

c.j. Mahaney: Faith Works in Humility

by Adrian Warnock

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and wisdom in resolving relational conflicts as taught in James chapter 4.

Duration: 1:04:17

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 17:14, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:18, Ephesians 4:29, Hebrews 3:12-13, James 4:1-2

Topics: "Interview"

Description

In this sermon, CJ Mahaney introduces himself and expresses his gratitude for the support and prayers of the congregation. He emphasizes the importance of peacemaking and resolving relational conflicts. Mahaney encourages the congregation to connect the dots between their participation and the growth of a sovereign grace church in Sydney, Australia. The sermon then transitions to a discussion of James chapter 4, focusing on the power of words and the need to put faith into action in our speech.

Transcript

If you are here as a guest, I want to add my voice of welcome to what you already heard from Vince. My name is Mark Mullery. It's my joy to serve as one of the elders at the church here, part of the pastoral team.

And it's my privilege to introduce the message this morning we have for some time been in a series in the book of James. The series is titled Faith Works. And last week we were on the topic of words.

James has much to say about words, and much of it should be of great concern to us because he informs us that our words can often be unhelpful, apart from God's grace, and can actually set our relationships on fire, like a forest fire, in an unhelpful way. And so we've been learning about how to put our faith to work when it comes to our words. And that is going to continue this morning as we come to this morning's message in the beginning of chapter 4 of the book of James.

It's also going to continue as we come into the first four weeks of October, as we go through a series about peacemaking and how to resolve relational conflicts. I was about to say that I want to introduce C.J. Mahaney to you, but he has already introduced himself to you. So he needs no introduction.

Many of you know him and have benefited from his ministry, his life, his preaching, teaching his books. I just want to say one thing, having listened to his preaching for some 20 years now. There's a writer who

has noted that there are verses in the Bible that speak to preachers.

And they say simply, preach me. There are key verses and passages in scripture that really call out to be preached. And I don't know anyone who has done this more skillfully and effectively than C.J. I can look back over the years and think to verses like Ephesians 4.29 or Hebrews 3.12 and 13, verses that call out to be preached that C.J. you have preached in a way that has had an enduring effect on me and upon us.

And this morning we come to two of those verses in James chapter 4. So C.J., thank you for preaching. Thanks for being willing to come preach here. Thank you for zeroing in on these verses that call out, preach me.

Come preach to us this morning, please. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

I'm saying anybody can do an outdoor picnic. It takes a real unique church to do an indoor one and to say it's superior to an outdoor one. So you have nothing but my respect, admiration, and concern.

That was well done by Vince. Well done. I'm sorry to cause your pastors any concern this morning.

You might not have noticed I was late. I was like late, late, late, late because I was driving over here. I was pondering this passage.

I was pondering this message. I was praying for you. I was praying for all Sovereign Grace pastors who have the privilege to preach today.

And then it seems to me there's like a demon with three assignments. One is, you lost your keys. And so you're looking for your keys.

Second is, where's your wallet? And then you think somebody stole your wallet. And then the third I experience is, where are you? And so I had that where are you moment. And I thought, okay, I'm not sure where I am.

And when I saw the sign that said North Carolina 12, I thought, yeah, you've gone way past Braddock Road. And I was just totally lost sitting at a stoplight. All kinds of options thinking you just can't teach this because it's stupidity.

That's exactly why. So that's why I was late this morning. So I did want you to know that.

And before I have the privilege to preach to you, I want to say something to you. And I want to thank you. I want to thank you in advance because in a matter of weeks, you will be devoting a portion of time over two Sundays to our mission presentation.

And it is humbling to participate in our mission together. And it is particularly humbling for me when churches like yours and pastoral teams like your pastoral team want to be a part of a mission that extends beyond their local church. It says much about that pastoral team.

It says much about the church. This is what it says. It says we are passionate about advancing the gospel beyond our locale.

It says we have a heart for the lost. It says we have a heart to church plant. It says so many things about your pastoral team, so many things about you.

