

## ***How to Restore a Wounded Relationship, Pt. 4 (Jas. 3:17-18)***

### **I. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED**

*This is part four in our series on how to restore wounded relationships. My real focal point is wounded relationships in the most intimate sense—in marriage, between parents and children, close friendships that get into conflict, those in close working relationships. This passage, James 3, is really Marriage and Family 101. It really is a very important passage for healthy, godly relationships in the context of a family. I am going to give a little review, and then we are going to move on into new territory in James 3.*

- A. The Lord is establishing the second commandment (to love our neighbor as ourselves, Mt. 22:38) in the Church as He empowers His people to enjoy healthy relationships. The spirit of a relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken.

*The Lord is establishing the second commandment in the Church just like He is establishing the first commandment. He is empowering His people to enjoy healthy relationships together. The spirit of a relationship can be wounded at various levels. It can be slightly injured or deeply broken. The reason I mention this is because some folks wait until relationship is completely broken and then say, “Oh, I need to start fixing and repairing this relationship.” When it is slightly injured, **that** is the time to be alerted.*

- B. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships. Living peaceably involves having a spirit of goodwill with all people—in one’s marriage, family, workplace, friendships, neighborhood, etc.

**<sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)**

*Paul tells us in Romans 12 that, “as much as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all people.” In other words, we do our part. Not every relationship will be restored, but the biblical mandate is for us to be to be focused on doing all that we need to do, all that we are called to do from the Word of God and then trust the Lord with the results.*

- C. **Go to your brother:** Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24). Every believer is to take initiative in reconciliation instead of waiting on others to do their part.

*I devoted the first two sessions of this series to these two points in Paragraph C. Jesus said that one of the primary things we are to do in seeing relationships restored is to go to our brother or to our sister and make an appeal to them. Jesus taught us to make an appeal, and He told us to make the appeal in two different directions. First, when we have something against somebody, meaning they have sinned against us, we go to them. We are not supposed to go to other people, but we are to go to them and make an appeal in private. Jesus also took it up a notch and said that if they think you have sinned against them, you still go to them. So whether they troubled you or you troubled them, on both occasions you go to them.*

*Every believer has the responsibility to take the initiative to go and begin a one-on-one conversation with the person whom either you troubled or they troubled you. The reason for this is that if only one of the two believers involved respond in obedience to this, the healing process begins. We are not to wait on the brother to come to us; we are to go to them on both occasions. Of course if both respond to the Word of God, then healing goes forth quite quickly. Again, in the first two parts of the series we developed those principles of going and making a godly appeal. There is no substitute for that. Some people wait on the Lord and say, “Lord, heal the relationship.”*

*The Lord says, “I will do My part, but **as** you go to them.” We cannot skip the appeal process.*

## II. OVERCOMING BITTERNESS AND HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:13-4:12)

Now look at James 3:13- 4:12. That is quite a large passage of scripture, but I want you to see that the entire passage is speaking on healing relationships. We are going to pick a verse right in the middle of this larger passage of about twenty verses. We are going to pick a verse right in the middle of it—James 4:1—and we are going to read it here because James is addressing relational conflicts.

As he is addressing these conflicts, he is making several points. He tells us how the relational conflicts occur. He says, in a sense, “I am going to be really clear about how they happen.” Then he tells us how the relationships can be healed and how our hearts can be healed in the process as well. Next he points out in a very specific way how people contribute to their own wounding and bitterness in the relationship. The typical way that we view conflict is that we believe we have been mistreated. We focus our attention on what the other person did and when in mistreating us, and we focus on forgiving them. That is a biblical posture. In effect, here James says, “I want you to see how your negative emotions and your wrong responses actually contributed, not just to the injured relationship, but to the turmoil and the pain you are feeling about it in the meanwhile.”

- A. James addressed relational conflict—how it occurs, how healing comes to our relationships and hearts, and how people contribute to their own wounding and bitterness (Jas 3:13-4:12). He pointed out that a significant source of our relational conflicts and the anguish, pain, and bitterness that follows is our desires and expectations that are outside of God’s will.

<sup>1</sup>***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures [desires or expectations] that wage war [create anguish, pain and bitterness] in your members?***

<sup>2</sup>***...You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. (Jas. 4:1-2, NASB)***

Let’s read right in the middle of this twenty-verse passage from James 3:13-4:12. Right here in James 4:1 we see the context. He says, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?” Again, whether in a marriage—this is Marriage 101—or in the context of a team working relationships in the marketplace, the church, etc.

He says, “Let me answer that. Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? That is one of the primary sources.” It is not the only source, but it is one of the sources—our pleasures. Some Bibles translate it “your desires” but another word that I think is very important, a word I am putting in there, is “your expectations.” We have expectations. Our expectations and our desires are really one and the same thing.

