# James, Lesson #5The Pressure of Conflict

## Good Questions Have Small Groups Talkingwww.MyBibleStudyLessons.com

## James 4

### ACCOUNTABILITY

What three fellowships do we have scheduled for the next three months? Who will invite every member? Who will help invite every prospect? Who will help plan the party?

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name and one thing you are grateful for this week?

### DIG

1. Today we will be discussing what the Bible has to say about conflict in relationships. On a scale of one to ten, how important would you say this topic is?

The quality of life is largely dependent on the quality of our relationships. If we have a good life, it means we have good relationships. If we have had a hard life it normally means we have struggled with relationships. We had a father who abandoned us or a husband who neglected us or kids that drove us crazy. — Josh Hunt. Enjoying God.

1. How difficult is it to get along with people?

In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Lucy says to Snoopy: “There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug.”

Snoopy replies: “That’s the way I am . . . huggable and buggable.” — Swindoll, C. R. (2009). Laugh again & hope again. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. How would you answer the question in James 4.1? What does cause fights and quarrels?

War is the result of sin. To ask God to prohibit war, then, is to ask him to prohibit the consequence of human behavior. Something he has never been wont to do. As long as there is sin, there will be war. — Lucado, M. (2011). Max on life: answers and inspiration for today’s questions. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. What is the difference between a fight and a quarrel?

Their problem? “Quarrels and conflicts.” The Greek word translated “quarrels” is a general word for fights or warfare from which we get our word “polemics.” The word for “conflicts” is a more narrow term for skirmishes, individual attacks. In terms of physical warfare, the first term would refer to the war; the second would signify a specific battle. These Christians were in an ongoing state of quarreling that exploded into open conflict. — Swindoll, C. R. (2010). Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter. Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (pp. 86–87). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

1. How common is conflict in our world?

The late honored historians, Will and Ariel Durant, declared that of man’s reported thirty-four hundred years-plus of written history, he has been at war all but 168 years. — Jones, G. C. (1986). 1000 illustrations for preaching and teaching (p. 359). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

1. Suppose someone said, “the devil caused that fight in that church or family,” how would James respond?

Where do these wars and skirmishes come from? We might be tempted to say, “From Satan!” or “From false brethren!” or “From heretics who crept in secretly!” Wrong! James answers, “Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?” James is good at rubbing our nose in our own depravity when we need it. It may seem harsh at times, and if you dwell there every minute of the day, it can be.

But frequent reminders of our own wicked natures apart from God’s grace can do us great good. Remember that James named the source of temptation and sin as our “own lust” (1:14). And disorder and wickedness result from our own “jealousy and selfish ambition” (3:16). In the same way, we are primarily responsible for our own infighting. Satan may have a field day and unbelievers may feel pleased to see us go at it, but we are the ones to blame. — Swindoll, C. R. (2010). Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter. Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (p. 87). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

1. How old are you before you see things and want them?

Vision always comes before victory. James said, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Could it be that we don’t have because we don’t see? My wife and I know better than to take our son Joel into any store. He’s a little Abram.

That little guy can walk into any store and see opportunity. There are very few things for sale for which he couldn’t find a use. Be it a toy store or a drapery store, he never fails to find something he desperately needs and thinks he should have. He’s always ready to go out and possess the land. We would prefer to possess him and stick him back in the car, because what he doesn’t see, he doesn’t desire to have. The point is this: to have something you have to see it first. — Maxwell, J. C. (2010). Be all you can be: a challenge to stretch your God-given potential. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

1. Did you fight with your brothers or sisters as a kid? What did you fight about?

Three boys in the schoolyard were bragging about who had the better father:

The first boy says, “My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, and they give him $100.”

The second boy says, “That’s nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a song, and they give him $1000.”