And I find it deeply, it's a deep honor to serve the Savior with you in our mission, to play our small role. And it is a particular joy for me to be with you this morning to thank you in advance. To thank you in advance for your example as a church.

I stood in the back and was just entering in to worship with you and pondering the influence of this church over these many years. Your example, your support in prayer, your sacrificial financial investment in the advance of the gospel through church planting in and through Sovereign Grace Ministries. When you see the two video presentations, you must connect the dots.

You must connect the dots. The first one is going to introduce today in Seoul, South Korea, there is a church because of your example and your prayer and your financial investment. And you'll be introduced to Song Hwan.

If you don't know of Song Hwan, you'll be introduced to Song Hwan in a matter of weeks and his wife Miran. And you will hear him testify as to the effect of Sovereign Grace Churches on his heart and life. It had a dramatic, life-changing effect.

You're also going to be introduced to a seminary professor who has been affected by Song Hwan personally and this church plant from a prominent seminary in Seoul. And I've been informed that a group of professors from this seminary are coming to our pastor's conference at the beginning of November. And I just want you to connect all these dots.

You might not be aware of these dots. The mission presentation is to make you aware of these dots, but it's also to make you aware of the connection between what you do here and these dots. Today, in Sydney, Australia, there's a church.

There's a Sovereign Grace Church because, I would argue, of your example, your support and prayer, your financial investment. They just started recently. On their first Sunday, they had 100 plus guests participate.

They have already had conversions. God is wonderfully at work. When you hear these stories, I want you to connect the dots.

And one dot I particularly want you to connect is the dot between your participation and my gratefulness. Thank you. So thank you in advance for your example, for your prayer.

And if you have the means, if God has so blessed you with any financial investment you can make in our mission. Thank you. Please turn in your Bibles to James Chapter 4. Oops, one more thing.

I forgot my watch as well. It's amazed I'm dressed this morning. Can I? Thank you.

Okay. Very good. Yeah.

Can I? Let's see. That's a great watch. I need one that rests on the podium.

Does anybody have one rests on the podium? Thank you so much. I think that's going to work just fine. Excellent.

Thank you so much. What's that? I think I've got everything else. I think we're good to go now, folks.

Got my Bible. Yes. We need to pray.

All right. We do need to pray. Let me pray.

Lord, thank you for the gift of laughter as an expression of joy, the joy we experience as we contemplate the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we sing together about the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we sing together in the context of this church where you have placed us and glorify your son and glory in the grace of God revealed in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Oh, Father, it is indeed joy inexpressible you have given us as we contemplate the forgiveness of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ as our substitute. In my place, condemned, he stood so that we might be forgiven of our sins and gather here in this place and sing of the glories of your great grace.

So thank you for this time together with this church I so dearly love. And now, Lord, as we give attention to your word, assist me, assist me so that I might serve those I love through the preaching of your word and assist them, assist all of us, Lord, with the assistance we desire. We need that only you can provide that you are eager to provide divine illumination.

Grant us that gift now as we give attention to your word, all by your grace, all because of the cross and all ultimately for your glory. I pray, Father, in Jesus name. Amen.

James chapter four. And we are going to confine our attention this morning to the first two verses. So please give attention as I have the privilege of reading God's word.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. Over a few year period, three humble, godly young men ventured where angels feared to tread and approached me and asked permission to court my three daughters.

One of those men happens to be a part of your pastoral team here. My initial response as I was approached about these three men, about my three different daughters, was, well, my approach sadly was a uniform approach. Because I am a selfish father, my initial inclination was not one of joy at their request.

But I granted their request because as I knew of these men and studied these men and heard of these men, we received them into our lives as the gift from God they proved to be and the answer to prayers we had prayed for our daughters, well, since their birth. And for me to observe now the way each of these men has cared for our daughters and led them and served them and cares for and leads and serves our grandchildren, it has brought me immeasurable joy. Carolyn and I had the privilege and responsibility to provide each couple with premarital counseling.

It was really our role and responsibility to interrupt their romantic trance prior to marriage and prepare them for the inevitable, prepare them for harsh realities, prepare them for the inevitable harsh reality of relational conflict. I think I can still vividly remember this particular session devoted to this particular passage and topic with each couple. Because to some degree, understandably, this was, well, almost if not completely incomprehensible.

