

What's the Real Problem?

Pastor Mark Johnson on Conflict, Pride, Envy, Wrong Motives, and Building Right Relationships

Program Summary

In this Friday edition of Mark & Friends, Pastor Mark Johnson begins James 4 by asking a searching question about conflict: What is the real problem? James does not begin by validating everyone's reasons for fighting; he points inward to desires battling within us. Pastor Mark explains that healthy conflict resolution begins by examining my own pride, motives, envy, anger, and contribution to the problem before trying to fix the other person. The goal of the kingdom is not merely to end an argument or extract an apology, but to build right relationships in the right spirit. The conversation explores biblical steps for addressing conflict, the importance of listening to how I may have hurt someone, the spiritual damage broken relationships can cause, and envy as a failure to trust God's gifts and provision. James also exposes prayer with wrong motives, reminding believers that God gives wisdom and gifts for His kingdom glory rather than self-centered pleasure. The program closes with a simple first step toward healthier relationships: before asking how to fix them, ask God how He needs to work in me.

Key Takeaways

James locates the source of many fights and quarrels not first in the other person, but in desires battling within me. Healthy conflict resolution begins with self-examination: before asking how to fix them, I should ask how God needs to change me.

Even when another person is unreasonable, insulting, or confrontational, Christians are called to respond in the right spirit.

Biblical conflict resolution aims at restored relationship, not merely winning, getting an apology, or putting someone in their place.

Going directly to a person is not enough if I go with anger, pride, impatience, or a desire to punish.

Humility includes being willing to hear how my words or actions may have contributed to another person's hurt.

Broken relationships inside the church can wound people spiritually and damage the witness of the body of Jesus.

Envy can reveal distrust in God's wisdom and provision for how He has gifted me.

I can celebrate another person's gifts without needing to possess their gift, recognition, or influence.

God gives each believer gifts to build up the body; my responsibility is to use what He has entrusted to me for His glory.

Prayer can be hindered by wrong motives when I ask primarily for self-centered pleasure, recognition, or advantage.

Kingdom identity changes conflict: as an ambassador for God, my words and responses should represent Jesus.

Scripture References

James 4:1-5, Matthew 7:3-5, Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:1-3, Ephesians 4:29-32, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 1 Corinthians 14:1, James 1:5

Quote of the Day

"The first place to look is not how to fix them. The first place to look is: how do I fix me?"

Broadcast Notes

Ron Fernald opens the program by reading James 4:1-5 as roughly twenty-five to thirty friends gather in the new downstairs WLJ studio. Mark notes that the team is still adjusting levels in the new room and introduces James 4 as a chapter that exposes what pride does and what grace makes possible. Pastor Mark Johnson begins with a high-school story about an ongoing conflict that nearly became a fight. He uses the familiar question 'What's the problem here?' to show how James answers more directly: the problem begins with desires warring within us. The discussion emphasizes taking the plank out of one's own eye, going directly to the other person with love and patience, and involving others or the church when biblical conflict-resolution steps require it. Pastor Mark distinguishes merely resolving a dispute from the kingdom goal of building right relationships. Mark Burns adds the ambassador theme:

believers should represent kingdom interests in what they say and do. The conversation then turns inward again - asking how I may have offended someone and being open enough to hear their perspective. Pastor Mark identifies pride and envy as forces that can fuel conflict. Envy, he says, can become a denial of trust in God's provision and gifting. Liz adds that recognizing and affirming another person's blessing can help turn attention away from self. The group distinguishes sinful jealousy of another person's gift from desiring gifts from God for service. The program closes with James 4:2-3 and the warning that prayers can be shaped by wrong motives. Pastor Mark's final counsel is concise: in conflict, do not begin with how to fix them; begin with how God needs to work in me.

Practical Applications

Before responding to a conflict, ask God to show me my own pride, fear, envy, anger, or selfish desire.

Use Matthew 7 as a heart check: identify the plank I need to address before focusing on another person's fault.

If a relationship needs repair, go directly and prayerfully rather than talking first to everyone else.

Before a difficult conversation, ask whether my goal is restoration or simply proving that I am right.

Invite the other person to tell me how my words or actions affected them, and listen without immediately defending myself.

Refuse to use an apology as the only measure of whether a conversation was worthwhile; pursue a right relationship and a right spirit.

Ask whether envy is hiding beneath criticism of someone else's talent, success, influence, or recognition.

