

## Resolving Conflict By Cultivating Repentance Part 3

*Epistle of James*

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**Bible Text:** James 4:7-10  
**Preached on:** Sunday, April 29, 2018

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Turn with me in your Bibles to James 4. James 4. We're picking up our series we've been on in the first 10 verses of James 4. The title of the message is the same as it has been for the last two weeks, this is three weeks, this is part 3 of "Resolving Conflict by Cultivating Repentance." Resolving conflict by cultivating repentance. The whole section is about resolving conflict. It's about conflict in the body and how God wants us to resolve that and he deals with a number of different things that we need to do and verses 7 to 10, though, are the real focused application and that's where we need to resolve conflict by cultivating repentance. That's really been our focus in verses 7 to 10 of this chapter, this fourth chapter of James, that the way we're going to change from being people who have conflicts all around us and are creating conflicts because of our sinful hearts, is to repent. We mentioned the importance of that doctrine, a forgotten doctrine in many ways in evangelical circles. The doctrine of repentance is something that should be a regular part not only of our teaching but our thinking and our living. As I mentioned that wonderful quote by Matthew Henry's father, Philip, that I want to carry my repentance all the way up to the gates of heaven; that that's a part of the Christian life; it's an ongoing part. And what does it mean to repent? It means to turn from sin to God. That's essentially what repenting is, it's turning. It is changing your mind about sin and about your life, that's one of the words in the New Testament, changing your mind, but the richer meaning of repentance informed by the Old Testament understanding is to turn, the key word being the word "turn, return," Hebrew "shub," so that a change a mind that leads to a change of action, a change of life, a change of direction. So we were going one way, now we're going another and it's turning away from sin, away from living for ourselves to God, to living in submission to God, to living out of love for God. So repentance is turning from sin to God.

So he's saying that the way that we have these problems with conflicts in our lives all around us and what we need to do is we need to repent. We need to turn from the things that lead to these conflicts and we need to turn back to God and return to him, and that's what he's teaching us what that looks like, how to do it, in verses 7 to 10 of James 4. This is really kind of an exposition of what it is to repent and what we've said, that in a sense there are a couple of different steps, actually I think I'm going to summarize it in three steps and we looked at the first two weeks ago, that to repent, first of all, you must go to God. It's seen in the first three imperatives. Submit yourselves to God. You know, we

have problems, we have conflict around us, we have sinful hearts, well then, submit yourselves to God. Turn to God and put yourself under him. Then the next two imperatives: resist the devil and he will flee from you; draw near to God and he will draw near to you. We saw how those are both about going to God. The devil's main strategy is to separate you from God. So to resist him is to go to the Lord. To in the words of the song, determine I will arise and go to Jesus. Here I am in my sin but I'm going to arise and go to him. That's the first step in repentance, to go to God, and we talked about that two weeks ago.

Then last week we said that you don't just go to God but you go to God for cleansing. The next two imperatives in the passage are about cleansing hands and purifying our hearts, and so the idea is we don't just go to God to stay the way we are, we go to God to be changed, to be cleansed through the blood of Christ, essentially by confessing our sins and our sinfulness.

Then we're going to see that we don't just go to God and go to God for cleansing but this morning we're going to see, the theme of today's message is we don't just go to God and then go to God for cleansing, this morning we see we go to God for brokenness. We go to God for brokenness in brokenness. We realize that the essence of really going to God is being broken before the Lord. This is what James turns to in the next five, actually the next four imperatives in the passage that we are going to consider this morning.

So I'm going to read verses 1 to 10. We're focusing in particular on verse 9. That's where the four imperatives are that we're looking at today that describe what it means to be broken before the Lord. So we go to God from our sin, we turn to him for brokenness, verse 9. Now let me read verses 1 to 10 to set the context. James 4:1,

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we ask that you would help us now to take heed to your word, that you would grant eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to respond for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So repentance, we're resolving conflict by cultivating repentance over the things that lead to conflict in our own hearts. James has made clear that the problem in our lives is not the people in our lives, not the difficult people, it's not the difficult circumstances that we find ourselves in, the problem is in our hearts. That's why we sin in anger. That's why we sin at all. It all comes from the heart. James agrees with Jesus, his elder brother, when he says, when Jesus said, "It's not what goes into the man that defiles a man but it's what comes out of the heart." James is essentially saying the same thing. The reason that you have conflicts, that you and I have conflicts is because we have pleasures in our heart that are waging war. The lusts of our flesh wage war and they are the things that lead us into conflict. So how does that stop? It stops with repentance and what does that look like in our lives.

