

# Resolving Conflict: Putting it All Together

*Epistle of James*  
By Ty Blackburn

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**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4, and as you turn, I do want to express my appreciation to Jess for preaching the word so well while we were gone, from the sixth chapter of Ephesians and am grateful for his ministry and the blessing that he is to our congregation and to me personally.

We're going to come back to our passage we've been looking at and we've been there a number of weeks, James 4:1-10 under the heading "Resolving Conflict," and we looked at it and we've really gone through pretty much every verse. The last verse we worked on three weeks ago or four weeks ago on May 6, and that was verse 10 and we talked about resolving conflict and each message was resolving conflict by doing something, resolving conflict by waging war, resolving conflict by unmasking our desires, resolving conflict, then the last one was by being truly humble, cultivating repentance. We spent several weeks on that. So resolving conflict by doing all these things. James is helping us to resolve the conflicts in our lives. He is burdened that the Christians to whom he writes and us, in turn, that we can profess to walk with the Lord Jesus and yet have areas of our lives that are denying him and one of the areas can be this area of conflict and conflict that mars our testimony, the way that we relate to one another. It has very serious implications. God is very concerned about it and so this passage, he's been unpacking that burden for us. How can we overcome these kinds of damaging conflicts in our lives?

So today the message is titled "Resolving Conflict: Putting it All Together." I want to go back and kind of summarize everything and then try to apply it in the most practical way that I can to our lives to help us before we move on to the next section. So let's read James 4:1-10.

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or

do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you might now by your Spirit through your word speak to our hearts, that you might show us more of your glorious character, the wonder of who you are, that you might manifest to us the beauty of Jesus Christ, the sufficiency of Christ, by showing us the greatness of our need, the poverty of our own spiritual needs. Father, we pray that you would exalt your glory and that you would have your way in our lives and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So James is concerned about the conflicts in our lives, that is, the things that happen on a daily basis that are undermining our testimony, that are grieving the Holy Spirit, that are hindering and hurting those around us, and what he's showing us is that the issue he's dealing with as he's talked about throughout the book, is living a consistent Christian life and his point is that consistent Christianity should not look like this; that if we're really walking with the Lord, walking in the truth, that these conflicts have no place in our lives. So he wants to show us how appalling it is and how we can then overcome it and that's what he's been dealing with in these verses and as we've walked through it, we've seen it. But what I want us to do today is to try to kind of put a bow on it, in a sense, and to package the whole thing together by starting out with two points. Putting it all together, resolving conflict putting it all together, and the first is to try to take and apply what we've seen, the first point is after you have fallen. After you have fallen. And then the second point is going to be before you fall next time. James basically is writing saying, "Look, this is the pattern that I see too much in the lives of Christians and I fear it's in your life as well, and it ought not be this way, and the way out, I want to show you the way out and I want to show you how to avoid falling like this again and again."

So after you have fallen is our first point. After you have experienced a conflict, how do you go about it? Just as an example, I want to read to you from Jeremy Pierre's book, "The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life," an example of a conflict and how quickly these things come and what happens is, we have these conflicts and we feel like in the moment when we get angry, lose our temper, say things we shouldn't say, we feel like it's almost second nature, that we don't even, it happens without our clear thought process. We find ourselves saying things, doing things, and then afterwards wondering how did we do that. Well, it comes from deeply held beliefs in our mind that we believe, think things, our thoughts, but also the things that we value and the commitments in our hearts. It comes from our hearts. It's not the people around us, it's our hearts. That's our problem That's

James's big point here. From where do these conflicts come? They come from your own lust, your own desires. At first glance, that's bad news because it's me that's the problem, but really that's good news because I can address that through the Gospel and through the power of the cross. You can't change people around you, but by God's grace you can change yourself. You can change your heart.

So he wants us to see this. Now here's an example of the conflict Jeremy Pierre describes in his book, "The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life." The evening had not begun well. Normally this man and his wife got home from work about the same time but this evening his wife had been home early and was sitting in front of the computer. As soon as he walked in the door, she had asked sharply, "Why is our checking account balance so low?" His answer had not been very inspiring, a couple of things he had picked up here and there, a few album downloads, eating out for lunch a few times last week. "Come here and look at this," she demanded in response. "We have less than \$20. We're in our late 30's and we both make enough not to always be in this situation. We can't get our act together enough to even put together a down-payment on a house." After that, the man had exploded. Out of his mouth had come insults, accusations, guilt trips. He had raved. He had kicked things. He ended up at a bar. It was all a seamless instinctive response to the situation at hand.

