

07/19/26 Message

Part of Real Religion A Journey Through the Book of James
July 17, 2026

Message: Living Close (Drawing Close)

Series: Real Religion

Background

This series is an exposition of the book of James, written by Jesus' brother who "found faith" after His death, burial, and resurrection. James was writing to a persecuted church, and he wanted them to understand the difference between man-made religion and true, genuine, real religion.

We see something happen in James that should be what happens to us once we grasp who Jesus really is. James became full of the Holy Spirit who lit a fire inside him that made people notice this man was changed!

—Pastor Chad

James is shouting:

- Walking with Jesus is not about RELIGION it's about RELATIONSHIP!

Emptying Ourselves

I have to be transparent and admit something. As an adult and as a minister, I have grown to despise the word religion. In our culture, religion has become a word to describe an institutional manner of encountering God. God was never meant to be institutionalized. In fact, Jesus came to break the chains of religion and introduce us to this concept of relationship. It's not about following the rules, expectations; it's not about the traditions of the past and doing things the way they've always been done. It's about emptying ourselves and becoming nothing so God can figuratively and literally become our everything!

And that only happens when we get real and part of that means we understand what real religion is all about.

—Pastor Chad

James 4:1-12 (NLT)

1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

5 Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him.

6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

James is saying:

- It's not a THEM problem, it's a YOU problem

James is Teaching Us

- The problem: EXTERNAL conflict starts on the INSIDE

James 4:1 (NLT)

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you?

Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

James uses a unique word to describe this, he uses the Greek word *strategia* and is talking about the desires that drive conflict causing this war within us. It's a military term and it describes an active campaign, a strategic battle. James is saying, before the conflict becomes visible between you and someone else, there's already this active war happening inside of you!

- The problem: WRONG motives and IMPURE (UNPURE) desires

James 4:2-3 (NLT)

2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

We want what benefits us the most and James tells us that is asking God with the wrong motive. Am I asking God to do what I want, or am I asking God to reveal to me what He wants? Am I asking God to change, or am I asking God to change me? See the difference?

- The solution: HUMILITY breaks the chains of CONFLICT

James 4:5-7 (NLT)

5 Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him.

6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The Greek word is *hupotasso* and it means to obey, to submit yourself to, to be submissive, be obedient to, and in our context, to submit to God's authority in every aspect of our lives!

- The solution: LIVE close to God

James 4:8-12 (NLT)

8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

He doesn't stop there, then he adds this:

11 Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

12 God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

- The solution: LIVE close to God and LOVE others

The greatest commandment, right?

Love God above everything else and love others as yourself. Then, and only then will you understand what it's like to actually follow Jesus.

- You respond to situations the way He would respond to situations.
- You respond to people the way He would respond to people.
- You forgive yourself the way He forgives you.
- You forgive others the way He forgives others!

Snuggle up and get close to God and He will change your emotions; He will change your thoughts; He will change your heart; and He will change your actions. He will break you free from the chains that Satan threw out there and somehow convinced you to put on yourself! Jesus will bring you out of the darkness. Jesus will bring you out of isolation. Jesus will lead you into this place of grace and mercy and love and responding to people and situations in a way you would never respond without His leadership, guidance, and direction in your life, because when you snuggle up to God, He will snuggle up to you! When you live close to God, God will live close to you!

—Pastor Chad

Assignment

If you'll dig into this study and this passage, I believe it will greatly impact your life and hopefully greatly reduce your stress, your frustration, and your anxiety. This passage challenges your motives, your prayer life, and your relationship with God. Even deeper, the time you spend with Him and what you do when you're together.

—Pastor Chad

- Write down the conflicts in your life right now. It can be conflicts within yourself, conflicts with others. Think about what you really want out of the conflict.
 - What is it actually about?
 - Do a check of your prayer life. Are you asking God to bless your desires by giving you what you want? Are you asking God to change the other person? (or) Are you asking God to change your heart? Change your perspective? Change your life?
- In one specific situation this week, choose humility over choosing yourself.
 - Not as a doormat, but as a deliberate act of trust that God doesn't need you to win this battle. He needs to change you and grow you and help you get to the other side. That makes you victorious!

God gives grace to the humble! God will live close to you when you live close to Him! That's better than getting your way or winning the battle! With God, you'll win more battles and likely avoid more battles than you could ever imagine! You want to change your life, you have to change who you're closest to!

—Pastor Chad