

**JAMES 4:6ff Draw Near to God**

Saphir – “not every mystic is a Christian, but every Christian is a mystic”

**8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

**9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.**

“Draw near” is 2<sup>nd</sup> Person Plural – Active voice

“Ya’ll draw near” it is individual and it is corporate.

**This context of relationship means that we are to live with God with the belief that our own walk is a community project ...It means confessing that as long as sin remains in me, and that apart from restraining grace and the rescuing ministry of those around me, I continue to be a danger to myself. (Tripp; LEAD)**

EX: Ravi Zacharias – there was a huge failure in the corporate dynamic

Who starts the process of drawing near, us or God?

It may seem like it is up to us, but in reality God does so by giving the command and the promise. When it comes to the issue of drawing near to God and being reconciled, God has the home field advantage. We’re playing on His turf and with His equipment.

- ❖ Perhaps we fail to draw near because things are going well and we’ve become self-reliant and have lost our sense of need for God.
- ❖ Perhaps we are afraid to draw near because we don’t know what God will have us do once we get close to Him – He may actually want me to forgive that person, or serve in that ministry, or engage in priority giving or become a missionary.
- ❖ Or perhaps we’re afraid to draw near because we don’t know how Jesus will react when He sees us as we really are.

GOOD NEWS – He ALREADY sees us as we are, and He died for us.

What do you think is Jesus’ attitude about the dark corners of your life that you try to hide from others? The lost temper, the dark inner thoughts, the hidden desire to gain approval or control of others, the slight-of-hand on a tax return, a time card, an expense report, or the ongoing struggle with your guilty pleasure.

For us to draw near to God we must answer this question...(Dane Ortlund Gentle and Lowly ch 9)

**Who is Jesus, in those moments of spiritual blankness?**

Not: Who is he once you conquer that sin, but who is he in the midst of it?

The apostle John says: he stands up and defies all accusers. He is our advocate when we need it most. “Satan had the first word, but Christ the last,” wrote John Bunyan. “Satan must be speechless after a plea of our advocate.”

*His heart is such that he stands and speaks in our defense WHEN we sin, not after we get over it. It is his advocacy that draws us near.*

The Holy Spirit helps us to cry out “Abba, Father” when we are accused by the enemy or feel oppressed by the law.

**If we understand the Gospel and the work of Christ, then our sin is not a reason to run from God; it is the reason why we should DRAW NEAR to God.**

Jesus is our advocate and he stands ready to defend us by covering us with his righteousness.

Jesus gives a parable that shows the heart of God toward those who seek to draw near. We call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son. – Luke 15

The younger son disrespects the father, takes his inheritance early, leaves home and squanders his estate with loose living. In desperation he decides to return home, grovel before his father and seek to be given a place as a servant. How does the Father respond?

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him

The father saw him from afar, felt compassion, ran, embraced and kissed him and then threw a party. THAT IS OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN who invites us to DRAW NEAR.

\*\*APPLICATION FOR PARENTS...

From the Book, Gentle and Lowly by Dane Ortlund.. great parenting advice that I wish I'd heard many years ago

"With our own kids, if we are parents, what's our job?

That question could be answered with a hundred valid responses. But at the center, our job is to show our kids that even our best love is a shadow of a greater love. To put a sharper edge on it: to make the tender heart of Christ irresistible and unforgettable.

Our goal is that our kids would leave the house at eighteen and be unable to live the rest of their lives believing that their sins and sufferings repel Christ."

In his own style, Martin Luther is very helpful to us when we face accusations. He knows how to take the fight to Satan.

Luther explained: You should tell the devil, 'Just by telling me that I am a miserable, great sinner you are placing a sword and weapon into my hand with which I can decisively overcome you; yea, with your own weapon I can kill and floor you. For if you can tell me that I am a poor sinner, I on the other hand, can tell you that Christ died for sinners, and is their Intercessor ... You remind me of the boundless, great faithfulness and benefaction of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... to Him I direct you. You may accuse and condemn Him. Let me rest in peace; for on His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins ...'

<https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/prince-darkness-grim-luther%E2%80%99s-battle-against-devil>

**THE GOSPEL AND DRAWING NEAR TO God IN PRAYER.**

Last week I mentioned how scripture reading and prayer are two essentials for drawing near to God, if they are done from the right posture of heart. It is possible to say the right things and do the right outward things without truly drawing near to God.

**Matt 15:8 this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. (is 29)**

One of the most basic things that the gospel does is change prayer from mere petition to *fellowship* and the praise of his glory. Galatians 4:6-7 teaches us that when we believe the gospel, we not only become God's children legally, but we receive the Spirit in order to experience our sonship.

**6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.**

*Years ago I read some very helpful material from Tim Keller on how to know and draw near to God...*  
DRAWING NEAR with the mind.

In II Cor.3:12-18, Paul says that, without Christ, we have a "veil" over our eyes when we read the Bible. Why? Without Christ we cannot bear the glory of God. Without the gospel, we fall into bad caricatures of God. Either he is "holy and intimidating" who is making a list and checking it twice. Or he is all peace and love who is willing to ignore or overlook our sin.

We either see the glory of his holiness, but not his grace, or the glory of his love, but not his perfect holiness.

But in fact, only the gospel allows you to see how absolutely holy God is. He is so holy that our redemption cost Jesus his life. In other religions “God’s” holiness is whittled down and can be appeased by lesser offerings, sacrifices, or obedience to certain rituals, practices, pilgrimages, fastings, etc. Only through the righteous life and suffering of Christ, do we see the scope and demands of the Holiness of God.