Name and thank God for the gifts He has actually given me, then use them faithfully rather than comparing myself with someone else.

Compliment and encourage another person's God-given strength as an act of gratitude rather than competition.

Examine one current prayer request and ask whether my motive is God's glory, kingdom service, or primarily my own pleasure.

When conflict involves someone who does not share my faith, ask for grace, mercy, patience, and self-control rather than reacting in the flesh.

Remember that my conduct in conflict is part of my witness as an ambassador for Jesus.

Today's Challenge

Choose one unresolved or recurring conflict. For seven days, do not begin your prayer by asking God to change the other person. Begin instead with: 'Father, show me what is happening in me.' Write down any pride, envy, fear, hurt, selfish desire, wrong motive, or unhealthy response He brings to mind. Then ask what one kingdom-minded step toward a healthier relationship would look like.

Closing Prayer

Father, when conflict comes, help me look first at my own heart. Show me the desires that battle within me - pride, envy, anger, fear, selfishness, or the need to be right. Take the plank from my own eye and give me a spirit that is humble, patient, loving, and open to correction. When I need to speak with someone, help me go in the right spirit, seeking restoration rather than victory. Give me courage to hear how I may have hurt another person without immediately defending myself. Protect Your church from relationships that become spiritually destructive, and make me an ambassador who represents Jesus well even in disagreement. Free me from envy. Teach me to trust the gifts You have given me and to celebrate the gifts You have placed in others. Purify my prayers so that I ask with motives shaped by Your kingdom rather than my own pleasure or recognition. Give me wisdom generously and use my words, gifts, relationships, and responses for Your glory. Before I ask You to fix someone else, begin Your good work in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield and regularly facilitates the Friday Mark & Friends verse-by-verse study through James. A seasoned pastor, teacher, counselor, and storyteller, he brings practical biblical insight to everyday issues of relationships, character, wisdom, conflict, and Christian maturity. In this opening study of James 4, Pastor Mark challenges believers to examine the desires and motives within their own hearts, pursue biblical restoration, reject envy, and use their gifts and relationships for the glory of God's kingdom.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. For decades, Mark has been involved in Christian radio and ministry, with a heart for helping listeners know Jesus and grow deeper in God's Word. Through Mark & Friends, he brings pastors, ministry leaders, teachers, missionaries, authors, and everyday believers around the microphone for biblical teaching, testimony, conversation, and encouragement. His desire is that each program help listeners learn, grow, and faithfully live out their relationship with Jesus.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Reading from James chapter 4, verse 1 through 5. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something, but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

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 is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? That's James chapter 4, verse 1 through 5. And that was Ron Fernald, a great friend of this radio ministry. He and Sharon, appreciate them stopping in with our room of friends.

Does anyone have a total? I think we're around 25 to 30 again. We're welcoming you to the Friday edition of Mark & Friends. It's September 18th, 2026.

And we're still adjusting some of the levels and some of the voices. I'm actually standing up this time wearing my Ambassador of Happiness shirt. I had to explain that this is a shirt many times I wear on our various trips to Israel.

And it was given to me. But we're going to hopefully bring happiness to you today as we have God's Word divided by Pastor Mark Johnson of Calvary Church here in Springfield. We've prayed up this program.

I think eight or nine or ten of us prayed. So, listening friend, I hope you're going to feel a sense of God's closeness, his love for you, and you're going to garner some truths from this book of James. It's kind of like the New Testament Proverbs.

There's points of application for all of us. And our prayer is that you're going to be touched and encouraged and blessed. Steve Griffin is holding down the fort.

He's in the other room doing the engineering. He did it last time for us. And he's back again with the First Lady Barb.

Where's Barb? Where are you, Barb? Oh, there you are. Barb's to my right. With this room full of friends on these nice couches.

So in two weeks when we do this again, you're all invited. But we appreciate so many people that are returning. And we'll have a feast afterwards.

But we're going to be feasting on Chapter 4. What James Chapter 4 shows, what pride does and what grace makes possible. Pride fuels conflict, divided loyalty, criticism, presumptuous planning, and neglected obedience. But God gives us more grace and calls his people, that's you and me listening friend, to submit, to draw near, to speak humbly, to plan dependently, and to do good.

They already know how to do. So we're going to learn a lot from Chapter 4. And if you missed parts of these programs on Friday, you can go back about three or four months. Each and every Friday covering parts of James Chapter 1 through 3. Now we begin in James Chapter 4. So our room of friends, thank you everyone for driving out here and being available.

