

Subject: *Drawing Near to God*

Scripture: *James 4:7-10*

Today we are celebrating 29 years together as Liberty Baptist Church. Over these years we have drawn near to God and near to one another. I want you to think back to when you first came to Liberty. For some it may be many years and for others it may be just weeks or months. Ask yourself two questions. Are you closer to others members now that you used to be? Are you closer to God now than you used to be? These are important questions.

In this text we find several themes and each of them deserve our full and careful attention. Submit to God. Resist the devil. Cleanse your hands and hearts. Be afflicted, mourn, and weep. Humble yourselves before God. The main thought is found in verse 8: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” I want to us to consider that statement in four ways:

1. The PRIVILEGE of drawing near to God

Drawing near to God is an invitation and a high privilege. In fact, it is our greatest privilege. It is the privilege of living a heavenly kind of life on earth. It is a privilege made possible only by God’s grace in salvation. We may not appreciate this as much as the Old Testament saints would have. When God appeared to Moses, He said, “Draw not near; put off your shoes from your feet.” When God revealed Himself and His law on Mt. Sinai, He warned the people not to come up on the mountain. In the tabernacle and the temple, God’s people knew that they had to keep a distance. The priests were allowed to go so far, and only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies once a year. God was holy and off limits. Man could only approach Him through a mediator.

When Jesus came things were different. He made a way for us to come into God’s presence. As soon as Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Mt. 27:51).

Ephesians 2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

Hebrews 10:19-22 ¹⁹ *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;* ²¹ *And having an high priest over the house of God;* ²² *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.*

We are blessed above all people to draw near to God by faith. And one day we will have the privilege of drawing near and being near to Him forever in heaven.

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

2. The PEOPLE who draw near to God

We must read James 4:8 in its context. God tells us what is required. We must submit to Him. We must cleanse our hands (actions) and our hearts (thoughts, attitudes). We must be afflicted and mourn (repentance, godly sorrow for our sins). We must humble ourselves

before God. He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. We can't draw near to God if we draw near to the world.

James 4:4 *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

1 John 2:15-17 ¹⁵ *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

3. The PLAN for drawing near to God

How do we draw near to God? We need a plan, a track to run on. We need to take the guesswork out of God's work. So here is a plan that will help us all.

- Draw near to God in private devotion

I'm speaking about the quiet time or devotional time. Read the Bible and pray. No one every challenged me to have a daily devotional time until I was in seminary. Start with 5 minutes, and then work up to 10, then 15. **Psalms 5:3** *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*

- Draw near to God in public worship

Hebrews 10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

- Draw near to God in group Bible study

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

You may feel that personal Bible study is enough, but we all need to be taught. God teaches us by His Spirit and through human teachers.

Acts 8:30-31 ³⁰ *And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you are reading? ³¹ And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*

Proverbs 13:20 *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* We need to walk with people who have godly wisdom. I find that I draw near to God when I draw near to those who know Him well. For example, some of us have gone through the study, *Behold Your God*. Almost every week I hear Liberty members say that was a life-changing study. We all need a plan for drawing near to God.

4. The PROMISE of drawing near to God

God promises to draw near to us if we draw near to Him. Just think of what that means. God is the source of every blessing, as the song says, *Come, thou fount of every blessing.*

When God draws near we have joy. **Psalms 16:11** *Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

When God draws near we have wisdom. **James 1:5** *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

When God draws near we have peace and assurance. **Psalms 27:1** *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

Jesus said we need to draw near to God with the heart, **Matthew 15:8** *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

The truth of the matter is that you and I are as close to God as we really want to be. The invitation is for all who will receive: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

We never have to worry if God is too busy, if God gets tired of us, or if God has changed His mind about drawing near to us. I remember wanting to develop a friendship with a godly man who lives about two hours from Bristol. He has written some excellent Christian books and is a fine Bible preacher. I gave him my card and asked him to call or email me anytime, but he never did. I thought that I had done all I knew to do. That kind of thing never happens with God. The Bible says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” What a promise!