

Healing Contentious Relationships

Overcoming the Power of Pride and Strife

Thomas Parr



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Healing Contentious Relationships

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Introduction

“By pride comes nothing but strife” (Prov. 13:10). When you think about it, this statement from Proverbs is quite dogmatic. Some people interpret it as saying that the only source of contention is pride. Others understand it as saying that pride’s only product is contention. Either way, the verse links pride and strife very closely. The bottom line is that if you walk into a room and encounter bad feeling and angry words between people, ungodly pride is there. Arrogance and quarreling go hand in hand.

Do you have contention and strife in your friendships, family life, or church life? Are you willing to accept that it is because of ungodly pride? You might think it is acceptable to have contention due to differences over doctrine and practice, but this is not so. It is godly to affirm doctrinal positions and to seek to live godly lives, but it is not godly to be contentious over these things—“a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all” (2 Tim. 2:24). *Contention* refers to strife, quarrels, and arguments. To love it is to love sin (Prov. 17:19). There is never an excuse to be harsh or cruel with one’s attitudes, words, and actions, and people who claim the right to do so are arguing for sin. It is crucial to accept these absolutistic

and zero-tolerance statements about contention. To live a life of peace and joy, we must take a strong stand against strife. We must want to “serve the LORD with gladness” (Ps. 100:2). Thank God this is what He wants for us!

In 2019 I had the opportunity to support a friend by going to two court hearings. I spent a few hours sitting in courtrooms and watching several cases come before the judges while I waited for my friend’s case to come up. As the hours ticked by, I noticed that many if not most of the cases involved domestic abuse or violence. As a pastor, I’ve known couples over the years whose marriages and families were suffering due to anger and strife in the home. Despite trying to help, I’ve often felt very ineffective and have found myself many times fervently wishing that people would gain peace in their lives through the power of the Spirit and the Word of God. For many years I have heard from both religious and secular sources that domestic abuse is a problem of epidemic proportions in our nation. But while I was watching couple after couple stand before the judges in those hearings, it struck me that I was seeing in a very short space of time firsthand evidence of how widespread the problem is. I wanted to distance myself from the abusive men who stood, seemingly remorseful, before skeptical judges. But I realized that people who want to avoid strife must not merely avoid bad examples but must admit their own tendency to sin, and I realized that this applied to me too. We may not have traveled down the path of strife as far as others have, but we all carry with us a sinful nature, and we all fail, to some degree, at being loving with our words (James 3:2). Every one of us must continually seek God anew for empowerment over sin. This book was written to help us do so by providing insight into

a passage that deals directly with the problem of strife. Christ has wondrously provided God's church with the Word and the Spirit in order for Christians to overcome sin (Ps. 119:11; Gal. 5:16). May your study of James 4 be soul-satisfying and sin-killing!

James 4 is an exposé of the pride, covetousness, and unbelief that inevitably lead to contention. In this wonderfully helpful chapter, James diagnoses where quarreling and fighting come from, and he provides essential help for having a life of peace. What people need to gain power over sin is the Word of God in a Spirit-filled heart. Therefore, this book jumps right into engaging with the text of James to get quickly to its riches even while continually pointing the reader to the gospel. The study questions at the end of each chapter are provided in the hopes that they will assist you in further meditation on James's thoughts (Ps. 1:2), and the appendix contains a list of Scripture passages for memorization (Col. 3:16).

James's chapter is *intensely practical and experiential*. It deals with the causes of strife, the patterns of it, and the solutions to it. In a world in which so many relationships are degenerating due to strife, the chapter is a much-needed help. It is also *marvelously hopeful* because it asserts that God's gracious power in Christ is given to believers who come to Him humbly and in repentance. The chapter is also *penetrating and insightful*, for it explores various ways sinful pride manifests itself. The reader can see how the disease of pride shows itself in ways other than relational strife, which allows pride to be opposed on multiple fronts, exposed wherever its Hydra heads arise, and firmly quelled by the power of the Spirit.

