

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on James 4:1-3 at Victory of the Lamb on June 8, 2014.

Series: Modern Family
Today's Focus: Family Feud

“Align What You Want with God’s Heart”

Last week we began this series Modern Family by seeing how none of us lives in the picture perfect family. There is a gap between the ideal family and the real family situation that we are in. Yet we saw how even though Jesus never compromised on that ideal of the picture perfect family...he also never condemned those who came to him who fell short of it with their dysfunction and sin. We heard how Jesus actually makes it ok to have a real family right now even as he invites us to keep fearlessly pursuing the ideal family. And that’s what we’re going to do today building on last week.

It’s interesting what people think about when it comes to their picture perfect family, isn’t it? I’m guessing



you’ve all seen one of these, right? One of these stick figure family decals for your vehicle? {pic} Lots of people have them. And they’re kind of fun, sometimes really funny. I think sometimes it’s a way to say, “Ok here’s our real family...except this is sort of how we envision our *ideal* real family.” Some people really try and get creative



with them like you’ve got the Star Wars family {pic}. That’s picture perfect for some of you, right?



But then again there are some other stick figure family decals out there too. For example a couple weeks ago I was in the van with my family going to Frame Park in Waukesha when we pulled up alongside an SUV at a stop light and I saw that this SUV next had a decal on the back window that looked like this {pic}. Have any of you seen one like this before? I think this



one’s particularly mean and kind of twisted but there are others too...like this one {pic} maybe meant to be a little more lighthearted.

Now what I don’t know is how many people are trying to be funny or how many people are just hurting and this is how it comes out for them because here’s what I realize. When it comes to family, there are as many different, powerful emotions swirling around in people as there are different families. Sometimes that emotion is deep hurt. Pain. Sometimes it’s anger that comes from deep pain. And while you or I may not take it out in the form of a chainsaw wielding stick figure decal... I do believe there is something here that we all have in common.

We all know how to have a family fight. Again none of us lives in the picture perfect family. And like we discovered last week, we don’t even find the picture perfect family in the Bible. Instead we find a lot of examples of...you guessed it—family conflict.

Take a guy like King David of Israel for example. I mean here’s a guy whom God used to actually write part of the Bible. You might know him as the guy who wrote the 23rd Psalm. “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.” Have you heard that one? It’s on just about everyone’s top 10 list of favorite Bible verses. But did you know that the very first civil war in the nation of Israel was instigated by David’s son Absalom because he was

such a bad father? It was family conflict between David and his own son and it led to thousands of people being killed because they weren't a picture perfect family. In fact they weren't even a very good family.

So as we talk about the modern family with all the complexities that go along with the modern family sometimes, it's not always all that modern. What we see when we open up the Bible is a lot of dysfunctional family life, a lot of pain and hurt just like we see today. We don't find the picture perfect family. Instead what we find in the Bible are picture perfect principles that our gracious God gives us. Learning these principles helps us see what an ideal family looks so that we can **align what we want with His heart**. Then we can have hope in dealing with family conflict.

That's why today we're going to look at some of those principles. We're going to turn to a book of the Bible today written by a guy named James. Now the interesting about James is that he was actually the younger brother, the half-brother of Jesus. So he knew Jesus growing up. I mean you talk about family conflict... "Hey, why can't you be more like your older brother, James?" "What, you think you're perfect or something, Jesus?" Now of course I don't know what kind of family conflict there might have been there. But James gives us profound relational insight in dealing with family conflict. Here's what he says in chapter 4:1. *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* And by the way, the Greek word James uses for "fights" is the same word used elsewhere for "wars." In other words this is serious stuff. There are casualties in a war.

Now if I were brave (or foolish!), I'd say, "Take a minute or two right now and to turn to the person who came to church with you today and ask them, "What causes fights and quarrels among us?" But I don't want you to do that because you know what I think might happen? Fights and quarrels would break all over the theater! "Well I'll tell you what causes fights and quarrels among us...you do! If you didn't always forget to pay the credit card bills...and if you would just put your dirty dishes into the dish washer once in a while instead of letting them pile up in the sink...and if you just do this and not do that on a consistent basis... it's you who causes fights and quarrels." Yikes, right? The reason why this would happen is because when we try to identify the source of conflict in the family, our default setting is to look outside of ourselves. It's not me, it's you. But here's what happens when you try and blame others for what's going on in your conflict.

