

WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

A STUDY IN JAMES

Drawing Near to God

**You can't have the promise of God drawing near unto you,
until you fulfill the command of drawing near unto God.**

Sometimes we feel 'disconnected' from God – maybe there is a specific reason – maybe not. Most people experience these feelings at times even after having walked with the Lord for many years. We must purposefully draw near to Him. Drawing near to God is necessary to salvation and for our Christian walk.

God is near. God wants us to find Him and has blessed all people everywhere to be able to do that. From one side of our continent to the other and around the world, everyone can find God. The Apostle Paul explained in **Romans 1:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Jesus promised in **Matthew 7:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

When we have those moments of feeling 'disconnected' from our Savior, it is good to turn to the words of James to remind ourselves of the necessary steps to reconnect to our awesome and loving God.

Read James 4:7 (ESV) ⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Submitting to God means we must relinquish control of our lives to the Almighty God. The word submit is a military term that means get into your proper rank. In this case, we are to submit to God's authority and stop worshipping self. The proud person will find this to be the ultimate challenge since self-preservation is a natural human instinct and we tend to think that we should 'be in charge' of our own lives. However, we are able to submit to God's power because the same grace that brings a believer into fellowship with the Creator of the Universe will sustain us in spite of the pressures of the world. As Christians we do not have to "fight our own battles." God takes care of His children. *...If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)*

We must resist the Devil to keep him from getting a foothold in our lives. How does Satan get that foothold? We give it to him! I have used this story in the past, but it part of my 'real life' commentary so I will repeat it. When I was growing up, a large deep ditch ran close to our house. My mother would always advise me that when the devil tempted me to tell him to get in that ditch and leave me alone in the name of Jesus. She was illustrating to me as a child that we must resist Satan. When we call on the name of Jesus, the devil will flee. **2 Samuel 22:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

Read James 4:8 (ESV) ⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Drawing near to God is at the heart of our worship of Him. Drawing near to God should not be an on-again/off-again relationship. Instead we should determine to draw near to God once and for all. We come near to the Lord with the intention of staying close to Him. We can draw near to the Lord by doing several things.

- We confess our sins. If we fail to confess our sin, the discipline of the Lord is sure to come until we do confess. Confession of sin keeps us in fellowship with God. We cannot be near God with unconfessed sin in our lives. **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- We are remorseful and broken because of our sin. Christians talk and worry about the disaster we see our nation heading towards and let we are not heeding **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)**¹⁴ *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*
- We concentrate on the Word of God. **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* We will not stay near to God if we do not focus on His Word. His Word is the divine instrument that He uses to draw near to us.
- We have a concern for being close to the Lord each day. **Isaiah 55:6 (ESV)**⁶ *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.*
- We keep a clear conscience. Paul said to Felix in **Acts 24:16 (ESV)**¹⁶ *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.* Holding grudges against others will stand in the way of our nearness to God.

When we are not near to God, it is our responsibility to draw near to Him and restore our worship of God and God alone. Take heart! We are not alone in our struggles. When God seems far away, remember, it is never God who moved. Sit down and read the Bible, sing a praise song or listen to Christian music, meditate on Jesus and He will be near. Confession and repentance are vital in drawing close to God. The psalmist wrote in **Psalms 24:3-4 (ESV)**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.*

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. If we are to have victory in our lives, we must clean up on the outside and the inside. Jesus said in **Matthew 23:27 (ESV)**²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.* Ron Mattoon says, “Cleansing our hands deals with cleaning up our conduct, and purifying our hearts deals with cleaning up our thought-life and motives. The hands speak of what we do and the heart speaks of what we are. The hands and heart are joined together because we do what we do because of who we are on the inside. There is no communion without cleaning. God cannot effectively use a dirty vessel.”

The term *double-minded* comes from the Greek meaning “a person with two minds or souls”. It’s interesting that this word appears only here in chapter 4 and in **James 1:8**. Bible scholars conclude that James may have even coined the word. A double-minded person is restless and confused in thoughts, actions and behavior. Such

a person is always in conflict with self. One torn by such inner conflict can never lean with confidence on God and His gracious promises.