What we were describing, this inevitable relational conflict in the midst of their romantic trance, seemed to be a harsh reality that they might at least be tempted to think, I think we might be exempt. What you identify as inevitable, we might be the unique exception. Now, each couple has, upon being married, experienced this harsh reality and each couple returned to us not long after being married to thank us for

this session of premarital counseling in particular and communicate the difference this passage we are considering this morning has made in their lives.

And what I have discovered over the years is this passage, this passage isn't simply relevant to those who are preparing for marriage. This passage isn't simply or primarily relevant to those who are engaged. No, no, this passage is relevant to everyone present this morning.

Whether you are male or female, this passage is relevant to you. Whether you are married or single, this passage is relevant to you. Whether you are a parent or a child, this passage is relevant to you.

This passage is relevant to you because, because, because there is, there is a relational conflict awaiting you in your future. It's coming at you and you're headed toward it. And let me inform you and prepare you, not your distant future, I'm talking about your immediate future.

For the majority present, you will experience a relational conflict at some point this week. Here's why I can say that with such confidence and certainty. Here's why.

Because we live in a fallen world and because even as a Christian, though sins have been forgiven through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the presence of sin remains. Indwelling sin remains. And indwelling sin in the life of a Christian is present and active and opposed to you.

And this week you will experience in this fallen world temptation. And therefore I can say with some degree of certainty. A relational conflict awaits you.

Perhaps you've even arrived aware of a relational conflict that remains unresolved in your life at present. I have great news for you this morning. This passage is just filled with help and hope.

Just filled with it. I mean, these few words, so few words, so much wisdom. Which no doubt you've discovered throughout your study of James.

So few words, so much wisdom. These few words, they are an expression of God's kindness to us all. I want you to encounter not only the wealth of wisdom, the wealth of grace and wisdom present in this passage, but I want you to be aware of the kindness of God in providing us the content and the discernment present in this passage.

It's kind of God to give us this wisdom so that we might be protected from relational conflict. So that we might wisely avoid relational conflict. So that if we find ourselves in relational conflict, we might resolve relational conflict.

All of this is provided for us in this passage, in these few words. So what we're going to do this morning, in effect we're going to make eye contact with God. We're going to make eye contact with God through this passage.

And we're really going to discover a number of things. We're going to discover the root of relational conflict. And we're going to discover by the grace of God how to resolve relational conflict.

We're going to discover the compelling relevance of this passage to us all. And here's what I can anticipate. I can anticipate, I want you to anticipate that this passage and the content of this passage, and the discernment you derive from this passage, and the grace revealed in this passage will make not only an immediate difference in your life, but an enduring difference in your life.

I want you to anticipate that. It has made an enduring difference in my life right up until the last few days. And I anticipate it will continue to do so.

And I anticipate that your experience will be the same. So, let's get to work. Now, just a moment, just a moment about background.

It's important that we understand something about the original recipients of this letter. Something about the circumstances in which James is addressing these individuals who were the original recipients in this letter. Obviously, serious, serious relational conflicts existed among the original recipients of this letter.

I mean, if you just read these two verses, these two verses are no flattering portrayal of the early church. It's a wonderful, realistic portrayal of the early church in and through these two verses. Oh, yes, without doubt, the original recipients were genuinely converted.

But, though genuinely converted, there was the distinct presence of relational hostility and the distinct absence of reconciliation and relational harmony. You want to notice right from the outset in verse 1, quarrels, plural, fights, plural. The plural reveals that these were not occasional.

These were not occasional. These were not unusual. These were common.

This was a chronic condition that James was addressing here. You also want to notice that James does not, in this passage, specify the nature of these conflicts. Now, we could speculate, we could step back and read the entirety of the letter and speculate in an educated way as to the occasion or the circumstances, but James doesn't address those or draw our attention to those in this passage because, here's why, because the occasion and the circumstances involved are not of primary importance to James.

