



## Weekly Newsletter: 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023

### Reflection: A Checklist for Stepping into a Difficult Conversation

By Joe Barnard

Church life is great until suddenly things go sour. Far too often, silent friction among members is undetected until a fire breaks out. The best way to avoid such interpersonal disasters is to press into the Scriptures again and again in order to glean the wisdom that we need to order to live out an ethic of love in the midst of unavoidable tension and frustration.

Now, the Bible has a lot of wisdom regarding how to become an antifragile community that grows stronger, rather than weaker, through conflict. One passage that is useful on this topic is James 3:13-18. The passage contains several important insights. One is that true spiritual wisdom is not just intellectual; it is also behavioural. Another is an x-ray scan of some of the evil passions that disrupt a fellowship of love, such as jealousy and selfish-ambition. Yet, perhaps the most useful take-away from the passage is the list of godly character traits that are the litmus test of whether we are living by a wisdom “that comes down from above” or a false wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (vs. 15).

The following is a check-list of questions taken from this passage in James. We can use these questions to test our hearts before going into a tense and difficult conversation with another person.

#### 1 – Is my heart free of evil passions?

According to James, we must be “pure” (vs. 17) in order to uphold the ways of righteousness. It is worth asking what James means by “purity”. The word is taken from a cultic, or religious, context. Originally, the word communicated the sense of something being uncontaminated by anything unworthy of what is holy. Yet, when James uses the word, he is transposing its meaning from a cultic setting to a relational setting. The idea is that we need to check our hearts before relating with one another to make sure that there are no evil passions that would defile a spirit of love. To entertain spite, or jealousy, or envy, is like bringing an idol into the sacred precinct of God. It is sacrilege.

#### 2 – Is my attitude forceful or restrained?

James tells us that we must be peaceable ([eirēnikē](#)) and gentle ([epieikēs](#)). The second word is particularly interesting. It has the sense of “practicing restraint”, of being tolerant (in the old sense of the word), or even of showing courtesy. In other words, gentleness here has nothing to do with being soft or pliable. The idea is that, in the midst of relational tension, we need to keep ourselves on a tight lead. Rather than allowing emotion to dictate how we communicate, we need to moderate ourselves and exercise self-control. We

need to make sure that our own presence is not so overwhelming that the other person loses his or her freedom to share a different side of the story.

### **3 – Am I seeking to win an argument, or am I seeking to uphold the peace of Christ?**

James, echoing the teaching of Jesus, tells us that disciples of Christ ought to be known as peace-makers. The idea here is not that we should be passive and conflict averse. Just as Jesus often got in trouble for being honest and speaking truths that some did not want to hear, anyone who follows the example of Jesus will discover that a commitment to truth will sometimes lead into tense conversations.

In such circumstances, it is important that we temper our truthfulness with a commitment to being “peaceable”. Our ultimate goal should never be to win an argument or to be proven correct in our opinion. Friendship is not a game won by scoring points, but a relationship deepened through compassion, kindness, humility, and patience. We need to keep these higher aims in constant view as we engage in prickly interaction.

### **4 – Am I willing to have my mind changed?**

Another word James uses is [eupeithēs](#), which the ESV translates as “open to reason”. So often, when we get into an argument, stubbornness kicks in. There is a better chance of being struck by lightning on the spot than shifting our point of view by an inch. Such obduracy is a contradiction of love. If we follow the teaching of James, we must be ready to listen to what other people are saying, which means (1) a willingness to see things differently and (2) an openness to hear criticism.

Rarely is wisdom distilled in the cellar of single heart. In most cases, landing on the truth will require each party to come out of a trench and to survey the situation from a more amicable point of view.

### **5 – Is there a bias of admiration or disdain influencing how I relate to this person?**

James tells us that we ought to be “impartial” in how we treat people. Now, there are two typical biases which hinder our ability to treat people justly. One of them is admiration. Hero-worship is an inevitable cause of blindness. If we are overawed by the status, wealth, or beauty of another person, we will very likely ignore their sin in order to sustain their approval.

The second bias is disdain. It’s easy to overlook the good in awkward people and, instead, to fixate on their shortcomings. If admiration blinds us to the vices of people, disdain blinds us to their virtues. Disliking a person is an easy excuse for reducing an entire personality to one giant flaw. As Christians, we need to see such partiality as a by-product of hate, not love.

