

James
War and Peace: Learning to Deal with Conflict, Part 6
James 4:1-10
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I love preaching the Word of God, because it's always a great adventure. I never would've imagined a number of weeks ago, when we began James 4:1 - 10 that we would spend six weeks on those ten verses. But it's been a wonderful journey for me; and I trust it has for you, as well. It's incredible: the profound depth of these words from the pen of James, and ultimately from the mind of the Holy Spirit. This morning, however, we come to the end of our journey over this paragraph of Scripture. And the passage that we'll look at, this morning, James 4:7 - 10 really draws together all that we have learned, thus far. Let me remind you that the theme of James 4:1 - 10 is dealing with the issue of arguing and fighting: the sinful conflicts that are so much a part our lives here in this world. And in this passage, James outlines for us three very practical steps for dealing with that conflict in a way that honors God. We've gone through each of these three great steps carefully. Let me remind you of them.

The first step to deal with sinful conflict in our lives is to identify the true source of conflict. We saw this in the first 3 verses of chapter 4. And the true source that lies behind arguing and fighting is our pleasures, or more exactly, it's the craving of our hearts for those sinful pleasures and the fulfillment of them. When we come into conflict with others, it's because they stand in the way of what we want. That's what James wants us to see. And if we're going to overcome sinful conflict, we have to understand that the true source of conflict does not lie in the issue, nor that we're fighting about, nor does it lie in the person with whom we're fighting. But ultimately, it lies within our own hearts because of what we want, and that not being fulfilled.

The second practical step for dealing with sinful conflict in our lives is found in verses 4 and 5, and it's magnify the real sin behind conflict. You see, when we look back as far as we can look, as we've looked so far, anyway, at what lies behind this sin of quarreling and arguing, we find the sin of spiritual adultery. James begins verse 4 by saying, "... adulteresses!" He calls us "adulteresses." You see, when we are engaged in a pattern of sinful arguing and fighting in our lives, it shows that we love the pleasures of this world, the fulfillment of those sinful pleasures more than we love God. And that, at its heart, is, as James says, "friendship with the world, enmity with God, and spiritual adultery."

The third practical step that we saw outlined in this passage is in verses 6 – 10. And it's identify the right solution to conflict. Understand exactly what the solution is. And the solution, as we've seen, is simply one word. It's the word, "grace." Verse 6 says, "But He," (that is, God) "is giving a greater grace." Folks, whatever our sinful struggles may be, our only hope is grace from God: Grace, grace that will forgive us, grace that will give us full restoration to fellowship with God, and grace that will empower us for future obedience. The problem is, the very thing we need, which is grace, comes only on one condition. And that condition for receiving grace is humility. James makes this point by quoting Proverbs 3:34 at the end of verse 6, there. "Therefore, it [that is, the Scripture] says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" James wants us to know that pride not only puts us on a collision course with other people [we see that all the time]; but pride also puts us on a collision course with God, Himself. But on the other hand, God is constantly giving grace to the humble. It's harder it's hard to imagine James stressing the priority of humility any more than that. The very thing that we most need to deal with our sin, both for forgiveness for restoration of fellowship, and for future obedience is grace. And the only way to get grace is through the virtue of humility.

I was reminded this week of the Old Testament prophet, Micah, who stresses this priority of this virtue of humility. You remember in Micah 6:8: He says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness [or loving loyalty], and to walk humbly with your God?" That's what God requires.

Augustan, the early church father, in one of his famous sayings, put it this way. He said, "For those who would learn God's ways, humility is the first thing; humility is second, and humility is the third." You've heard the little saying about real estate: that the key to real estate is location, location, and location? Well, the key to spiritual life in the kingdom of God is humility, humility, and humility. James points us to one of the bedrock laws of God's moral universe. You see, we can only come to benefit from God's grace through humility. So, that immediately raises another crucial question. And that is: "How is it, that we can humble ourselves before God?" We are all, by nature, proud. So, how is it we can humble ourselves, so that we can receive that grace? The answer James gives us is very straight forward and very simple. We humble ourselves before God, so that we can receive His grace by repentance, by repentance. The path that leads from sin and pride to humility is repentance.

Now, remember the flow of the passage, here. James began by rebuking us for quarreling and fighting, for sinful arguments among ourselves. And then James explained that the source of that

arguing is a heart that's intent on satisfying its own pleasures. And that means that the real sin at the heart level is loving our own pleasures more than we love God, or "spiritual adultery."

