

**Victory of the Lamb – Faith Works – Come Near to God – James 4:8**  
**Pastor Bill Limmer – November 20, 2022**

**James 4:8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.**

How close are you to God? For some that is an easy answer because the answer is not very close at all. I'm not even sure he exists. For some the answer is I'm struggling with that because I have blown it and I'm pretty sure that God is distant because of that. For some, maybe you want to be close to God but you don't know where to start. For some of us we are thinking I'm pretty close at least I'm closer than others.

Sometimes any number of us approach God like we are dieting. We eat well all day long and then the clock strikes 8pm and it is time for the salt and sweet game (hamster wheel) – of chips and cookies, chips and ice cream, and cereal – so I'm told. We play with God. Sometimes cherishing him, and sometimes we are bored with him, and sometimes forgetting he even exists. And then Jesus comes along and says to all of us no matter who we are, where we have been, or where we are at, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** Matthew 22:37

We are continuing our sermon series, **Faith Works**, a study of the New Testament book of James. Today we are going to answer this question **How do I answer “yes” to God?**

A major theme in James is a person's heart, whether that is talking about self-righteousness, or thinking we have a license to sin, or what comes out of our mouth. It is really all about our heart's. There is a fight for your heart. A fight for being number 1 in your life.

We were created to worship. We were created to have a number 1 in our life. Since the Fall into sin the question has become who or what will we worship, who or what will become number 1 in my life. Every sinful thought, word, and action comes from a desire to put my will above God's will, a desire to love me, or something or someone else more than I love God. Our heart is an idol factory that is humming 24/7. We love God but not as much as we love self, as the football game, as a vacation, as family, as money, as . . . An idol is anything that steals are

our love from God. You know this: sometimes our hearts love evil things, and they love good things more than God.

Author David Paulson gives us some questions to consider when it comes to idols. Which commands of God am I most reluctant to obey? Where do I spend my money, my time effortlessly? What/who do I feel like I cannot survive or function without? What/who am I terrified of losing? What/who do I think and talk about the most? What I cannot and will not be happy unless\_\_\_\_\_.

Pastor and author Scott Sauls says, – **“our over desires cannot bring us lasting wholeness, happiness or the fulfillment we desire. Only Jesus can. Ironically, only when we love Jesus more than these things, do we actually end up enjoying these things to a much fuller extent.”** CS Lewis said, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown into it. Aim at earth and you will get neither. Jesus said it this way: Matthew 6:33 **But seek first the kingdom of God<sup>[a]</sup> and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.**

So is anything holding you back from getting close to God? Are you afraid to go because you think you are going to get in trouble – I’m in trouble. I better hide from my dad. Christianity is, I’m in trouble I better go to God. Are you feeling overwhelmed about what it might take to become closer to God? If that is you, did you ever stop to think that staying distant from God is costing you even more? How many people do you know who are waiting for you with open arms, unconditionally, no matter what you have done? I want you to know that God is waiting for you unconditionally with open arms right now!

It is our sin that brought the distance, the separation, but God’s plan is to bridge that separation through Jesus. Only the wide and ever-present smile of God can free us from the chains of human approval, which is always changing and moving. God loves us because who He is not because of who we are or aren’t. God isn’t tolerating you. He loves you. He is always there for you. He created you in his image and breathed life into to you so you could be close to him.

For some this might be shocking – but the greatest thing that could ever happen to you is that you would come close and have a deep and intimate relationship with God and not an arm’s length acquaintance relationship with God. God’s plan is to restore you to your original image. To know serve and love God first.

For example: Remember on the cross, a guy dying because the government deemed him such a danger to society that he should not be a live, that guy brought to repentance prays to Jesus "Remember me." And Jesus says, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." Remember when Jesus died on the cross, the temple curtain was torn in two. What was separating us from God is gone. We can walk right in physically, emotionally, spiritually. **Don't settle for distance when Jesus paid so a high price to bring you close to him.**

God loves you before you ever even think of doing anything good. Christianity is different than moralism. Moralism says God will love me when I act a certain way, but in Christianity God's embrace comes to us at the beginning of the journey and not at the end and that embrace is always with us.