We all know we have certain expectations. I want to shift the whole discussion around, from the words **desire** and **pleasure** to the word, **expectations**, because when we lock in to seeing what our expectations are, then we can even see how some of those expectations contribute to some of the problems we are having in our relationships because they are expectations that are outside the will of God. They are expectations that our culture affirms, but the Bible does not affirm them, and we get it easily mixed up. We think that everybody reasonably expects this so it must be biblical. The Bible says, “Well, no that is not something that the Bible insists on.” So we are going to tease this apart just a little bit.

In verse 1, James asks, “What is the source?” That is, what is one of the things fueling your quarrels and your conflicts in your friendships, in your working relationships, in your family, in your marriage? He continues to say isn’t one of the sources your wrong expectations, your non-biblical expectations, your desires, your pleasures?

*In verse 2, he gives one example. You are envious, then you cannot have the thing that you are envious for. You see what other people have: you see the quality of relationship they have or the status they have or the honor they have or the gifting they have or their position in life they have. You say, “Hey, I want to have that as well.” Though we look at others to imitate their dedication to the Lord, we are not to look at others and determine that what they have is what we are going to have no matter what.*

*He says, when you do that, what happens is that you do not get it the way that you were imagining it. Then you quarrel and fight, and you have conflict in your marriage, you have conflict in your family, etc.*

*So James pointed out that a significant source of our relational conflicts, and even some of the anguish and the pain and bitterness we feel is our own desires and expectations that are outside of the will of God that we have not defined as being outside of the will of God. We just assume they are normal; we assume they are something we should insist on.*

*He goes on to say that those expectations are creating some of your anguish in your heart. It is a very searching scripture, James 3-4 is.*

- B. The whole story of someone’s bitterness and emotional pain includes both how they were *mistreated* and how they *responded* to the mistreatment.

*The whole story of someone’s bitterness and the whole story of their emotional pain—bitterness and emotional pain do not always have to be the same—includes how we are mistreated **and** also how we respond to the mistreatment. The whole story of somebody being bitter is not just that they were mistreated, but also how they responded to the mistreatment. The two together form the greater storyline.*

1. There is an “*enemy on the outside*”—this speaks of people who mistreat us. When someone blocks our goals of honor, comfort, money, relationship, promotion, inclusion, etc., it can cause frustration and anger in us, sometimes leading to offense and bitterness.

*Well, let me restate it a different way. There is an enemy on the outside. That is, there is the person who mistreats you and the injustice that is done towards you.*

2. There is an “*enemy on the inside*”—this speaks of our response to the mistreatment. James identified our envy and self-seeking as the cause of much of our pain (Jas. 3:14).

*Then number two, there is the enemy on the inside, and that is what James focuses on in this passage. It is our response to the mistreatment. We will see in James 3:14—we will get there in a moment—that He identifies envy and self-seeking as one of the primary sources of the conflict and even the turmoil we feel in the conflict. It is not only the injustice done against us, but it is also our response to the injustice.*

3. We are both *victims* and *agents* of our offense and wounding. We are victims when we are mistreated; we are agents when we respond wrongly and allow our mistreatment to become a festering wound of bitterness. The injustice done against us does not produce bitterness; rather, it is our wrong response to the injustice that produces bitterness.

*The Bible makes it clear that we are both victims **and** agents of our own offense and wounding. We are offended by a situation. We are wounded by a situation. We are victims in the sense that we were really mistreated. It is real. They really should not have done the things that they did. Then again we are agents, too. In other words, we are helping the wound go forward by responding wrongly. We allow the injustice done against us to escalate into a festering wound of bitterness.*

One of the premises of Scripture is this: that an injustice done against us does not produce bitterness in us. The injustice itself does not produce the bitterness, but rather it is the **wrong response** to the injustice that allows the bitterness to happen. We can have pain when somebody mistreats us, but bitterness does not set in until we respond wrongly to it.

4. Nobody can make us bitter by what they do to us. We only become bitter when we respond wrongly. When tempted with bitterness we often focus on forgiving the person who mistreated us—the *enemy on the outside*. James called us to focus on the *enemy on the inside*. Healing for our own heart includes addressing our own negative emotions.

*Nobody can make us bitter by what they do. We only become bitter by responding wrongly to what they do. My point in this session is that when we are tempted with bitterness often our focus is on forgiving the person who mistreated us. So people come forward and receive prayer, and they commit to forgiving the person who mistreated them. That is completely biblical, but here in James 3, James is going a different direction. He is saying, **in addition to** forgiving the people that mistreated you—he is approaching it in a different way, not at all undermining the truth of the need of forgiving the people that mistreat us but he tells us here—focus on the enemy within, not just the enemy without.*

*Do not only focus on forgiving the mistreatment. Deal with the negative emotions you have that contributed to the conflict initially and even contributed to the anguish you had in the midst of the conflict.*

- C. James pointed out two main *causes* of relational conflict—bitter envy and self-seeking (v. 14). He contrasted the two types of *wisdom* (perspective of conflict)—heavenly and earthly (v. 15).

