



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 11: The Anatomy of Repentance

James 4:7–12 | Steve Lombardo | March 26, 2017

James is a challenging book to preach through for a number of different reasons. Let me talk about two reasons that it's such a challenge. First, we break the book into passages and sections to preach and teach from. Studying in little chunks is a good way to do it; however, that causes us to miss the big picture of the entire book of James.

When this letter first came to the early churches, they would read the entire letter. They would get the “faith without works is dead” chapter two imperatives: do this, don't do that, do this, don't do that. They would get all the heavier, law-type commands. But then they'd also get to James 5:15–16, “*The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*” They have the grace and forgiveness of God right there in the same letter. So we can be shortsighted if we don't recognize that the church would take the whole letter in one chunk, not just in pieces. So that's one challenge.

The second challenge is the result of the nature of our audience. Some of you here are newer Christians, growing in your faith, and what you really need is to be encouraged in your walk with God. You need to be lifted up as you press forward in your faith and knowledge of God. Then there are others here who might not even be a Christian, or you consider yourself a Christian, you're in the church, but you're far from God and you're not living the way God has called you to live. You need to hear the full weight of the book of James. You need to be shaken to your core.

So because people can be in such different places, when we come to the book of James, we just need to let the text speak for itself and let the Holy Spirit speak through the preaching of God's Word. So that's our purpose today and I'm excited to do that with you. Let's go to James 4, and we'll read verses 7–12. I'm reading in Jesus' name.

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. <sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

The ten imperative verbs in this text clearly indicate that James is issuing an urgent call to his readers to repent from their ungodly behaviors described in the preceding passages. So this is a message on repentance, “The Anatomy of Repentance.” Verses seven through ten have ten verbs in the Greek—and also in the English—imperatives of what we are to do. In the immediate context, it has to do with James 4—not causing quarrels, not being a friend with the world—but also at the end of James 3, in reference to worldly wisdom versus heavenly wisdom.

“*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*” (Proverbs 14:12). There's God's way and there's man's way. There is a way that seems right to us which is not God's way. There is worldly wisdom and there is heavenly wisdom. What is this heavenly wisdom? Remember it says in James 3 that we're called to live lives that are “*pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*” This describes heavenly wisdom. It sounds a lot like the fruits of the Spirit that



we're called to put into practice as Christians in Galatians 5:22–23, *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."*

What is worldly wisdom? At the end of James 3 we see that we're being called to repent of jealousy and selfish ambition. Worldly wisdom is also called earthly, unspiritual, demonic—the "way of the world." What we in the church do a lot of times is look outside our church and think, "Worldly wisdom is for people who don't know anything about God. That's for somebody who's lost, who's outside the church." But isn't it interesting that James is writing this to people who are in church? He's calling believers to repent of worldly wisdom.

Some of you here today have grown up in the church. You do the right things. You listen to the right music. You have the right friends. You went to the right Bible camps. You grew up with this idea that God owes you a certain kind of life. Then when He didn't give you that certain kind of life, or something else happened where He let you down or failed you, you are now far from God. You're here at church, but like the people in Isaiah's day, you acknowledge God with your lips but your heart is far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). You need to hear a message about worldly wisdom as well. God is in debt to no one. He does not owe you. You're partaking in worldly wisdom characterized by jealousy and selfishness, and you need to repent from that. So this is going to be a message of repentance.

## **1. The person who is repentant submits to God (verses 7–8a).**

Submission means the action of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another person. Do you accept that there is a God and that He is above us and more powerful than we are? *"Submit yourself therefore to God."* Why is the word "therefore" in this text? The "therefore" refers back to verse six: *"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"* So since God gives grace to the humble, therefore submit yourself, humble yourself, before God. Submit to this Superior Power, this Superior Person, the Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth. Submit yourself to Him—because God gives Grace to the humble.

The captain of a ship looked out into the dark night and saw some faint lights in the distance. Immediately he went to his signalman and said, "Send this message: alter your course ten degree south." Promptly a return message came back. "Alter your course ten degrees north." The captain was angered. His command had been ignored. So he sent the second message: "Alter your course ten degrees south. I am the captain." Soon another message was received: "Alter your course ten degrees north. I am Seaman Jones, third class." Immediately the captain sent a third message. He was angry now, and he sent a message he knew would strike fear into whomever he was talking to: "Alter your course ten degrees south. I am a battleship." Then the reply came back, "Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a lighthouse."

God is a superior Person to us, and He has called us to humble ourselves and submit ourselves to Him.