But now, James, as it were, peels another layer off the onion to take us to the true center, the real heart of our problems, the root that lies beneath spiritual adultery, and ultimately of all sin is pride. Because, ultimately, every time we sin, we have concluded in our own minds that we know better than God knows. We're making a deliberate choice against Him. So that means, that whether we are the sinning children of God, or whether we are complete strangers to Him. Let me say that again. Whether you sit here, this morning guilty of a pattern of sin of some kind in your life, and you're a child of God, you know you belong to God; but you have continually engaged yourself in some pattern of sin; or whether you sit here, this morning, never having really bowed your knee to Jesus Christ, never having accepted Him as Lord and Savior; either way, the way home is essentially the same: It is to humble ourselves in genuine repentance before God. And in James 4:7 - 10, we have a series of commands. And these commands flow out of the proverb that occurs in verse 6. And, as we will see, this series of commands is an exposition of humble, heartfelt repentance.

Amazingly, this passage is practically identical to 1 Peter 5:5 - 9. What that probably means, as one commentator says, is that what James tells us here is a wide-spread Christian call to repentance. In other words, in the early church, when you wanted to explain "repentance" to someone, you laid out this path. You said, "This is what it looks like."

Now, when you look at verses 7 - 10, the structure of these verses is very deliberate by James. And it's also very clear. Let me map it out for you before we look at the specifics. Notice that verses 7 - 10 begin and end with a summary statement; verse seven: "Submit, therefore, to God." Notice the word, "therefore" links this command back to the proverb in verse 6. Then, notice verse 10: "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord." Now, it's clear that this command also is linked back to the proverb of verse 6, because the verb, "humble," in verse 10 and the noun, "humble" in verse 6 are different forms of the same Greek word. These two statements: "Submit yourselves to God" (in verse 7); "Humble yourselves" (in verse 10) are essentially synonymous. They serve as bookends, supporting the rest of the description of repentance. And in these two summary statements in verses 7 and 10, we have captured for us the essence of repentance in two words. Look at them for a moment: the word, "submit," and in verse 10, the word, "humble." These two words are essentially synonyms that begin and end the passage and explain for us, in the simplest terms a sketch of true biblical repentance. Now, the Greek word in verse seven that's translated as "submit" literally means (listen carefully to this). It literally

means “to put in order, under.” It’s a word that describes “willingly submitting your will to the will of someone in authority over you.” In secular Greek, it was used of a soldier who willingly submitted his will to the will of his commanding officer. He submitted himself to his commanding officer.

That’s why Douglas Moo, writing of verse 7, says this in his commentary: “To submit to God” means to place ourselves under His Lordship, and therefore to commit ourselves to obey Him in all things.” Then when you come to verse 10, the word, “humble”: This word simply means “to make oneself low.” It was often used in the Septuagint of literally making yourself low, of prostrating yourself before someone; recognizing your utter need, and absolutely throwing your body flat before another person. Those attitudes are the heart of repentance. The essence of repentance is a willing, submission of our rebel hearts to God, and casting ourselves, as it were, before His feet, begging for His mercy and His grace. That is a picture, in those two words, of what repentance really is.

Now, sandwiched between those two bookends, or those two summaries, are a series of imperatives. And this series of commands, or imperatives, is grouped deliberately, by James, into three couplets. So, think of “Submit yourself to God” and “Humble yourselves” as summaries and bookends; and all those commands in between are grouped into sets of twos: couplets.

Couplet number one is: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Couplet number two is: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.”

Couplet number three is: “Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.”

Now, here’s the key to understanding this passage. Each of those couplets provides us with a fresh insight into genuine biblical repentance. Each couplet tells us how to submit to God, how to humble ourselves before Him. Those three couplets outline for us three components of repentance three components of genuine repentance. Let’s look at them together.

The first component of genuine repentance is found in the first couplet. And we could summarize it this way: “Turn your heart to God.” Turn your heart to God. Notice the end of verse 7: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” Now let’s look at those two together. Together, they tell us we must turn toward God. Notice the first one: “Resist the devil.” This simply means to refuse to bow to Satan’s authority. It’s a call to change allegiances. You see, what James is saying is that, when we are sinning, it’s as if we have changed our alliances from God to Satan. And repentance begins by severing our alliances with Satan, by saying, “I will not live in his ways and in his paths, anymore. And I’m going to turn, instead, and re-align myself with God. I’m going to turn my heart toward God.” The word “resist” here, by the way, is not an offensive word, an offensive word. It is a defensive word. It means “to stand against;” to cut off the loyalties that we have had with Satan; to cut off our alliances with Satan to stand against him; to make our alliances with God clear.

