

From Warfare to Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles, and if you don't have a Bible with you, if you're a visitor, there's some Bibles at the sides and the back. The stewards will be glad to hand one to you. So do stick your hand up or go and ask for one. We're reading, as we have been doing in recent weeks, in the New Testament, in the letter of James. And we're coming this morning to James chapter 4, and we're going to look together at the first 10 verses. And I'm going to read that for us. James chapter 4. It's page 1012, if you have one of those visitors' Bibles.

Now, boys and girls, listen carefully, because you're going to ask your mom and dad later on, aren't you, questions about what they learned from this Bible passage this morning. And that will mean they'll have to listen too, won't they? Because you'll be asking them questions. James chapter 4 and verse 1. What causes quarrels, literally wars, and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire, do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You adulteresses, literally that's what it says, you adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world? Or do you suppose it's to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealousy, jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

[2 : 18] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Amen. Well, may God bless to us his word. We'll do turn, if you would, to James and the fourth chapter.

Last week, being Remembrance Sunday, I was reflecting really on how distant memories of real war and its consequences for this nation and our people really seem to be.

But I was born just 22 years after World War II. And growing up in the early 1970s, memories of the war were still everywhere.

[3 : 36] As a young boy, all our comics were war stories. One of the joys of waiting for my haircut at Mr. MacArthur's barbershop down the road was that he had a huge supply of commando books.

And if the grumpy old barber was rather busy, the bonus was that you could get at least two of these books read as you were waiting for your short back insides. And all these comic books were full of war stories against the Japs and the Jerrys.

And that's what we read. That's what we lived on. We played with our action men, toys. We watched lots of war films. And we thrived on them.

But it wasn't nearly so much so for my parents' generation. Those who'd actually experienced the war. My father fought in the war in the Far East, but he hardly ever talked about it.

And I recall others with strained faces whenever the war was mentioned. And I'll never forget either going to the cinema with a friend taken by his mother in 1977 to see the film A Bridge Too Far.

[4 : 46] Some of you may have seen it, the film about the Allied landings after the Normandy landings, seeking to go and take the bridge at Arnhem in Holland. And it was a catalogue of catastrophic mistakes.

And the force of some 10,000 men were nearly completely all wiped out. It was a very violent film. And my friend and I were spellbound by all the action. But his mother wept and wailed all the way through.

To our great embarrassment, really. But she was inconsolable all the way home. And you see, the thing was, what it seemed to us is really rather trivial and even quite exciting and something of a fantasy.

To her and to many others who had really experienced that. It was very, very different. Devastating destruction. Brought back to her all the pain, the death, the horror of so many.

And even to be reminded of it was deeply, deeply painful for her. And that is something of the sense of what James is trying to convey to us here in his letter.

[5 : 54] Especially as we come to this fourth chapter. He's seeking to show believers in these churches, in a message which the Holy Spirit has preserved for all churches, seeking to show them that what they may see is just something rather trivial.

A matter of being a little bit casual, a little bit half-hearted in their Christianity. What they see is that he sees and God himself sees as being as ugly and horrifying and dehumanizing as all-out war.

Verse 1, if you look, in many translations is much starker than in our ESV here. What causes wars and fightings among you? Is it not your passions at war within you?

And it comes as a jarring contrast, doesn't it, to the last verse of chapter 3, which describes what God wants and desires in his church. A harvest of righteousness sown in peace.

And yet, what he sees, it seems, is the opposite. It's war. With all its horrible damage.

[7 : 08] And yet, it seems that rather like schoolboys watching a war film, the real horror of it just doesn't register with these Christians very much, if at all. And James has been persistently exposing the truth all through his letter.

Like a careful physician, probing, examining, testing to elicit the truth. Remember in chapter 1, verse 26 and 27, he laid out three tests to reveal the heart pathology at the root of this malaise. And he goes on then to prosecute these. In chapter 2, the focus is on exposing the treatment of others, which he says very clearly exhibits not the wisdom from above of true faith, but just worldly attitudes to wealth and to status.

Unlike God's command to indiscriminate love, they're slow to hear and to do God's will. The very antithesis of those who showed real faith, like Abraham, like Rahab, who he talks about.

By contrast, they're very quick to speak. They want to be heard by others. But their talk about others and their talk to others reveals all kinds of wrong, all kinds of worldly ambition and anger that animates the hearts.

