Drawing Near to God

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0:00] What causes fights and quarrels among you?! Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?! You desire but do not have, so you kill.

! You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.
When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.
Or do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?
[1:03] But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.
Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.
Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up. This is the end of today's reading. One of the things I would say as Clarence helps me is when we read a passage of scripture like this, if we didn't have any Bible knowledge, we would think it was written to a group of people other than God's people.
And yet, this passage of scripture was written to God's people, to people like you and me who belong to the Lord.
[2:27] And we therefore need to hear it. And we need to reflect on it. And we need to heed it.

Let me go ahead and pray as Clarence comes. Heavenly Father, we ask this morning that you would draw near to us.
We ask, O Lord, that you would speak to our hearts from your word. Would you cause us to, even in this moment, be postured to hear and obey what you would say to us.
Father, we ask that you would use this sermon this morning to posture our hearts for this coming week as we seek your face through prayer and fasting.
Meet us, O Lord. And do what we just sang, we ask. Would you speak to us? And then, Lord, would you help us to obey all that you say to us?
[3:49] And we ask that you would do this. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And I thought Clarence would be here. I thought I was going to use the other microphone.

Amen. One of the sobering realities of the Christian life is that we who belong to Christ are simultaneously saints and sinners.
In other words, we are saints who sin. We have put our trust in Christ.
He has forgiven us of our sins. And we belong to him. He set us aside. He's called us saints.
That is the description of those who belong to God in Scripture. But we still sin. Now, obviously, we don't sin in the same ways having come to Christ as we did prior to coming to Christ.
[5:39] We don't sin in habitual and willful ways. But the reality is that we still sin. And sometimes our sins are such that they cause us to visually be identified more with the world than with God and his people.

It's one of the realities of the Christian life. And I think many of us have lived long enough to experience that, to observe that.

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And certainly it is something that we see in the pages of Scripture. Scripture brings us face to face with this contradictory reality of saints and sinners at the same time.
And one of those places is this passage that we've just read in James chapter 4, verses 1 to 10.
And as we prepare for our week of corporate consecration, I do pray that the Lord would use this passage in our lives in a foundational way to guide us and to guide us and to direct us and to meet us as we come before him this week.
But this morning's sermon is not just focused on this week of corporate consecration. I think what we need to hear from this sermon this morning, brothers and sisters, is relevant to us in an ongoing way because this is the reality of the Christian life.
[7:24] We will battle sin until the day we die. We will battle sin until the day we breathe our final breath.

And then and only then will sin be something that is no longer relevant to us. This passage from James is both convicting and encouraging.
But before it can encourage us, it needs to convict us. We will not truly receive the encouragement that James offers in this passage.
Unless we bring ourselves under its conviction and we allow the Lord to deal with us, wherever we are this morning, wherever he finds us this morning by his spirit, let us, let the Lord have his way with us.
And it is out of that that we would receive the encouragement that James has for us in this passage.
What we see James doing in this passage is he is challenging the contradiction of worldliness in the lives of God's people, and he's calling them to repentance.
[8:53] As we hear and reflect on these words of James this morning, he has encouragement I pray that all of us will leave with, all of us who belong to Christ, I pray that we would leave with this encouragement in our hearts.

Drawing near to God calls us to renounce worldliness and pursue godliness in an ongoing way.
This is what we are called to. We are called in an ongoing way to renounce worldliness and to pursue godliness.
And I wish it were one and done, but it's not one and done. Every day, brothers and sisters, we are engaged in a battle. And we heard this last week.
Spiritual warfare is ever with us. And therefore, every day that we live on this earth, we are called to be pursuing God, to be renouncing worldliness, and to be pursuing godliness.
[10:15] I've structured this morning's sermon around two points, two very simple points. And the first one is renouncing worldliness.

