

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

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INTRODUCTION: (SCRIPTURE READING – JAMES 4:7-10)

- A. You could accurately say that our lives consist of a summation of many different relationships:**
1. Think about our many relationships: Give list of groups of people we have relationships with
 2. These relationships did not just happen did they? May have took a lot of work to develop, a common interest or work drawing us together, taking initiative & being more outgoing, etc
 3. Maintaining and growing these relationships doesn't takes work too doesn't it – How do you go from associates to close friends? How do two friends go to dating, then to marriage?
- B. Perhaps God designed life here on earth for man to revolve so much around relationships because it prepares us and even could be a shadow of our relationship with Him:**
1. The Bible often uses the word "fellowship" to describe our relationship with God (**1 John 1:3**)
 2. Some of the same things needed to develop and deepen our relationships with one another are needed for our developing and deepening our fellowship with the Lord (give examples)
 3. Every Christian wants a better relationship with God, to feel a deeper level of fellowship with God, but the question is how do we pursue that? The answer is simple: Draw Near to God!

THE PURSUIT OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

- A. James writes in very practical terms about how we should go about drawing near to God – In fact, he says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" – What a wonderful promise! (James 4:8a)**
1. To draw near to God we must first change our affections & draw away from this world (**James 4:1-6a**)
 - a. What was the common factor between the cause of the quarrelling and the prayers that are not effective? Selfish ambitions, covetousness, unbridled passions... It's a problem of worldliness
 - b. Friendship with the world of course isn't speaking of the natural creation around us or even specifically the people, but all of the passions, priorities, attitudes, mindsets, conduct, values, and the like which are under the influence of the devil & his devices (**1 John 2:15-17**)
 - c. James uses a very painful picture to describe those who are supposed to be Christians but pursue worldliness at the same time – Adultery! Why? Because while we are supposed to be in a relationship with God we are also in a relationship with this world! (**Hosea 1:2**)
 - d. We have to draw a line of allegiance. Friendship with the world means enmity with God. So we must choose which we will draw near to. We cannot draw close to both! (**Matthew 6:24**)
 2. If we are going to draw near to God we also must humble ourselves and submit to God (**James 4:6-7a, 10**)
 - a. How many people are kept from God because of pride? For some, their pride keeps them from obeying the gospel, for others their pride keeps them from admitting sin & seeking God's will
 - b. The person who is full of himself cannot be filled by God because there is no room left! Not only is there no room for God, but it puts us in opposition to God... Our pride fights against His will!
 - c. Pride is a definite grace buster! As long as we are filled with pride we can't be filled with God's grace... Who stands a chance of drawing near to God w/o His grace to take care of our sins?
 - d. Humility alone isn't our goal – There's many humble people who don't know God! We grow closer to God the more we act on our humility by submitting to God and His will! It's recognizing His sovereign authority, His rule in our lives, trusting His guidance, and fully obeying Him!
 3. Another part of drawing near to God is actively resisting the devil (**James 4:7b**)

- a. Great struggles await when we lose sight of the fact that we are engaged in a real war! It is fought on the battle ground of our hearts, the weapons used against us are temptations working through our own desires, the enemy we are fighting is the devil, & the results are eternal!
- b. Drawing near to God, as we have seen, means drawing away from everything that is against Him and who is more against God than the devil himself? Here is there is no middle ground!
- c. Resisting the devil is when we say no to temptation, when we take conscious steps to strengthen our faith against his attacks, when we make decisions the limit the opportunities of Satan
- d. We've got another promise – While Satan does come after us like a roaring lion pursues its prey, if we will resist his advances, He will flee from us just as he left Jesus when Jesus resisted him
- 4. Drawing near to God also means doing our best to eradicate any sinful thinking or behavior **(James 4:8-9)**
 - a. The single greatest hindrance to our fellowship with the Lord is sin! Sin, regardless of how big or small it seems to us, separates us from God. It is this destructive result of sin that sent Jesus to the cross in order to restore the ability of man to enjoy fellowship with God **(Isaiah 59:1-2)**
 - b. This means resisting sin on both levels – Cleansing our hands represents getting sin out of our actions and purifying our hearts represents removing sin from our motives and our thoughts.
 - c. We think of drawing near to God as a joyous experience, and it is, but this commands us to weep and mourn! In context this refers to sorrow over sin! The Lord mourns over our sins and so should we if we are to be like Him! Mourning over our sins shows our humility and desire to change... mourning over sins of others shows our love for godliness and our for their souls!
 - d. God desires fellowship, He wants to draw nearer to us, & He is on our side, but we must do our part! God has done so much to make it possible, but He won't force us to draw near to Him!
- 5. Finally, we draw nearer to God as we treat one another with greater love and justice **(James 4:11-12)**
 - a. Earlier James condemned the fights & quarrels that took place due to our selfish ambitions. Now he returns to our relationships with one another... This too is part of drawing near to God!
 - b. Think about it: When a Christian rips and tears apart other Christians verbally they are ripping and tearing apart another child of their Father! Can we expect to be close to Him if doing that?

