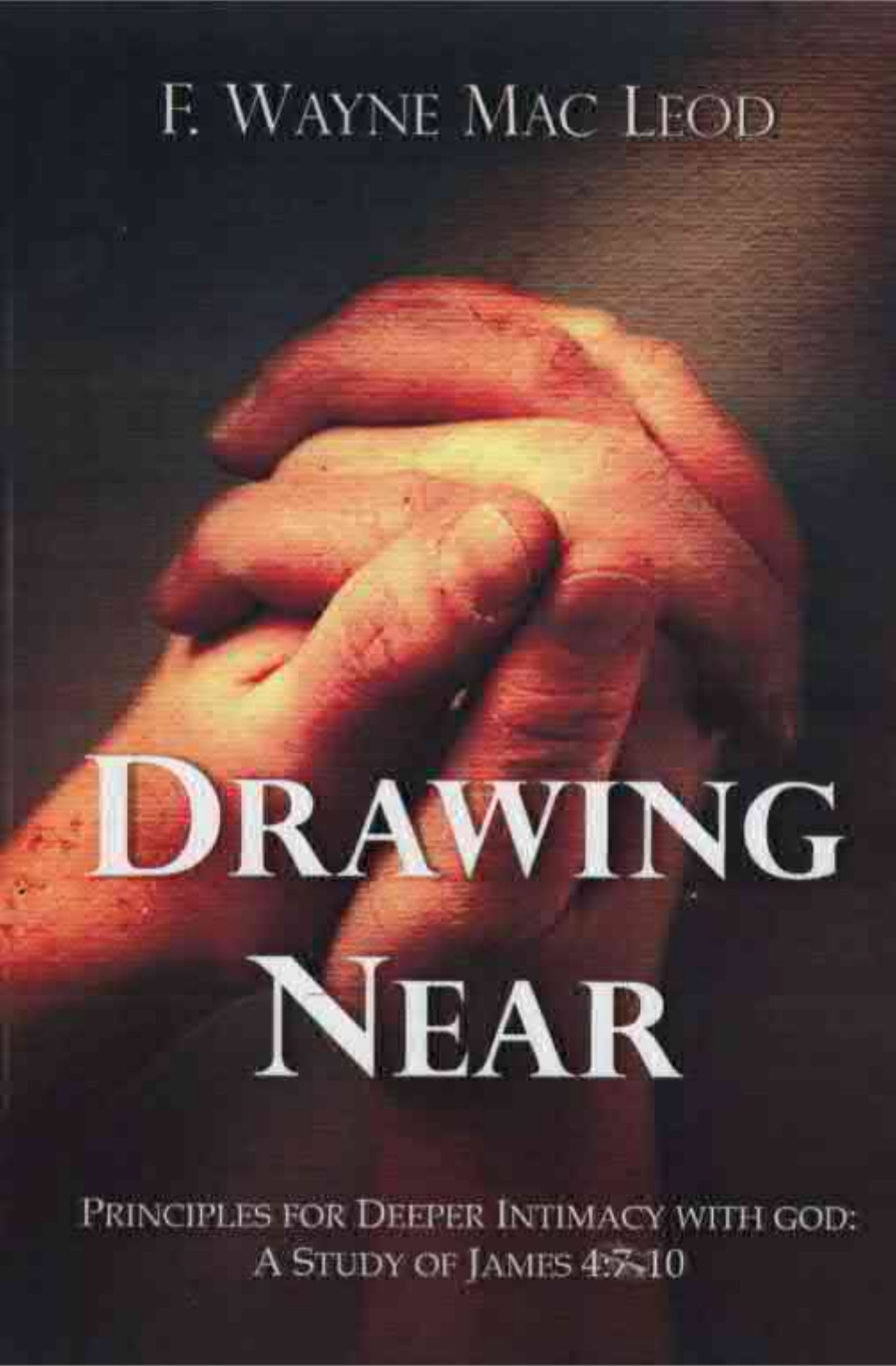


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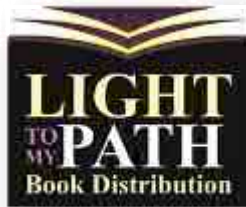


DRAWING NEAR

PRINCIPLES FOR DEEPER INTIMACY WITH GOD:
A STUDY OF JAMES 4:7-10

Drawing Near

*Principles for Deeper Intimacy with God:
A Study of James 4:7-10*



F. Wayne MacLeod

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Drawing Near

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Preface

There is within each of us a heart cry to know God and to experience Him in a deeper way. This is why we were created. How do we draw nearer to God? What are the requirements for those who want to know Him and walk more closely with Him?

James 4:7-10 speaks directly to this issue. Here in this passage the apostle shares seven steps to deeper intimacy with God. There is nothing new here. The truths James speaks about in these few verses are principles that have been with us from the beginning of time. They are tried and true principles that God has established for all who will draw near to Him.

My purpose in this study is to let James speak. More particularly, I want the Word of the Lord to speak and His Spirit to open it up and apply it to your life in a new way. There are many opinions about what it takes to be mature and godly. The only authority on this matter, however, is the Word of God. I trust that the Spirit of God will take the principles James lays out here and apply them afresh to your life as you take the time to consider his words. May the Lord be pleased to open up these old principles in a new way. May James 4:7-10 become alive as the Spirit of God uses it to draw you nearer.

F. Wayne Mac Leod

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As we begin let me explain what this study is about. It is a study of James 4:7-10.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Before breaking down and applying these verses, let's take a moment to consider the context in which they were written. This will give us a sense of what the verses are about.

In James 4 the apostle speaks about the temptations of this world. He opens the chapter by addressing the matter of quarrels among brothers and sisters in the faith. He tells

these believers that the reason for these quarrels was because of the passions that were at war within them:

2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You have not because you do not ask (James 4).

What were these passions that caused so much quarrelling among brothers and sisters of the faith? James goes on to speak about believers seeking friendship with the world.

4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4)

It appears that the people of James' day were attracted to the things of the world. In fact, this appeared to be their passion. Their hearts were set on the things of this world. They passionately sought after them and were willing to fight, quarrel and even murder to obtain these worldly goods.

Notice from James 4:4 (as quoted above) that this friendship and lust for the world made them adulterers in the sense that they were breaking their covenant promise to God to be His and His alone. They were turning their hearts from God to other gods. In doing so they were turning against their God and making themselves His enemies. James tells the believers of his day that whoever chose to be a friend of the world made himself or herself an enemy of God.

Jesus would speak of this when He said in Matthew 6:24:

24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6)

The believers of James' day had a choice to make. They could serve and seek God or they could serve and seek the things of this world. They could not, however, be faithful to God and lust after the world.

What is particularly striking here in James 4 is what James tells us about God's passion. Listen to what he told the believers in verse 5:

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

The God of Israel "yearned jealously" for His people. He desired them and longed for a deep and passionate relationship with them. His heart broke to see that they found more delight in the things of the world than in Him. He had created them for Himself. He had sent His Son to die for their sins so that they could enter a deep and passionate relationship with Him. His desire was for them, but they had other interests.

This is the context of James 4:7-10. The Lord God yearns jealously for His people. He longs for them to be His and to find their delight in Him but His people have found other interests. They have been blinded to the beauty of their Creator. They have rejected His love and sought other lovers instead.

James 4:7-10 is about drawing near to God and experiencing Him in a deeper way. It is about understanding the

fullness of what God has for us as His people. In these verses the apostle addresses this matter of the love of the world and the desire of God for His people. He shows us the path to true intimacy with God. He calls those who have become attracted to the world to a greater love.

Over the course of these next few chapters we will break down James 4:7-10 and examine the challenge of James to a people caught up in a love for the world. The principles James teaches in these verses are as applicable for us today as they were in the days James wrote them. They are not new principles but they are tried and tested principles that, if applied in our lives, will lead to the restoration of intimacy in our relationship with God. I trust that the Lord will bless as you take the time to meditate with me on this vital truth taught by James.

For Consideration:

- What was the problem facing the believers of James 4?
- How strong is the lust for the pleasures, positions and possessions of this world in the church today?
- Can we passionately pursue the world and God as well?
- What does James tell us about the attitude of the Lord God toward His people in this chapter?

- How important is intimacy with God to you personally? How strong is the pull of the flesh in your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help us to see His yearning for us.
- Ask God to give you a deeper passion and longing for Him.
- Ask God to show you if there is anything that keeps you from a deeper experience of His presence in your life.
- Take a moment now to ask God to forgive you for how you have cast a longing eye to the things of this world and turned your back on God. Ask Him to give you grace to cleanse your heart and purify your heart as you surrender it completely to Him.

CHAPTER 2 -

SUBMIT YOURSELF TO GOD

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God (James 4)

In the opening chapter we discussed the context of James 4:7-10. We discovered that the believers of James' day were pursuing the things of the world, and their relationship with God was suffering. God yearned jealously for them (James 4:5), but their hearts were elsewhere. James reminded these believers that they were making themselves enemies of God. They could not expect to love God and the world at the same time.

We can all understand the pull of the flesh toward the things of this world. The problem, however, is that the standards of the world are not God's standards. His ways are very different from our worldly ways of thinking. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, the first thing we need to do is to submit to Him and His ways. There can be no true intimacy with God without submission. Let's take a moment to examine what James tells us here about submission.