Now Paul gives us a graphic picture of what it means to stand against Satan, or resist Satan in Ephesians 6. Turn there, for a moment with me: Ephesians 6:10. He says,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and ... the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God.” [He gives us a picture of resisting Satan the picture of an ancient soldier, putting on his armor in preparation for battle.] Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able [Here it is] to stand firm against the schemes [or the methodologies] of the devil. For our struggle is not against ... [people.] [Folks, the enemy is never people] but [rather] against ... rulers, against ... powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. [In other words, our true battle, as believers, is against Satan and his hierarchy, his structure.] Therefore, [verse 13] take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able [Here it is.] to resist, to stand against in the evil day; and having done everything, to stand firm. [And then he tells us specifically how this is done, verse 14:] Stand firm therefore, [and take on these various pieces of armor,] HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH. [In the ancient world, of course, the men wore flowing robes; and if it was time for war, you needed to tuck those robes up, and get them out of the way, so that you could do battle. We’re to tuck them in. And here he says,] HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH [perhaps, better: “truthfulness,” or “a sincere commitment to the fight.” He says,] Be genuine in your commitment to battle! [Then he says, in verse 14 again:] “and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,” [Here, righteousness probably refers to that practical righteousness that comes

from obedience to the Word of God. We can resist Satan by obeying the truth of God: putting on true righteousness. He goes on to say,] and having SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; [We move by means of the good news of peace with God. That protects us in our forward movement. Good news of genuine peace: Hence, the cessation of hostilities with God. He goes on to say,] "... [take] ... the shield of faith..." [Here, faith is probably not a body of doctrine that we believe; but, rather, simple trust in God. Believe God! Believe what He says! And it'll protect you from Satan.] ... take THE HELMET OF SALVATION." [Here, it's probably a reference to the hope of salvation, or the assurance of salvation. We can be equipped to resist Satan by being confident of the promises of God, the Truth of God, and standing in those truths of salvation. And then, finally, he says,] "[Take] ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." [He's talking about the truth of Scripture. Those are our weapons.]

Now notice, back in James 4, that James gives this promise: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." If you stand against Satan with those weapons, he will flee. "Resist the devil." Cut off your alliance with Satan. And stand against him. Declare whose side you're really on.

Now notice the second half of this first couplet is: "Draw near to God, draw near to God." The Septuagint often uses this Greek word, that's translated, "Draw near" to describe "approaching to God in worship." But I think, more likely, here, it's used like in Hosea 12:6, where we read, "Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice; and draw near (literally's what the Septuagint says,) your God continually." It's "Turn your heart toward God."

Let me show you a couple of other texts where this point is made. Turn to Malachi the last book of the Old Testament. In the fifth century before Christ, Malachi writes. And in chapter 3:7 he's urging the people of Israel to repent. And at some point, we'll take a look at the book of Malachi. It's a wonderful book, and the structure is quite interesting. But today, let me just point out one verse to you. Malachi 3:7: "From the days of your fathers, you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts." This is what he's calling us to do. "Draw near to God. Return to God. Turn our hearts toward God!" I love the way Psalm 145:18 puts it: "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." That's how you draw near God: You turn to God by calling out to Him; by severing your alliance with Satan and his ways, and turning toward God.

Now, did you catch the implication of James 4? “Draw near to God.” The implication is that when we are given to quarreling and arguing, and therefore to the pursuit of pleasure and to friendship with the world and to spiritual adultery, we have created a very real separation between ourselves and God. You ever thought about your sin doing that? When you sin, there is a separation that occurs. It’s not a physical distance. God is everywhere at every moment in time. He fills all of space that He’s created. But it is a separation of relationship, of fellowship. There is a literal distance that occurs between us and God when we are engaging ourselves in sin. But if we will draw near or return to God in repentance, then here is His amazing promise. Look at the end of verse 8. “He will draw near to us.” (The middle of verse 8, actually) “He will draw near to us.”

