be nullified...But avoiding conflict in any relationship requires at least one person being selfless...

**Unhealthy Conflict comes in...When one spouse refuses to pick up their** clothes despite the wishes of their partner...then they are acting selfishly...When one spouse continues to spend and spend indiscreetly and not according to budget despite the wishes of their partner...Then they are acting selfishly...

**When one spouse simply refuses to be home** on time despite the wishes of their partner...Then they are acting selfishly...When one spouse works longggggg hours ignoring the vain attempts of the other to spend time together...then they are acting selfishly...

**\*\*To tell you a quick story: I recently watched a documentary** where the former secretary of the treasury was interviewed...This man ascended the ladder at Goldman Sacs by working hard and working very longggggg hours eventually arriving at CEO before his appointment as the treasury secretary...

**Anyone who arrives at the top typically is a workaholic...**But one day, his wife said to him...that if you keep leaving before the kids wake up and arriving after they go to sleep...That

one day you will come home and I will be gone and the kids will still be there...

**He got the memo...**

**I heard a quote recently that says this**, “If you live your life as if everything is about you...Then, you will be left with just that...Just You...”

But listen to this one... “One of the highest representations of the Image of God is a husband and wife serving and loving each other...”

Friends,

**Marriages are ripped apart by selfishness...**

**Families are ripped** apart by selfishness...

**Friendships are ripped** apart by selfishness

Businesses are ripped apart by selfishness

**Transition: But friends, ya know**, conflict does not just exist in marriages or in families ...But conflict can also exist in the family of God...

Conflict can exist in the church...In fact, Many of us carry around the scars of someone else’s previous selfish agenda...Yet Conflict in the church is also rooted in selfishness...

And friends, listen...Watch this...Conflict will always exist in here when the focus is on “me” rather than “we”...

**Conflict rushes into church when people say**, “Well I like...I like a preacher with more hair... Well I like...a laser light show and Smoke machines...**Well I like...**

Or “Well, I don’t have...” “I don’t a place to belong” or “Well, I was offended when someone looked at me weird...” What is the one key word in all of those... “I”...

**Can I be a bit transparent? Friends, Church is not about “Me”** (point to yourself...)

**Church is about “We”, “Him” and “Them”, right?**

**Church is about “We”**...that we as a body of believers can come together and worship together...Regardless of background, color or preferences...that we can come together to lift up the name of Jesus Christ together...That we can open up the WORD OF GOD and study it together and apply it together...To glorify Him and Make His name Great TOGETHER...

**Church is also about “Him”**...Church is about worshipping “Him” (point up), serving Him (Hands out) and being equipped to follow Him (point out)...That we glorify Him, that we honor Him, that we serve Him...That we truly worship Him...

**Friends, listen, when we are concerned** for “Him” then style of music is much less important and what is more important is “Him” that He is worshipped...

**All this...All the AWANA programs**, all the Sunday school classes, all the prayer meetings, all the bulletins, Sunday clothes, should be about “Him”...Right? I mean friends, let us put unity and worship above selfish preference...Amen?

**Let us put unity “WE” and worship “Him”** above personal preference “ME”...Let us recognize the source of conflict and let us restrain our own natural selfishness...

**Transition: The Root of ALL UNHEALTHY CONFLICT in marriage**, family and church is selfishness...Yet there is one more place of conflict that all Christians experience...Conflict with God...

**What is the source of conflict with God? You guessed it...** We have conflict with God When God does not give us what we ask or when God doesn't answer our prayers...

**To tell you a quick story...I recently spoke** to a former inner city student of mine...And this young man said...”Ya know Byron I'm questioning Christianity... Because God never seems to come through...I mean, I pray and He does nothing...”

**We've all been there, right? We've all been in conflict with God...**Where we pray and pray and the Lord doesn't seem to answer...

**Why doesn't the Lord answer our prayers in the way we wish? Look at verse 2b-3...Fascinating...**

**Read 2b-3**, “You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask <sup>[c]</sup>with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* <sup>[d]</sup>on your pleasures.”

**Why doesn't the Lord give us what we want? Two reasons...**

**Reason #1:** We do not have because we do not ask...Sometimes the things we want...we do not have because we do not ask...We have never asked of the Lord...

**Why else does the Lord not give us what we want?** I think #2 is probably the larger reason...

**Read verse 3**, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you

may spend it on your pleasures...”

**Reason #2: We do not have because we ask selfishly...** We ask selfishly... We each have prayed to God for something selfish and didn't receive it...

**Story: When I was a child, I remember praying every night** to be a pro-baseball player in the spring, a pro golfer in the summer and a NBA basketball player in the winter...”

**Of course, I got none of that...Why?** Well I'm 6' tall with a 6" vertical leap but also because I was praying selfishly...I was praying for “me”...

Instead I should have prayed, “Lord, give me direction for your choice of my career...” Lord, be my light...

**Transition: Yet...Notice verse 4...** Notice what James discusses next as he addresses the consequences of selfishness with God.... What is the end result of being selfish before God? Look at verse 4...

**Read verse 4,** “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

**Selfishness before God and before others...** makes one what? A friend of the world and an enemy of God... Yikes... So, if we forget to ask... Or, If we ask of God with selfish motives... then James calls a friends of the world and an enemy of God... Hmm...

**Yet Think about it for a second... Watch this... I want you** to think of your relationship with God in people terms... In a person to person relationship... Is someone truly your friend if they only come to you wanting something? (NO...)

**Does someone really love you properly if all they ever have is** their hand out when speaking to you? (No...) Now if everything time we speak to God... If all we have is our hand out.... Do we truly love God? How can we expect to be “friends of God” if the only hand we give God is an open hand... saying “Give me”... “Give me”... “Give me”...

How insulted must God feel? And the root problem of all unhealthy conflict before God and others is selfishness...

**Transition: My point #1: is to Reduce conflict by Recognizing its source Followed by Point #2: to Reduce conflict by Restraining Selfishness...**

**Yet point #3 is found in verses 5-6 as James answers a very insightful question...The question he answers is..."What does God really want from you? Look at verses 5-6**

**Read verses 5-6,** "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "[e]He [f]jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? <sup>6</sup> But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.""

**My Full Point:** Reduce conflict by Recognizing its source (verse 1), Restraining Selfishness (verse 2b-3) and to **Point #3: Reduce Conflict by Remaining Surrendered and Humble verse 4-6**

**What does God really want?** "God jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in you..."

**What does God want? Two things...God first wants you...God wants you...** More literally the Greek construction read in Verse 5, "He (God) jealously yearns over and over again for the spirit which He has made to dwell in you..."

**Friends, God wants you...The Surrendered you...** God doesn't want the give me, give me you...God wants all of you ...He doesn't want just your selfish side...He doesn't just want your needy side...**God wants your total surrender...**

**Think about it: God jealously yearns** for a surrendered you...God wants all of you...Despite your conflict...Despite your messiness...Despite your conflict with one another, despite your lack of knowing how to pray... God wants your total surrender...

**But what else does God want?** Look at verse 6, "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.""

**What else does God want?**

**#2: God wants you to be humble...** God wants you to humble yourselves...to surrender your desire for control...God wants you to come to Him humbly in prayer...seeking to do His will and earnestly seeking His face in relationship...

**\*\*My full point this morning is: "Reduce conflict (before God and before others) by Recognizing its source verse 2 by Restraining Selfishness verse 2b-3 and by Remaining Surrendered and Humble verse 4-6"**

**Transition: But now, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to take a minute and answer the question,** "So what? How do I apply this passage to my life?"

**YOU:**

**The goal of today's sermon is for** each of us to reduce unhealthy conflict in our lives...My goal is to take James' message on conflict and make it very practical to our lives allowing all of us to experience the Bible **with "handles"**...

**So, in order to reduce or eradicate unhealthy conflict in our lives...we must first recognize where conflict comes from...**

**Step #1: to Reduce conflict is by Recognizing its source** - All unhealthy conflict is rooted in selfishness...Friends, if you are unhappy in your marriage, if you are unhappy in your job, if you are unhappy in your relationship with your children or with God...It all pretty much boils down to at least one or many persons promoting "ME" over "WE"...

**Yet friends, I'd like to make an observation...**Most relational conflicts are **fueled** not by a selfish agenda but they are often fueled by a misunderstanding... Yet the spark of relational wildfire is often a lack of willingness...a lack of willingness to recognize that someone else's perspective may not be **"wrong"...**it may be just different...

**Friends, recognizing the source of conflict requires** us to determine if it is a difference of opinion or... a selfish agenda...Friends let us not light ablaze a wildfire of unhealthy conflict over a matter of simple misunderstanding...

**Step #2: Reduce conflict by Restraining selfishness**

- I am going to recommend to you something very practical...If you are sitting here tired of conflict...perhaps conflict with your spouse or loved one...Then I want you to think of the very conflict you are tired of having.....Perhaps it is the conflict of your spouse bugging you to spend money more wisely, or perhaps it is someone not listening to your needs, or the incessant annoyance of someone asking you to go to bed on time...

**I want you to think of the conflict...**And then I want you to think of why? What is the selfish need you are filling? It is a desire for freedom to spend...It is a desire to feel important?

**Now, Take that selfish motive and ask for forgiveness.....**before the person you have wronged and before God...Because friends, is it really worth it? Is conflict really worth a grudge or bitterness towards another? Why not resolve it through forgiveness?

**Step #3: Reduce conflict by Remaining surrendered and humble...**

- Friends God wants all of you...Not part of you...And if we are holding onto selfishness and or

your own dreams, then you aren't surrendered and humble...If we are concerned for ourselves...If you pray for your goals, for your job, for your retirement, for your church agenda while completely ignoring God's Will...Then perhaps you aren't a friend of God...

What does the Lord really want? God wants a surrendered and humbled you...If you are holding behind your back your dreams and goals...If you are holding back your desires from God, then you cannot truly be a friend of God...Friends, release "YOU"...surrender and be humbled...

WE:

**Friends, this church is embracing a culture of love**...A Love for God and for others...Friends, let us remain surrendered and humble to go before the throne room of God not with our checklist but with an open mind to His will...To what He wants...

**Friends, our goals, our lives, our church should be marked by surrender and humility**.....Our ambitions should be His ambitions... Our focus must be His focus....Our mission His mission...Our love His love...Our dreams His dreams, Our Will His will...Our desires His desires...Our agenda His Agenda...And Our love for others His love for others...

Amen?