

HOW TO AVOID ARGUMENTS
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 10 of 15
James 4:1-10
Rick Warren

James 4:1-10

I. THE CAUSE OF ARGUMENTS:_____

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (v. 1)

THREE DESIRES

- * The Desire _____ (Possessions)

"You want what you don't have ... you long for what others have ..." (vs. 2 LB)

- * The Desire _____ (Pleasure)

"... you want only what will give you pleasure" (vs. 3b LB)

- * The Desire _____ (Pride & Power)

"Pride leads to arguments ..." Prov. 13:10 (LB)

Why aren't our desires fulfilled? (vs. 2-3)

"You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives..."

Conflict with God (vs. 4-6)

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (vs. 6)

II. THE CURE FOR ARGUMENTS: _____

"God ... gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (vs. 6 & 10)

Steps to Defusing Conflict

1. _____

"Submit yourselves then to God ..." (vs. 7a)

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart." Col 3:15

2. _____

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (vs.7b)

"In order that Satan might not outwit us, we are not unaware of his schemes." 2 Cor. 2:11

3. _____

"Come near to God and He will come near to you." (vs. 8a)

"He will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in Him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord." Isaiah 26:3

4. _____

"Wash your hands ... purify your hearts ..." (vs. 8b)

"Let there be tears for the wrong you've done." (vs. 9 LB)

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ." Phil. 2:3-5

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We're going to be looking at what James has to say on "How to Avoid Arguments". As I talk with couples one of the most common complaints I hear from people is "We just can't seem to get along. We argue so much. We love each other. Why is it we have major blowups over such minor issues?" I talk with parents who say, "With my kids there is constant tension. I don't understand why we're always in an argumentative mode."

James talks about that. In this passage on how to avoid arguments he gives us both the causes and the cures -- the reason for argument and the remedy.

At the very start of this message, think of the person that causes the most conflict in your life. You're going to get the most out of this message if you think about the person who causes conflict in your life and how to avoid arguments with them.

James doesn't beat around the bush. He gets right to the point. He doesn't waste any time. Long before modern psychology came along he had some profound insights on the cause of conflict. 4:1 *"What causes fights and quarrels among you. Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"* James says that the cause of arguments is conflicting desires. When my wants conflict with your wants the sparks are going to fly.

Conflict starts early in life, even before you could talk. Have you noticed that a baby, if his needs are not instantly gratified, he lets you know. You can argue even if you don't know how to talk.

Marriage has built in conditions for conflict. Think about the things you expected of your spouse before you got married -- how idealistic and unrealistic you were about marriage. What a rude awakening that was, the day you woke up! All marriages go through three stages: Stage one, happy honeymoon: Stage two, the party's over; Stage three, let's make a deal. At Stage three you have to learn how to handle arguments because it's going to happen. There are going to be conflicting desires. Frustrated feelings cause fights.

What desires? The Bible makes very clear here and other places in Scripture that there are three basic desires we have that cause conflict. These desires are legitimate desires unless they're out of control. They are God-given desires. But when you put them above other people, when they become number one in your life, they will cause conflict. What are they?

1. THE DESIRE TO HAVE

We want to have things. Materialism. Possessions. v. 2 *"You want what you don't have ... you long for what others have."* God created things to be used and to enjoy. That's what they're there for. We use things and love people. The problem is when we start loving things. When we start loving things we get the equation backwards. We start loving things and use people -- manipulating them,

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controlling them, moving them around to get what you want because things become more important in your life.

It's very easy to fall in love with things these days with all the TV commercials. The desire to have becomes number one in your life and that creates conflict. It is not by accident that Gallup says that 56% of all marriages that end in divorce end because of money problems. Things become a battleground. We, as Americans, think the constitution says, "Life, liberty and the purchase of happiness." Someone asked Howard Hughes one time, "How much does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little bit more." The thrill wears off very quickly. We've got to learn to deal with the desire to have. If you decide to base your life on comparing it to other people, you will never be happy no matter how much you get. Just the time you catch up with the Jones' they refinance. There's always something more.