And only the gospel allows you to see how absolutely loving God is. Again, this is unique to Christianity. How do other religions convey the love of their God? What does it cost that God to demonstrate love to unworthy people? Tim Keller puts it so well...

“A non-Christian person may think God is all-accepting—but without the gospel, where do we see that God’s love cost him anything?. **Without absolute holiness—his love is sentimentality; without this absolute loving acceptance without regard to our works—his holiness is unbearable.**

The bottom line is this. **The gospel enables you to intellectually see the splendor of God as no other teaching does. It gives you a vision for the glory of God and the kindness, or the beauty, of God. “**

The great colonial pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, gives insights for us when we’re afraid to draw near because we don’t know how Jesus will react when He sees us as we really are.

Edwards points out that it is not the glory of God that draws us in, transforms us, and make us salt and light. NO, it is the loveliness of His heart. It is, he says, a “sight of the divine beauty of Christ that bows the will, and draws the hearts of men. A sight of the greatness of God in his attributes, may overwhelm men.” But our deepest need is not seeing God’s greatness, but seeing His goodness.

**Seeing His greatness may get our attention, but one glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God, and supreme amiableness of Jesus Christ, shining into the heart, overcomes and abolishes this opposition, and inclines the soul to Christ, as it were, by an omnipotent power.” Edwards**

We are drawn to God by the beauty of the heart of Jesus. When we come to Christ we find that he is exceedingly ready to receive us.

EX: like the Father in the parable – He runs, embraces and kisses us.

### **Drawing near with the heart.**

Edwards:

**When I’m teaching God’s word, my aim is to raise, as high as possible towards the Lord, the affections of my people.**

That should be our goal as parents, as fellow members of the body of Christ, and for our personal time with God.

Secondly, the gospel gives you a basis for drawing near to God from the heart, and the Spirit gives us the help to do it. (Galatians 4:4-7). Our goal in prayer now is the contemplation of the glory and goodness of God in the gospel. How can we very practically draw near in our prayer life

The essential discipline is meditation on the truth. Meditating is a "crossing" of two other disciplines: Bible study and prayer. Meditation is both yet it is not just moving one to another—it is a blending of them. Some of you are thinking, “Hold on, I can’t meditate. I can’t sit in that weird position and go “Oooomm”. I don’t like the smell of incense.”

I appreciate your concern, but that IS NOT biblical meditation. And YOU CAN meditate. In fact you probably do it already. Do you ever worry?? If so, you are meditating... on the bad stuff that might happen.

**Meditation is praying the truth (just studied) deep into your soul until it makes all sorts of personal connections with YOU personally, so it shapes your thinking, it moves your feelings, and changes your actions.** Meditation is working out the truth in your life.

**Example :** How you read a love letter. You tear it open and you weigh every word. You aren't reading it quickly just for information—you want to know what lies deep in the clauses and phrases. And more importantly, you want the letter to sink in and form you.

Augustine saw meditation, "the soul's ascent into God" as having three parts: Retention; Contemplation, and Delight (*retentio, contemplatio, dilectio*)

First, retention means unpacking the truths of Scripture and holding them centrally in the mind.

This means study and concentration on a passage of scripture to simply understand it, so you see its main point

Second, contemplation means "gazing at God through this truth".

It is to pose and answer questions such as:

--what does this tell me about God; what does it reveal about him?

--how can I praise him for and through this?

--how can I humble myself before him and through this?

--if he is really like this, what difference does this particular truth make to how I live today?

--what wrong behavior, harmful emotions, false attitudes result in me when I forget he is like this?

--does my life demonstrate that I am remembering and acting out of this?

--Lord, what are you trying to tell me about you, and why do you want me to know it now, today?

Above all, the purpose of *contemplation* is to move from a kind of objective analytical view of things to a personal dealing with God as he is --to move from knowing a fact about him to actually "seeing" him with the heart--to adore, to marvel, to rest in, or to be troubled by, to be humbled by him.

Third, delighting in the God you are looking at. You begin to actually praise and confess and aspire toward him on the basis of the meditated truth. But whenever you are meditating/contemplating and you suddenly find new ideas coming to you and flowing in, then write them down and move to direct praising and confessing and delighting. That is (as Luther would say) the "Holy Spirit preaching to you". It is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as He opens the eyes of our hearts.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF DRAWING NEAR

Why not build in to your life unhurried quiet, where, among other disciplines, you consider the radiance of who he actually is, what animates him, what his deepest delight is? Why not give your soul room to be reenchanting with Christ time and again?

It doesn't require as much time as you might think, but it does require consistency. Bible reading and prayer *are* very important, but they are only a means to an end. Christ is the end.

The real criteria for your devotional time is, "*Did I meet with, commune with, fellowship with my 'Abba-Father' this morning?*"

That may happen in the first 5 minutes or it may not happen at all, but it certainly won't happen if we don't build it into our lives.

Ortlund

When you look at the older saints in your church, how do you think they got there? Sound doctrine, yes. Resolute obedience, sure. Suffering without becoming cynical, by the grace of God..

Perhaps they have simply tasted, over many years, the surprise of a Christ for whom their very sins draw him in rather than push him away. Maybe they have not only known that Jesus loved them but felt it.

Drawing near to God is not a one-time event. It is a lifestyle – both a necessity and a delight.

**Draw near to God and He WILL draw near to you.**

Christ has given us a tangible ongoing practice by which we can draw near to Him – the Lord's Table.

--	--