People who come to the waters of baptism proclaim, "I'm forsaking my way. As I go into the water, I'm dying to myself, and I'm raised up to new life in Jesus Christ, because He died and gave His life for me. So I'm raised to new life in Him. I am crucified with Christ, therefore I no longer live. Jesus Christ now lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Even though they might not understand—and we might not always understand God's ways—we acknowledge that God's ways are higher than our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great are God's thoughts above our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8–9), so we are going to trust in Him because of Jesus Christ, and we are going to submit to Him for all of our lives. That's why we celebrate baptism and those who have submitted to the Lord God Almighty.

### **When you submit to God, you place yourself under His authority.**

Well, what does this look like practically? First, you view all of God's Word as true. Not all Scripture is created equal. There are some parts which are more applicable than others, but all of Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16). We can't pick and choose what we're going to submit to and believe.

We were talking in my small group this past week about this very question. I shared with them that there are parts of the Bible that talk about homosexuality as a sin. I don't struggle with homosexuality, so for me, I can talk about that sin all day long. It's not really a problem for me. But there are other parts—sometimes even listed in the same place as homosexuality—that I do struggle with. We can't be people who just pick and choose that which we have an easy time with and preach that really hard. No, we preach the whole counsel of God's Word. We can't be Jeffersonian Christians. Thomas Jefferson had his own version of the Bible. He took the New Testament and cut out the parts that described miracles, ending up with the gospel of Jesus being simply a moral code

for living. We can't do that. So practically, when we place ourselves under the authority of God, we also place ourselves under the authority of God's Word.

## When you submit to God, you reject worldly wisdom and embrace heavenly wisdom.

We mentioned earlier that we reject the unspiritual and demonic doctrines of our day, embracing heavenly wisdom. The fastest-growing religious belief in our country is atheism. Men like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens would scoff at the notion that there's anything supernatural. They think, "What you see all came about by chance. And the razor's edge that we live on here on our planet is just by chance. Anyone who needs to embrace the idea of God is silly and in need of a crutch." Because of Jesus we reject this worldly wisdom.

## When you submit to God, you resist the devil.

Now, the devil is not on par with God. Does everyone agree with that? It's not God here and the devil here, and they're fighting for dominance. No, the devil is a created being, a fallen angel, but in our text today we read the wonderful promise that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. So a person who is repentant is submitting to God, and part of that is submission to the ultimate authority. Then when a competing authority appears—and the devil is stronger than we are—when he comes to tempt and deceive us, we resist him. The promise here is that God—to Whom we are submitting—will strengthen and protect and keep us, and the devil must flee.

Maybe you're facing a temptation today. Maybe there's a sin that is very hard for you to deal with—perhaps an addiction, or unforgiveness of someone who has hurt you deeply. Whatever that sin is that Satan is tempting you to hold on to, remember that if we resist the devil, he must flee. So resist him.

## When you submit to God, you draw near to God.

I remember memorizing James 4:8 when I was a kid, but in a different version: "*Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.*" Jesus said it this way: "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28).

As we're dealing with all these imperatives in James, I want to pause and speak to some of you who have felt really weighed down even by this sermon series. You're feeling beat up, like you can't ever measure up. In the study of the book of James, you've felt like there are so many imperatives, "How am I to do them all? I must be a rotten Christian." But you need to remember that if you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. I want to encourage you with this truth. Jesus says this in Matthew 11:28-30:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The gospel is good news. Jesus did what we could not do for ourselves. He paid the penalty for sin. As we put our faith and trust in Him, we receive from Him not only His forgiveness but also His righteousness. When we stand before God, we stand forgiven, cleansed and holy—in spite of our sin—because Christ bore our sin.

So let me encourage you that there's a difference between the conviction of sin from the Holy Spirit and accusations of the devil, the evil one. I want to help you identify the difference, because we can be oppressed by the enemy Satan and think we're being convicted of sin, so we want to be careful to correctly understand these categories.

In John 16:7-14, we see that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin, which is a good thing. In speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says this:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

So the Holy Spirit's mission, His purpose as the third Person of the Trinity, is to convict of sin, to guide us into truth, and to glorify Jesus. He convicts us of sin, so when we do wrong we know, "I have sinned against God, against others." But then the Holy Spirit

also guides us to the truth that there is forgiveness of sin. If we repent and turn from our sin, we can be forgiven and freed from that sin. And finally, the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, pointing us to Him. This is His work.

In 1 John 2:1–2, we read this:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

That is the truth. If you do sin, you have a propitiation, a sacrifice, for that sin in Jesus Christ. That's the good news. So the Holy Spirit convicts us, but He also guides us to truth while pointing us to Jesus.

The devil doesn't do that. *Ha-Satan* is his name and it literally means, in the Hebrew, "the accuser of the brethren." When the devil comes along and accuses us some different things are happening: guilt leads to shame leads to hiding. That's what happens when the devil accuses us. It's not the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit convicts, guides into truth and points to Jesus. The accuser brings guilt, shame and the desire to hide.