You know, I think we see a dramatic picture of this promise in the words of Christ, in Luke 15:20. You remember what Jesus said about the Father’s response to the prodigal son? Listen carefully. “While he [that is, the prodigal] was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” There’s so much to be said here. I heard a couple of wonderful messages by John MacArthur on this passage. You need to know this: that in the ancient Middle East, it was absolutely shameful for a man (an adult man) to run in this way. And here, God is pictured as running to the prodigal who’s willing to turn back home, who’s willing to turn to God. That’s God’s response, by the way, to the repentant sinner.

If you’re here, this morning, and you have never come to faith in Jesus Christ, I can promise you this: that if you are willing to turn away from what you’ve been pursuing, and to turn toward God, to draw near to God; if you will, as the prodigal did, to come to your senses, realize where you’ve been, and be willing to return to your Creator, to acknowledge your sin, to seek forgiveness in the person of His Son, then He’ll run to meet you.

But James’ promise in James 4 is not the promise to a repentant sinner, who needs to come to salvation in Christ. It, rather, is a promise of restored fellowship for the repentant Christian! You see, God always responds to the Christian who turns his heart toward God.

The first couplet teaches us that repentance, the path to humility, begins by choosing to turn toward God.

The second couplet identifies a second component of genuine repentance. Not only do we need to turn toward God. But number two: we need to turn from all known sin. Notice the end of

verse 8: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.” Now both of those terms, “cleanse” and “purify” were originally used in the Old Testament to describe the priests’ ceremonial cleansing before they could serve in the temple. And they’re used together in several contexts, where that’s what they referred to: that ceremonial cleansing that was necessary. But both of these terms eventually came to describe something much different: not merely ceremonial cleansing, but they came to describe spiritual repentance.

Turn to Psalm 24. And you’ll see, in the words of David how these words can be used. Psalm 24:3, he’s talking about who can who can ascend into the hill of the Lord. Who can dwell with God? Who can stand in His holy place? Verse 4, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” He’s now taking those words which describe ceremonial cleansing. And he’s saying, “There’s something much more needed than ceremony. There must be real, genuine cleansing at the heart level. When you come to the New Testament, (and by the way, that’s throughout the Old Testament. In the interest of time, I won’t take you to the other references I have in my notes.) But in 2 Corinthians 7:1, we come to the New Testament, you see the same thing. It’s still used of this spiritual repentance. He’s just said, “We shouldn’t touch what’s unclean.” So, in 2 Corinthians 7:1 he says, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

So, James is saying to all of us, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.” He’s saying, “You have dirty hands and divided hearts.” Now notice that this is not a reference to our need of God’s cleansing. That’s true; we do need God’s cleansing. But that’s not what he’s saying, here. He’s saying, “We need to clean up ourselves. Cleanse your hands, you sinners.” By the way, James uses “sinners” here, a term usually reserved for unbelievers. But, he uses it here, because it describes the reality that, although we have been forgiven, although we have been delivered from the wrath of God, we are still guilty of sinful actions against God. We’re sinners. And he says, “Cleanse your hands.” “Hands” is an obvious reference to our deeds, to our actions, to our behavior. So, “to clean our hands” means we must repent of, we must turn from, we must leave all behavior that’s against God’s character and His law.

In the context of James 4, the specific sins that James is referring to are arguing, fighting, living for sinful pleasure. He says, “Cleanse your hands.” James adds, “Purify your hearts, you double minded.” “Hearts, of course, refers to our thoughts, our attitudes, our affections, those things going on inside of us. And he calls us “double minded.” “Double minded” refers to someone who is torn between two; someone who is torn between his love for the world and his love for

Christ. So, “to purify a double minded heart” means that we must cleanse ourselves from all those sinful thoughts, all those sinful desires and attitudes that stand opposed to Christ. Again, in the context of James 4, James is urging us to repent of our divided allegiance, of our spiritual adultery, of our love for the world or to put it as Jeremiah does, “. . . from worshiping the idols of our hearts.”

But the question that came to my mind when I was studying this, and I’m sure it comes to yours is: “Great! I understand this is important. We need to turn from sin.” But how do we do that? How do you cleanse yourself of external behavior? How do you purify your heart of sinful thoughts and divided loyalty? Well, it’s very simple. You cleanse your hands from sinful deeds by refusing to carry out those deeds. You clean your heart by refusing to let your mind dwell on ungodly things.