Article "Yuppy Angst: Coping with the Stress of Success. They are well stocked with MBA's, VCR's and BMW's, but they feel SAD. Their Victorian houses may be stuffed with antiques and high tech gadgetry but the owners feel empty inside. The boomers have embraced everything from aerobics to Zen but they still have the feeling that something is missing. Maybe a beach house, a breast lift?" It goes on to talk about the emptiness of people trying to fill their lives with things, the desire to have. It doesn't satisfy. It leaves you empty.

2. THE DESIRE TO FEEL

I want to feel good. I want to be comfortable. I want to have my senses satisfied. v. 3 *"You want only what will give you pleasure"* It's not wrong to enjoy life. 1 Timothy 6:17 *"God made everything for our enjoyment."* But when pleasure becomes the number one goal in your life -- if it feels good, do it -- you're asking for conflict. It's going to cause problems in your life. When my pleasure takes the place over what is needful, then we're in trouble. The fact is, I'm more interested in my comfort than I am in yours and all I think about is what makes me feel good. The desire to feel good creates conflict.

The desire to have and the desire to feel good are two of the desires that when they are thwarted cause conflict. Why do you think people argue about sex in marriage? The desire for pleasure is strong. When it is thwarted, resentment builds up.

3. THE DESIRE TO BE

This is pride, power, prominence, popularity. I want to be number one. It's the desire for "me first". Frank Sinatra summarized this desire in a song, "I Did It My Way". This is the "ME" decade. The "ME" generation. Get on top. Be the big shots. Strive for success. We walk around saying "Watch me". Little kids say, "Watch me, daddy", we say "Watch me, everybody" but we say it in subtle ways -- Watch me by the way I dress. Watch me by the kind of clothes I buy. Watch me by the kind of car I

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drive. Watch me by the kind of things I stock my house with." It's a desire to impress. It's the desire to be full of pride, to be number one, to impress.

Proverbs 13:10 *"Pride leads to arguments."* That's so simple. That's the first verse my wife and I memorized when we got married: *"Only by pride comes contention"*. Why? I'm too proud to compromise and that causes conflict. Game kids play when they wrestle together -- "Cry Uncle" -- they wrestle until one pins the other and forces him to say "uncle!". My brother could nearly kill me before I'd cry "uncle". Why? Because of pride. We don't want to give in. Have you ever been in an argument where you knew you were wrong but you wouldn't admit it. Why? Because of pride. Pride causes arguments. This is the bottom line of all these things. The next time you're in an argument, stop and ask "Is it worth it?"

James tells us that pride -- when we think we can do things on our own -- causes two problems. v. 2-3 *"You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives."* Here James tells us two reasons why our desires aren't fulfilled. Number one: We don't pray. We don't ask God. We look to the wrong source. We look to people to fulfill our needs instead of looking to God. He says, "I'll meet your needs, just pray." And when we do pray, we usually pray with the wrong motive. We ask things in a selfish way. The Bible has said that everything I need God has promised to provide. He'll meet my desires to have, to be, to feel -- not just luxury but all my needs. Philippians 4:19 *"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* if we'll ask in prayer. But we'd rather fight than pray. We'd rather argue about something than go look to the Lord for the answer. When I'm upset with my wife, the last thing on my mind is prayer. We're not thinking about that. But James says, that that's the problem. We look to others instead of looking to God and that causes conflict. We'd rather try to work it out ourselves. Prayerlessness in itself is an evidence of pride. Why don't I pray? I don't think I need God. If I really thought I was more dependent upon God and I needed Him more I'd pray more. Prayerlessness in itself is an evidence of pride. James says we'd have a lot more peace if we just prayed more. We'd have a lot less to worry about, a lot less to argue about, a lot less to fight over if we just prayed more. The old song, "Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer."

In the next verses, James talks about conflict with God. Pride not only causes conflict with other people but it causes conflict with God. v. 6 *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* God declares war on selfishness. Have you noticed that God has a unique way of engineering circumstances to pop our pride? Just about the time you think, "I've got it together!" He puts you in your place if you think you don't need Him. To be in opposition to God is a dangerous place to be. You're on a collision course. There's no way you're going to win.

