

James – Life after Faith
James 4:6-10
“A Guide for Getting Right”

1. THIS PASSAGE CONVICTS US
 - A. Of being cocky when we should be humble
 - B. Of being corrupt when we should be holy
 - C. Of being content when we should be heartbroken
2. THIS PASSAGE COMMANDS US
 - A. To come close to God
 - B. To come clean to God
 - C. To come correctly to God
3. THIS PASSAGE COMFORTS US
 - A. The resource God gives us
 - B. The response God gives us
 - C. The resolve God gives us

1. In October of 1999, Joshua Piven released the first of what became a series of books entitled *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*.

2. In the book, readers are told exactly what to do when facing a number of “extreme” situations. For instance, if you ever find yourself needing to wrestle free from the grip of an alligator, this book guides you in how to do that.

3. Likewise, if you ever are called upon to land an airplane, or should you need to jump from a motorcycle to a moving vehicle, or ever need to win a swordfight, perform a tracheotomy, or escape from killer bees, this book provides step-by-step instructions as well as illustrations.

4. While the information in *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* might prove useful on a rare or extreme occasion, there are other, more common, situations in which we could all use some guidance.

5. Such is the case with the passage we find in James chapter 4. Going back into chapter 3, James has been confronting his Christian brothers and sisters with the inconsistencies and iniquities in their lives.

6. It has all led up to the passionate charge of chapter 4 verse 4, where James exclaims, “*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*”

7. Having made that critical point, James proceeds to instruct us on how we can get right. This section is what you might call a guide to Christian repentance.

8. I hope you do realize that repentance is not something we do only once, at the moment of our salvation. Even those who have been justified, and *made* right, will still need at times to repent and *get* right.

9. There is a lot said in this little section of verses, and in seeking to unpack what is here, I want to draw out three things that this passage does to us as we read it. First of all:

I. THIS PASSAGE CONVICTS US

1. The writer of Hebrews says that the Word of God is “*sharper than any twoedged sword*,” indicating that is able, among other things, to cut us and to prick our hearts.
2. That is certainly true of these verses in James 4. There is a convicting tone to what James says in this text.
3. Notice the things in this passage that convict us. First of all, we are convicted here of:

A. Being cocky when we should be humble

1. Notice verse 6. James refers to Proverbs 3:34, and says, “*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*”
2. The word “resisteth” is a military term, and it describes taking a stand against an enemy. God stands like an army against those who are proud.
3. With that in mind, notice what James says in verse 10: “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord...*” If we need to humble ourselves, then we must be proud.
4. The old scholar A.T. Robertson says that the word for “the proud” in verse 6 could be translated “stuck-up folks”.¹
5. We ought to be convicted by this because our churches are full of spiritual snobs, who strut around with the self-righteous noses in the air, thankful they are not like the perishing heathen around them.
6. We are convicted here of being cocky when we should be humble, and also, further, we are convicted of:

B. Being corrupt when we should be holy

1. Remember, James is writing throughout this epistle to his “brethren” – to those who are saved, and claim the name of Christ.
2. With that in mind, notice what he says in the second half of verse 8. “*Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*”

3. We should be holy, even as our God is holy, and yet James indicts us because our hands are dirty and our hearts are divided.

4. We ought to cringe when we hear James call us “sinners”. It is a like an old, embarrassing nickname we thought we had outgrew. We don’t want to hear it, nor anyone hear us called by it.

5. Yet, that is exactly the title Bro. James gives us. We are convicted of being something other than we should be.

6. We are convicted of being cocky when we should be humble, corrupt when we should be holy, and notice also, we are convicted here of:

C. Being content when we should be heartbroken

1. Look at verse 9. It says, *“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.”*

2. James says, “You are smiling and laughing, just enjoying your life, but your contentment is only because you don’t know your true condition.”

3. We are like the passengers of the *Titanic* the day before it sank. We are just enjoying the nice cruise, not realizing how close we are to drowning.

4. There is nothing wrong with joy and laughter. Proverbs 17:22 says, *“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine...”*

5. The problem is not that contentment is wrong. The problem is that contentment *with sin* is wrong. We are laughing when we should be crying. We are comfortable when we should be concerned.

6. The old preacher, Vance Havner once said that the task of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable.

7. The comfortable are certainly afflicted in this text. It is a passage that convicts. There is a second thing this passage does to us as we read it. Notice not only that *this passage convicts us*, but notice also that:

II. THIS PASSAGE COMMANDS US

1. In the original language, this particular stretch of verses is written almost exclusively in the imperative mood. That simply means that it is full of commands.

2. In fact, there are no less than ten of these imperative statements in verses 7-10. One writer says that these commands “come in a jack-hammer burst.”ⁱⁱⁱ

3. One after another, James lays down a series of things that we are to do with ourselves if we are seeking to get right with God.

4. Notice the heart of these commands we find in this passage. First of all, the Bible is commanding us:

A. To come close to God

1. Verse 7 begins with the command, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God...”* Then verse 8 says, *“Draw nigh to God...”*

2. The first step in getting right is coming to the One you’ve wronged. And our sin is always ultimately against God.

3. In Psalm 51:4, David confesses, *“Against thee, [and] thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...”*

4. Some people run from God when they sin. They hide from God, just as Adam and Eve did when they sinned in the Garden.

5. If we are to get right, however, we’ve got to stop side-stepping God, and start seeking Him instead.

6. Preaching on this text over 100 years ago, Charles Spurgeon pled with his congregation saying:

“Run not away from him, but draw nigh to him; cast down thy weapons of rebellion, and fall prostrate before him, seeking the forgiveness which he is willing and waiting to bestow upon thee.”ⁱⁱⁱ

7. This passage commands us to come close to God, but notice also that this command is:

B. To come clean to God

1. Look again at verse 8. James says, *“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”*

2. In the Old Testament, the priests were required to wash their hands before entering the Tabernacle. Before they handled the things of God they had to have clean hands.