CHAPTER 1



The Cause and Pattern of Strife

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 discusses three things in these opening verses. First, what causes strife? Who is to blame for it? His answer—that strife comes from our own hearts—is obvious but has massive ramifications when it is accepted and believed. Second, he shows the pattern of strife, which helpfully reveals the telltale signs that bring it about. Knowing the pattern is helpful because it allows the Christian to identify situations that bring contention out of one's heart. Third, he answers the question of why our desires go unfulfilled, and he pinpoints problems with our prayer lives and our view of God. These verses are remarkably applicational and experiential.

The Cause of Strife

James starts his chapter by teaching us an important principle—we must not look primarily at external causes when trying to understand quarreling and fighting. There are indeed external factors, but these are not the primary reasons for fighting, and if we are to get to the bottom of what causes strife, we must look at heart issues. As Jesus taught, it is from the heart that evil things come (Mark 7:21–22). Warring outside of us comes from warring desires within us (James 4:1).

If a married couple is fighting a lot, for example, it is very easy to think that the strife is happening because there is not enough money, or she is not submissive enough, or he is too controlling. Couples often focus on such circumstantial causes as the main reasons for the strife in their marriages. But James says we must look deeper; we must look at the heart.

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” James locates the problem in our hearts. The word *lust* (“desires for pleasure”) often conjures up the basest sorts of desires in our minds, but the Greek word doesn’t demand that we think in terms of illicit sexual desire. The word can simply mean *desire*. James is saying that quarreling comes from our desires, our wants. Ultimately, we fight because we want things.

Recognizing that strife comes from desire ties our sinful quarreling back to ourselves rather than our circumstances. It blames us, not things around us. When we admit, “Yes, I yelled because I wanted something, and I was afraid I wasn’t going to get it,” we expose our sin for the base, lowly thing that it really is, and we see ourselves as the cause of it. We’re not pointing

fingers at others anymore but at ourselves. We're saying, "I am at fault. This sin came out of my own heart."

Quarrels come from us. We fight because we let something we want become so important that we are willing to sin over it. In other words, we pridefully exalt our desires over God's law. Admitting this means that we are confessing our sin (1 John 1:9). To receive forgiveness, we must not blame other people, things, or circumstances. We need to own our sin. We need to admit that we are the cause of it.

People have all sorts of justifications for why they cause strife in relationships or in the church. "He doesn't enjoy the same things as he used to." "He doesn't talk anymore." "She is always complaining." "She is never satisfied." "The church seems lifeless." Many of these external factors can be (and are) genuine problems. But how we respond to the problems is what is at issue. When a wife wants her husband to talk with her so much that she resorts to insulting him when he doesn't do so, she has caused strife because of her desires. She might claim that it's his silent treatment that is the problem, but that is avoiding her own heart issue. He may need to restart communication, but the bottom line is that the wife indulged in abusive speech because she wants him to talk. On that occasion, her desires caused strife. A husband who yells at his wife because she expresses discontent needs to recognize the same thing. Yes, she should be content, but it is his desire for peace that caused him to use abusive speech. Blaming her for provoking him ignores the heart issue of his own sin. He yelled for the simple reason that he wanted something and wasn't getting it. There's something very infantile about the root causes of sin—we sin because we want things.

The same pattern happens in church life. A church member may look at the lack of evangelistic zeal in the church and begin complaining to others in a very uncompassionate way, grumbling about “hypocrites in the church,” assuming a position of spiritual superiority over the “sad sacks in the pews,” and spreading contention. Does the church lack something in the area of evangelism? Certainly it does. But such critics aren’t helping the situation by using the problem as an opportunity to be demeaning. The fact of the matter is that this situation is similar to the first two. The person who is causing strife wants to see others evangelize, and that desire has caused him to use abusive speech. James is right—we quarrel because we want things. The things we want might be good, but our wrong reactions when we do not get them show a heart that is committed to self rather than to God.

All sins can be boiled down to pride, covetousness, and unbelief. These master sins are three facets of the same dark gem, and James focuses on covetousness, which is simply wanting something so much that you are willing to sin against God for it. Such excessive desire is by nature faithless because it doesn’t trust God as the provider of the things we want. And such desire is also self-exalting because it puts self before God. We cause strife because we pridefully exalt our own desires and do not trust God for them.