If pride is the cause of arguments -- and that's the case James is making "I'm going to have my way when I want it, my time, my place" -- What's the cure?

II. THE CURE FOR ARGUMENTS IS HUMILITY

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v. 6 & 10 *"God ... gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* What is grace? Grace is God's power to change. What would you like to change about yourself? Whatever it is, you need grace to do it. What do you want to change about your relationships, your marriage, your family? Whatever you would like to change, you need grace. You can't change it on your own. You need God's power and that's called grace. Grace is the power to change, and there is only one way you get grace. You humble yourself. God doesn't give grace to people who are full of pride and think "I can do it on my own." He gives it when we come and say, "God, I need your help." And that's where we get the power to make the changes we'd like to see.

In the next few verses, James gives several short sentences. He is so practical. He gives four specific actions that need to be taken in order to stop the fighting. Here's how you diffuse a conflict, whether it's between you and a kid, you and your wife, you and someone at work. You do four things to diffuse a conflict:

1. GIVE IN TO GOD

"Submit yourself then to God." v. 7. Let God be God in your life. Give Him control. Put Him in charge. Yield yourself to Him. This is the starting point. Quit trying to run your own life. In v. 1 it says *"...your desires that battle within you..."* James says that conflict that happens with other people happens because you have conflict on the inside. You don't get along with other people because you've got a civil war in your life. This is the real issue. The starting point is getting peace inside before you can have peace outside. Find peace of mind, find peace in your heart. The real conflict is inside of you -- who's in charge of my life. If you're in charge, then anytime somebody comes along that doesn't go the way you want to go, then you get uptight. You get irritable. You get upset. You want things to go just the way you want them to go and when they don't go that way, it makes you mad. But if God's in charge of your life, it doesn't irritate you as much.

Colossians 3:15 *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart."* When we have the peace of Christ in our heart then we'll be at peace with other people. If we don't have this in our life -- God's peace in our hearts -- then we try to manipulate others, try to control them and try to move them around to get what we want out of life.

In the early years of our marriage, Kay and I had tremendous conflict. We fought over everything. We were in love with each other. We felt God had brought us together, but we just didn't get along. We fought over everything. I'd be divorced today if it weren't for the Lord. The fact was that we were both saying "Divorce is not an option; we're going to work on this thing if it kills us" and it nearly did. I ended up in the hospital. Kay thought she was having a nervous breakdown. It was terrible. We just didn't get along. Why? Because the desire to have, the desire to feel, and the desire to be was clashing. In every marriage there is some kind of power struggle. It's just we use different tools. We tried everything to make it work and we just didn't get along. The turning point was the day we gave up. We just gave it to God and said, "Only You can save this marriage. We can't do it on our own. Do whatever you have to do in our lives to make this thing work." You stop praying, "Lord, change my partner" and start praying, "Lord, change me." You work on you and watch what happens. The

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starting point of getting along with others, to avoid arguments, is get peace in your heart through the rule of Christ.

Give in to God. This means you learn to say "Thy will be done" instead of saying "Me first". That's the difference. When you can say "Lord, whatever You want that's what I want" then the peace process starts.

2. GET WISE TO SATAN

Be aware, be alert. Realize what he's doing. Realize where the conflict comes from and that he's the source behind it. Don't be dumb. Don't be ignorant. *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* The word "resist" is a war term. It means to be prepared. To stand against. Withstand an attack. The devil wants to destroy your marriage. He wants to destroy every other good relationship. Why? Because he loves conflict, arguments. He wants to cause confusion, arguments, stress, hurt feelings, disappointment, anger, chaos. He loves to do it. James says you've got to give into God, let Him have control. Then you've got to do some defensive action. You've got to resist the devil and realize what he's doing. If you get up in the morning and you don't run into the devil, head on, it means you're already going in the same direction.

2 Cor. 2:11 *"In order that Satan might not outwit us, we are not unaware of his schemes."* Paul says, wise up! Recognize his tactics. Know how he operates.