(adapted from Craig Groeschel) Matt was probably in his mid 40's, graying slightly around the temples. His eyes showed that life had not always been easy, but his warm smile and firm handshake assured the pastor that Matt was in a better place right now. Then one Sunday after church, as he shook the pastor's hand he said, "Pastor, I want you to know my answer is yes. I just need to know the question." The pastor looked confused, grinned, nodded, and said, "Thank you, Matt. God bless."

The next Sunday the same thing happened. Matt shook the pastor's hand and said, "the answer is yes." Once again, the pastor nodded. All week-long the pastor was puzzled. "Yes, to what?"

The following Sunday same thing happened except this time the pastor said, "Matt can we meet for coffee on Tuesday morning." Matt, of course said, "Yes. The answer is yes."

Over Tuesday morning coffee after the early morning greetings Matt changed the conversation. He said, "I was not always the person that I am today. I hurt a lot of people. I've had not just one addiction but numerous addictions that ruled my life. I betrayed my wife and abandoned my kids." And Matt began to cry.

He took a deep breath and continued. "But I am thankful for those horrifically low times because that is what helped me see my desperate need for Christ. When I was at the bottom a friend invited me to church. And that is when I heard you speak about never being too far away from God and the unconditional love of

Jesus. I needed unconditional love.” And tears started to roll down Matt’s cheeks again. “At first, I couldn’t believe it was true for me, for others yes, but not for me. But time again your words of Jesus love kept penetrating my heart, and I realized it was true for me too.”

“And that is why my answer is yes. Because Jesus changed my life, I will always be available to him. Whatever you ask I will do. If you want me to mow or snow shovel the answer is yes. If you need me to help out a family in need, the answer is yes. I will give without hesitation. The answer is yes, just let me know the question.”

What is your answer to God?

Here is how to make our answer yes too!

In the Old Testament book Ezekiel, we learn that God is seeking out each one of his with his love and grace. We learn about God and all he has done for us in the Bible. **Read the Bible** not just for information but for God – John 5:39 **You study<sup>[a]</sup> the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.** This doesn’t have to be overwhelming you can join our bible reading plan, by simply going to **votl.life/Bible**, or simply start in the NT book of John, or type in your browser “verse of the day” and just concentrate and meditate on that verse all day long.

Through the construction process, the builders use levels to make sure the foundation and walls are set the way they need to be so that your home will last. God’s word not only tells us what Jesus has done for us but it also gives us that level to adjust our lives. Matthew 7:24-27 **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”** Get closer to God by hearing his word and following his word.

One of the words God has for us is to **PRAY** to him. To pour our hearts out to him. You don't have to pray a certain way or say certain words. God knows your heart and mind so just share that, and that will be perfect.

**Don't ever, ever think that you've been gone too long to come to Him. God is not some spiritual parole officer waiting for you to fail. If you have strayed from prayer, or never prayed, He is not keeping score. If you don't feel him at all, tell him that: I don't feel you right now God." Pray with any amount of faith that you have, . . . ask for faith if you have none. If you are mad tell him. If you are ashamed, guilty, confused, afraid, doubtful; tell him. He can handle that. He is understanding, patient, gracious, He loves you. You will soon find that you want to talk with him, because he actually pretty awesome to talk to. J.S. Park**

One of the ways we hear and follow his word is to "one another" each other. In other words: **Friends:** Moses had Aaron and Hur to hold him up. Friends can pull you close – get some of those. I have a huge support group – from family that listens, loves, and prays and deals with my unlovable side. I have friends and staff members listen, direct, guide, and pray. Our Life Groups are great place to start.

It is my prayer that you will read your Bible and see Jesus. That you will pray with your heart to Jesus and that as you do so your desires become his desires. And that God blesses you with family and friends who will listen, encourage, guide, course correct when necessary, and love you.

God is actually way better than we can even imagine, and He is always there for you with open arms, unconditionally. The closer you get to God the more you will realize that he was closer than you ever thought. The closer we get to God the more grace, mercy, love, acceptance you will find and the Holy Spirit will move you to answer "**Yes**" to God.