So I want us to consider this under two main points this morning and the first point that we see here in James 4 is the necessity of brokenness. We're talking about brokenness being a key part of repentance. Remember, repentance is going to God, it's going to God for cleansing and it's going to God for brokenness and in brokenness, and so what we see here in verse 9 is the necessity, the absolute necessity of brokenness; that to repent, you have to be broken. To really change, there has to be a sense of brokenness. You have to go through, in the words of the Puritans or in the words of even John Bunyan, you have to go through the valley of humiliation if you're going to come out the other side cleansed and different. Thomas Boston in his book on repentance says that the van of repentance follows the horse of humiliation. Repentance happens because we're humbled and we're broken. Humiliation is something that's very unattractive. Nobody wants to go through humiliation and, of course, it's something natural about us but it's really our pride and the way to God is through the valley of humiliation.

The words of that song or that poem, "The valley of vision." You know, "Hemmed in by mountains of sin, I see your glory." The valley is the place of vision. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up. That to go up, I must go down. This is true for every sinner. There has never been a person come to God without first being humbled. You can't be saved until you know that you're lost.

So this idea of humiliation, this is why Jesus in that sermon in the first major sermon we have recorded in the New Testament by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with these words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. O how happy are those who are completely impoverished spiritually, who are completely helpless spiritually. O how happy are they for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then the second Beatitude, "O how happy are the poor in spirit," that's what "blessed" means, "oh how happy are." So, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." When you see your poverty, your spiritual poverty and you mourn over it, this is the way of salvation, Jesus says, and James is saying the

same thing, that the way that we come to Christ is the way we continue to grow in Christ. This is why repentance is to be a part of our lives all the way to the gates of heaven, that the way that we come is through being humbled, and the way we keep coming to Jesus and keep being purified is by being humbled and broken.

James puts this in emphatic forceful language in verse 9, "Be miserable and mourn and weep." Remember, there are 10 imperatives from verse 7 to verse 10: submit; resist in verse 7; draw near in verse 8; cleanse; purify; and here the next four all relate to this issue but three right in a row, be miserable and mourn and weep. Those are all aorist tense imperatives just like all the others. It speaks of decisive action. He wants us to be miserable and mourn and weep. He's essentially saying the same thing three times because the word "be miserable" can be translated as the NIV translates it, "grieve"; as the RSV translates it, "lament." It could be translated "mourn" as well. These three words overlap one another so it's like he's saying the same thing in three different words. Now there are certain aspects that each add to it but essentially he's saying mourn, and mourn, and mourn over your sin.

Let's look at the different aspects. The word "be miserable" is how the NAS translates that first imperative. Be miserable. I mentioned the NIV says, "grieve." The King James translates that Greek word "be afflicted." And the ESV, "be wretched." The idea of the word is "to endure hardship; to be distressed and miserable." So this sense of affliction and wretchedness just overwhelms the soul in misery. So he's saying what we need to do is we need to be miserable over our sin.

"Mourn," the next word in the NASB. Mourn. Most translations translate it just that way, m-o-u-r-n. Mourn means "to be sorrowful; to be filled with sadness."

And that last word, "weep," and these two words can be used interchangeably, in fact are a lot in parallelism in the New Testament, but the word "weep," the NIV translates it, "wail," it's a verb which speaks of expression of outward grief. It's to be grieving but it's not just tears, it's the outward expression. You know, in Hebrew culture, in Middle Eastern culture even today, they're much more expressive in their grief outwardly. We are, I think partly and probably affected by maybe America being affected largely by England. We have a little bit of that tendency of the English, stiff upper lip and not showing your emotions, not appropriate to show your emotions to a certain level, or whatever. Other cultures aren't that way and there's nothing superior about not showing your emotions. In fact, I think it's more unbiblical. It would be better to show our emotions more honestly. You know, there's a place and you can turn that into a show and being doing it for wrong motivations but essentially grieving and crying and wailing, that's the idea.

So it is to be so overwhelmed emotionally that it's coming out and by saying it three times, I mean saying the same thing essentially three times, "be miserable, mourn, weep," he's elevating this to the superlative degree. The Hebrew way of expression, to say something three times is to elevate it to the highest level. You think of the angels testifying to God's holiness, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord." He's the supreme expression

of holiness. That is his. He's saying in some sense the same way, that our misery and our mourning ought to be so dominant that it's the thing that dominates our life when we find ourselves confronted with our sin.

So he uses that idea of the force of that. Remember, he's writing to a mostly Jewish audience. He's writing to Jewish believers. He has a particular heart for those Jews who had now placed their faith in Christ and many of whom were in Jerusalem under his ministry at some point as he led the church in Jerusalem. They had now been dispersed and so he writes this letter to encourage them in their faith and he knows they know the Jewish ways of thinking and the biblical ways of thinking, and so be miserable and mourn and weep has that power to it, emphatic.