First, notice in the phrase, "submit yourselves therefore to God," the use of the word "therefore". This implies that

what has been discussed in the first part of this chapter is important and forms the basis for the statement made here. In other words, in light of the fact that you cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God, you must make a decision. If you want to enjoy a relationship with God, you must submit to Him and His ways. The word, “therefore”, shows us that this is the conclusion James makes. Submission is not an option if you want to be a friend of God and experience intimacy with Him.

The word submit in the Greek language is “hupótasso”. This word is derived from two other Greek words. The first is the word “hupo”, meaning “under” or “beneath”. The second is “tasso” which means to “arrange” or to “set”. When you put these two words together you get the idea of arranging an object under or setting it beneath something or someone else. Soldiers, for example, arrange themselves under the authority of their military commander. To submit is to surrender to the will of another.

The concept of submission is not one that is looked on favourably in our day. Society, however, cannot function without some form of submission. Children must learn to submit to their parents. Citizens must learn to submit to the laws of the land. Employees must learn to submit to the schedule of their business and the work according to the standards of their company. A team member must submit to the greater wishes of the team if they are to function at full capacity. Without submission there can be no harmony. Productivity in business will diminish and relationships will become strained. Submission allows us to be more effective in business and relationships by encouraging greater harmony.

What is James telling us here? He is telling us that if we want to enjoy a healthy relationship with God, we must

learn to submit. We must arrange ourselves under His authority. We must set ourselves under His care and direction in our lives. We must choose to surrender to His purpose and will. You cannot fight God and be in a close relationship with Him.

Notice something else in this phrase, “Submit yourselves therefore to God.” Notice particularly the word, “yourselves”. Again, this word is important. There are two points we need to make about this word.

First, the word “yourselves” makes this quite clear that we are submitting our person to the Lord. We are submitting all that we are to Him. Our entire being is to be arranged under His authority. There is a difference between submitting our ministry or our possessions to the Lord and submitting ourselves to Him. You can submit your ministry to the Lord but not yourself. You can submit your children to the Lord but not yourself. What James is asking us to do is to place our entire being under the authority of the Lord God—heart, mind, will and body. When you submit yourself to the Lord, then every decision and action will be surrendered to Him. If you are surrendered to the Lord, what you do and think will also be under His control. When you submit yourself to Him, then everything you touch will also be submitted to Him. If He is Lord over us, then He is also Lord over all we own and all we do.

The second point I want to make about this phrase, “submit yourself,” has to do with who is doing the submitting. There are different ways of bringing something into submission. A king in Bible times could go out to war and, if he won the battle, would he force his subjects into submission. They would return as slaves but not willing servants.

James is not speaking here about a forced submission to God. "Submit yourselves therefore to God," implies that the people doing the submitting are the believers themselves. They will do this willingly and with cheerful hearts out of love for God. They will do so because He yearns jealously for them. They will lay themselves lovingly before the Lord in total surrender. This is a decision they will make by the grace of God who has softened their heart toward Him.

Let me say that it is quite easy for us to believe that we have submitted ourselves to God when in reality we are still living for ourselves. Who among us can say that we are living in complete obedience to God and His Word? I have met believers who feel they have submitted themselves to God, but whose lifestyle does not meet up with the standards of God's Word.

Sometimes we are willing to submit in those things that are convenient or when things are going well for us. When submission is difficult, however, we choose the easy path of compromise. God will not always lead us in easy paths. Sometimes the way He chooses for us is difficult. Submission is not only necessary in the easy things but also in the difficult areas of life.

One of the things that Lord has been showing me recently is that it is quite possible to serve the Lord but not be submissive to Him and His purpose. Sometimes we have ideas of where we think our ministry should be going or how our church should be growing. We push for these ideas and build up our ministries for God. I have seen churches fight to keep their doors open when God wanted to close them. I have seen missionaries struggle to stay on the field when God was calling them to something else. If you were to speak to these individuals, they would tell you

that what they were doing was for the Lord. The reality, however, is that this is their idea and not the Lord's.

I think of Philip the Evangelist leaving the revival in Samaria to go into the desert to speak with the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip never did return to the ministry in Samaria where God had been using him so powerfully (see Acts 8). I think of Moses at the age of forty, full of passion to serve the Lord and release His people from bondage. I watch him as he sees Israel reject his message. I seem him, full of questions, leaving Egypt for fear of his life and wandering aimlessly in the desert where he would live for another forty years. Submission does not always make sense to us. Submission may mean being willing to drop what we have a passion for in order to do what God has a passion to do. Submission requires being in tune with the Lord and what He wants –not what we want to do for Him.

Submission is not just for the big things of life but also in the mundane things as well. Proverbs 3:5-6 puts it this way:

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3)

We often quote this passage, but living it out in real life is not so easy. The writer of this proverb is telling us that we are not to lean on our own understanding but acknowledge God. In other words, we are not to take it upon ourselves to direct the course of our lives the best we know. Instead we are to acknowledge God as Lord and walk in His ways. Human understanding is not to be our guide. We are to be guided by the Lord God Himself. We are to recognize His Lordship and walk in His ways.

Notice, from Proverbs 3:5-6 that our goal is to acknowledge God in “all” our ways. All of life is to be lived in submission to the Lord—not just certain aspects of life. All of our ways are to be surrendered to Him and His purpose. This means bringing all of our decisions to the Lord and seeking His heart in them. How many decisions do we make in the course of the day? Are we acknowledging God as Lord in those decisions? Are we seeking to walk in His purpose in those decisions?

It is easy to think we know the will of God without ever seeking Him about it. God’s ways are very different from ours. In recent years the Lord has been teaching me more and more about bringing all that I am doing to Him. I have found myself seeking Him not only for direction in the next study He wants me to do but also about the repairs I am doing around the house.

I have been serving in the ministry of Light To My Path Book Distribution now for a number of years. As I think about the direction I would like to take this ministry there are times when I feel that I would like to see the Lord open doors for translation of books into a particular language. I know that if I pushed this I could likely find someone to partner with me on this and I could have books translated in that language. I have chosen, however, not to push these ideas but rather to pray, asking the Lord about them and leaving the results in His hands. I believe that while I could make things happen in my own strength and wisdom, it is much better to wait for the Lord to prepare the way and the timing for all this to take place. When He opens the door, I know that it will be from Him and not my own idea and effort making it happen. I don’t want to run ahead of Him, I want this ministry to be held in submission to the purpose of God.

I have been amazed at how the Lord has opened doors for me. As I look at this ministry, I cannot take credit for what He had done. God has opened the doors. He has brought me translators. He has provided the finances. He has led me in what He wants me to write. All I have done is to try to walk in obedience to what He has been calling me to do. He receives all the glory.

Submission requires seeking the Lord in all things. It means putting aside our own ideas and surrendering to His purpose. It means committing myself to living a life of constantly seeking God for direction and walking in obedience to what He shows me. This is not possible if I am busy planning my own schedule, pushing my own ideas and serving in human wisdom and understanding. The kind of submission James is teaching here is a total surrender of ourselves—mind, will and strength—to the purpose of God.

You will not know this purpose if you are busy doing things in your own way. You can only know the purpose of God if you are in communion with Him on a regular basis, seeking His heart. It means letting Him change your plans. It means committing these plans to Him in prayer. He will be your Lord. In all that you do, seek His purpose. Surrender your ambitions and goals in life to Him. Surrender each moment to His guidance and blessing. Only in this type of surrender can you experience the intimacy God desires.

What blessing comes from this type of surrender! We become His hands and feet. His mind is in us and we walk in His enabling, wisdom and strength.

For Consideration:

- Can the believer struggle with submission to God? What kind of things can get in the way of true submission?
- What does it mean to submit to God? What is the difference between surrendering different parts of our life and surrendering ourselves to God?
- Can we serve God and not be truly submitted to His purpose?
- Can we truly submit to God if we are not constantly seeking His heart in all things?
- Have you submitted yourself to God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to submit yourself to Him and not just different parts of your life.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to bring Him into more and more of your life. Are there parts of your life that you feel you can't submit to Him right now? Ask Him for strength to commit them to Him today.
- Ask God to give you a greater passion to walk in submission to Him in all things.

CHAPTER 3 -

RESIST THE DEVIL

7 ... Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.
(James 4)

We have examined what James had to say about submitting ourselves to God. This submission gives us an allegiance and defines our purpose in life. Let me explain.

Consider an athlete who signs on to a particular sports team. Prior to joining a team, the athlete has no commitment to any team. When he signs a contract with a specific team, however, he commits himself to do all he can to help that team win. From that moment on all other teams are seen as opponents.

This is the case for us as believers as well. By submitting to God we define our life purpose. We commit ourselves to Him and His way. We choose to resist anything that competes with that purpose.

James reminds us here that one of the enemies to those who have submitted themselves to God is the devil. The apostle Peter understood this when he said:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5)

Peter compares the devil to a hungry lion prowling through the forest looking for something to eat. Christians are his prey. He will not hesitate to devour as many believers as he can. In fact, believers are his prime target (see Revelation 12:17).

Submitting ourselves to God makes the devil our enemy. By submitting to God we declare war on Satan and his efforts in this world. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the devil will do all he can to defeat us or cause us to fall.