**<sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.** <sup>15</sup>*This wisdom [perspective] does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*

**<sup>16</sup>For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.** (Jas. 3:14-16)

*In this passage, James pointed out two main causes to relational conflict. The two causes are envy and self-seeking. Envy and self-seeking in the person who mistreated you, and envy and self-seeking in the person who was mistreated. Envy and self-seeking in both parties, in different applications, different measures, different expressions. The envy and the self-seeking of the enemy on the outside—the person coming against you—and the enemy on the inside, our own envy and self-seeking that is responding in a wrong way.*

*The next thing James does in this passage is he contrasts two types of wisdom. He calls it heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom. Instead of the word, wisdom, you could put two different perspectives of the conflict. He is saying that if you look at the conflict from a heavenly perspective you are going to respond differently than if you look at it from an earthly perspective.*

*Now the problem today is that the wisdom that comes from our culture is very different than the wisdom that is in the kingdom of God. The wisdom or the expectations or the way that we view conflict, the way our culture teaches us to do it, is very different from how the kingdom does. The two merge together in the Church. They are not supposed to, but it is pretty easy for that to happen. We end up responding out of the values and perspective of our culture. We respond to conflict this way, and we think we are doing the Bible thing.*

*The Bible and James are saying that that is not the wisdom from heaven. That is not the kingdom response, and that is not the kingdom perspective. You got that from the world; you got that from your culture. Those expectations were not at all the expectations the Word of God set forth for your life. Those were ones that you picked up naturally out of the culture. So he contrasts the two different perspectives of the conflict, two different perspectives of how we are to respond.*

*Well, let's go through the passage quickly. In James 3:14, he says if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. He says not to imagine you are beyond it and lie to yourself about the presence of envy and self-seeking in your heart.*

*He says that if you see no envy or self-seeking, then you are boasting, and you esteem yourself too highly. In another translation it says you are arrogant, you are not walking in the truth about what is in your heart, but rather you lie against the truth and minimize it. He says to own it fully, and that will be the pathway to your own freedom in your heart. It will be the beginning of the restoration of that relationship.*

*He says in verse 15 that the perspective that refuses to acknowledge wrong emotions in our own heart does not come from heaven. It is not the biblical perspective. He says this is the earthly perspective.*

*In verse 16, he explains that there is no benefit in denying the truth or in rationalizing the truth or minimizing the truth about your own envy and your own self-seeking. He says that wherever even a residue exists, wherever it exists, even a small measure, in a mature believer, there will be confusion. There will be confusion in the relationship, and there will be confusion in our hearts. The confusion means the opposite of God's order that is peace, love, and humility. He says that you will have the opposite of love and peace in your heart.*

*He says that if you do not own these things, you will end up staying in confusion in your own emotions and that confusion again is the opposite of God's order. It means turmoil and anxiety because of what is happening in the relationship above and beyond what needed to be. Now there is always some pain in a relationship when there is stress in it, but because we are not owning our part of it, then the confusion in us actually escalates and goes to another measure. All we can see is that they mistreated us and that is the end of the story. The Holy Spirit is saying, "No, you can actually minimize some of that confusion in the relationship and even in your own emotions if you would own what I am saying to you here." James was teaching the early church these things.*

- D. ***Unfulfilled expectations***: Offenses in the heart arise from our unfulfilled expectations or desires (Jas. 4:1). We all have some expectations or desires that are outside of God's will or timing. James identified these expectations as having their roots in bitter envy or self-seeking (Jas. 3:14). Varying measures of negative emotions are present in our heart throughout our life.

***<sup>12</sup>Hope deferred [expectation unfulfilled] makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes [expectation fulfilled], it is a tree of life. (Prov. 13:12)***

*Again, instead of the word, desires, causing our conflict, I want to use the words, unfulfilled expectations; those are the same as desires. We all have unfulfilled expectations. Some of those expectations are godly expectations. They will be fulfilled in God's time in God's way, and there is a challenge in waiting for that.*

*We have a whole other set of expectations that are not in the will of God. They are expectations that we gain from our culture, but they are not in the Word of God. We fight for them, but the Bible says to fight for humility in your own heart and fight to grow in a servant spirit; that is what you should be contending for. You are contending for things to be easier and for you to have more comfort and more honor. The Holy Spirit is contending for you and me to grow in humility and in having a servant's heart. These are two different agendas entirely! And we are all the same in this struggle.*

*Humility and a servant heart, which the Bible calls the greatest things, are expressions of love. Beloved, when you and I die and stand before the Lord, all that we are going to bring with us is love or humility and servanthood. So in my marriage, in my relationships, in friendships, working relationships, while I want things to be easy and go well, the Lord wants me to grow in humility and servanthood. I am saying, "Yeah, I will do that next week, next month. I am going to get around to that. I really am, Lord."*

The Lord says, “Well, no, no. My agenda and your agenda are different. You want things easy. I want you growing in humility.” Because when you stand before the Lord on the last day the only thing that you will bring with you on that day is humility and servanthood, or love, whatever you want to call it. We are not going to bring our testimony of an easy life; we are going to bring love. So we would rather put off growing in humility, but the Holy Spirit says, “No, you really do not. You only think you want to put that off. But you will have that forever if you grow in it. You will carry that with you to the age to come.”

