

Book of James

Sermon #8: To End All Wars

James 4:1-10

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- October 23, 2022

If you'll turn in your Bibles to James chapter 4, we'll start with verses 1 through 10 today. And when I was reading these paragraphs this week I thought, *This has profound application, especially for Grace Covenant Church.* Because when you read these sentences, what will jump off the page here is that it directly appeals to the values and the vision of our church, because it's going to be talking about relational discipleship.

At Grace, those are our words—"relational discipleship." And that happens here. How does that happen? Through the Holy Spirit, through the truth of the Bible, and through relationships with one another. That's what we mean by relational discipleship, because it's relationships that we have with one another that bring out the best and the worst of us. And it's in the context of that moment of bringing out the best and the worst of us that we become like Christ in all of life. And that's our vision. The vision of Grace is to guide one another, as many people as we possibly can, to become like Christ in all of life. And we do that in these moments of relational discipleship.

Overview

When you look at today's passage in Chapter 4, verses 1 through 10, you're going to see that he's talking about relationships at their worst. He's going to be bringing up why we get into arguments and disagreements and why there is division in the church.

He won't leave us there. He's going to explain why, and then he's going to show us the way out—how to bring things back to peace. The topic is going to be relationships, but particularly anger and jealousy that we have towards one another and the spite that that can cause. And that turns into words and that brings about chaos, war, and destruction.

Beauty (this is going somewhere) is defined by God's creation working in harmony. Sacred beauty is when sacred things from God are working in harmony. And the sacred things of God that this is going to be appealing to will be family and the Church, which is often called a

family. And when those work in harmony, when people in a family (church family or at home) humble ourselves and are humble towards each other and towards God and constantly looking for opportunities to yield or to serve (“yield” was a word we studied last time together), then harmony breaks out and beauty and sacred things happen.

Now if we bow up and are proud and demanding and say, *It’s my comfort that matters, it’s my ego that needs to be satisfied*, that brings about division. It’s going to bring about destruction—war. That’s what he’s going to mention.

And so, in this section James is going to be red-faced with passion, because at stake here is the beauty of a sacred thing, the Church and the home. And he’s going to be talking about the arguing and the conflict that’s going on, and he’s fundamentally saying, *Look, it’s not a game. This is a sacred thing we’re talking about.*

And so, his style is going to turn up to an eleven. He’s going to put down his coach’s whistle and he’s going to pick up a drill sergeant’s stripes and a bullhorn. And I want you to be listening for the military metaphors and the military vocabulary that’s saturated throughout this. By the end of this he’s going to be picking up that bullhorn and just screaming direct orders at us. There’s not a lot of explanation, just do this. And we’ll say, “Sir, yes sir.” And the reason for his passion is because these are sacred things that we’re destroying with our arguments and our conflict.

Strife in the Church

So, before we even get started with the passage itself, can you think of a time recently when there was a dust-up in your relationships, when there was conflict and division and arguing? In the last week? On the way here? Last month? How about those beautiful COVID years we had together?

James 4:1

What causes wars and battles among you? Don't they come from your passions that war within you?

Let's think about those situations and then look at chapter 4, verse 1. He's going to talk to us about why those things happen. Verse 1 says: "What causes the wars and battles among you? Don't they come from your passions, your pleasures that war within you?"

What is he talking about? He's saying that the church family, brothers and sisters in Christ, have a war zone going on here. And the words "quarrels and conflicts" are literally the words for "battles and war." That's that whole military metaphor that he's going to use. He's going to say, *Why is there so much trouble between brothers and sisters here?* He's going to give us two reasons why we have these disagreements and conflicts--they go deeper—and the two reasons that cause this infighting. The first one he's going to mention is a psychological reason, and the second one will actually be a theological reason causing so many arguments.

First Cause: Inner Desire

James 4:1

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war within you?

The psychological reason is first. It's actually at the end of verse 1, but it's the second sentence. Look what it says: "What is the source of the quarrels and the conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war within you?" The word "pleasures" there could be desires, passions, and those are waging war within us. And then they just start waging war everywhere. And the word for "passions" or "desires" could be positive or negative. It's somewhat of a neutral term. It can be a good thing or a bad thing. But even if it's a good thing, it's a thing gone wild. It's when that desire becomes too powerful because it's not being met, and so we get frustrated and frustration turns to anger and anger turns outward, and we're going to start making things difficult.