Now that would have been something, to say it three times you would have thought would have been enough, but he says it three times and then he restates it at the end of verse 9. He didn't stop with just, "Be miserable and mourn and weep," he adds another imperative in the next, it's kind of a two-clause thing with one imperative, "let your laughter into mourning be turned, and your joy to gloom." There is one verb, "let it be turned; let it be changed." But he says essentially, it's essentially saying the same thing, "Be miserable, mourn and weep. Your laughter needs to be turned into mourning. Your laughter needs to be turned into crying. Your joy needs to be turned into gloom." So he restates it and he doubles the restatement.

He is very serious about us mourning over our sin, isn't he? You see, he knows that the only way that people who were conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity like you and I were, sin has such a hold on the heart that we have to labor by God's grace, it's a grace. Repentance, remember, is a grace. God has to do it. We must remember this, like everything else in the Gospel, there is a sense in which it's all of grace and yet we have to cooperate with the means of grace. You're saved because you call upon the name of the Lord, just as we heard in Acts 2 earlier. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Well, you can't call on him unless he's opened your heart to call on him, but you are commanded, "Call on him."

So call on him and trust him even as you're calling on him for the grace to make that genuine in your heart and he's basically telling us, "Repent by mourning, by seeking mourning before the Lord. Enter brokenness." This is the way to approach God. This is actually what God finds beautiful is brokenness. When sinners are broken before God, God's heart rushes to their aid. This is what makes us attractive to the Lord.

You see this in a number of ways throughout the Scriptures. Turn in your Bibles back to the Old Testament, Joel. It goes like this: after Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, the first three minor prophets. So if you're in all those Zephaniah, Zechariah, keep going to the front. Hosea, Joel, Amos are the first three minor prophets. It's a good thing to memorize actually. Anyway. That's one of those blessings of learning the song when you were young, to kind of sing to yourself, "Oh yeah. Okay." Hosea, Joel, Amos.

Joel 2, this is actually the same book we read the quotation from in Acts earlier was from this same prophecy. Peter quoted it when he was explaining, "Listen, we're not drunk. It's only 9 o'clock in the morning. We're not drunk, are you crazy? What's happening is the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel prophesied, that God was going to pour out his Spirit on all flesh, not just select leaders like he did in the old covenant. After his Messiah comes, he will pour out his Spirit on all who believe." But before that in Joel's prophecy, he talks about what repentance really looks like. In verse 12 of chapter 2 he says, "Yet even now," after he's told them how they're experiencing God's judgment, he says, "'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning.'" How do you return to God? You return to God with weeping and mourning, and fasting is certainly an appropriate thing to do as a part of cultivating this not as a desire to earn God's acceptance, no, that's not biblical fasting, but to help cultivate a heart of brokenness it is.

Look what he says next, though, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning," verse 12, "And rend your heart and not your garments." He's saying that what really impresses God is not the tearing of the garment that would often happen as an expression of repentance, but the tearing of the heart.

"'Rend your heart and not your garments.' Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent And leave a blessing behind Him." He uses two words for "repent" there. "If you return to God, if you repent and return to God, he will," he says, "turn," that's actually return or repent, "and relent." Such is the nature of God.

But brokenness is a key part of seeking the Lord, a key part of cultivating repentance. This is why Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 in talking to the Corinthians says, "I'm glad that I made you sorrowful in the letter that I sent, not that I wanted to make you sorrowful just for the purpose of making you sorrowful, I wanted to make you sorrowful to give you the kind of godly sorrow that led to repentance." That to repent, you have to be sorrowful. You have to be sad. You don't repent without brokenness. There is a kind of sorrow, Paul says, that is worldly that does not lead to repentance. So James is telling us the same thing. We need the kind of sorrow that leads to repentance. Godly sorrow. But the important thing to see is you can't return to God without sorrow. This is just a part of what is required. To be sinful and to come to live in the presence of a holy God requires repentance. It requires brokenness.

This explains if you turn back, you're still in Joel, turn over to Psalm 51, a well-known Psalm of David's repentance, expressing his repentance, his penitence before God after the sin with Bathsheba. He explains something about the ways of God and the ways of God with sinners. How can sinners come to dwell in the presence of a holy God? In verse 16 as he's pouring out his heart to the Lord, he tells us something very profound, verses 16 and 17. Verse 16, Psalm 51, "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering." He's saying, "Listen, I know you've given us the sacrifices to picture a sacrifice to come, but the sacrifice itself, the sacrifice

of an animal is not what really delights you, it is what that delights you? You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." He says now the sacrifice was given to draw near to God. The sacrifice was given so that sinners could come into the presence of God. In the old covenant, they were given the sacrificial system to teach them that for sinners to come into the presence of a holy God, it was going to require the sacrifice of God's own Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ. And the way that God taught them that was through the sacrificial system.