Some of you have heard these passages in James, and you're thinking, "I'll never be good enough. I'll never live up to all these things. I can't do it." Maybe you were raised in a home where you often heard that you weren't good enough, that you couldn't measure up, that you could never live up to what was expected of you. That's what the devil says to us as well. "You can't do those things. You can't live up to God's expectations. So why don't you just give up and quit trying to live this life this way?" It leads to shame, hiding and covering up.

First John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Verse seven: "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*" Get in the light. Walk in the light. That's where the Holy Spirit brings us when He convicts us of sin. The devil wants us to stay in the darkness, so he accuses us. Then we feel shame and guilt, staying in the darkness. The Holy Spirit convicts, points us to Jesus, guides us in all truth—and exposes the darkness.

So if you want the devil to lose his power over you—resist the devil and walk in the light. That's where the power is. But as long as you're choosing to hide all the time, you won't want to tell anybody about that sin you're struggling with: "What will they think of me or do to me? Will they even talk to me anymore?" God says when you walk in the light, the devil loses his power. He runs from the light. And you walk in the light as He is in the light, and the blood of Jesus cleanses you from sin and you have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7).

Be encouraged today. The Holy Spirit is going to convict us in the book of James, but He's going to convict us in a way that guides us into truth and points to Jesus. The devil wants to bring us guilt and shame that leads to darkness. Martin Luther said this:

When the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this. "I admit that I deserve death and hell—what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is, there I shall be also."

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

## **2. The person who is repentant sees the ugliness of sin and the glory of God (verses 8b–10)**

The person then who is repentant submits to God, and secondly, sees the ugliness of sin and the glory of God. "*Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*" Purify your heart—how you think, your disposition toward sin. Cleanse your hands—what you do. James continues in 4:9, "*Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*"

### **Repentance is serious.**

James is not saying this just to make you a sour person. He's saying, "Be serious about your sin." Sin is not something to be contemplated or tolerated or played with, yet don't we sometimes have such a lackadaisical attitude toward sin that we are tempted to have an antinomian view? That's a big word that simply means that God's grace will forgive us anyway, so we can just live however we want. That's not the gospel. We're not saved by how we live, but we live in a way that is informed by whether or not we're saved. When we love Christ, when we see Him more clearly, we're going to live for Him. We should never have the

attitude, "I'll just do my thing and go about my business, and if I happen to bump into sin, no big deal. God will forgive me." James says, "Your sin is serious. See your sin and see the glory of God." This is a big deal!

## Repentance is a humbling experience.

James goes on to say, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." See, there's hope even in these verses that might seem gloomy. When you humble yourself—when you get low—God is going to exalt you.

My brother was a Navy SEAL for nine years. Almost every time I preach, I tell people that my brother was a Navy SEAL, and somehow I hope they think I'm tough. I'm not. My brother was on the security detail for the Prime Minister in Iraq. It was a pretty cool position, if you don't mind possibly dying. My brother and his buddies were ready to do that for us, which is cool. What a responsibility and what an exaltation! It was scary for us as his family, especially for my mom. But he didn't go to this job right after he signed up for the Navy. He went to boot camp, then into BUD/S training—Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. During that training, they punish you physically and mentally. They're trying to break you. Then they have a week they affectionately call "Hell Week," when you're just pressed to the limit and don't sleep at all. Many recruits ring the bell at that time, which means you're done. You go inside, get some food and go to sleep. But for those who make it through the cold—they keep you cold the whole time—through the pain—they make you run all the time, everywhere, crawl everywhere, swim, carry logs, carry a 300-pound boat on your head with six other guys. My brother has neck problems today from all that training. They bring you down low, so you buy into their system. Lots of guys will be brought low—so low that they break and they're out. But for those who make it through, those who humble themselves, they can be exalted. He was lifted up and placed where few people ever get to serve, with high responsibilities.

It's the same for us if we come before God and humble ourselves. We must realize, "I'm not God. His ways are higher than my ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). I'm thankful that He's shown me the way to Jesus Christ. And because He has, I see that my sin is ugly. I repent of my sin. I return to Him." I get low—and then guess what? God's going to exalt me. God's going to use you for His glory here on earth. Think of that! God's going to use you for His Kingdom.

God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth—He uses little old us to bring the message of salvation to somebody who needs to hear it. You could be part of somebody's eternity. You could share the words of Jesus with somebody. Their life could be changed for all of eternity—think of that! Groups of people—your neighbors, loved ones. You're part of Village Bible Church where people are being saved all the time, and kids are growing up learning about this Jesus. You get to work in His Kingdom.