[8 : 28] And it seems that's being seen also in their church leadership. Hence, as we saw last week, James has very strong words in chapter 3 against promoting angry and ambitious men into leadership, however gifted they might be.

But instead, rather seeking patient and peaceable godly men who will show not discord, but will sow a harvest of peace in righteousness. And that will be visible, James says, in harmony and peace within the churches.

That is the fruit of wisdom that comes from above, he says. But what James seems to be seeing very often is not that.

Not people at peace, not people humbly living with each other, but proud people, haughty in their attitude with one another. And here you see in chapter 4 now, James is coming right over the target.

He's taking the gloves right off. Or I suppose, if we keep with a medical metaphor, he's putting his gloves on. And he's got the patient strapped down on the table. He's ready to wield some very sharp instruments to pierce right in below the skin to expose what is really festering deep within as the root of the whole problem.

[9 : 41] To expose how in so many ways we are actually often polluted by the world, by its toxic thinking. How easily that divides our hearts.

So that the deadly deoxygenated blood of worldliness and worldly thinking mixes in with the healthy life-giving blood of faith.

And causes a dangerous mix that actually will poison and end up making us not friends, but enemies of God. Opposed to God, but opposed by God.

It's a very devastating chapter this. And James really does get right to the heart of the issue, which is the human heart and its affections. And he exposes that corrupting division that lies so often very deep within us.

But he does it not to kill and destroy. His words are very painful, but they're a necessary cauterizing intervention that alone can pave the way for true healing and bring back to living faith.

[10:50] The thing which alone, James says, can save us from death and will cover a multitude of sins. That's his purpose, isn't it? The last couple of verses of the whole letter tell us.

And here in the first ten verses of chapter four, he's showing the church the only hope that will bring us back from warfare to wisdom.

And it lies, of course, not in the gift of man, but alone in the grace of God. So let's follow James, Dr. James, as he gives to us the presentation and then the pathology and then finally the prescription to heal that fatally divided heart.

Look at verses one and two. James lays out here the horrible presenting symptoms, the real consequences of divided hearts, which is angry conflict within the church.

And these verses expose, don't they, the vileness, the disorder that verse 17 of chapter three says will be the fruit of jealousy and selfish ambition among God's people.

[11:56] What causes wars and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and don't have, so you murder. You covet and you cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

Wars and fights with a really murderous character, characterizing the Christian church. Now, obviously what James is describing isn't literal violence and murder, but he's using that language of warfare deliberately to show us just how serious it looks from God's perspective, do you see?

For one thing, it's deeply anti-evangelistic. What on earth outside us think of Christians who behave like that for churches that are like war zones.

The scholar Douglas Moo quotes the 17th century Jewish philosopher Spinoza saying that Christians who profess a faith of love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all, he says, often are quarreling with such rancorous animosity that this, he says, rather than the virtues they profess, is the readiest criterion of their faith.

Isn't that grim? And yet, here we have it in the mother churches of the Christian faith, just a little more than a decade after Pentecost.

[13:22] And yet, it's still something that's so common in churches today. Isn't that right? Where there's a continual state of war that blows up periodically and fights outbursts of active antagonism.

That's those two words there in verse 1. Now, we might shrug it off and say, well, that's church life for you. People are people.

You see, James uses this stark language of warfare to express just how horrifying it is to God to see that. And it should be also to us.

It's not that there won't be disagreements about things, of course. But what James is decrying here is the ugliness of it, the manner of it, and the source of it, verse 1, the passions, he says, that war within us.

That is what spills out into the corporate life to destroy relationships and destroy people. Alec Mateer puts it very vividly. All our desires and passions are like an armed camp within us, ready at a moment's notice to declare war against anyone who stands in the way of some personal gratification on which we've set our hearts.

[14:44] It's our emotions, you see, that drive these words and these acts. Verse 2, frustrated desires lead to hostile acts. Coveting, what we don't have and others do have leads to a murderous character assassination sometimes.

All manner of jockeying and strife, envy for possessions or positions or power, for riches like others, for recognition from others, for rule over others.

We think others are the problem, you see, but the real problem is within us, says James. That word desire takes us back to chapter 1. Do you remember desire? Which is the root of all sin.

