

## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

**COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH**  
JAMES  
CONFLICT (AND OTHER STUFF)  
JAMES 4:1-10  
06/11/2017



### MAIN POINT

The key to resolving conflict is to uproot our pride and humbly submit our hearts and lives to God.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Share about the last argument you had with a member of your family.**

**What do you and your family tend to argue about most often? What motivates you and your family to argue about these things?**

Living with our families for years gives us years of practice at relational sin. Unfortunately, many of us know how to push our family members' buttons but are not as adept at resolving conflict. As sinners living in a sinful world we should not be surprised to find ourselves in the midst of conflict. However, as followers of Christ, we must not be content to leave conflict unresolved. Living faithfully for Christ requires that we seek what is driving the conflict in our lives and uproot it so that we might humble ourselves before God and others.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:16-26.**

Toward the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul contrasts the "works of the flesh" with the "fruit of the Spirit."

**What do the works of the flesh (vv. 19-21) all have in common? Would you describe all of the things in this list as "works"?**

**Where is the source of the "works of the flesh" (see Mark 7:18-23)?**

**What do the fruits of the Spirit all have in common? What keeps us from exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit?**

Not all of the things Paul lists as "works of the flesh" are things we would readily describe as "works." We more readily understand things like "enmity," "jealousy," and "envy" as attitudes rather than works. These attitudes produce "rivalries," "dissensions," and "divisions." This tells us something about the root of sin. Each of the attitudes listed in Galatians

5:19-21 are inward and self-focused. In other words, the root of our sin is the pride in our hearts. This unhealthy focus on self keeps us from appreciating one another and convinces us that others exist for our own benefit. In contrast to the “works of the flesh,” the attitudes listed as the “fruit of the Spirit” are all others-focused. “Love,” “patience,” “kindness,” and “gentleness” all require us to cease using others for our own selfish ends and begin putting other people ahead of ourselves.

**Which of the “works of the flesh” do you find yourself gravitating toward most often? How can we replace the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit?**

Knowing that the works of the flesh are rooted in our pride gives us the key to overcoming them. We must stop relying on ourselves to overcome our sinful attitudes and actions and must confess our helplessness to change our hearts. We need the Spirit to move powerfully in our hearts, redirecting them from focusing on ourselves to focusing on the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 4:1-6.**

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**What does James say lies at the root of all our quarrels and fights?**

**Have you ever asked God for something “wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (v. 3)? Why do you think James called people who pray this way “adulterous people” (v. 4)?**

**We tend to think of jealousy in a negative light. Why is God justified in yearning “jealously over the Spirit he has made to dwell in us” (v. 5)?**

James was not talking about sexual but spiritual infidelity. And when he referred to the world, he did not have in mind the physical earth, but the self-centered values of those who crave their satisfaction. Spiritual adultery is abandoning the worship of God for the worship of self. James goes on to say that God “yearns jealously over the Spirit he has made to dwell in us.” God is jealous for our desires because He is deserving of highest praise and because He loves us—He knows that we will only find true joy when we humbly submit to Him.

**How might knowing that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” help us take steps to resolve conflict?**

When we view others as existing to help us get what we want, we treat them as tools for our own selfish ends rather than as people made in God’s image. It is only when we recognize God’s all sufficiency and our desperate need for His grace, that we will humbly confess the pride that is causing division between us and others.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 4:7-10.**

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**What does it mean to submit? What does it look like to submit to God? Why might submitting not be a popular activity in our culture?**

That we should submit to God means we should make important to us what is important to God. We should arrange our lives to be in harmony with God’s priorities for us. To submit to God means to surrender our hearts—our wills, desires, and priorities to God.

**How might the devil try to hinder us from resolving conflict? How should we respond to the devil’s attacks?**

The word “devil” means “slanderer” or “accuser.” Satan often attacks us by trying to convince us that we are powerless to overcome the sin in our lives. James, however, calls us to resist the devil. When we do, James said the victory over his temptation is certain—he will flee from you, with regard to the devil and his temptations, there is no middle ground, we must actively resist him.

## What does it mean to be “double-minded”? How does humility combat double-mindedness?

If selfish pride is at the heart of the conflict we experience with one another, we must humbly admit our sin and seek God’s grace to overcome it. When we understand our weakness and His strength, our sinfulness and His righteousness, we will stop looking to ourselves for the answers to the conflict in our lives. When we see our insufficiency and God’s sufficiency, we will seek the one who has the power to transform us and produce spiritual fruit in our hearts.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In what areas of your life are you most prone to selfish pride? What is one step you could take this week to acknowledge your insufficiency and Christ’s sufficiency in that area of your life?**

**Who is someone in your life with whom you are having conflict or an uneasy relationship? How can God’s grace help with that relationship?**

**How might we as a group help each other pursue humility?**

### PRAY

Thank God for graciously saving us and giving us new hearts. Pray that we would learn to live by, rely on, and demonstrate His grace. Pray that our church would be marked by people who humble themselves before God and resolve conflict in a loving and gracious manner.