Let me show you this in the context of the Old Testament. Turn to Isaiah 1, Isaiah 1. Here, Isaiah is castigating God’s people, Judah, for their sin. Verse 15, he says, “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.” Verse 16, “Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean.” How? Well, he goes on to explain. “Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil! Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow.” This is what it means to cleanse our hands. It means to let go of our sin and get on the path of obedience.

What about the heart? Well, turn to Jeremiah 4. We have this explained for us, as well. Jeremiah 4, again, Jeremiah talking to the people of Israel, and particularly to Judah: He says in verse 14 of Jeremiah 4: “Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved.” What does that mean? Well, he defines it in the second half of the verse: “How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?” He says, “Listen! Get rid of those evil thoughts! Don’t allow them in your head.” But if you’re like me, you’re still left wondering exactly how that happens, how that fleshes out in real life.

I’m thankful for Peter, because Peter makes it very clear for us. Turn to 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 1:22. Here’s how it happens. He says, “You have purified your souls (Verse 22): “You’ve purified your souls.” How, Peter? “In obedience to the truth.” Here’s how you cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. You turn from what you know to be sin, and you try to obey God. You get on the path of obedience. You make a commitment to obey God. You purify your soul in

obedience to the truth. So, the first component of repentance is turning your heart back to God. The second is turning from all known sin.

The third element of repentance is found in verse 9: “cultivate godly sorrow, cultivate godly sorrow.” Notice what James says. “Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.” Now folks, this doesn’t mean that we, as Christians, should walk around gloomy and glum all the time. It doesn’t mean that laughter is sinful. In fact, Psalm 126:2 says, “Our mouth was filled with laughter, our tongue with joyful shouting.” Why? “Then they will say among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’” We laugh and we shout, and we’re filled with joy, because of all that God has done!” There’s nothing wrong with that. But here’s what James is saying. To paraphrase Solomon: “There is a time to laugh; and there is a time to weep.” It’s like Jesus’ words in Luke 6:25 Jesus, said, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” You see, what both Jesus and James are warning about, is the kind of superficial happiness and laughter and joy that still tolerates sin in the life.

Tasker, in his commentary, said, “When a Christian compromises with the world, and is double minded, it is a sure sign that his sense of the gravity of sin has become blunted.” James is saying, “Listen! When we’ve been tolerating sin in our lives, it’s not a time for light-heartedness! Genuine repentance cuts deep!” Notice the words he uses. Verse 9, “Be miserable.” He’s calling for a state of feeling miserable and wretched. A good translation of it would be this: “Be devastated with shame over your sin, mourn.” This word, “mourn” refers to a deep kind of inner grief. “Weep!” This word describes the sort of violent wails that often accompany funerals in the Middle East, both in the ancient world and even recently; we’ve seen them on the screens of our televisions, as they mourn and wail over the loss of a loved one.

You see, together, these terms speak of a broken heart. The sad thing is: some professing Christians are so out of touch with their true spiritual condition, that they’re laughing when they ought to be weeping. And so, James adds, in verse 9: “Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.”

Now, folks, let’s be honest with ourselves. We are influenced by the culture in which we live. And we live in an instant society. We want it; and we want now. So, when it’s time for us to weep over our sin before God, we wanna weep for two minutes, and then get up and be filled with joy. When God calls His sinning people to Himself, it always involves a deep sorrow for sin. Repentance is not a frivolous, “I’m sorry, God; I’m on my way.”

Let me show you what it looks like. Turn back to the prophet, Joel. In Joel's prophecy, he's telling the people that judgment is coming: a plague is coming, in chapter 2. But in the middle of prophesying this judgment, notice what he says in Joel 2:12. He says, "Yet, even now," declares the Lord, "Even while I'm prophesying judgment, return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and weeping and mourning! And tear your heart, and not your garments." In the ancient world, a sign that you were weeping over some devastating event in your life was to tear your outer garment, so people knew. Lord says, "I'm not interested in your outer garment. Tear you heart before Me!

Now, return to the Lord, your God; for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness, and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him?" That's what we're to do! We're to be filled with fasting and mourning and weeping; and we're to tear our hearts, as it were, before God! This is so far from where our culture is. The truth is: Scripture says that every sinner every sinner, without exception, will eventually mourn his sin. It will either be now. Or it will be when it's too late, when God has already begun to display His wrath.