A situation happens, he explodes, words come out of his mouth, he physically is slamming doors, leaves the house, and all of this happens. The next day, they show up to the pastor and they're talking about what happened. He's looking at his shoes and he doesn't understand how it happened except that he probably, if you were to begin to probe, thinks that his wife, it's really, "I just want a little respect." But James is saying, the problem when we have those kinds of experiences is not the things that happen to us, it's our heart; that we really can be godly just by dealing with our own hearts.

So what we saw as we looked at this is the 10 imperatives. James gives 10 imperatives in verses 7 to 10. He starts talking about conflicts in general in verses 1 to 6. He asks the question, "What is the source? Where do these things come from? Why do you have conflicts in your life?" And he says it's because it comes out of your heart, out of the lusts and desires and pleasures in your heart. Then he begins to explain what that really is in verse 4. That's adultery. That's spiritual adultery. That's the problem. It's hostility toward God. Then in verses 7 to 10, he tells us now what you need to do. He says, "Here's the problem, here's where it comes from, now here's what to do," and in verses 7 to 10 is where he gives the practical application, and we saw that he gives 10 imperatives: submit to God; resist the devil, those are 10 commands; submit; resist; draw near to God; cleanse your hands; purify your hearts; be miserable, mourn, weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning; humble yourself in the sight of God.

So these 10 imperatives and I want us to look at after you've failed there are four basic steps that he is giving us in these 10 imperatives. We can condense them into four steps that then we will work out and how it can really turn into true repentance and a changed life. Essentially what he says, the first summary, I'm giving a four-point summary of those 10 imperatives. The first point is humble yourself, and this is from the first two

imperatives: submit therefore to God and the last, humble yourselves in verse 10. It kind of brackets those 10 imperatives. Submit to God and then he ends up with humble yourself and the idea is the first thing we have to do when we have fallen is humble ourselves. We have to be willing to acknowledge the problem is us. We have to be willing to go to God and ask him for help, to submit to him.

We have to then seek his presence. That's the second subpoint: seek the Lord's presence. So we've had a blow-up, we've lost our temper, we've slammed the door, we've yelled or whatever, we've gotten alone, now, "Lord, I need you. I realize I'm the problem. I'm coming because I need you to fix me." That's humbling myself and, "Now I'm coming to you. I need your presence." This is what James is saying in the next two imperatives at the end of verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8 when he says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." When we looked at that verse, we saw that those basically are two ways of saying the same thing. They both picture movement. Resist the devil and he will flee, draw near to God and he will draw near to you, and we pointed out that basically the devil's always trying to keep us from running to the Lord. He wants us to run away from God and so resisting the devil is the same thing as drawing near to God. So we need to go to the Lord. We need to seek his presence. We don't need to have a pity party about how bad we are, we need to go to God. You don't just get convicted, "I can't believe I've done it," and sit and sulk. That's not going to make anything better. We must go to the Lord. This is James's point.

Isaiah 55:6-9, a great passage. Listen to these words of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 55:6, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." The message of God is always, "Come to me." When you are broken, when you find yourself mired in sin, run to the Lord. You don't run away. Satan says, "You can't go to God." He's lying. He's saying hide. He's the one who told Adam to hide in the garden. Remember when Adam sinned in the garden? God comes down and Adam's hiding, Adam and Eve are hiding in the garden? It's the last thing we need to do. We need to run to the Lord and this is what James is saying. So when we have fallen, we humble ourselves and we run to the Lord. We seek him because he is a God of compassion and he will abundantly pardon.

The third step is we confess our sins. James says, after he says submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you, draw near to God, he will draw near to you, he says cleanse and purify, the next two imperatives, "Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts." This is essentially a way of saying confess your sins. So what we need to do is we need to confess our sins to God. We draw near to him, we come to him and say, "Lord, here I am. I'm in a mess. I don't know what happened. I don't know why I just did what I did but I need you and I want to now seek you and I know I need to cleanse my hands and I need to purify my heart. My hands are dirty, my heart is impure, so help me. I need to confess my sins. Help me. Help me identify these things the way you see them and confess them accurately."

The word "confess" in Scripture, the New Testament word for confess your sins, is the word "homolegeo." "Legeo" means "to say," and "homo" means "the same." It means "to say the same thing," so to confess is to say the same thing about my sin that God says about it. It's to call it exactly what God calls it. This is pivotal in the turn-around that needs to happen. We have to call our sin what God calls it.

