

Conflict It's Cause And Cure

James 4:1-10

Pastor John Miller

I want to start by reading only verse 1 of James 4. James says, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"

Someone once said,

"To dwell above with the saints in love—

That will be glory.

But to live below with the saints I know—

Brother, that's another story."

It's sad when you read this passage in the book of James and you realize he's talking to Christians. He's not talking about unbelievers. He's not talking about the unsaved. He's talking to Christians. Note it in verse 1: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure..."—catch those words—"...that war in your members?" James is telling us what causes conflicts. He asks a question, and then he answers the question with another question. There are two question marks. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" Then he answers the question by giving us another question. "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"

Let me paraphrase: Where does fighting come from? Why are there wars in the world? Then he answers it: Doesn't it come because we have sinful desires or lusts in our own hearts? Someone once said, "The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart." How true that is. Man's heart has never been changed, other than through the power of the Gospel. The only way to change a person from the inside is by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He comes in to give us a new heart. He takes out the heart of stone, the heart that is in rebellion, and He gives us a heart of love and submission to God and we're able to love others and get along with others. So verse 1 is a question and an answer. Where do wars and fighting come from? They come from our own lust that war in our members.

I don't believe there should be a chapter break between verses 3 and 4. In other words, when the Bible was originally written, there were no chapters and verses. So sometimes we have created divisions that aren't really in the text. So in chapter 3 James talked about the tongue; the tongue used in either the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of God. The wisdom of the world brings strife, and the wisdom of God brings peace. Notice chapter 3, verse 18: He says, "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Two times in this verse you find the word "peace." Then you come to chapter 4, verse 1, and it says, "Where do

wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" Two times in this verse you find the word "war." You close chapter 3 with the word "peace" twice, and you open chapter 4 with the word "war" twice.

So James is still talking about the two kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of the world which is "earthly, sensual and demonic," which ends in strife and war; and the wisdom of God, which comes from above, which is pure, peaceable, easy to get along with and full of "good fruits" and "without hypocrisy." The problem is as old as Cain and Abel. Why is there fighting? Why are there wars? Because we're sinful. Cain slew his brother, Abel, and up until today, we have fighting and wars.

James does two things in these verses. I want you to catch it. First of all, he gives us the cause of our conflicts, verses 1-5, and secondly, he gives us the cure for the conflicts, verses 6-10. Let's look first of all at the cause of conflict or fighting and wars.

Starting at verse 1 down to 5, we read, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss..."—or "for the wrong motives"—"...that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?"

James names two causes of conflicts. I realize there could be others that are not listed here. James basically lists two of them. The first one is in verses 1-3. The cause is hedonism. Notice it in verse 1: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" The Greek word here that is translated "lust" or "desires" in our English Bible is actually the Greek word "hedone," and we get our word "hedonism" from it.

What does "hedonism" mean? It basically means that pleasure is the chief goal and good of life. It's the desire to avoid pain at any cost, and only to be finding pleasure. So it's the Playboy philosophy: "If it feels good, do it." It doesn't matter who it hurts, and it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong. Whatever actually feels good, that's what you need to do. So it's the hedonistic philosophy.

This is an amazing thought when you realize that James is talking to Christians. Notice it in verse 1: James says "among you." "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" Who is the "you" there? He's talking to Christians; Christians who are fighting and warring, Christians who are not getting along. They are fighting among each other. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" They come from your lusts or desires. The word is "hedone" or "hedonism," or the philosophy of seeking pleasure as the chief goal of life. So what we actually have here is Christian hedonism. They think the purpose of life is to have pleasure, not to know

God.

The Christian life brings pleasure. Now don't misunderstand this passage. We're going to get further down in this passage, and it says be miserable—weep and mourn. “Let your laughter be turned to mourning.” You say, “Yeah, there's the Christian life. You look like you've been baptized in lemon juice all the time.” People think that the more you frown, the more spiritual you are. The more bummed out you are, the deeper you are in the things of God. No. There's joy in the Lord! But there is a time to weep and to cry: when we become worldly and we're not seeking God and we've made pleasure the number one goal of our life.

