

Reflection Questions: James 4:1-10

For the message, Christ in our Conflicts: The “Heart” of the Matter given by Pastor Mike Ivancic at New City Church of Calgary on May 21 2017

These discussion questions are designed primarily to help you apply the message from the Scriptures by helping you think through application to your personal life, your church life, and your city's life. You can use these by yourself for reflection, or with your family or small group for discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Pray. Take a moment to pray asking God to guide you in reflecting upon the Scripture text.

Read the Scripture text: James 3:13-4:10

A summary of the sermon: The Letter of James (largely recognized by scholars as the brother of Jesus) is considered wisdom literature. What is wisdom? Wisdom is being adept at living well. It's a life strategy for living well. This makes James one of the most practical books in the Bible. It doesn't primarily give us new theology (although it does somewhat) it takes already established theology and shows us how it works out in the context of real life.

Wisdom is almost exclusively known by its fruits. James tells us there are (2) two kinds of wisdom: earthly (worldly) and heavenly (3:13-18). Worldly wisdom is often characterized by jealousy and selfish ambition which leads to discord. Heavenly wisdom, where it is present, is known for being peaceable, harmonious, sincere and reasonable.

James tells us that the selfish root of worldly wisdom's fruit lies in our hearts: passions (Greek work – *hedone* – English – hedonism) and desires (literally “mega” desires) (vv.1-2a). This means wherever there are quarrels and fights worldly wisdom is in play. It's not that we simply want things (recognition, acknowledgement, respect, honor, to be right) we need and demands these things from others.

Remember, James is talking to Christians. What compounds their failure in dealing with conflict is that they either don't pray or the pray simply to get what they really want (vv.2b-3). You pray that God would change the other person or the circumstance rather than change you own hearts and its coveting desires.

But James even go deeper. He tells us that ultimate root of our conflict is with God (v.4). Because only God can and does meet the deepest needs of our hearts to search and demand that from others (spouse, children, friends, work) is not only worldly (“choosing to be a friend of the world”) but an incredible act of betrayal (“adulterous people”) to the who loves and gave himself completely to us.

But God tirelessly pursues his wayward people (“yearns jealousy for us and gives us more grace”). All we need is need and the humility to ask and receive (vv.5-6). The number one thing that we forgot in all conflict is God himself. James, using the language of repentance (turning back) exhorts the ones who receives grace to submit (God), resist (Devil), draw near (God) (vv.7-8).

Finally (vv.9-10) , James gives us an astounding promise that as we humble ourselves (admit that life is not about us and we can't do it on our own) we paradoxically receive all that we need (he will lift us up). The reason we know this principle is true is because of the one who proved it - Jesus (Philippians 2:6-9). Because we have been raised (lifted up) with Jesus (Colossians 3:1) everything he received (honor, recognition, glory) we know receive by faith in him as well.

Bottom Line: The “heart” of relational conflict begins with conflict (passions, desires) in each of our own hearts. However, we must recognize that our ultimate conflict is not with others but with God. Only by repenting (submitting and drawing near to God), humbling asking (prayerfully) and receiving his grace (as shown to us by the gospel of Jesus) will we begin to heal our conflicts by showing us where we find our deepest needs fulfilled.

QUESTIONS

1. How does this text speak to your life?

- How are you challenged, convicted, encouraged, or surprised by this text?
- Think of a time that you had quarrel and fight with someone. What did you want from them? What did you need from them? In hindsight what did you learn about yourselves and the conflict?
- When a sense a conflict is beginning to happen or has happened how instinctive is your first reaction to pray? If you do pray what do you pray for in the conflict? Why do you think that is?

2. How does this text speak to us as a church community?

- What would it look like for us a church community if we are to live out this text in our city?
- If conflicts happen in the church as much as they happen in the world than what's the difference and what good purpose may come out of it? How can we go about not wasting our conflicts with each other?
- Why do you think we are surprised when conflict happens in the church (e.g. people often leave when it does or fight each other)? How can we view them as God views them?

3. How does this text speak to our city?

- What aspects of the message of this text would cause the greatest offense to our city if they heard it? What would be the greatest hope and encouragement?
- If every broken marriage, every destroyed friendship, every breakdown in family, every dysfunctional workplace, every war, battle stems from at least a deficiency in how we deal with conflict than how might this text point a better way forward so we don't always eat the bitter fruit of our conflicts.

CONCLUSION QUESTION

What is the one thing you want to take away from this study to remember or to make a change in your life.

PRAYER

What are some ways you can turn what you are learning into prayer? List them as bullet points....

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