So we look at relationships, and we want more out of those relationships than we are getting, but the Lord wants us to grow in love and humility. We say, “Yeah, we know Lord, but later. We will lock into that later. We really will. We want more of these other things right now.” Again, some of those things are godly expectations, while others expectations are from our culture. We do not always know which are which, and so James says to ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Be a man of the Spirit, be a woman of the Spirit, a woman of the kingdom. Respond to the conflict in a biblical way, and you will find liberty in your heart. You will find healthy relationships will begin to grow and be cultivated in a far greater measure.

Well, Solomon talked about these desires that are not fulfilled. In Proverbs 13:12, he addressed this very issue. He called it “hope deferred,” and he said that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Hope deferred, or desires that are unfulfilled, or you can say expectations that are unfulfilled. When we have clear desires that are clear expectations, and they are unfulfilled, our hearts become sick. Sick meaning we have pain in our heart, we have turmoil, we have anxiety. Some of those expectations are godly, and again God will release them in His time and His way, but other expectations are not in the Word of God. Again, they are in our culture, but they are not in the Bible. We fight for them, and we get captured into very negative emotions because we cannot have those things the way that we want them.

Again the Holy Spirit would say that the wisdom from heaven, or the biblical perspective, is to grow in love and humility. We feel like, “Oh Lord, we know that. We agree with that. We get that, but come on, let’s be realistic! We are Westerners. We are twenty-first century Westerners, and there are things we need, and there are things that we want.” Well, the Holy Spirit, you know, is champion wrestler. He is going to win at the end of the day.

James said not to boast against the truth, about these things operating in your heart, because you will have confusion. You will not get free of the confusion on the inside. Beloved, I want to walk liberated on the inside. Even if various people are against me, I can walk liberated in the inside. You can be in the closest relationships and even have injustices done against you, and, though you care about the relationship, you can still have peace on the inside with a free heart. That is what James is talking about.

1. **Envy:** Many offenses and emotional pains are rooted in envy—the expectation of having what another has (their role, honor, money, possessions, abilities, friends, life situation).

Let’s look at some of these expectations. There is bitter envy. He went to the extreme, the **bitter** envy. Not all envy is bitter envy. That is only when it is escalated to a certain level. But there are early stirrings of envy. Envy is an expectation to have what other people have. We look across the way, and we look at this relationship, we look at this status, this position, that gifting, we look at the way their life is working, and we think, “I want that.”

Now, we look at people, and we are to be inspired by their dedication to the Lord, but we are not to be envious or be determined we are going to have the same life situation they have. But we look and determine we are going to have it. You know, “I am going to have that same status. I am going to have that same platform. I am going to have that same life situation.” And that expectation gets locked in our heart. We call it an expectation. The Bible calls it envy. We might think, “Well, you know, it does not seem that bad.”

2. **Self-seeking:** Many offenses are rooted in self-seeking—the *expectation* of gaining a better position, more honor, recognition, or money; of being included or invited to join the team; or having a deeper relationship with someone than they desire.

*Then James goes on and adds another phrase. He says, “self-seeking.” That is having the expectation to gain a better position, more honor, more recognition, etc., when it is an expectation that is outside the will of God. I mean there are biblical reasons that we want more of the blessing of God, we want more of the activity of the Spirit, we want more of what God has freely provided for us on the cross, but we easily confuse some of those things with wanting more of other things that are outside the will of God for us, and we do not always know which are which. That is called self-seeking.*

*Again, it is the man or the woman who says, “I want more out of the relationship than I am getting out of it.” The Bible says, “I want more humility and servanthood in your life during your pilgrimage on the earth.” “Well, Lord, that is good, but let’s be practical.”*

*The Lord says, “No, I will take you on that way of liberty if you will go with Me on it.”*

- E. **Confusion:** This includes broken relationships and the pain and anguish that follow (Jas. 3:16).

*James says in verse 16 that there will be confusion wherever there is envy and self-interest in our heart. Even though the other person mistreated us to the measure where we have envy, again these are expectations that we gain from looking at others or having self-interest. He says that confusion will be lodged in your own emotions, and there will be a certain turmoil, a certain anguish, that actually could be minimized if you would own the truth about what is happening in your own heart.*

- F. **Do not boast and lie against the truth:** This is one of the most important principles in healing relational conflicts, having a good marriage, and building team relationships (workplace, etc.).