God will exalt you, and at the end of time, you'll be seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ Himself. You will be like Him at His appearance, the Scriptures tell us. This is awesome. So we are thankful for the work of God in our lives.

But understand that our sanctification doesn't happen by just trying harder. We grow in holiness when we see Christ more clearly. Look at 2 Corinthians 3:18: *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* So we, beholding Jesus, are being transformed from one glory to another. That's why we're doing what we're doing now. I'm talking about Jesus so you'll see Him more clearly and understand Him more deeply. And as you understand Him more deeply, you will love Him more deeply and live with Him more strongly. As you see Him, as you pray, as you study the Scriptures—there's a point to all of that. It's not just so you can be a good Christian. It's not so you can follow the rules. It's so that you see Jesus and know Him better, so that you grow in Him more. When you see Jesus in all His glory, then your sanctification begins to flourish. That's why we make much of Jesus, because there is much of Him. As we see Him, we grow.

## **3. The person who is repentant speaks not as the lawgiver or judge, but as a recipient of God's grace (verses 11–12).**

*"Do not speak evil against one another."* Do not judge one another harshly. When you do, you become God's law, taking the place of God. You become the judge and the lawgiver. There's only one of those, and it's God Almighty Who can save and destroy. Remember, He's the Lighthouse, not you. You might even be a battleship, but you're not the land.

James is not dealing with judging *per se*; rather, he is addressing evil speech and, consequently, our evil hearts.

Be careful when you speak to and when you speak about others. *“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”* (Matthew 12:34). So when we speak harshly about or to a brother or sister, it reveals our hearts—and our hearts are wicked. So be careful how you speak.

**The concern is the motives behind our judgments.**

What’s behind those words? We had a great discussion in our small group this past week about motives. If we’re practicing worldly wisdom, the motives behind how we speak to somebody else in the church—or outside of the church—are selfish or out of jealousy. We can speak in such terrible ways about or to somebody, because we’re walking in worldly wisdom. But if the motive is love, then it’s heavenly wisdom. Then we can speak into another person’s life who has allowed us into their life. We can speak the truth, but we must speak it in love. The question is one of motives.

## Today’s takeaways.

**1. You need to change your thinking.** You are not God and God does not owe you anything. One of the big critiques from people outside the church and some in the church—especially as we think about evil, because evil does exist—is this cry against God: “Why is He not fair?” But if we’re honest, we wouldn’t want God to be fair, would we? We deserve judgment and punishment for our rebellion. We weren’t just born into sin—we practice it, don’t we? So change your thinking about God. God doesn’t owe you a thing. God in His mercy, in His grace, has allowed you to be here today to hear about repentance, which is a gift from Him.

**2. You need to get serious about your sanctification.** You need to get serious about prayer, about the Word, about accountability, and about how you speak to others. This is a serious work. These Scriptures in James are there to turn your laughter into mourning. If you come to our church any day and see our staff, we’re laughing a lot. There are a lot of good things to enjoy in life, but when we think about the reality of sin and our rebellion, we want to be serious about our salvation. God saves you and calls you to be like Jesus. So take seriously the times you have in prayer. Take seriously the study of God’s Word. In those times when you see Jesus more clearly, you grow more deeply.

**3. You need to fall in love with Christ.** As you view all that He is and what He has done, it will fuel your walk with Him. Fall in love with Him.

This past week I was honored to do the funeral for my wife’s aunt, my mother-in-law’s sister. In the funeral message I talked about the two greatest commandments that Jesus gave: to love the Lord your God with all your might, strength and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Then we talked about why we should love God. Why? I said it is because of Who He is and what He has done. But it’s hard to love someone you can’t see, isn’t it? Now, God is revealed in a lot of different places—in our relationships in the church, in the testimonies of lives that have been changed, in the evidence of creation. We look around and we can see the evidence of God, but it’s hard to love someone you can’t see and who doesn’t speak to you audibly.

So how do you have a relationship with someone you can’t see? When I was a kid, my brother and I had a fort outside. We lived out in the country with a forest area just down the road. We had our fort there and really liked to play there. I was really little, but I remember going off by myself with two sticks. I put them down on the ground and said, “Okay, God. I believe in You, but I need some help. I know this is not hard for You. I’m putting these sticks like this. Could You just move the two sticks?” I waited a few minutes. Then I said, “Okay, God. I know You don’t need more time, but I’ll give You five more minutes.” God did not move those sticks. But then I grew up and heard about Jesus Who died on two sticks for me. He died for my sin, in my place, and rose again. So I love God for Who He is and what He’s done for me on Calvary. Because of that, I repent of my sin and walk in Him.