So we've gone to the Lord, we're going to the Lord, we're staying in his presence and we're committed now to confessing our sin, "Lord, I need to confess. I need to see what's wrong with me." And right related to this is this next step and these last two steps really go together: confess your sins and mourn over your sins. This is essentially what James has said in verses 7 to 10. He said, "Humble yourself." He said, "Seek the Lord's presence." He said, "Confess your sins and mourn over your sins," and that's going to lead to repentance and to life change, and the confession and the mourning are something you have to work at and labor at. It doesn't just happen with a quick flair prayer. "I'm sorry. I lost my temper, Lord. I shouldn't have done that. I know that's bad." No, he's talking about when he piles word upon word in verses 8 and 9, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom." He is saying, "Look, you need to spend some time with me dealing with your sin." So we need to go to the Lord and we need to start really saying, "God, search me. Know my heart. Show me what this really is. What's going on inside this evil heart?"

Then as we see it, we start confessing it and so what really this really has to be, it's prayer and it's meditation on Scripture all together in the presence of the Lord. This is the way we're going to overcome being people that are characterized by conflict. This is the way we'll overcome any sin, is we have to go to the Lord in prayer, confessing and seeking to mourn over our sin and we need to let him fill us with his word to search our hearts and to show us what this really is.

So confession and mourning goes together and it's really another way of saying meditation and this is such a forgotten art in circles of believers, especially today where we're used to, I mean, you think about the way that we live our lives and the way that things happen today versus how they happened 20 years ago even. We all are about soundbites and do you know how short the soundbites are now? Isn't it amazing how you're watching the news and that little segment, they'll talk about something really important just like that. Or you watch a debate, that's the most ridiculous thing, the Presidential debates. You know, when they really had real debates, Lincoln-Douglas debates, for instance, like Lincoln spoke for like an hour or an hour and a half and then Douglas responded to him for like a half an hour, 45 minutes. Then Douglas spoke for like an hour and a half and then Lincoln responded for 45 minutes. Because if you really want to say something that people can really base your policy on, you've got to say something but we're used to this kind of very distilled down, watered down, shallow thinking. It's just something that's really begun to permeate our culture.

Quick, how many characters is a tweet? 160 or something? I forget what the number is, but anyway I don't do twitter, but a soundbite like that, but growth in grace, God has to

go deep in your heart to bring life change and you have to spend time meditating and biblically meditation is something that throughout the Scriptures is made very clear is a key part of the Christian life. To meditate is to ruminate. We talked about how sheep, you know, the Bible says we're like sheep and one of the things about sheep is they eat their food and they keep chewing their food and they keep chewing their food and they keep chewing their food. It's because the chewing and the digestive process actually creates more protein than they got from the grass in the first place. More of the calories come from the chewing and salivating. It's kind of gross, actually, but it's true. That's where the nutrients come, not from just the grass. That's how you can have a big sheep or a big cow, how can a cow weigh 1,500 pounds eating grass? Well, there's no way on a vegetarian diet and the reality is, it's not a vegetarian diet because they chew the cud until they're eating all kinds of protein. That's where their calories come from. Well, we're sheep, we need to ruminate if we're going to have nourishment and so we're malnourished Christians if we're not meditating. So we go to the Lord, we've just blown it and we open our Bibles and we're praying to the Lord and we're saying, "Lord, show me what's going on in this sinful heart."

So James actually has told us in the first six verses, now we're talking about 7 to 10 and how to apply it, right? Because that's where he's given the imperatives, the commands. He's telling you what to do. One after another: submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, be miserable, mourn, weep. "I've got a lot of things I want you to do," James says. Boom. Boom. Boom. But what he's done before that is give us the tools that we need to actually do this because he's already told us some things that we can really spend some time meditating on related to what just happened. If you were that person who lost their temper after the conversation about money with your spouse and you slammed the door, what is it that's going on in my heart? So we get alone with the Lord and his word and we start thinking, "I'm confessing and I'm mourning."