So to approach the Lord in the temple when they committed various sins, there were certain sacrifices that were prescribed. They would bring a goat, or they would bring an ox, or they would bring pigeons, or they would bring various animals depending upon the particular offense and the particular need and the sacrifice, God then would grant them and absolve them from the guilt not because the blood of the animal had any efficacy because it was an expression of faith that God was going to send the Messiah. But what really happened, though, was that offering the sacrifice did restore them to fellowship with the Lord so that the people were taught that to come into the presence of God, a sacrifice is required. That's what enables me who are separated from God to now drawn near to the Lord. I can go back to the tabernacle. I can go to the temple because of this sacrifice. I can pray and know God is hearing my prayers because of this sacrifice. And what David is saying is as God is revealing himself through the Old Testament, things are becoming clear, what's really important on the heart of the person who trusts in the sacrifice is not the sacrifice itself but the brokenness in the heart of the person. It is our brokenness that is really what God is after. It's our sense of complete unworthiness and conviction to the point of despairing before God knowing that we're hopeless before him; that our only hope is his mercy. David says that's what God delights in. He draws near to a broken and contrite heart.

This is something the Lord makes clear in a number of places. Another one of my favorite verses is Isaiah 57:15. Listen to this. Isaiah who is constantly referring to the Lord after he had that vision of God's holiness, he's constantly calling God "the holy One, the high and lofty One." That's his vision of the Lord. Look what he says in chapter 57, verse 15, "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy." This is God speaking, the one whose name is holy, who is high and exalted. This is what the Lord says, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite." I dwell in the highest place imaginable but also with the person who's lowly and contrite and broken.

This is who God is so for us to approach him, we must be broken, and so James is saying that the way that we will come to know the Lord at first in salvation is by being broken, and the way that we'll continue to grow in our relationship with him is by being increasingly broken. As we see our sin, we're broken.

I mentioned last time that illustration from Jerry Bridges that sanctification, in a sense, that is growing in grace in the Christian life, growing in holiness, after you're justified you place your faith in Christ, you trust in him and his finished work for salvation, his death, his resurrection, in Christ alone, then you're justified before God, declared righteous forever. But if that's happened to you, one of the things that's going to be evident is you're going to want to be holy. You're going to want to live an increasingly pleasing life to the Lord. This is a part of what God does when he causes someone to be born again, he puts a new spirit or principle of life in them, and so now you want to grow in holiness and it's a battle, it's a day to day battle. You have the old man, the pleasures that are still in your body which are waging war against the Spirit and your desires to do what is right.

So this battle is going on, well, to grow in holiness, though, what happens is the Lord keeps showing us our sin so we can keep repenting and keep trusting in Christ and keep surrendering. And I mentioned the illustration of like Jerry Bridges uses of sanctification, progressive sanctification, growing in cleanness and holiness before God is like a man who lives in a room or a house and the house is completely dark, remember? And then salvation is like the light coming on, but the light's on a dimmer switch and it didn't come on that bright. It came on relative to complete....Have you ever, this used to happen a lot more, nowadays we have so many even at night your clock radio, your cellphone, whatever, there is light emanating from those things. But I remember there have been a few times where I got up in the middle of the night and I couldn't see anything. I remember one time I found myself walking, I was trying to go to the bathroom and I went to where I thought the door of our bedroom was and I found a wall, and I didn't want to wake Patti up, you know, it's the middle of the night, so I'm trying to feel around the wall to find the door. And I got so perplexed, I was getting worse off. I don't know what happened, but I was like 10 feet away from the door by the time I got done. I finally said something. She heard me shuffling, got up, ran across, turned the light on and here I am across the room.

It was so dark. I couldn't see anything. Well, usually there is some light either from the moon outside or the street lights or a light somewhere else in the house or your clock radio or whatever, you see something, but when you can't see anything and some light comes on and now you see. Well, this is what happens in salvation. Complete darkness turns into significant light and now that you see this, you're saved. The light has come. Now you see, "Wow, look at these things in my life that need to change." You see. Imagine you're in this dark room and the house is in complete filth, pigsty, but you don't know it because you're in the dark. Now it comes on and you see it and you start cleaning. "I've got to get rid of this stuff. This is terrible." Then, of course, the illustration Bridges uses is progressive sanctification from time to time, the Lord turns up the dimmer switch to be brighter and each successive turn of brightness by his word coming into our lives through circumstances, through people confronting us, through us reading the word, the light turns up and we see more of the ugliness that's always been there that we didn't see before. So it's this progressive growth in grace.