As mentioned, I think Ron and Sharon came in from Washington about an hour and 18 minutes or so. Ted's in here from the Champaign-Urbana area. Appreciate him.

And all of you from outlying areas. Jacksonville represented here. Where are you from? Gurney.

Gurney, Illinois. All right. So welcome to the Friday edition of Mark & Friends.

So Pastor Mark, Chapter 4, Ron read verses 1 through 5. What do you have to say? Well, first of all, I want to give a shout out to one of our listeners. Diane Graham has been a great friend of my wife and me for many, many years. A great part of our church for years.

Once she retired, she started traveling all over the country working with RV maps and going to see her kids. But she listens to the program, and I just wanted to say hey to Diane and tell her the next time you make jambalaya, send somebody up here with some of it. We would like to have that.

For a recruiting day. There you go. Have you ever had, I don't want anybody to name any names here, and if you're sitting in the car driving with somebody, I certainly don't want you to look over at someone when I ask this question.

Have you ever had an ongoing disagreement with someone in your life? An ongoing issue that just kind of festered? Maybe in your church, maybe in your family. And the question is how do we face those kind of situations? When I was a sophomore in high school, there was a class that I was in that I didn't know most of the kids in that class when I went into it. And me and another guy that were kind of friends, but several boys in that class had decided they were going to make my life miserable.

And this went on for months, and it kind of escalated, and the teacher never handled it, he never took care of it. And one day after class, the ringleader, I met him in the hallway, and we had a confrontation. And it was moving to some serious conflict resolution at that moment of what was going to happen in the future when the teacher came up and separated us and asked the question, what's the problem here? I've asked that question dozens of times as a youth pastor, at the back of the bus when a group of kids are traveling, at a retreat or a basketball game, even in my office after a service between two people, what's the problem here? Like most people, when I was confronted as a sophomore, I began to lay out my reasons I felt mistreated, what I'd taken from the other students, and that no one was handling the situation.

The other young man began to proclaim his innocence, and that I was just picking on him. I've heard the same story many times between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters and their family, church members, co-workers, on and on the relationships go. It seems like James is stepping into a set of circumstances where things have been confrontational, and he's now talking to these scattered, persecuted believers about how to deal with this misunderstanding between each other.

Have you ever been there? So think about this. He has been very, very clear in his teaching, I mean, kind of confrontational in his teaching throughout this whole book. If you're rich, remember you depend on God just like the rest of us.

If you're tempted, it's because of your lust, and it's not God's doing. Don't you know what the Word tells us to do? Stop showing favoritism. God will help you, and he'll help you to control your tongue and get your tongue under control.

Get some wisdom from heaven. He hasn't pulled any verbal punches, and he doesn't as he continues. So here's the question in our relationships.

What's the problem here? What's the real problem? There are some disagreements among believers, and we are not told with whom, but he's talking to believers in this. And James is not a sympathetic counselor. He does not give them a chance to establish any justification for their actions.

He does not go into anything or allow them to say anything that he has heard or that they have said to each other. Listen to his words. He basically says not what's the problem here, but here's the problem.

Here's the problem. Do you see what he's saying? Let me read it, James 4, 1 and 2. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something, but you don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

You quarrel and fight. If James had been in the hallway of Springfield High School, he would have not asked what the problem was here. He would have said, you're the problem here.

You're the problem here. Fights and quarrels are a sign of people in rebellion to God. Think about that.

And it's interesting how he points out the fact that you're supposed to look at yourself quite possibly being the problem before you start accusing or looking at the other person's issue. That's exactly what he's saying. We do face problems.

We do face other people who are confrontational. We face other people who are contrarian in their nature. We face people who just want to dig us for some reason.

But there's a right way to handle conflict in a healthy setting and a wrong way to handle it. And he's trying to teach us as Christians to handle this with the right spirit even when we're insulted, even when we're belittled, even when the person's unreasonable. What do we do in the face of these conflicts? Remember, he's writing to believers.

He gives us some instruction in the church on how to deal with conflict. Anybody remember what the Bible says about dealing with conflict? What does he tell us to do? Take the plank out of your own eye. Take the plank out of your own

eye.

Love your enemy. He says to go to that person individually if they respond, that's good. If they don't, take one or two more with you.