They're not of primary importance because the occasion and the circumstances aren't the cause. He's about the cause. He's after the cause.

He wants to help identify the cause of quarrels and fights. And this is good news for us because, really, regardless of the occasion or circumstances involved in the lives of the original recipients, this passage is relevant to us. This passage is relevant to us in the midst of our quarrels and fights.

What good news! This was written not only for them but for us. This was written, this was divinely inspired and written and preserved not only with them in mind but with us in mind as well. God was not only speaking to them, He was and is kindly addressing us as well this morning.

And in just a few words, and it only seems to take James a few words, I mean, one can imagine that a counseling appointment with James would be short, specific, and hopefully redemptively sweet if one was attentive and humble in response. I mean, there's just so few words here, but there is so much wisdom. So what do we learn? What do we learn about relational conflict from these two verses in Holy Scripture? Three simple points.

Three simple points. Number one, relational conflict normally is worse than we think. It is normally worse than we think.

Here's our sinful tendency. Here's my sinful tendency. My sinful tendency is to minimize the seriousness of relational conflict in general and to minimize my role and responsibility in particular.

That's my sinful tendency. And we're quite comfortable describing our relational conflicts with moral generalities. Or generalities actually that have no ethical root to them.

We like generalities. In effect, morally neutral generalities. So we're quite comfortable just talking about how, yeah, there's a conflict and we're just wired differently.

As if that is somehow some kind of profound explanation that explains it. Yes, there's some kind of wiring, and of course, wiring has no moral or ethical component to it. And we're comfortable with that.

We're comfortable saying we just don't get along. We like to talk about personality differences. I mean, it's just endless.

We could just in some ways entertain each other with all the phrases that we create that minimize the seriousness of relational conflict and actually exonerate us from any moral or ethical responsibility in the context of relational conflict. And let's just be real clear. James wants to be real clear with us.

He won't allow that. He will not allow a superficial assessment of conflict. He will not allow a therapeutic assessment of conflict.

He won't allow it. Won't let us minimize it. Won't let us ignore quarrels and fights.

Now, actually, what he insists in this passage is that we examine our quarrels and fights closely, that we examine them carefully. And as we examine them closely and carefully, and as we are theologically informed to examine them closely and carefully, here's what we discover. We discover they're actually worse than we thought.

Worse than we thought. You want to notice carefully the language that James uses here in this passage. What begins as a quarrel at the outset of verse 1 is described as war within at the end of verse 1. What begins as a fight in verse 1 is described as murder and coveting in verse 2. Listen, you just read carefully, read consecutively, and here is what you will notice.

James' language doesn't soften as the verse progresses. His language strengthens. The verse, in effect, begins with a human observation of relational conflict.

And then, as the verse continues, it proceeds to a divine examination and evaluation of relational conflict. So, as you read on in the verse, you are introduced to a divine perspective of conflict. Quarrels and fights, human observation, reveal.

They reveal war. They reveal anger as the root of murder. They reveal coveting.

They reveal selfishness. And not simply or solely or even primarily against another person, but most seriously and importantly against God Himself. So, listen, we are looking at the wisdom from above in written form.

James turns our attention away from the quarrels and fights and away from the effects of quarrels and fights. And he turns our attention and directs our attention to our hearts. And he provides us with a divine perspective of our heart.

And as our heart is examined and a divine perspective is applied to our heart, here is what we discover. This is worse than we originally thought. Now, there is good news in that discovery.

Oh, there is good news. Because you will never make progress in resolving quarrels and fights unless you recognize the severity of quarrels and fights. If you think of them as superficial, you will not address your heart.

You will not ultimately resolve a quarrel and fight. But if you are affected under divine examination with a divine perspective and assessment of your heart in the midst of a quarrel and fight you are participating in, you will recognize the severity of quarrels and fights. And it will make all the difference in resolving quarrels and fights.