How does the devil operate? He doesn't stand around with a pitchfork and a red suit, like Underwoods deviled ham. How does the devil operate? He plays on our pride. Particularly wounded pride. He tells us what we want to hear. He whispers in our ear. He gives us little thoughts, suggestions, ideas. When you're in the middle of an argument, he starts whispering in your ear, things like "You don't have to take this kind of stuff. Retaliate. Who do they think they are? Get even. Assert yourself. Don't put up with this kind of stuff. Show 'em who's boss." He tells you all the things your pride would love to hear. You need to say, "Satan, I know that's you." Resist him.

How do you resist the devil? Same way Jesus did it. He quoted Scripture. Memorize Proverbs 13:10 *"Pride leads to arguments."* The next time you get into an argument, that can be brought to mind by the Lord and you stop and think, "How am I being prideful here. What am I not willing to admit? Why am I not willing to compromise? Where am I only thinking of myself and not the other person's needs, desires, attitudes."

There is a great promise here. It says, *"Resist the devil and he will flee."* You don't have to put up with him. Give in to God and get wise to Satan.

3. GROW CLOSER TO GOD

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How does this affect arguments? First, how do you grow closer? By reading the Bible, by going to church, by getting involved in a Bible study -- all of these kinds of things help you grow closer to God. I have made an amazing discovery that the more time I spend alone with God, the better I get along with other people. Count on it! When the argument level rises in our marriage it means somebody is not spending time with the Lord. It's that simple. Grow closer to God.

Isaiah 26:3 *"He will keep him in perfect peace all those who trust in Him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord."* When you spend time with the Lord, you turn your thoughts to Him, then you get along better with others because He keeps perfect peace in your heart and you're not as irritable. Have you noticed some people only draw close to God when they're in trouble? They only pray when they have a need. You need to spend time with Him. Bible study, Sunday morning, daily quiet time -- make time for these things. You say you're too busy? Then maybe you're too busy. Maybe you need to cut some things out of your schedule to make more time to spend time with the Lord. The more you spend time with the Lord, the more you're going to enjoy the rest of your time. It will be more productive, more beneficial. You'll get along better with others, have fewer arguments, because you're spending time with God. "Draw closer to God, He'll keep you in perfect peace." Get up 15 minutes earlier each morning. Maybe start with the book of John. Read and pray and notice the difference in your attitude and the relationships the rest of the day. I challenge you to do that.

The conflict in your life is in direct proportion to the time you're spending with God.

There is a great promise here too. When I in genuineness draw close to God, *"He will come near to you."* He doesn't back off. He draws close to you. When you move toward Him, God moves toward you.

You give in to God, get wise to Satan, draw close to God and then...

4. BE WILLING TO ASK FORGIVENESS

If you want to stop the conflicts in your life, if you want to get along with other people, avoid arguments, learn to ask forgiveness from God and from those you hurt. v. 8 *"Wash your hands ... purify your hearts..."* Our hands represent our conduct and hearts represent attitudes. He's saying, clean up your act. v. 9 (LB) *"Let there be tears for the wrong you've done."* Don't minimize what's happened. Take it seriously. Be sorry for your self-centeredness. It is a big deal when your wife's feelings are hurt. Take it seriously. If someone says you've hurt them, you've hurt them. It may not be a big deal to you, but it was to them. Be willing to ask forgiveness.

Now... go back to that person I asked you to think about a few minutes ago. Would you like to begin to resolve the conflict with that person? How do you do it? Are you willing to go and apologize for your part? Maybe they are 95% wrong and you're only 5% at fault, but you take care of your 5% and let God handle the other 95% in their life. Their response is their response. "I know we've had our differences and I know I haven't always been thoughtful. A lot of times I've thought more about myself than your needs." How humbling that would be! Right! Because God gives grace to the humble! If