It's deep within us, James says there. It entices us. It conceives and gives birth to sin. And if it's left unchecked, it will destroy us, he says. The warfare without reflects that warfare within.

within. And it's a war, he says, that is raging against our own soul. This is not two different forces battling each other there. It's war against us, ourselves, and our true identity, who we are now in Christ.

[16:00] Peter uses exactly the same language in 1 Peter 2, verse 11. He's utterly explicit. The passions of the flesh, he says, war against your soul. So if you indulge them, you even give a foothold to them in your heart, you're cooperating in your own self-destruction.

That's what he's saying. That sounds very extreme, but it's striking, isn't it, when you read the New Testament, just how often the writers speak of a deadly danger to our eternal souls of things like relational disharmony within the church.

Paul speaks to the Galatians just as James does here. Through love, he says, serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Just what James is saying. But if you bite and devour one another, says Paul, watch out that you don't consume and be consumed by one another.

Our sinful desires, our jealousies, our ambitions can destroy people and ourselves, is what he's saying. Jesus himself tells us that, doesn't he?

[17:15] To be angry, to be insulting to a brother is murderous behavior. It's hellish behavior.

Apostle John puts it the other way around in his letter and says, not to love her brothers is to be murderous like Cain.

I don't know about you, but I find that very challenging. Especially when Phil Copeland showed me something today where he said a Christian pastor said two of the angriest people he had ever met and ever counseled were theologians.

People who loved the Bible and loved biblical theology. But it hadn't transformed their living at all.

And everything made them angry, he said, because everything was always about them.

Isn't that striking? Well, that's what James is saying here. The presentation is anger. It's fights and quarrels without. But the real problem is within.

And that's where he turns, you see, from the last line of verse 2 to the end of verse 5 to show us the hidden pathology, the root cause of divided hearts, which is adulterous conflict with God himself.

[18:30] All these conflicts among people betray an underlying conflict with God himself which is revealed very often, James says, in our prayer life. Either we aren't praying at all or we're praying wrongly, he says.

The passions and wrong desires, warring within, don't just end up destroying our relationship with people but end up destroying our prayers. James already reminded us back in chapter 1 verse 17 that everything we need to truly satisfy us comes from God.

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, he says. And he urges us to ask God in loving trust for that wisdom from above. And that will bring us peace personally whatever our circumstances.

That will make us bear fruit in lives that are right that are bringing this harvest of righteousness that he speaks about. But what he says here is you don't have because you don't ask.

We don't ask God because we're out of touch with his desire for our lives. And either we can't pray because well deep down we know that our desires and our ambitions aren't right and aren't God's so we can't pray or we won't pray because well we're full of confidence in our own way.

[19:54] We're going to do it our way. We're determined to pursue what we want and we can do it so we don't need to pray. And verse 16 if you look down of chapter 4 talks about that kind of boasting in our own arrogance.

We've got the future sorted out. So either we don't pray or verse 3 we do pray but we don't receive because we're asking wrongly to satisfy our passions.

It's selfish prayer which of course isn't real prayer at all is it? Real prayer isn't about getting God into line with our desires and plans for our lives it's about us being aligned with God's desires and plans for our life for His kingdom for His world for the whole future.

But this is not that kind of prayer it's the kind of prayer well it's the kind of prayer that would never come to a church prayer gathering to pray and join in prayer for gospel work around the world but would be very quick to send an email desperately asking for prayer for themselves when perhaps they get ill or have a particular need of something.

That's a surprisingly common view of prayer in the Christian church today still isn't it? Well don't be surprised if you don't get any answers when that's the way you pray is what James is saying.

[21:10] That double mindedness in prayer that he talks about in chapter 1 verse 6 and again verse 8 right here is just so revealing isn't it? Of the divided heart which is an anathema to God.

and he says that kind of prayer will get nowhere. There are things that will stop our prayers and by the way the apostle Peter tells husbands in particular that one of those things is the selfishness that very often men show in failing to show proper honor to their wives as heirs together with them in the grace of life.

Read 1 Peter 3 verse 7 if you're a husband as a warning to all of us God won't listen to your prayers if you're not treating your wife right. How about that? Sometimes God won't give us what we want because our motive is wrong.

It's selfish and sometimes he can't give us what we want because the very desire itself that we're praying for is wrong and sinful. If I want what someone else possesses I can't pray Lord help me help me to find a way to dispossess them of that so I can have it.