In the Westminster Catechism it says that the chief goal of man is to know God and enjoy Him forever. I like that. That's the purpose for which we were created: to know God and enjoy Him forever. But without God, there is really no pleasure or joy. Americans believe we have the right to pursue happiness—and we do—but we pursue happiness and never find it. It is the illusive carrot on the end of the stick. You'll never really be happy. But if you pursue God, then the result will be happiness or pleasure. If you make God the goal of your life, pleasure and happiness will follow. So the result of seeking after pleasure is conflict.

Now I want you to notice that James makes it clear again in verse 2: “You lust and do not have.” You have all these desires—you're seeking pleasure—but you can't find what you're looking for, so you kill to get it. He may not be talking literally here. He may be talking like Jesus did at the Sermon on the Mount when He said that if you have anger in your heart toward someone, you've murdered them.

I don't know what it is, but yesterday I tried to change lanes again in front of someone and they honked at me. If that was you, I'll pray for you. You say, “I just tried to say ‘Hi,’ Pastor Miller.” I want a new law in California; we take horns out of cars. Stop honking at me! I know I don't drive that well, but don't honk at me; okay? It freaks me out. I almost lost my sanctification. It's so hard to drive on the road and not murder somebody. “Oh, that idiot!” If you have hatred in your heart, Jesus said you've already committed murder toward that person. So you “murder,” verse 2. And you desire to have, but you can't find or obtain what you're looking for, so you war and fight.

Now He introduces in verses 2-3 the idea of praying. So you might say that the number one cause is hedonism, the number two cause is prayerlessness. “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” What a simple statement. I believe that we lack a lot of pleasure in our life, because we don't really ask God, and we don't really look to God.

Then James says in verse 3, “You ask and do not receive...”—Why?—“...because you ask amiss...”—you ask “with the wrong motives”—“...that you may spend it on your pleasures.” So number one, we don't ask; number two, when we do ask, we don't ask the right way. You say, “Well, what do you mean by that, Pastor Miller?” What I mean by that is that we're praying for our pleasures; we're praying for what we want rather than what God's will is. The purpose of prayer is not to get God to bend to your will. The purpose of prayer is not to get my will done on

earth as I want it done in heaven. It's to get "Thy will done on earth as it is in heaven." When you pray, your prayer should be aligning itself with the purposes of God. That's why I believe we should be praying, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

One of the reasons God says "No" to prayer, verse 3, is because we're asking for our own lusts. We ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our own lusts. You're praying for a boat, and God doesn't give you a boat. You try to convince God that if He gave you a boat, you'd take the youth group out on the lake. Yeah; once every 10 years. God knows that if you had the boat, you'd be showing off and you wouldn't be in church on Sunday. It's not good for you, so He says "No" to you. But you say, "Yeah, but I want a boat." (Sorry to pick on you boaters out there.) Whatever it might be. You're praying and you say, "God didn't give me what I asked for." Well, maybe it wasn't His will. The Bible says, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and if He hears us, we know that we have the petition that we've desired of Him."

So we've become worldly and we seek pleasure and we're praying, but we're only praying for our own lustful desires, and as a result, we don't receive what we've prayed for. Ask yourself: Is my praying revealing a hedonistic heart?

A third reason for conflict is in verses 4-5. It's worldliness. Basically the whole passage is telling us it's because of our own lusts, and we become worldly. Verse 4 says that you become an adulteress. My King James translation has "adulterers and adulteresses," but it's only in the feminine; it's only "adulteresses." "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity..."—or "hostility" or "war"—"...with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." That's a radical statement. That's why I said this passage is "in your face." If you love the world, if you're a friend of the world, you actually become an enemy of God.