But he's using a negative word for that expression of desire because, literally, the Greek word for "passion" or "desires" here is where we get the word "hedonism." But the word "hedonism" is a good word here because it's the world value. It's the whole value system that says that all choices lead to me being comfortable. The chief goal in life is for me to have my ego padded and stroked and enjoyed. I want to feel physically better and I want my ego to be inflated.

So, the question that he asks in verse 1 is "Where do all these battles and these wars get started?" And he just says this: it's when someone or something prevents me from getting what I want. And I walk into this house, I want to walk into this church and say, *Everyone must do whatever it takes for me to feel good about myself or to literally feel good physically.* He talks about these inner cravings that war within us—the cravings for affection or influence or control or power. It can just be for comfort.

I just want a hassle-free life.

Is that it?

That's all it is. I just want that—a hassle-free life.

That's what these cravings are inside of us. And they become so important that the cravings are more important than other people and the cravings are more important than other purposes in life. So, everything else becomes second. This becomes first. *And I want these things met.* And so, we wage war.

We Have Cravings that Underlie the Conflicts

James says that the sources for these things are not a mystery; it's not someone else; it's not something else. It's us. And he's going to say this repetitiously. He's going to say there are three different kinds of cravings. He's saying the same thing, but he's just restating it differently. There are three different cravings and three different effects that happen to us. They're in the second sentence—we're only in the second sentence now.

James 4:2

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You are envious but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

“You desire but do not have, so you kill. You are envious but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.” He says that you don’t get your desires met, and so, you kill. This is hyperbole. He’s not talking about people literally killing each other. It could probably lead to that, but we say (don’t we?), “Boy, if looks could kill.” *Did you see what your face looked like when they said that? If looks could kill ...*

It says we’re envious, and because of that we quarrel and we fight. That’s the battle and the war words used a second time. It’s the idea that we’re using our words, and we found out earlier that those words have the power to light a forest on fire, or a church, or a home.

And then, lastly, he says that you don’t have because you don’t ask. You quit even praying about this. You’re too busy launching rockets to even bring this up to God.

James 4:3

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

What I love about this is James says, *I know what you’re thinking. You do pray about it. Well, let me tell you why it’s still not working out for you.* Look at the next sentence, verse 3: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” There’s the word “pleasure”. There’s that word “hedonism” again.

You’re asking for whatever—let’s just say stuff—but all the stuff you’re asking for is all about you again. Here you are in the center of the universe. And so, James is drawing attention to the style of prayer they have and we have and the way they treat God. He’s saying it’s like that kind of prayer where God is like a vending machine and you put in your two quarters and you don’t get what you want, and what do you do that vending machine? Oh, yeah, you’re going to kick it. Yeah. You do that to a vending machine—that’s what you’re doing to God. You’re

shaking Him, you're rattling Him, you're turning it on the things that He considers sacred. I'm going to do what I have to, to get what I want.

And if you have a pure motive prayer, it has a different view of God in it. It's not about doing your part so you can get something back. It's not raging desires that are causing that. A pure-motive prayer understands the audience is an all-wealthy, all-powerful, great King and Creator of all things, and you're in submission to that King, and that King loves you and wants what is best for you. And you're going before Him and saying, *I want what Your purpose is for my family. I want what Your purpose is for my life.* And when you start praying prayers in the context of who that audience is, just watch what happens. Just see what God will do. He'll answer those prayers.

So, in summary, the first part here that James is writing, he's declaring, quite obviously, that there are arguments and battles and conflicts because it's about me being first and foremost in my comfort. And we should think about that conflict from last week or last month or last year and think about how much of the conflict was because we had some kind of passion or desire, some raging war within us, not getting what we want, and so we took it out on other people.

Second Cause: First Allegiance

Now the second cause is deeper than our psychology. It goes into our theology. We have theological reasons for getting into all these arguments. And when we look at the next section, I want you to be listening for the first allegiances in our lives. What is absolutely the highest priority of what we live and die for? I think everyone in here, by definition probably, has God as an important part of their life, and that's part of the problem. It's not that God is important; it's that He's not first.

James 4:4

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Look what he says in chapter 4, verse 4: “You adulterous people”—I would use the word “traitors” because he’s talking military—“don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

James is saying, *Look, soldier, choose your sides. You think you can have two commanders? You have to choose one. You can't be friends with the world and then be friends with God. You'll be enemies with God.* You can't fraternize with the enemy. There's a word for that—the word is “traitor.” You can't flirt with someone who's not your husband or your wife. That's the road to adultery.