### **6 – Does my communication reflect my beliefs about the situation?**

Finally, James tells us to be “sincere”. In saying this he uses a word that would have originally communicated the sense of not wearing a mask – of not play-acting according to a role. In conflict, it’s easy to succumb to a spirit of cowardice and tell people simply what they want to hear. In truth, such flattery is nothing more a game of pretend. In such instances, there is no sincerity, no honesty, and thus no opportunity for spiritual growth.

Love summons us to be more courageous in our relationships. We must be willing to communicate our actual convictions. Such honesty demonstrates that the relationship itself is authentic. No friendship is genuine that does not involve sincere exchange. If you love someone, don’t speak to them as if you are reciting an inflexible script. Have the courage to communicate honestly so that, through such communication, a real friendship has the opportunity to take root and blossom.

## Annual General Meeting and Gift Aid

The AGM of the church will take place this Wednesday (19<sup>th</sup> April) on Zoom at 7pm. Please contact Liz ([Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) if you would like the Zoom codes and don't already receive them.

The church accounts were emailed out yesterday (Monday) to all church members. Please contact Liz ([liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) if you didn't receive them or would like a hard copy. Hard copies will be available on Sunday morning for those who do not have email.

The finance team at Holyrood would like to thank everyone for their generous giving over the last year. If you give to the church under the gift aid scheme and require a note of your total giving during the 2022-2023 financial tax year, often needed for annual tax returns, then please speak to Nick Archer and this information will be provided. Thank you!

## Men's Discipleship Groups

The men's discipleship groups are meeting this Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April (7.30am in Starbucks on Lothian Road or 10.30am in the church). Contact Joe ([joecbarnard@gmail.com](mailto:joecbarnard@gmail.com)) for more details.

## Women's Bible Study

We're planning to start a Women's Bible Study in the church at 10.30am on Thursday mornings from this Thursday. It will run for 6 weeks (until the end of May). Norma Shippin will lead the study. Please come along if you're free and contact Liz ([Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) for more information.

## Book Group

This month's book group meets on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April at 3.30pm. We are reading *Ten women who overcame their past* by Dayspring Macleod. For further information please contact Anncris ([anncris@gmail.com](mailto:anncris@gmail.com))

## Dates for your diary

Here are some dates to note –

- The next SASRA prayer meeting will be **this Thursday** at Paul Curd's home at 1pm for lunch (meeting starting at 2pm). Contact [admin@sasra.org.uk](mailto:admin@sasra.org.uk) for more info or speak to Norma Carlyon.
- The next Mission prayer meeting with our missionaries and those serving overseas will be on **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April** at 9am on Zoom. Please contact Liz ([Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) if you would like to receive the Zoom codes and don't already.
- **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April** is a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday and we'll have an evening service from 6-7pm in the church
- On **Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May** our prayer meeting will be in person in the church and there will not be a Zoom option. This begins the rhythm of meeting in person on the first Wednesday of each month.
- **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> May** is the bank holiday for the King's Coronation and there will be no Baby & Toddlers or Warm Space

## Christian Fellowship Walking Group

Many of us enjoyed hill walks (and coffee shops) with Anna Murray over a number of years. Calum MacKellar has taken over organising walks on the third Saturday of each month from April to July.



The first walk will be on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023 and will be a walk around Gladhouse Reservoir. It is 5 miles on nearly flat ground and will take about 3 hours. Meet at 10am in the car park in front of the Bingo Hall at the Meadowbank Shopping Centre. For those coming directly: Meet in car park on Gladhouse Reservoir at 10.45am. Contact Calum ([cmackellar@yahoo.com](mailto:cmackellar@yahoo.com)) for further information.

## Cairngorm Convention - 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> June



Joe is one of the speakers at the Cairngorm Convention in Badaguish this June. Everyone is welcome and the team are looking forward to “gathering again to experience wonderful teaching; insightful and helpful seminars; children and youth groups; musical concert; hot chocolate and campfires; praise and worship.”

For more information go to <https://www.cairngormsconvention.org/>

## Church Calendar

For your prayers and info –

- Monday:
  - Baby & Toddler Group: 10am – 11.30am
  - Warm Space from 12.30 – 4pm
- Mission Team Meeting
- Wednesday: AGM and Prayer Meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Thursday
  - Men’s Discipleship 7.30am at Starbucks on Lothian Road or 10.30am in the church
  - Women’s Bible Study at 10.30am in the church
- Sunday:
  - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Jon Gemmell preaching.
  - Home Groups



[www.holyroodevangelical.org](http://www.holyroodevangelical.org)

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