James was fully aware of the nature of this spiritual battle. Speaking to believers about drawing near to God, he feels compelled to address this matter of the devil. The devil is an enemy to intimacy with God. He will do all he can to keep us from drawing near to God and enjoying deep fellowship with Him. If we are to experience the relationship God intends us to have with Him, we must be aware of the devil, his schemes and how to overcome them.

Notice what James tells us to do here in James 4:7. He tells us to resist the devil. The word resist comes from two Greek words literally meaning “to stand against.” While it is simple enough to understand what it means to resist, the problem comes with its application in this context. How do we resist the devil when we cannot see him? How do we resist the devil when he is stronger than we are? Not only this, but the enemy is a very clever master of disguise. How can we recognize his ways?

In the book of Acts, we read the story of the early church and how the believers sold their properties and gave the money to the apostles for the needs of the poor in their community. Among those who sold their property was a couple by the name of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5 tells us how, after selling their property, this couple decided to keep a portion of the money for themselves. This was perfectly acceptable (see Acts 5:4). Ananias and Sapphira, however, decided that they would lie about the price they had received for the property. They did this to lead the church to believe that they had given everything, when in reality they had kept a portion for themselves. As they brought their gift to the church, they brought it with a lie. Listen to what Peter told Ananias when the Lord revealed this to him.

3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (Acts 5)

Disguised in this good deed was the attempt of the devil to infiltrate the church with a lie. Satan will do all he can to deceive and break through our lines. Resisting these deceptive means of the devil is not always easy and requires tremendous discernment from the Lord.

How do we resist the devil? Let me make a few points on this subject in an attempt to clarify what James is telling us here.

DISCERNMENT

We will need tremendous discernment from the Lord if we are to resist the devil. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira,

we see that it was the Lord who revealed to Peter the nature of their gift. The Spirit of God showed Peter that, what appeared to be a wonderful act of generosity, was, in fact, an attack of the enemy. This was not something Peter would have known himself. To all outward appearances this gift was like all the other gifts that had come into the church. Without the clear leading of the Spirit of God, Peter would never have seen this as an attack of the enemy.

The wonderful thing about being a believer is that the Lord God has placed His Holy Spirit in us to guide us into all truth (see John 16:13). The Spirit of God will reveal those things that are necessary for us to continue walking in intimacy and communion with the Father. It is important for us is to learn to walk in the leading and discernment the Spirit of God gives and not trust our own understanding.

In the book of Joshua, we read the story of a group of people from the region of Gibeon. As Joshua was conquering the land of Canaan, these people knew that they were no match for the God of Israel and Joshua His commander. To save themselves from certain defeat, the people of Gibeon resorted to deceit. They dressed in old clothes and took mouldy bread and worn out wineskins with them and approached Joshua with the intention of leading him to believe they were not his enemies but a people from a distant land who had come to be friends with Israel.

When Joshua saw the old clothes they were wearing, their worn out sandals and the mouldy bread they had brought with them, he assumed that they had indeed travelled a long distance to befriend his people. He made a covenant of friendship with them that day based on the lie and deception of the Gibeonites. As in the days of Ananias and Sapphira, the devil was seeking to infiltrate the camp of

Israel with a lie. Joshua fell into this trap. What is interesting about this passage is what Joshua 9:14-15 tells us:

14 So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. 15 And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. (Joshua 9)

It is important for us to see the reason Joshua and the leaders of Israel lost this battle with the devil. Joshua 9:14 tells us that they “did not ask counsel from the Lord.” This is important. If we want to resist the devil, we dare not attempt to do this in our own wisdom. The devil is a master of disguise and deceit. He knows how to deceive us. He knows our weaknesses. We will not see his arrow coming toward us when it strikes. He will take us off guard. He will pounce on us when we do not expect it. If we are going to resist his attacks, we will need a wisdom that is greater than our own. We need the wisdom and discernment of God. The Spirit of God will give us this wisdom but we need to be seeking Him and not leaning on our own understanding (see Proverbs 3:5-6). Joshua did not pray about the covenant he made with the Gibeonites. Joshua 9:14 leads us to believe that had he prayed, the outcome would have been different. God would have revealed the deception.

Our wisdom is insufficient to resist the devil. Only as we submit our decisions to the Lord and listen to His leading can we discern the attacks of the enemy and resist them. This requires bringing the Lord into the decisions we make. It means trusting His direction more than our own thought processes. We will never experience the intimacy God desires for us until we seek His discernment and wisdom in the decision we make. We resist the devil by seeking the Lord’s purpose in our decision-making.

TRUTH

Another aspect to resisting the devil has to do with believing the truth as recorded for us in the Word of God. This is seen clearly in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

When the devil tempted Jesus to turn a stone into bread, Jesus replied:

4 ... "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" (Luke 4)

When the devil promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down and worship him, Jesus said:

8 ... "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" (Luke 4)

When asked by Satan to prove the Father's care by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus answered:

12 ... "It is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Luke 4)

Do you see what is happening here? Every time the devil tempted the Lord Jesus, our Lord would filter what he said through the teaching of the Word of God. Jesus was guided by the truth of the Scriptures. The written Word of God was His weapon against the attack of the enemy and by it He resisted the devil.

Jesus describes the devil as the father of lies. Speaking to the religious leaders of the day He said:

44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8)

As the father of lies, the devil will attack us with deception and falsehood. How do we counter the falsehood of the devil? We do so by turning to the truth as contained in the written Word of God. If we are to resist the devil, we must study and know the truth of Scripture. By studying this truth, we will be able to discern the lies and deception of the enemy. The Scripture, as contained in the Old and New Testament, is the sword in our hand that enables us to resist the lies and falsehood of the devil. We resist the devil by knowing the truth of God and committing ourselves to following that truth.

FAITH

We resist the devil by means of the Spirit's leading and prompting and by the truth of the Word of God. Faith is also necessary if we are to resist the devil. It is quite possible for us to hear the voice of the Spirit in our heart and know the truth written in the pages of Scripture and still not have the strength to resist. A soldier's weapons are of no use if he is not willing to pick them up and use it.

Imagine a soldier going into battle equipped with a shield at his side. He is fully equipped to do battle but there is a problem. As he looks at the battle before him, he begins to question his ability. The shield at his side seems smaller now that he sees the enemy. He wonders about his ability to use that shield and whether it will indeed be effective. He fears for his life and wonders whether the slender piece

of polished metal or leather will actually be sufficient to protect him from the enemy. He stands now paralysed in fear and doubt, unable to hold up his shield.

It is one thing to speak about the protection of the shield in a time of peace but quite another to do so when one is facing the devil head on. Just as Peter heard from God concerning the gift Ananias and Sapphira brought, you may hear from God concerning a situation. You hear His voice but you also know what you think you need and maybe you are tempted to question Him. You hear Satan whisper in your ear, what he whispered to Eve in the Garden "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (see Genesis 3:1).

What is true of the leading of the Spirit is also true of the Word of God. You may find yourself in a situation where the clear teaching of Scripture confronts your lifestyle. Satan again will whisper in your ear "did God really say...?" The temptation to compromise or ignore the Word of God is very real. The cry of the flesh has caused many to abandon their weapons and surrender to the enemy.

Let me reassure you that the sword of God's Word has all the power it claims to have. The writer to the Hebrews makes this clear when he said:

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
(Hebrews 4)

There is no question about the leading of the Spirit and the truth of the Word of God. These are weapons that have

been successfully used against the devil from the beginning of time. They are as powerful against his attacks as they have always been. The question is not about the power of our weapons, but about our willingness to trust our weapons to do what they are intended to do. Resisting the devil has to do with trusting what God says and having confidence in the weapons He has given us.

OBEDIENCE

There is one final point I want to make with regard to resisting the devil. While faith in God and the weapons He has given us is important, James would be the first to remind us that faith without works is useless:

20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless. (James 2)

Faith must be acted on if it is going to be effective against the enemy. The soldier who has faith in his sword will draw the sword and head into battle. The believer who hears the Lord's leading will respond to the call. The one who knows the truth of the Word of God will act on that truth by taking a stand against the lies of the enemy. Your faith in the Word of God and the leading of His Spirit is useless if you do not walk in obedience.

Faith is not easy. When we draw our sword we are committing ourselves to battle. The enemy will not take this lightly. He will stir up our fleshly passions and desires. He will use logic in an attempt to reason with us and get us to question the wisdom of God and His leading. Resisting Satan will mean refusing to question the Word of God. It may mean leaving our coat behind and fleeing the room like

Joseph did when tempted by his master's wife (see Genesis 39). Obedience listens to the voice of faith and chooses to walk in obedience.

When we resist the devil in this way, he is forced to flee. Adam Clarke says this in his commentary on this passage:

“Resist the devil—He cannot conquer you if you continue to resist. Strong as he is, God never permits him to conquer the man who continues to resist him; he cannot force the human will.”

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How do we resist the devil? We do so by seeking the discernment of the Holy Spirit and the truth of God as found in His Word. We step out obediently, trusting that what God says is trustworthy and true. The truth of God's Word is sufficient to resist Satan, the father of lies. He cannot stand against the truth of God and so he will flee from us out of hatred for that truth.