So, it's about a purity of commitment. Each and every one of us has in our souls a ranking of values. And we have a primary allegiance to something. And a lot of times we don't know what the primary allegiance is, honestly. It shows up in our values. Sometimes we don't even know what our values are until that value is not met. And then we have this stirring, this raging conflict within us. We're not getting what we want in our value system. And now we find out, *Whoa, these values were attached to this allegiance and this allegiance is not to God Almighty.* We become angry and bitter and we start bringing this wrath out.

This is the second time in James' epistle that he's referencing the world. He says that if you're friends with the world, then you're enemies with God. “Friends with the world” has two applications. One is the whole world value system--again, the trillions of dollars that are spent daily, maybe, to put me back in the center of the universe. And then it's also like a means: the world's way, the world's system also has the value that the ends justify the means. You do whatever you have to, to get what you want out of life. There you go.

This is opposed to God's way: having God's values, God's purpose, and even God's means, God's way of getting things done. That's the war that he's talking about. And that's how we show ourselves to be enemies of God.

How Do We Become Enemies of God?

How does that happen? Especially when we go to church, we're studying our Bibles and are regularly involved in our devotions, so how do we get to the place where we are enemies of God? Or why do we find ourselves traitors or adulterers, in his words? There are two reasons that happens.

One is just ignorance. Sometimes when people become Christians they don't understand. Maybe it hasn't been explained to them. They don't know that when you become a Christian your salvation means that you're serving a great king. And in our culture, we don't know what it means to live under a monarchy, but it means to do what you're told. It means that you surrender everything to that kingship. We've been bought out of slavery, and so everything is, quote, surrendered to him: our values, our possessions, our ambitions, our reputation, our means of getting things done that have worked so effectively in the past. And anything that He lets you keep, good, that's yours. But it's the idea that nothing belongs to me. And that "nothing" is not just physical; it's the value systems. Sometimes people just don't know when they go into salvation that it means it's a surrender to all of that.

But I think that one of the ways that many people fall into this adultery or treason is gravity. And gravity never has a bad day. And spiritual gravity that never has a bad day is the unredeemed part of my soul. My spirit is made perfect in salvation. The rest of this life is purgatory, and that soul is becoming like Christ in all of life, but it is still depraved. It leans towards "me first"—"my way"—"I should be in charge" and "I should be comfortable." That's one part of gravity.

Two is the world around me that feeds that demon inside of me. I'm glad we mentioned demons. The third part of gravity is Satan himself. He's singing the siren song, and somehow I find myself tapping my toe to it, and next thing I know I'm dancing along with him. The next thing you know I'm walking into the house or I'm walking into church, thinking, *You know what? I deserve a hassle-free experience here. I'm pretty busy, I'm kind of tired, and I feel like I've earned a little something here. I want some attention, I want some approval, if you don't mind. If you do mind, I'm going to start a little battle. And I have the ability to turn this thing into a war.*

So, if it's not ignorance, it's just this gravitational pull. And James right here is saying, *You've got to choose your master, daily. You have to choose who's going to be king. Are you going to be a friend of the world, or surrender to this King?* You have to surrender to something. You're going to surrender to gravity or you're going to surrender to Yahweh. His whole thing here is that you can't do both. I think the audience here, intuitively, thinks that we can do both. And so, James says, *No, when you surrender to God, you surrender to God and His purposes.* And by surrendering to God and His purposes, it puts your priority, your primary allegiance of yourself and your desires and your comfort down here somewhere. Because the priorities of God are going to come in conflict with the priorities of gravity, of me, myself and I. You see? There's always going to be a conflict. We're temporal (this part of us), and God has eternal values and eternal purposes.

Application #1

And so, one of the applications here—just to brace everyone—is the vision of a biblical church is that it has regular conflict with this gravity in me, this selfishness. Let me just say it another way. The purpose of a God-honoring church is going to run either head-to-head with us eventually, or it's going to just drift off, and it's going to go to true north, and we're going to find ourselves at odds with a God-honoring, biblical church when we've left that trail. It's just a matter of time before a biblical, God-honoring church tells us no. And when that church says no to something that we enjoy, something that gives us pleasure, something that maybe makes us look good, shots are fired.