So what's the response? As you see more of that, repent over it and mourn over it at each stage. That's what James is saying. That the mourning and the brokenness should be a regular part of the Christian life. It should be like, "I can't believe this stuff that is in my life. This is repugnant to me and how much more repugnant is it to God." So we cultivate repentance at each stage of sanctification, each time God confronts sin in our life. This is what he's saying to do.

It's an absolute necessity. Brokenness, godly sorrow, must be a part of the Christian life if we are to grow in his grace. It has to be there at the beginning when you get saved and it has to continue to be there. There will be times where we forget, we're tuned out, but that when we see again what's going on, we should pursue this kind of brokenness. So the necessity of brokenness, that's the first point.

The second point is the pathway to brokenness and there will be two subpoints under this point and this will be our last point. The pathway to brokenness. Now how is it that we go about being broken? He's telling us, "Be miserable, mourn, weep, turn our laughter to crying, our joy to gloom." But how do you do that practically speaking? Well, the pathway to brokenness in a sentence is to see our sin, to see our sin more clearly, and it's going to happen as we pray and meditate over our sin.

I said it's a grace of God to repent, but it's one that we have to cooperate with and one of the disciplines that is lacking in many of our lives is prayer and meditation. I'm talking about biblical meditation, Christian meditation. It's different than worldly meditation. Ungodly meditation seeks to empty the mind. This is what you'll see in the Eastern religions. Empty the mind, that's not meditation biblically. That's dangerous. Biblical meditation is to fill the mind with the Scriptures. To fill the mind with the truth. To do as Paul says in Philippians 4:8, "Whatsoever things are true, pure, lovely, let your mind dwell on these things." Keep turning these things over in your mind.

That's what meditation is. In the Old Testament there are various words used to describe meditation, things like to talk real lowly is one of them. To talk, converse with yourself, is another one. Talking to yourself the Scriptures. Talking, you know, some kind of, you may not do this but I'll sometimes find myself doing this, "What was the list that Patti gave me to do? Number 1, 2," and I'll do it like that, and sometimes I find myself, I'm talking out loud. Well anyway, that's essentially one of the words for meditate. It means that, to take the Scriptures and be talking them through and applying them and what does this mean in my life? How does this apply to me?

So what James is saying, if we're going to be miserable, mourn and weep, let our laughter be turned to crying and our joy to gloom, what's going to have to happen is we've got to meditate about our sin the way God sees it. We have to see our sin clearly and rightly and it's going to require meditation. There are two, then, ways that we need to do that. There are two subpoints. The pathway to brokenness, seeing our sins, the main point but the two subpoints: to see our sin for what it is, is the first subpoint; and secondly, we'll see to see our sin for what it does.

To see our sin for what it is. James here in the passage helps us to begin to see our sin for what it is. I mean, he's saying that the reason we have conflicts is because we have problems in our heart, that we want things and that's in our hearts that are leading us to do things that are hurtful. He says, "You have quarrels and conflicts," we said that could be translated "wars and battles," the Greek words, wars and battles. And this what you're doing, we're warring and battling, so my conflict is not frustration, it's not that I'm a little irritable, and that's one way of describing it but that's a very self-protective way of describing it. If I want to be biblical, I'm going to call it what God calls it, I have a heart that is warring and battling people around me.

So I see sin for what it is, it's warring, it's battling, it's murdering, and to stop and reflect on that has power, doesn't it? It's not that I'm surrounded by people that are just difficult and I'm doing the best I can, "I'm really doing pretty good. You know, I haven't gotten angry that much. I said something then, but you don't think about the 10 times I didn't say something." We think like that. God says the one time that you did say something was you were warring and you were battling and the reason was because you weren't dealing with the sin in your heart that was there the other nine times you didn't say something because you had hostility in your heart, which is another thing that we see.

So he says sin isn't just warring and battling, it's lusting, it's envying, it's seeking pleasures. It's being controlled by our pleasures. That's what James is saying. The reason you're murdering is because you're lusting and you don't get so you're being controlled by a lust. You're being controlled by a desire to have something. Your desires are controlling you. Even saying that starts to help me hate the sin more. "I'm being controlled by something else other than me. What am I doing? This is stupid. This is crazy."

And these lusts, pleasures, envy, those are the words that the NASB uses, "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" Your pleasures. "You lust and do not have. You're envious and cannot obtain." So these words of the heart. So we begin to say, "I want things either that I shouldn't want or I want things that I maybe should want but I want it too much so that I'm willing to sin when I don't get it." And I need to call it that. See sin for what it is. And I need to meditate on that. "Lord, help me see this the way..." And this is why we go to God for it. We go to God, "Lord, here I am and I'm having conflicts and I don't want to be this way and I know I need to come to you for cleansing my hands and my heart, and I want you to do that, and I want to mourn over my sin. Help me."