What does resisting the devil have to do with the context of this study? The devil's great desire is to keep us from intimacy and union with God. He will do all he can to break that relationship and keep us at a distance from our heavenly Father. If we are going to draw near to God, we will have to face the attacks of the enemy. If we are going to experience the fellowship God intends for us, we will have to resist the devil who is seeking to destroy that fellowship. James reminds us, however, that those who take up the challenge of resisting the devil will see him flee. To know God in all His fullness will require taking up arms against the devil and resisting him with the truth of God. This will

be a constant battle, as the enemy will not give up, but the end result is deep and wonderful fellowship with God, the one who fights side by side with us.

For Consideration:

- How does submission define our purpose in life?
- What do we learn here about Satan and his efforts to keep us from fellowship with God?
- How important is discernment in resisting Satan? Is our human effort sufficient to resist him?
- How does the Word of God help us resist the devil?
- Is God worthy of our confidence and trust? Have you ever found yourself questioning His purpose?
- What is the difference between faith and obedience? Why are both important. Can one function without the other?
- How does resisting the devil help us in our fellowship with God? Can we have true intimacy with God if we are not resisting the devil?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be true to Him and the purpose He has given you in life.

- Ask God to give you greater discernment to see the tactics of the devil.
- Thank the Lord for the truth of His Word which is our written guide to living in fellowship with Him. Thank Him also for His Holy Spirit who gives us understanding and discernment to live in the purpose of God.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace not only to trust Him and His Word but to stand firm against the attacks of the devil.
- Ask God to give you courage to stand firm in the midst of questions and human doubt. Ask Him to never let your faith waver in those moments.

CHAPTER 4 - DRAW NEAR

8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
(James 4)

We come now to the next step toward deeper intimacy with God. Notice in James 4:8 that James challenges his readers to draw near to God. The words are clear, but the application of these words requires some reflection.

TO WHOM DO WE DRAW NEAR?

Notice first in this phrase that we are to draw near “to God”. That may sound easy enough, but before we move on any further it is important that we consider what James is telling us. Let’s take a moment to examine some individuals in the Bible who had the opportunity to experience this God to whom we are to draw near.

In Exodus 24 we have the story of Moses and the elders approaching the presence of God on the mountain. Listen to the description of this event:

9 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. 11 And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exodus 24)

What is striking about this passage is in verse 11 where the author tells us that through they entered the presence of God, God did not lay His hand on them but they lived (ate and drank) to tell the story. These men feared for their lives as they drew near to God. They were surprised that they were not struck down by the hand of God for their sinfulness. For these people, approaching God was a fearful thing. In fact, in Exodus 32 we read how Moses went up into the presence of God and was there for some time. The people at the foot of the mountain were fearful that Moses had perished in the presence of God and requested that Aaron give them another god:

1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (Exodus 32)

Listening to the words of the people, Aaron would make them a god that they could control and fashion to their liking. The awesomeness of the God of Israel, who appeared in fire and cloud, terrified the people of Israel so that they feared for their lives.

In Isaiah 6 the story is told of how the Lord God revealed Himself to the prophet Isaiah. Listen to the description of what took place on that occasion:

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6)

The experience of the nearness of God in this encounter was so frightening that the prophet cried out:

5 ... "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6)

"I am lost," said Isaiah. "How can I stand in the presence of such holiness?" Isaiah felt that to stand before such a holy God meant certain death. This was the response of Isaiah when God drew near to him.

Finally, consider the vision of the apostle John in Revelation 1. In his vision, he heard a voice calling him to write down the things that he would see. When he turned to see the source of the voice, he saw "one like the son of man." He had a golden sash and hair as white as snow. His eyes were like burning bronze and his face shone as brilliant as the sun (see Revelation 1:12-16). Notice the response of the apostle to what he saw that day:

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. (Revelation 1)

What John saw that day was too much for him to take in. He literally fell to the ground in a lifeless lump. The glory

and holiness of Christ who stood before him was more than he could handle in his mortal body.

I give these examples to show that drawing near to the God of Israel is not something to be taken lightly. The God we are called to draw near to is a holy and glorious God. In fact, were it not for the work of the Lord Jesus, not one of us could approach Him. John describes a future day when the people of the earth will be in terror at His presence:

15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Revelation 6)

The challenge of James is a big one – "draw near to God." Boldly approach the Almighty. Come near to Him. Let us not take this challenge lightly. Realize, however, that there can be no intimacy with God as long as we run from Him. Only by drawing near can we experience His presence and fellowship.

WHY DO WE DRAW NEAR TO GOD?

We have seen that we are to draw near to God. The next question we need to address here is this: Why do we draw near to God? There are a number of reasons why individuals in the Scripture drew near to God.

Forgiveness

Obviously, the first reason for approaching a holy God is for forgiveness. This is quite clear from Isaiah 55 when the Lord said through His prophet:

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55)

God calls us to approach Him so that we can be forgiven of our sin. As sinners how can we approach a holy God? Yet how can we be forgiven if we do not approach Him, for He alone is able to pardon? The apostle John gives us assurance that God is a God of tremendous compassion who will forgive all who come to Him:

8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1)

Cleansing and forgiveness is available in the God of Israel. We are called to draw near to Him so that we can be forgiven. There can be no intimacy if we do not draw near to the God we have offended and seek His forgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews gives us assurance that as we do draw near we will know God's cleansing:

21 And since we have a great high priest over the house of God. 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled

clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10)

We can come boldly into the presence of God because provision has been made for our cleansing and forgiveness. Jesus, the Son of God laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sin. Let us draw near and claim that forgiveness and be restored to fellowship with God.

Intercession

Not only do we approach God for forgiveness but we also approach Him for blessing. In Genesis 18 we read how God sent His angels to Abraham to announce the destruction of the city of Sodom, where his nephew Lot lived. The news of the judgement of God on this city disturbed Abraham. Listen to his response in Genesis 18:22-23:

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.
23 Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?
(Genesis 18)

Notice particularly in verse 23 that "Abraham drew near." The reason he drew near was to speak to God about the city of Sodom. He sought the favour of the Lord on his family. He grieved for the fact that his nephew and family would perish in this judgement of God and pleaded with the Lord to save their lives. We draw near not only to be forgiven but to cry out on behalf of our loved ones. The door is open for us to draw near to God with our requests and petitions.

Blessing

Who among us does not need the blessing of the Lord? I have often been struck by a hymn written by John Newton who lived from 1725-1807. He wrote these words concerning his need of the blessing of God:

For mercies countless as the sands,
Which daily I receive
From Jesus, my Redeemers hands,
My soul what canst thou give?

Alas! From such a heart as mine
What can I bring Him forth?
My best is stained and dyed with sin,
My all is nothing worth.

Yet this acknowledgment I'll make,
For all He has bestowed—
Salvation's sacred cup I'll take,
And call upon my God.

The best return for one like me,
So wretched and so poor,
Is from His gifts to draw a plea,
And ask Him still for more.

I cannot serve Him as I ought,
No works have I to boast,
Yet I should glory in the thought
That I should owe Him most.

(Newton, John: "For Mercies Countless as the Sands: Grace Hymns, Grace Publications Trust; London, 1978, #15.)

John Newton understood something very important about the Christian life. He understood that everything of any benefit and good came from the Lord. He knew that if He was to be all God intended him to be, he needed to live a life of dependence on God, drawing from Him the strength, wisdom and resources necessary to do what He had called him to do. Without the blessing of God on his life and ministry, there was no hope of Him ever being able to bear fruit. He longed for the blessing of God and pleaded with him for that blessing, for apart from it, he was helpless.

When James calls us to draw near to God, he is calling us to come before Him to seek His blessing on our lives and ministries. James tells his readers in James 4:2 that they did not receive from God because they did not ask. Will we draw near to God to ask His favour? Will we bring every aspect of our lives to Him for His blessing?

In Matthew 19 mothers brought their children to the Lord Jesus in order for Him to lay hands on them and pray. The disciples didn't feel this was appropriate and rebuked the mothers for taking up Jesus time. Notice the response of Jesus to the disciples:

14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19)

Mary the mother of Jesus came to Him when they were at a wedding in Cana. It appears that the hosts had run out of wine. The Lord Jesus heard her request and miraculously turned water into wine.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples decided to go fishing. John 21 tells us that they fished that night but caught nothing (John 21:3). In the morning, the Lord Jesus

appeared on the shore and called out to them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. When they did, they caught so many fish their nets began to break while hauling them to shore.

Why have I given these illustrations? I have done so to show that the Lord God is willing to bless us in many different situations in life. He wants to touch our children. He wants to help us in the embarrassing situations we find ourselves in. He wants to provide for our needs. There is blessing for all of these situations. Like the disciples we often fish without catching anything. When the Lord blesses what we do, however, what a difference it makes.

The challenge here is for us to draw near to God for His touch on our lives. How can we be effective if we do not know His blessing? How can we be blessed if we don't draw near? Our usefulness depends on this blessing. Let us boldly draw near and ask Him for it.

Protection

We also draw near to God for protection. The psalmist speaks of this when he writes:

28 But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works. (Psalm 73)

Notice the connection between being near to God and making Him a refuge. This same connection is made in Psalm 145 when the psalmist says:

18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.