It's amazing to me how unbelievers laugh about their sin. They're often so proud of it. When I was a seminary student, I worked in the shipyards every summer as an electrician, wiring 75-foot steel-hold boats, down in off the coast of Mobile. And I was always struck by the fact that there were a number of times I can remember two occasions, particularly, and I'm sure there were more. But I remember these two vividly. When I talked with two men who were definitely not believers about their need for Christ and their response was to laugh about it: to say, "Yeah, I know. I know, I'm a sinner, and I know that, my future doesn't look very good. But" Then they'd make some joke about having a good time in hell, as if it were sort of the ultimate party.

Somehow, those men had forgotten what Jesus describes: a place of eternal torment, where there is wailing and grinding of teeth, where the fire is never quenched. Yet, sadly, even though we know that, even Christians can become light-hearted about their sin I've had people come up to me and say things like this: "Yeah, I know the" (Or not come up to me; It's when I've been talking with them). They'll say, "Yeah, I know the adulteress relationship I'm involved in is sinful. But God'll forgive me." Listen, that's a long way from being miserable and mourning and weeping about your sin. Douglas Moo writes:

"A carefree, devil-may-care attitude is typical of those who are friends of the world. They live the hedonist philosophy: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for

tomorrow we die;” a world view that ignores the terrifying reality of God’s judgment. But even the committed Christian can slip into a casual attitude toward sin, perhaps presuming too much on God’s forgiving and merciful nature. James’ words, in this passage, directly counter any such attitude. He wants us to see sin for what it is: a serious breach in our relationship with a loving heavenly Father; a breach, that if not healed, can lead to both temporal and spiritual disaster.”

Contrast a casual attitude toward sin with the kind of true repentance Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 7. Turn there, with me for just a moment. Second Corinthians 7. In the interest of time I won’t take much time, here. But I just want you to see this. In verse 8, he says, I wrote you a letter; and it made you sorrowful. He says, But I’m glad (verse 9) because it made you sorrowful to repentance. Verse 10, he says, There’re two kinds of sorrow about sin. There’s one that isn’t true repentance, just being sorry for the trouble it causes, that you got caught, whatever. And then there’s this true godly sorrow. And let me tell you what godly sorrow looks like, verse 11, here it is. [Here’s what true biblical repentance produced and godly sorrow looks like.]

“For behold what earnestness [what eagerness] this very thing, this godly sorrow has produced in you;” [When there’s true repentance, there’s an eagerness to deal with it.] “... what vindication of yourselves,” [You want to set the stigma of sin that’s been attached to you right! You want to deal with it!] “... what indignation!” [This is the word for anger righteous anger, not against others; but against us and our own sin!] “what fear,” [True repentance produces a genuine fear of God, who holds our breath in His hands.] “what longing,” [This word, “longing” describes the intense desire for a relationship.] “what zeal,” [This is the word for jealousy, what jealousy,] “what avenging of wrong!” [Doesn’t mean carrying out vengeance on others; It means dealing with sin; being absolutely ruthless in our dealing with the sin in our lives.] That’s what true repentance looks like! That’s what godly sorrow looks like!

Now here’s the question: How can we cultivate that kind of godly sorrow in our hearts? Well, very briefly, there are a couple of things we can do. First of all, contemplate God’s goodness Romans 2: There, Paul tells us in verse 4, that “the goodness of God leads us to repentance.” Contemplate the goodness of God to you. And if you really think about it, and you dwell on it and your response to Him, it will drive you to a godly sorrow over our sin.

Secondly, you want to cultivate a godly sorrow, come to a full understanding of who God is in His holiness. You remember, in Isaiah 6, Isaiah sees God for all that He is in His great holiness.

And how does he respond? “Woe is me! For I am undone! For my eyes have ...” What? “Seen the King!”

You want a godly sorrow about your sin look at God’s goodness. Look at God’s holiness! And finally, look at your own sinfulness. Come to a full understanding of your own sinfulness, through the Word of God! Several passages drive this point home, that the Word of God leads us to appreciate our sinfulness for what it is. In Acts 2, you remember Peter preaches. And after he’s done preaching, it says, “When they had heard this.” When they heard his sermon, when they heard the Word of God taught, what happened? “They were pierced to the heart.” My prayer all week, and this morning, and now, even as I preach, is that: if you’re sitting here, this morning, and you’re living in a pattern of unrepentant sin, that the Word of God would pierce you to the heart; make you appreciate your true condition before God. Second Corinthians 7:8, Paul says, “My letter filled you with godly sorrow.” The Word of God produces that in us.