The right response to James’s point is simply to accept the fact of the matter. We must look at our hearts when we try to place blame for strife. We are at fault when we speak and act in harsh, unkind ways. We wanted something and chose to fight about it. The blame is on us. As the Puritan Thomas Manton said quite bluntly, we carry an enemy in our own hearts who

defaces the beauty of the soul, disturbs its order, and enslaves its will.¹ We must accept responsibility; we cause strife because of our inward desires that war within us. We must accept James's point and simply point the finger at ourselves. "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7).

The Pattern of Strife

Now that James has shown us that the problem is undoubtedly with us, he proceeds to make the threefold pattern of strife quite clear. It is important to pick up on patterns because it helps us to be alert to situations in which we might be tempted. The threefold pattern is simple: We desire, we do not receive what we desire, and therefore we cause strife (James 4:2). If we received what we wanted all the time, we would not fight. It is when desires go unfulfilled that the idolatrous heart of man rises up in protest, resorting to abusive speech and causing contention. The moment we feel disappointment at unfulfilled desires, we must be on our guard, for conditions are favorable for temptation. Picking up on the pattern allows us to "feel it in our bones" when those conditions are favorable. Thus, we can be on our guard. It is like knowing rain is coming when the sky darkens with clouds.

James uses colorful language to describe this pattern. He says that not receiving what you desire causes you to murder. That's extreme language to say the least, and you might dismiss the idea on the face of it, since thankfully you've never killed anyone. But James is alluding to Jesus's words in the Sermon

1. Adapted from Thomas Manton, *James* (1693; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 327.

on the Mount, in which He linked sinful anger to murder (Matt. 5:21–22). He says that anger leads to murder, and those who indulge in it are liable to eternal judgment. It is not that anger is just as sinful as murder; that would be an unbalanced conclusion, and neither Jesus nor James taught this. But sinful anger is terrible and will receive God’s judgment; it needs to be exposed and forsaken. In order to highlight its evil, James links our anger to the extremity to which anger can lead. We need to sense anger as a hateful thing and a step toward heinous evil. We should sense it as the serious danger that it is. When tempted to be angry, we should feel as if we’re about to step on a venomous snake.

The pattern is clear—when we desire something but do not obtain it, we become angry and cause strife. James’s teaching here is so blunt that we might miss its implications. The pattern shows us something we noted earlier but in an even starker way. We cause strife due to our covetousness and overweening pride, but people who cause strife often blame the wrong thing. They won’t own their sin; instead, they blame the circumstance that brought out their wrong words and behavior. How many times have you heard someone say, “Yeah, but he provoked me!” or “She cause me to stumble into sin!” It may be true that there was stumbling and provocation, but when people sin they simply need to own up to their pride and covetousness rather than focus on circumstances outside themselves.

It is crucial to see the difference between circumstantial and efficient causes. The efficient cause of an action is the real cause of it; a circumstantial cause just provides the setting in which the efficient cause manifests itself. The Puritan Thomas Goodwin used an illustration that is a bit earthy but quite helpful.

He said that a dung heap smells worse when the sun rises and heats it up. What is the cause of the worse smell? The sun's rising is indeed a cause, but it is not the efficient cause, only the circumstantial cause. The efficient cause of the worse smell (you might say the culpable cause of it) is the material in the heap. The sun was merely the circumstance that brought it out; the sun cannot be held to blame for the smell. The stink is in the heap, and so is the blame for it. It is foolish to raise your fist to the sun as if it were culpable for the heap's stench. The problem is not in the sun but in the heap.²

When we sin we often try to blame the circumstantial cause. We blame the thing that brought out our sin while we ignore the real cause of it—our pride, covetousness, and unbelief. We raise our fist at the circumstances that made conditions favorable for sin when actually the stink is in the heap. Yes, circumstances were conducive for sin, but circumstances don't commit evil. We're to blame for our sin. I am to blame for mine. You are to blame for yours.