The third boy says, “My Dad is ever better than that. He scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a sermon, and it takes 6 or 8 men just to collect all the money!” <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-davon-huss-humor-parenting-dealingwithconflicts-fathersday-10401.asp>

1. Are desires a bad thing?

He says that even though we sleep, our desire does not. “It is who we are.” We are desire. It is the essence of the human soul, the secret of our existence. Absolutely nothing of human greatness is ever accomplished without it. Not a symphony has been written, a mountain climbed, an injustice fought, or a love sustained apart from desire. Desire fuels our search for the life we prize. Our desire, if we will listen to it, will save us from committing soul-suicide, the sacrifice of our hearts on the altar of “getting by.” The same old thing is not enough. It never will be.

The secret that begins to solve the riddle of our lives is simply this: we are the sea lion who lost the sea. Life as usual is not the life we truly want. It is not the life we truly need. It is not the life we were made for. If we would only listen to our hearts, to what G. K. Chesterton called our “divine discontent,” we would learn the secret of our existence. As he wrote in Orthodoxy, “We have come to the wrong star . . . That is what makes life at once so splendid and so strange. The true happiness is that we don’t fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way.” — Eldredge, J. (2008). The sacred romance, desire, waking the dead. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. The Buddhist way is to kill desire and thus discover contentment. Is this the Christian way?

Spiritual surrender is not resignation. It is not choosing to care no longer. Nor is it Eastern mysticism, an attempt to get beyond the suffering of this life by going completely numb. As my dear friend Jan describes, “It is surrender with desire, or in desire.” Desire is still present, felt, welcomed even. But the will to secure is made subject to the divine will in an act of abandoned trust. Think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Frederick Buechner has suggested that we contrast him with a picture we have of Buddha, so that we might see the difference of true surrender:

Buddha sits enthroned beneath the Bo-tree in the lotus position. His lips are faintly parted in the smile of one who has passed beyond every power in earth or heaven to touch him. “He who loves fifty has fifty woes, he who loves ten has ten woes, he who loves none has no woes,” he has said. His eyes are closed.

Christ, on the other hand, stands in the garden of Gethsemane, angular, beleaguered. His face is lost in the shadows so that you can’t even see his lips, and before all the powers on earth or heaven he is powerless. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,” he has said. (Now and Then)

Christ is weeping freely; his prayers are marked by loud cries and tears. He makes it very, very clear what he desires. Not once, but three times he begs his Father to remove this awful cup from him: “Yet not my will, but thine be done.” He surrenders with desire, in desire. Making himself poor, he opens up to us the treasures of heaven. Buddha abandons his desire; Christ surrenders his will. It is no small difference. — Eldredge, J. (2008). The sacred romance, desire, waking the dead. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. What should we do with our desires?

Place a priority on Prayer. James 4:2 tells us: “You do not have because you do not ask.” Is it possible that you have never asked God to reveal your giftedness? So why not ask Him right now? However, you shouldn’t rush the process. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, and claim the promise that He will answer. I am saddened to discover that many Christians would rather spend thirty minutes filling out a gift inventory than thirty minutes talking with their Father about their giftedness. In our world of instant gratification, we want answers right now. Enjoy your time with God; seek the Giver and not the gift.

If you have been asking and you are still unsure, you might want to do a motive check. James 4:3 says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” Are you seeking to know your gifts so that you can become more effectively involved in kingdom activity, or are you looking for a spiritual prize? Be transparent as you talk with your Father; He knows your thoughts and intents. Ask Him to give you a pure heart and the desire to edify the body through your giftedness. — Hemphill, K. (2009). You are gifted. Nashville: B&H.

1. How do you think our fighting makes God feel?

In a parable she entitles “A Brawling Bride,” Karen Mains paints a vivid scene, describing a suspenseful moment in a wedding ceremony. Down front stands the groom in a spotless tuxedo—handsome, smiling, full of anticipation, shoes shined, every hair in place, anxiously awaiting the presence of his bride. All attendants are in place, looking joyful and attractive. The magical moment finally arrives as the pipe organ reaches full crescendo and the stately wedding march begins.