What does he mean by "adulteresses"? The concept is taken from the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's the idea that we are wed to God; that God is not only our heavenly Father, but He is our heavenly husband. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was actually the "bride" of God. He was their people. He was wed to them. When the nation of Israel turned away from God, they committed spiritual adultery. Now we, as Christians, are the bride of Christ. We belong to Christ. He is our heavenly bridegroom. We are his engaged wife. We are the bride.

But when we turn our hearts away from God and we befriend the world and begin to love the world and begin to long for the world and desire the things of the world—you say, "Well, what is 'the world'?" The word "world" is the Greek word "kosmos," and it means the evil world's system apart from God: the lust of the flesh—people controlled by their passions; the lust of the eyes—people living for possessions; the pride of life—people are proud. We're going to see in this passage that God resists the proud, or He fights against them. So the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life: the evil world's system. When you begin to love the world and become a friend of the world, then you become an enemy of God, and God actually begins to fight against you and resist you. No wonder there is strife, contention and

wars going on. So you have “adulteresses” because of your friendship with the world, and you become an enemy of God.

Then verse 5 is an amazing text. All Bible scholars agree that it is difficult to translate. It says, “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain...”—What Scripture says this, we don’t know. He doesn’t give us a specific verse, so there isn’t any one verse that is worded just like this, but it’s the tenor of what the Scriptures say—“...‘The Spirit...’—and we don’t know if this is the Holy Spirit or our human spirit that longs after God, but my guess—and I could be wrong—is that it is the Holy Spirit—“...Who dwells in us yearns jealously?” The word “yearns” or “lusts to envy” sometimes confuses us. We think of it being sinful or evil, but the word “lust” means “desire.”

Did you know you can lust for God? Or desire God? “As the deer pants after the water brooks, so lusteth...”—or “so thirsteth”—“...my soul after Thee, O God.” It’s a good thing to desire God. But it’s an evil thing to desire sinful pleasures of the world that are out of the will of God and contrary to the Word of God.

So God gives us the Holy Spirit. Let me read another translation of verse 5. “The Spirit, which He has made to dwell in us, jealously desires us.” Just as the word “lust” could be good or bad, the word “jealous” could be good or bad. Do you know that God is jealous? That’s not a bad thing; that’s a good thing. Do you know what He’s jealous of? He’s jealous of you. He loves you. He doesn’t want anything to come between you and Him. He wants you to love Him with “all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your might.” He wants to reign in your heart without a rival there.

Do you know that it’s a good thing for a husband to be jealous of his wife’s love? And for a wife to be jealous of her husband’s love? What is a very popular, growing trend in America today is “open marriage.” I shudder to think about it. Open marriage: the husband has a girlfriend, and the wife has a boyfriend. They go off on dates and see other people. Why be married if you have an open marriage? It’s a contradiction in terms, because when you marry someone, you say, “I’m going to love you. I’m going to be devoted to you. I’m going to be faithful to you. I’m going to be committed to you. I’m not going to have eyes for anyone but you. I’m going to meet your needs. You’re going to meet my needs. We’re reserved for one another.” That’s a good thing. That’s a holy thing. That’s a righteous thing. If anyone tries to come in between that couple, that’s an unholy thing. That’s a bad thing. So it’s good for a husband or wife to be jealous of their love for one another and to be devoted to one another, even as God is jealous over us.

This blows my mind to think about: that the God of all creation, the infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise and eternal God lives in me and longs for my devotion, longs for my fidelity, longs for my commitment and longs for me to love Him and Him only. Think about that.

Are you a spiritual adulteress? Has your love for God grown cold? We think of lust as being only sexual, but it can also be for the pleasures of this life and the things of the world. We can grow cold in our love for God, and God says that “You’ve become a friend of the world, so

you're My enemy." Because God gave us the Holy Spirit, He is jealous for us.