That's theft isn't it? If I desire a forbidden relationship with someone else's wife perhaps or a sexual relationship that's forbidden a homosexual relationship for example God can't answer that prayer because I'm asking wrongly.

[22 : 37] And there's so many times so many ways that we do ask wrongly sinfully and selfishly in a worldly way. And when that is the case God is saying to us no no instead your prayer needs to be quite different.

Pray to me Lord root this desire out of my heart. Lord do this craving this desire do it to death and instead fill my desire with you to fulfill you to love you.

As Augustine prayed Lord you've made us for yourself and our hearts will not find rest until we find them in you. you see this disruption in our prayer life is just evidence of a rupture deep in our hearts.

It's evidence that our passions have drawn us away from our first love. Instead there's a real rupture right at the very heart of our faith in the deepest relationship that we have with our Lord himself.

And that's what happens isn't it? That's what happens in a marriage rupture. communication cools down. Intimacy ceases.

[23 : 48] Intimate intercourse ceases first and then all intercourse ceases. We don't talk anymore. That's the outward sign isn't it?

Of a deeply inward rupture. And alas that is so often due to unfaithfulness. And just so here says James look verse 4 literally you adulteresses.

He's not being misogynistic by using the feminine form here. He's just using the language that God himself uses all the way through the Bible where God himself says he's the husband of his people. A people who are constantly wayward unfaithful to him like an adulterous wife. Just read the first few chapters of Jeremiah for example.

Jeremiah chapter 2. Israel was holy to the Lord he says. the first fruits of his harvest. Remember that's exactly the language James uses to describe the Christian church in chapter 1 verse 18.

[24 : 46] The first fruits. But says the Lord my people have committed two evils. They've forsaken me the fountain of living waters and they've hewed out cisterns for themselves.

Broken cisterns that can hold no water. Adultery. By chasing the idols of the world around. You've played the whore he says with many lovers and you would return to me declares the Lord.

Do they think that he can two time God do what they like and yet God will just meekly smile and say oh everything's fine. But no he says I can't do that.

And so the spring rains haven't come despite your prayers and your wealth and your livelihood is not going to be just as you'd love it to be. Well James is saying here just so with you.

Do you think God's both stupid and soft? That your two timing adultery that your scorn of your great love will have no consequence at all?

[25 : 57] You've chosen an alliance with the world with everything that is opposed to God and to his Christ. You have chosen says James to be at enmity with God.

You've made yourselves a personal enemy of God. James is just echoing the language of the whole Old Testament. Read Ezekiel chapter 16. Read Hosea chapter 2.

Just two examples. There are many more. And the language of Jesus himself who called his people an adulterous generation. Christ's apostles speak exactly the same way.

Of Christ as a jealous husband of his church, his bride. In fact, the whole climax of the Bible story is the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride. It's a marriage.

And James uses this language, you see, both the marital imagery, but also the military imagery of making enemies of God to underline just how serious their behavior has become.

[27 : 00] That language of enmity, enemies. It's very strong, isn't it? It's very serious. It's a language of broken treaties. It's a language that leads to all-out war.

But they seem quite oblivious to it, you see. They think, well, the situation isn't too bad. They can roll along living as God's church outwardly, even while inwardly, their affections are elsewhere

increasingly, or at least, at the very least, they're split with many worldly affections.

Just like a marriage, I suppose, that can go on outwardly, going through the motions. And yet, in fact, there can be an affair going on in the background, can't there? But people can convince themselves that that's okay, it's just normal, everyone else does it.

But that's the problem, you see, James is shouting here. This rupture, this dividing of your heart from God, the true lover of your souls, happens just through normal friendship with the world, like everybody else.

Not necessarily through gross and scandalous sin, just the desires that everybody else has, the things everybody else does. Desires for possessions, for pleasures, for positions, perhaps influence and power, all kinds of things.

[28 : 31] And often, people seek these things, you see, like positions or power in the church because they don't get it elsewhere or because they think that they can be pious and holy. It doesn't sound selfish, you see, if you put a Christian cloak on your heart's ambitions and your jealousy.

We can fool other people about that. You can fool yourself about that. That's the thing, you see, these people James is writing to, they didn't think at all that they'd abandoned God.