### COMMENTARY

#### JAMES 4:1-10

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4:1. Evidently, the peace and peacemakers James wrote about in 3:17-18 were in short supply among these Christians. He pointedly asked: From what source did their wars and the fights arise? The word wars refers to chronic military campaigns, while fights indicates separate battles in those campaigns. In the context of conflict among believers, the words refer to “disputes” and “quarrels;” some were expressions of ongoing hostility while others were temporary flare-ups. We get our word hedonism from the Greek term for “cravings.” It conveys intense desire for what a person does not have. The term “war” has the sense of ongoing military action in which sensuality arrays its forces and moves to the attack in believers’ bodies.

4:2a. These believers kept on desiring and went on failing to get what they desired. The Greek term rendered “desire” means “lust after” or “covet.” It is different from the word for “cravings” in verse 1, but it also has the idea of focused yearning for what a person does not have. James used strong language in an attempt to drive home the seriousness of these Christians’ behavior. When he charged, “you murder,” he probably had in mind Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:21-22, where the Lord taught that hatred and contempt are spiritually tantamount to murder. James was not describing petty differences but substantial and chronic conflict among believers. The sense is probably that these Christians wanted what others had, could not get what they wanted, and continued their hostile attempts to obtain their desires. The Tenth Commandment prohibits coveting (see Ex. 20:17), but Christians were shattering it. The word “covet” conveys the sense of jealousy, spite, and envy—a white-hot zeal to have what someone else has. These believers’ attempts to get what they wanted were being frustrated, so they continued to fight and war (see v. 1).

4:2b-3. These believers did not receive because they did not ask in prayer. James did not suggest that God would give them what they coveted and quarreled over. He well may have meant his readers did not receive fulfillment and satisfaction because they had wrong motives and methods. Their greedy infighting left them empty and frustrated. When these Christians petitioned God, they still did not get what they wanted because their desires were wrong, were not in line with God’s will. The word “wrongly” can point to evil motives. Believers selfishly asked God to fulfill their

desires for pleasure. “Spend” has the idea of squandering resources, of wasting them or consuming them by extravagance. The phrase “desires for pleasure” translates the Greek word for self-gratification that James used in verse 1 (“cravings”). God’s answer to selfish, self-serving prayers is a resounding “No!”

4:4. Here “adulteresses” has a spiritual reference, describing one who is unfaithful to God. It probably reflects the Old Testament background of Israel’s committing adultery by idolatry. The term “world” indicates the sphere that is separated from God and dominated by evil. “Friendship with the world”—adopting its values and methods—means setting oneself in opposition to God. The word for “hostility” has the idea of separation. Whoever is disposed or willing to be the world’s friend becomes God’s enemy. Whoever chooses to live in the sphere ruled by evil thereby makes himself or herself God’s enemy.

4:5. Precisely what Scripture James had in mind here is difficult to determine. One suggestion is that he had in mind a verse such as Genesis 6:3, Exodus 20:5, or Exodus 34:14; but he restated it in his words. The phrase “without reason” means “to no purpose.” We might paraphrase the question: “Do you suppose the Scripture does not mean what it states?” God’s Spirit begins to reside in believers at conversion, and His Spirit continues to yearn jealously for their loyalty. With love He intensely pursues their loyalty. The Spirit works in accordance with God the Father’s insistence on having no rivals in their hearts. Thus the Spirit seeks to guide us toward being God’s friends and away from being friends of the world.

4:6. We do not have to continue in a state of bitter, selfish conflict. In contrast to destructive infighting, greater grace is available to overcome hostility and restore relationships. The term “grace” has the sense of God’s free gift and here refers to the necessary power to end chronic conflict with others, renew loyalty to Christ, and relate in love. James quoted Proverbs 3:34 to remind us of the peril of pride and the need for humility: God goes on setting Himself in opposition to the haughty and arrogant, but He continually extends His favor to people who are conscious of their need for His resources.

4:7. Ten urgent imperatives appear in verses 7-10. This extensive call for immediate, remedial action shows the seriousness of the situation being addressed. The first command is “submit to God.” By deliberate choice, these Christians were to align themselves under God’s leadership and be obedient to His directives. In their renewed obedience to God, they were to set themselves in opposition to the Devil. Because of God’s presence and power with them, the Devil would flee from them. Evil would be vanquished from the battlefield.

4:8. In rapid-fire succession James gave three additional imperatives. He urged believers to “draw near to God” for the purpose of offering Him reverence and worship. To do so would strengthen or repair their personal relationship with Him.

4:9. James piled up terms to stress the sincere repentance believers should demonstrate because of their sins. They should be so distressed that they are moved to lament with tears. Their frivolous “laughter” should become lamenting; and their shallow, worldly “joy” should be changed to dejection. Only deep, genuine repentance would lead to the forgiveness they needed to remedy their situation.

4:10. James repeated the emphasis he had made in verses 6-7. He called on these readers to confess to God their sins, weaknesses, and inadequacies. They were to admit their need for His grace and be open to receive it. As a result of this change in attitude, God would lift conflict and divided loyalty from them. He would enhance their relationship with Him, and they would have moral and spiritual power necessary for Christian living. God’s exaltation would be the polar opposite of the worldly prestige, honor, and recognition for which they fought one another.