Now, go back to James 4. James ends this paragraph in verse ten with a summary command that takes us back to verse 6. Notice verse 10. “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord.” You see, if God gives grace to the humble, then the way to experience God’s grace is to humble ourselves before Him. And as we’ve seen, this morning, the way to humble ourselves is to repent to turn to God to turn from our sin and to cultivate godly sorrow for sin. It’s to recognize our spiritual poverty and our desperate need of God’s grace. But when I hear that, my response is what yours should be, as well. How can we repent like that? You see, even our repentance needs to be repented of. So, here’s the irony, folks: even genuine repentance is a gift of grace!

Acts 11:18. “God has granted repentance.” You see, that’s what the promise in verse ten means. Look at verse 10 again. “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord; and He will exalt you!” In context, God’s promise that “He will exalt us, or lift us up” refers back to the promise of grace in verse 6. In other words, “He will exalt you” means “He will give you the grace He promised,” if you will humble yourself in repentance.

George Stulak, in his commentary, puts it this way. He says, “James is telling us to expect that God will come near to forgive sin, to restore joy, and to strengthen the repentant sinner to live in purity and righteousness. He will acknowledge you, if you will humble yourself.”

What’s the solution to quarreling and fighting? It’s the same solution as every other sin. It’s God’s grace! And God gives it to the one who humbles his heart before Him in genuine repentance. But here’s the really amazing part. Don’t miss this: God always responds to

genuine repentance with grace! There's so many places where this is clear. I love Isaiah 55. You remember, we're told there: "Let the let the unrighteous man turn from his ways, and the wicked man from his thoughts. Let him return unto the Lord; for He will" What? "Abundantly pardon!" Now I don't know about you. But when I hear that, I think, "Wait a minute. How can God do that?"

Well, it's as if God anticipated that response; because He says, (Let me tell you,) (the next verse): "Even as the heaven is high above the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways; and My thoughts than your thoughts." This is God! This is our God! When we turn in genuine repentance to Him, He always responds in grace! God always welcomes home the prodigal, who's willing to leave his sin and return home to the Father.

My favorite story of such grace, I've shared with you, I believe, once before. But I can't resist an occasion to do it again. It's in Max Lucado's book, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*. Max tells the story in that book of a Brazilian girl named Cristina. Listen to her story. Cristina wanted to see the world. Discontent with a home, having only a pallet on the floor, a wash basin, and a wood-burning stove, she dreamed of a better life in the city. One morning, she slipped away, breaking her mother's heart. Knowing what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, Maria hurriedly packed to go find her. On her way to the bus stop, she entered a drug store to get one last thing: pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew Cristina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were, before, unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search: bars, hotels, night clubs, any place with a reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place, she left her picture: taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo, she wrote a note. It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out; and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to its small village.

It was a few weeks later, that young Cristina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth, but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over, she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet, the little village was, in too many ways, too

far away. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again. And there, on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Cristina's eyes burned. And her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation: "Whatever you've done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please, come home." And she did."

You see, like Cristina, and like the prodigal, the only hope for us is when we are willing to leave our sin and go home, home to God. Maybe, today, you need to come to your senses. You need to leave the sin that you have enjoyed for so long, and that has punished you so severely with its enslaving power, and turn toward God, and go home in genuine repentance.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, I pray that You would use Your Word in our hearts. Father, I pray for the person here, this morning, who's never repented, who has never bowed the knee to You, never acknowledged their sin, never cried out for Your forgiveness. Lord, I pray that today would be the day that You would humble them before Your Word and before Yourself. Lord, I pray that they would find a place, even this afternoon, where they could fall down before You, humble themselves, submit their will to Yours and follow the path of repentance that's laid out in this amazing passage.

Lord, I pray for the person here, this morning, who professes Christ, but who has been living in a pattern of unrepentant sin. Father, I pray that this morning, You would strip away all of the façade and the hypocrisy that they have created, and that You would allow them to see themselves as You see them; to see their sin for what it is before You; and that they would mourn and weep and cry out for Your forgiveness, they would turn from it to You.

Father, I pray for the rest of us, who know You and who aren't living in a pattern of unrepentant sin. Nevertheless, our lives, every day, need repentance. We sin constantly against You. And Father, I pray that You would help us to understand what repentance is. And help us to live a life of repentance before You.

We pray to the glory of Your great Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.