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Part 1 The Conflict We Did Not See Coming

Series: The War Within

Text: James 4:1–3 (NKJV)

Introduction – The Battle Beneath the Surface

Now hear the Word of the Lord:

Scripture:

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have.

You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (James 4:1–3)

James begins with a question.

Where do wars and fights come from among you?

When we hear “wars and fights,” we think:

- Broken marriages

- Church tension
- Workplace conflict
- Family division

But James does something shocking.

He turns the spotlight inward.

Who Is the Real Enemy?

James says these conflicts come from **“your desires for pleasure that war in your members.”**

The Greek word for “desires for pleasure” is *hēdonōn* — where we get hedonism.

It means self-gratifying pleasure. Living for what makes me happy.

James says the war “among you” is coming from a war “within you.”

That’s the conflict we did not see coming.

We blame:

- Our spouse
- Our boss
- Our pastor
- The culture
- Even Satan

But James says the greatest threat to unity is not out there — it’s in here.

There is a guerrilla war happening in the soul.

If we are not careful, sabotage ourselves.

Like the Man Who Locked His Own Door

There once was a man who prayed every day for opportunity.

He prayed for God to open doors.

He prayed for favor.

He prayed for growth.

And then one day, an opportunity came.

A friend offered him a partnership in a small business. It wasn't perfect, but it had promise. The man was excited until the doubts began to whisper.

"What if you fail?"

"What if people see you struggle?"

"What if you aren't ready?"

So instead of stepping forward, he delayed.

He overanalyzed.

He criticized the idea.

He found flaws that weren't really there.

He told himself he was "being wise."

Eventually, the opportunity passed.

Months later, he watched that same business succeed with someone else in his place.

He went back to prayer and said,

"God, why didn't You open a door for me?"

And in the quiet of his heart came the answer:

"I did. But you locked it."

The Lesson

Sometimes the enemy isn't outside of us.

Sometimes it's fear.

Sometimes it's pride.

Sometimes it's insecurity disguised as "wisdom."

Self-sabotage doesn't always look dramatic.
It looks like:

- Procrastination when it's time to act.
- Picking fights when things are going well.
- Quitting before we can be rejected.
- Doubting ourselves when God has already spoken.

We pray for a breakthrough,
but cling to comfort.

We ask for growth,
but resist change.

We want healing,
but rehearse old pain.

And without realizing

And the real enemy is unchecked selfish desire.

Illustration

(SHOW HOUSE BURNING)

It's like a house with smoke pouring out of the windows. We rush outside looking for someone to blame — while the fire is burning in the basement.

James says: Go downstairs. Jesus said in Mark 7:21–23 that evil comes **“from within, out of the heart of men.”**

The problem isn't environmental.
It's internal.

The battlefield is the heart.

There was a man who woke up one morning already irritated. He stumbled into the kitchen, poured himself a cup of coffee, took one sip... and made a face like he had just swallowed battery acid.

He stormed into the living room and snapped at his wife, "Did you change the coffee brand?! This is terrible!"

She calmly said, "No."

He muttered, "Figures. Nobody pays attention around here."

Then he got to work, grumpy. Snapped at his assistant. Complained about traffic. Blamed the weather. Blamed the government. Blamed his dog.

All day long he was telling people, "I don't know what's wrong with everyone today!"

That evening, still annoyed, he went back to the coffee maker to prove his point. He opened the lid.

He had forgotten to put coffee grounds in the machine.

He had been drinking hot water.

And blaming everyone else for it.

Beware: Cravings Turn Carnal

Verse 2:

"You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war."

That word "lust" can mean intense craving.

When selfish craving goes unchecked, it escalates.

Desire → Demand → Destruction.

James even says, "You murder."

Are Christians literally killing each other?

Jesus clarifies in Matthew 5:21–22: anger and hatred in the heart are murder before God.

1 John 3:15 says:

“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.”

You don’t need a weapon to commit spiritual murder.

- Slander is murder with the tongue.
- Bitterness is murder in the soul.
- Gossip is murder in the shadows.
- Cold withdrawal is murder by neglect.

James is showing us that selfish desire doesn’t stay private. It spills out.

A Psychological Truth

Cravings promise satisfaction.

But they create agitation.

The more self becomes central, the more fragile we become.

And fragile people fight.

1. When Prayer Goes Sideways

James now shifts upward.

“You do not have because you do not ask.”

First problem: Prayerlessness.

We try to fix conflicts without consulting God.

The selfish heart does not naturally pray.
It strategizes.

But then James says:

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

The phrase “ask amiss” comes from the Greek word **κακῶς (kakōs)**.

It means:

- Wrongly
- Badly
- With evil intent
- In a morally corrupt way

James is not saying they asked for the wrong *thing* necessarily. It's saying they asked with the wrong *motive*.

The problem wasn't the volume of prayer. It was the condition of the heart.

The problem is no longer silence — it's selfishness.

We turn God into a divine vending machine.

“Lord, fund my agenda.”

But God refuses to bankroll selfishness.

He is too good a Father to raise spoiled children.

Illustration

No loving parent answers every request with yes.

If a child asks for gasoline to put out a fire, the answer is no.

God's “no” is often mercy.

The Default Setting of the Human Heart

Let me make this painfully simple.

Every human has:

- Opinions
- Preferences
- Desires

Now here's the question:

Whose do you like the most?

Yours.

That is the default setting.

James is not saying we struggle with selfishness.

He is saying we are born enslaved to it.

Only the supernatural power of God can break those chains.

2. The Solution: A Greater Fire

James says the answer is prayer, but not selfish prayer.

The Christian life is not "try harder to kill selfishness."

It is "ask God to grow love."

Philippians 1:9-11:

"This is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more..."

Paul prays for more love.

Why?

Because when **the love of Christ grows, selfishness suffocates.**

Fire needs oxygen.

There is a fire of selfishness.

And there is a fire of Christ's love.

Whichever one gets the oxygen grows.

When we pray for more of Jesus — His beauty, His mercy, His glory — the old fire loses air.

Personal Application

Ask God:

- “Expose the battle within me.”
- “Redirect my prayers.”
- “Grow Your love in me.”

James is not condemning us.

He is inviting us into maturity.

3. The Gospel Connection

Ultimately, this passage points us to Jesus.

Where we demand our way,
Jesus surrendered His.

Where we grasp,
He gave.

Where we fight for pleasure,
He endured the cross.

The cross is the death of selfishness.

And the resurrection is the birth of new love.

Conclusion – **From Conflict to Communion**

The conflict we did not see coming is the war within.

But here is the hope:

When Christ reigns within, peace flows without.

When His love increases,
Selfishness decreases.

When we pray rightly,
God answers joyfully.

So today, don't walk out unchanged.

Ask.

Ask for love.

Ask for wisdom.

Ask for freedom from self.

Because when the war within is surrendered to Christ,
The peace of Christ begins to rule.

And the fire of His love will burn brighter than the fire of your
selfishness.

And when that happens — relationships heal, prayers change, and
Jesus is glorified.