3. James says we need to wash our hands when we come to God, and we also need to “purify” our hearts.

4. The idea is that both our outward actions as well as our inward attitudes to be cleansed when we come to God!

5. Psalm 24:3-4 says, *“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart...”*

6. We cannot cleanse our own sin, but we can come to Jesus, and willingly wash ourselves, for:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains*

7. We are commanded to come close to God, and to come clean to God, and we are further commanded here:

C. To come correctly to God

1. How is it that we are to come close and come clean to God? James makes it clear. We are to come with a humble, broken, and submissive heart.

2. Psalm 51:17 says, *“...a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* That is what James is describing in verse 9 when he says, *“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep...”*

3. The word “afflicted” is translated from the same root as the word Paul uses in Romans 7:24 when he cries, *“O wretched man that I am!”*

4. Jimmy Draper is a third-generation Baptist preacher, has been pastor of one of the largest churches in America, served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and was also president of *Lifeway*.

5. In his book on James, he makes a very honest confession. He tells about what he calls “a crushing experience” in his life. He says, “I had always thought that I was purer than I was...I thought there were things that would never come into my life. But [one] morning God let me look in, and I saw in my own heart the blackness of a thousand midnights and the seed of every sin known to man...He let me see myself as He saw me.”^{iv}

6. We cannot get right with God until we come rightly to God, and humble ourselves before Him, acknowledging the truth of who and what He already knows we are.

7. That is the heart of the commands we find in this text. Notice something further that happens to us when we read this passage. Notice not only that *this passage convicts us*, and *this passage commands us*, but notice also lastly that:

III. THIS PASSAGE COMFORTS US

1. Though this passage stings a bit, it is the sting of a syringe filled with good medicine for our souls.
2. Though you may not immediately recognize it, there is a lot of comfort to be found in this confrontational text. James offers hope and help to those who desire to get right with God.
3. Notice the comfort that we find in this passage. First of all, there is comfort in:

A. The resource God gives us

1. Verse 6 is like a beautiful sunrise creeping over the dark valleys of this text. It has one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture.
2. James says, *“But he giveth more grace.”* The word translated “more” literally means “greater”. He gives a greater grace!
3. We are reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 5:20. *“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:”*
4. Yes, we have failed God more times than we care to remember. Yes, our hands have been dirtied and our hearts have been divided. But, thanks be to God, He gives more grace!
5. There is more grace available for those who need it! You can get right, not because you deserve it, but because He'll give more grace!

As Annie Johnson Flint so wonderfully put it:

*His love has no limits,
His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundaries known unto men,
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!*

6. There is comfort in the resource God gives us. Notice also there is comfort in:

B. The response God gives us

1. Verse 8 says, *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”* There is comfort in knowing that the first step I take toward God will amount to two, for as I take a step toward Him, he will take a step toward me.
2. The real comfort of this response from God is that He takes much bigger steps than I can, and He will get to me long before I can ever get to Him!
3. Verse 10 offers another response of God. It says, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”*
4. I will fall down before Him; He will help me stand before Him. If I will bow my knee, He will lift my head!
5. God doesn't hold any grudges. We don't have to worry about Him not responding to our desire to get right.
6. Like the prodigal's father in Luke 15, God is just waiting to see you start down the road, and when He sees you coming he will meet you with kisses of forgiveness!
7. There is not only comfort in the resource God gives us, and in the response God gives us, but notice also:

C. The resolve God gives us

1. Tucked away in this passage is another great promise of Scripture. Verse 7 says, *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*
2. The ability to resist the devil in the second half of that verse can only come after you have obeyed the first part of that verse.
3. Verse 7 begins with the words, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”* Once you have given your life over to His control, then He will equip you with the resolve you need to put the devil to flight.
4. British preacher and author, John Blanchard, says of this passage, “There are two views the Christian ought to covet more than any other: one is the devil's back and the other is God's face – and James promises that he can enjoy both!”^v
5. The way to put the devil to flight is to resist Him with the resolve that God gives you after you have given yourself to Him.

1. I have a GPS system that I use whenever I travel. However, not too long ago, the system let me down.
2. I was traveling to Memphis, TN, and I put in my hotel address, but somehow, in downtown Memphis, I got lost following the directions that were given to me by my GPS.
3. Eventually, I got where I needed to be, and I figured out what had happened. My GPS is several years old, and since I bought it, the interstate running through Memphis had be reconstructed in a certain area.
4. I got lost because the road had changed, and my expensive GPS system did not know it.
5. I've got good news. The road you take to get right has not changed in 2,000 years. The "guide to getting right" that Bro. James gives us in this fourth chapter, will still get you where you need to be!
6. If you feel the conviction you ought to feel for your sins, and if you obey the commands to come to God cleanly and correctly, you can be assured that He will respond to you by giving you the grace you need to get right!

ⁱ Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the New Testament: Vol. VI, (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1933), p. 52

ⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, James: Faith that Works, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991), p. 184

ⁱⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles H., Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, (Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1917), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*

^{iv} Draper Jr., James T., James: Faith & Works in Balance, (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1981), p. 128

^v Blanchard, John, Truth for Life, (Evangelical Press, Darlington, England, 1986), p. 285