But jealousy and selfish ambition was in their hearts. And the quarrels and the conflict in their habits showed that, in fact, they were at war, not just with each other, but James says, with God himself.

And even worse, therefore, he was at war with them. And that really is deadly serious. And that's the same deadly serious message, isn't it, that the risen Lord Jesus himself, decades later, gave through John the apostle in his vision to the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 1 to 3.

Read those words. I myself, says the Lord, will come against them. I will war against them with the sword of my mouth.

[29 : 50] That is very shocking to our ears, I think. But that is not an Old Testament prophet speaking, that is the risen Lord Jesus speaking to his New Testament church.

A lot of Christians do not like that. Want to confine all these sorts of things about judgment to the Old Testament times. Unfortunately, read the New Testament, you'll find Jesus and his apostles will have nothing to do with that attitude.

You might be sitting there saying, well, Lord, I'm a Calvinist. You can't come against me. I'm once saved, always saved. Well, I'm a Calvinist too, says the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I say, he who endures to the end will be saved. How about that? Or don't you believe the scriptures? That's the force of verse five here.

Do you see, however we translate it, it's very hard actually to know how to render that verse as you'll see if you've got a different version from the ESV here. In the ESV, it reads like the point is that God is not uncaring about our disloyalty to him.

[30 : 58] He's deeply jealous for the covenant love he has with his people and he yearns in love for each of his own. And so we need to understand how our half-heartedness troubles him.

and we need to let it trouble us just as much. He's yearning for us. And it may be that, but the problem is that the word translated there jealous only ever in the Bible means sinful envy and jealousy.

And the spirit there really almost certainly ought to have a capital S. It ought to refer, I think, to the Holy Spirit, the one who he may dwell in us when he brought us to birth from above.

So I tend to think that the ASV, the American Standard Version, translates it best like this. Or do you think the scripture speaks in vain or meaninglessly?

Does the spirit he made and dwell in you yearn with sinful jealousy? In other words, he's not quoting some particular passage from the Old Testament, what the ASV puts in inverted commas there.

[32 : 04] There's no verse that says that. He's just speaking about the scriptures as a whole. Do you believe the testimony of scripture or not? That God's spirit can have no part at all with sinful jealousy, with sinful desire.

So indulgence with all these kind of things are completely incompatible with your true identity in Christ, with being possessed by his spirit. The fruit of his spirit is seen in everything he speaks about in chapter 3, verse 17, in love, in purity, in peace, in gentleness, in mercy.

So you see, it cannot possibly be being spiritual to be warlike and quarreling and divisive and acrimonious within Christ's church. That cannot be in the spirit-filled body of Christ.

And that's what Paul says to Titus, isn't it? Avoid foolish controversies and dissensions and quarrels. And as for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have

nothing more to do with him because you know that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned, you see. And that's not an easy thing to do, is it, in the church? It's not an easy thing for church leaders to have nothing more to do with a person like that, especially these days when anybody like that will play the victim and claim that they're being wrong, that they're being abused.

[33 : 36] But notice, says the apostle, you are not judging them, they're self-condemned because it is anti the spirit of Christ. And their actions are just evidence of a deep pathology within them of divided hearts that are infected by worldly jealousy, by selfish ambition, by putting themselves, before others, and therefore putting themselves before God.

And that's why these Christians that James is writing to needed to hear that sort of thing very straight. That's why we all need to hear these things straight because by nature we're all friends with this world, aren't we?

And if we're not all receiving meekly the word which is able to save our souls, then James says we're all in real danger. We're deceiving our hearts.

And our hearts may very well lead us away, to wander away into real spiritual danger and disaster, conceiving sin, which when it's full grown, he says, will lead to death.

Because that's where divided hearts, that's where half-hearted Christianity leads according to James. It really is that serious. Now you can look around and think, well, what's the big deal?

[35 : 03] We're not any worse. We're pretty mainstream, surely. It's not that bad. But verses three to five here, surely when you look at them, they are a devastating indictment, aren't they?

Unless we do think the Bible speaks in vain, it doesn't really mean what it says about sin and its seriousness, about hearts being wrong and against God, unless we're totally blind to what our own hearts and our own personal thoughts and words and deeds are, unless we're totally blind to the real truth about what we know is true of ourselves, if we take this seriously, we might think, well, if we're spiritual adulterers, like James says, we might think, well, perhaps there's no hope for me, because I reckon that we all do recognize, don't we, something of our own heart condition in James' medical report, I certainly do, I find it very sobering, so is there any hope?