That's the first spiritual endeavor that we see this passage calling us to. It is calling us to draw near to God by renouncing worldliness.
But what is worldliness? worldliness. The definitions vary. But I think for many people, we tend to think of worldliness in external terms.
We tend to think of worldliness in terms of the clothes we wear or the entertainment choices that we make. worldliness. And certainly, those choices and other choices can reflect worldliness or not.
But worldliness fundamentally is a matter of the heart. Worldliness is a matter of the heart, how our hearts are postured, and it is out of that position of our hearts that we live life.
[11:23] Worldliness flows from our hearts, and it's manifested in the decisions that we make as we live our lives. But first and foremost, it is a matter of the heart.

And first and foremost, because it's a matter of the heart, God primarily has a perfect view of our heart. None of us has a perfect view of the other's heart.
God does, and it is He with whom we have to do. Notice that James begins by addressing the issue of quarrels and fights, by asking the question, what causes fights and quarrels among you?
How would you answer that question? Why do you fight and quarrel?
Think about your last argument. Maybe it was with your husband, or your wife, or another family member, or a co-worker, or maybe an employee in a business that gave bad service.
[12:47] Imagine James speaking to you. Imagine this morning that James was talking to you, and James was saying to you, what was that all about? Why were you quarreling?

I think most of us would answer James by giving him the facts surrounding the argument, or the quarrel, or the fight that we were engaged in.

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Perhaps a husband would be saying, well, my wife just doesn't know time. I brought her to her attention.
She habitually keeps us late, and instead of apologizing, she defended herself. That's why we were quarreling. Or maybe it's a husband, or a wife, who says, my husband is just insensitive.
We both work, and he watches me slaving in the house, and he will not help, and he even creates dirt, his own dirt that he will not clean, will not pick up his own clothes, will not move his own dishes, and we both go out to work.
[14:01] And I brought it to his attention. He didn't apologize, and he gave no indication that he's going to change. And I can go on.

I can go on. And largely, that's what we would do. We would give the facts of why we were quarreling. But James disagrees.
James disagrees with our approach to explaining the cause of our quarrels. And notice what he says in verse 1. He answers his own question.
And he gives a singular reason for all quarrels. It doesn't matter if it's a husband versus a wife, or a wife versus a husband, or siblings, or co-workers.
James gives one answer to all quarrels. He says, here's the cause of your quarrels. Look at what he says, starting in verse 1. What causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you?
[15:07] Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? James says, we quarrel and we fight because our passions are at war within us.

And what are passions? passions are ungoverned and unrestrained desires that we have.
They are desires that we desire so strongly that they rise up into passions. Where we are on the edge of demanding and wanting whatever it is we want or whatever it is we desire.
And when we think of people having opposing passions, whether between two persons or in groups, and divided over passions, quarrels and fights, James says, they erupt because these passions within us, they are warring, they are contending.
And in truth, James is not saying that fundamentally a desire that we might have is sinful or wrong. We can have good desires.
[16:30] It is a good desire that a wife would want her husband to love her. It is a good desire that a husband would want his wife to submit to his leadership.

But those can rise to a level where we so crave them that we fight and we quarrel to have them. James tells us that these passions can be so unbridled and ungoverned that they can lead to murder. And we have all lived long enough to see that.
We have abundant instances in our society where people's ungoverned desires have led them even even to murder.
James also tells us in verse 2 that we do not have some things we desire because we do not ask. Because we don't make it a matter of prayer to God.
[17:31] And what he's doing here is he's pointing to the issue of prayerlessness. He's saying that there are some things that we don't have because we have not prayed to God.

And this I think is a reflection of us not walking close to God walking in communion with God that we would pray to him. And so James is saying that you're not praying about what you should pray for and what you're trying to do is you're trying to get it and you're striving to get it and you are in conflict because of it.
And then he goes on and tells us further in verse 3 that even sometimes when we do pray we don't receive it because we are asking wrongly to spend it on our passions.
James is saying in addition to not praying for what you should pray for and then quarreling over it he says when you do pray your motives are wrong. And brothers and sisters we who belong to Christ are capable of this.
we can be praying to God out of selfish ambition out of wrong motives we could be praying to God and asking that God would do this or that because we're going to prove something to someone we want to be seen in a certain way by people and James says it's all your selfish ambition it's all your wrong motives you want God to do this that you may satisfy that ungodly desire that you have James says this is why you fight and you quarrel because your passions your burning desires are at war within you and what is his assessment of all this?
[19:25] Look at what he says in verse 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