*James says, “Do not lie against the truth.” This is one of the most important principles in healing a relational conflict. Each believer in the conflict is to acknowledge the truth of what is happening in their heart. Let’s say there are two believers in a marriage—that is what I like to focus on, but it is bigger than marriage—if both of them are committed to Jesus, one of the most important principles in a healthy relationship is that we do not lie against truth of what is happening in our heart.*

*Again envy is when we have seen what others have, and we want that kind of set up. Self-interest is where we are making demands that are actually outside the will of God but within the confines of our cultural expectations. The media says that we deserve these things, but the Bible does not.*

- G. Many focus on forgiving those who mistreated them, without acknowledging their own desires that contributed to their pain. It is not enough to forgive people who mistreat us. We must address the issues in our heart that allowed our response to mistreatment to escalate to bitterness.

*Now many people focus on forgiving. I have mentioned this already. The problem is that they do not acknowledge the contribution they make to their own pain. They focus on forgiving the person who caused them pain, but they do not focus on acknowledging what they did to cause the pain to continue and to escalate. It is not enough to forgive people. We looked at that in the first three sessions: forgiving people that mistreat us.*

*James says that you do not have the whole story if you allow the mistreatment to escalate to bitterness because you have held on to your own negative emotions, and you have pampered them and fed them, and they are growing stronger in you. James says that you will just stay in confusion, even as a believer who loves Jesus.*

*You stay in the marriage, but you will have a broken heart most of the time with confusion on the inside, lots of turmoil. You really could go a different way in this.*

- H. We naturally seek to rationalize or minimize our desires that come from envy and self-seeking. Some will say, “I am sensitive” or, “I am just broken” or, “I struggle with insecurity and rejection,” but will not acknowledge that some of their negative emotions are sinful and not in God’s will. They have an appearance of humility in acknowledging their brokenness, but come up short of getting free, because they do not acknowledge or repent of their self-seeking desires.

*We all naturally rationalize and minimize our own self-interest. I know I certainly do. We figure out ways to say it is not self-interest. That is, we tell ourselves it is normal to want what we want. It is what “they” are doing that is bad. What I want is normal. We see what they are doing clearly, but it is really easy to rationalize, minimize, or explain away what we want.*

*I have been pastoring for about forty years, and I have heard so much of this, even said it a little bit of it myself. Somebody will say, “Well, you know I am just really sensitive. When they do that, I am just a real sensitive person and I can’t help being hurt.”*

*Another guys says, “Well, I am just really broken, and I cannot help it.”*

*Another person says, “Well, I just struggle with insecurity and rejection, so I need to be treated a different way. You need to pamper my emotional brokenness, and do not touch that emotional brokenness. I am broken. I have admitted it, so I am humble.”*

*Though they have an appearance of humility, they still come up short of getting set free because they do not ever acknowledge what they are bringing to the conflict or even admit to their own emotional confusion. They will not acknowledge that. They will acknowledge they are broken, but James says that you are more than broken, that you have self-interest and it is fueling the pain in you, but you are only blaming the other person. Again this is Marriage 101, but this is Friendship 101 too, and kingdom relationship.*

- I. The Bible teaches that the foundational response to being mistreated is to entrust the results of the conflict to God’s leadership, knowing that He will answer in His way and His timing.

***<sup>23</sup>...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)***

*Now the foundational response to being mistreated in the whole of the Bible, whether Old Testament or New Testament, the foundational response is that we entrust the situation to the Lord and we entrust the Lord with the results of the conflict. The Lord will ultimately break in, in His time. In His way He will intervene, and He will help out. That is the foundational principle, that we trust the Lord that He will intervene in His way.*

*1 Peter 2:23 says that when Jesus was reviled, He entrusted and committed Himself to the Father that the Father would judge righteously. I think this is primary passage in the whole Bible about this topic, although there are many passages like this. In the place of the word, judge, you could put the word, intervene, that the Father would intervene righteously. God would intervene righteously in the right timing to do the right thing. In the timing of God, it may be some years from now. It may be some weeks or months. Who knows? God will intervene. Jesus said, “My Father will intervene. He will judge. He will break in at the right time in the right way. I am trusting Him with that.”*

- J. When someone mistreats us, verbally or by their actions, we are to commit the situation to the Lord as we make our appeals to that person (Mt. 5:23-24; 18:15). We can have peace, knowing that God is watching and will intervene in His way and in His time, as we live before His eyes.

*Though we trust Him to intervene, we still need to make our appeal. See, some people look at that verse and they think, “I trust the Lord to break in.”*

*The Lord says, “I still want you to go make the appeal to the person who is troubling you or the person you have troubled. You still must have that conversation. It is not either/or, but it is both/and. They go together.”*

### **III. EIGHT RESPONSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:17-18)**

- A. James identified eight responses that express heavenly wisdom (biblical perspective) in relational conflicts. These show us the way to heal relationships and to live in freedom with a vibrant heart. (Note: You are not to enable someone to abuse you by coming back to them with an open heart).

