

James

I. Introduction

A. **James 4:1-10** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [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. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [6] But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

B. We've spent the past nine weeks looking at the spiritual side of conflict and conflict resolution. This side of dealing with conflict is more important than the practical side because without a spiritual change in the right direction, you will not apply the practical side any further than your selfishness and fears will allow.

C. Prayer

II. Practical Application of Conflict Resolution Methods

A. Thoughts About Conflict

1. Conflict invites us to recognize that we live with others who hold different views and have different realities on some issues.
 - a. One of the first problems we face in resolving conflict is assuming both parties share the same reality, experience, and outcome to the conflict. Therefore, to work through a conflict requires acknowledging that the parties may have differing, and sometimes contrasting stories. For example:

- (1) Assertive persons are more likely to see conflict as a difference in methods or goals. They tend to hold their story as the accurate story. And they press for agreement on specific solutions with specific and easily measurable outcomes.
 - (2) Passive persons are more likely to see conflict as the other person's need to release tension, express frustration, or to vent their emotions. They are less likely to see the conflict as a result of something they are doing wrong, but rather as unacceptable to the other part. Because of this, the passive person sees the best solution as waiting for the hostile or negative moment(s) to pass – after which they are likely to return to what they have been doing.
- b. Therefore, each story must be heard and then worked through to see if and where you do or can agree on some of the issues.
- c. Wherever there is agreement on the story and the issues, there is opportunity to resolve some or all of the differences.
- d. Here is where it takes true humility by both parties (the spiritual side of conflict resolution) to make serious progress.
2. Two styles:
 - a. The more assertive or aggressive a person, the more he prefers directness, specifics, frankness, confrontation, and self-disclosure. The primary goal of the assertive person is to deal with the facts and quickly resolve the dispute.
 - b. The more passive or easy-going a person, the more he prefers indirect, ambiguous, cautious, non-confrontational, and subtle ways of working through the issues surrounding a conflict. The primary goal of the passive person is to maintain a sense of peace in the environment, a sense of harmony between the parties, a sense of personal security, and the sense that they are not so bad after all, or did not do anything wrong at all.
 - c. Passive persons tend to see the direct/assertive method of dealing with conflict as threatening, unkind, unloving, relationship damaging, and creating more problems than it solves.
 - d. Assertive persons tend to view the indirect/passive method of dealing with conflict as vague, evasive, misleading, somewhat dishonest, and useless for resolving anything.
3. Gracious, humble, godly cooperation opens the door for honest communication, for information to be freely shared, for underlying assumptions to be revealed and dealt with, for joint definitions to be

achieved, for mis-perceptions to be clarified, and for the rationale for each party's position to be understood.

- a. Understanding the other parties rationale for what they did or are doing does not mean approval. But without understanding the other parties thinking you end up with solutions that make no sense or are of little help to one of the parties.
 - b. A godly approach to cooperation means making sure the other side has sufficient power in the process to effectively make their story, needs, interests, and expectations known.
 - c. A godly approach is intent on seeking a mutually beneficial solution.
4. The selfless attend to relationships and their own responsibilities. The selfish attend to their rights and personal security.

B. Productive / Destructive Conflict Management Styles

1. (A) **“You” messages** – telling the other party he/she is the cause of the problem. (B) **“I” messages** – telling the other party how you feel, how you see things, what your concerns are.
2. (A) Communicate in **generalities**. (B) Communicates **specifics** (who, what, when, where - giving details).
3. (A) **Talk about** concerns with friends or associates who are sympathetic. (B) **Talk directly** with the other party who is part of the conflict.
4. (A) **Words are friendly**, but **gestures**, body posture, and facial expressions communicate **negative** feelings (i.e., disapproval, distrust, resentment). (B) **Verbal and non-verbal messages say the same thing** because you are honestly saying what you mean and how you feel and what is bothering you.
5. (A) **No** apparent commitment to **listening** – do most of the talking. (B) Obvious commitment to listening – **willing to hear** the other's story, reflect back what is said.
6. (A) **Speaks of himself** – stating personal concerns and preferences as if they must happen for resolution to take place. (B) Speaks of himself and affirms the concerns of the other party – appears to be **looking for a solution that is good for both parties**.
7. (A) **Reactive** – quick to attack, defend, judge negatively, see the worst as if it were the whole picture. (B) **Responsive to the truth** – able to listen longer, investigate so as to hear more of the story, consider other points of view, look for a common reality.

8. (A) **Blame focus** – switch issues, wants immediate resolution, focus on criticism rather than working through each others story in order to look for common reality, unwilling to bear his/her part of the responsibility for the conflict. (B) **Problem focus** – takes one issue at a time and looks for common reality, suggests solutions that seek the good of both parties, looks for alternative solutions until a common agreement is reached.