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himself an enemy of God James describes the warring passions and the ungodly behavior that we engage in as adulterous it's a strong strong word to describe that conduct why does he use that word to describe this conduct why does James use adulterous to describe these sinful passions and cravings when he says it makes you a friend with the world

James does that because our hearts are the Lord's and when we are friends with the world when we align ourselves with the world it is a betrayal of the love that is his alone our hearts belong to the Lord and when our hearts are aligned with anyone else or anything else it puts us in a place of spiritual adultery and James says friendship with the world makes us enemies of God and he says you by doing so are adulterous people again worldliness is a hard disposition and what it is it is a hard disposition of unbelievers it is a hard disposition of those who do not belong to Christ and this is why brothers and sisters worldliness is no light matter it is a serious matter
James tells us in verse 4 that to be worldly is to be in opposition to God to be at enmity with God and clearly what James has in view is not the physical world but he has in view the world spiritually he has in view the world as fallen humanity in organized rebellion against God in their values and attitudes and behavior the Lord Jesus understood this danger that his disciples would face in this world and we have a prayer recorded in John 17 called the high priestly prayer where Jesus prayed he prayed for his disciples and he prayed for all of his disciples all those who would ever come to faith and this is how he prayed in verse 14 John 17 starting in verse 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world
I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one they are not of the world just as I am not the world Jesus is praying for us that while we live in this world we will not be people who embrace its values and attitudes and behavior but that we would be separate from it and one helpful way that we can reject this world and its offerings is to see for what it is and scripture tells us what the world is in 1st John 2 15 to 17 we have a very vivid and clear description of the world John is appealing to God's people and this is what he says do not love the world or the things in the world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him for all that is in the world the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the father but is from the world and the world is passing away with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever brothers and sisters these are sobering words and these are words that all who profess to know Christ must take heed to what John says essentially in verse 15 he says anyone who loves the world is an unbeliever anyone who loves the world the love of the father is not in him and that's what it to be a believer what it means is the love of the father is in you God has put his love in you and John is telling us that this is an impossibility to have the love of God in us and to also love the world those who belong to Christ are to be reminded that love for the world demonstrates that we are on shaky ground we are on dangerous ground when we are setting our affections on the world and what it offers and John tells us this he says that this world that we see that advertises so much more than it actually delivers he says all that's in this world is the desires of the flesh the desires of the eyes and the pride of life and he tells us that this world is passing away this world that seems so permanent so enduring brothers and sisters is passing away and it's only those who are doing the will of
[25:51] God who will abide forever may we hear this this morning and may we hear this in an ongoing way so that the world does not swing us to make us believe that it is more than this this is what it is it is a passing away reality though it seems like it's here forever forever and I think one of the things that we need to do brothers and sisters is we need to think about worldliness in our lives in a broad way every aspect of our lives is an opportunity to express worldliness or godliness godliness every single aspect of our lives is an opportunity to express worldliness or godliness and we have to embrace the mindset of Christ to help us to live life all of life embracing godliness and renouncing worldliness last sunday actually the first sunday of the year we we talked about what it means to glorify god to seek to glorify god in all that we do that we have two chief concerns first of all to seek to glorify god in all that we do and then to be concerned about the spiritual condition of others when we are pursuing when we are renouncing worldliness we are then in truth seeking to glorify god i mentioned that these these words of james are encouraging the reason they are they are also encouraging even though they are stinging and they are convicting is james is really saying to us he's saying though you are behaving like the world you actually belong to christ that's why the language of adultery is relevant adultery would not be relevant if we didn't belong to christ if we!