***<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. <sup>4:1</sup>Where do wars [quarrels, NAS] and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure [desires or expectations] that war in your members? <sup>2</sup>You lust and do not have...you fight. (Jas. 3:17-4:2)***

*Now we are getting to the really key verse: James 3:17. My prayer is that God would write James 3:17 on our hearts as a spiritual family, on every individual. It is really intense. James outlines eight responses to the conflict. He says that if you have these eight responses, then you are expressing the heavenly wisdom, the biblical perspective. If you have these eight responses, the relationship is going to be on the pathway of healing.*

*Now if the other people do not respond, there is no guarantee the relationship will be healed completely, but these eight responses are the way the relationship gets healed from your point of view. This is what you are to do so your heart will get healed. If you do, if you respond in these eight ways, then your heart will get healed in the process even if the relationship does not fully get healed.*

*Often the relationship is broken, and then we have turmoil on top of the broken relationship. We are paying twice because of some of our responses.*

*Now again James 3:17, I call it Marriage 101. It is the kingdom response. It is like an eight-faceted diamond. It is the kingdom response in conflict. These eight facets are pretty straightforward so we are not going to spend a lot of time on them. They are really not confusing to understand. They are just challenging to walk out.*

*Beloved, your heart will get free by responding in these eight ways. Many relationships will get healed by responding in these eight ways, because if you respond rightly to an injustice, many times the other believer will be inspired by your tenderness and humility towards them and will actually begin to respond in tenderness and humility as well. Even if they do not, your heart can be set free.*

*Again I am not just talking about a faraway relationship. This is how marriage should operate. This is how family members interact, and the most intimate relationships in this way. Now if only one of the two parties is committed to this, a lot of good will happen. If both are committed to this, like in a Christian relationship, you can enter into the full inheritance of your relationship. Well, maybe both of you are Christians, but only one of you is going to respond in a biblical way to the conflict. I tell you a lot of good will happen if one of you responds rightly. Good things happen out of that.*

*He says here in verse 17—again a very searching passage—the wisdom that is from above is first pure. Second, it is peaceable. Third, it is gentle. This wisdom—meaning the biblical perspective of the conflict and the response to it is what it is talking about—fourth, it is willing to yield. Fifth, it is full of mercy. Sixth, it is full of good fruits. Seventh, it is without partiality. Eighth, it is without hypocrisy.*

*In verse 18, James went on to say that the fruit of righteousness, the harvest of righteousness, is going to come forth by the people who sow this seed. This eightfold response is likened unto a seed. He said that if you sow that seed, you are going to find that there is going to be a harvest of righteousness that is going to come forth in due time.*

*I put James 4:1-2 here so you can see that the very next verses are about the relational conflict. In other words, the whole passage is really in context to healing relationships and having the full kingdom benefit or the full kingdom possibility for relationships.*

*I am just going to mention these eight characteristics of heavenly wisdom or the heavenly perspective quickly. They are not confusing; they are just challenging. Even when we are committed to these eight things, we are still going to come up short. I have been committed to these eight things for some years now, and I come up short all of the time in the eight. Because I am committed to them, they are part of my dialogue with the Lord.*

*So when there is an injustice, like somebody intentionally says something that is a lie or is an intentional distortion to undermine me—I have had a bit of that happen over the years—or in just normal relationships when people do not get the thing that they are expecting out of our relationship, and then they are mad at me, whether in family relationships, whatever, all of these, I have set this verse, James 3:17, before me. I say, “Lord, this is what I am committed to.” Again, I do not always walk in it, but because I am committed to it—and that is what I am calling you to be committed to it as many of you are already are—it is part of my dialogue with the Lord.*

*So when the guy intentionally seeks to undermine me, and I retreat before the Lord, one of the main things we talk about is my responding in these eight ways. I am saying, “Lord, but he is lying on purpose!”*

*The Lord says, “Yeah, I know, but still if you do these eight things, there is a chance for the healing of that relationship and blessing.”*

*“Well, I do not want him blessed.”*

*“We are going to need to change that. We need to get you in the right direction here. Your heart will be set free,” the Lord would say to me, “if you will respond in these eight things even if he never, ever responds.”*

*So, if you are committed to these eight, you are in the pathway of healing, and this stays a part of your conversation with the Lord. When there is a conflict in your marriage, this is part of the conversation when you and the Lord talk. It is not just, “Lord, change that woman! I mean, come on, Lord, change her.”*

*Your conversation is, “Lord, I am really not doing these, and I really do not want to right now, but I am committed. So can I do them tomorrow? No, I am going to do it. Ugh! Lord, I would rather just be selfish for another couple of hours.” The dialogue is honest and clear before the Lord, not that I have ever had that dialogue...thank you...that was a joke.*

- B. **Pure:** We are to respond with *pure motives* in seeking the good of others, and *purity of insight* (without distortion) into how even a small residue of envy and self-seeking in us contributed to the conflict. Purity includes acknowledging our negative desires with humility. Having a pure heart doesn't mean that all of our negative desires are gone, but that we are honest about them. This includes taking responsibility for our deficiencies that contributed to the relational conflict.