There are four other subpoints here, kind of under the dual heading: confess and mourn. It's not as clean an outline as I'd like but you're confessing and you're mourning and here's four things James has told us to think about as a part of that meditation, confession and mourning that he's told us in the passage about our sin. He's told us, he said, "First of all, consider how out of place your conduct is in the life of a Christian. Think about that." This is what he said in the very beginning in James 4:1 when he said, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Remember, I said that the words could be translated better, "What is the source of wars and battles? What is the source of wars and battles among you?" And he repeats those same two words in verse 2 when he says, "You are envious and cannot obtain; so you battle and war." War/battle, battle/war, which is really striking when we remember to read chapter 3 right into chapter 4 remembering that James when he wrote this epistle, did not have chapter and verse divisions. He wrote a letter and you read a letter paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, and that's the way James wrote it. It's wasn't chapter 3, chapter 4. So when you read chapter 3 into chapter 4, he's saying, "Listen, this is the kind of Christian you need to be. Who is wise in understanding among you? Who thinks you're really doing well in the Christian life? Well, look at your relationships, look at the way you treat people. Those who are meek

and show the good behavior by his deeds in the meekness of wisdom," verse 13, "that's the people who are truly wise."

Verses 17 and 18, he said, after he's told the wisdom which is not from above which is earthly, natural, demonic, which is characterized by selfish ambition and jealousy, that's people who claim to be knowledgeable Christians but who look like that, they're not really wise at all. The wise Christian, the wisdom from above is first, verse 17 of chapter 3, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Three times the word "peace" in verse 17 and 18. This is how you recognize a wise Christian, they're going around sowing peace. They're sowing peace. They go around and it's like peace breaks out around them wherever they go.

So you read that and now right into chapter 4, "What is the source of wars?" He says, "This is what a Christian ought to look like, they go around sowing peace," and it's like he's painting a picture. "Look at this picture of what the Christian life ought to be: peaceable, gentle, sowing peace by those who make peace. What's up with you and the wars and battles all around your life?" That's what he says. "Look at the contrast. This is what you ought to look like but what you really look like is wars and battles, not peace." So James is saying the first thing we need to do, to meditate on is, "This is out of place in my life. This tone of voice, these harsh words, have no place in the life of a person who names the name of Jesus Christ and this is what I need to do before the Lord. Lord, I see this is so wrong. No matter what anyone did around me, this should never come out of these lips, the same lips that blessed Christ at one moment and cursed my brother or sister in the next. This ought not be." So he's like, "Meditate on that. Just consider that. Let that weigh on you."

The Lord does this in a lot of different places where he talks about sin versus righteousness. For instance in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is... that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." So not sexual immorality but possessing your vessel in sanctification and honor and "not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God." So he's saying in that situation if you're having trouble possessing your vessel in sanctification and honor, think about the fact that you're living in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God. God forbid that I would live that way.

So meditation is thinking about that and allowing the word to do its work in my heart to help me really see sin the way God sees it because we always have a way of air-brushing our sin. We make it look better than it is. We explain it away. We justify it. And God says, "The only way you're going to turn from it is if you really hate it like I hate it." So that's when we go into his presence seeking his face, knowing that he's a God of grace but that he's also holy and he's going to deal with us; that it will be better to be dealt with by him than to be anywhere else by ourselves because he is a God of compassion and a God of mercy. He'll deal with our sin but he'll also cleanse us from our sin.

So that's the first thing, consider that this is completely out of place, James says. That's what he tells us in verse 1. Then the second thing we can meditate on as we're continuing to confess and mourn over our sin, we're calling it what God calls it, right? We're saying what God says about my sin. We're wanting to mourn over it. Well, he basically says in verse 1 and 2, he says, "Accept responsibility. Accept 100% responsibility for the conflict, for your part in the conflict. 100% responsibility."

"What is the source of these wars and battles among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask." The problem is your heart, he says, and he uses so many different words here. The word "pleasures" occurs twice, "Is not the source your pleasures?" I'm reading the New American Standard Bible. "Your pleasures? Wage war." Your pleasures, a desire for pleasure, the things that gratify you in your heart, these things are waging war in your members. "You lust and do not have." The heart going out after something, wanting something, lusting after it. You are envious and cannot obtain, so these are all functions of the heart. James says the problem is not what's happening around you or to you, the problem is what's happening in you.

