

# PRACTICE MAKES PERSONS

## “He Gives More Grace (And Boy Do We Need It)”

James 4:1-12 | March 17, 2019

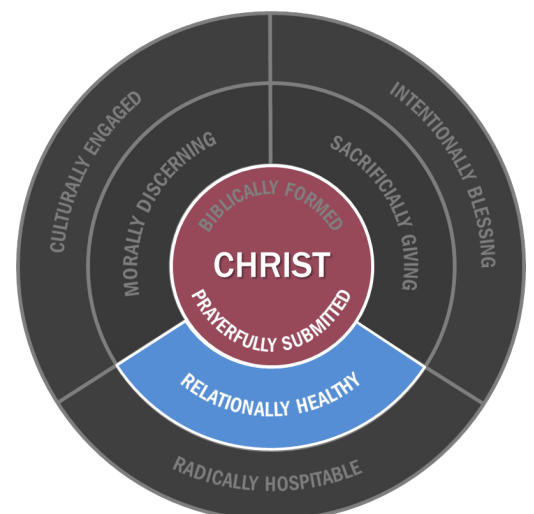
**Sermon Summary:** Like all communications, the Scriptures are comprised of both text and tone. And the tone of James presents an ongoing challenge to our modern sensibilities. Give the original audience of displaced Christians living as refugees and asylum-seekers, we would expect James to bring comforting, consoling words. But instead he exhorts and rebukes the church repeatedly, with 60 commands spread throughout five chapters. Ten commands are concentrated in this passage. What sort of grace is this?

**1. The Grace of Conviction.** The quarrels and fights among God’s people are symptomatic of deeper issues. Instead of finding their true satisfaction in God and the gospel—the essence of conversion—their affections have run amok and they’ve backslidden into the hedonistic ways from which they were saved. God had become their husband—but now they are cheating adulterers. The “text messages” prove it (the text of Scripture, that is). So now God is jealously contending for the s/Spirit he placed in them (whether the human spirit everyone has or the Holy Spirit who indwells all Christians). These are not petty, inconsequential problems. These are “big deal” sins that have opened a yawning breach in their relationships with God and each other. James does not want to be guilty of spiritual malpractice, healing his people’s wounds lightly (cf: Jer. 6:14; 8:11), so he lays the wood. Only the brutal facts will lead them to deep repentance.

**2. The Grace of Contrition.** After describing their sin, James says, “But he gives more grace.” What a beautiful truth! They have not sinned their way out of the kingdom; they can come back. But doing so will require a second wave of grace, the grace of contrition. Only a godly sorrow and thorough repentance will enable them to lay hold of the all the virtue of the cross. As with other sins, flippant, emotionless apologies do not heal and reconcile. So James prescribes:

- A. *Submit to God and resist the devil.* This is military language calling people to subordinate their lives to God while taking up positions against their enemy. They’ve been AWOL; it’s to snap-to and get back to the front lines of the spiritual battle.
- B. *Draw near to God and be drawn near to.* Sin always opens a breach in relationships, so James calls his flock to close the gap. Move toward God. Like the prodigal son, go back home and watch the Father run to you as you do.
- C. *Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts.* This is worship language, particularly as applied to priests. They approached God with cleansing and confession, washing inside and out.
- D. *Be wretched, mourn, weep, turn your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.* This is funeral language. Mourners let themselves “be wretched,” not bathing and being unkempt. They mourned and wailed to express their hearts. Such expressions can be useful for us to, guiding our hearts and emotions.

### Discipleship Focus:



Have you ever received the grace of contrition? Have you ever received the gift of tears for your sin? We know as intellectual facts that we've shamed and despoiled ourselves as God's image-bearers; we've fallen desperately short of his glory; our sins deserve hell; and our atonement required the agonizing death of Jesus Christ. We would expect, at least occasionally, that this would move us to tears. But it almost never does.

**3. The Grace of Cure and Consolation.** When God does give the graces of conviction and contrition, they lead us to his mercies. As James 4:10 says, "We humble ourselves before the Lord, and he exalts us." That word "exalt" is striking. We would expect it to say something like, "Humble yourselves and God will forgive you, or restore you, or let you out of the dog house." But it says, *exalt you*. That's a worship word. It's what we do when we lift up God and glorify his name. James says God will do that for us—not in the sense of worship us, but he will lift us higher than we ever dreamed possible.

- He won't just take us off the ash heap of sin—he will seat us in the heavenly realms with Christ!
- He won't just make us happy again—he will restore to us the joy of our salvation!
- He won't just tell us "go and sin no more"—he will make us agents of grace to others. As David says in Psalm 51, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." God will give you a gospel story to share with others, that they too might be forgiven.

## Discussion Guide

1. How do you process the tone of James' letter? Did the explanation in the sermon make sense to you? Do have any additional insights into why James spoke like this; why the Holy Spirit inspired him like this?
2. If you were diagnosing and further explaining the quarrels and fights in your world—whether individually or as a community and nation—what would you say? What is causing them?
3. Discuss this quote from C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*:  
"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy, normal and satisfying form, we are in a sense on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is his invention, not ours. He made the pleasures; all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, *at times, in ways, or in degrees*, which he has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to the least natural. An ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula."
  - What does this teach you about God? What does it teach you about the devil's schemes?
  - How do you see these "pleasure principles" operative in your life?
  - What is one thing you can do to realign your disordered desires?
4. Discuss this quote from Cornelius Plantinga in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*:  
"The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. Some of our grandparents agonized over their sins. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could still go to Holy Communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might wonder if this sin threatened her very salvation. But the shadow has dimmed. Nowadays, the accusation, *You have sinned*, is said with a grin, with a tone that signals an inside joke. At one time, this accusation still had the power to jolt people."
  - Should sin still jolt us? How so?
  - How do we cultivate a contrite spirit? How do we move deeper into this space?
  - What might be the benefits of going there? The dangers?
  - Is there any area of your life in which James 4 is applicable, and in which we can pray for you?