

Becoming a Peacemaker Series

The Path of Peace in Desire Conflict (Jas. 4:1-3)

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Path of Peace in Desire Conflict

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Picture, Picture on the Wall

1. All of us have experienced a desire. Our desires motivate our lives. Our desires are the fuel that move us. An important life skill is learning how to navigate and use our desires in healthy ways. Unfortunately, it is easy for our desires to put us at odds with another person's desires in a way that results in conflict.
2. On Monday, I was at home and I just finished working out. I had showered and sat down to prepare and review for our small group that was going to be meeting in a few hours. Abi came into the room and asked if I was going to find a spot for the Minnesota Vikings rookie card picture that was gifted to me. It was currently sitting on the floor leaning up against where I was planning on putting it. I told Abi I was doing work and wanted to get ready for small group before I hung the picture.
3. Abi clearly wanted the picture to get hung on the wall right away. She said she didn't want the picture to get knocked over and damaged. I desired to finish getting ready for small group, Abi desired for me to put up the picture. Potentially, this type of a situation could cause conflict to develop.
4. I knew I had enough time to get ready to lead our small group, have supper, and put up the picture. I just desired to do these activities in a different order. I decided to do what Abi wanted and we put up the picture together. I set aside my work for a few minutes as we took down the current hanging picture, pulled the cardboard off the Vikings picture and hung it up on the wall.

B. Another type of conflict that we encounter in the normal activities of life is desire conflict. This type of conflict happens when the desires of two or more people intersect, and those desires are at odds with one another. Desire conflict can happen over trivial and unimportant issues such as the one described above or very significant and critical issues of life and everything in between.

C. As disciples we need to learn how to handle conflict in healthy ways when our desires are not compatible with other people's desires. So much of success and failure related to the Christian life is a matter of what is happening inside us—in our heart and soul. Dealing with our desires is an internal aspect of our spiritual formation and growth. Let's look at a wise way we can sort through, understanding, and respond to our desires.

II. Major Source of Conflict: Our Desires

- A. Jesus, not surprisingly, asked brilliant questions that cut right to the heart of the issue, "What do you desire?" (Mt. 20:21) and "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mt. 20:32). Our desires, what we want and yearn for, have a tremendously powerful influence on our lives. Sometimes our desires can be good for us and those around us while other times our desires are harmful both to us and to those around us. Our desires greatly impact our lives either by energizing us when they are fulfilled or by draining life out of us when they go unfulfilled (Pr. 13:12, Dt. 14:26).

- B. Our desires also become a major source of conflict in our lives especially when what we desire is dependent on other people,
- ¹ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is the source not your pleasures that wage war in your body's parts? ² You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. (Jas. 4:1-2)
- C. The rhetorical question that is asked is designed to provide an answer to the source of the conflicts we experience ("What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?", v. 1). A second question answers the first ("Is the source not your pleasures that wage war in your body's parts?", v. 1). Pleasures are the feelings that accompany an unsatisfied state.¹ We have conflict in our lives because we are unsatisfied.
- D. Our desire for the things we believe will bring comfort, pleasure, fulfillment, happiness, and satisfaction to our lives is the source of conflict ("You lust and do not have", v. 2). Lust refers to an intense desire for a particular thing.² Unfulfilled desire leads to conflict ("so you fight and quarrel", v. 2). Desire conflict is conflict that happens due to a person wanting or pursuing something and not being able to get it. Often out of disappointment, frustration, or anger, the person being denied their desire will act in harmful and destructive ways trying to get what they want ("so you murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel", v. 2). Less serious immoral behavior like being envious all the way to very significant immoral behavior like murder can all be motivated by the influence of unfulfilled desire. We need to be very cautious about how we respond to our unsatisfied desires—they can be very dangerous. Our pursuit of happiness can result in extreme harm to others.
- E. Desire conflict becomes even more severe when the person who wants something from someone else thinks they deserve it or is entitled to get what they desire. Sometimes our expectation of certain desires being fulfilled is justified but other times it is not. Whether our expectations and desires are accurately informed depends on the situation and the nature of the relationship. Either way, the stronger our expectation of having a desire fulfilled the greater the tendency of improper behavior follows not having that desire fulfilled.

III. Identify the Source of the Desire

- A. How can disciples figure out the best way to navigate their desires and the conflict related to them? By putting the principles taught by God into action in their lives. The aim of the following Biblical advice is guidance, not a specific path to follow—a procedure. Again, due to the variety and complexity of this type of conflict, wisdom and discernment are needed to determine how these Biblical principles can best be applied in any given situation.
- B. The path forward in desire conflict begins by identifying the source of each desire. The Bible clearly identifies two ultimate sources of all our desires. One source is good for us while the other is not,

¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on James 4:1 "pleasures"

² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on James 4:2 "You lust"

¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. (Gal. 5:17)

- C. Every desire we have either comes from ourselves in our natural state or from God, there is no in between (“the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit”, v. 17). In the Bible, the flesh refers to our natural broken human nature that is separated from the influence of God—it doesn’t refer to the physical body as though the physical body that God created is bad. Our morally broken human nature, left to its own tendencies and habits, will lead us away from the behaviors that God says are good for us. The desires coming from our own broken moral nature are called corrupt—actions that bring discredit and shame.³ These desires are also called harmful—causing or capable of causing a change for the worse.⁴ Not one single person will do what God says is good on their own without God’s help (Psalm 53). We simply don’t have the capacity in us to love God and pursue a God centered lifestyle.
- D. The mentioning of the Spirit is a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of God (technically called the Godhead—the whole personhood of God as a three person being) whose presence lives inside every true disciple who belongs to God to help them become the person God wants them to be (Jn. 14:16-23). The Holy Spirit works in the heart and soul of those who belong to God to empower them to grow into a person who is like Jesus (Phil. 2:12-13, 2 Cor. 3:18). God’s influence on a person’s life, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, changes the person so they live in a way that is pleasing to God—primarily through the development of godly character (Gal. 5:22-23).
- E. Our natural tendencies pull us in one direction while the influence of God in another direction (“for these are in opposition to one another”, v. 17). These two sets of desires, influences, and powers are set against one another and put us on different life trajectories. As a person grows spiritually into a more mature disciple, they will more naturally operate as the Holy Spirit desires. Good behavior that pleases God can become normal and natural and our good desires gain a greater influence in our lives. The natural tendencies of the flesh are replaced with the supernatural tendencies of the Spirit. The more a person grows and matures spiritually, the easier it becomes to do what God wants—sometimes even without having to think about it or intentionally expending effort to make it happen. In many ways the Christian life is most difficult at the beginning. Paul explains these spiritual realities in greater detail in Romans 8.
- F. If we are going to know whether a desire should be encouraged and pursued or rejected and resisted, we first need to know its source. All desires come from one of two sources. Either the broken human nature separated from the influence of God or the Holy Spirit connected with the influence of God. All the varieties of desires we feel come from one of these two sources.
- G. Usually, we can discern the source of our desires by their alignment with God’s word (the Bible), the effect of the desires (whether positive or negative) and the behaviors the desire lead to (approved or condemned by God). If the desires we experience and encourage harmonize

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Peter 2:10 “corrupt passion”

⁴ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Timothy 6:9 “harmful desires”

with what God says is good in His word, we are following good desires. If the desires we feel and act on move us toward godliness, becoming more like Jesus, healthy relationships, overall well-being, and flourishing, we can discern by the effects of our desires on us and those around us to be from God. If the desires that motivate our lives result in actions that God identifies as being wrong and are exhibited in the lives of people who do not know God, we are allowing bad desires to continue in our lives when we shouldn't.

IV. Discern if the Expression of the Desire is Good or Bad

- A. To complicate the matter a bit, simply identifying the source of the desire is not enough to determine how to respond to desire conflict. Why? Because even good desires can be interacted with in inappropriate ways. Just because a desire is good and given by God doesn't mean we pursue, express, or fulfill that good desire in a healthy God honoring way. How we act in response to our desires also matters.
- B. Notice one of the reasons God doesn't give us what we are asking for in prayer,
 - ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend *what you request* on your pleasures. (Jas. 4:3)
- C. Sometimes we don't receive what we desire from God because we are not even asking God for what we want (v. 2). Other times, disciples will be praying to God asking for what they desire but God doesn't give them what they are requesting because they will misuse what they are given ("so that you may spend what you request on your pleasures", v. 3). Pleasures can be something or someone that provides a source of happiness.⁵ Does this mean happiness is wrong? Of course not, God desires and acts to satisfy us. But a selfish pursuit of happiness is wrong. Selfish prayers are not pleasing to God and He has the general tendency not to answer them in the affirmative. Pleasure and enjoyment are not wrong in themselves, they are gifts from God, but self-centered pleasure is. The selfish pleasure seeking that is being addressed here is selfishness that hurts others and creates relational problems (v. 2).
- D. Good desires can be expressed in bad ways. For example, the desire for rest and relaxation is not wrong, in fact, it is a God given need that He cares about and protects. Although rest and relaxation is a good desire, sometimes it is expressed in a bad way when it becomes the main priority and focus of our lives. When we get mad and mistreat other people in our lives who interrupt what we expect to be "our time" to be able to rest and relax, this good desire becomes a problem. When people think retirement is the most important factor in their happiness, the good desire for rest has grown into an unhealthy desire. If a person thinks they need to rest for a decade or more and feel justified in being self-centered, something has gone wrong in their priorities.
- E. Another problem to watch out for when it comes to our desires is when good desires become so important to us that they are disproportionate with the place God has for those desires in our lives. When good desires are elevated to a place of importance not intended by God a good desire is being pursued in a harmful way. Some desire become so important to people they receive the highest commitment and allegiance, the place that only God should have in our

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on James 4:3 "pleasure"

lives, our desires have become idols—something we worship and pursue for ultimate satisfaction in life. If a desire becomes the source of our identity, that desire has become an idol. Just because a desire is good doesn't mean everything connected to that desire is also good.

- F. A question that can help us evaluate our good desires to determine if they may be being expressed in bad ways might be: Is fulfillment of this desire more important than the well-being and proper treatment of other people? Or does this desire encourage or lead me to mistreat others? Every good desire God gives us to has a good reason attached to it. Good desires are intended to motivate and bring about good results. Therefore, if bad results are being brought about by good desires, there must be something wrong with the way we are responding to or engaging in that desire.

V. Reject, Resist, and Replace Bad Desires

- A. The Bible provides a significant amount of guidance, help, and direction when it comes to responding to unhealthy desires. Summarizing several different teachings on this subject: disciples are to reject, resist, and replace bad desires (Rm. 6:11-12, 13:14, Eph.2:3, 4:22, 6:13, Gal. 5:24 Eph. 4:25-30, 2 Tim. 2:22, Tit. 3:3, 1 Pet. 1:14, 1 Pet. 2:11, 4:2-3).
- B. The main thrust of a healthy response to bad desires by those who belong to God is explained in the book of Titus,
 - ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, (Tit. 2:11-12)
- C. What does the grace of God and salvation do in people's lives? We are given a direct answer about how these affect a person's desires ("instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires", v. 12). When God touches a person's life, He begins changing their desires. In this case, a different relationship and response to bad desires starts to develop. Disciples learn how to respond in new ways to the former bad desires that controlled their behavior and lifestyle ("instructing us to", v. 12). Interacting differently with our bad desires is a learned skill, it doesn't happen automatically when God saves us. Just because a person becomes a disciple doesn't mean they will only desire what is good. Through teaching and discipline knowledge, skill, morals, and social behavior is developed in the life of a disciple.⁶
- D. Disciples are taught and empowered by God to refuse to indulge in some pleasure ("deny", 12).⁷ In this context, any pleasure related to unrighteous and that which goes against what God says is morally good ("ungodliness", v. 12).⁸ While most disciples readily admit they should resist their desires that are not morally good far fewer disciples are willing to admit they should also resist the next category of desires: worldly desires ("and worldly desires", v. 12). Disciples also learn to resist and keep themselves away from desires characteristic of the earthly realm—opposed to the transcendent spiritual realm.⁹ Common desires related to this earthly existence

⁶ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 "instructing"

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 "deny"

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 "ungodliness"

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 "worldly desires", Colossians 3:1-3

that are sought out by people who don't know God are resisted—even the desire to seek after the physical necessities of life (Mt. 6:31-33). A further explanation of these worldly desires can be found in 1 John 2:16, Mark 4:19, and Luke 14:16-24. Jesus said no to worldly desires as He never own a single piece of property, He only owned the clothes on His back, Jesus left behind all the tools of His carpentry work, and Jesus didn't prioritize His own family when they didn't believe in Him. In all these ways, Jesus said no to worldly desires.