So he is echoing what Mark 7 says, what Jesus said in Mark 7 when he said, "It's not what comes into the man that defiles the man, but it's what comes out of the heart." That is, it's not the circumstances in my life, the people in my life. The events in my life do not make me the way I am. That is, the circumstances in my life, the people in my life, the events in my life do not make me the way I am, they reveal the way I am. That's what Jesus is saying and that's what James is saying. They reveal what's in the heart so I can never blame my sin on anyone else. I cannot blame 1/100 of 1% on anyone else. I own 100%, absolutely 100% of my sin because in any circumstance, 1 Corinthians 10:13, there is another verse to meditate on. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man and God is faithful and with the temptation will provide a means of escape." So if any time I sin, if I weren't responsible, then God would have had to fail. He's always there providing a means of escape so when I fail, why did I fail? Because I failed. I'm responsible.

So understanding that, contemplating that, "Lord, I want to blame. I'm always so quick to put the blame on someone else. Help me with this. It's my heart. I'm the problem." And this is that kind of confession. You see, I'm saying the same thing God says. "You say it's my heart. I agree with you, it is my heart. I'm going to say the same thing you say about me. I'm a wretched sinner in need of grace."

So, first of all, consider that it's out of place. Secondly, accept responsibility. James tells us that. Thirdly, contemplate the true nature of sin. Contemplate the way God sees it. That's what he does in verse 4 when he says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" James says, he like gives a slap upside the head to say, "Look, this is what it really is. You think you're wanting respect." For instance, go back to that illustration we used at the beginning. If you talked to that man who was upset that his wife was complaining about the money and, you know, you



worked through it, probably you might have a lot of different things come out. He might say, "I feel like she doesn't appreciate me. I work hard and so I bought a fishing rod and I did whatever and I went out to lunch and I wasn't responsible, but I've got a hard life and I just want respect. I just need some respect from her and she doesn't respect me and therefore since I didn't get that, I felt like that I needed to show her that she needs to respect me." I see he wanted something and he lusted after it and he couldn't get it and what did he do? He murdered. He was willing to kill with his words. He was willing to insult her, to hurl insults upon her and to try to incite fear even by slamming the door, showing his physical power or whatever, then leaving, withdrawing from her. And to come back to him and say, "Look, when you were wanting respect, now the Bible says you are entitled to be respected," but the problem is if we really got into it, if he's like me, he wants respect the way he defines respect. For him, that probably means to be admired and never questioned and that's the kind of respect I'm entitled to. What needs to happen is he needs to see that is an unbiblical, ungodly even understanding of respect. "I need to repent of that." To be respected is not to be never questioned. That's not God's definition of how a wife should respect her husband. The way that God defines it, a wife should respect her husband by providing help, the help suitable to him, to giving counsel to him, to providing challenges in a respectful manner, but challenging and encouraging and provoking to love and good works. That's what God says about respect so I need to repent of that, even.

Now it takes some time to get to some of these things and the good news is the Lord is more committed to making you holy than you are to wanting to be holy and so he will get you there but we've got to start cooperating with him on a daily basis and he will show us the various areas where our thinking is not right. So we lay that aside and we confess then, "Lord, I've been wanting something. I've been wanting her to treat me like I'm perfect." That is just ungodly and wicked. That's repulsive. Actually true confession is like this: you start off talking to God about your sin and true confession, you stand alongside the Lord and you look at your behavior and you condemn it with him and you say, "Yes, I agree. That is filthy and wicked and vile and I hate it. I agree with you, Lord." That's the kind of confession that leads to mourning. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? There's so much wrong with me, Lord. I need you. I need you every hour. I need you every hour, Lord."

Adultery, it's enmity, hostility, it's treason. It's all of these things. It's rebellion. It's declaring war on God when I value the things that the world values over against what God values, I am treating God as my enemy. I'm declaring war on God. This is what I'm doing and so meditating on that, realizing that that's what I was doing when I got angry because my wife said this, or that's what I was doing when I got angry because my child did this, it's not just circumstances, it is wickedness in my heart. So we unmask the desires and we call it what God calls it.

So James says consider that these things are out of place, that we should be people of peace. Accept 100% responsibility, it's all from your heart. Contemplate the true nature of sin by unmasking the desires. And fourthly, he turns the knife in such a helpful way in verse 5 by saying reflect on the real presence of God in your life. He says, "You're doing

these things, you're committing spiritual adultery, you're worshiping idols in the presence of the living God." That's what verse 5 is about. Remember we talked about that I think the best way to translate that would be to say, "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose, the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us desires to the point of jealousy?" That he's talking about the Holy Spirit that he's placed in us, that the Holy Spirit wants to have all of us and he's jealous for our affection. And I think he's quoting, he's not quoting any particular passage. All commentators agree on that. There's no particular verse. He seems to be quoting a broader teaching of Scripture which we mentioned Exodus 20 to 34. You see the jealousy of God laid out there. In fact, Exodus 34:14 says, "I am the Lord whose name is Jealous." He's jealous for affection of his people. He will not abide you to worship him and Baal.

