

The Kind of Prayer God Listens To

By Pastor Matt Black
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Midweek Prayer Meeting
James 4:6-10

Scripture and Theme: Open your Bible to the book of **James 4:6-10** this evening. The title of our study this evening is: “How to Have a Prayer Life that God Listens To”.

Introduction: Yesterday’s power is not sufficient for this hour! So when you come to chapter 4 and verses 6-10, James is saying: This is what you need to do to become a believer! There are ten imperatives here. This is James’ invitation to repent. This is what humility and repentance looks like.

James was the Lord’s half brother, son of Joseph and Mary, but he was also the pastor of the church of Jerusalem. We must never take the Bible out of its context. Therefore, let’s remember that James in his book is trying to separate the false professors from the true and genuine believers there in his church in Jerusalem.

- He says in **chapter 1**: A true Christian prays with **unwavering faith**. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”. So over chapter 1 I want you to think: **FAITH!**
- In **chapter 2**: we learn that a true Christian has a **fruitful life**. “Faith without works is dead.” If you say you are a Christian, then you have a servant’s heart. You don’t have to be prodded. You have to prod stubborn goats, but not gentle sheep. So over chapter 2, I want you to think: **FRUIT!**
- **Chapter 3** tells us that genuine Christians have **strict control of their tongues**. They are either guarding their words, or they are begging for forgiveness an awful lot! So over chapter 3, I want you to write: **FILLING!** You are filled with fresh water as the chapter says, not bitter, and it comes out!
- Now here in **chapter 4** of James, there is this **FAITHFULNESS** to God again characterized by prayer—don’t ask amiss that you might consume it upon your lusts. Don’t be an **adulterer** with the world. James is clearly saying—a life of adultery with the world is a life of unbelief, no matter how much you pray.

So let’s go ahead and stand for God’s Word this evening. Open your hearts to God to speak to you tonight. Let’s read in **James 4:6-10**, “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”.

[Prayer for guidance]

James 4:6-10, “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” Paul is quoting **Proverbs 3:36**, “Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.”

What kind of a person will God do business with? Not just anybody. **Isaiah 66:2**, “to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”.

The question is, how do you act humbly? Verses 7, 8, and 9 tell us what it looks like. In these verses there are Ten Commandments. The Old Testament has the Ten Commandments, and these are the ten commandments of James.

We’ll be looking at two of the ten imperatives of prayer tonight.

Remember last week we went over two imperatives. Remember the first?

1. “Submit yourselves therefore to God” (verse 7). What does that mean? It is very simple. It means to ‘*align yourself under the authority of God.*’

Submissive Prayer!

“**SUBMIT**”: The word is used of troops under a general. It means that you have a loyal allegiance to Jesus Christ as sovereign Lord over your life.

- It means pledging your allegiance to God above all others. It is pledging your allegiance to God’s will, no matter what it may mean.
- It means crucifixion to your own will: “Not my will but thine be done”. My will is now crucified. **Galatians 2:20**, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Then we saw a second imperative. You must do it. If you are to follow Jesus, you must do what in verse 7?

2. That’s right, you must “Resist the devil” (verse 7). **Militant** Prayer! Literally, ‘*take your stand against the devil*’ and he will flee from you! Turn your back on Satan and take a stand against his control over you.

Take your stand against the devil. The word is diabolos, the slanderer, the accuser, the devil. Be ready for satanic attack at all times.

The Christian life is a life of constant battle. You never get a break from resisting the devil. Even at this moment the satanic bullets are flying over our heads. Everything we do as Christians ought to be an act of war against the devil and this world!

You must see Satan as a defeated foe! Listen, Satan goes about as “a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (**1 Peter 5:8**), but he’s a toothless lion. He’s conquered. Remember: “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (**1 John 4:4**).

And now we come to a third command to enter into that life with God. If you’ve entered into it, you know this is your constant desire. Listen to this promise. There’s an attitude of heart that pleases God in prayer. Here it is in **verse 8**:

3. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (**verse 8**). Desirous, hungry, fervent prayer! Forsake all others and love God.

I don’t need to tell you what this means! Men, when you saw your wife for the first time, nobody had to tell you to draw near to her!! There’s an abandonment in this word!!

Drawing near to God means my crying heart’s desire is for intimacy with the living God.

We are to do this—to “draw nigh to God”!

A. The priestly context.

The term “draw nigh” originally referred to the priests who were to “draw near” and offer sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. Wicked and unclean they were, but they had to do it through the blood!!

And one of them, the high priest, would “draw near” and go directly into the Holy of Holies.

It was the highest privilege for the priests to draw near to God and have that position on the Day of Atonement. It was the highest privilege for the high priest to draw near alone before God Almighty!

The priests back then, before they could draw near, had to wash and cleanse themselves, their hands and their feet, their body. They had to have offered sacrifices on their *own* behalf and had a right relationship with God.