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you want to change, the only way you're going to change is to be humble, and the only way to be humble is to go and ask forgiveness. It's hard but do you want to change? Do you want to reduce the conflict? Maybe the way you do it is by cracking the door open by you taking the first step even if they are primarily at fault. Admit what you've brought into the relationship that was wrong. It's humbling, sure, but God gives grace to the humble. Maybe this week you need to write a letter, make a call, make some restitution even to that person who's irritated you -- Joyce Landoff calls that an irregular person -- those heavenly sandpapers that irritate you. Take the first step.

v. 10 *"Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up."* God doesn't want to keep you down on the ground. The way to honor is humility. I used to think the way to be honored by my wife and my kids was to never admit that I was wrong. If my kids thought I was wrong they wouldn't respect me any more. What kind of dad is he if he's not perfect. It wasn't a surprise when I found out they already knew I wasn't perfect. I found that the way I rose in honor before my kids and my wife was to admit I was wrong, I was selfish, I was thinking about only my own needs. The Bible says that God lifts up the humble and the more honest we are about our weaknesses and our faults, the more God honors us. If you want to be honored by your husband/wife/the Lord, it means humility. Coming and saying "God, I give up. I can't do it all on my own. I need Your power to resist the devil when he says, Live for yourself." I grow closer to God and spend time with Him and I'm willing to ask forgiveness.

Philippians 2:3-5 *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, [Why? because pride causes arguments] but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also the interest of others."* [He doesn't say don't look about your own interest -- you've got needs. He's not saying to lay down and be a doormat. But look out also for the interest of others] *Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.*" How do you get that attitude? Let Jesus Christ live through your life. When Jesus Christ lives in me and Jesus Christ lives in you, Jesus isn't going to argue with Jesus. There is no ego there.

Which of these desires cause the most conflict in your life? Maybe it's the desire to have and you're so busy out there making a living that you forget to make a life, hustling, day in and day out, to make a buck so much that your relationships are falling apart. The desire to have is greater than the relationships you have around you. It means that the kids suffer, your wife suffers, your husband suffers, your friends suffer because the desire to have has taken preeminence in your life. That causes conflict. I've noticed kids don't want things as much as they want our time.

Maybe it's the desire to feel good. "I have my rights!" That's something the devil likes to say an awfully lot. That's the exact opposite of what the Scriptures are saying, "Think about other people, not just yourself. What are their needs?" The desire for my feelings, my comfort... Does that cause conflict? "I'd really rather think about what I need right now than what the family needs."

How about the desire to be? Do you find it difficult to admit it when you're wrong? Do you find it difficult to back down in an argument when you've been in error? It's going to cause conflict. Do you find your schedule pushing out time for the Lord? Then re-evaluate your schedule. Make time for the things that are important.

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In the first three verses of this chapter, four times it says you're unsatisfied -- "you want but you don't get", "you strive for but you can't have". You're unsatisfied. Many people in life are unsatisfied with the way they are living. The secret of satisfaction is in Jesus Christ. Give yourself to Him and find your needs met in Him rather than in other people. He will never let you down.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart right now? "Lord, would you help me to think of others and not just my own desires? Help me to be willing to admit when I am wrong." Maybe you need to go to somebody today and apologize. Say, "I've been selfish and I'm sorry." The Bible says, *"God opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble."* God will give you the power to change and become the person you've always wanted to be. The Bible says He lifts you up, before honor is humility. Then would you pray, "God, today I want to give in to You. I give You my life, my marriage, my career. I submit it all to You. I ask You to put the peace of Christ in my heart to rule. Help me to get wise to Satan, to realize he plays on my pride and tells me things I want to hear but really only make matters worse. Father, help me to grow closer to You, to make time in my schedule for time with You. Father, I admit that many times I've put me first and I ask You to forgive me. Help me to become like Jesus, to have the attitude that He had, to not only look after my own interest but also the interest of those around me. Teach me to say, 'Thy will be done' instead of 'Me first'." If you've never invited Jesus Christ into your life, do it. Ask Him to come in.

Lord, thank You for Your word. It's practical and it helps us in the very areas that we need it the most. Use this message today in our lives this week so we can have more peaceful relationships, less conflict, less strife, less arguing and more love, joy, and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.