So James is reminding us, he says, "Think about your sin the way it really is. Unmask it. It's adultery. It's treason. It's war against God and you're doing it with the Holy Spirit inside your heart." Remember when we went over this passage and I would encourage you again if you didn't do it, go to Ezekiel 8 where the prophet Ezekiel is made to see a vision by the Lord taking him to the temple in Jerusalem, this is God basically showing in the book of Ezekiel why he is judging his people by sending them into exile. He's showing the wickedness of the nation of Judah and Ezekiel's picked up by the Spirit and he's taken to Jerusalem and he sees right outside the temple, the temple of Yahweh, the one place in the world God has designated that you can meet the living God, the one true God, Yahweh, Jehovah, right outside the temple he sees there is this altar to one of the Canaanite deities which was really there in Jerusalem as you're walking to the temple and one of the areas you passed by this altar to Asherah. How can that be? How can you have the temple right here and an Asherah pole right beside it? Then he says, the Spirit says, the Lord says to Ezekiel, "I'll show you still greater abominations," and then he takes him around the side of the temple and he says, there's this hole and he says, "Dig through this hole," and he looks inside and there are 70 elders who are worshiping these various kind of crawling and creeping things and they're worshiping all of these idols. Then he says, "I'll show you even more," and he takes him around from the outside of the temple into the courts of the temple where the women's court is and he shows the women who are mourning over another one of the Canaanite deities. They're worshiping. Their hearts are engaged in worship so much that they're mourning as part of that worship of that particular god was, they're mourning and expressing their worship, their heartfelt worship for this Canaanite deity in the court of the temple of Yahweh. Then he takes them inside the actual court where the sacrifices are made and right at the foot of the altar 25 Hebrew men are bowing down worshiping the sun and it's as if God is saying to Ezekiel, "Do you see why I'm sending them into exile? How can anyone abide this kind of adultery?"

James is saying that when you and I who've been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ, if you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus and you've been washed, when we bow down to things in our lives like desires for respect or love and we put those above pleasing God and worshiping God, that we are worshiping idols, bowing down to creeping things just like they were and he says it's even worse, the Spirit of the living God is in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:18, the Apostle Paul says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and

you are not your own? For you were bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body."

So he says this is the way to then mourn and to confess sin, is to take a real experience where you lost it and to take it and apply it with that kind of care and precision in the presence of God, with the word of God opened and to say, "Lord, I want to call it what you call it and I want to hate it like you hate it and I want to mourn over it as you mourn over it and that's where change happens because what that does is drive you to Christ. "Look at me, Lord," as Paul said, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The next sentence, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ." My only hope is I have a glorious Savior. I have a Savior who came and he lived his whole life and every thought that he ever thought and every emotion and affection that he ever had, everything that he ever desired, every action he ever did, every act of his will that he ever committed in 33 years, was perfectly pleasing to the Father. Think about that. I mean, perfect righteousness. Tempted in every way yet without sin and he offered his blood to pay for those who would believe in him and his blood cleanses. As Ted read earlier in the service, he mediates a better covenant. He made a sacrifice that is once-for-all. He washes you thoroughly and completely so that you are clean. It's not just that sin's removed, you're not just cleaned, you're robed in his righteousness so that God then sees you as if you had lived his perfect life. So you come to the Lord and you've blown it and you're telling him and you're seeing what you've done and yet then you realize, "Yet this too is covered under the blood. And Lord, you can help me the next time I'm in that circumstance or some circumstance like it, you can live your life through me if I yield to you and submit to you."

So that's after we've failed, it's important that we take advantage of the failure and we seek the Lord with all of our heart so that we can be prepared to walk in righteousness going forward. That's one of the beautiful things that God does, is that though your sins are as scarlet, he makes them as white as snow. There are some things that we learn better after we've failed. I mean, it's not a justification for failure. No, sin is always evil and wicked and far better to not go there, but God's grace is so great that where sin abounds, there does grace much more abound. So seek him.