*The first thing—and again I will just mention them just very briefly. You can read them and they are pretty straightforward—he says, “Be pure,” The first thing is pure. Now pure means having a clear perspective and a clear motive. Pure is the opposite of distortion. Do not be distorted. The pure motive is: I am going to serve*

them, I am going to respond in humility to them, and I am going to do the will of God in the relationship. That is the pure motive.

*The pure perception is: I do not feel like doing that, and I am admitting that my heart is not in it, but I am committing to it anyway. That is what James says. First, it needs to be pure. Lock in to the right motive and to being honest with yourself. Do not have a distorted view. Do not lie against truth. First of all, the first priority he said here is that you are pure in motives, and you are pure about being honest about how you are responding. That is number one.*

- C. **Peaceable:** We are to respond in a peaceable way instead of with accusations, complaints, anger, sarcasm, etc. We are to respond this way even when someone has intentionally undermined, lied about, or mistreated us. It is natural to resist people who do not treat us well, or to speak negatively about them instead of responding peaceably to them in a spirit of goodwill.

*Second, be peaceable. Now I have been peaceable when there is a conflict, and again I want to focus on marriage right now, although not limited to that at all. When you are not being treated in the way you want to be treated, or your spouse or your good friend or teammate is not responding in the right way to you, or they are accusing you, the most natural response is to answer with an accusation, with sarcasm or with complaints. James says, “Do not, do not answer that way!” You can tell them what is wrong, but do it in a peaceable way, with no sarcasm, with sincerity, when your spirit is at peace. You must respond in a peaceable way. That is the second facet of this diamond called a kingdom response to conflict.*

- D. **Gentle:** It is important to maintain a gentle tone in our communication in restoring a relationship. We are to make our appeals in a spirit of gentleness, aware of our own failures and deficiencies.

***<sup>1</sup>If a man is overtaken in any trespass [even mistreating you]...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)***

*Third is to be gentle; have a gentle spirit. The tone of communication in a conflict is one of the most important issues in restoring a relationship. It is important that the tone is gentle. It is not harsh. It is not accusatory. It is calmed down and is not this amped-up kind of environment.*

*I have mentioned this a number of times over the years that my wife and I decided that when we have a conflict we are not going to talk about it until both of us are at peace. That was a decision we made at the very beginning, thirty-seven years ago. If one of us is a little bit agitated, even a little bit, we are going to wait until we are both at peace because we have no chance to heal the relationship or resolve the conflict well unless we are both in peace. So we have to wait some time. I have made a commitment to her. I said that I would wait until we are both at peace and then I promise you that I will bring it up. I will not take it as an escape hatch to avoid the conversation. So it has to be peaceable, and it has to be gentle.*

- E. **Willing to yield:** We are to be willing to yield to the appeal of others to change our attitude and to do things their way, even if it may not be the absolute best way. This speaks of seeking to be accommodating and agreeable, instead of stubborn and resistant to what others want and think.

*Being willing to yield means we are willing to yield to the appeals of others. So they are making an appeal to you. They want your attitude to be different. They want you to do things their way. Well, the problem is their way is not the best way. The Lord might say, “So?” There are a number of best ways, a number of good ways to do something. There are a number of good ways and each one of them has a downside to it. So it is not the best way! That is where humility comes in, because it is not the smartest person who wins. It is the one who loves most who wins in God’s court.*

The Lord would say, “So it is not the best way, and so you do not fully agree with their perception. You need to change your attitude or your way or something. Just do it anyway! It is not a big deal. That is what humility is about.”

Now if doing it the wrong way or the lesser way in your perception hurts a lot of people, then that is different. But if it just kind of disrupts your sensibilities—I just want it better because my way is good, and I feel good because my way is good, and that is just how it is—He is saying, “No, be willing to yield. Let it be less than perfect, and that is where humility comes in to the relationship.” Do not be stubborn. Do not be resistant in the tone of the relationship, but seek to be accommodating. We are not talking about compromising biblical truths. We are talking about seeking to get on their team and to do it their way if at all possible, even if it is a little less optimum in your opinion.

- F. **Full of mercy:** Showing mercy means acting generously towards others. We are to be merciful with the failures and deficiencies of others in relational conflicts. We are not to have a spirit of revenge that seeks to punish the other person for his failures in his relationship with us.

Here is another kingdom response: to be full of mercy. “But Lord, they were intentional in what they did to us. They were intentional to what they did to me, to my family, etc.”

The Lord says, “I want you to cover them. I even want you to seek their good. Do not have a spirit of revenge. Do not try to punish them for it. Let Me take care of that. It is your job to have mercy in your response to them in their failures and their deficiencies.”

1. Being *full* of mercy includes not requiring their perspective of the conflict to be 100% accurate. We seek to hear what they say even if only 10 % is accurate and 90% wrong.
2. A response of mercy covers and overlooks the wrong responses of others (Prov. 19:11). Treating someone with mercy and kindness is not the same as quickly trusting them.