- B. Application. Friends, Jesus has made the way to God open! **Hebrews 10:19** says we now have, “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus”. It is an awesome thing to be in the presence of the living God.

So how do we know we are actually drawing nigh to God???

Turn over to **Hebrews 10:22**. The writer of Hebrews here picks up this priestly language of the sacrifices and applies it to the new covenant. He says as the

priests of old prepared themselves to draw near to God, so we are to draw near to God having prepared ourselves as well. **Hebrews 10:22**, we read “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Draw near to him. Nothing else is on the agenda. Just God. That’s why we’re here, right? We call it many things in the Bible.

1.) Affections. LOVE.

Your purpose in life is to love and adore God! Be on a perpetual honey moon with God. Love him!

- **Mark 12:30**, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

Drawing near to God means my crying heart's desire is for intimacy with the living God.

2.) Appetite. HUNGER. **Matthew 5:6**, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

3.) Agenda: SEEKING. Priority!! Turn over to **Jeremiah 29:11-14**, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. 12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. 14 And I will be found of you, saith the LORD”.

Draw nigh to God. He is seeking you. He is after you. He has come into this world for you. What is it that you are waiting for? Seek Him! Know Him! God is

In fact, in John 4, the Bible says that God is seeking worshippers.

- **John 4:23**, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

Seeking God is like a lightning bolt. There is this desire. It is a gift of God. He is drawing you, but you are drawing nigh to Him! Remember the precious words of Jesus in **John 6:44**? “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Where does this hunger for God come from? It comes from God! I want to show you the great love of God. **1 John 4:19**, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

Think of **Isaiah**. We don't read that he was seeking God. It says all the sudden he saw the Lord. God gave him a vision! And Isaiah went to seeking God. He went to drawing nigh to God! It's a humbling thing! We see Him high and lifted up, and we realize He's seeking us! He's seeking worshippers. He's not seeking those who would use him as a lottery or a store. He's seeking people to draw near to the Holy of Holies.

God is after you!! So draw near to him. He's here. He's come. He's died. He's done it all. Draw near to Him!

Then we come to another imperative...

4. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners" (**verse 8**). What James is saying is, now that you're drawing nigh to God, cleanse your hands, sinners. A cleansed life is what he speaks of. That's not a new thought.
 - A. In the OT book of Isaiah we have a beautiful picture of this. Look at chapter 1. In **Isaiah 1:15-16**, "when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17 Learn to do well..." Then He says in **verse 18**, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Cleanse yourselves. That's what the Scripture says the sinner is to do. Cleanse your hands, sinners.
 - B. **Dirty Fingernails**. Have you ever had dirty fingernails? You've got to get a tool to get under them. Ladies, you don't go to your wedding day with dirty fingernails. And you don't go to the Lord with dirty sin in your heart and in your life!

Why hands? "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners" (**verse 8**). Why hands? Because hands are the symbols of action, the symbols of behavior, of deeds that have been done. So we are talking about a radical repentance. Scrub the filth of sin in every way out of your life! We need to experience a radical amputation from this world! We need to divorce the world and forever put it away!

The heart touched by God hungers for righteousness and for clean hands. You hate what you see about yourself, your sin, the heinousness of it is repulsive.
5. "Purify your hearts, ye double minded" (**verse 8**). Here we are commanded to repent inwardly. All sin comes from the fountain of the heart. It's the heart, Jeremiah said, that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, desperately wicked. And the sinner comes not just longing to be delivered from the things he did that are wrong, but from the wrongness that's deep within him...deep within him. Turn over

to Psalm 24. What was the psalmist's cry? **Psalm 24**, and verses 3 and 4 comes to mind, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

Jeremiah 4:4, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem”.

Joel 2:13, “And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God”.

6. “Be afflicted” (verse 9). That's it. What does that word mean? It means to feel wretched—to feel absolutely totally miserable. It is the inward brokenness over sin. Be afflicted! Be broken over your sin!

We don't often say that to people. We like to say: “Wouldn't you like to feel good?” But perhaps we ought to say...folks, I want you to feel miserable, you have to feel bad before you can feel good.

This feeling follows the true estimate of one's sinfulness. The Christian life is filled with joy, but it doesn't start out that way. It is sad, because oftentimes when we give the Gospel, we want to get the bad part out of the way and get to the good part. You are a wretch. Jesus came to save wretches. But we need to give people sufficient time to feel their own wretchedness.

Conclusion: Next week we'll look at a few more. But let's pledge our allegiance to God. Let's align ourselves under His sovereignty no matter what the pain and what the cost. Let's do the hard thing because He is worthy. Let's resist the devil. Everything we do as Christians is an act of war against this world!

Next week we'll look at:

7. “mourn...” (verse 9). Mourning is how the spirit responds. There is a deep grief over sin.
8. “...and weep” (verse 9). Weeping is how the body responds.
9. “let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness” (verse 9).
10. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (verse 10).