So, let me ask you, how do you view your quarrels and fights? Think back to your most recent one with someone. How do you view it? How do you explain it? How do you describe it? How do you assess your heart in the midst of it? How do you evaluate your participation, your responsibility? You got a superficial assessment? Trying to minimize it? Trying to minimize your responsibility? Trying to minimize the severity of what is revealed in the midst of it? Or, do you realize, no, this is bad. No, I am sobered.

This is worse than I thought. This is worse than I thought. Listen, if you aren't sobered by the severity, you will not desire and pursue God's gracious provision and solution.

Informed by this passage, theologically informed by this passage, your understanding of quarrels and fights and your heart in relation to quarrels and fights will be transformed. It's really worse than you think. Number two, it's simpler than you think.

It's simpler than you think. Again, this is good news. Relational conflict really isn't complicated.

Man, it can seem complicated. And if you're in the midst of it, it can sure feel complicated. There is so often when I have been in the midst of conflict with the wife I don't deserve.

My wife, Carolyn, we have been married now for 35 years. There have been so many times when I have been in the midst of conflict with her when it seems so complicated. And it feels so complicated.

And in the midst of conflict, we've even had kind of unexpected amusing moments, or Carolyn has found them amusing, when I'm attempting to lead and serve. And so I'm bringing a summation of what's happened in our conversation from the beginning of the conversation to that moment. And even my summation is confusing.

And it's so confusing that you can't help but just begin to smile. There's a lot of things going on in my heart when that happens. And usually none of them are good because it's a violation of a personal priority, which is that thou shalt always respect my leadership and think it wonderful regardless.

And so in that moment when I'm seeking to exercise it, if you wrote down what I just said, you would just say, you're a confused man. Like, am I supposed to follow a confused man? I have been in this situation. I mean, it's confusing.

We can't even agree on how it started, the origin of the conflict. And look, we're talking about something that just started 20 minutes ago. I don't want you to think when this happens, it's like, we're trying to reconstruct something that took place 12 years ago.

And so our memories are impaired and we remember differently details and aspects. No, no, we're talking about something that started 30 minutes ago. And she's got a different perspective.

Well, no, I think this is the origin of it. Well, no. No, no, this would be the origin of it.

And then from this, that. And then we reference this. And then and it's just all so complicated.

And so, you know, if you're not theologically informed, what you what you think is, OK, let's just get back to the origin. Where it started, how it started. We can agree on that, then we can resolve it.

But you try to go back there and you can't even agree on that. It just all feels so complicated. Seems so complex and confusing.

Well, James, James arrives on the scene and says, I'm here to help. I'm here to help. I'm here to help.

And I want you to know something. I want to make a few announcements to you. Regardless of how complicated it seems to you, CJ, regardless how complicated it feels to you, CJ, it is not complicated.

It's not complicated. It is not complex. It is not confusing.

It is not mysterious. It does not require professional help. It is not demonic.

And good news for you, CJ. It's not necessary for you. Remember how it began? Nope.

James says, allow me to locate the source of the conflict. Fasten your eyes on the last two words of verse one within you. That's the source.

If you're participating, that's the cause. Not outside of you. Not somewhere else.

Not in someone else. Within you. And then James says, let me provide you with the root issue.

There's three times in two verses. Verse one, your passions are at war. Verse two, look at this phrase, you desire and do not have.

Verse two, you covet and cannot obtain. That is three very clear statements. Statements about and descriptions of, if you wanted a category, sinful cravings.

Sinful cravings. Passions at war within. Desire and do not have.

Covet and cannot obtain. This is the cause of all conflict. Whether it be in a marriage or between countries.

So whenever you find yourself in a quarrel or fight, first remember, normally, most likely, it's worse than you think. And discerning the cause is simpler than you think. Because the cause, the root issue in conflict is found within you.

First, it's found within you. This is huge. Because conflicts don't create, they reveal.

We tend to think of them as, they create. I was doing fine until I got to talk to you. I was good to go and then you came.

Came into the room and we began to discuss. And so we think that that individual created this. No, that's not true.

What's going on was present in you prior to that individual talking to you. They didn't create it. It's just a means of revealing it.

So conflicts don't create. Carolyn has never created anything in my heart. Carolyn, I can never say to her, you are the cause.