C. Four Characteristics of Productive / Destructive Conflict Resolution

1. (A) Each party is able to narrow the conflict in definition, focus, and issues of dispute, so that it can be clearly visualized, stated, and understood as to just what the conflict is about. (B) One or both parties expand the number of issues, participants, negative attitudes, and self-justifications.
2. (A) Each party is able to limit the conflict at hand to the issues directly causing the conflict and resist the introduction of secondary issues. (B) One or both parties enlarge the conflict beyond the specific and initial causes so that it becomes un-manageable and unresolvable.
3. (A) Each party is able to direct the conflict toward cooperative problem solving with minimal competition. (B) One or both parties resort to strategies of power, threat, coercion, and deception.
 - a. Competition introduces an **EITHER-OR, WIN-LOSE** aspect to the resolution process. It promotes either-or communication, either-or solutions, and either-or attitudes and actions. As the competition escalates, the thinking becomes more concrete, the positions become more polarized, and the communication becomes more and more attack / defend. The conflict is then diverted from the immediate issue (*what is right*) to the power issue (*who shall define and decide*).
 - b. In the competitive environment we tend to believe truth and justice (*most often our truth and our perception of justice*) must prevail lest falsehood and injustice triumph.
4. (A) When necessary, each party is able to trust a third party to help resolve the dispute in a mutually satisfactory manner. (B) One or both parties refuses to seek outside help when necessary, and instead polarizes their position and takes a win-lose stance.

D. Suggestions For Increasing Cooperation

1. Become more aware of how your personality traits and behavior affect the other party. Take responsibility for your own behavior and

- personality traits. Seek to understand who the other person is so you better understand what motivates them to do what they are doing.
2. Place a high value on the good of the other. Selfishness is obvious, offensive, and a deterrent to working together. Though humility and love are equally obvious, they are endearing, and promote cooperative environment. Therefore, as you humbly serve the other party in seeking their good, cooperation is nurtured and has a high probability of lasting longer.
 3. Do not fight over numbers. In the end, it doesn't matter if the offensive thing was done once or hundreds of times. What matters is if it was done too often or not enough to cause problems in the relationship. Fighting over numbers turns a discussion into an argument. Say "It happened too often." or "You have not done it enough."
 4. Investigate. Avoid the trap of thinking you know everything about the conflict. Ask questions, verify or clarify all assumptions, get the other person's side of the story, find out how your behavior has effected them. Do your best to make sure no one is being misquoted, misinterpreted, or misunderstood.
 5. Identify the real issue. There is the stated issue, then there is the underlying interests. The underlying interests are made up of concerns, fears, expectations, needs, desires, and hopes. If we are to identify and understand the real issue, we must try to identify and understand what is not being said, but is deeply felt by each person involved in the dispute. If the underlying interests are not met, the issue will not be resolved in a way that rebuilds trust and restores the relationship.
 6. Discuss the long-term consequences. Consider what will happen, long-term, if things stay the same. Consider carefully how the agreed on change will affect both parties now and in years to come.
 7. Agree on a method of verifying progress. Do not leave the working out of your resolution to chance. Establish a method for meeting on a regular basis – for two or more months – to review progress and correct the agreement if necessary. This will help the resolution accomplish its intended purpose of restoring trust in the relationship.
 8. Agree on a method for dealing with failure. Getting back on track after falling off is important to the restoration of trust and the relationship. Agree in advance how you will handle failure if and when it occurs.

E. Apologies – The good, bad, and the ugly.

1. The Seven A's of Confession.

- a. Address everyone involved. Confess to each person who has been affected by your wrongdoing (Psa. 41:4; Luke 19:8).
- b. Avoid ifs, buts, and maybes. Consciously delete words that dilute your confession, excuse your conduct, or shift blame to others (I John 1:8-9).
- c. Admit specifically what you did wrong. Don't hide behind vague generalities. Specifically identify your sinful **attitudes** (pride, selfishness, greed, envy, bitterness, ingratitude, stubbornness, etc.) and **actions**. Then admit that what you did was wrong because it violated God's will (Ps. 51).
- d. Apologize. Acknowledge and express sorrow for the fact that your actions hurt the other person. You might ask the person to explain how he or she was affected by your actions.
- e. Accept the consequences. Explicitly accept full responsibility for what you have done. This may require fulfilling a promise, making restitution or losing benefits or privileges (Luke 15:19; 19:8).
- f. Ask for forgiveness. Finally, ask the person you wronged to forgive you, and if necessary, allow time for that person to work through his or her feelings (Gen. 50:17).

2. Look over Apology Handout

III. Conclusion

- A. The practical side of conflict resolution is important and you are wise to review this side from time to time so that you have it in mind when needed.
- B. But the spiritual side of conflict resolution is more important, for without it you will not use the practical side in the way it is intended to be used and for the duration of the conflict.