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didn't belong to christ we can do whatever we want to do with our lives and it would have no consequence but it has consequence because we belong to christ and therefore this language of unfaithfulness comes into play brothers and sisters we should be encouraged that even despite our sin despite our strain the lord holds on to us and we are his people and this is why the charge of adultery is raised and so we need to receive both the correction and the encouragement look at what James says in verse 5 he says that God has given us a spirit he's put his spirit within us and his spirit yearns jealously over that spirit that he's put in us God has put his spirit in us so that we can worship him and when we worship anything else or anyone else we are stirring up his jealousy and it's not human jealousy it's divine jealousy and therefore we see brothers and sisters that worldliness is not okay but not only does
James call us to renounce worldliness what we see in this passage is he also calls us to pursue godliness and this brings me to my second and final point how do we renounce ruraliness and pursue godliness well James tells us in verse 6 look at what he says he says God gives us the grace to do it he says but he gives more grace therefore it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble brothers and sisters embracing worldliness is an expression of pride and when we embrace worldliness which is an expression of pride what scripture says is God will resist us God himself will be opposed to us but as we humble ourselves submitting our desires to God and entrusting our lives to him to do what he wills he will give us grace to renounce worldliness and to pursue godliness look at what
James says in verse 7 he says first and foremost with the grace of God provides we are to submit to God this means that rather than aligning ourselves with the world rather than pursuing what the world offers we are to submit ourselves to God and what this means is in for example those situations where we have desires but we really in truth can't bring those desires to pass what James is saying he's saying submit those things to God submit yourself to God submit those circumstances to God rather than quarreling over them submit yourself submit your case to the Lord and trust in him to work in his way and to work in his time to submit to God means to live life based on his terms not on the terms of this world next
James says to us he says that we are to resist the devil in verse seven and the promise is that he will flee from us and here we have in view that the devil is the one he's the one who tempts us just as he tempted Jesus and the same way Jesus resisted the devil by relying on scripture we need to do the same and again this is this is why it is not a time filler on Sunday mornings when we take time to learn scripture together it is an intentional effort to position us to have God's word in his heart the Bible says that it is by hiding God's word in our hearts that we will not sin against him and so when we hide
[33:17] God's word in our hearts we are in a better position to resist the devil how many know that resisting sin is more than a made up mind takes more than a made up mind to resist the devil I think many of us have witnessed that we've experienced that we need divine spiritual help to resist the devil and what we see it is that following the example of Jesus it is with the word of God that we resist the devil verse 8 we're told to draw near to God and the promise is that he will draw near to us when we draw near to God we are to repent of our sin we are turning away from our sin and James also tells us in verse 8 he says you're to cleanse your hands you're to purify your heart

James is speaking in direct ways he's saying to us if there are sinful things you are doing turn away from them stop them wash your hands of them if there are sinful ways of thinking that you are engaging in you are to purify your heart away from those particular things repent of thoughts that are ungodly and not pleasing to the Lord I'm in a WhatsApp group with many people from around the Caribbean and the U.S.
and some other countries and this week one of the pastors in the group posted a video clip of an American television show host also a comedian and he posted and said watch this and then he says one or two occasional bad words and I thought to myself why would I want to watch that why would I want to watch something that you've already told me has one or two occasional bad words but see brothers and sisters sometimes we think of ourselves more highly than we should sometimes we think we can manage sin sometimes we think that we can knowingly and intentionally listen to something watch something that is sinful because we can manage it we can handle it brothers and sisters
God didn't make us for that James says we are to cleanse our hands we are to purify our hearts those things should have no place in our lives living in this world as it is we are exposed without any