And if they still don't, then you take it before the group. Liz, that's really good because I went to the person. I just didn't go with the right spirit.

I went with the wrong spirit. I was fed up. I was done.

And so we've got to go with the right spirit and talk. We've got to go with love. We've got to go with taking the plank out of our own eye.

We've got to go in patience and trust for God to bring healing. And sometimes that means the church has to get involved. Mark, a sentence I wrote down is, how did that work for you? You know, oftentimes we say that because I like your question, what's the problem here? Well, when we operate in the flesh or, you know, we use our worldly wisdom, I would follow up, well, how did that work for you? Because when we operate outside of God's plan, it doesn't usually go well.

I would have to confess that in my situation, things resolved after that day. It still wasn't the right way to handle it. Most of the time when we resolve things with the wrong spirit, they don't resolve in a healthy way.

Now, maybe if it had been handled in the right spirit, that other young man and I could have become friends. That never happened. The goal of the kingdom isn't just to resolve the conflict.

The goal of the kingdom is to build right relationships. And so somebody has to be the first one in the relationship to have the right spirit if you're ever going to get to a right relationship. And so he calls us to be that one that has the right spirit, but he doesn't call us to be run over.

So there is, inside of the church especially, if there's conflict, we've talked about it. We go to that brother and we talk about it. If that doesn't resolve it, we go with others and we talk about it.

If that doesn't resolve it, then the church has to get involved in it. And so we learn how to maturely walk through things with the goal being not to put the other person in their place, not to get an apology out of them, but the goal is to get relationship built. Mark, I was thinking another role that we all have as ambassadors for God is everything we do or say really should represent the kingdom interest.

And so when we're operating in the fruit of the Spirit, then we should show that loving care, compassion. But primarily our calling is to be God's representative here on earth to the church and unchurched. So I think James is always pointing out how we have to have that kingdom identity and value in what we do and what we say.

This is fundamentally what it's saying about how to handle these disagreements is to recognize that there's pride or things warring within us that are wanting to respond to how somebody else is treating us. And maybe we haven't heard from them. One of the things we've got to consider is have we heard from them what we have done that's helped spark this flame? How have I offended you? How have I hurt you? Now, sometimes you're innocent, but sometimes you learn, oh, you heard me say this or somebody said this to you about me.

I didn't mean to say it that way. I didn't mean to come across that way. And you have a chance to resolve.

Or I didn't understand that that would hurt you. You have a chance to resolve some things if we have a right and open spirit in the conversation. So there's a right way for conflict resolution inside the church that we should walk in.

And part of it is just being able to be open enough to hear where I may be at fault in causing the issue and then hearing from them what they're feeling. Do you want to address the portion of the verse, those desires that battle within you? Is that some of that pride that we battle over? Exactly. That's exactly what it is.

We battle inside. We're offended. We're hurt.

Our sin nature rises up in frustration with that person. Or maybe we just don't like the way they act or the way they conduct themselves. Then we've got to look at our pride and say, why am I judging them this way? Why can't I accept my brother or my sister in Christ in a healthy way? What is the issue? And what James is going back to is he's going back to saying, the issue is you.

That's the issue. Yeah. I mean, you read this, he says, these desires are having a battle within you to the point where you kill.

This is a messed up church. Somebody's killing somebody else over this issue. And I think he's kind of like, maybe this was really happening, but I think he's kind of using hyperbole, but he's saying, if you leave this alone, it'll get to the point where you're going to start contemplating murder to fix the problem.

That's the exact opposite of submitting yourself to God. And part of the deal when we talk about the killing, the Bible warns us and Jesus tells us, don't be afraid of those who can kill the flesh. We can kill people spiritually.

Broken relationships can destroy somebody's faith. They can leave a church wounded, hurt, mad, upset, deciding there's nothing to it because of the way we act inside the church sometimes. And that's not the way.

We're supposed to be a unified body of believers that love one another. He says, you do not have because you ask God. He was talking about our desires.

Envy is a denial of the power and riches of God. So sometimes this conflict comes because we envy someone. Maybe they've got better music talent than I have.

Maybe they have more money than I have. Maybe they have more influence than I have. Whatever it might be, and we envy them.

Envy is a denial of the power, the riches of God. So can I look at somebody who's more gifted, say musically, than I am? And I would say, well, I would love to have that kind of music talent. But God's given them to that.

