

## TUESDAY 06 September 2022 "Protect yourself" (James 4:7-10)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*Do you know anyone with wild emotional swings depending on the circumstances of life? Do you also know people who are very constant, stable in their emotions?* These days we're watching and listening as James the apostle is writing his letter of encouragement and exhortation to the first century Jewish Jesus followers scattered all across the Roman Empire. These dear people lived during a very difficult time of persecution and thus emotions were always in flux and sometimes explosive.

Come on, let's join a few others who've gathered in James' little house in Jerusalem as he writes. He's in his fourth chapter as he picks up his stylus: **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."** (James 4:7,8) Wow James packs a lot into one paragraph, doesn't he? Yes, it's true, if we are spiritually aware, then we do recognize that the devil is always scheming, always trying to distract us away from God and engage us in dark kingdom thinking or attitudes or choices or behavior. And yes, we do have the God given, Holy Spirit indwelling power to resist the devil and live victoriously over those temptations. *But how does that move from a fact or an idea to actual life?*

A few years later the apostle Paul was led by the Spirit to write this additional word of encouragement on this topic to the Jesus followers in the big city of Corinth. The Corinth of the first century was very much like any of the biggest cities in your country: **"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."** (1 Corinthians 10:12,13) My friends, do you hear both Paul and James saying the same thing? Life in our dark world is challenging and the devil is very active, but if you've trusted Jesus Christ to be your Savior, you are delivered from the power of sin bondage and the Holy Spirit of God lives within you to empower you so that you can stand strong and victorious in the face of any temptation! *And that's why James invites us to draw near to God, pursue a close and vibrant relationship with God and many authors in the Bible promise that in return, God will draw near to you!!*

Next James writes: **"Wash your hands you sinners and purify your hearts."** This statement from James perhaps leads us to immediately think of the COVID protocol all around the world of washing your hands frequently. Well, there's a spiritual application to be made here my friends.

From the time we were children we learned our hands are often the dirtiest, most bacteria infected part of our body. Why? Because our hands touch things and often those things are dirty. Did you learn as a kid to keep your fingers away from your face, especially your mouth? Why? Because filthy hands, bacteria covered hands going into the mouth will cause disease, right? A friend of mine nearly died once because in her accounting job she often counted money by licking her fingers from time to time. The money was filthy, and we almost lost her. She was very sick for a long time!

But you and I both know that is not what James is writing about here. *Look at your hands for a moment, through spiritual lenses.* What if God gave you and me the ability to see the stains from anything sinful or less than God honoring that our hands have touched recently? What about the TV remote control or the keypad that controls your internet searches, the keys that you strike, writing letters or emails or social media posts.

King David wrote it this way: ***"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? The person who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up their soul to an idol or swear by what is false."*** (Psalm 24:3,4) Do we understand what both James and David are calling us to consider regarding our hands and their role in the moral and spiritual condition of our lives, our reputations, our legacies, my friends?

*Do you also hear James' call for pure hearts? "...purify your hearts, you double-minded."* Do you see, my friends, the direct relationship between the condition of our hearts and the filth or cleanliness of our hands? Guarding our hearts is one of the main themes of Jesus' teachings and the Bible, right? It's one of the most fundamental of all wisdom principles in life. We've tried to teach this to our kids and grandkids, haven't we? King Solomon wrote: ***"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of your life."*** (Prov. 4:23) So, how are you and I doing that practically my friends? *What specific steps are we taking to keep our hearts undefiled by what we allow into our ears, or what we look at with our eyes, or what we allow our minds to ponder, or even our hands to touch?*

King David wrote this cry to God for help: ***"Teach me Your way O LORD and I will walk in Your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may fear Your name."*** (Psalm 86:11) Take it slow, one brief phrase at a time. Do you see how powerful those words are? *Have you developed a passion in your heart for God's truth and a determination to walk only in the path of God's truth, without deviation or drift?* I'm sure you've battled with a torn heart, haven't you? That happens when you want to pursue two different directions at the same time. It's impossible. Here's an old proverb a friend taught me once: *"a dog has four legs but can only walk on one path at a time."* Now ponder that a moment, it's really deep my friends. The person who told it to me had only a first-grade education but was one of the wisest old men I've ever known. *That's what an undivided heart is about... keeping your focus singular.*

The writer of the book of Hebrews said it this way: **"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus..."** (Hebrews 12:1,2) That is a wonderful and very practical way of applying what James is writing to your life and mine today, 2000 years after James wrote! **God's truth and wisdom doesn't become untrue or irrelevant with age!**

James picks up his stylus again and writes these words: **"Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the LORD and He will lift you up."** (James 4:9,10) But wait a minute we shout! *I thought the Holy Spirit in my life should lead me to JOY in life. Why James are you telling me to grieve and even wail?* You've seen it my friends and so have I. It's the carnival at Mardi Gras season or the drunk out of your mind partygoers laughing and celebrating, or the sadistic person smiling when someone else is in pain, or the deceitful scammer walking away with your money when you've been duped by their lies. *James is calling us to be careful that we are not minimizing the danger of wickedness or making light of sin in our lives.* James is calling us to look seriously at our hands, our hearts, the words we've spoken or written, the reputation of our lives and grieve at any evidence of sin, don't overlook it, don't blame others, don't make excuses. Come to Jesus and repent and receive the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. *In that humility of repentance God then does the miracles of forgiveness and reconciliation with Him and restoration of your relationship with Him and the fresh cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. THEN my friends, THEN is when the joy of your salvation will return and overflow.*

That's what King David's great psalm of repentance, Psalm 51, is all about. **"Create in me a pure heart O God and renew a steadfast Spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me!"** (Ps. 51:10-12) All of this is one of the great secrets in life and living victoriously and effervescently rather than discouraged or despondent. I can see James putting down his stylus again and going over to that window he looks out so often. He's watching normal people doing normal life, just like you and me. He hears occasional laughter, but more often he hears arguing and harsh words of accusations. As he watches and listens another Old Testament powerful word of praise comes into his mind: **"You, O LORD, turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing Your praises and not be silent."** (Psalm 30:11,12) *Oh yes, my friends, that is the great transformation of life only possible in a relationship with Jesus! Have you discovered it? Are you living that miracle today?* Here's a song to help us celebrate this wonderful truth...

**Today's Scripture is James 4:7-10.**