1) Blame gives away CONTROL of your happiness. See, as soon as I say, "If you would just behave right then I would be happy, but since you're not behaving right, I'm not happy" ... Here's what you're saying, "Here is my happiness. I'm going to hand it over to you. When your behavior lines up with my expectations that's when you hand it over back to me." Isn't that a wonderful idea? How many of you would like to hand over control of your happiness to someone you're in conflict with? But that's what you do every single time you blame someone for what is going on in your family conflict. "Here's my happiness. Give it back to me when you're ready." The problem is this also completely misses the real cause of fighting and quarreling.

James says, *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* And maybe you're thinking, "Well that's kind of a simplistic question, James, because for every person there's a different cause." And James says, "Not really. And the fact you don't recognize this is the reason you keep getting caught up in family conflict." So here's what it is. *Don't they (your fights and quarrels) come from your desires that battle within you?* To which you want to say, "No, that's not true. They come from *them*! They come from *him*. They come from *her*." James says, "No they don't." James says that inside of you, you have some conflicting desires that are battling it out. So here's my second point today...

2) You WANT/DESIRE something but don't get it. There is something that you want and because you are not getting what it is that you want out of your family members it is causing fights and quarrels among you. That is the source of family conflict.

Now I know what some of you want to say, "But you don't understand, Pastor Ben. It's not that I want it, it's that I deserve it." Or "He promised!" Or, "She agreed to it." Ok granted. This doesn't account for everything. But don't just take the easy way out. Underneath everything you deserve and everything you were promised, there is still this fact: you are not getting something that you want. Whether it's legitimate. Whether it's not. Whether it's fair. Whether it's not. That is a root of the conflict you experience. And James says you're not resolving it in the right way.

He says, *2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.* He says, "You want something, and you don't have it, so you kill to try and get it." Now he's not talking about using a gun or a knife. He's not talking about first degree homicide. He's talking about the 5th commandment. *You shall not murder.* And God's word is real clear about this. You can murder a relationship by holding a grudge against another person. You can murder a relationship with spiteful words or a sarcastic tone. Your tongue is a powerful weapon of war. This is something James talks about in chapter 3 right before our verses today.

Listen to what he says: *Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:5b-6).* "Wow, thanks James for that encouragement"...but he's right! Who of you hasn't experienced this where what was maybe a perfectly fine moment or what you thought was a perfectly good relationship was destroyed because of one little sarcastic quip or one little word spoken with spite because it elicited a response in kind which took the conflict up another notch and another notch and another notch. A spark became a fire. The relationship is what burned down. Other people got singed.

And if James were writing today he might very well have said it like this: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire *by a single text message, or a single email, a single Facebook comment, or a single tweet.*" And I'm guilty of this too. Which is why, by the way, I have a personal rule that if it involves emotions...I will try not to say it via email. I will try and always set up a time to talk face to face in as loving a way as I can after I've had a chance to think about it instead of firing off an emotionally charged text message or email in the heat of the moment. You see just because you hit send in a huff does not make it right. It is not a valid excuse to say, "But I just had to do it to feel better. I just needed to vent." No, it was a text message set on fire by hell. And some of you have sent them to your spouse, to your pastor, to your siblings, to your friends. Stop blaming others. You need to own that sin and repent of it. *2 You desire but do not have, so you kill* James says. **You want something and you don't get it.**

Now before you feel like there is no hope here, I want you to imagine what might happen if, starting today, you decided -- "Whenever I'm in family conflict instead of hitting send I'm going to hit pause and before I say or do anything I'm going to ask 'What is it that I'm lacking that I want to get out of that person?'" Or imagine what might happen if as an argument starts to heat up you decided you would go first and say, "I know what the problem is here. I'm not getting what I want." You know what would happen? The temperature of the argument would start to go down. The anger in the room would start to deflate. Because as soon as you own even a sliver

of the conflict, now you can't just blame the other person. Imagine if we would just stop in the middle of the conflict and recognize, "I'm not getting what I want and it's leading me to kill the relationship."

