

# Repentance

VBC

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Series: Now to Live the Life #9

James 4:8-10

## “Descending to Relational Heights

### INTRO

10 years ago, the movie Forrest Gump came on the scene

- A story of a man mentally challenged
- Who never lost his love for his childhood sweetheart, Jenny

But Jenny chased other lovers and ran from his affection

- After a number of ill-conceived flings, after her lusts have taken her to the depths, their paths cross...and Forrest continues his pursuit...

In a small way, Forrest illustrates the incredible tenacity of God's immense love - which continues to reach out - even though we too have gone after other lovers

- Even though we have chosen not to reach out to Him
- Even while we are completely undeserving

God affirms this in James, a letter addressed to a rather unhealthy, unfaithful community

- Believers in God who were double-minded – chap.1
- Believing one thing - living another – chap.2
- Devouring each other with their words, jealous and selfish – chap.3
- Bickering and fighting - the result of self-centeredness, self-absorption – chap.4

It all amounted to a betrayal of their relationship with God (4:4)

Nonetheless - as we see throughout God's Word - throughout life - God keeps pursuing - NOTE VS 6

- The grace of forgiveness - that is greater than the guilt of self-centeredness
- The grace of healing - that can replace the pain of verbal, physical abuse
- The grace of reconciliation - that can work to overcome estrangement

All of us need that grace - if there is hope we will be gracious

- Of extending grace to others

But this grace is conditional - NOTE VS 6B

And that creates a dilemma - our hearts, by nature, have a surging, disorienting pride

- We tend towards self-importance, self gratification, self promotion

- To put it another way --

"BECOMING HUMBLE IS COUNTERINTUITIVE!"

HENCE - WE TEND TOWARDS GRACELESSNESS

- We injure relationships by insisting on our needs - "Affirm me!", "Fulfill me!", "Agree with me!"

- We fight and quarrel because the heart wants what it wants – vs.1

***So how do we humble ourselves?***

- Stand in front of a mirror and declare - "Loser"?

- Hug street people?

***God tells us what's required here in James***

- Humility that leads to grace that leads to healed relationships begins with this...

**1 - WE NEED TO LOVE OUR GOD – vss.7a, 8a**

- It is the logical start point - for if we don't relate well to God - nothing else will help

- What does this mean? NOTE VS 7A

**A- ARRANGE OURSELVES UNDER HIS WILL – vs.7a**

- This is the first act of HUMILITY

- To give way to His way, to get out of ourselves - and get under Him

- Give up our need to control and live under His

- Give up our expectations and arrange ourselves under His

- And what are they?

- Husbands love wives as Christ loves the church

- Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth - but only that which is needed for the moment-that which will build up

- Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace - Eph 4:3

**B- HUMILITY MEANS A YIELDEDNESS TO DRAW NEAR - NOTE VS 8A**

**1 - Near enough to SEE WHAT GOD SEES IN ME**

- Near enough to see how full I can tend to be of myself - and how little room I leave for God

**2 - Near enough to know that ANY EFFORT to make life work without absolute dependence upon God is sin**

**3 - Near enough to sense the CONVICTING of the Spirit when we injure others**

**4 - Intimate enough to FEEL HIS GRIEF when we abuse those who have been made in His image**

**5 - Near enough to know how much we have been FORGIVEN**

- How much joy He has to offer -- and hence how gracious we need to be, CAN BE, towards the failings of others

*In essence* - the first remedy for relational failure is worship - for only then is the heart centered

**2 - WE NEED TO RESIST OUR ENEMY – NOTE VS 7B**

- HUMILITY IS to yield and follow God's orders - to refuse the enemy's grip

That's hard - Satan often dons a friendly uniform - links up with our natural inclinations

- We welcome him - when Scripture calls us to shoot him - and if he doesn't stay dead - shoot him again

- Resist the pull of their every temptation

- To harbor bitterness
- To retaliate, get back - and injure the one we should be loving
- To posture ourselves to be on the throne

*Point*

- If we don't hate him - we'll probably hate someone else
- A mother will hate her disrespectful son - a man will hate his divorced wife
- Until they hate the real enemy

### 3 - WE NEED TO RENOUNCE OUR WAYS - NOTE VS 8B

#### A- HUMILITY IS to be honest with ourselves - to see our fallen inclinations the way God does

- The dirt on our hands
- How deep rooted is the rottenness in our hearts
- The tendency within to wound, to harbor grudges
  
- Vs. 8 is a call to **REPENTANCE**
  - To renounce these things - rather than cling to them like a drowning man to an 80 pound weight
  
  - It is about realignment
    - Repentance is the chiropractic remedy when our necks are stiff and incapable of bending

Some of you may say – Well, I have this down

- I already see the dirt, I already hate myself - I feel like a failure all of the time

But that is despair -- not repentance

- That is yielding to the enemy's condemnation rather than the Spirit's conviction

In fact - that is the kind of heart that hurts people

- *SELF HATRED IS WHAT LEADS TO OTHER HATRED*

True repentance is a vigorous renouncing - not a despairing hopelessness

- *SELF DEMOTION - NOT SELF HATRED*

#### B- And ALL of this will involve - should involve mourning - NOTE VS 9

- Wherever there is genuine repentance, there will always be a strong emotional element
- David, for all his faults, had a keen awareness of his personal relationship with God
  - And his failures almost always led to tears
  - Ps 119:36 - "My eyes shed streams of tears because Your law is not kept"

It raises a searching question

- When is the last time I have cried over my sin?
- When has my unkindness, my mean spiritedness, my self centeredness led to shame and remorse before God?

***If we find this difficult to do - it may be that our relationship with God has become...***

**1 - Far too superficial, glib - perhaps presuming too much on His forgiveness and mercy**

**2 - Far too impersonal**

**3 - Far too removed from the reality of what our sin does to God's heart**

Maybe we are too sophisticated for sackcloth and ashes today

- I don't know - but I know this - MacDonald was not overstating the point when he wrote --

"Our lack of understanding of what repentance means is the greatest single cause of loss of vitality in the Christian life"

- Unless there is a heartfelt sorrow for sin - behavior will stay the same

- If we casually excuse our selfishness - we will never progress very far in correcting it

### ***RESULT***

It is when we are humbled - something forged in the presence of God

- Where our bent for promotion of self is bended into devotion to God

- Where the center and the periphery each take their rightful place

- That something great happens - land at the pinnacle of grace - grace that makes a difference - NOTE VS 10

### **HE WILL LIFT US OUT**

- Lift our relationships out of the pit

- Lift our marriages from despair

- Lift us into a renewed relationship with Him where we love with abandon