You might also think that one of the steps to getting victory over worldliness, verse 5, is surrendering to the Holy Spirit's promptings; not grieving the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit longs—Do you know that if you are a Christian and you go a day or two without praying, you just desire to pray? You desire to talk to God. You desire to hear God's Word. You haven't been in church, so you just want to be in church. You want to be in fellowship. You thirst for God. You hunger for God. You want the things of God. If you drift away from that, your soul shrivels up. It's because the Holy Spirit is jealous, and He's longing for you to love and to know God.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, there was the seed, the Word of God, that was sown in the heart of a man but was choked out by the cares and the deceitfulness of riches. They were the weeds that choked it out. How easy for God's Word to get choked out of our life by selfishness and prayerlessness and worldliness.

You ask, "Well, Pastor, what is the cure for hedonism and worldliness in the heart of a Christian? We find that in verses 6-10. This is the cure for the conflict: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" We do know where God said that; He said that in Proverbs 3:34. Continuing in verse 7, he says, "Therefore submit 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." This is why I said this is rip-your-face-off text. "You sinners," "you double-minded"—he's layin' it on 'em. Verse 9: "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He..."—that is, the Lord—"... will lift you up."

There is one cure for conflict. There is one cure for Christian hedonism and worldliness. It's in verse 6, and it's the grace of God. "But He gives more grace." Notice the words "more grace." Some translations say, "He giveth greater grace."

I don't believe this is what we call "saving grace." John Newton wrote the famous song Amazing Grace.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found;

T'was blind, but now I see.

It's the greatest modern song that's ever been written. Amazing grace. That's salvation grace, and no one can be saved without the grace of God. We're saved by grace. It's "not of ourselves; it's a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." So salvation is all of grace. And what is grace? Grace is unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. Nothing you do merits,

earns or deserves salvation. God gives it to you freely by His grace.

Now once you become saved, you need daily, sustaining grace. You need grace for living. You need grace for health. You need grace to get out of bed in the morning when the time is changing, and it's still dark outside. You should see the first-service people; they're like whoa [rocking back and forth]. They come to church with their flashlights. I need grace when my body has pain, or I've just been diagnosed with cancer. I need grace when I find out someone I love has died, and my heart is broken. When I stand in the cemetery and I lower a loved one into the grave and I'm saying goodbye to my nearest and dearest and my heart is broken, I need grace. I need God's grace to come to me to help me and strengthen me.

When Satan comes against me and attacks me and the world presses in on me—you know that it's hard to live in this world because it's evil and wicked and dark. It's so sinful: the evil world's system, the kosmos is all around. It's so difficult to live a holy life, to live a consecrated life to God. So what we need actually is this greater grace, the abundant grace, this overflowing grace. It's help to live in a fallen world.

In John 1:16, the Bible says, "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." In the Greek it's actually "grace overflowing with more grace." In Romans 5:20, Paul says, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded..."—or "overflowed"—"...much more." So where there's a bunch of sin, there's a bunch of grace; where there's overflowing sin, there's overflowing grace.

You say, "Wow! Well let's just go out and sin so that grace can abound! The more I sin, the more gracious God is so let's go sin today. Let's have a sin day!" No. The Bible says, "Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid!" Perish the thought! Don't you know that you become a slave? You're like a marionette, a puppet pulled by the strings of your pleasure. You're looking for things that can't satisfy. You're bound by Satan. It causes conflict. We need God's sustaining, God's helping grace for living. It's God's all-sufficient, all-sustaining grace. Someone said, "For daily need, there is daily grace. For sudden need, there is sudden grace. For overwhelming need, there is overwhelming grace."

I heard the story of an artist who submitted to an art gallery a painting of Niagara Falls for an exhibition. But the artist forgot to title his painting. The gallery mounted it on the wall, but there was no title for the painting. The gallery was left to think up a title for the painting. They came up with this title for the painting: "More to Follow." I like that. I thought, What a description of God's grace! It's like Niagara Falls. Picture all that water coming over the falls and flowing into the river below. Think of that as God's grace for us; it's ongoing, continuing, overwhelming as God's grace overflows.