Now I want to quickly then after thinking about that, after you've fallen think about before you fall. Again, this will be much quicker because we've covered the main substance of it. If we've taken time to mourn over our sin and we're having the mind of Christ and we're thinking about the fact, wait a minute, I'm not living for, back to our illustration, to be respected unquestionably by my wife. No, I'm living to please the Lord. I want to worship God and even when I'm challenged, even if it's in a sinful challenge, I want to worship God the way I respond. I want to be kind.

So what does that look like? Well, we talked about, remember I talked about the development, the progression of an idol and I mentioned there are several books you can look at, a number of the counseling books we have in sanctification, Christian living, biblical counseling books we have. Particularly helpful, though, is Ken Sande's "Peacemaker," chapter 5, the progression of an idol. I don't know if he calls it that but it's

chapter 5, and also chapter 5 in "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand" by Paul David Tripp, it talks about how desires in the heart become controlling things that rule us and make us do what James is talking about. So they have kind of a summary that they offer that helps to think about on the front end before you fall, okay? So this is kind of forewarned is forearmed.

So they talk about and particularly the way Sande, I'm more close to his. I'm tweaking his a little bit, Ken Sande from "Peacemaker" chapter 5, but he basically talks about you have a desire and often your desire is a legitimate desire, most of the time they are. "I want to be respected," like the man who wants to be respected by his wife. That's a legitimate desire. Sure, it's okay to want to be respected but the problem is that a desire, this is the progression of an idol and so I'm going to give you five steps. We talked about this before but I want to show how it all ties together now. So you have a desire and the problem is that desires becomes a demand and the issue is when the desire is not met. I'm wanting respect. I'm not being respected. Problem. Warning light. And I demand to be respected. I deserve to be respected, you see? So desire becomes a demand, the second point, and when it becomes a demand, you've lost. What you've done now is you've elevated this desire to equal or above your desire to please God, and so then its quick progression happens after that. Your desire becomes a demand, it becomes you submit to that desire as to a false god. "I want respect more than I want anything else and I need respect. That's how I'm going to have happiness. That's how I'm going to have joy in my life. I want respect above everything else and I'm willing to sin against God if I don't get it or to get it." So I'm submitting myself and then fourth is serve. Desire, demand, submit, serve. Now I'm serving my false god. I'm serving the god, this idol I have of whatever I want: respect, or I want comfort, I want ease, whatever it is. And number five is I destroy. I destroy anyone who gets in the way of my idol. This is basically another way of kind of an overlay you could put on James 4. You're wanting something and you're not getting it and so you murder. Do you see? You battle. You war.

So that's the progression of an idol: desire becomes demand, then you have submit, serve, destroy. The flipside of what it should be for the godly Christian is you start off with desire and you have frustrated desire. That's that kind of 1.5 point. Between number one and number two is you're not getting your desire. So desire, but rather than become demand, it becomes request and I think James tells us that essentially here when he says, "You have not because you ask not," at the end of verse 2. You want something, you're not getting it, why aren't you asking God for it? You have not because you ask not. So some things you don't have because you're not asking.

Now, so what this would mean in that situation, the man comes in and his wife says, "Have you seen the bank account? What's going on?" "Lord, I feel like she's disrespecting me here. I don't know what's going on. I would like to be respected by my wife." But you see, you're talking to God rather than just dealing with the circumstance on my own. We kind of go through life saying, "I've got this, Lord. I can handle it. I'll fix her. I'll fix him." Right? No. Request, "Lord, I need your help. I don't know what's going on here. I want to please you. I'm wanting something. I can tell I'm upset. I'm wanting something. I think I'm wanting respect. I'm wanting," a lot of times for me it's I want comfort. I don't want to

have to do something hard again. I've had a bunch of hard things today and you're bringing another hard thing to me and that's making me mad. I'm wanting comfort. I'm wanting ease. "Lord, I would like things to be comfortable and easy." But even just asking him about it, "Can you make this work out well?"

Now, often he doesn't give you what you want but you still ask him because that's getting you oriented in the right direction. I am to live my life before the face of God, "So Lord, I would like this to work out. Help me. Show me what I'm supposed to do here." That request, that's the turning point. Now what you want to do with that because request has got to become submit to God, the third point is going to be submit to God, this is where you actually bring a little bit of that former work you've been doing on repenting and confessing and meditating and seeing it the way God sees it, mourning over it. You can bring some of that in at this point. "Wait a minute. Oh, here, another circumstance where I'm wanting to worship an idol and I don't want to bow down to my idol because that's really bowing down to an idol, it's not just me getting what I want. I have the idol of ease and comfort. I don't want to worship that over God." And so you're thinking that way and you make a determination, "Lord, even if you don't give me what I want, I submit to you. If I don't get respect in this situation, if I don't get comfort in this situation, I am your servant. I'm here for you. You've bought me with a price. I belong to you. Who do I think I am? My life is not my own. I'm here to serve you. Why was I even thinking..." You see how your mind starts thinking and suddenly you're getting on the right track. "I'm here to serve you and your interests."