<sup>8</sup> **...for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet. 4:8)**

Peter said that love covers a multitude of sins. Now notice that it is *sins* that are covered by love, not a person, not annoying personality traits. It is not you cover them just when they annoy you with their personality. No, I mean if they actually sinned against you, if they actually mistreated you on purpose. It says, “Love covers it,” meaning, love does not keep the mistreatment as part of the conversation in the relationship year after year after year. Love covers. Love lets it go because that is how the Lord treats us.

3. Mercy triumphs over judgment as our hearts are liberated and the healing process begins, and the people who acted wrongly may be restored to obedience and confidence in God.

<sup>13</sup> **Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:13)**

James went on to say that mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy offered and mercy responded to will triumph over judgment every time. In what way does mercy triumph in a relationship over judgment? Well, when you show mercy, when you offer it, your heart gets liberated, number one. Number two, when you show mercy the healing process of the relationship begins. Number three, if you show mercy, you will actually inspire them to respond in a different way as well, so even they triumph in the mercy that is being offered to them.

Now I want to make a point here. Treating somebody with mercy and kindness is not the same thing as trusting them. Meaning, somebody can violate your trust, and you can be kind, non-sarcastic, non-accusatory, kind, seek their good will, have meaningful interaction with them, but not be trusting all that they are saying or doing until trust is reestablished. Some people mix up being kind and being merciful with trusting, thinking that they are the

same thing as trusting. No, trust is a separate issue, but you can be kind and helpful to people you do not trust. I mean think about it how the Lord is to us. I mean He does not trust all that His people are doing or what they are going to do, but He is extremely kind to them. He calls us to be the same.

- G. **Full of good fruits:** We are to follow through with actions on our intentions to be merciful to our adversaries. Wisdom, like faith, must be expressed by good deeds in our life (Jas. 2:14-17).

*The response that heaven wants, the kingdom response, is full of good fruits. It is not just good intentions, but it has follow-through with actions. It is follow-through. Now our follow-through is not perfect, but when our follow through comes up short, we recommit to follow through. It has good fruit. It has good actions that follow the positive sentiments that we are offering people.*

- H. **Without partiality:** This includes not showing partiality to ourselves or to others who bless us. We must not hold our adversaries to a higher standard of judgment than we hold ourselves.

1. Paul emphasized this in Romans 2:1, warning us not to judge someone for an action while violating the same biblical principle ourselves, though perhaps in a different way.

***<sup>1</sup>...you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Rom. 2:1)***

2. James warned against showing partiality to people who give us favors (Jas 2:1-9).

***<sup>1</sup>My brethren, do not hold the faith...with partiality. <sup>2</sup>For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings...<sup>3</sup>and you...say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there”...<sup>4</sup>have you not shown partiality...and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas. 2:1-4)***

*It is without partiality. That is, we do not have a different standard for evaluating ourselves and those who bless us with good things compared with those who do not bless us. We do not evaluate ourselves and the one group one way, but evaluate the people that bother us in a much harsher way. James says to have the same evaluation. Imagine the guy gave you a million dollars or imagine you are thinking about yourself, and your evaluation is going to be far kinder. He says, “Do not have any partiality. Treat the person who has bothered you with the same mercy and with no partiality whatsoever.”*

- I. **Without hypocrisy:** This speaks of being genuine, sincere, and true to appearances, with no show of pretense to “appear to be kind” in order to gain an advantage. We are not to present ourselves as forgiving and kind to a person, and then later act and speak negatively against that person.

*Then finally the eighth one—we will end with this—is without hypocrisy. Meaning we do not show ourselves to be kind and forgiving in front of them and then put on a show behind their back, talking badly about them or seeking to hinder them or block them or cause things to go negatively for them. James says, “No hypocrisy in it.” When you are looking at them, and you are declaring your goodwill, you need to hold the testimony of your mouth behind their back. You need to determine that you are not going to speak evil against them and you are not going to use your influence to block them in any way because they troubled you in the past. You are going to have no hypocrisy in what you are showing to them. Well, amen and amen!*

- J. James asserted that the eight responses in verse 17 are like a “seed” whose fruit, or harvest, is righteousness. As we sow this “seed,” we will see the growth of righteousness in our life and our relationships. It often takes a while to see the harvest, once we begin responding in the right way.

***<sup>18</sup>Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:18)***

1. ***Those who make peace:*** Jesus promised a blessing to all who consistently seek to restore peace in relationships that are in conflict (Mt. 5:9), including their relationships.
  2. ***Sown in peace:*** We are to respond with a peaceful spirit to those we are in conflict with.
  3. ***Fruit of righteousness:*** You will sometimes inspire others to respond in humility and righteousness as they see your merciful response to them in the midst of a conflict.
- K. If we truly love our friends, we will not simply justify their complaints of mistreatment. We should help them to identify even a small residue of envy or self-seeking in their heart; this helps them in a practical way to grow in righteousness and heal relationships. Some friends offer non-biblical advice, encouraging them to fight for “their rights.”