One of the best examples of this daily, sustaining, helping grace that helps us overcome hedonism and worldliness is 2 Corinthians 12. It is one of my all-time favorite passages. It says that the Apostle Paul was given a thorn in his flesh. You say, "Something's wrong with you, Pastor John, if that's your favorite passage. Paul's thorn in his flesh is your favorite passage?"

"It's one of them, but it's at the top of my list; okay?"

Paul had been caught up to paradise. He had seen things and he had heard things which were amazing, and because God had given him this paradise experience, God had to balance his life. Don't miss this point: God had to balance his life with pain, so God gave him a thorn in his flesh.

You say, "What do you mean, 'God had to balance his life'?"

If Paul had only had the paradise experience, he would have become proud. Guess what happens to the proud? God resists them and "knows them far off." The proud are not used by God. Paul's ministry would have become ineffective because of his proud heart. So to keep Paul humble, Paul says, "There was given unto me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." That's the purpose.

Do you know that God might give you a painful experience to keep you humble? You should be humble because, "The proud God knows far off." But to those who are humble, God dispenses grace. You want to have contentment rather than conflict? You need to humble yourself and let God dispense His grace. Someone called it "the gravity of God's grace." I like that. It's always pulling down. It's always coming down to those who are lowly. It's like Niagara Falls—the gravity of God's grace. It runs to the lowly.

So Paul prayed about this thorn. He knew that God gave it to him to keep him humble, but he didn't know that at first. So Paul prayed. By the way, I believe the thorn was a physical infirmity or a weakness in his flesh; some malady or pain that he had to endure. Paul said, "Jesus, would you take away this thorn?" Isn't that how we normally pray? "Get rid of it, God. Bad things, God take away. Good things, Lord, thank you for that." Guess what the Lord said? "No." God said, "No." So Paul prayed a second time: "Lord, would you take away this thorn?" God said, "No." Then Paul prayed a third time: He said, "Lord, I'm going to ask one more time. Would you in Jesus' naaame—

You know, sometimes when you go "naaame.... I don't know why Christians pray like such kooky, weird people. "In the naaame of Jesssusaa." Somehow we get this idea that God will answer more quickly if we say "naaame of Jesssusaa." We don't talk to people like that. If you meet a friend at the mall you don't say, "How yaa doin' aaah? Good to see yaa today." Slap that dude. Nobody talks like that. Why do we talk to God like that? Anyway, that's not in the text; I just threw that in there.

I can imagine the third time Paul prayed, "In Jesssusaa' name, I claim it. I speak it out in Jesusssusaa' name! I'm healed!" You know what God said? "No."

"But I said, 'In Jesus' name!'"

By the way, do you know that when you pray "In Jesus' name," it means "for His sake"? It means "for His glory." It means "for His will." It's not a magic word like rubbing an Aladdin lamp,

and the genie comes out and gives you your wish. Rather, I'm praying in the will of God. I'm praying to glorify Jesus.

So God said, "No...No...No" three times. Then God said something to Paul that changed Paul's whole perspective. He said, "But Paul, I'm going to give you something. I won't take away the thorn..."—listen carefully—"...but I'm going to give you My grace. And My grace will be sufficient for you." And He said, "My strength will be made perfect in your weakness." When Paul heard that, he said, "Okay. Well, praise the Lord! I'm going to glory in my weaknesses, because He said, 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'" He said then the power of God can rest upon Paul. So Paul was thankful for his weakness, because his weakness drove him to the throne of grace to find strength in an hour of need.

Someone put it in a poem:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater.

He sendeth more strength when the labor is increased.

To added affliction, He addeth His mercy.

To multiplied trials, He multiplies peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,

When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,

When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,

Our Father's full giving has only begun.

His love has no limit. His grace has no measure.

His power no boundary known unto men.

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,

He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

That's the grace of God. It's God's Niagara Falls. He continues to overflow us with His grace.

Now how do we tap into that greater grace? Verse 6: It's not by being proud; it's by being humble. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Now James does this to wrap it up: He gives us five steps to take if we are going to experience God's greater grace, resulting in contentment.

Step number one: Submit yourself to God. Verse 7 says, "Therefore submit to God." The word

“submit” is a military term. It means “to get back in rank.” It means you’ve fallen out of rank, so get back in rank. The essence of sin is selfishness. Satan said, “I will,” but Jesus said just the opposite: “Thy will.” You’re either saying one or the other; you’re either saying “my will” or “Thy will.” You need to submit yourself to God. So if you have drifted far from God—he’s talking to Christians—get back in line. Submit to God.

The second step to tapping into God’s grace is resist the devil, verse 7. “Resist the devil...”—by the way, there really is a devil, and he doesn’t like you and wants to destroy your love and your walk with God—“...and he will flee from you.” We must resist the devil. We must take action. There really is a devil, but you and I must actively resist him. In Ephesians 6:12 it says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” There is a spiritual battle going on, and God has made provision for us.

We resist the devil by wearing the belt of truth, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness, by taking up the shield of faith, by putting on the helmet of salvation, by picking up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and by “praying always with all prayer and supplication and watching thereunto.” So you live truthfully, you live righteously, you trust God by faith, you stand in your salvation, quote Scripture—get grounded in the Word—and you pray to God. Then what happens? The devil flees.

By the way, these are commands with promises that follow. The command is that you submit yourselves to God, and he will draw near to you. You resist the devil, and he will flee from you. So you actually see the back side of Satan but the face of God, if you take these steps. You’re seeing God’s face, but on the other side, you’re seeing Satan running from you. That’s a promise; he will flee from you. So you resist the devil.

Then thirdly, step number three, in verse 8: “Draw near to God...”—This is where the promise follows, “...and He will draw near to you.” So command: “resist the devil”; promise: “he will flee.” Command: “draw near to God”; promise: “He will draw near to you.”

In Psalm 73:28, Asaph, who had become worldly and started to long after things of the world but finally came to church and got his perspective on God, closes the psalm by saying, “But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God.”

As I said, the command is followed by a promise. I love this statement: “and He will draw near to you.” Isn’t that an awesome statement? It’s a promise. If you feel far from God, guess who’s moved? Not God. If you just turn, God starts moving toward you. If you take one step, God takes two steps. If you start walking toward God, He starts running toward you.

Remember the story that Jesus told of the parable of the prodigal son? The younger son said to his dad, “Give me my money. I want to do my own thing”; hedonism, pleasure, recklessness. So the dad gave him his money. The son went to a far country, and he wasted his substance on riotous—that’s where we get our word “prodigal”—living. He finally ended up in a pig pen.

No money. No friends. Isn't it funny that when you have money, you have friends?

Put a swimming pool in your back yard. Everyone comes to your house. You have friends you didn't even know about. Ding dong. They're out there in their trunks on the front porch. "Hi. We came to see you guys. Oh, it's a hot day. Can we go swimming?" I don't have a pool, by the way, so I'm just relating that to you. Some of you think I have a pool, and you're bummed out because you think you can come to my house to swim; right? I don't have a pool. I'll squirt you with a hose when you come to my house. But you have money, you have friends. Remember in high school, if you had a nice car, everybody liked you? If you had money, everybody liked you. If you had a beach house, everybody really loved you a lot.

So the prodigal son is totally destitute. All he has is the pigs, but they won't share with him. He finally comes to his senses and thinks, "How many hired servants my father has with bread enough to spare, while I perish with hunger. This is stupid! I'm going to go back to my father and say, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm not worthy to be called your son. Will you just take me back as one of your hired servants?'" This is what he rehearsed in his mind. Then he started on his journey back. As he was going back, a long way down the road, the Father was watching and looking and longing for him. God is actually jealous of me! He actually loves me and longs for me and looks for me. The Bible says that the Father actually started to run toward him.

This is one of those cases in the Bible where it actually depicts God running. In that culture at that time, for a man to run was so undignified. The men wore long skirts, so if they ran, it could blow up and you're in trouble. That's why we have that term "gird up your loins." If a guy had to go fast, he would pull it up into a mini skirt and tuck it into the belt around his waist. Then he could take off. I'm glad I didn't live back then.