- E. Have you let go of your desires related to this world? Are your main priorities securing a good career, earning money, buying a nice house, driving the vehicle you want, taking the vacations, you dream of, having a family, etc.? Those who still love the world are enemies of Jesus (Jas. 4:4-5). While worldly desires aren't wrong in themselves, some of them are even needs for our survival, they become harmful to us when they distract and prevent us from pursuing God and the things above. There needs to be a clear break in our hearts' desires for worldly pursuits, and we need to seek God's kingdom and righteousness ahead of any worldly desire.

VI. Attempt to Fulfil Every Good Desire

- A. Once we have done all this work to sort through our desires and how we are responding to them, we are now able to pursue all our good desires in healthy ways,
 - ¹¹ To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will consider you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, in accordance with the grace of our God and *the* Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. 1:11-12)
- B. Good desires are so valuable that even the apostles prayed for their fulfillment (“To this end also we pray for you always”, v. 11). Paul wants the disciples in the church in Thessalonica to be filled by God with every desire for goodness that they have (“fulfill every desire for goodness”, v. 11). As a spiritual leader, the apostle Paul is interceding and praying on behalf of the church to God. Paul is using His knowledge, abilities and relationship with God to influence God by speaking to Him about the people in this church. This isn't a one-time prayer, it is a continual habit.
- C. The hoped for and intended outcome of these prayers is for God to respond and do something specific in the lives of these disciples (“fulfill every desire for goodness”, v. 11). Paul is desiring God to satisfy these disciples by filling them up completely.¹⁰ Every single fixed intention to please God by doing what is morally good is what is filled up.¹¹ As the Holy Spirit changes the heart and desires of these disciples, the disciples work hard at pleasing God by doing what is right. Healthy disciples desire to do what God wants as well as wanting to please Him. The ability to do these good actions and carry through on these intentions is what is being fulfilled through prayer. The end of all this is disciples who are “full of goodness” (Rm. 15:14, Eph. 5:9) as a result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives (Gal. 5:22). This fulfillment of our good desires is combined with the actions that flow from our devotion and trust in God (“and the work of faith with power”, v. 11).

¹⁰ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Thessalonians 1:11 “fulfill”

¹¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Thessalonians 1:11 “every desire for goodness”

- D. The result of our good desires being provided for and fulfilled is the glory of God (“so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you”, v. 12). When disciples live the way God wants them to and is actively working in them to produce, Jesus is put on display and honored. This is the purpose and goal of the Christian life—progressively becoming more like Jesus until we are finally like Him (Pr. 4:18, 2 Cor. 3:18, Gal. 4:19. 1 Jn. 3:2). While this spiritual objective will never be fully realized in this life, significant progress can and should be made with God’s help.
- E. When we or someone else has good desires, we should strive to fulfill those desires just as the apostle Paul prayer for and just as God is working toward. Good desires could include helping a man who wants to become an elder (1 Tim. 3:1), instructing a wife who wants to know how to love her husband (Tit. 2:4), encouraging a child to honor and obey their parents (Eph. 6:1), assist a person who is struggling with pornography and wants a way out (Mt. 5:28, Job 31:1, Gal. 6:1), or teach someone to use their spiritual gift (1 Cor. 14:12). The list of good desires to be encouraged is endless.
- F. As disciples we should be continually praying and asking God to empower us to be able to carry through on the good actions we want to perform and the godly character we want to develop. We need to depend on Jesus knowing we can’t become the person He wants us to be or do the difficult actions He requires of us unless He is helping us. The Christian life can’t be lived effectively by our effort alone; we need God to be working in us.
- G. If you are facing a difficult circumstance and you know you will be having a hard time acting the way God wants you to act, pray ahead of time and ask for His help and strength. If you are struggling to develop a particular godly character quality, regularly ask God to help you develop it. If discouragement is setting in because your progress and growth feels like its barely crawling along at a slow pace, ask God to encourage you.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Desire conflict helps us diagnose and wrestle within our heart about what we want. Sometimes, we will need to learn to let go of some of our desires. Those that are unhealthy for us. Other times we will need to further encourage, strengthen, and develop desires that may not be as strong as they should be. The desires that are pleasing to God and help us live more abundantly in Jesus.
- B. Following the above Biblical principles will allow us to walk on the path of peace while in desire conflict so that we can,

²³ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

(Pr. 4:23)