Now here's the great thing. James leads us to what the real solution is. *You do not have* (what you want) *because you do not ask God*. Has it occurred to you that you might be asking the wrong person for what you want? Has it occurred to you that before you try and squeeze what you want out of family members, that you could take your desire, your need to God? What if what you want out of your family is something they can't even give you? What if you're just trying to squeeze something out of your family that they can't give you and they're trying to squeeze something out of you that you can't give them? **3) ASK God to align what you want with His heart for your family.**

James says, "Time out. Try taking your request to God and ask him to meet your desires instead of one another." Friends, what is it ultimately that is deep in our souls that we want and so we try and squeeze it out of others? Isn't it often the case that what we want is someone who will unconditionally accept us? Someone who will unconditionally love us? Someone who will always have time to listen to us and perfectly empathize with us? Someone who knows us inside and out and cares about every single detail of our lives? James would say, "Maybe you're trying to squeeze out of your family members things that only God can give or things that God can give better and bigger than your family!"

Now some of you may know that there's a chapter in the Bible known as the love chapter—1 Corinthians 13. It says things like this. *4 Love is patient, love is kind... 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs...7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Well one way to read these verses is to read them and recognize, "Wow there is such a huge gap right now between the real and the ideal when it comes to the family relationships in my life and I am responsible for that gap." And that's not necessarily a wrong way to read them. And yet that alone is incomplete if you don't also see the other way God wants us to read those words and that is like this: "Yes, this here is picture perfect love which I see fully realized in only one person who has ever walked this earth, only one person who has ever measured up to this ideal, and that is in God's Son one and only Son, my Savior Jesus Christ whose love for me is like this."

See friends, who can give you better acceptance than Jesus can? Who can be more patient with you than Jesus can? He is the One who says that God himself is now your dear Father in heaven who cares about you so much that he knows the very number of hairs on your head. He is the One who over and over again in his word says, "I am not here to condemn you but to save you." He is the One who fulfills this great and precious promise even today as he bids you to draw near one another as a church family and receive the sacramental meal that he serves in which he says, "Here is my body and blood. This is how far I was willing to go for you because I love you. This is for you for the forgiveness of all your sins."

Well friends, who is that forgiveness that Jesus offers for? It's for those who first know how much they need it! For those who know that they have broken not only their relationships with other people here on earth but also their relationship with God in heaven... for those who know that it can only be restored through Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it possible to celebrate a restored relationship with God. Jesus makes it possible to even begin to see our family relationships restored as we live our lives in the light of his Easter victory and his grace.

So in light of his forgiveness for us, what if before we go marching down the hallway or leaving the mean note or firing off the text message we just paused and got down on our knees and said, “Dear God, the reason why I’m so upset is because there is something I want and I’m not getting it and I’m trying to squeeze it out of my family members and so I’m going to bring it to you. Here’s what I want. I want ____?” James says, “What if you brought what you want to the God who can actually do something about it, who loves you, who made you part of his family through faith in Jesus Christ?” Take what you want to God before you take it out on your family. Now here’s the last thing James says to us today...

3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. In other words don’t expect God to give you what you want if in the end it’s still all about you. You see an amazing thing happens when you open up your soul and just lay it out there before God. When you pray out loud to God, you hear yourself talking, and suddenly a lot of times you realize what things you want that aren’t aligned with God’s heart. When you have to say it out loud sometimes you hear how selfish your desires are and so James says, “Pray it out and you’ll discover your own motives and God’s not going to just give you things that are all about you because he loves you too much.” Because God says, “You know my child, I’m not going to do that for you which would ultimately make your life a train wreck and hurt you. I love you too much.” But God will begin to realign our hearts and he will begin to restore us. So let’s ask God to do that today. Let’s ask him to align what we want with his heart.

Heavenly Father, I know that this wasn’t easy for us all to hear today. It wasn’t easy for me to preach either. Because I know that for me and for some of us here listening today this has been a big wake up call. And what is true for all of us today is that there are some things we want, and we don’t get them. And we are tempted to try and squeeze those things out of our family members instead of taking them to you. So show us those things in our wants that we want with selfish or improper motives. Instead align our prayers and what we want with what is on your heart and what you know is best for us and for our families. Open us up to the truth that all things are possible with you and help us not to hide our sins but to bring them to Jesus through whom we have your unconditional acceptance, your unconditional forgiveness, and your permanent love. Finally, fill us with your Spirit today that we might go home and this week begin to apply with wisdom what we have learned today how to deal with family conflict. We glorify you and we praise your holy name today through Jesus our Savior. Amen.