
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 4: 7-10: How to Repent!

General idea: Do you struggle with which direction in life to go? It is James' intent in this passage to show us the direction by imperatively grabbing us with ten commands that are essential to honoring God and relating to people. These commands call us to direct, hands-on action without delay. We are to humble ourselves before God and, at the same time, resist the devil, as we cannot serve both. When we draw near to God, the devil is pushed further away. If we draw near to the devil, then God is pushed further away. The signpost is clear where we are to go; the direction we choose is up to us.

God wants us to make the fervent attempt to repent, get right with Him, and not lead a double life in trying to serve two contradictory paths in life. When we do, we are being hypocritical, creating broken relationships, shattered lives, and unmet opportunities. This leaves us in despair as the devil and our ways have no hope or purpose other than to steal what God has to give to us. We already have joy and completeness in Christ when our hearts and minds are centered on Him. So, the bottom line of this passage is the call to submit and surrender to God, allowing Him to be our only Lord and direction. Then, He will lift us up beyond our greatest desires and plans to a much greater plan and purpose in life!

Vs. 7: This passage asks us the crucial question: *are we resisting God or resisting the devil?* How we respond to life and other people will be rooted in how we respond to God. Do we fight Him or do we glorify Him? How do we know? The answer is in how we are with our attitudes and mindsets; are we humble or proud? If we are proud, we are serving the devil, even though we may think we are serving ourselves. If we are humble, then we are serving our Lord. This strikes at the root of our mindset and motivation in life.

- *Submit* means to obey! It is our surrender to God in His will. We are urgently called to accept the absolute authority of God. We are under His authority whether or not we acknowledge Him, so we might as well acquiesce. It does no good to fight God, as Jacob discovered (Gen. 32:22-32). In this context, it also refers to fights and quarrels so they do not build and take us over (James 4:1-6). Jacob's dispute with his brother had to be resolved (Gen 33).
- *Resist the devil.* This means to flee the devil's kingdom, his values, and his wisdom and embrace God's kingdom, values and wisdom. This has more to do with moral values than spiritual warfare. The devil does not have equal authority or power as the popular "Ying/Yang" philosophy states; rather, he only has the power we give to Him, while God has absolute power. The devil is not invincible; he is easily thwarted when we don God's armor so we can

disregard his temptations and flee from him. We evade the lusts of our heart and world by running from it, not toward it (Eph. 6:11-18; James. 3:15, 17; 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8-9)!

- The knowledge of who we are in Christ will be the driving force of how we are with others (Galatians 2:20-21; 6: 3-5; Philippians 3:10)!
- We are best able to function in ministry by concentrating our efforts of growing in our relationship with Christ into a daily love endeavor (Hebrews 10:19-25; 11:1-3).

Vs. 8: *How do I maintain my direction in life, so I am pleasing Him and seeking His purpose?* The answer lies in the direction in which we are heading. When we draw to God, we undertake His precepts and apply them to life. God is consistent; when we seek Him, we find that He has already sought us and will continue to reveal Himself and the depths of His love and will all our days on earth as well as throughout eternity. The key to this is our willingness to confess our sin and move toward Him and away from false and deceitful ways.

- *Draw near to God* means purification, developing your personal relationship with God through the disciplines of the faith (Ex. 30:19; Matt. 7:7; Rev. 3:20). We are responsible for our spiritual growth. God provides the *plan*, Christ is the *way*, and the Spirit is the *guidance*; however, we provide the *will* of our hearts from our humbleness, and further exhibit it with our hands and feet. The focus is on trust and obedience.
- *Cleanse your hands* refers to Psalm 24:4, "clean hands and a pure heart." Our inner purity guards us against moral defilement. This is an illustration of how a priest cleaned his hands and feet at the bronze basin before he approached God at the Tabernacle/Temple. They had an elaborate ritual that cleansed them from the dirt of the land and the dirt of the heart (Ex. 20:16; 30:17-21; Lev 19:12; Deut. 21:6; Psalm 24:4; Jer. 5:2; 7:9; Zach. 5:4; Mal 3:5; Matt. 5:8; Eph. 6:11-18; James 4:2, 14; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).
- *Purify your heart.* This means that submission to God produces humbleness which then produces right attitudes and motives.
- *Double minded.* This is a harsh diatribe that describes a *hypocrite*. James is directly calling his people, "you sinners!" Greek philosophers, as well as many Jewish teachers, detested hypocrisy and considered it the most heinous sin. James, as with his brother, Jesus, in Matthew 23, is making the point that the people are being "two faced," insincere, and treacherous. Our behaviors must show our beliefs!

Vs. 9-10: James is plainly telling us that God hates pride! God hates worldliness! God loves humility. What did our Lord exercise while He walked this earth?

Humility! He is God incarnate, Lord of the universe. Born as a baby, he lived in the lower social order of human life in devotion and meekness, serving as our ultimate example. He did not have to live that way. He could easily have lived as the greatest king in the most lavish lifestyle imaginable, yet He chose humility because it was the best way; it was His way (John 3:16; 17:24; 1 John 2:15-17).