Wrong thinking produces wrong behavior. When we are double-minded, we create instability for ourselves because we cannot make up our mind to truly draw near to God and relinquish control to Him.

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

Weeping indicates wailing over our sin. When we become broken about our sinfulness, we take our sin more seriously. When we get disgusted with our disobedience, then we are on the way to getting victory over it. Mourning over our sin is what leads to blessing.

Matthew 5:4 (ESV) ⁴ *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* When I think of this verse, I have always thought of being comforted in our mourning in the context of the Lord comforting those who mourn over loved ones they have lost to death. Today, I realize this beatitude of Jesus is connected to the words of James concerning mourning over sin. The word *mourn* indicates a passionate grief that cannot be hidden. The laughter that comes from sensual, sinful living should be turned to mourning and weeping over sin.

Read James 4:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

Joseph humbled himself as a slave in Potiphar's house and God exalted Joseph to second in command in Egypt. If you want to be promoted, then become a servant. This is God's formula for success. How do we humble ourselves? We do this by asking God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of others we may have wronged. God says He will lift us up when we do this. **Micah 6:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Keep in mind it is a dangerous thing to pray for God to humble us. Things will go much better for us if we humble our own selves. When we don't humble ourselves, we are really saying we don't trust God.

We so often spend valuable time trying to make ourselves look good and lifting ourselves up. What we need to remember is to lift up Jesus. **John 12:32 (ESV)** ³² *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*” Jesus was willing to accept the responsibility for our sins, sins He did not commit. Jesus was willing to be lifted up on a cross. Because Jesus conquered the cross, and death, He will lift up those who look to Him for eternity. He will also lift us up in the present if we humble ourselves before Him.

If it is our desire to delight the Lord and stay connected to Him, we must avoid using our tongues for the purpose of undercutting others.

Read James 4:11-12 (ESV) ¹¹ *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.* ¹² *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

The Bible teaches that we must have Christian discernment. *1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 (ESV)* ²¹ *but test everything; hold fast what is good.* ²² *Abstain from every form of evil.* However, testing everything and avoiding every kind of evil does not provide license to judge the hearts and motives of others. God's children need to focus on devoting ourselves to obeying the Word and not investigating how others obey.

What is the only instrument that sharpens itself with use? The answer is the tongue. Are you sharpening your tongue at the expense of others? Are you rushing to judgment in your words and your thoughts? The list of things the Lord hates includes: *a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. Proverbs 6:19 (ESV)*

James was warning Christians to avoid slandering one another. We might not consider making critical comments in the same category as slander. Slander is defined as a false and damaging statement. Some might say, "well, if it is true then it is okay to criticize!" How do we know what is true? When it comes to thoughts and intents of the heart only the Lord knows!

What did James mean when he warned not to judge the law? People who criticize (and this is an easy sin for Christians to get caught up in) make the mistake of setting ourselves up to be "judge and jury." The ninth commandment says in *Exodus 20:16 (ESV)* ¹⁶ *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* People who criticize others rarely see themselves as giving false testimony. Instead they begin to think that their opinions are the "gospel truth" when they just might turn out to be "fake news". We all need to be continually reminded of the words of Jesus in *Matthew 7:1 (ESV)* ¹ *"Judge not, that you be not judged.*

The conflicts among the Christians in James' church had their origin in judging and speaking evil of one another - not really that much different from church families today. The sad truth is the ones we love the most are sometimes the ones we criticize the most. *1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)* ¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

It is easy to fall into Satan's trap of thinking that life is all about us and our opinions. God is the only Judge. What James said about there being only One Lawgiver is also found in the Old Testament. *Isaiah 33:22 (ESV)* ²² *For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.* God's Word never changes.

The 'criticism bandwagon' is so easy to jump on – talking about others can become a favorite pastime if we do not stay near to the heart of God. Remember, Jesus' words from the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" Practice this: *1 John 4:19 (ESV)* ¹⁹ *We love because he first loved us.*