Everyone rises and looks toward the door for their first glimpse of the bride. Suddenly there is a horrified gasp. The wedding party is shocked. The groom stares in embarrassed disbelief. Instead of a lovely woman dressed in elegant white, smiling behind a lace veil, the bride is limping down the aisle. Her dress is soiled and torn. Her leg seems twisted. Ugly cuts and bruises cover her bare arms. Her nose is bleeding, one eye is purple and swollen, and her hair is disheveled.

“Does not this handsome groom deserve better than this?” asks the author. And then the clincher: “Alas, His bride, THE CHURCH, has been fighting again!”

Calling them (and us) “the church,” the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians:

Christ . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her . . . to make her holy and clean . . . so that He could give her to Himself as a glorious church without a single spot or wrinkle or any other blemish, being holy and without a single fault. Ephesians 5:25–27 NASB/TLB — Swindoll, C. R. (2009). Laugh again & hope again. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. What is the solution? How can we fight less than we do?

We fight so much. “Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from?” asks the brother of Jesus. “Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves” (James 4:1 MSG).

Servants resist stubbornness. Ulrich Zwingli manifested such a spirit. He promoted unity during Europe’s great Reformation. At one point he found himself at odds with Martin Luther. Zwingli did not know what to do. He found his answer one morning on the side of a Swiss mountain. He watched two goats traversing a narrow path from opposite directions, one ascending, the other descending. At one point the narrow trail prevented them from passing each other. When they saw each other, they backed up and lowered their heads, as though ready to lunge. But then a wonderful thing happened. The ascending goat lay down on the path. The other stepped over his back. The first animal then arose and continued his climb to the top. Zwingli observed that the goat made it higher because he was willing to bend lower.

Didn’t the same happen to Jesus? “So God raised him to the highest place. God made his name greater than every other name so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus” (Phil. 2:9–10 NCV). — Lucado, M. (2005). Cure for the common life: living in your sweet spot (pp. 133–134). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. Let me read you a real fight from a book by Les Parrott. How could this fight have gone better?

We haven’t always known how to deal with our conflicts, and we’ve had some real humdingers along the way. Like the fight that ensued in our car on a Saturday morning while we were running errands. That one didn’t end until the next day. The conflict? It was a circular conversation over who was pulling more weight on the home front. In short, it was a chore war, and each of us had drawn a battle line. We both dug in our heels and were dead set on proving the other person wrong.

“It would be nice if you could actually lend a hand on occasion,” Leslie said sardonically.

“Seriously?!” Les retorted. “You’re actually going to say I don’t help out?”

“Do I need to?”

“Apparently!”

“Okay, then, you don’t help out.”

“What do you want me to do that I’m not doing?” Les asked the question as if Leslie would have to think long and hard to answer it. She didn’t.

“How many do you want?

“C’mon.”

“Let’s start with taking out the trash.”

“I do take it out!”

“Then why did we have a heaping pile of rubbish in our garage for the past two weeks?”

“Oh, that’s rich! You know I was traveling and—”

“And you didn’t take it out before you left.” — Parrott, D. L. & L., & Parrott, L. (2013). The good fight: how conflict can bring you closer. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. Are all fights bad?

We jabbered on like this throughout the day, with accusations hopscotching around to various chores: cleaning bathrooms, yard work, and so on. When we weren’t talking about it, we were each building up our case and reloading our ammunition for the moment the battle engaged once more. Each of us was far more concerned with winning the fight than resolving it. We were in a serious power struggle, a world-class game of blame, and we were dangerously close to belittling each other with true contempt. In short, we were having an honest-to-goodness bad fight. Except there wasn’t anything honest or good about it.

At the time, we didn’t really know it was a bad fight, because early in our marriage we didn’t know there was a distinction between a good fight and a bad one. We just thought a fight was a fight. But that’s far from the truth.