- *Mourn/Lament/Grieve* is a call to us for authentic repentance. When we do wrong, we will realize from the law written on our hearts that we did wrong. We will feel remorse and guilt.
- *Wail/Weep* means to express grief for our sins! We must see the heinousness of our sin, and in humbleness and honesty, sincerely be upset so we can fully accept His grace and forgiveness. There was a connection in the ancient Jewish world between grief and self-humiliation. At funerals, families would wail loudly; when they tired out, they hired others to continue on, to pronounce to the community humiliation to show their grief. In the same way, they could show true repentance, as wailing was the cultural thing to do to prove, by self-humiliation, the mourning of one's sins (Lev. 23:29; 26:41; 2 Kings 22:11; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-13).
- *Repent* means to completely and utterly turn away from our desires and deeds and toward His love and plan. Real, authentic repentance is sincere; we will regret our past behavior and be on guard in future relationships so that a moral and lifestyle change will result. It is God's desire that we repent of our sins and come to His way (Matt. 4:17; Acts 17:30; 24:14; Rom. 2:4; 1 Thess. 5:6, 8; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:22-24)!
- *Humble*. This passage is quoting Proverbs 3:34, and is referring to submitting to the sovereignty of God. God's plan for our life is far better than any desire, evil or good, we could ever have. Thus, it is logical and beneficial to be humble in Him (1 Pet. 5:5)!
- *He will lift you up*. God alone deserves the right to be exalted and honored. This is an essential attitude before effective Christian character, maturity, and spiritual growth can be possible (Chron. 7:14-15; Prov. 3:34; 25:6-7; Isa. 2:11-12; 5:15; Matt. Mt 18:4; 23:12 Luke 11:43; 14:11; 18:14; 20:46; 1 Pet. 5:62).

This passage is a roadmap of how to repent. God tells us both what to do and what not to do which will lead to a victorious life from a life that is transformed in Him. The call is simple, for us to *submit, come near, wash, purify, grieve, mourn, wail, change, and humble* ourselves. Each one leads to a closer relationship with God, and to a life that is bearing fruit, building character, and becoming more mature and effectual to others around us. This is exhibited and practiced by maximizing our time with God through the disciplines of the faith, Bible reading, devotions, prayer, and godly fellowship. It comes from trusting our Lord and His plan, thereby taking the focus off ourselves and the ways of Satan

and the world. We are to be vulnerable in confessing our sins and drawing to Him as LORD. When we are humble, God is glorified and He lifts us up. It is not about our way; it is all about HIS WAY (Prov. 24:3-4; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 29:11-14; Phil. 2:3-4)! When we chase the devil and/or our pride, we will sink below the tossing waves in a sea of despair, a life that boils over with trouble (James 1:6-8). The key to preventing that sinking is to allow God's work in us and these commands to take root, so our lives reflect righteousness. When we remove our sinful attitude of pride, He is glorified.

When we accept Christ in our life, He needs to be Lord of our life. We are to take responsibility for allowing His conviction to touch us deeply; then we can let go of our ways and surrender to His way (Matt. 11:28; Luke 11:9-10). We must stop trying to manipulate God to give us our desires and needs, and concentrate on how we are to worship Him in all that we do, in total trust, and total devotion. So, let us stop combating with God, stop fighting within ourselves, and stop the hostility with one another and concentrate our efforts toward God's glorification and worship. This means we are to recognize sin and its destructive nature. It may look good, but it will take us away from God and others and leave us bankrupt in our relationships, and filled with bitterness and despair.

So, *what can I do?* Do not laugh at sin; guard against it. Do not accept the worldliness of the world; rather, model maturity and character because you are being empowered by the Lord. We are to flee the world's influence while being the influencers of it. We are to flee the devil while being on guard of his tricks and trade. You may be thinking that only the weak and cowardly would surrender themselves—even to God. But, the fact is, only a coward will refuse to allow ultimate greatness in himself that is only achieved by yielding totally to Christ. He is greater than those who are His (John 3:30)!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there a sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?

7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. If God asked you if you are resisting Him or resisting the devil, what would you say? Do we fight Him or do we glorify Him? How do we know?
2. Why do you suppose James gives this diatribe of ten imperative commands? How would your church respond if your pastor preached on this so passionately that he would “get in their face” by pointing a finger at people’s compliancy?
3. How does this passage point us to honoring God and relating to people?
4. What does it mean to you to, *Draw near to God*? How does being humble before God help us resist the devil at the same time?
5. Why can’t we serve both our desires and God’s will? Why do so many Christians try with all of their might? What will this double mindedness give them?
6. When we draw near to God, the devil is pushed further away; if we draw near to the devil, then God is pushed further away. How has this been so in your life? What has been the pattern in your life and your closeness with God?
7. The signpost is clear where we are to go; the direction we choose is up to us. So what does the signpost say to you? How can you submit to and surrender to God? What would this mean? What would it look like? How will you go about it?
8. What do you need to do to allow Christ to be your only Lord and direction? How can the fact that He will lift us up beyond our desires and plans to a much greater plan and purpose in life give you the confidence and passion to do it?
9. The devil does not have equal authority or power as the popular “Ying/Yang” philosophy states; rather, he has the power we give to Him, while God has absolute power. How does knowing this help you resist the devil and your desires?
10. What do clean hands and a pure heart mean to you? What would it mean to your church? What needs to be cleansed from the dirt of the land (your deeds) and the dirt of your heart (your desires)?

11. How does humbleness produce our right attitudes and motives? What would real authentic repentance look like in your life?

12. What can you do to stop combating with God, stop fighting within ourselves and stop hostility with one another? So, what will you do?

Remember, we are to flee the world's influence while being the influencers of it!

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matt. 23:12.

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