So meditation is thinking about the Scriptures, it's praying, but it's really thinking about the Scriptures in the presence of God. It's talking to yourself with the Lord. I mean, to me that's the most effective meditation in my life is I'll be talking about, I'll be thinking about the Scriptures and I'll be asking the Lord, "Lord, help me to understand how does this apply." And I'll be talking to myself some too. "This is so stupid for you to do that. Lord, help me with this." It's like this dialogue going on. Turning it over. "How does this apply? How am I guilty of this? Show me, Lord, open my eyes."

So we see our sin for what it is, that's the pathway to brokenness, meditating on our sin for what it is, but then the second subpoint under the pathway to brokenness is to see our sin for what it does. We have some things here that James helps us with but I want us to think about this, see our sin for what it does under three headings. So the second subpoint has three sub-subpoints. 2B1, for what it does to myself. We're going to see our sin for what it does, we're going to say to myself, to others, to God. It's a helpful way to think about the impact of sin and what it does. What does it do to me, what does it do to others, what does it do to the Lord, most importantly.

So what does it do to me? What are these things doing to me? Well, 1 Peter 2:11 says that, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." So when I am controlled by fleshly lust, when I'm letting lust, desires, even for good things that I'm desiring too much, when I'm wanting it too much, it is warring against my soul. It is damaging my inner man. Hurting me. It is insanity. I'm hurting myself. I'm taking in that which is doing destructive harm to my soul.

How does it affect others? We see the damage that sin does to others. I mean, he's talked about wars, battles, murder. You think about that. So when we get angry and we say something unkind, we speak down to someone, we're sarcastic, there is a murderous intent in our heart and that intent goes out and that does damage. The word is corrupting. This is why what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4:29 when he says, "let no unwholesome speech proceed from your mouth, only such a word as is good for edification." So unwholesome is corrupting and tears down.

So words go forth from your mouth and they're corrupting and destructive to other people. Stop that, he says. Don't let that come out of your mouth. Turn it around by God's grace and make it edify, building up. So when I have done that, I need to think about how I've been destructive; how I have sown decay in someone else's soul; I've hurt them; I've tempted them to turn away from the Lord; to be discouraged. I've been warring and battling with them. I mean, what's happened is I've really been attacking them even though I didn't necessarily feel like that. I thought I was defending myself because you're really irritating me and I'm just putting out my hands to defend myself. No, I was attacking them because of the lust in my own heart.

So we've done this damage. Now think about that, how that impacts even people beyond the person that's the direct recipient of the attack. What's it like to be a bystander in that situation? It's also polluting, destructive, discouraging. I mean, think about parents who fight and yell at one another, husband and wife yelling at one another, James says they're battling, they're warring, they're murdering each other and the kids are bystanders sometimes. So thinking about this, applying this would be like when I'm doing that, it's like I'm asking my kids to grow up in a war zone. You see the images from around the world, there are so many wars everywhere. Always, right? Syria. What would it be like to be a child in Syria? What a terrible place to live. Spiritually, is your home like that? Are you making the environment for your own kids like that? In a much more insidious dark way spiritually? Well then, meditate on that and mourn over that. "God, what am I doing? How can I be so blind?"

See the damage that sin does to myself. See the damage that sin does to others. Meditate on that. See the damage that sin does to God. This is where the mourning becomes most intense for the believer. When you think about what David had done when he sinned with Bathsheba, he allowed the lust of his heart to control him and he took another man's wife for himself and then having impregnated her, he calls the man home to try to cover his sin, calls him home from battle. He says, "I want you personally, I want you to have some time off. Go and spend some time with your wife." So David is trying to cover his sin assuming they'll have relations and then they'll assume it's his child. Uriah is such a noble man that he won't even enjoy time with his wife while his brothers are out in battle. He sleeps outside on the porch of his house. That kind of loyalty is repaid by David by David giving the order to the general, "When you're fighting, draw back from him and leave him so he can be surrounded and killed." So Uriah is killed. So David committed adultery and he committed murder.

What wicked sins and the damage his sin did to Bathsheba, to Uriah, to the child that they had, remember the Lord took that child. But in Psalm 51:4, we know David was broken in all the ways he should have over all those things but in Psalm 51:4 he says this, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned." He's not saying, I have sinned against no one else, but he's saying comparatively, "The offense against you, O God, is so great," that though I'm sure he made the others right every way he could, he married Bathsheba, brought her into his house and God gave him Solomon through Bathsheba. Clearly he had repented appropriately. Christ comes through that. Isn't that amazing? Through the line of Solomon. But he says, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned. When I see my sin before you, it crowds out every other concern. You are the one that I have attacked because my sin is an attack on God's character."