To deal effectively with any conflict, we’ve got to know the difference between a good fight and a bad fight. — Parrott, D. L. & L., & Parrott, L. (2013). The good fight: how conflict can bring you closer. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. Do you think that couples that fight less are happier?

Professionals formerly believed that couples who were more prone to arguments were the least satisfied with their marriage. The studies that led to those findings, however, failed to distinguish among the kinds of fights the couples were having. Truth be told, the difference between a marriage that grows happier and one that grows more miserable is not whether they fight but how they fight. — Parrott, D. L. & L., & Parrott, L. (2013). The good fight: how conflict can bring you closer. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. What makes a good fight good?

All fights are not created equal. A good fight, in contrast to a bad fight, is helpful, not hurtful. It is positive, not negative. A good fight stays clean, but a bad fight gets dirty. According to researchers at the University of Utah, 93 percent of couples who fight dirty will be divorced within ten years. A study at Ohio State University showed that unhealthy marital arguments contribute significantly to a higher risk of heart attacks, headaches, back pain, and a whole slew of other health problems, not to mention unhappiness.3 In the end, bad fights lead to marriages that are barely breathing and will eventually die. In fact, researchers can now predict with 94 percent accuracy whether or not a couple will stay together based solely on how they fight. Not *whether* they fight, but *how* they fight.

Respect is a two-way street. If you want to get it, you’ve got to give it.

R. G. RISCH

The line separating good fights from bad is not fuzzy. Research makes the difference clear, and the following chart lays it out plainly.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|   | BAD FIGHT | GOOD FIGHT |
| GOAL | Winning the fight | Resolving the fight |
| TOPIC | Surface issues | Underlying issues |
| EMPHASIS | Personalities and power struggles | Ideas and issues |
| ATTITUDE | Confrontational and defensive | Cooperative and receptive |
| MOTIVATION | Shift blame | Take responsibility |
| MODE | Belittle | Respect |
| MANNER | Egocentric | Empathic |
| DEMEANOR | Self-righteous | Understanding |
| SIDE EFFECT | Escalation of tension | Easing of tension |
| RESULT | Discord | Harmony |
| BENEFIT | Stagnation and distance | Growth and intimacy |

 Arguments where one partner or the other becomes defensive or stubborn or withdraws are particularly destructive. Belittling and blame are also toxic. The list of qualities that make up a bad fight could go on and on, but if you boil the essence of a bad fight down to a single ingredient and sum it all up in a word, it would have to be *pride*. Parrott, D. L. & L., & Parrott, L. (2013). *The good fight: how conflict can bring you closer*. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. What good can come out of a fight?

A husband is talking on the phone, and when he hangs up, his wife comes in and says, “Did I just hear you take credit for organizing that volunteer effort? I thought Amy did all the work.” A simple question like that from his live-in monitor should cause him to reflect on his behavior. But his need for honesty is not likely to be his first reaction, is it? He is likely to be offended that his integrity is being questioned. He might get angry that his wife was eavesdropping on a conversation. But whatever he does, there’s likely to be a squabble. He’s been cornered, and his fight instinct kicks in.

If, however, during the squabble he has the good sense to lay aside his pride and see his lapse of honesty, he’ll come out of it with more integrity, more congruence. Knowing we have this built-in monitor of our words and actions should do much to keep our words and actions aligned with truth.

When your partner says you came across brusquely to a server at a restaurant or questions your motives for disciplining your child, he is causing you to confront yourself—the part of yourself you’d rather avoid. Sure, it may cause tension. It may spur a scuffle. But when you fight well, it also helps you shed pretenses and dishonesty. A good fight keeps you and your relationship real. The more authentic you are as people, the healthier your relationship will be. — Parrott, D. L. & L., & Parrott, L. (2013). The good fight: how conflict can bring you closer. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. What do you want to recall from this week’s conversation?
2. How can we support one another in prayer this week?