20 The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy. (Psalm 145)

Life on this earth is not going to be easy for God's children. Jesus told His disciples that He was sending them out into tremendous dangers:

16 Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the
midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Matthew 10)

As the days of the end approach, we will see an increase in persecution and intolerance of the ways of the Lord. Believers will be called upon to take a stand. How are we to survive in these times? How are we to endure the opposition that comes our way? Jesus told His disciples that He would be with them as they went out in His name:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28)

In a world filled with uncertainty we need to draw near to God for refuge and protection. We move out in His name into a world that is often unwilling to accept our message. We may be mocked and rejected but if we draw near to Him, He will be our Protector. In Him there is security and comfort, but we must draw near. We must run to His arms of love if we are to experience this shelter and protection.

WHAT ARE THE HINDRANCES TO DRAWING NEAR?

We have seen some of the reasons for drawing near to God. I want to touch briefly now on some of the hindrances.

Sin

It is clear from what we have seen in this chapter that sin is a hindrance to drawing near to God. The only solution to sin is to draw near to God, but when we do draw near to God we must be willing to confess our sin and turn from it. As long as we are living in sin, we will be hindered in drawing near. Speaking to his son Solomon, David gave this charge:

9 And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your fathers and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. (1 Chronicles 28)

David reminded his son that he would find God if he searched for Him with all his heart, but he warned him that God would cast him off if he forsook Him. While we don't have time to deal with this verse in detail, what is important for us to see here is the effect of sin and forsaking God. There can be no intimacy with God as long as we are not dealing with our known sins and approaching Him for forgiveness.

Jesus told His listeners that if they came with an offering for the Lord and remembered that their brother had something against them, they were to leave their gift at the altar and go to their brother to resolve this matter before offering

their gift to the Lord (see Matthew 5:23-24). In other words, their offering would not be accepted if they were guilty of sin before a brother or sister. Intimacy with God is hindered by sin.

Pride

Another hindrance to drawing near to God is pride. While pride is one of the sins that keeps us from drawing near, it needs to be examined separately. Pride can manifest itself in many different ways.

First, pride can manifest itself in a refusal to admit one's sin. I have met individuals who truly believe that they have no sin in their lives and that they are good people. They do not see any need of forgiveness. Others know that they are sinners but refuse to do anything about it. They choose to continue in their sin rather than admit their guilt and come to the Saviour.

Second, pride can manifest itself through an inflated sense of our human ability. You may have met individuals who believe that their education and good sense is sufficient to advance the kingdom of God. I have often been disturbed by church business meetings where the members of the church sit around and share their earthly wisdom about how they feel the church should be run without taking into account how God may be leading. How many young pastors have gone into a new church with the idea that their training was sufficient to advance the cause of Christ? These individuals have no sense of need to draw near to God for His wisdom and blessing. They would like to have God's blessing but they do not see it as being absolutely necessary for the advance of His kingdom. Somehow they feel that they can serve God in their own strength and wisdom.

Luke recounts the story of two men who went up to the temple to pray. One of the men was a tax collector and the other was a Pharisee. When the Pharisee prayed he said:

11 ... God I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. (Luke 18)

The tax collector, knowing his unworthiness spoke saying:

13 ... God be merciful to me a sinner! (Luke 18)

Speaking of this tax collector Jesus said:

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18)

Pride will keep you from drawing near to God and will hinder your fellowship with God.

False Understanding of Our Unworthiness

Another hindrance to drawing near to God is a false understanding of our unworthiness. The reality of the matter is that we are all unworthy of the salvation and support of the Lord God. We have fallen short of the standard He has laid out for us and we have often grieved His heart.

This unworthiness, however, must be understood in the context of grace. When the prodigal son left home and wasted all his inheritance, he did not deserve to be restored to fellowship with his father when he returned home

(see Luke 15). The father, however, opened his arms to receive his son.

The Lord God is a gracious and compassionate God. He is willing to receive all who will come to Him seeking His forgiveness. He sent His Son so that we could know this forgiveness. The problem, however, is that some people are so trapped in their sense of unworthiness that they can never draw near to God to receive what He has for them.

Many of these people are sincerely sorry for their sin, but they have failed to understand that the grace of God covers their iniquities and opens the door to the blessing of God on their lives. If you are unwilling to accept the grace of God because you feel you are too unworthy of it, you will never be able to draw near. Only those who understand grace will dare to draw near.

Insincerity

Finally, I want to touch on this matter of insincerity. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said of His people:

13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught my men... (Isaiah 29)

Notice what the Lord is saying here about the people of Israel. They talked about a closer relationship with God but in their hearts this relationship did not exist. These people were like the Pharisees of the New Testament who appeared before men to be pious and holy but, who, in reality, were very far from God.

Churches are filled with people who give the appearance of drawing near to God. They are faithful church attenders and say the right things. They live a Christian lifestyle but their hearts have never truly been touched by God. These individuals may even preach in our churches. They may have an intellectual knowledge of the truth of the gospel but they are not truly in a relationship with God. They draw near in word and deed but not in heart. Their heart is divided.

Those who draw near to God must do so in sincerity. They must come with hearts seeking after God and submitted to Him. They must come with hearts that are resisting the devil and his influence in their lives.

In conclusion, let me say that if we are to grow in fellowship and intimacy with God, we must draw near to Him. We must recognize our need and draw from the resources He provides. We must come to Him for forgiveness, protection, strength and blessing. We must recognize Him as the source of our wisdom and ability. Only as we draw near in this kind of dependence can we experience the fellowship He intends for us.

I believe that there is room for every one of us to draw nearer to God. We have not yet exhausted His supply stored up for us. We have not yet experienced the fullness He has in mind. Will you draw near to receive what He has for you? Will you cast aside sin, pride, unworthiness and insincerity and come with an open heart to receive all He has for you today. Unless we draw near, we will never know this fullness.

For Consideration:

- To what kind of God does James challenge us to draw near? What are His characteristics? Can we approach God casually?
- Can a sinner draw near to a holy God?
- What are some reasons why we need to draw near to God? What is the result of not drawing near to Him?
- What can we seek the blessing of God for in our lives? What do you hesitate to ask God to bless in your life?
- What keeps us from drawing near to God?
- Are we unworthy of drawing near to God? What role does grace have in our drawing near to God?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He is a holy God, separated from sin. Thank Him for His grace that forgives our sin.
- Thank the Lord that He wants us to draw near to Him. If you have not been drawing near to God, ask Him to forgive you and help you to see your need of Him.
- Ask the Lord to cleanse you of any sin, pride or insincerity that might keep you from Him.

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to keep us and enable us to minister in His name. Ask Him to equip you for all He has in store for you today.

CHAPTER 5 -

CLEANSE YOUR HANDS

8 ... Cleanse your hands, you sinners...

In the previous chapter we examined James' teaching about drawing near to God. In Old Testament times, the Jewish priest would often draw near to God for the purpose of bringing offerings on behalf of the people. Listen to the requirement of the Law for the priest who would draw near to God for this purpose:

17 The LORD said to Moses, 18 You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, 19 with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hand and their feet. 20 When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. 21 They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever for them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations. (Exodus 30)

There was a basin of water of water placed in the outer court of the tabernacle. As the priests entered to minister to the Lord, they would approach this basin. They were required by law to wash their hands and feet in this basin before proceeding any further into the presence of the Lord. Notice particularly that this law was so important that to disobey it was to risk one's life by offending God. The hands and feet of the priest who served needed to be cleansed of filth and dirt or their service would not be accepted by God.

This concept of approaching God with clean hands is mentioned by the Psalmist when he asks the question in Psalm 24:

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully. (Psalm 24)

Notice in these verses that the person who can draw near to God is one who has been cleansed. The conclusion we draw from this is that if we want to enter into a deeper fellowship with God and know Him in a more intimate way, we must deal with this matter of cleansing.

What does this cleansing of the hands represent? To cleanse something is to remove the impurities and filth. This is what James is speaking about here. Scripture often speaks of the kinds of filth and impurities that can stain our hands. Consider what Job said in Job 16 as he reflected on his suffering and pain:

16 My face is red with weeping,
and on my eyelids is deep darkness,

17 although there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure. (Job 16)

Job speaks here about the great pain he was experiencing. He wondered what was causing this agony in his life. As he reflects on this, he wondered why he had to suffer when there was no violence in his hands. Had he been guilty of violence, he could have understood the reason for his pain and the fact that God appeared to have abandoned him. Job understood that if his hands were stained with violence, he could not expect to draw near to God. He needed to confess his sin and be cleansed before he could approach God and experience deep fellowship with Him.

The prophet Isaiah begins his book by reminding the people of how distant God had become from them. Their cities had been burned; their land had been devoured by their enemies (Isaiah 1:7). The country was in ruins. When they cried out to God for help, He refused to listen to their prayers (Isaiah 1:15). What caused this separation between God and His people? Isaiah 1:15-16 give us the answer:

15 When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my
eyes;
cease to do evil... (Isaiah 1)

The Lord made it clear to the people of Isaiah's day that the reason for this lack of fellowship had to do with the fact that when they lifted up their hands to pray, they did so with hands filled with unconfessed sins and evil deeds.

Pilate understood this in his day when he was forced by the people to condemn Jesus as an innocent man. Notice what he does in Matthew 27:24:

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves," (Matthew 27)

Pilate symbolized his innocence of any crime in the death of Jesus by the washing of his hands, a gesture symbolic of cleansing from sinful deeds. If we want to know a deeper intimacy with God, we must first deal with our sin and rebellion against Him.