I mean, we are basically saying every time that we sin, every time that we want something and we're not getting it and we punish someone and we do evil, what we're saying is God is withholding something from me that I need and I am determined to have it, and he's not good for not giving it to me. When someone commits adultery, they are saying God is not good. A man looks at pornography on his computer, he's saying God is not good because he's not giving me what I need. That is a lie. God has given every one of us what we need. If you're single, he's given you what you need. He will give you the grace to be pure in your singleness. He makes no mistakes so stop saying that he is not good.

But when we do these things, we are testifying he's not good. We're agreeing with Satan. That's essentially what he said in the first sin, remember? "The Lord is holding back on you. He doesn't want you to have that tree, the fruit of that tree because he knows that's what you need. You see, God's not good. If he were good, he would want you to have that." So the one tree that God had forbidden, the whole world is open to them, one negative command, "Don't eat the fruit of that tree. Don't eat it." He didn't say don't touch it. He said, "Don't eat it." In that one command, Satan turned around against the Lord and they believed him. It's mind-blowing. "Maybe he's not good. Why would he hold out on us that?" Rather than looking at all that he's given you. He must have a good reason to

hold that back because look at his generosity everywhere else. Every time we sin, we are lying about God. We are telling an unbelieving world, anyone looking at us, "Yes, God is not good."

Now, when you understand that, that makes it much uglier. "I didn't want to say that." I mean, we don't know and consciously think that way about the sin, we just think we want something and we forget it, we don't want to think about that fact that God doesn't want us to have it. But what we're doing is we're saying his character, we're assaulting his character. We are hurting his reputation. We are damaging his reputation. Now we ultimately can't damage him in any way because he is holy and above everything, but we can damage the way people think about him. Remember what Nathan said to David when he rebuked him. Remember when he said, "You are the man"? He said, "You've given occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. You have given an occasion, you, the anointed of God, the man of God, the man after God's heart who loves the Lord, who the Lord loves, you have allowed the enemies of God to blaspheme, to have an occasion of blasphemy. To look at him and say, 'Yeah, see, God isn't good.'"

So the damage that sin does to our relationship with God and our own statement about his character, but then secondly, consider the damage that sin does relationally to our understanding of the persons of God, our relationship to the person of God. I mean, what James says is if you are allowing lust to control you and so you're having conflicts, every time you're having hostility in your heart, there is some lust you're not getting and, therefore, you are making yourself a friend of the world and you're making yourself the enemy of God. Think about that. He's saying you're treating your Father as your enemy. You're acting like he is a mortal enemy, the one who has brought you to himself and adopted you as his own.

Think about it. Remember we talked about the prodigal son a couple of weeks ago and how wonderful it was the prodigal son left the pigsty that he was in, feeding the pigs, wanting to eat what they had and he said, "I want to go back to my father," so he goes back to his father and he wanted him just to treat him as a hired hand, "Let me work for you, dad." And his father interrupted him and brought him back to full status of sonship. Put a robe on him. Gave him a ring. Killed the fatted calf. This son who was lost is now found. Imagine that son now treating his father as an enemy again. That's what he did when he left but how could he do it again? When you and I, when we give ourselves to lust, we're basically being idolaters and we're treating our God, our Father, as an enemy.

What are we doing to the Son, the Lord Jesus? He says, "You adulteresses." Friendship with the world is adultery. It's not just hostility to God, it's adultery. Jesus is our husband. He gave himself for the bride, the church, Ephesians 5. We belong to him. We've been betrothed to him. If you belong to Jesus Christ, you are betrothed to your husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, and when we commit idolatry, we are being unfaithful to our husband. Spiritual adultery. Think of the ugliness of adultery and think, "This is what I'm doing. This is what I'm doing in this area that I'm struggling in."

And what are we doing to the Spirit? He calls that out explicitly in verse 5, "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?'" We talked about the fact that I think that could be better translated, "The Spirit which dwells in us desires us to the point of jealousy." The word order in Greek is ambiguous and different commentators take it different ways. I think that's what he's saying in context. He's saying, "Look, you're doing this spiritual adultery, you're doing this treating God as your enemy with the Spirit of God living inside of you. You're doing it right before the face of God." That's why he's saying, "Mourn over this. You're grieving the Spirit who dwells in you."