He's given me the abilities He wants me to have. And instead of envying them for what they have, making sure I am using the gifts He's given me the way He would have me to use them. And so what I become guilty of is I become guilty of looking at that person who's maybe musically talented and accusing that person of having a wrong motive in how they sing or what they do.

And I'm having a wrong motive in how I'm receiving it. I'm wrong in my spirit. Instead of just saying, I'm going to trust whatever's in that person's heart, that's between them and God.

I'm going to receive the words of this song and the intent of this song to glorify God. So how would you say that we should distinguish between envy and when Paul tells us to greatly desire the gifts of God? How do we know if we're being envious of someone who's got that talent or if we're just wanting to have that talent to be able to use it? Well, one, I've got to accept what talent God's given me. What has He given me? I'm not going to strive for what God hasn't given me.

What has He given me? There's a natural leaning into the things that God gives us. But two, I think if you can put a name on it, then it might be envy. If you can put it, oh, I want to sing like Sally, then there might be envy involved in that.

I want to be received like she's received. No, the best thing in all of these things is are we glorifying God with our talents and our gifts? And can I just receive that and walk in? So I watch the envy of my own heart. Envy is a denial of my trust in God that He has created me the way He intended me to be.

He's given me the gifts He's intended for me. And I want to use those gifts for the glory of His kingdom, wherever that might be. And Liz is going to share in a second here.

But listening friend, if you're tuning in and you're wondering about that background sound, yeah, there's doing our lawn again or blowing the leaf blower. So being the second time we've recorded, Mark and friends, as we gather here in our new studio at WLUJ, it does pick up sounds from outside. So I'll have to try to make sure they're not doing the lawns when we meet.

But bear with us. And I think that's part of the aspect of radio. You just never know what sounds you're going to pick up.

But Liz, what do you have to say? Okay. I think Tim thought could be if I am able to recognize the blessing that God has given the other person and compliment them, praise the Lord for their talent, I'm not looking at myself. I'm honoring God by honoring them.

I've done that recently, and the person was taken back. I had said, You look so pretty. You look all put together.

This was at the Y. And the lady said, Oh, you don't know how much that helped me. I looked in the mirror today, and I thought, How ugly you are. And she said, It really helped me.

So I think we need to recognize other people's talents. That helps us distinguish whether it's envy or God-given. Remember, Paul said, Covet these good gifts, but they come from God.

You want the gifts from God. What James is talking about here is jealousy of other people. I want what some other person has.

That kind of coveting or jealousy is sinful, but coveting gifts from God is not. Jealousy will lead to the anger, which causes the conflict. So what it comes back to is what causes these things.

What keeps us from our prayers even being answered? And our prayers don't get answered because we ask with wrong motives. What is the motive in my heart? Well, the Spirit of God has to reveal that to us, and we need to be open to the Spirit of God revealing that to us. God has made each and every one of us with gifts that are supposed to build up the body of Christ.

Am I using my gifts, or am I just frustrated over how somebody else is using their gifts? Now that's just one issue in the whole aspect of being in conflict with someone. You may be in conflict with someone in your family who just doesn't love God, and they just want to make your life miserable, because you do. They want to make fun of you.

How am I going to handle that situation? Can I handle that with the grace of God, the mercy of God, the patience of God, or do I handle it out of the flesh, out of anger, out of frustration? So he's saying lay all those things aside and worry about living your life for the glory of God's kingdom. Oh, listening friend, I'm going to close out with the second half of verse 2 into verse 3. 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.

Oh, listening friend, may we all take to heart that God wants to work in and through us. He wants to give us wisdom. We can ask, and he'll lavish wisdom on us, but it's for his kingdom glory, not for our own.

But he does want to work in and through us where as ambassadors, we're followers of Jesus, and we want to share and proclaim that good news message. Mark, I'll give you the closing thought. Yeah, I just want to just say when there's conflict, you're having conflict, the first place to look is not how to fix them.

That's what he's saying. The first place to look is how do I fix me. Get that right, and now you're moving down the pathway towards something that's healthy.

Oh, listening friend, if you missed a portion of today's broadcast, want to hear it again, or find out all the other resources, the scripture, the transcript, talking points, a prayer for you today, stop by GreatNewsRadio.org and WLUJ.org, and you can listen to the program or access these resources under the Mark & Friends tab. Well, thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family.

This is Mark Burns, Pastor Mark Johnson, and a room of friends. From the ministry of Great News Media, God bless you, and have a great day and night.