

Authentic Christianity
Seek God
James 4:7-10

January 31, 2021 am

HDBC

I keep two propane tanks for my grill because it is so frustrating to be in the middle of grilling a batch of burgers only to run out of gas.

A few years after buying our house, we added a fireplace. We burn a lot of wood. We keep the fireplace going most winter nights when we are home. In order to keep the fire burning, we have to keep the wood coming and sometimes we have to stoke it. Stir it up. Why? We don't want the fire to go out.

Sometimes we speak of our relationship with God in terms of fire. We speak of someone being on fire for Jesus. Refers to a zeal for God. Enthusiasm for the Lord. And sometimes that zeal grows cool. We are not as excited about the Lord as at some other time in our lives.

The old-fashioned word to describe this would be ***backslidden***. Normally we reserve that word for people who have seriously gotten away from the Lord. But think about it like this. If there ever was a time when you were more committed to the Lord, more passionate for him, more excited about Him and his kingdom than right now, . . . you are backslidden.

Let's be honest, sometimes we just need to rekindle the flame. The old-fashion word for that is ***revival***. Churches need it. Individuals need it. Churches sometimes have ***revival meetings*** designed to help do just that. Motivate us to renew our passion for Christ. You can have a revival meeting without being revived. You can be revived without a meeting.

Evangelist, Gypsy Smith, used to say: *If you want to have a revival, draw a circle on the floor, step into that circle and then pray, **Lord, send a revival and let it begin in this circle.***

That's what I want us to do this morning. Each of us to draw a circle around ourself and ask God to start revival in that circle. The key is to **Seek God!**

Read Text – James 4:7-10

These verses contain ten imperatives for how to seek God.

For the unbeliever, this is a call to be saved. James describes the things that accompany saving faith. All are present in some way when a person is saved.

For the believer, this is a call to **rededicate yourself** to knowing God more intimately, loving Him more passionately and serving Him more faithfully.

So, if you are not a believer in Jesus, pay careful attention. These imperatives will provide insight into how to respond to God's gift of salvation. For those who are believers, it is a call rekindle the fire, renew the passion and commitment.

Because some can easily be grouped together, I've reduced the list to six things that are keys to seeking God and rekindling the fire.

1. **Submission** (7a)

To arrange under. Most often used in military context. Acknowledge the proper rank. To yield to another. It means I will surrender my will to His will. I am not the master of my life. When He calls, I say **yes**.

In the NT it is used of **Jesus' submission to His parents**. Paul uses it of a believer's submission to the government and of a **wife's responsibility to her husband**. The principle & practice of submission is found in all areas of life.

What a private does to a sergeant

What a student does to a teacher.

What a child does to a parent.

Submission is not a sign of weakness, but of courage and strength.

Remember that **Jesus submitted his will to that of the Father**. We are called to do the same. We arrange ourselves under His authority. We acknowledge that He is in charge and we are not!

This is not easy. In fact, it requires a radical determination that we die to self. How much of your life decisions are being made based on what is best for you, what you prefer, what you desire? When there is a kingdom need, a ministry opportunity is your first inclination to say **no** because it would require a sacrifice to self?

2. Resistance (7b)

*To take your stand against him. To **fearlessly defy** him.* Choosing to stand against all that he is doing. This is the natural companion to submission. Once you submit to God you will find yourself needing to resist the devil. Allegiance to God causes you to be at war with Satan. We must oppose him. There is no middle ground or neutrality.

Not just a defensive word. Speaks of aggressive resistance. He is a powerful adversary, but we have the assurance that when we submit to God and resist the devil, **he will flee**. That is not because of our power, but because we are resisting in the name of Jesus.

Think of the llama. I recently learned something new about these odd looking animals. Lexy Fowler is a sheep rancher in Montana. Like other ranchers she used to struggle to keep from losing lambs to coyotes. She had tried all kinds of tricks but nothing seemed to work. One year she lost 50 lambs to coyotes.

Then she discovered the llama. They are afraid of very little and appear to be afraid of nothing. When they see something their first instinct is to put their head up and head straight for the thing they see. For a coyote, that is a very aggressive act and actually causes them to go the flee. Coyotes are opportunists and the llamas take that opportunity away. When we resist the devil, in the power of Jesus, we take away his opportunity. Remember **Jesus used Scripture** in resisting the devil. Let's do the same.

First two keys: Submission to God. Resistance to Satan.

