

# My Way

Brother James

## James 4:1-7

Do you know that there are more than 40 active conflicts around the world at the moment.<sup>1</sup> Forty wars or conflicts right now in the world! During WW1 and WW2 humanity lost 50 million people. Nowadays when I look at the Middle East wars today (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon) 75 percent or more of those killed or wounded in wars are non-combatants. When are we going to learn that wars do not solve our issues? No one wins at war. Everyone loses. The tragedy of war...

How wise is humanity?

James is good in raising important questions. In chapter 3 he asks, “**Who is wise and understanding among you?**” then James introduces the theme of wisdom from above.

He does the same here: “**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?**”

This chapter is related with previous ones. What is wisdom? **Wisdom is the ability to discern what is good and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge.** It means having the right skills in dealing with whatever happens in life: **the capacity to live a life that ought to be lived.** James is not interested in whether one *knows about wisdom*. It is not what we know that makes us wise, **but what we are.** Thus the source is not our abilities; it is not our DNA. You can be a genius but not wise. The source is God from ABOVE. Wisdom from ABOVE.

Evidence of wisdom from above:

**“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”** (James 3:13b ESV)

We did discuss the words good (*kalos*), meekness (*praotes*), and wisdom (*sophia*). In the same chapter James introduces the difference between earthly wisdom and the wisdom from God (above).

Let me quote again how James describes earthly wisdom:

**But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic...**

(James 3:14-15ESV)

Then he adds,

**For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.** (James 3:16b ESV)

Evidence of earthly wisdom:

Disorder and every vile practice.

James introduces another word **Passion** (*hēdonē*) that brings disorder, conflicts and wars:

**Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.** (James 4:1-3 ESV)

Although wars and conflicts between nations have similar causes yet commentaries suggests that James is also referring here **to the early Christian church members** who were having conflicts and “wars” among each other. Let me add also that they will be right causes for dispute. “Some battles are, to be sure, worth fighting; but even then they must be fought without sacrificing Christian principles and virtues.”<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Passions, Pleasures, and Desires:<sup>3</sup>**

Our conflicts start **from our passions, pleasures and desires**. Passion is in Greek *hedone*. From this word we do have the word **Hedonism**. In philosophy, hedonism means the pursuit of pleasure as a purpose. **Hedonism is pleasure-seeking as a way of life.** “Taken to its extreme, it is relentless and ruthless pursuit of personal pleasure without regard for the others.”(David Roper)

Why aren't dictators stepping down from their thrones? Why do nations dominate or kill the other? Why do we fight with our loved ones at home? Why do we fight even at church? Why did Cain kill Abel, the first homicide in the universe?

Paul was honest about his past. He writes to young Titus: **“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”** (Titus 3:3 NIV)

Let me clarify one thing. **Pleasure and desire are good, God created them. “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>because it is consecrated (*put to its intended use*) by the word of God and prayer”** (1 Tim 4:4-5 NIV) (italics added). God created in us all these feelings and desires. **We distorted** them **by sinning**. You see, pleasure becomes unlawful when we steal a watermelon, and we lose the enjoyment of eating it.

-King David stole Bathsheba from her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11,12). The pleasure of marriage was lost. **His self-pride** was dominating in stealing the “only lamb of the neighbor” as prophet Nathan said to King David, when confronting him with his sin.

You want something, you don't get it, and then you “kill, murder” for it. By the way, **most homicides are not premeditated acts**. They are “crimes of passion”. Most of the time people regret doing them but too late.

## **2. Asking with the Wrong Motivation:**

**You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.**  
(James 4:2b-3 ESV)

We have a promise from God that whatever we ask from God he will grant us.

How many times I have seen people get mad at God because they ask and they do not receive what they ask? **The root of our conflicts is our**

preoccupation with pleasing ourselves. Once we don't get it we start blaming everyone and including God. What is your motive when you ask for anything? You see, James is not condemning the things we ask for, but he is questioning the motives behind our prayers. He says a lot of time our motives are self-serving.

Perhaps we don't ask because we are too proud. Or we feel He is too distant from us and our little problems are not important for Him.

James warned us to not blame God when things go not the way we want.

**Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.** <sup>14</sup>**But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.** (James 1:13,14 ESV)

I have already preached a sermon about prayer, about asking God for wisdom from above. God will give generously when we ask.

**If we do not ask God, it means we are asking someone else, or finding our satisfactions in something else.** I guess one should ask, what am I asking? Whom am I asking? What do I want? What is my motivation?

Let me tell you again about prayer. When your desires and motivations are not godly, please again go to God in prayer. **Ask God to change your heart.** Ask God that you are being selfish and need help. If you feel you are distant from God, go to God again and cry out asking His presence in your pain. Going to God is the best place, even if you don't get the answer that you like.

C.S. Lewis writes in his sermon "**The Weight of Glory**" (1942)

"Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making

mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

We are confused and sometimes lose our aim and direction. **Little “mud pies” give us temporary satisfaction.** We stop there and lose the greater picture of the wonderful things God wants to offer us. Please read more about what C.S. Lewis said in that sermon about desires.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. In the World but not of the World**

Here come some tough words from James describing us, when we lose our focus and again our self is the center and not God.

**You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?** (James 4:4,5 ESV)

Being unfaithful to God makes us “adulterous.” Making friends with unbelievers is not wrong. Let us be careful what we read here. Having an intimate relationship with “world” is wrong. (marriage, business partnership...)

**Our God is a God of love and relationships.** He wants us to have an intimate relationship with Him to the point that this relationship has been described as a marriage. **He “married” us.** He is a jealous God, like when you love someone, you do not want to lose him/her. You care and you want the best relationship.

Let me give you some examples from the Bible:

**“And the LORD said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. (Deuteronomy 31:16 NIV)**

**“Their mother has been unfaithful  
and has conceived them in disgrace.  
She said, ‘I will go after my lovers,  
who give me my food and my water.’” (Hosea 2:5 NIV)**

God wanted to make a “marriage commitment” with His people. Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments (marriage vows). He comes down to find out the “bride” is worshiping a **golden calf**. Can you see how God felt when He saw His creation breaking their commitment?

**God is saying, “Choose with whom you want to make friendship and marriage vows? You cannot choose two masters.” God does not give up from us.**

#### **4. Choose Grace**

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:6-7 ESV)

Next week we will elaborate.

#### **Questions:**

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” What is a conflict you are dealing with right now? What is the cause? Examine yourself. Is there any bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart?

#### **I Need You Every Hour**

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4453666/The-world-war-Interactive-map-reveals-conflicts.html>

2. Tyndale commentary

3. a term that means simply ‘pleasure’, but which often carries the negative connotations of sinful, self-indulgent pleasure (we get our word ‘hedonism’ from it). It consistently has this negative meaning in the New Testament (Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:13).

4. <http://www.verber.com/mark/xian/weight-of-glory.pdf>