No, not true. Conflicts don't create. Conflicts reveal.

And what does each and every conflict reveal? Well, if you're participating, conflicts reveal a certain sinful craving. That's what they reveal. A certain sinful craving.

Look at verse 1 again. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Listen, the original recipients lacked discernment as to cause. Fights and quarrels were common, a chronic condition.

They didn't know what the cause was. Perhaps you lack discernment as well. James is here to provide us with discernment.

Sinful cravings within are the cause of relational conflict. David Pallison wasn't able to be with us this morning, so I brought him along in the form of a quote. And this quote is going to help you to understand this passage.

It's going to aid your comprehension of the passage so that you might hopefully understand the passage, comprehend the passage, be affected by the passage, apply the passage, and experience the transforming effect of the passage. David wrote of this particular passage the following. He said, one of the joys of biblical counseling comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person's dark room.

He wrote, I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility. Listen, who really understood their motives. James 4.1 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts.

Couples who see what rules them, cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life, can repent and begin to learn how to make peace. I pray this quote helps you to understand what's most important, and that would be this passage. Memorize that simple phrase.

It's a wonderful summation of this passage. Cravings underlie conflicts. And then he gives a list of cravings, and that wouldn't be an exhaustive list.

It's just a representative list. So, wherever there's a relational conflict, informed by this passage, if you look underneath the conflict, you're going to find a craving. Because cravings underlie conflict.

That's why this is discernment of the root issue, the heart issue. Sinful cravings that have not gone satisfied. Unsatisfied sinful cravings.

If you look underneath the conflict, there is a craving. Underneath every conflict is a craving. God is so kind to give us this discernment.

Why do you fight? It's real simple. CJ, why do you fight? It's real simple, James says. It's because you do not get what you want.

And when you do not get what you want, you fight. For what you want. That's the root issue.

Nothing deeper than this. There's nothing underneath that. But that's it.

We have identified the root issue and how kind of God to not only identify... I'm so grateful that God doesn't just say in this passage, The cause is within you. And then leave me to try to discover in what way it's within me. No.

That would not sufficiently serve me. That would be similar to when I'm driving along and the check engine light comes on. Which I just find decidedly unhelpful.

Partially because I'm just totally ignorant of cars. But I've done this. I've done this multiple times.

I've done this because I'm a guy. I've done this because I'm a dumb guy. I've done this because I'm a proud dumb guy.

Check engine light comes on. I pull over. Open the hood.

As if I'm going to be able to discern. What is wrong? Look, I don't even know exactly where to put the windshield wiper fluid. That's not a joke.

The few times I've done it, I'm fearful. Is this where the oil is supposed to go? I mean, I just don't know anything about cars. So it is utterly ridiculous for me to open the hood and to stare as if that's going to make a difference.

But I find it frustrating. Check the engine. Could we be a little more specific, please? Like, this is big and it's complex and it's complicated.

How about a hint? Where should I check in this engine? Ah, consult the owner's manual. What does it say? Drive that car immediately to the dealership because you don't know where to check. And it just so happens we do.

So we've hooked you up with a check engine light in order to serve you. Oh, I'm so glad my Bible isn't simply a check engine light. I'm so glad God doesn't just say, when I say, Lord, what is the cause? I'm so glad God doesn't say, it's sin.

Stupid. Can I listen? It is sin. But then he goes on in this passage to reveal sin with a specificity, a war, coveting, a craving, in order to provide us with discernment so that we might understand our hearts.

This will change your life. This has changed my life. I mean, this functions, folks.

This has functioned for me beginning the first day I learned this to the most recent conflict I've had with Carolyn. This passage, this phrase. I'll give you the most recent one.

We're talking, talking about, I think I know the topic. You need her for details. The ladies are gifted to remember details, and the guys are not.

And I'm saying it's good to be a guy. Minimizing my role and responsibility. But anyway, I don't remember the topic.

I just remember this. I remember the topic. She didn't agree with me.

That's fine initially. And I attempted to persuade her to the obvious advantages and superiority of my position. She wasn't buying it.

Now, had you been, let's say, sitting across the room, you might not have noticed anything. Had you been sitting close, you might have noticed, I think something just happened. I think something, something, something, something just happened in his tone of voice there.

I think we just transitioned from a conversation to a little different tone. You would have been perceptive. My tone did change.

She, of course, perceived it. Suddenly the ambience of the conversation changed. I sought to persuade.

She wasn't, she just didn't agree. Why can't you just back off, CJ? Because I have a craving. I want her approval.

I want her agreement. I want her approval. She's not giving it to me.

So I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight for it. I'm going to start to transition into a prosecuting attorney.

Now, listen. In the midst of that, this verse saved me. Saved us.

This verse did. So I realized, by God's grace, Whoa. Why does this matter? This now matters too much.

Immediately what I thought. This is evolving into a conflict. What are you craving? And by God's grace, I was able to ponder my heart and realize I'm craving her respect and approval in the form of agreement with my perspective.

She's not giving it to me. And this is sad and the effects of sin. I'm willing to fight for it.

Fight the one who loves me the most. To persuade her to somehow serve an unsatisfied sinful craving. Once again, confirmation.

I'm a sinner. I need a Savior. I'm grateful I have one.

And I'm grateful I have one that gives me wisdom to discern my heart in the midst of conflict. The cause is really simpler than you think. It's within you. It's a sinful craving within.

As you learn to identify that sinful craving that is underlying, supporting, subsidizing, escalating the conflict. You can identify that sin. And by God's grace, repent and either avoid conflict or experience reconciliation. It's worse than you think.

Discerning the root issue is simpler than you think. And then finally, resolving relational conflict is easier than you think. Verse 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you.

Oh my. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you. I mean, listen, and He will exalt you and in context, this passage, context of the passage, relational conflict, I mean, what kindness, what grace, what hope we find in these words.

God's grace is greater than our sin. The sin described in verses 1 and 2. The sin revealed in verses 1 and 2 and confirmed in our lives. God's grace, as we encounter it, verse 6, verse 10, is greater than our sin.

Humble yourselves before the Lord. You know what? Humbling ourselves before the Lord really shouldn't be difficult having been informed by this passage of our sin and our contribution to conflict in verses 1 and 2. It shouldn't be difficult. We should be humbled by what we read in verses 1 and 2. Therefore, it should not be difficult to then humble ourselves before the Lord.

But let's be clear, the resolving of all personal relational conflict begins first and foremost with humbling ourselves before the Lord, not humbling ourselves before another. This is where all relational conflict, the resolving of relational conflict begins. We must first humble ourselves before God.

One must first acknowledge his sins before God because listen, relational conflict is first and foremost conflict with God. Your conflict, my conflict with God. Your sin, my sin against God.

That must first be resolved before there can be any hope of reconciliation with others. So, okay. Okay, I want this.

I want to humble myself before the Lord. Humble myself before the Lord. How can I humble myself before the Lord? Listen, good news.

It's easier than you think. We humble ourselves before the Lord by sincerely and specifically confessing our sins to the Lord. That is how we humble ourselves before the Lord.

So, listen to these familiar words of just sweet hope and comfort. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That passage is referencing a genuine confession.

It's implying a genuine confession. It results in not only conviction, it results in a genuine confession. It results in the forsaking of our sin.

Now listen, I pray none of us becomes overly familiar with that verse. Because here's what we should be thinking. How? How can it be that easy? When I have sinned against him and his holiness, when I have defied him, when I have offended him, how can the mere confession result in forgiveness and cleansing? How can something so serious, so offensive, be resolved so immediately and so completely through a simple confession? How can it be this easy to resolve my relational conflict with God himself? Listen, it can only be this easy because the Savior has done the unimaginably difficult.

Because he has done the unimaginably difficult, it is now easy for me to be reconciled with the Father. Because he, the Savior, has resolved the greatest conflict. The conflict between the Holy One and mankind.

The conflict between the Holy One and me. The conflict between the Holy One and my sin. And he, the mediator, the Father, has provided, has stood in my place, living a perfect life and dying a substitutionary death on the cross.

