

Cravings and Conflicts - Part 2

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] Thank you very much. All right. Well, please turn your Bible to the letter of James chapter 4.!

And having taken a break last Sunday for Easter, we're resuming our sermon series in the letter of James.

! And this morning our attention will be directed to verses 7 through 10. Now, those of you who were present two Sundays ago would recall that Brother Lyndon preached the first part to this sermon from this text.

Not the exact text, but the earlier part. And you may remember how we closed that service. How we closed and responded to the sermon that we heard.

We closed by singing the hymn, Grace Greater Than Our Sin. And that was a very fitting song for us to close with because the final point of the sermon was that God's cure for cravings and conflicts is the grace that he provides.

[1 : 19] We're reminded that the things we crave and oftentimes lead us into conflicts that tear relationships apart and land us in trouble.

But God's cure for it is the grace that he provides. But exactly how does that work? How does God's grace enable us to trust him with our circumstances and trust him with our desires?

So that we don't quarrel and have conflicts with other people when things aren't going our way or when we can't have our own way.

And that's the question that I'll be seeking to answer from this passage this morning. But although our attention is only going to be directed to verses 7 through 10, I want to begin reading in verse 1. So that we are reminded of what we heard in the last sermon. So James chapter 4, beginning in verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[2 : 41] Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and you 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. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

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.

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?

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And now we come to the text that we will focus on this morning.

[3 : 49] Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners. And purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord. And he will exalt you.

Please pray with me. Father, we bow our hearts this morning. Looking to you and asking that you would grant us grace to hear your word.

And to respond to it. Lord, we thank you that you know each of us uniquely. You know us collectively. And therefore, you are able to give us what we need as we consider this issue of cravings and conflicts.

[5 : 09] Lord, I ask that you would use these next few moments for our eternal good.

Lord, may your voice be heard in the preaching. And may you transform our hearts and lives afresh. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen. I think one of the things that we all have in common, if you look around the room this morning, even though we look different, is that we all have things in our lives, circumstances, desires, that we have no control over in terms of bringing them to pass.

For any number of different reasons, those desires remain unfulfilled. For some of us this morning, it may be the desire for a spouse or a child to change and to treat you with the respect you deserve. It might be a desire to be treated fairly by a supervisor or a boss. It may be the desire for marriage or for a child in marriage.

[6 : 36] Or it might be some other good desire and yet we remain with them unfulfilled. Some of us have come into this year with desires that we've held for years.

And they remain unfulfilled. But as we heard last week or the week before in this sermon, as good as those desires are, those desires, if we aren't careful, can become cravings.

And they can lead us into conflicts with people who we believe are connected to those desires and can actually rethink, help to realize them.

And in that sermon, Brother Lyndon again reminded us of the cure for moving from having a good desire into a conflict and a craving is the grace that God provides.

And so the question this morning is how can we hold our desires in such a way that they do not become cravings that eventually lead to conflicts? How can we do that?

[7 : 56] How can we hold these desires, these good desires, these noble desires, in such a way that they do not become things we crave, we crave so strongly that they lead us into conflicts?

some of you may have heard this story, but I guess this would be about a month, maybe two months ago, there was a lady who was executed in the U.S.

And the reason that she was executed was that she so desired to have a child that she went through an elaborate scheme to cut a baby out of a pregnant woman's stomach, staged the whole thing, went into the parking lot of the hospital, told her husband or boyfriend that she just had the baby, come and pick her up, and just staged the whole thing.

She wanted the child that badly. She craved it that badly. They led her to murder. And friends, we must recognize that desires ungoverned, desires improperly held can lead us to all manner of things.

And so we need to hear this this morning. How can we hold these desires in such a way that they do not lead us to cravings, they do not lead us to conflicts that land us into trouble?

[9 : 37] Again, Brother Lin had started to answer this question for us when he pointed us to verse 6. Verse 6 says, but he gives more grace.

Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. God gives grace and he gives more grace to enable us to not move into the area of craving and conflicts stemming from desires that are unfulfilled.

And so in our remaining time this morning, I want us to consider three specific activities that we find in the text for which God will give us grace so that we can hold our desires in such a way that they do not lead to craving and they will not lead to conflict with others.

First, in the face of cravings and conflicts, we who belong to Christ are given grace to submit to God.

That's the first thing that James says in verse 7. He says, Submit yourselves to God. Yes, God gives grace but that's not it.

[11 : 09] We don't say, well, I receive your grace and we go away. No, we receive grace to do this. We receive grace to submit ourselves to God and we need grace to do that. We don't have the strength once we see that, okay, I need to submit to God.

I need to submit these desires to God. That's not enough. We need to receive grace to do that and James tells us he gives more grace. He gives grace for us to be able to do this.

Notice that James uses this word, therefore, and it tells us he's making a concluding point. James is telling us that rather than fight and quarrel to bring these desires to pass, we are to instead recognize that God is sovereign and submit ourselves to him and submit our desires to him in all things.

And true submission to God is true trust in God. It's the recognition that God is in control. It's the recognition that ultimately, no matter what our situation is, we are dealing with God.

ultimately, we are dealing with God. Not dealing with the spouse, not dealing with the child, not dealing with your boss, your supervisor.

[12:31] Ultimately, we are dealing with a sovereign God whose sovereignty is like an umbrella over every single aspect of his universe in our lives.

Obviously, I included in that. And one of the reasons we must submit these desires in ourselves to the Lord is that, really, unless we can go to Scripture and find in its words the very specific point that we may be considering to say, this is God's will for you, we don't know.

As good as some of the desires are that we hold this morning, we cannot say with absolute certainty, that is God's will for me. We don't know that. And so the proper response is to submit to God.

Submit to the sovereign Lord. And he gives us grace to be able to do it. When we have desires yet to be fulfilled, I really know of no better way of submitting to God than doing so through prayer and being in his word.

And God will meet us. He will meet us in prayer, assuring our hearts that he has our good at heart. Assuring our hearts that he would withhold no good thing from us.

[13:59] And he will meet us in the pages of scripture. He will meet us as we're doing this morning, memorizing God's word, reminding ourselves that we have a treasure that is lasting, that is beyond this world.

God will meet us when we open his word. One of the things that will happen is you will find as you study God's word that there are what I would call anchor passages, passages that will anchor your soul and keep you from drifting into cravings and into conflicts and keeping you focused, trusting the Lord and submitting to him.

One of my anchor scriptures is Psalm 16. It's a scripture that God in his kindness has led me to and it's a scripture that often would be awakened into my heart as I consider desires in my own life that are yet to be fulfilled.

And I want to, if you're not familiar with Psalm 16, I commend Psalm 16 to you this morning. I encourage you get into Psalm 16 and hear God's word to those whom he calls to submit to him. Listen to just a couple of verses I want to direct our attention to. The first is in verse 2. The psalmist writes, I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, I have no good apart from you.

[15:31] You are my Lord, I have no good apart from you. Brothers and sisters, there is no more comforting way to hold our desires than to have this conviction that we have no good apart from the Lord.

That is anything that we enjoy or we have away from God is not worth having because it's not good. Our good is only in that which we receive connected to God in accordance with what we know his goodwill is for our lives.

And that's what we want to be, like the psalmist, to get to the place where we are able to see that our desires and the realization of those desires are only truly good when they are in accordance with God's will for our lives.

We should want nothing separate and apart from the Lord. Verse 4 says, the sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply.

[16:51] Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. And the idea is that there are people abandoning the Lord.

And Israel did this all the time. Rain didn't come when they wanted it to come. And so they said, we're going to go and serve this rain God. He's going to give us rain. A child doesn't come when they want the child to come.

So we're going to serve this God of fertility. And they run after these other gods. They abandoned the true and the living God because of these desires. sorrows. And the psalmist says, there's only one thing that they can be sure of.

Their sorrows will multiply. Their sorrows will multiply because the gods they run after, they're not true gods. They're not the true and the living God. The psalmist says, I will not pour out.

I will not worship at that altar. I will not go that way. I will stay worshiping the Lord because apart from the Lord, I have no good.

[17:53] And then in verses 5 and 6, the psalmist writes, the Lord is my chosen portion and my cup.

You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

Friends, this is the way we can submit to God when we are convinced of this. That God holds our lot. God holds the Lord of his people. And the psalmist says, you know what?

When I consider my life, I consider the boundaries that you have set on me, places I can go and things I can do. He says, they have fallen in pleasant places. They are beautiful where they have fallen.

The NIV actually says, the boundary lines. God has set boundary lines on our lives. And we must be persuaded of this. If we're not persuaded of this, we will not submit to God.

[19 : 00] Whatever our desires are this morning, however long we have held them, however badly we desire them, may God bring all of us to the place where we can say with the psalmist, Lord, though I don't understand how, I can say the boundary lines for my life.

Wherever they are at this present moment, they have fallen in beautiful places, in pleasant places. I trust you. I submit my life to you. Now, will we do this perfectly, you know, one straight line and just always progressing?

No. There'll be ebbs and flows. There'll be those dark and hard days. There'll be those days where we finding ourselves in deep despair, but what does James say?

He gives more grace. He pours more grace in those situations. He doesn't just say, here's your grace and go away. He gives grace.

He continues to give grace and every time we need more grace, he gives more grace, but he gives more grace to help us. grace. Now, does this mean that we are to kind of like be fatalistic and not do anything and just take whatever happens, que sera sera, whatever will be, will be, and we do nothing?

[20 : 30] No, that's not what it's saying at all. It doesn't mean that we aren't to express disagreement or express disappointment in the conduct of a spouse or a child or a family member who we desire to change.

It doesn't mean that we don't say to a boss or a supervisor, I think I'm being treated unfairly. We do those things, but we don't crave to try to bring to pass what we want.

We trust God with that. We try to keep our hands off of it. And one of the things I've learned in my own life is that in my life, and this is what I would call my own theological experience, I've found that God seems to work more in my life when my hands are off situations.

And it seems like the more my hands are in situations, it just seems like they tend to linger, and I believe it's because God wants to ensure that I understand his hand is at work and has done things rather than my own hands and my own efforts.

And so let's have the necessary conversations. Let's do the common sense things that we are to do, those things right in front of us, but let us honestly before the Lord do our very best that we're not trying to connive and scheme and try to bring to pass those desires that we really need to be submitting ultimately to the Lord, remembering apart from God we have nothing good, apart from God we have no good.

[22 : 14] Whatever God gives us, we don't have to worry about protecting, he will preserve and he will keep. Whatever we get, we need to protect. And so where are you this morning with your desires?

And I can ask this because every single one of us this morning has desires in our hearts. There's no one on this earth whose life is as he or she wants to be.

Think of the most powerful, wealthiest person. And if they had an opportunity to change some things, they'd change some things in their life, but they can't. And so the ground is level in that way. And so I asked you this morning, where are you with your desires?

Are you submitting them to God? Are you trusting the Lord, bringing yourself under the conviction and the awareness that he is sovereign?

while you're quarreling and having conflicts and fights, trying to make those desires a reality?

[23 : 19] Maybe you're saying I'm submitting as best I know, but it's a struggle. And I say to you this morning, he gives more grace. God gives grace.

Let's receive his grace. let's submit to him. Well, not only is grace provided to submit to God, but second, grace is provided so we can resist the devil.

So James tells us also in verse 7, he tells us, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Now, in the face of it, that seems unusual because we may think, well, I'm submitted to God, why do I need to resist the devil?

You submit to God, the devil should be no problem, right? Well, no. The mere fact that we are told both to submit to God and to resist the devil tells us that submitting to God doesn't free us from the devil and his onslaughts and his attacks.

We are to do both. And the reason is that the devil comes and he will say, hey, you don't have to put up with that. You know how long you've been doing that?

[24 : 37] Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that? He would be sending these fiery darts against us. He would be tempting us in all manner of different ways so that we don't submit to God, so that we don't trust God.

He will plant seeds of doubt in our minds. And so we are called to resist the devil. And so when we find ourselves having desires, rest assured the devil is trying to get us into cravings and get us into conflicts.

And when we find ourselves in cravings and in conflicts, you can rest assured the devil is nearby. And this is one of the sobering things that I've seen as we've been working our way through James. You remember earlier in chapter 3, James refers to this arrogant, contentious attitude is demonic. This wisdom, he says, this worldly wisdom, he says it is demonic. And the whole idea is we tend to think a lot of times that things we do are neutral.

[25 : 51] But friends, many times, some of the things that we engage in, there's the very influence of the demonic behind it. And one of the areas is this area of cravings and conflicts and fights that can even lead to murder.

And so we need to recognize that when we are moving from desires and getting into cravings, it's like the devil is just saying, come, come, come, and beckoning us, beckoning us, and we cross that line, and we find ourselves in conflicts, conflicts, in fights that are ripping relationships apart.

And so James is addressing this reality and he's saying to us, even when we submit our lives to God, we need to resist the devil because he's going to come.

He's going to tempt us. None of us is exempt from his temptation. And you know what? The devil knows us better than some of us know ourselves because sometimes we don't study our own selves.

We don't know our own constitution. We don't know our own weaknesses, but he does. In Luke 4, verse 13, where Luke is recounting the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, this is the way it concludes.

[27 : 14] This is the way the temptation account concludes. In verse 13, Luke 4, 13, and when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Meaning, he didn't depart forever, he departed until there's another opportunity and he's going to come back. And so even when we are told to resist the devil, how long does the resisting last? Until there's an opportune time. He may go and swing right back because he sees an opportunity. and the heat comes on and he's tempting us.

And we're called to resist him every single time. And what's the good news? He gives more grace. The good news is that we're not called to resist the devil in a vacuum.

God doesn't fold his arms and say resist the devil. God gives more grace and he says resist the devil because he's going to come and he's going to tempt you. he's going to cause you to try to he's going to try to cause you to get into craving making what you desire to come to pass and it's going to land you in trouble.

[28 : 26] So let's not be ignorant of Satan's devices and all of his schemes. Let's continue to submit to God and let's resist the devil.

So James tells us God gives us grace to submit ourselves and our desires to him. He tells us God gives us grace to resist the devil who will come and tempt us to not trust God and to take matters into our own hands.

And so and finally he tells us that we are given grace to draw near to God. That's what he tells us in verses 8 through 10.

Look again at how James says it. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

[29 : 35] Now it's very clear in these words that James has in view those who engage in the kind of conduct that he has up to this point starting in chapter 3 been correcting.

Correcting conduct that is that is contrary to the way God's people are to live. And we know he's talking to God's people to do this because he says draw near to God.

You don't say to an unbeliever draw near to God. The message to the unbeliever is to come to God, to come to Jesus Christ. But to those of us who have come to the Lord Jesus Christ, those of us who are named by the name of Christ, and who sometimes find ourselves in the kind of conduct that we see James correcting.

And see this is the honesty of the word of God. Yes, God's people do sometimes behave like this. Fight and quarrel and are arrogant and have selfish ambition and seek vain glory and have bitter jealousy in their hearts.

And James says you have drifted from God. You have associated with the world. He says you are cheating on God. You are an adulteress. He says come back.

[31 : 01] Draw near to God. God. Draw near to God. And he will draw near to you.

What is this? This is an active call to repentance. He says you cleanse your hands. And what's the whole idea?

The whole idea is that we have soiled our hands with sin. We have soiled our hands and actively doing that which we ought not do. And he says you have to cleanse your hands. Again, when we think of what James is saying, we cannot cleanse ourselves in any true way.

What he's saying is stop doing that. Wash your hands off of that kind of conduct and that kind of behavior. He's saying and purify your heart.

Things are going on in your heart. And friends, one of the realities, and I think you'd agree with me this morning, is we can be careless with our hearts because our hearts aren't seen.

[32 : 06] Sometimes we are more concerned about what people see us do and we let our hearts be like a piece of ground where the weeds grow up and thorns and thistles and all kinds of things is uncapped.

He says you are to deal with the unseen as well. And the reality is that what we do flows from our hearts. And so we are not wise and we ignore our hearts. He says you cleanse your hands.

You are to purify your hearts. He says be wretched. Mourn and weep.

And the whole idea is that we so easily can be engaged in that which we should mourn over and weep over and we don't. mourn over. I believe you have seen it.

You've seen a person who professes to know Jesus Christ and they'll say things like don't let me lay down my religion for you. Or don't the Lord saved me, take away my sins but not my sins.

[33 : 13] And we act in these ways that we should mourn over. James is saying you ought not to be able to do that. You ought to mourn.

You ought to weep. You ought to grieve over that kind of conduct. how easily we can behave like that and then we can go on and we can laugh and have a great time.

James is no. He says let your laugh to be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. And how does this happen? Just because we decide okay I'm going to mourn?

No. God gives grace for that. God gives grace for us to see our sin to break our hearts to cause us to repent to cause us to turn because left to ourselves we wouldn't.

Left to ourselves our sins won't grieve us. We need grace to do what we're being called to do to draw near to God in this way we need grace.

[34 : 26] You know there have been times in my life when I have been aware of knowing something is wrong but not having conviction that I know I should have and I said Lord have mercy on me.

Would you help me to see the ugliness of that the horror of that and enable me to repent and enable me to have godly sorrow?

He gives grace for that. And if it isn't enough he gives more grace and he gives more grace and he will give us grace to be able to do what we've been called to do.

James is challenging our ability and our tendency to be cozy and comfortable with committing sin and being unrepentant.

love. And all of these expressions of self-humbling before the Lord. That's what we read in verse 10.

[35 : 41] Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. You know what that means? Just humble yourself before the Lord and he will do what's best. And whatever he does you're exalted because it's from the hand of God.

He calls us to trust him. He calls us to draw near to him. Should we read our Bibles?

Yes. Let's read our Bibles. Should we pray? Yes. Let's do those things. Should we gather like we're doing? Yes. Let's do those things. But we need grace. And the more we are convinced that we need the grace of God, we will cry out for grace.

And the wonderful thing is he gives more grace. I think it's John who says that it is from his fullness that we receive grace upon grace upon grace.

And so I ask again, where are you this morning? where are you? How are you holding your desires? Where might there be conflicts in your life because you've allowed desires to become cravings?

[37 : 09] And where might there be people in your life who you have, in a sense, viewed as God and your fight is with them? Your words have been with them instead of the one who alone holds our lot in his hands.

And so we're called to submit to God. We're called to resist the devil. We are called to draw near to God. And friends, as we do that, again, it's not to say that once we do that we have no more temptations to move from desiring to craving and to conflicts.

no. It's not saying that at all. But I tell you, it'll look a whole lot different than it perhaps looks for some of us this morning.

And so may the Lord help us. May the Lord give us a vision of the beauty of a life that is submitted to him, trusting him, fully persuaded that we have no good thing away from him.

and may he give us a clearer vision of the horror and the emptiness of sin, that we might turn from it and that we might truly turn to him.

[38 : 30] Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts before you this morning and we pray that you would help us.

God, give us grace and more grace to submit to you. Give us grace and more grace to resist the devil and give us grace and more grace to draw near to you and trusting you with our lives and all of our desires, knowing that as we do at the proper time in due season, you will exalt us.

We ask that you would do this. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.