Consider the case of a church librarian who stirs up strife without really being aware of her sin. She has a good desire; she wants to promote reading, so she carefully selects books to add to the church library. The selection of books starts growing nicely. But despite all her efforts, very few people check out books. Few people even visit the library room. The librarian begins voicing derogatory thoughts about people and complaining bitterly. Someone confronts her about her sinful words, and she blames the nonreading people; but their reading problems

2. See Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 10:60.

are the circumstantial cause of her cruel speech. The culpable cause for her sin is herself, and for her to mention the nonreaders is to shift blame. Yes, they should read, but their lack of interest is not the culpable cause for the librarian's harsh words.

It may be difficult to relate to a story about an irritated librarian. But notice the James 4 pattern in the case, a pattern that we undoubtedly share. She wanted something that happened to be good. But when circumstances didn't turn out to fulfill her good desire, she spoke words that were hurtful and insulting. Her unfulfilled desires led to derogatory speech that stirred up contention. She quarreled because she wanted something and didn't get it. She might defend herself and say, "Well, I was provoked by these ignoramuses in the church," but that uses insulting language to blame the circumstantial cause. Her sin was caused by her ungodly response to her unfulfilled desire. Can you see yourself in this?

Consider the case of a homeschool family. The oldest child is getting serious about school, and the parents are happy to see it. But along with the child's newfound ambitions comes a whole new passel of problems. The younger children in the home are still just as rambunctious as ever. The oldest is sitting in his room trying to study algebra while the other children are making a ruckus for the tenth time in an hour. The oldest child desires quiet study, but his younger siblings aren't giving him what he wants. His anger is riled up and he breaks out in unkind words. He desires something good, but his idolatry is exposed when it is revealed he wants quiet more than he wants kindness. Yes, the smaller children should be quiet. Yes, the parents should create an environment that is conducive to academic pursuits. But circumstances aren't the direct cause of

the oldest child's sin. He is speaking hard words because he isn't getting what he wants. Yet it is so easy to blame the circumstances that brought the sin rather than the heart that really caused it and is guilty for it.

Sometimes God allows us to be placed in trying circumstances so that we can see our pride and idolatry. We must not blame God or the circumstances when we fail. The circumstances simply bring out our idolatry and our commitment to self. Our hearts are the direct cause of our sin. If our hearts weren't bad, we would not be so tempted by trying circumstances. It is actually crucial to our spiritual health to simply look at ourselves and let the blame for our sin fall there. If we make excuses and point fingers, we avoid the conviction that drives us to Christ. We must let our failure in trying circumstances reveal our heart so that we cry out to God for grace and so the Spirit will transform us more into the image of Christ.

Recognize that your bad behavior stems from your bad heart. This is the fundamental place from which James launches his discussion of healing relational strife. It is where we need to start if we want to heal relationships. Own your sin and the sinful heart that produces it. Do not shift responsibility or blame others, but say with the publican, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The publican's language is actually "me, *the sinner*." It is the verbal equivalent of a pointed finger, but he is pointing it at himself and not blaming his circumstances or other people. This is in contrast to the Pharisee who compares himself (favorably) with others (Luke 18:11).

Let's be clear about the pattern that leads to strife. We want things, often good things, but when in God's good providence we do not get what we want, we are tempted to desire those

things more than we want joy in Christ and sweet obedience to Him. If our heart is more committed to self than to God, strife will result as we protest and wrangle to try to gain our desires.

Why Our Desires Go Unfulfilled

“Yes, OK, I sinned. I should not have become angry when my desire was unmet. I admit I was idolatrous, but boy was I in a hard circumstance! I mean, the Bible even says that ‘hope deferred makes the heart sick.’ Can’t you have a little compassion? How would you fare if you were put into such hot water?”

This might be a response of someone who recognizes his sin but also sees how painful and disappointing unfulfilled desires can be, how hard circumstances can become. Responses like this show willingness to admit sin, but they also make a point: it is normal to desire things and to be extremely disappointed when our desires go unfulfilled. I think we can all relate to the objection, “C’mon, have a little compassion!” It is a point well taken, though not an excuse for sin.