Is there any hope for the downcast young student maybe who slipped back into behavior that they know is wrong and worldly? is there any hope for the man in his 30s?

His career has pulled him away from the priorities that he used to have in his Christian life? Or for the woman in her 40s maybe, whose marriage and whose family life have disappointed her, made her bitter, envious of others?

Or the pastor in his 50s finds his own heart utterly exposed by this? He feels a tsunami of shame and despair. Is there any hope, James?

[36 : 52] Or is it just to the hospice for terminal care? Well, thankfully, you see, his answer is there in verse 6. You see, there is hope. Not just for palliative care, but for a powerful and complete cure.

And it's all and only in the grace of God. You see, in verses 6-10, he lays out this hopeful prescription. The radical cure for the divided heart.

And it lies there in the astonishing condescension of God's grace. But, and surely this is one of the great buts of the Bible, isn't it? But, he gives more grace.

God's grace is utterly sufficient even to cure this terrible heart condition that afflicts us all. He is full of pardoning grace.

More full of grace than I have sinned. And again, James is just telling us what the whole scripture testifies to about the patience, the extraordinary condescension of God's great mercy and his grace to wayward children, to adulterous people.

[38 : 07] Even actually in Jeremiah, where I quoted from, if you read in Jeremiah chapter 3, 3, where he speaks about that terrible betrayal, that adultery, he says, return, faithless Israel, for I am merciful.

Only acknowledge your guilt, and I will not be angry forever, therefore return. God's grace is abundantly sufficient. He gives more grace.

He gives generously to all without reproach. remember he says in chapter 1 verse 5, but to those who ask with wholehearted faith and trust, to those who come humbly knowing that they need that grace, not to those who resist the diagnosis, not to those who are too proud to think that they need his mercy and forgiveness because he says here God opposes the proud.

He gives grace to the humble. God's grace, he says, makes us responsible. You can resist, can't you?

You can resist the doctor's diagnosis. You can say, there's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine. I'm not listening. I'm not taking that medicine. No, there is cure. There's complete cure in his abundant Plentiful grace, but it comes to those who honestly will face up to the diagnosis and submit to the healing that comes from his gracious hand.

[39 : 34] Verse 7, you must submit to the God of grace, to receive his grace. Verse 10, you must humble yourself to be exalted, to be made whole.

That's just James' way of saying that God promises his grace to those who will repent. And you see, between those summary statements in verse 7 and verse 10, they act like brackets, don't they?

He shows us what it means practically to repent, to submit humbly and penitently to God's healing grace. And it's wonderfully simple. He speaks about how we can receive that grace of God that heals our divided hearts, how we find that heavenly wisdom that is what God wants us to have now and always.

I guess you could call it three hours of the Christian life. And it's the pattern for the life of faith, day in, day out, every day until our very last day. The first is something very personal.

Return, verse 7, do you see? Return to wholehearted, undivided devotion to the one Lord. Return to Him alone from our dividedness in our allegiance and our affections.

[40 : 51] And it means two things, he says, verse 7, resisting the devil, resisting his siren calls to deceive our hearts, to offer to fulfill us and give us all our passions, desire, which is always a lie because he is the father of lies.

Resist him and he will flee from you, he says. And secondly, draw near to God, verse 8, and he will draw near to us. Two-part command, you see, made possible by those promises.

He will draw near and the enemy must flee. He gives the grace for what he commands when we come to him. Come to me, says the Lord Jesus, take my yoke upon you, take my command on you, because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And he won't reject us as we fear he will, as we deserve. He'll receive us personally. And that's what repentance begins with, just coming to him personally.

It means returning to him, drawing near to him repeatedly, because only with him can we do anything. God will return to him. But as Alec Mateo says, what comfort is in this verse.

[42 : 04] He tells us God is tirelessly on our side. Return to him. Flee the evil one. And then we're no longer cooperating in our own self-destruction, but with the Holy Spirit who lives in us and is conforming us into the true image of his Son.

Return to the Lord. Secondly, something very particular. In the second half of verse 8, a reversal of the dividedness in our actions and in our attitudes.

Cleanse our hands from doing those particular things that we know are wrong and not doing the things that we know are right that we should be doing. Well, real repentance is always visible, isn't it?