So it goes desire, request, submit and serve. Now I'm serving God. "I'm yielding my members to you. I'm yielding my heart to you. I don't like this situation. I've told you about it. I'd like and wish I really weren't in it but I'm your servant at your disposal, for your glory, and I'm serving you." And what happens next? It goes desire, request, submit, serve, edify. Destroy at the bottom of the other side, edify here. You see, when you let your desire become a demand and you worship a false god, you destroy, you tear down. When you worship the living God and you submit to the living God, you build up. You become an agent of peace and you find yourself looking like what James was talking about in chapter 3 instead of chapter 4, verses 1 to 10, you're looking like chapter 3, verses 13, 17 and 18: you're meek and you're sowing peace. And the real wonderful thing is that you are happier. That's the irony. Righteousness is the happiest place to be. Satan's lie is that it's not. Satan's lie is that it's much better to do it his way. He is a liar. God made you, your wiring is made to walk in righteousness so that when you do what is right, you're actually doing what you're made to do and what even is going to feel better over time.

So joy, here's another verse that shows that, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The meek let go, that's what it means to be meek, "I'm going to let go of my right to be respected, I'm going to let go of my right to have ease and comfort. I've had a hard day and I deserve... No, I don't have any deserving about it other than hell and so I'm going to let that go and I'm going to be meek. I have no rights, Lord." Blessed are the meek, they inherit the earth. I think that's just God's sense of humor and his delight. You know, the opposite of meekness is to walk through life like this: put something in my

hand and I'm going to hold onto it. I want my respect and I will have it. I want my ease and comfort. I want some peace and quiet and I will have it. When you're like that, you're not going to have any peace and quiet, you're not going to have any comfort, you're not going to have any respect. You might have feigned respect, you might have feigned peace but you don't have real peace, real comfort, real respect. You lose everything. But when you become meek, you do this: I would really like to be respected. You can pray like this to the Lord, "I would really like to be respected, Lord, and I don't think I'm getting that right now." But you're talking to God about it. It's like this in your hand, "I would really like some peace and comfort, Lord. You know how hard a day it's been for me. I would really like that but I know that I'm your servant," and you work through it, "and I'm going to walk in a way that glorifies you. You promised that you're not going to put me anywhere where you won't give me grace to sustain me. You said that when I'm weak, I'm strong. I feel weak so make me strong." You know, all the promises of God, you're thinking about that, but you become... Meek is I'm holding it with an open hand. "If you want me to be respected, Lord, that's up to you, but if you want to take it away, it's up to you." And you leave your hand like that.

You live life with an open hand and the beauty of living life with an open hand is God not only will give you what you were asking for but he can give you all kinds of other stuff too because your hand's open. He can just keep piling things on you and this is the way God is. He delights to show his glorious, gracious, magnificent kindness to those who trust him. That's the way that Jesus has called us to. On the front end it's painful, it hurts initially when we have to die to self, yes, but it's always the best way and it gives glory to him and he's worthy of that.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we thank you for your faithfulness and thank you for your word, your amazing kindness to us. Lord, we are sinners through and through, nothing good in our flesh. We marvel that you found a way to cleanse us, to make us righteous, to make us righteous forever by the blood of your Son, and to then, Lord, put your Spirit inside of us and to give us your word so that it can be something that transforms us day after day as we look into the beauty of your law, the perfect law of liberty, you can transform us into the image of Christ. That's what we were created to be, that's what you intended mankind to be. Help us, Lord. Father, we pray that you would grant deep complete repentance to each one of us in areas that we need to be repenting in and we pray for those here that have not placed their faith in Christ, that have not truly surrendered to Jesus, that you would grant them repentance unto life that they would surrender themselves and cast themselves upon Jesus. Father, we pray that you would have every part of every one of our hearts; that you would do whatever is necessary to expose our sin, to show us our sin and to help us turn from our sin, and to help us continue to see the glorious sufficiency of our Savior. We pray this in his wonderful name. Amen.*