We have already seen in Isaiah 1:15-17 that God refused to listen to the people of Isaiah's day because of the sins they were committing. Listen to what the apostle Peter wrote concerning God's refusal to answer the prayers of His people:

7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3)

Peter reminded husbands that if their hands were stained with lack of respect and honour toward their wives, their prayers to God would be hindered. They could not expect God to hear their prayers if they were not showing respect for their wives. Their sin would hinder intimacy with God. In order to repair this relationship, they would have to cleanse their hands of this guilt.

Just as the priests of the Old Testament needed to cleanse their hands and feet before entering the presence of the Lord, so we also must examine our lives to be sure that as we approach Him we do so with clean hands. We must be willing to confess our sins and receive His pardon.

The hands seem to represent our actions and our deeds. One of the central themes in the book of James is that of living out our faith in practical ways. James believed that the person who claimed to be a believer would demonstrate that in the way he or she lived. Our relationship with God should reflect the fact that we are “doers of the Word” and not hearers alone (James 1:22). The hands of those who loved the Lord and walked in fellowship with Him would be unstained by a lack of care for orphans and widows (James 1:26-27). These hands would not be guilty of partiality and prejudice in human relationships (James 2:1), slander (James 4:11), boasting (James 4:13) or an adulterous friendship with the world (James 4:4). Those who walked in true fellowship with the Lord would make sure they approached God with clean hands.

James tells us that if we want to draw near to God we must cleanse our hands. Notice how he connects the cleansing of our hands with the fact that we are sinners: “Cleanse your hands you sinners.” It is the sinner who needs to cleanse his hands. Cleansing of our hands does not mean that we are not sinners. The fact of the matter is that we don’t just wash our hands once in our lifetime. We must often come to the Lord for cleansing for sin. In fact, the more closely we come to the Lord, the more we understand and see our sin.

The story is told of a man who went to visit his friend on the other side of a forest. When he left his house it was

getting dark. As he travelled through the woods, night began to fall and it became harder to see what was in front of him. His foot struck the root of a tree and he fell headlong to the ground. He stood up and brushed off the dirt as best he could. In the distance he saw the light of his friend's house. He directed himself by that light. With each step the light grew brighter. As he looked at his clothes, however, he began to notice the dirt. Brushing off the dirt, he continued toward the light. The closer he got to the light, the more dirt he saw. The light revealed what he could not see in the dark. This is how it is in our relationship with God. The closer we get to God the more we become aware of our sinfulness.

As we draw near to God, He will reveal the dirt on our hands. Each day we draw near to God will require a fresh handwashing. Until our life on earth is ended and we reach our heavenly home, we will need to wash our hands and confess our sins and shortcomings on a regular basis.

There is a blessing for those who cleanse their hands of sin. Job tells us:

9 Yet the righteous holds to his way,
and he who has clean hands grows stronger and
stronger ... (Job 17)

The strength Job speaks about here comes from the Lord who blesses those who choose to turn from their sin. The Lord draws near to bless those who cleanse their hands of sin and evil.

The Psalmist tells us something else:

20 The LORD dealt with me according to
my righteousness;

according to the cleanness of my hands
he rewarded me. (Psalm 18)

23 I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from my guilt.
24 so the Lord has rewarded me according to my
righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his
sight. (Psalm 18)

The Lord draws near to reward those who have cleansed their hands. It is quite clear from these verses that the Lord delights to draw near to those who walk in obedience to His ways. He will bless those who turn from sin and keep their hands clean and undefiled by sin.

How do we draw near to God? We do so by confessing the guilt of our actions before Him and turning from those sinful ways. God will bless those who draw near to Him with clean hands. but He resists those whose hands are stained with the guilt of sin and evil deeds. May the Lord give us grace to examine our lives in light of His Word so that we may cleanse our hand of anything that keeps us from drawing near to Him.

For Consideration:

- What did the Old Testament law require of the priests regarding the cleaning of their hands before entering the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle?

- What does it mean to have clean hands? What kind of things stain our hands and make us guilty before the Lord?
- Can we draw near to God with guilt on our hands? What provision has the Lord God made for our forgiveness and cleansing?
- How does God reward those who cleanse their hands of guilt and sin?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you sought to approach Him without first dealing with the guilt on your hands.
- Take a moment to ask the Lord to show you the guilt on your hands.
- Thank the Lord for the provision He has made for your sin and the cleansing from guilt. Thank the Lord Jesus that He came to die on the cross so that we can be forgiven and cleansed of our guilt.
- Thank the Lord that He draws near to bless and reward those who walk in His ways.

CHAPTER 6 -

PURIFY YOUR HEARTS

8 ...purify your hearts you double-minded. (James 4)

In the last chapter we examined what James had to say about the need of cleaning our hands of any guilt and sin if we are to draw near to the Lord God. In this next phrase of James 4:8 he takes this matter a step further. He tells his readers that they were also to purify their hearts. Let's take a moment to examine what James is telling us here.

In the book of Isaiah, we read these words spoken by God to His people:

13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men. (Isaiah 29)

As the Lord God watched the people of Isaiah's day, what did He see? He saw a religious people who worshipped Him only with their words. He saw a people who tried to honour Him by following a set of spiritual rules, faithfully

taught by their religious leaders. What He did not see, however, was a people whose hearts were devoted to Him. This grieved the Lord. His greatest desire was to see a people who were whole heartedly devoted to Him.

The heart is vital if we want to draw near to God. James addresses this in verse 8. Let's take a moment to break down what he tells us here about the heart and its role in drawing near to God.

First of all, it is important first that we understand what James means by the heart. When the apostle speaks about the heart he is not referring to the organ that pumps blood through our body. The Greek word "kardía" refers to that part of us that feels, thinks, or expresses emotions and passions.

Notice in verse 8 that James speaks particularly in this regard to those he calls "double-minded." It is important that we see the connection between the heart and the double-mindedness referred to here. A double-minded person is a person of two loyalties. Jesus would address this matter of two loyalties in Matthew 6 when He said:

24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6)

Joshua also addressed this matter with the people of his day when he challenged them to make a decision about the God they would serve:

15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the

River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24).

Finally, the Lord Jesus, speaking to the church of Laodicea said this:

15 I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3)

Notice the common theme in all of these verses. There is a call on every believer to choose the god he or she will serve. There is no room for divided loyalties in the Christian life. God calls for a heart that is totally committed to Him.

This problem of double-mindedness is a significant issue, but one we often fail to understand. When I married my wife, I chose to turn from all other women and devote myself to her alone. This was not only a commitment I made on my wedding day, but one I choose to honour for the rest of my life. It is also a decision that needs to be clear in my mind if I am to grow in my relationship with her. God expects nothing less. It is not without reason that God charges His people, the nation of Israel with adultery because they had turned to other gods (see Hosea 1:2).

There are many temptations in the Christian life. Our gods today may not be made from stone, wood or gold but they are still very real. Our work, our ministry, our pleasures, our possessions or even other people can all take the place of God in our lives. I have met individuals whose Christian ministry meant more to them than their relationship with God. If God were to take that ministry from them

they would turn from Him. I have met people whose whole life is about advancing in their career and making money. There are so many temptations in this world that seek a part of our heart and mind. It is so easy for us to have a divided heart and divided loyalties.

Notice what James is telling us here. If we are going to draw near to God we must purify our hearts. Take a moment to consider your heart. What are the passions of your heart? What are the responsibilities and commitments of your heart? What are the temptations that call for your attention? There are so many voices crying out. The heart is the dwelling place of our thoughts and attitudes. It is also the home of our lusts and ambitions. It is a place that will need regular housekeeping. Though unseen by human eyes, the heart is clearly seen by God. It is often easier to cleanse our hands but more difficult to purify our heart. Cleansing our hands is an outward act, while purifying our hearts involves changing the inside.

The word “purify” has the sense of removing all defilements and impurities. The purpose of this is to consecrate oneself to God and His purpose. This purifying of our heart requires a deep work of God’s Spirit. Notice, however, that James tells his readers that they were to purify their hearts. This required a conscious effort on their part. It was, however, an effort that could not be undertaken without the work and ministry of the Spirit of God and the forgiving work of Christ.

The work of purifying the heart involves subjecting our heart to the Word of God and its expectations. James compares the Word of God to a mirror (see James 1:23-24). That mirror will reveal the inner thoughts and attitudes of our heart. It will reveal anything that is incompatible with

the purpose of God for our lives. The Word of God will expose hidden motives and reveal our sinful passions. If we are to purify ourselves, we must allow the light of God's Word to shine into every corner of our heart, revealing those hidden things that dishonour Him.

Listen to what the writer to the Hebrews tells us about the Word of God in Hebrews 4:

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4)

The word of God will penetrate into our heart to discern its thoughts and intentions. It will expose our hidden attitudes and motives.

The Spirit of God will also work to purify our hearts. Before He left the disciples, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to them:

7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16)

Notice the role of the Holy Spirit. He was to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. If we invite the Holy Spirit to do this work, He will convict us of sin in our hearts and show us what God requires. He will expose the hidden secrets, unknown even to us. Often I have believed that I had overcome a certain sin in my life only to discover that the seeds of that sin still remained? At other times, the

Holy Spirit has revealed improper motives and attitudes in my heart or convicted me of a divided loyalty? Purifying our hearts begins with submitting to the truth of the Word and the conviction of the Spirit of God.

Not everyone is ready to undergo such an intimate examination. There have been times in my life when I wondered how much more sin the Lord was going to reveal. I felt overwhelmed with the things the Word and the Spirit were revealing. We can deceive ourselves into thinking that because there are no major sins on our hands that we are where we should be. The Lord wants to penetrate much deeper into our lives. He wants to expose things hidden even to us that have never been dealt with. This can be a painful process. It is certainly a humbling experience. No one wants to have their hidden sins and attitudes exposed. God's desire, however, is to go deep in our lives. He is more concerned about the heart than even the outward actions. If we let Him, He will expose those sins. He will do so for our good. He will expose anger, bitterness, and an unforgiving spirit. He will reveal lust and sinful thoughts. All these things are an offense to Him. He wants to cleanse you of these sins. He wants to remove their burden from your heart.

It is one thing to know the impurities of our heart and another to deal with them. James calls us to move beyond the discovery of our improper motives and divided loyalties. He calls us to consecrate our hearts to God and remove the impurities that would be an offense to Him. This requires two steps.

First, it requires confession and repentance on our part. Knowing that there are impurities in our heart is not enough. We need to confess those sins to the Lord and repent of them. Repentance requires a turning from these

attitudes or divided loyalties. It requires restructuring our priorities in life and walking in the way of righteousness. When God's Spirit reveals an improper attitude toward a brother or sister we must confess this as sin and commit ourselves before God to change that attitude. This will require a resisting of Satan and a refusal to allow our mind to think this way again.

Some time ago the Lord revealed to me that I was unwilling to accept His love. I felt so unworthy of His love that I could not imagine He could love me. There were so many voices crying out in my heart and mind reminding me that I was a sinner. I remember the day the Spirit of the Lord pointed me to His Word and showed me that God did love me. I remember the words of the Spirit in my heart that day: "Wayne, who are you going to believe? Will you believe the voices crying out in your heart saying that God could never love you or will you believe the Word of God?" That day the Spirit of God showed me that I was guilty of not believing His Word. I had chosen to believe a lie of the enemy instead. I remember clearly crying out to God on that day: "Father, I have not believed You. I have believed the lie of the enemy instead. Forgive me."

The apostle John tells us that God is willing to forgive if we come to Him:

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1)

We have this promise from God that if we come to Him and confess our sin, He will forgive and cleanse (or purify us). Our hearts can be purified through confession, repentance and the forgiving work of Christ.

Let me return to the illustration I have been using about my believing the lie of the enemy. The cleansing of my heart from this unbelief did not stop at confessing my sin to God. Even after confessing my sin I still struggled with the old thoughts. In those times, however, the Lord would remind me of His truth. I would find myself in those moments of doubt countering the lies of the enemy with a statement from God's Word about His love for me. I resisted those lies with the truth and made a conscious choice in those moments of doubt to trust what God said rather than believing the lies of the enemy. As I continued to resist those thoughts, my heart was cleansed of this sin of disbelief. The Lord gave me victory by means of the Word, the Spirit and the strength they gave me to resist the lies of the enemy. This is not an attitude I want to see in my heart today.

Let me be clear here. I am speaking about only one sinful attitude the Lord revealed in my heart. The Lord has continually revealed other attitudes that I have had to confess as well. I expect that this process of purifying my heart of sinful thoughts and attitudes will continue until the end of my life on earth. I want the Lord, however, to expose these things to me so that I can overcome them. I want my heart to be pure before Him. If you resist the purifying work of the Lord because you are afraid of what He will reveal, you will never grow any closer to the Lord. Only those who are ready to admit their guilt and allow God to expose and heal it will be drawn closer.

What we see here is that God is not looking for those who will be committed to Him on the outside only. He is not looking for a people who will worship Him only with their voices. He looks beyond all the outward show to the attitude and passion of the heart. He longs to see a people whose relationship with Him goes beyond the externals to the very core of their being. He longs to see a people

whose sincerity is such that they will refuse to allow even the unseen thoughts or passions of their heart to interfere with their commitment of love and devotion to God. Cleansing the outside is not enough; God is looking for a people who will commit themselves to Him from the heart.

How he delights to draw near to those who passion for Him comes from the very centre of their being. He draws near to those who examine and purify their hearts out of love and reverence for His name. What is the extent of your commitment to God? Are you committed in word and deed alone, or does this commitment extend to your heart?

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between honouring God with your words and honouring God with our heart?
- What does it mean to be double-minded? What kind of things seek to take the place of God in your heart?
- What role does the Word of God and the Holy Spirit play in the purifying of our heart? What role does the work of Christ play?
- What is the difference between enjoying the good things God has given us in life and making gods out of those things?
- How deep does your commitment to God go?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal any impurities in your heart that would keep you from Him.
- Thank the Lord for the way He longs for you to love Him from the heart. Thank Him for His love and devotion to you personally.
- Ask the Lord to give you an undivided heart—one that is committed to Him from the very core of your being and not just in words and deeds.

CHAPTER 7 - BE WRETCHED, MOURN AND WEEP

9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. (James 4)

James 4:9 is an example of a verse that must be interpreted by the context of the book and chapter. Let's take a moment to break this down and see how it applies to the subject we are dealing with here.

James uses a number of words in verse 9. It may be helpful for us to examine these briefly.

Wretched

The apostle begins by telling his readers that they are to be wretched. The Greek word “*talaiporéo*” means to endure hardship, affliction or distress. Remember that the believers to whom James was writing were scattered and suffering persecution because of their faith (see James

1:1). James spoke about the hardship and affliction they were enduring in the first chapter of his letter.

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1)

The faith of these believers was lived out in a sinful world. Just as the world did not accept the Lord Jesus, neither will it accept His servants. Jesus made this clear in John 15 when He said:

20 Remember the word that I said to you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. (John 15)

Those who seek to draw near to God will suffer in this world. In drawing near to God we make ourselves enemies to the world, for our Lord’s standards are not the standards of the world. James reminds us here that there is a cost to drawing near to God. He has already told us that those who make themselves friends of the world will become enemies of God (James 4:4).

The writer of the book of Hebrews describes men and women of faith who have gone before us. It is worth quoting from Hebrews 11 in this context.

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the

edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11)

These men and women of faith suffered tremendously at the hands of the world. They experienced the wretchedness of life in a sinful world. This was the cost of drawing near to God. It was a cost, however, that they were willing to pay for the greater joy of being in the presence of their Lord.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 14 to emphasise the cost of drawing near:

27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

If you want to draw near to God you must examine the cost. Many want to experience a deep intimacy with God but they are not willing to pay the price. Their love for the

world is too great. They are not willing to take up their cross.

Mourn

The second word James uses here in James 4:9 is the word “mourn.” The word “pentéo” simply means to be distressed or lament. What is causing this mourning and distress. James does not tell us in this verse, but we can understand some important details from the context. In James 4, the apostle has been speaking about fights and quarrels among believers (see James 4:1). He reminds his readers that the cause of these quarrels are related to the worldly passions found in their hearts. They were so attracted to the world and what it offered that they were willing to fight their brothers and sisters to obtain these things. James speaks very clearly to these believers in James 4:4. He calls them an adulterous people and enemies of God.

The apostle tells these believers to mourn. He just reminded them of their love for the world and the damage that this was causing in their relationship with their brothers and sisters. He reminded them that they were turning their back on God and living in spiritual adultery. In fact, those who did not mourn in this circumstance revealed just how far from God they were. Augustine of Hippo once said,

“Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.” (<https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/in-context/article/augustine/>).

For the true believer there is no greater joy than when our hearts are resting in our Saviour. When this is not happening, there is cause for great mourning and distress. Listen to the distress of the Psalmist in Psalm 42:

1 As the deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God,
When shall I come and appear before God?
3 My tears have been my food
day and night
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?” (Psalm 42)

Do you see the heart cry of the Psalmist here? Tears flow as he mourns for the presence of God. Is this the cry of your heart? Do you grieve because the world has stripped away your intimacy with God? Are you content with what the world offers or will you be restless and in distress until you find the Lord and rest in Him?

Weep

The third word used by James in verse 9 is the word translated “weep.” The Greek word “klaío” is a strong word. It speaks of wailing and grieving in a very deep way. It is a loud wail expressing intense grief and agony. James is not speaking about a quiet sorrow or regret but a deep agonising pain and despair. This kind of weeping comes from the very core of one’s being. Remember in the last chapter we spoke about the purifying of our heart. There seems to be a connection here between this purifying of the heart and the weeping we see here.

One of the things about the heart as the seat of our passions and emotions is that it can become very hard. The Lord often speaks about the hardness of the hearts of His people (see Ezekiel 3:7; Matthew 19:8; Mark 16:14; Ephesians 4:18). One of the things that hardens the heart toward God is the attractions and temptations of this world.

These things pollute our heart and cause them to become insensitive to God and His voice. When we submit our heart to God, He purifies it by removing those things that distract us and keep us from intimacy with Him.

As our hearts become softened to God they begin to long for Him more than anything else. He becomes the focus of the heart and the only one who can satisfy its longings. The heart weeps with intensity when God is distant. It grieves when anything comes between it and the object of its affection. We come to a place where we say like Paul in Philippians 1:21: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Christ is the centre of our heart and passions.