3. Fellowship (8a)

To join one thing to another. Speaks of a loving, intimate companionship. **When my kids were small they loved to get into our bed in the morning.** Why? Closeness, intimacy, togetherness, security.

The University of Northern Iowa once offered an art course that included an unusual exercise. The teacher brought to class a bag filled with lemons and gave one to each student. The assignment was for the student to keep his lemon with him day and night--smelling, handling, examining it. Next class period, without warning, students were told to put their lemons back in the bag. Then each was asked to find his lemon. Most did so without difficulty.

Very simply put, we are instructed to move toward God, to draw near to Him. The promise is that He will move toward us, draw near to us. This is not about geography or proximity. This is about fellowship. You can be in the same room with someone, even sitting in chair next to them, but not be ***near to them***.

Think about gatherings; parties, worship services, small groups, ball games. You can be with people but not close to them.

4. **Cleansing** (8b)

Two imperatives. Clean up our actions and our hearts. Hands refers to outward actions and heart refers to what's on the inside. You can't rekindle the flame while hanging on to known sin. **Wipe your feet** before coming into the house. **Wash hands** before coming to the table. God does not expect us to be perfect but He does expect us to fight hard against the sins in our hearts and our hands, in His power. **Swindoll** keeps it simply but direct.

Cleanse your hands = Stop doing evil!

Purify your hearts = Stop thinking evil!

That kind of change does not come easily.

Jeremiah referred to it when he said:

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

Literally, ***educated in evil***. The one who is educated in evil can't do good. Evil habits that remain unchanged prohibit you from doing good. Idea is that **you have done evil so long that it has become second nature** and it will block the good that we want to do. Avoid the common excuses:

Well, nobody's perfect.

I'll never be any different; that's just the way I am.

I was born this way, nothing can be done about it.

Col. 3 Paul tells us to put off old self and put on the new.

The flesh dies a slow, bitter, bloody death--kicking and struggling all the way.

The key to cleansing is found in **Submission, Resistance, Fellowship!**

5. Grief (9)

This verse describes a contrite heart. Until our sinfulness causes sorrow in our hearts, we have not truly repented, nor are we ready to repent.

Grief is not repentance, but is a natural companion to repentance. Sin should break our hearts! Unless there is grief over your sin you will not repent.

What we need today is not **anger but anguish**, the kind of anguish that **Moses displayed** when he broke the two tablets of the law and then climbed the mountain to intercede for his people. The anguish **Jesus displayed** when He cleansed the temple and then wept over the city.

The difference between anger and anguish is a broken heart. It's easy to get angry, especially at somebody else's sins; but it's not easy to look at our own sin and weep over it.

6. Humility (10)

It means to cast away pride and loftiness. **See God** in his greatness and power. To see yourself for who and what you really are. What else can we do when we are truly in the presence of God? **Reminded of the words of John the Baptist, *He must increase and I must decrease.***

I enjoy Facebook and use it as a ministry tool. But Facebook and all other social media certainly do not promote humility. In fact, by their very nature they promote pride . . . look at me . . . look at what I've accomplished . . . look at what I've done. I know that is not a popular thing to say and may make some of you feel uncomfortable and even not happy with me. I'm not telling you to stop posting about yourself, but to be aware of the subtle pull to pride.

Booker T. Washington was an outstanding example of humility. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking through town when he was stopped by a wealthy woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her.

He smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. ***It's perfectly all right, Madam,*** he replied. ***Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend.*** She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart.

Not long afterward she persuaded some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

This text is a call for us to die to self that we might live for Christ. Will you do so? Will you seek God above everything else, including self? Will you allow God to have your heart, mind, body and life? Will you give Him your present and your future? Will you surrender your will to His?

Would you like to see revival and awakening come to our nation, our city, our church? It will come when one by one we follow the call found in this passage.

A young man was eager to grow in His Christian life. He got a piece of paper and made a list of all the things he would do for God. He wrote down the things he would give up, the places he would go to minister and the areas of ministry he would enter. He was excited. He took that list to the church and put it on the altar.

He thought he would feel joy, but instead he felt empty. So he went home and started adding to his list. He wrote down more things he would do and wouldn't do. He took the longer list and put it on the altar, but still he felt nothing.

He went to a wise pastor, told him the situation and asked for help. The pastor said,

Take a blank sheet of paper. Sign your name at the bottom. Put that on the altar.

As long as you are making your own list of what you will and will not do for Christ, you have not fully surrendered to Him! Sign the blank sheet and give that to Him.