It is undoubtedly true that “hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). Unmet desires can be and often are painful. Of course, there is no excuse for abusive speech and contention. No unfulfilled desire justifies cruelty, angry outbursts, or insults. If we sin in these ways, we must simply own our sin (and our sinful hearts) and seek forgiveness and empowerment in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what James wants us to do when we fall into causing strife.

But James also addresses how to deal with the unfulfilled desires themselves: “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 4:2–3). In this

statement there is a marvelous underlying presupposition—a view of God as generous and wanting to give that is mirrored in many other texts of Scripture. God wants to fill you with good things (Ps. 103:5). He richly gives you all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). He wants you to experience goodness and mercy all your days (Ps. 23:6). God is generous and wants to delight our hearts. Of course, this is not a prosperity gospel that denies there will be suffering in this life (Mark 10:30; John 16:33). But James is identifying why our desires go unfulfilled (which he says is a problem with our prayers), and therefore he is clearly encouraging believers to seek God for their desires: “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

After making the initial point that strife comes from us and that we ought to own the sins we cause, it is surprising that James does not keep convicting us or immediately give us solutions to strife. Instead he assures us that God wants to fulfill our (good) desires, even ones that we cause strife over. That is remarkable; he offers gospel before bringing law. He wants us to realize that God is caring and openhanded. He’s telling us that the lack we experience is not ideal and that we ought to pray to God about it. We shouldn’t sin because of unfulfilled desires, but God does want us to address these by seeking everything from His kind heart. Believing the good news that God is generous and large-hearted is fundamental to relaxing and trusting Him and praying to Him, not to mention being a peacemaker with others.

James tells us two things about how to deal with unfulfilled desires. We must first seek our desires from God Himself, through prayer. Second, we must seek our desires with pure motives, putting God first. If we fail in these two things, we

sin against God. We exclude God as provider, which is a sign we don't trust Him; and wanting things just to consume on our own lusts shows that we do not acknowledge Him as chief good in our lives. Living independently from God (faithlessness) and loving pleasure more than we love Him (covetousness) are two fatal errors. James is helping us see how to seek joy in this world hand in hand with God. He is showing us how to avoid turning everything we want into an idol that we'll wrangle and create strife over; he's showing us how to honor God as we roam His good earth delighting in His good things. Nothing is easier for fallen people than to love the gifts but ignore the giver. Let's look closer at James's two points about how to deal with our unfulfilled desires.

First, we must seek fulfillment of our desires from God Himself, not independently from Him. "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). He's talking about living by faith, asking God to meet the need you feel so poignantly; he's talking about prayer and how our painful lack comes from our prayerlessness. God is generous, ready to provide for our real needs and legitimate desires, but He wants to be entreated for them (Matt. 7:7). God wants us to come to Him as our provider and to seek everything at His hand. In fact, God makes prayer necessary; if prayer is lacking, God's supply stops.

Earlier in the book, James said that God is the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes (James 1:17). The objective reality is that everything we have comes from the generous God who constantly showers us with goodness. But God wants us to acknowledge this reality by actively seeking Him for everything. Doing so is to subjectively live according to the objective reality of who God is as the fountain

of every blessing. It is a practical confession of faith in God as the living God, the One with whom we have to do, the provider and preserver of all things. James is saying that if you ask, you will have, because God loves to hear His children pray and loves to provide for their needs. God is generous, so we should come to Him as the generous giver He is. Doing so honors God as He has revealed Himself to be.

Yet we do not have because we do not come and seek all things from Him. John Calvin, echoing James, shows how crucial it is to have the right view of God as magnanimous and big-hearted, not stingy:

It will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him.... Until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service.³

Second, James tells us that we must pray with a pure heart: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3). He seems to be ready to answer an objection, such as, “Yes, I did pray, but God didn’t provide for my need.” Aside from the fact that God sometimes tells us to wait, James is saying that sometimes we want things and even pray for them without the glory of God or the good of His people in mind; rather, we are focusing only

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.2.1.

or primarily on ourselves and our own desires. In other words, we don't receive what we want because our motives are not pure. We must repent and come to God with a pure heart, with our priorities straight and our motives committed to honoring God first and foremost.