On the cross, he became the wrath absorber, receiving the totality of the wrath I so richly deserve for my sins upon his innocent self and soul, satisfying the righteousness, justice, and holiness of God, so that I might become an object of his mercy and his grace. So that when I sin against him and I am convicted, when I sincerely confess, I am forgiven from all unrighteousness, free from all condemnation. How can it be that easy? It can only be that easy because he did, the Savior did, the unimaginably difficult on the cross as our substitute for our sins.

So if you're a non-Christian here this morning, so glad you are here. I don't have any doubt one of the reasons you're here, God brought you here, whether you're aware he brought you here or not, I believe he did. And I believe he did to hear this.

Your primary concern should not be with any relational conflict that presently exists in your life with another person or one that might take place in the immediate future. Now the conflict you need to be concerned about is the conflict between you and the holy God who created you to whom you are accountable. Or more accurately, the conflict between the holy God who created you and you in your wickedness.

Your concern in this moment should be, well, how do I resolve that? Here's what the Bible would say to you, you can't resolve that through your obedience, through your good works, for you have offended him and sinned against him and are justly, because of his sin and in light of his holiness, the object of his wrath. And humanly speaking, there is nothing you can do to satisfy his righteous wrath. Nothing you can do, humanly speaking, to resolve this conflict.

And here's the good news, he took it upon himself, the father, to send his son to die in the place of sinners like you and me in order to resolve this conflict so that sinners like you and me could be reconciled to him and forgiven of our sin if we turn from our sin and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ as the substitute for our sin. And I pray, I plead with every non-Christian here, flee to the cross in this moment, repent of your sin and cry out for mercy from the one who is eager to give mercy so that your greatest and most serious conflict can be resolved in this moment. There is no hope of resolving a conflict with another individual apart from first humbling ourselves before the Lord and it's easier than you think because grace is greater than our sins.

But I must conclude just briefly pointing out that resolving relational conflict begins, most importantly, with confessing my sin to God but it very much also involves asking forgiveness of those I have sinned against. As an expression of humbling myself before God, I must also, where and when appropriate, humble myself before others when I have contributed sinfully to a conflict and that just simply involves a sincere, specific confession to them as well. Here's what I've discovered about a sincere, specific confession to those I have sinned against.

Here's what I've discovered about a genuine confession. A genuine confession that is sincere is specific and it is brief. I would encourage you to be suspicious if your confession is lengthy.

For me, normally, when my confession is lengthy, there's a good probability that I'm actually not asking forgiveness but instead I'm appealing for understanding. Not really confessing my sin, even if I make reference to my sin. If it's lengthy, normally, to some degree, I'm explaining my sin, excusing my sin, I'm requesting understanding for my sin rather than just simply, sincerely, and specifically identifying my sin and asking forgiveness for my sin.

So, I would encourage you to be suspicious of a lengthy confession. I think genuine conviction is evidenced by a sincere, specific confession of sin. And only then, only when we have been genuinely convicted and been specific in our confession of sin, will we be able to help someone else with the speck that might be in their eye.

You can't really do that until you identify the log that's in yours. Otherwise, that log is just poking them in the eye. Listen.

There's a relational conflict in your future. It's coming at you. You're headed for it.

It's going to happen at some point this week. It might happen before the day concludes. Allow this passage.

Listen. Memorize this passage. Memorize the phrase, cravings underlie conflicts.

Take this wisdom with you so that when you find yourself in the midst of temptation or a quarrel and a fight, you can, by God's grace, look within and seek to identify what are you craving? What do you want that you're not getting? How can you identify that, repent of that, so that you might avoid conflict or resolve conflict? By the grace of God, for the glory of God. Let's pray. Father, thank you for these words.

How kind of you to not leave us alone in our conflicts without a clue as to the cause of conflict. Now, you have given us insight into cause. And you, by your grace, have resolved the greatest conflict between you and sinners like us through the sacrifice of your Son.

Therefore, Lord, it is our joy to humble ourselves before you. And thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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