So the Father pulls his skirt up, ties it around his waist and starts running toward the son. I'm sure the son is thinking, "Oh, no. I'm gonna get a lickin'. He's gonna wup me for sure, 'cause I've been so bad!" The minute the Father got to his son, the son started into his speech about sinning against heaven. The Father stopped him and put his arms around his son. The Father smothered him with kisses. The Father put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, gave him a robe, killed the fatted calf and threw a big party. He said, "My son, who was lost, is found! He was dead but he's alive!" You see, when I take one step, God starts running toward me.

Now, again, this passage is to Christians. Maybe you've drifted far from God. Maybe you've become a Christian hedonist. All you care about is pleasure. Maybe you've become a friend of the world. The danger is that you will become conformed to the world, and then you become condemned with the world. We don't want that to happen. Maybe you need to turn and draw near to God. If you do, the promise is that God will start running toward you; He will pursue you.

How do we pursue God? Verse 8, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners..."—which speaks of our actions—"...and purify your hearts, you double minded." The heart speaks of our attitudes. So our actions and attitudes need to be cleansed.

The fourth step in tapping into God's grace is in verse 9: Be miserable. I didn't say it, the Bible did in verse 9. Be afflicted. The word "afflicted" in the Greek can be translated "be miserable." It carries the idea of being broken and feeling wretched because of your sin. If you are a child of God, and you become worldly and sinful, it's not a time to laugh. It's not a time to smile. It's not a time to be happy. There's a time to weep and there's a time to rejoice. In a person whose life has sin, it's a time to weep and mourn.

That word "afflicted" literally means "be miserable." It's talking about repentance. There is joy in the Christian life, but not when there is sin. So we need to repent. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 5:4: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they..."—emphatic in the Greek; "they" and they only—"...shall be comforted." You want comfort? You want joy? It starts by weeping and mourning.

Notice in the text in verse 9, James actually says, "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." When David, the king of Israel, sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba—this is not spiritual adultery but actual adultery or infidelity in David's life—and murdered her husband to cover his sin, David said, "My moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Day and night God's hand was heavy upon me." That's why he wrote in Psalm 51, "God, I want you to restore unto me the joy of my salvation." Why? Because he had lost his joy. The joy had drained out of David's life. He needed the joy of the Lord. So David came to the conclusion that "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise."

Jesus said in Luke 6:25, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." But those who are now weeping and mourning over their sin will have comfort and joy. The Bible says, "If we sow in tears, we will reap in joy."

How long has it been since you cried? Not because your car broke down or someone was mean to you or you lost your job, but because of worldliness in your heart. When was the last time you actually cried and said, "God, I'm so sorry. My love has grown cold. I'm so sorry that I've drifted far away from You." When was the last time you actually got on your knees and you cried before God and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and you repented of your sins and turned back to God.

Maybe God had you read this today. It's no accident we're studying this passage, because maybe your heart has become hedonistic. Maybe your heart has become worldly. Maybe your love for God has grown cold. You wonder why you're living in conflict with other people. Maybe because you're out of harmony with God.

Here's the fifth, and most important step to tap into God's grace. It rounds it all out. It's actually a summary, verse 10: Humble yourself. Verse 10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." Notice that you don't humble yourself in the sight of men or people. I'm all for mourners' benches and people praying at church and getting right with God, but to put on a show doesn't matter. It's before God that we need to repent.

It says "humble yourself." This is a very important point. Don't wait for God to humble you. Humble yourself. Do it now; don't wait. Ask God to humble you right now. When you do that, the Bible is very clear that this is the result: "He will lift you up." So God is saying, the way up is first down. And then the way down, is up.

So number one, you submit to God; number two, you resist the devil; number three, draw near God, and He will draw near to you; number four, you weep and mourn; and number five, you humble yourself.

Let's pray.