B. The Hebrew writer discusses the fact that we draw near to God through building & exercising our faith:

- 1. We often emphasize how Hebrews 11 is about faith that pleases God, faith that saves, or faith that obeys; however, it is also about the kind of faith that draws us near to God: **(Hebrews 11:6)**
 - a. Faith that just recognizes God exists or even Jesus is Lord doesn't draw us any closer to God than the faith of the demons which also believe, but tremble – We want a deeper faith than that
 - b. The kind of faith that draws us close to God (1) Believes God exists (2) that God is a rewarder (3) and diligently pursues God! Thus it is a convicting, a trusting, and an active & obedient faith
 - c. How close you can draw to God depends on how deep your faith takes you in these areas..
 - d. As we know, the Hebrew writer gives several examples of people who had the kind of faith that draws a person closer to God. Consider some things about just one of them – Abraham **(vs. 8-19)**
 - 1) He trusted so much he left his home not knowing where he was going, knowing God knew
 - 2) Even when he gets to the promised land he still lived a pilgrim's life, in tents, because he was seeking another city who's designer & builder was God... wanted to be with God!
 - 3) When God calls Abraham to do the most difficult thing in his life, offering his only son and the son of promise as a sacrifice to God, Abraham obeyed trusting God could raise him from the dead since he knew & experienced that God always kept his promises
 - 4) Abraham's fellowship with God was so close that God referred to Abraham as "my friend forever" – What higher commendation could God give? **(2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8)**

2. Through the sacrifice of Jesus we can draw near to God by faith with confidence (**Hebrews 10:19-25**)
 - a. The holy place of the tabernacle or temple represented God's special presence. Only the high priest was allowed to enter it & then only once a year. He could only enter after making sacrifices & washing with water. As the holiest of holy places you just couldn't draw near!
 - b. The sacrifice of Jesus not only allows us to draw near to God, but it allows us to draw near with confidence! The "new & living way" is interesting – The term "new" in Greek actually refers to something "lately slaughtered" and yet it is said to be living. Jesus is the only sacrifice for sins that continues to live! The blood has been shed, the curtain torn, & access granted to all
 - c. Notice verse 22 – Here are several qualities of a person who would draw near unto God:
 - 1) With a true heart – Seems to imply sincerity. We come to God with honest open hearts, not holding back and not with ulterior motives. Single mindedly turning over to Him
 - 2) In full assurance of faith – Means unwavering confidence. Not just in the academical matters of our faith, but in the practical matters. **(Rope Illustration)**
 - 3) Hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and body washed with pure water...
 - d. We draw near by holding fast to our hope – We can't expect to draw close to God if we are like a spiritual yo-yo... Close to God one minute, pulling away the next! Hope not only causes us to serve the Lord, but it keeps us close to Him & faithful even when discouragements assail!
 - e. Collectively drawing near to one another plays a vital role in drawing near to God on an individual basis. The more we strive to "stir up" each other to good works and encourage one another to greater faithfulness, the closer we draw to God... You benefit by seeking to help others!
3. Of course the point needs to be made that the one way we can draw near to God is through the work of Jesus as our perfect high priest and by faith in Him: (**Hebrews 7:19, 23-28; Hebrews 4:14-16**)
 - a. Our hope draws us close to God and our hope is based in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ! His one sacrifice stands here in great contrast to the innumerable sacrifices made under the O.C.
 - b. He didn't just make a sacrifice for sin, He offered His own life as a sacrifice for sin – As we seek to draw near to God it is only through that sacrifice & through Him that fellowship is possible!
 - b. His work did not end at the cross –He continually serves as our high priest making intercession for us before the Father as the One who died for our sins, but lived our life & experienced our weaknesses... We draw near with confidence knowing He can give the exact grace we need!
4. When our goal is to draw near to God, it transforms everything we do, especially the spiritual things:
 - a. David is a great example of this (**1 Sam 13:14**) – You can read the psalms he wrote and feel his fellowship with God in his words! He spent much time in prayer, praised God regularly, had a deep desire for His word, valued every opportunity to worship, trusted His providence, sought to obey His laws, and saw God's signature on everything around him!
 - b. Let's consider some practical ways things change when our goal is drawing nearer to God:
 - 1) Prayer – Because we have to, because we need something, because we have done something wrong, out of habit – Or pray because we want to talk to God?
 - 2) Study – Learning a bunch of facts, neat stories about people who lived thousands of years ago, filling in blanks in a Bible lesson – Or knowing the Lord more and more each day, listening to Him talk to you, and trying to become as much like Him as you can?
 - 3) Good Deeds – Trying to make people like us, doing it just because we are supposed to, trying to gain "stars in our crowns" – Or trying to help people who are made in the image of our Lord, having a heart for His children, and again trying to be like Him

4) Daily decisions – We ask, “Would this decision help me draw closer to God or cause me to move further away from Him?” Some decisions aren’t necessarily inherently sinful, but they show a lack of spiritual interest! Don’t repeat the mistake of Lot!

Invite: ([Hebrews 10:22](#)) Part of drawing near to God is having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. When does this happen? Consider two passages ([1 Pet 3:21](#); [Acts 22:16](#))