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effort on our part to the kinds of things that grieve our hearts you're standing in a line and there's someone every other word is cursing apart from maybe a person's job like a police officer who may be exposed to all manner of sinful content brothers and sisters we should never intentionally put ourselves in the position of taking sin in our air gate and in our eye gate when we do that we're not cleansing our hands we're not purifying our hearts we are dirtying our hands and dirtying our hearts when we expose ourselves in these ways and brothers and sisters we need to we need to accept the reality that this world owes us nothing it owes us nothing it doesn't owe us movies to watch thank God when you can watch a decent one but it doesn't owe us a movie so much so that we say well I'll watch this because only a few occasional bad words in it no brothers and sisters God has called us to renounce in godliness he has called us to pursue godliness and we must take it seriously let me just pause to say this to us this morning we do need to think of worldliness more broadly than the example that
James is giving us in this passage James addresses quarrels and fights and cravings and passions that we that we have that lead us to that and perhaps you're not the fighting kind maybe it's not your constitution maybe you've lived long enough to say it doesn't make sense maybe for whatever reason that's just not you and it's easy to think well this isn't really applicable to me no James I think James addressed this first of all because I think this is relevant broadly the issue of quarreling and fighting is relevant broadly and perhaps there were issues in the congregation and so it's relevant to us broadly I think as well but we need to think about worldliness in very broad ways what other areas maybe it's not quarreling and fighting for you but what other ways worldliness may be an issue that you need to be hearing this morning and you need to be convicted by and you need the help of the
[39:17] Lord to change and maybe this is a prayer that we can take into this week God show me where there is worldliness in my life God show me where it has been so subtle that it's just escaping my head or maybe I'm so accustomed to it I don't even see it as I ought to see it James tells us in verse 9 that it shouldn't be business as usual that as we draw near to God he says mourn and weep over your sin and the idea is that there are reasons to grieve over our sin and yet it's happy hour for us James says it shouldn't be he says mourn and weep over your sin he says we're to turn away from fence sitting and from double-mindedness trying to serve God and to be in the world at the same time which is an impossibility we can't have one foot in and one foot out and think we're anywhere we're nowhere when we are living in that way and so in verse 10

James says to us the final verse he says humble yourselves before God and he will exalt you it's interesting where James ends when we consider where he started he started with quarrels and fights expressions of pride wanting to have our own way insisting on having what we desire and he ends by saying no rather than do that humble yourself and whatever expression of worldliness is it is undergirded by pride and he's calling us to humble ourselves and that God will exalt us I organized a sermon under these two points renouncing worldliness and pursuing godliness but these are not separate points these are connected points we cannot do one without the other to renounce worldliness is to be pursuing godliness and to be pursuing godliness is to be renouncing worldliness we can't do one without the other although I
I tried to walk us through this passage thinking about it in those two ways but brothers and sisters they are interconnected they are intertwined we cannot truly do one without the other and we need the grace of God to help us to do it thank God that he did not just call us to do this and didn't give us the means by which we are to do it God has given us means by which we are to draw near to him the first means is his word he's given us his word God God sanctifies us with his word he sets us apart with his word we have the means of prayer and fasting which we will be engaging this week as we come before the Lord seeking his face these are means that help us to draw near to him and brothers and sisters as we draw near to God in prayer and fasting this week
I want us to remember that there's only one reason that we can draw near to God there's only one reason that we can draw near to God and here's the reason God has drawn near to us God has drawn near to us in the person of his son who came and lived a perfect life that none of us could live and died a substitutionary death that we deserve to die and because of that he's able to forgive and reconcile to himself sinners like you and me he drew near to us in the person of his son and it is because of that that we are able to draw near to him renouncing worldliness and pursuing godliness only because of what

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God has done the grace that's involved in that we can do what he has called us to do this week brothers and sisters so let us let us draw near to God this week and the promise is as we do that he will draw near to us and God is already at work he's already at work he's not there twiddling his thumbs and waiting for us to do something again he's drawn near to us in the person of his son and every desire that we have to draw near to God is God at work in our hearts by his Holy Spirit he is at work and so let us draw near to God let's pray heavenly father would you help us hear to hear and apply your word this morning father would you cause your word to lodge in our hearts would you enable us to reflect upon it and we pray that it would bear good and lasting fruit not just in this week but in the months and years to come
[45:49] Lord you have drawn near to us in the person of your son and now you are calling us to draw near to you work in our hearts this morning we pray in Christ's name amen let's stand for our closing song as

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