PC SERMON OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

[Jas 4:1 NIV] 1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?...

Wouldn't you like to know the answer to that question?

Today's passage reveals what causes fights, quarrels, and murders, and how to stop them.

I. THE PROBLEM

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 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. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

In one word, what's the problem? What word, in some form, is repeated twenty times in these five verses? _____

Notice a threefold heart problem:

A. YOU'RE NOT GETTING WHAT YOU WANT.

4:1 "What causes fights & quarrels?... Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have."

Conflict arises when someone's not happy. Someone's desire is not being met.

We all have desires. It's not necessarily wrong to feel a desire.

But it's wrong to believe...

a) I can't be happy unless all my desires are met. (False!)

b) Other people should be meeting my desires (or even God!). (False!)

A truly humble person says, "I have no _____." (God has provided.)

B. YOU'RE VALUING YOURSELF ABOVE OTHERS.

2a "You desire but do not have, so you kill."

2b "You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel & fight."

Why did James jump straight to "you kill"? When we covet and want what others have, or we demand that others meet our needs, we're saying, "I'm better; I'm more deserving." That's the same attitude or heart—the same thinking or motivation—of a _____. That's why James first says, "you

kill." He is underscoring the heart at the root of coveting and bickering. At the root of our coveting is a _____ heart.

C. YOU'RE USING GOD.

Coveting not only belittles the other person but also belittles God. You're telling God he's not doing a good job meeting your needs. You're saying he's not sufficient.

This is in our subconscious mind; we'd never say that to God out loud. Therefore, we often don't even ask God for what we want.

2b You do not have because you do not ask God.

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

We even turn our prayers to God into demands that he give us our idols.

You would expect James to call us "idolaters," but watch what he says next:

4a You adulterous people...

In the Bible, God often expresses that our coveting is spiritual adultery.

4b ...don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?

NOTE: He's not talking primarily about people but about the things of the world, the culture of the world, the stuff of the world. But if all your friends are chasing after the world, that's a flag. Other passages warn us, "Bad company corrupts good character."

4c Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

God is a jealous God. He's not jealous OF us, like he wishes he had what we have. But he is jealous FOR us, like a loving husband wants his wife to be faithful. God loves you too much to let you chase after what will abuse you.

II. THE IMPORTANT TRANSITION: "BUT GOD"

Despite all of our brokenness, in the middle of this passage, everything turns on this familiar phrase: BUT GOD.

6 But he [God] gives us more grace.

The solution does not begin with us but with him.

We fight and quarrel because we think we want what we deserve. You don't want what you deserve! We deserve to be punished in hell for our pride and sin. You want what you don't deserve—grace. "But God gives us more grace." What love he has for us!

Your life will dramatically change when you grasp this truth. Your prayers will change from "Lord, I want a new car, new house, new wife; give me what will make me happy" to "Please, dear God, don't give me what I deserve; I just want grace."

6b That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor (or literally, grace—same word...) to the humble."

Now, under God's grace, you're ready for the solution.

III. THE SOLUTION

A. HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE THE LORD (instead of using God).

If you're having relationship problems, quit trying to fix the relationships. The first step is to get right with God.

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

(Notice James has hinted in this passage at the three main sources of temptation: the flesh, the world, and the devil. Resist the devil. When you resist instead of flirting or excusing your behavior, the devil flees.)

8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

(God is always right there! He's so near to you!)

8b Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Does James want you to go around crying all the time, sad all the time? No. He began his letter in chapter 1: "Consider it pure joy..."

God wants to give you contentment, joy, and happiness, even in hard times. But he won't give happiness to someone who's coveting and chasing idols. He will only grant that happiness to a humble person focused on him. Part of humbling yourself is taking sin seriously, recognizing you're not a good person but a sinner who's offended God. Grieve your sin; humble yourself before him. THEN he will lift you up and "restore to you the joy of your salvation."

In practical terms, what does it look like to humble yourself before the Lord on a daily basis? Assuming you've humbly accepted his offer of salvation—the first step—then daily humility looks like this:

* Kneeling before him in prayer and saying, "I submit to you."

* Taking sin and temptation seriously and not laughing about it. Resisting the flesh, the world, and the devil.

* Being thankful every day for what he's given; saying, "I have no needs." "God, you are all-sufficient."

B. SHOW OTHERS GRACE, NOT JUDGMENT.

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

I confess I've had a bad habit of being a lawmaker!

When we become lawmakers, James says we're playing God!

12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Let's see if we can go a whole week without criticizing anybody. What are your personal favorite criticisms or "laws" that you'd have to refuse to enforce this week?

C. TRUST GOD'S PROMISE TO "LIFT YOU UP."

Instead of chasing after the world to fill all these unmet desires, trust God when he says he will lift up those who humble themselves. When we trust him to provide, we can rest in peace and not quarrel. We can say every day, all the time, "I have all that I need."

With our outline in mind, consider what the proud person says compared to the person who is humbly receiving God's grace.

* "I'm not getting my way!" vs. "I have all I need."

* "I'm more important than them!" vs. "They deserve grace."

* "God, give me what I want!" vs. "God, I just need more of you and your grace."

In summary, here is how you solve all your relationship problems: Solve your heart problem. Get right with God, and he will repair your relationships.

INVITATION

Is there someone in your life who's praying you will turn back to God? Turn to God today. Come clean today.

God loves you and has created in you a "God-shaped hole" that only he can fill. We've chased after the things of this world to fill that hole in our hearts. We deserve to be punished by God for our rebellion. "But he gives us more grace." Through Jesus, you can be forgiven and renewed. Turn to him today.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identifying the Root of Conflict

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:1-2 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture: *"1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God."***

- **Discussion Question: Think about a recent disagreement or frustration you experienced with someone. Looking back, how might an unmet personal desire or a demand to get your own way have fueled that conflict?**

2. Examining Our Motives in Prayer

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:2b-3 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture: *"You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."***
- **Discussion Question: The outline notes that we sometimes turn our prayers into demands for things that function like idols. How can we check and realign our motives when we bring our requests to God?**

3. Recognizing "Friendship with the World"

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:4 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture: *"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."***
- **Discussion Question: In what subtle ways do cultural values, the "stuff" of the world, or the desire for approval creep into our daily lives and pull our hearts away from God?**

4. Understanding Grace Versus Deserving

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:6 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture: *"But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'"***
- **Discussion Question: The outline states that we often fight and quarrel because we think we want what we deserve, when what we actually need is grace. How does shifting from demanding justice to receiving grace change the way you handle difficult relationships?**

5. Taking Daily Steps Toward Humility

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:7-8, 10 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture: *"7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you... 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."***
- **Discussion Question: The outline suggests practical daily habits of humility, such as kneeling in prayer, taking temptation seriously, and acknowledging that God is all-sufficient. Which of these specific actions do you find most challenging in your routine, and why?**

6. Releasing the Urge to Judge

- **Scripture Reference: James 4:11-12 (NIV)**
- **Full Scripture:** ***"11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?"***
- **Discussion Question: We all have personal "laws" or expectations that we tend to hold others to. What is a specific criticism or expectation you are feeling challenged to let go of this week in order to show others grace instead of judgment?**