There is a reason that our prayers must be properly motivated if they are to receive a positive answer—God is greatest and most glorious and therefore must be first in our lives. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” It answers, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Paul says we should make it our goal to glorify God in all our actions (1 Cor. 10:31) and that God created everything for His own pleasure and honor and glory: “All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16). Once again, there is an objective, theological reality we must subjectively reflect in our experience. The objective reality is that God made us primarily for His glory, honor, and pleasure. Seeking God primarily for ourselves subverts that. It puts self above God and is fundamentally idolatrous. Putting God first, in His rightful place, is what getting our priorities straight means. Unless we can be sure we are putting God first, how can we know we are serving God at all?

When we pray just so we can get what we want, we must know God doesn't listen to the idolatrous. He doesn't coddle the selfish. He doesn't encourage narcissism. He doesn't feed our fallen natures. He made us for Himself; we must not live for ourselves. Our sinful natures subvert the God-honoring purpose for our existence and seek to place ourselves in God's rightful place. He will not relate with those who are so diametrically opposed to His purposes. “If I regard iniquity in

my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Ps. 66:18). As Calvin put it, we must not attempt to “make God the minister of [our] own lusts.”⁴ Perhaps you need to fall down on your face before God and confess your self-centered lifestyle, pleading with Him to renew a right spirit within you (Ps. 51:10). It is a wondrous testimony to God’s grace that He receives repentant sinners who flee to Christ humbly and broken over their sin.

Ask yourself some questions: “Do I really believe God is generous?” “Do I seek Him to have my needs met, or do I have an independent attitude?” “Do I want what I want primarily for myself, or is the orientation of my life one that seeks the glory of God first, so that my desires are primarily about God and promoting His interests?”

In short, James says that our lack, the lack over which we can cause strife, comes from two things: (1) a lack of faith in the generous God, which leads us to fail to seek all things from His hand, and (2) a covetousness that leads us to make even our prayer life about ourselves. Again, this boils down to pride, covetousness, and unbelief. The same things that cause us to mistreat people cause us to mistreat God in prayer. It is of course wrong to say that every unanswered prayer is the result of sin on the part of the one praying, and James isn’t making that claim. After all, God does tell us to wait, but James is correct to pinpoint our fallen natures and their tendency to exalt self over God.

One of the most beautiful things about these two points is to consider them in their context. Instead of going after us

4. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 22, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 330.

solely to rebuke us and bring us under conviction of sin, James presents a view of God as generous, giving, and large-hearted, wanting to give but holding back because of our unbelief and base greed. Yet by putting these verses here, God shows us the way to blessing and satisfied desires. Ultimately James is implying that God wants us to be happy! But not at the expense of godliness. To top it off, the marvelous thing about Christ's salvation is that both godliness and eternal happiness are ideals that will be fully realized in heaven. Man's sin, my sin, your sin, will not defeat God's purpose of everlasting joy.

Study Questions

1. If we are to get to the bottom of the cause of strife, we must look at _____ issues. How does Mark 7:21–22 teach this idea?
2. How are pride, covetousness, and unbelief related as causes of sin?
3. Can our desires for *good* things end up being causes of sin? How can this be?
4. We fight because we let something we _____ become so important that we are willing to _____ because of it.
5. What desires do you have that you might be tempted to create strife over?

6. What is the threefold pattern of strife?
7. What is the difference between a circumstantial cause and an efficient cause? How does Thomas Goodwin illustrate the difference?
8. What is the similarity between the irritated librarian and the oldest child in the homeschool family?
9. Can you think of a time when you blamed circumstances for your sinful response to them?
10. How should we respond when we fail in trying circumstances? How does Luke 18:13 help us see how to respond?
11. What is James's underlying assumption about God when he says we do not have because we do not ask? See 1 Timothy 6:17 and Psalm 103:5.
12. Why should we seek everything from God's hand rather than independently of Him? List as many reasons as you can find in the chapter.
13. Why is the Westminster Shorter Catechism's first question so important? What Bible verses can you find that support the catechism's statement?