There's a picture, I invite you to read this sometime this week, Ezekiel 8, and I'll just kind of summarize it quickly. Ezekiel prophesies to the nation of Judah after the captivity has begun under Babylon. The Babylonian captivity has begun and he ministers for a number of years through that period prophesying to the nation, in a sense explaining to them why God is doing what he's doing. And he has a vision in chapter 8 where he is in Babylon as a captive, the Spirit of God picks him up by a lock of his hair, transports him all the way to Jerusalem and sets him down at the temple. And again, his message is essentially, "This is why we're in captivity." God is showing him and he takes him and he sees four different visions there at the temple.

He sets him down at the north gate of the temple and he's about to walk into the temple and he sees there the idol of jealousy it's called there in the NASB, and that is essentially an Asherah pole, an idol is right there at the gate of the temple. It was apparently originally set there by Manasseh. It was taken down by Josiah but apparently rebuilt or put up again by a follower, one of the kings after Josiah. So as you go into the Hebrew temple to worship the one God who said, "Do not make any idols," there's an idol right outside the door and he says, "Look at this abomination." And he says, "I will show you ever greater abominations, Ezekiel."

So he takes him around the temple and he says, "Look right here," and there's this little hole in the wall and he says, "Dig into the hole in the wall," and he digs in the hole in the wall on the outside of the temple and he looks in and he sees 70 of the elders of Israel and they are burning incense and worshipping all of these graven images of animals right here in the temple courts. They're practicing idolatry right in Jerusalem at the temple.

Then he says, "Follow me here," and he takes him around to another part of the temple court to where the women are, the court of women apparently, and he shows them that they are mourning, they are crying but they're not crying in a godly way before the Lord, they're crying over one of the Canaanite gods. They're mourning and worshipping this Canaanite god again in the temple vicinity.

Then he takes him for the last vision. He keeps saying, "Do you see these abominations? I will show you still greater abominations." He finally takes him right to the door of where the temple court goes into the temple proper, into the Holy Place, and right outside the door of the Holy Place where the altar is, where the sacrifices are made, he sees more than 20 men, these would be Levites and priests, and they're not looking at the temple

door, they're falling down on the ground worshipping the sun. And he says, "Do you see these abominations? This is why I'm destroying this city. They're worshipping other gods right before my face. What would you do?"

James is saying something very similar to you and me. He's saying to you and me, "You are the man. You are the one who is worshipping an idol right before the face of God. The Spirit now dwells inside of you, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you," 1 Corinthians 6, "you all are the temple of the Lord," 1 Corinthians 3, "so that when you have relational problems in yourself and you're battling among each other, as Christians you are worshipping other gods in the temple courts. These things ought not be."

So that's why he says, "Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to crying and your joy to gloom." In the brokenness, though, as we see that and as we embrace that, what we have to do is embrace it. "Lord, don't let up. Cut away everything that needs to be cut away. Show me my sin and don't stop short. Deal with what you need to deal with in me." And as he does that and he brings brokenness, he brings sorrow and that sorrow pours forth into true worship because then you know what he said at the very beginning of this, he told us because he knew it was going to be painful what he's about to say, he said in verse 6, "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

So he says, "Now you see yourself lowly and broken down. Look for his grace. Cherish his grace. Cherish the blood that has bought that grace. Look to the cross. Look to Christ. Run to him. Lord, change me. I don't want to be like this anymore. Cleanse me. Take all of this wickedness out of me." That's repentance. Repentance toward God, repentance, turning from sin to God is hating sin with a new level and a new intensity and it's treasuring Christ with an even greater intensity. This is why Jesus becomes sweeter to the true believer throughout their life. This is why though they become more righteous, they become more broken because the Lord shows it at deeper levels the ugliness. We didn't even know this idolatry was there and he exposes it and he pulls it out into the light and he says, "Look at that," and we should take the time to be miserable, mourn and weep and then run to Christ. There is no sweeter place to be than broken before God like this who is, as Joel said, "Turn back to him. Rend your hearts, not your garments. Return to me, says the Lord, for will he not repent and relent and leave behind a blessing? He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness."

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we praise you for the miracle of grace that you have made available in Jesus Christ to see that you are able to cleanse people that are stained as deeply as we are with our sin. There are no words to express, Lord. Your grace truly is amazing. Your salvation is more than we could have ever hoped for. Father, we pray that you would grant us true repentance. We pray for those that are here who have not yet been saved, that you would grant them repentance today, that they would turn from their sins to God through Christ; that they would cry out to you and stop halting between two opinions and follow Jesus. Save them for your glory. We pray, Lord, that every believer here, that you*

*would keep breaking us. Do whatever is necessary to make our love for you truer and purer and more pleasing to you. We trust you, Lord. We thank you that you never do more than is necessary; that you are so perfect in wisdom and goodness, that we know that you will do what is right and best. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*