On a regular basis, the men and women in this church that are involved in various levels of leadership are constantly asking the question—it's kind of a fundamental question: How can we best and most effectively get as many people to become like Christ in all of life? That's a simple-sentence, decision matrix that we use when we're running up against stuff. How do we most effectively help as many people and guide them to become like Christ in all of life? Sometimes the answer to that question is in conflict to what some people have considered very valuable to their personal lives. Sometimes they're good things.

But the point is, that in those decisions, people have to respond in a way that says *I'm not first in this equation. I'm somewhere down the list. Or, Let's start a little something. Let's get a fire started. Let's lob a grenade.*

We've had to end the choir because it answered the question about how to get more people involved and become more like Christ. We're sitting on the ground of a twenty-five-year-old Christian school that we had to scrape to the ground. Yeah, that's not an easy thing for parents. The style of the building caused a lot of people to get upset. Some people didn't think we should have a beautiful building. There are Bible studies that have ended and various ministries. And I think we were successful in upsetting everyone in the year 2020 with our COVID decisions.

But it's not the decisions made; it's not really about what eventually happens; but it's how we respond to it. And sometimes we don't know what our primary directive is. We don't know what our primary value is, the thing that we pledge allegiance to. And so, we see it in a value. And we don't know what our value is until someone says no to our value. And then when we feel that inner desire, we have to make a choice: what is our primary allegiance? Because the commander-in-chief of the church said to make disciples. And when He said to make disciples, He didn't say to do it when it's convenient, when it doesn't cost you anything, when your kids get out of the house, or whatever it might be. He just said to make disciples.

So, I guess one application is ... yeah, we're a good Bible church following God's directions, so it's going to force these issues.

Application #2

And the second application when it comes to pledging allegiance to this primary source that you follow and what makes your life work, is that James is saying to put Yahweh there. Put Yahweh as the king of your soul, because He is the provider and the protector of who you are. It's because of who God is and it's because of what God has done. It's the very nature of God himself. Why isn't He there?

Let me put it another way. Have you seen throne rooms? Have you looked at the throne itself? There's only room for one person on that throne. And James is saying, *Why would it be anyone else but Yahweh, the Creator of all things?* You need to get off that throne. When we have our ego, our comfort, our ambition on the throne, that's idolatry. That's treason. And that leads to battles, which leads to war, which blows up sacred things.

James says, *Look, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, means yielding towards that.* It means giving up our rights for His purpose, His calling in our life. He's saying that when that

happens, peace breaks out. You're going to love the consequences of that. Your prayers are going to be answered.

He's really calling us to repentance. The arguing happens because of psychological reasons and purposes in our life that aren't being met. We're looking at God in a whole wrong perspective that shows ourselves as idolators, adulterers. And so, James is saying, *You've got to get this right.*

The Road to Revival and Peace: Repentance

So, if you're asking how we get this right, I'm glad you asked, because the next section is about how we get there. This is the road to revival and peace. In a single word, it's to repent. And that makes sense, right? If you find yourself as a traitor, what would you say or do to make this right? *I need to repent. I need to acknowledge the things that I'm doing for the enemy and I need to take responsibility for that.*

If you found yourself in adultery, what would you say? You need to repent. You need to acknowledge the things you've done wrong against your mate and then take responsibility for those things. It's kind of a simple answer—it's just not an easy answer, because it starts and ends with humility. It literally starts and ends with humility.

James 4:6

**But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:
“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”**

He's going to start this whole section with the phrase “humble yourself.” He's going to end with “humble yourself.” That's the bread in this sandwich here. Because that's the key to repentance. Look what he says in verse 6: “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’” If I'm proud, God opposes me. Those are not good odds. So, he says to give into Him, surrender to Him.

How does he say to do this? This is where I feel like James is putting on his drill sergeant hat. He's not going to explain any of these words. He's going to give us ten commands, rapid fire. They're in the imperative voice: *Just do these things. Don't think; just do them.*

Here he comes, Master Sergeant James. Here we go. Ten things.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

One: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” There are two of them. Submit yourselves to God. Cease fire. Stop fighting with Him. Turn your will, your freedom, over to Him.

And then he says to resist the devil, that he will flee from you. The idea of that is somewhat simple. The devil, the world, your own ego-centered life? Listen for that. When you hear that in your mind, acknowledge where it’s from. Is it from God? It is not. Then it’s gravity, spiritual gravity that leads us into ruin.

James 4:8a

Come near to God and He will come near to you.