There's fruit in real actions, particular actions. And purify our divided hearts, our reversal of our divided attitudes, the things that we cherish, to his health and holiness again in our thinking. Not the ways of the flesh, the old nature. And each of us knows, don't we? All of us know what our own particular challenges are, the things we need to change in our thoughts, in our deeds, in our words.

[43 : 15] We can't do it on our own, but when we draw near to God, to his throne of grace, he's promised us, hasn't he? That there will be abundant mercy and grace for every time of need.

Return and reverse. And thirdly, verse 9, something painful, rejection of the dividedness of our acceptance, our approval, even our applause of this world's values.

And therefore, also real regret for our part, our participation, even our promotion of things that God hates. Acknowledgement that things that brought joy and laughter should actually make us mourn and weep.

Our scornful laughter at sin, James says, needs to turn into serious lament for sin. Our casual delight in these things needs to turn, he says, to a conscious dejection that we've so grieved the Lord.

I've never seen verse 9, have you? On a Christian card or a calendar. I've seen the first half of verse 8, but I've never seen the second half of verse 8 in a Christian card, have you?

[44 : 41] Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not advocating for a morose, joyless Christianity. There is a time to laugh. Some Christians need to hear that. There's a time to dance even. Maybe some Christians need to hear that.

I always remember my uncle saying about a particular person, the first thing the Lord is going to do to so-and-so when he gets to glory is get him down on the floor and give him a good tickling. He needs it. Well, yes, there are Christians like that.

There's a time to laugh, a time to dance, Ecclesiastes says. But there is a time also to mourn. There is a time to weep. And you see, James is saying that sorrow, real regret for sins, is a part of real repentance.

Indeed, it's a fruit of it really, isn't it? Because it's a fruit of grace that's at work already in our hearts. Grace that draws us back to the presence of our Lord. Grace that helps us to see again his beauty, his wholeness, his perfection.

Floods our souls again with light and with life and with love. So that at the same time we're exultant in the joy of that reconciliation and yet we're humbled also, aren't we?

[45 : 53] By the shame of what he's had to redeem us from. But there is an abundant grace, isn't there, in that way of shame. As Alec Mateer puts it, our position is one of perpetual supplication for grace to obey in order that we may experience the more grace which God gives to the obedient.

Nevertheless, the purpose of God is to lead us down into the lowest place of self-awareness and lamentation. The Lord sets the downward path before us because there's no other way up.

Or as William Still used to often put it more pithily, the way up is down. Verse 10. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Return to the Lord personally in our allegiance, in our affections. Reverse our our actions and our attitudes in whatever particular ways we know, we know that we need to.

And reject and regret what we have accepted and applauded. However painful that is. That's what ongoing real faith and repentance looks like, James says.

[47 : 26] Not complicated, is it? Very simple. But it's very humbling. It's not easy. Remember proud Naaman in 2 Kings 5, the Syrian captain?

What a huge struggle it was for him, wasn't it? To humble himself. To do the word that the prophet had spoken. But he found grace, didn't he? Great grace. Just as God promised.

I love this story. It's a great word. The prophet has spoken to you, his servant said to him. Will you not do it? Has he actually said, wash and be clean?

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan according to the word of the man of God. And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.

And he was clean. that's a wonderfully vivid picture isn't it? Of what James is holding out to us here in verse 10. The way up is down.

[48 : 29] But it's a great word of promise about the real way of blessing. Submit yourselves. Humble yourselves like that and God will exalt you.

He'll draw near to you. And he will be near to you always. Always. in every trial. I wonder if that's a word for some of us this morning very especially.

Other quarrels and fights in your life with other Christians. In our fellowship here perhaps. Well if that's the case friends don't look out at others.

Look in to the painful truth. accept the difficult diagnosis. But accept the powerful prescription the wonderful promise of verse 6.

But whatever the magnitude of your need he gives more grace. He gives grace to the humble.

[49 : 40] So verse 10 humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. he can cleanse us and restore us like the flesh of a little child.

A true child of our father in heaven. Amen. Let's pray together. O Lord who has mercy upon all.

Take away from us our sins and mercifully kindle in us the fire of the Holy Spirit. Take away from us the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh, a heart to love and adore thee, a heart to delight in thee, to follow and enjoy thee.

for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen.