

THE UPSIDE OF CONFLICT

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

James 4: 1 - 12

I DESIRE

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:1

You are in a conflict because you have a desire, and that desire has not been met. There are good desires, such as wanting a healthy friendship or a more intimate relationship with a spouse, and then there are inherently wrong desires, such as vengeance, lust or greed.

Spend a few moments reflecting on what your desire is / was for the relationship where you have conflict?

Did you want to be understood? Did you want to be heard? Did you want to be cared for or loved? Did you want to be important to the other person and you felt forgotten? Did you want them to treat you in a certain way and that did not happen? Really reflect on what your desire was for the relationship, and write it out in the space provided here.

Spend a few moments reflecting on how you did not communicate or how your desire did not get met.

I DEMAND

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

James 4:2

Unmet desires have the capacity and power of working themselves into the soil of our hearts. This is especially true when we see the desire as something that we need or deserve, and therefore, must have it to be content and fulfilled. We often justify our demands to validate our actions. Even if the initial desire was healthy, when it goes unmet it can grow so strong that it can begin to control our thoughts and behavior. The Bible refers to this as an idol. An Idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled or secure. It's something other than God that we set our heart on that motivates us (1 Corinthians 4:5), that masters and rules us (Psalm 119:135; Ephesians 5:5) or that we trust, fear or serve (Isaiah 42:17, Matthew 6:24; Luke 12: 4- 5). An Idol is something we love and pursue in place of God (Philippians 3:19).

Since the desire did not get met, spend a few moments looking at how you have turned the desire into an idol. How has the desire controlled your mind or heart?

Write your reflections here.

How have your desires caused your behavior to reflect that of demanding? Be honest. Invite the Lord in to test your heart and to see if there are any anxious thoughts within. Honestly write down how you have contributed to the conflict through your actions. Actions happen on the interior and exterior of our lives. Have you withheld something or deprived the other person of something in your relationship and through those actions have communicated a demand? Have you been vicious in your communication, blown up, gossiped, or slandered, and therefore, have communicated a demand?

Write your reflections here.

I DISCRIMINATE

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

James 4:12

When our desires are not met and we choose behavior that is demanding, what follows is taking the posture of Judge. We choose to discriminate against the person with whom we are in a conflict.

We criticize, nitpick, nag, attack, and condemn because we literally play God. The Bible says that this is heinous. If your heart is soft towards God this should sober your mind and soften your spirit. When we judge others and condemn them in our hearts for not meeting our desires we are imitating the devil (James 3:15, James 4:7). We have now doubled our idolatry problem; we have allowed an idol to rule our heart, and we have set ourselves up as a mini-god. We cross a line when we begin to sinfully judge others, which is characterized by feelings of superiority, indignation, condemnation, bitterness, or resentment. Sinful judging often involves speculating on others' motives. Most of all, it reveals the absence of a genuine love and concern toward the other person. When these attitudes are present you have discriminated and have chosen to play God.

Spend a few moments honestly reflecting on how you have chosen to discriminate against the person that you are in a conflict with. Be honest. Don't look at the speck in the other person's eye ... look at the log that is in your own.

I DISCIPLINE

You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 4: 2b - 3

Idols always demand sacrifices. When others fail to satisfy our desires and demands and then we discriminate against them, the next natural behavior usually causes us to punish the person who has hurt us. We discipline them because we want to teach them a lesson. Whether deliberately or unconsciously, we will find ways to hurt or punish people so that they will give in to our desires.

The punishment can take many forms. Sometimes we react in overt anger, lashing out with hurtful words to inflict pain. Other times we withdraw from the relationship. We are subtly cool towards the other person withholding affection or physical contact, we refuse to look them in the eye, and sometimes we even abandon the relationship altogether.

Sending subtle cues over a long period of time is another form of inflicting punishment. Inflicting discipline on others is one of the surest signs that an idol is ruling our hearts. (James 4: 1 - 3)

Spend a few moments reflecting and asking God if you have consciously or subconsciously tried to discipline the person with whom you are in conflict. Write down your reflections here.

WHAT IS THE CURE? DELIVERANCE

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me.
Exodus 20: 2 - 3

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
James 4: 7 - 10

There is only one way out of this bondage. It is to look to God himself, who loves to deliver people from their idols. Deliverance happens through Jesus. We must acknowledge and confess our sin and the part we have played in the conflict. We must repent of it, meaning to feel genuine sorrow for the role we have played. The next step is to intentionally choose to put God back on the throne and trust in Jesus as the great healer, mediator and reconciler.
THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL!!!!

Spend some time walking through deliverance.

Pray through the steps of:

1. Confess
2. Repent
3. Trust

Once you have walked through the 4 D's of CONFLICT, the next step is to prayerfully consider if the Lord is inviting you into a process to restore the relationship.

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