He goes on in verse 8: “Come near to God and He will come near to you.” I love that because he’s appealing to God in companionship. You draw near to Him, He’ll draw near to you. God’s not like a boss that you check in with for your to-do’s and you get a pat or a raise. The Bible says we’re to call Him Father. And later towards the end it says, *No, Abba*, which is slang for “Daddy.” Pursue God in a relational way.

James 4:8b

Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

In verse 8 it says, “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” Washing your hands is the idea that when you do things with your hands, the Bible uses that as what you’re doing with your life. Take responsibility, because we’re sinning in the context of what we’re doing with these desires and starting these skirmishes and arguments.

And then he says to purify your hearts, you double-minded. Double-minded: thinking that we can have Jesus second and us and our values first. No, you've got to choose your King.

James 4:9

Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

So, he goes on, and in the next verse he's giving four commands one right after the other. "Grieve, mourn, wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom." Remember when I told you he's red hot on fire because of the consequences of this? These are sacred things we're ruining—family and church—by being in division with one another. And he's saying, *Look, this is wrong. This is evil. This is sin. Not: My bad or Sorry, get over it.* But call it what it is. We're wrecking something that's supposed to be sacredly beautiful. And so, he says that when we see the weight of the consequences—turn around and look at the wake you're leaving behind. That should cause you to mourn and grieve and wail and have gloom. He's fire and brimstone now, isn't he?

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

And so, James begins and ends with humility. Look at verse 10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." When we have various arguments that turn into battles that turn into wars in our relationships with one another, it gives us this wonderful opportunity for relational discipleship because it brings to the surface what's motivating us. And he's saying, *Not only in your own heart of hearts, the way you think about yourself, that you should be the center of all things, but we also think that we ought to be above God.* And that should cause us to repent. He's saying you're at war with God. And you're not going to win that war. He's saying to humble yourselves before the Lord. Just tap already, early and often. You're going to get hurt otherwise.

But not only does he say to humble yourself before the Lord, which is a reasonable thing to do, but that He will lift you up. The idea is that you're going to love what He does in your life

when you're absolutely and completely surrendered to Him. You're going to love being in the heart of His will. You're going to love being in the jet stream of His purpose for all of creation and mankind. Your dreams will be so petty in comparison to what your life will be filled with when you're living in the heart of God's will. When He is on the throne of your soul, you'll be glad that you surrendered the petty things in your life. That's his call to repentance. You're going to love the life that He has for you. All you have to do is to give up the life that you have for yourself. That's all you have to do. Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.

So, Grace, here's our call from James. Have you thought about the skirmish, the little spat, maybe the big thing that you might have caused at church or at home, with brothers and sisters in the sacred elements that God has left us here? He's saying to repent. Repent! Come on back! Repent means to change your view and change your direction. Come on back. Pursue God. Get near Him and He'll get near you.

Let's have a call to repentance, as a church and as individuals within it. Let's make ourselves right. God's command for us is to make disciples, to guide as many people effectively as we possibly can to become like Christ in all of life. We'll count on the Spirit to guide and direct us and empower us. We'll count on the Word of God to help navigate this course. And in relationships, in the good and in the bad, we'll use those as opportunities to show ourselves to be us, honestly, if Jesus were us. That's the goal.

So, join me in a prayer of repentance—a prayer of revival is what this is. Would you join me? First let's just take a second and turn our palms up. Let's hear from the Spirit as to whether we're part of the problem of what we might have been involved in the last week, month, or years.

[Prayer]

Spirit, would You speak to us and tell us, as much as it is up to us, how we can be at peace with all men? And Spirit, would You cut to the quick as to how these passages apply to us, how the problem has been the desires within our hearts to either just be comfortable or honored or safe, and that's what lit the match?

Or even greater still, Lord, that I say Lord, but You are not Lord. You are second and You don't play second. You don't even know how. So, I confess that while I call you King, I treat

you like a servant. But that ends today, right here, right now. The end of my pride and the end of my need to just be satisfied—I surrender. I give up. I'm humble before You. Not to be exalted, but because You are the exalted King. I'm humble before You.

Lord, I'd ask that You would direct and give me the courage to take the next steps to wash my hands and take responsibility, to make things right, that I might be more like Christ in all of life; that I might help guide others to become more like Christ in all of life. We ask this in Jesus' name. As an individual soul and as a church collectively. In Jesus' name. And everybody prayed ... Amen.