Does this describe your relationship with God? Does your heart grieve His absence with intensity? Do you weep with a desperate longing for his enabling and intimate fellowship? Is He the centre of your focus? If I were to ask believers today if they wanted to know a deeper fellowship with God, just about every believer would respond by saying, "Of course I want to know God more and experience a deeper fellowship with Him." The question, however, is not whether we would like to experience a deeper fellowship with God but rather, "How important is this fellowship and intimacy with God?" Does your heart cry out in deep despair because it does not experience this fellowship? Does your heart wail and weep when it no longer senses the presence God?

Many want to know the presence of God but their hearts are still divided. They want God but they also want the world. If they can know God and the world at the same time they are content. God, however, draws near to those who seek Him with a weeping heart –a heart that is not content with anything but Him.

Listen to the advice of James in verse 9:

9 ... Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom (James 4)

Again remember the context of this verse. James 4 speaks about friendship with the world. James tells believers that they did not receive from the Lord because they asked and spent what they received from Him on their own worldly pursuits (see James 4:3).

The laughter and joy spoken about in James 4:9 is a worldly laughter and joy found in friendship with the world and satisfaction in worldly passions. James is not against joy and laughter. In fact, joy is a fruit of the Spirit of God. The joy of God, however, is quite different from the joy the world offers in temporary possessions or experiences. James told his suffering readers to count it all joy when they experienced trials (James 1:2). They were to be joyful because they understood that these earthly trials would draw them closer to the Lord who was the source of true joy.

James speaks in this context to those whose joy and laughter is in the things of this world. They lived for the world and found great joy in its possessions and privileges. Have we not met many who have become so satisfied in what the world offers that they do not feel their need of God? The hearts of these individuals have been filled with earthly joy and laughter but it has come at the cost of intimacy with God.

I was in Cuba some years ago speaking to a pastor. As he shared with me he said: "Wayne, many American pastors come here and say to us: "We admire your faith. You have gone through so much and yet you have a strong faith."

The pastor went on to tell me: "I don't see it like this. I look at North American pastors and say: "I admire your faith. You have so much and yet you still have a strong faith."

Here was a pastor who understood the pull of a materialistic society and how it can destroy faith and intimacy with God. The pull of materialism is powerful. We can satisfy our fleshly needs in what the earth offers. We can fill our tables with food and our lives with pleasures. We can live a comfortable and satisfying life, but to do this we may risk allowing these things to take the place of true intimacy with God and a depth of fellowship that only comes from a life of total surrender.

Are you willing to surrender the laughter and joy of this world in exchange for a deeper and more satisfying joy? Are you willing to face the rejection and mocking that comes from a life of full surrender to God? Listen to the promise of Jesus in Matthew 5:3-6:

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5)

There is a kingdom prepared for those who recognise their poverty of spirit. There is comfort for those who mourn. There is an inheritance for the meek. There is satisfaction for those who truly hunger and thirst after God and His ways.

The way to intimacy, according to James, is through a recognition of our need. Intimacy with God is granted to those who desire it with a grieving passion. It is for those whose hearts have been purified from a love for this world and its attractions. God draws near to those whose hearts are broken because they long for fellowship with Him. May God give you this kind of heart and the strength to renounce anything that would compete for His attention.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the cost of seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord God?
- What are you willing to sacrifice in order to experience a deeper intimacy with God?
- What temptations are there in your life that keep you from God and from a more personal walk with Him.
- Have you found yourself content with what the world offers? Are you happy with a limited knowledge and relationship with God?
- What causes the heart to become hardened to the things of God? What is the condition of your heart today?

For Prayer:

- Ask that Lord to reveal to you any way in which you have become so content with the things of

this world that you no longer seek Him as you should.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for a lack of passion in your heart for Him.
- Ask God to soften your heart so that it longs for Him more than anything else.

CHAPTER 8 -

HUMBLE YOURSELF

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

The final step toward intimacy with God in James 4:7-10 is to humble ourselves before God. This follows in line with what James told his readers earlier in the chapter:

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4)

What is humility? Humility has to do with how we view ourselves. Consider what the apostle Paul said in Romans 12:

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (Romans 12)

Humble people see themselves as God made them—nothing more, but nothing less. Notice that Paul told us that

we should think of ourselves “according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (verse 3).

There are those who live their lives with a sense of absolute unworthiness and a sense of helplessness. They feel that they are so unworthy they cannot serve the Lord. They do not believe that their spiritual gifts would be of any use to the Lord. This is not humility; it is a lack of faith and understanding of God and His purpose. The humble person is not one who hides away in a corner afraid to step out in service, but one who, understanding the gifts God has given, steps out in obedience to use those gifts for the glory of God. The humble person understands that it is not their strength and wisdom that is going to win the battle, but the Lord's. They also know the call of God on their hearts, and so they step out in obedience with the faith God has given to win that battle.

Living a life of humility involves accepting God's view of who I am. It recognises that I am a sinner who has fallen short of the standard God has laid out (see Romans 3:23). It also involves recognizing my dependence on God for all things. The humble person understands that every breath comes from God the Creator and that life is in His hands.

Humility also means accepting that we are God's creation and willingly submitting to His purpose. This means that the humble person will walk in obedience, surrendering to God in all things.

This submission to God involves willingness to step out in obedience in the use of the gifts and talents He has given. The humble person is faithful in the use of their spiritual gifts, time and resources. Humility is not inactivity. The truly humble person will be very busy. The humble person will find his faith being stretched in the Lord. At times this

service may result in great persecution or trials, but the humble person will willingly endure this for the sake of the Lord God.

Humility involves an acceptance of my position in life. I am not the Creator or Lord. I am created by God, created for His glory and honour. I accept the Lordship of God in my life. I will surrender to Him and His ways, seeking with all my heart to walk in obedience to Him. I will risk my life for Him. I will be faithful in the use of my gifts and time for him. Humility is much more than an attitude of the heart; it is a whole-hearted commitment to the will and purpose of God for my life.

Notice that James tells us that we are to humble ourselves. This is an important statement. How do we humble ourselves? We do so by recognising that God is Lord and Master. We do so by submitting to His Lordship in every aspect of our lives, daily drawing from Him the strength and wisdom we need to be faithful and obedient.

As I begin each day I need to commit myself afresh to God's Lordship in my life, drawing upon His strength and wisdom. I need to surrender the day before me to Him and His purposes, making it my priority to live out that day for Him and willingly sacrificing whatever it takes to bring Him glory and honour.

As we willingly surrender in true humility to God, James tells us that God will exalt us. To exalt is to lift up or to elevate. In Luke 16 Jesus said:

10 One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. (Luke 16)

When we prove trustworthy in the little things God gives, He will entrust us with more. There are those who want to start with the big things without ever learning the lessons that come from being faithful in the small things. God wants us to be faithful with what He has given us whether it be big or small. He will reward those who are faithful to Him in whatever He gives them to do.

God lifts up those who humbly serve and recognize Him as Lord. This lifting up may come in a number of ways. For those who are weary in faithful service, God will give them strength:

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew
their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40)

To those whose hearts have been broken under the load of faithfulness, God promises His presence:

18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and
saves the crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflic-
tions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him
out of them all. (Psalm 34)

3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their
wounds, (Psalm 147)

To those who walk faithfully through the valley of the shadow of death, He promises comfort:

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and staff,
they comfort me. (Psalm 23)

All who call upon Him in truth can know His wonderful presence.

18 The Lord is near to those who call on him, to those who call on him in truth (Psalm 145)

For those who have made great sacrifices in their obedience to the Lord we have these words of Jesus.

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first. (Matthew 19)

As we humble ourselves, God blesses and draws near. God draws close to those who are faithful to Him.

There is one more significant detail we need to mention in closing. Notice that this humbling is “before the Lord.” This is key to understanding what James is telling us in this verse. There are many people who are humble in character but who have never humbled themselves before the Lord. To humble oneself before the Lord is to submit to Him. Having a meek character is not what James is speaking about here. He is talking about bowing down before the Lord God and committing one's life to Him. There are many who are meek in character who will never be exalted

because they have never surrendered their hearts and lives to the Lord God.

Only those who humble themselves before the Lord can know what it means to be drawn near. If you want to know God in a deeper and more intimate way, you will have to surrender your ambitions and goals in life to Him, accepting His word and purposes. This may mean a life of difficulty and struggle, but it is a life God will bless. He will lift up those who bow down to Him in humble surrender. He will draw near to those who submit to Him. They will know His comfort, peace, protection and blessing. As we humbly submit to Him and His purpose, He draws near to us and exalts us.

For Consideration:

- In what way is humility more than an attitude. Can we demonstrate true humility if we are not faithful in service? What is the connection between humility and obedience?
- What does it mean to humble ourselves before the Lord?
- What is the difference between being of a humble character and humbling ourselves before the Lord?
- What are the promises of God to those who humble themselves before Him?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to humble yourself before Him. Ask Him to show you if there are any areas of your life that you have not surrendered to Him and His Lordship.
- Ask God to give you grace to step out in humble obedience in the use of your spiritual gifts. Ask Him to forgive you for not being as faithful to Him as you should be.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to humbly surrender to Him in all aspects of your life.
- Thank the Lord that He has promised to draw near those who truly humble themselves before Him.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at <http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca>