**Come Close**

**Embrace the Ultimate Invitation – Come Close to God.**

**James 4:1-10**

We all have desires don’t we? To desire is to be human.

Some desires can lead us to a place of peace, and contentment; joy but some desires are as Nouwen puts it, unruly, turbulent and very distracting.

Its true. Some of my darker desires can serve to be a catalyst to keep me pursuing God.

I think we all have felt desires and core desires; stuff on the surface – the immediate, I desire a cup of coffee, I desire sleep, comfort, friendship and desires that are more core.

Erwin McMannus calls them Soul Cravings - core desires – that if followed can lead us to a place of wholeness, joy and peace. Shalom.

What sorts of desires are you aware of in your own life this morning? What sort of places are those leading you to?

Maybe the fact you are here this morning is an indicator that you are acutely aware of your desire for love, grace, community and ultimately a loving relationship with God.

**James 1:1-10 Pray**

**A little Context**

James here seems pretty grumpy. Harsh.

He uses language like “You adulterers!”, “An enemy of God”, “Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts”. Calling them to grieve, mourn and wail, turn your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

1st James sounds harsh first b/c he’s not Canadian. He’s not just Jewish, he’s first Century Jewish.

2nd, this church is in serious trouble. James begins with this rhetorical question, indicating that there are fights and quarrels among them. They are clearly a deeply divided community – no community at all. And a whole bunch of dysfunctional practices going on that didn’t reflect God’s community whatsoever.

Jealousy. Selfish ambition. Slander. Anger. Deception. And all kinds of other evil dysfunctional practices.

They apparently were being led by a leader or two who taught and modeled a philosophy that encouraged the pursuit of status and success and achievement the same way their surrounding culture did.

They were arrogant, smug, and indifferent towards God and the poor.

So among them were multiple groups; some who were following these leaders hook line and sinker, and some who were loyal to Jesus, some who wanted peace at any cost, and some who were willing to fight for what’s right.

James is so concerned, he believes that without intervention they are in immanent danger of losing their way and this community of faith dissolving.

This is why James comes in there like an OT Prophet. Like Isaiah or Ezekiel of old, James gives them a rebuke to win them back.

He wants the church to wake up, to rub the sleep from their eyes, to look in the mirror and see what they’ve become, see who they really are.

I wonder how you might receive correction? Do you need a prophetic voice speaking to you? Do you need a hammer up side the head, or is it a velvet hammer?

How does God get your attention when He needs to?

**Proverbs 27:6** says, “The wounds from a friend can be trusted, but the enemy multiplies kisses.”

James is being a good friend in and through these words.

The text is broken up into 3. A progression.

1st they are Exposed, 2nd they are Offered and 3rd they are Invited.

1. **Vs. 1-3 Exposed their need: We see their mis-directed desires exposed. Laid bare.**

Quarrels and fights because they want what they don’t have.

Pretty strong language here. You want what others have, so you scheme, fight, wage war and kill to get it.

Most commentators agree that James isn’t saying the church were really killing one another; but using a metaphor to communicate how far they had fallen.

This is all language that describes their surrounding Roman culture – a culture that advocated, endorsed doing whatever that needed to be done to be satisfied; even kill.

And it all stems from desires.

In every one of us we are full of mixed motives, impulses and desires.

The Rabbis believed that these impulses had their base in the various organs or “members” of the human body. And these members wage war against one another.

Pulled one way by conscience and one way by evil desire. Law of love or law of sin.

**I was reading Nouwen** this week.

*“Desire is often talked about as something we ought to overcome.  Still, being is desiring:  our bodies, our minds, our hearts, and our souls are full of desires.  Some are unruly, turbulent, and very distracting; some make us think deep thoughts and see great visions; some teach us how to love; and some keep us searching for God.   Our desire for God is the desire that should guide all other desires.  Otherwise our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls become one another's enemies and our inner lives become chaotic, leading us to despair and self-destruction.”*

Here this local church is at war within and with one another.

They were behaving like a bunch of kids in a toy shop. We want this, that and the other thing; there’s so many options being thrown at us we are confused and restless and full of worry.

**Nouwen** goes on to say that as long as we keep vacillating among these many wants, we will never be able to move forward in life with inner peace, shalom.

So many of us were taught that if we had a bad desire, we were simply supposed, push it down, and deny it’s even there in the first place.

But we know that the more we treat our desires that way, the more fuel or weight we give them.

Seems logical. We are afraid that if we accept what we are feeling that it will lead to approval – living it out.

So we don’t want to accept that this is part of who we are; we shove it down, try to pretend it’s not there.

But the more energy we pour into the thing we are resisting, the more power we give it.

I think we all have desires within we don’t like. Things we wish weren’t there, or part of us.

**Illustration:** Let’s pretend we’re up on top of the Gondola, looking at Squamish. 360-degree panoramic view. What feature don’t you prefer? If you had it your way, it wouldn’t be part of the landscape?

* Squamish Port?
* Power Lines?
* New Development – Crumpet Woods.
* Coast Aggregates gravel pit?
* What else?

The danger is that we can focus on the negative feature in the landscape, and totally miss all the beauty.

There are features of our own personal landscape that maybe we don’t like, but the more we try to resist it, push it down, the more power we give it. We end up focusing on the negative feature and thereby missing all the other features that make you beautiful.

I believe that many who live this way eventually break. They can’t take it…so rather than push the desire down; they have no other option except to approve of it. Endorse it. Validate it.

Take for instance the desire of being discontent. Not in the positive sense that can lead us to growth and deeper purpose…

Many believe the lie that if we desire something, means that is who we are at our core, and therefore we are entitled to pursue it, take it, make it our own.

We see this sort of thing happen all around us:

* My husband doesn’t meet my emotional needs so I will find one who will.
* My wife doesn’t fit the bill anymore so I’ll trade her in for a younger model with more options.

Lies that tell us that…

* “That if I have a strong feeling or desire something or someone, then I need to act on that desire because, after all, it is the core of who I am.
* “That to deny my feelings is to negate who I am and leads to unhappiness.”
* The lie that wholeness is an absence of struggle and tension.”

Embracing these core beliefs can lead us to some very difficult circumstances; and dark places.

So what did James’s audience truly desire?

It wasn’t the status, the popularity, wealth, but what these things promised to give them. What they wanted is the same thing you and I are looking for.

* a sense of wholeness
* joy
* peace

That’s what they were looking for. Only thing they would never find it where they were looking.

James here is telling the listener that we don’t have what we want because we’re searching for it in all the wrong places.

*This is where we go wrong when it comes to our desires isn’t it?*

*When we try to meet the desire on our own terms, without going to God.*

*James says…*

*“You don’t have what you want because*

*you don’t ask God for it.”*

But their problem was more than just that they didn’t go to God; it was also that some were going to God but were asking with the wrong motives – to get only what brings us pleasure.

It wasn’t “How will this benefit the whole, but rather, how will this benefit me.”

**Illustration:** My kids would tell you that if you came to me to ask me a question around higher mathmatics or French, you’re asking the wrong guy. They would know that you really don’t know me that well; if you think I could help you with either of those subjects.

The same it is with God.

Nystrom says, “Our determination to ask God the wrong things only underscores how little we know God.”

So easy to go to God with an arrogance, a piousness, that we somehow know what is best. We know better what we need than our Father in heaven knows what we need.

God’s wisdom is so often at odds with our own sense of wisdom.

So James begins the text by exposing what’s really going on. Shining the light. Reflecting the mirror – Blowing their cover.

Next James moves from Exposed misplaced desires to being offered a gift…

Something is offered to them that will show them their way out. That will open them up to what they’re truly looking for.

1. **Offered a Gift vs. 4-6**

He begins with this rebuke. You adulterers!

*Encouraging word. Why?*

*It says so much about them. Who they were at their core. What they truly desired.*

*It says that their ultimate loyalty was to God. It means that they were ultimately married to God. It reminds us of the covenant relationship they entered with God through Christ.*

*James is calling them back, to embrace their true identity.*

They were in a covenant relationship with God but walked away. Here James is beckoning them back.

He was telling them they were in dire straights. They were about to shake hands with the devil. Keep listening to this; keep walking down this path, James was afraid they would lose their way.

And he uses this language that sounds pretty harsh.

**Enmity with God. God’s enemy…**

Again, he’s not trying to guilt someone to obedience; or shame him or her. Let’s not impose our baggage or spiritual abuse onto this text.

The use of the word “world” here means those values, institutions, behaviors that are the opposite of what and who God is about.

It’s not that God is the One pulling away from us; it’s us pulling away from Him. Choosing values that do not reflect God’s Kingdom of love and self-sacrifice.

In tension we hold to the ultimate truth that we are loved.

**Jn. 3:16** says, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge or condemn the world but to save the world through Him.”

So God’s love remains’ intact. He pursues. Lays down His life. It’s humanity who consistently pulls away from Him.

**I think every parent understands this idea of enmity.**

We love our children through every stage of life they are in. Absolute love. Willingness to lay down our lives for our kids.

But when parent’s children choose to make choices that go against everything the family stands for, tension is brought into the relationship. Harmony is gone. Something isn’t right.

Love remains in tact. Even so the love is all the more evident. All the more the parents pursue. Don’t fixate on the issue; focus on what is important – the child. The relationship.

I think we get it all twisted.

I have strict relatives that are part of a strict Mennonite Sect called Holdimans. If you and your family step out of line or choose to no longer obey the rules; you are shunned. Friends of mine were shunned by their family. So when their family would go to their house they had to eat at a separate table, all-alone, not connected to the rest of the family.

I think we read this and think God does this to us. He doesn’t. We set our own table, apart from him, and it grieves Him.

Instead he prepares a table for us, he breaks bread and pours the wine and invites us to His table…to receive the bread of forgiveness and the wine of release….

“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door I will come in and we will share a meal together.”

The invitation is always open.

Why James mentions the Holy Spirit here. The Spirit that He has placed within us is filled with jealousy or envy. God is a jealous God.

Not in a negative sinful sense but a desire for what’s best for His children.

*You can hear the Father beckon us.*

*God desires with all of his heart that we come home to live with Him and in Him; to ask for and rely on His wisdom…His life.*

*James is calling these people back; he is saying that they will never get what they are looking for on the errant path they are on.*

*But the voice is exactly the voice we need isn’t it?*

*Some of us need a stern voice; some need tender. At times in our lives we need a coach, at other times we need a gentle mother.*

*When I get tired and at times tempted to give up; I often hear the tenderness of the Father ask me, “Do you want to continue?”*

*He doesn’t say you have to. He doesn’t chase you down. He doesn’t guilt you to follow. He just tenderly asks you…Do you want to continue?*

*In this all His grace is made available.*

**Scripture says he offers us more grace…**

*If I had $5 in one pocket and $10 in the other pocket, which one would you choose? $10 of course.*

*James says God gives us more grace to stand against such desires, temptation; when approached with humility.*

*That’s the offer.*

*But just like anything… just because it’s offered doesn’t mean it’s yours. You have to receive it.*

***3rd –*** *Invited to receive this gift of grace, invited into relationship.*

1. ***Invited vs. 7-10***

Here James uses sacrificial language every Jewish person would understand to describe what humility looks like. What this turn around looks like.

Not a recipe but a picture… Words like…

1. Humble before God
2. Resist the devil
3. Come close to God…and he’ll come close to you.
4. Wash hands you sinners…
5. Purify hearts you double minded
6. Tears over what you’ve done
7. Godly sorrow
8. Deep grief…
9. Sadness instead of laughter
10. Gloom instead of joy
11. Humble yourself in this way and God will lift you up.

You thought you had to take, and hoard, and do it yourself in order to be lifted up, honored; and it got you nowhere.

Do it God’s way and He will take care of it. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you as well.”

What he’s describing here is what repentance looks like.

It’s what the bible calls brokenness.

**The Psalmist** says, “A broken and contrite heart the Lord will not turn away.”

Attachment theory calls this tears of futility. Allowing your child to come to a place of tears, where they finally admit they can’t do it on their own.

This is sacrificial language every Jewish person would understand.

Becoming fit for the kingdom – aligning your heart with God. Drawing near to God.

That together God and His people form community.

James knew sacrifice needed to take place in order to mend this community – that they would reflect God’s kingdom to the world once again.

In the OT if the Priest brought guilt upon his people he would bring the sacrifice. And in the sacrifice, power was released on behalf of the community.

In the OT sacrificial system blood stood for life. Whatever touches the sacrifice or the blood would be made holy. Be made right in God’s sight. Be made pure.

**Lev. 6:25,27** says that whatever touches any of the flesh will become holy.”

**John 6:53-56** Jesus said “Unless you eat the flesh, and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”

**Touch Him** – come in contact with Him, you are made holy.

Power in the sacrifice to make you clean; and empower you to live a holy life.

**Nystrom** says, “Laws bereft of moral quality are worthless. Laws or rules just for obedience sake is empty; purely externals. Without a living faith within they are hollow elegant shells.

This is so much more than obeying a set of rules; it’s a change of heart. It’s not just a bunch of religious externals; it’s internal change.

You see the whole invitation is to come close to God. Come near to Jesus, Come home and you are made clean. Pure.

Jesus said it isn’t the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I did not come to call the righteous but the sinners.” Mt 9:12-13

**I want to close with a story.**

**In his powerful and alluring novel *Atticus*, Ron Hansen offers a masterful retelling of Jesus’ parable of the love and forgiveness that God lavishly bestows on us.**

Atticus, a sixty-seven-year-old Colorado cattleman, has two sons. The older son, Frank, is married and a state senator. The younger one, Scott, is brilliant but impetuous. Some years before, Scott had lost control of the family car on a winter day, and in the resulting crash his mother was killed. After spending some time in mental hospitals, Scott drifted to Mexico, where he led a scarred, profligate life. At Christmas he returns home, and in the midst of his father’s inquiry about his life and activity, Scott says:

I just *am* Dad. You’ve got one son who’s a huge success any Father’d be proud of, and you’ve got one son who’s a slacker and using up your hard-earned cash on just getting by from week to week. Hell, I’m forty years old. You oughta be used to me being a failure by now.

Shortly after this interchange Scott goes for a walk in the back 40, and comes upon the vehicle in which his mother died. Atticus, growing concerned, looks for his son and finds him sitting in the car. In this moment the father gets a glimpse of the depth of Scott’s self-loathing, and part of the reason he believes he is beyond forgiveness.

The milkwhite Thunderbird [was] just as it was sixteen years ago when Scott took Serena to the store. The high speed of the accident had destroyed one headlight and crumpled up the right fender and hood like writing paper meant to be thrown away. The right wheel titled on its axle as though it had not been fully bolted on, and the rubber tire shredded from it like black clothing scraps.

Atticus walked around to the driver’s side and opened the door. The iron complained at his pull but Scott did not look up, he stayed as he was, in his father’s red plaid hunting coat, just sitting there, one wrist atop the big steering wheel, his right hand gingerly touching the windshield glass where it was crushed and spiderwebbed on the passenger’s side. A milky light was filtering through the half-inch screen of snow. Atticus asked, “You okay?”

Scott pressed his cold-reddened fingertips into a crack and said, “Wondered if her hair was still there. Crows must be nesting with it.”

Soon Scott returns to Mexico, and in an effort to escape his problems but with an astonishing lack of sensitivity to his family, he fakes his own suicide. He then watches from a distance as his father searches for clues in the Mexican village where Scott lived.

*You’ve put him through hell*, I thought, *again and again*.…

I felt humiliatingly unequal to his faithfulness, his loyalty, his love, as if I were heir to some foreign genes that my father had no part in.

Finally, however, the truth comes out, and Scott reveals to his father that he is, indeed, alive.

I asked, “Will you forgive me?” And I felt forgiven even as I said it.…

His shifty second son was there, found and alive, and if there was hurt in his face and he seemed to have visited every room in hell, it hardly mattered now; Atticus was flooded with joy. He’s had his mind set on just one thing and got surprised by the far better.

To the great disappointment of Atticus, Scott seemed to express no interest in coming home to Colorado. Nearly a year passed, and then one day…

Looking for the flush of a second bloom from his wife’s perennials, Atticus got his sheep shears and knelt in the garden in June, cutting back the penstemon, rockcress, stork’s-bills, and daisies. A soft rain began to fall as he heaped the green clippings on gunnysack and hauled it out back to the compost pile, and then he heard a far-car on the highway. Why he didn’t know, but Atticus walked to the front yard, taking off his gloves, and he saw a yellow taxi heading toward the house. And while his son was still a long way off, his father rushed out to greet him.

In humility, James says, come near to God, and he will come near to you. As Atticus forgave Scott and wished only to lift him up, so God will forgive you, and he will lift you up.[[1]](#footnote--1)

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