

Draw Near to God

A New Year's Message

Scripture: James 4:4-8

Sermon Series: *New Year's Message*

Topic: Communion, Devotion

I. Introduction

Entering into a year new affords us the opportunity to look back over the past year and prayerfully look forward to a new year. We can look back over the past year and give thanks to God for a year of his grace and mercy. We can look forward to a new year and plan for how we would want things to be different.



Looking back reminds us of God's daily mercies to us and it can also be a means of an invitation to improvement. This is especially important when we consider our relationship with our Lord. How was your relationship with the Lord last year? Is there any area that can be improved or strengthened this year? Were you as near to Him as you'd like to be? Would you like to be nearer to Him this year? James, the brother of our Lord Jesus, may be helpful here.

James 4:4-8 (ESV) Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The primary question here is, *What does it take to stand in a place of friendship with God?* A Christian cannot be both friend of the world and friend of God. James is calling the people of God to make a choice. To be on friendly terms with the world places oneself at enmity with God. To be on friendly terms with God, means that one will be the enemy of the world. The

question James puts to the reader is, with whom do you most want to be friends, God or the world?

II. Draw Near to God

The heart of this passage is verse 8, “**Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.**” This is today’s invitation. If you will aim in this new year to draw near to God, then He will draw near to you. This is the question before us as we begin a new year. Will 2026 be a year of drawing nearer to God? James wants you and I to draw nearer to our Lord. And he tells us how to do it. This raises two questions. First, does God really want us nearer to Him? Second, if so, then how do we get there? How do we draw nearer to him?

A. God Invites Us to Draw Near Him

The first question is, Does God want us near Him? The definitive answer is yes. Yes, God wants you near to Him. **God invites us to draw near to him.**

- 1) **Humanity was created for nearness with God.**¹ This is one of the first purposes revealed in Scripture for which we were created. Remember the opening chapters of the Bible (Gn 2-3). God created a world in which he put a garden and in that garden he placed man, with whom he walked daily and communed with him. They talked together and enjoyed friendship and partnership. God invited man to join him in exercising dominion over this world and gave him the task of naming all the animals. Humanity was created for nearness to, communion with God in a pleasant state of friendship with our heavenly Father.

But that nearness, communion, and friendship was lost when Adam and Eve chose to sin against God by disobeying His command. The result of their sin was separation from God. Communion with Him was cut off. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were driven from the garden and out from God’s presence.² So God planned a way for that nearness, communion, and friendship to be restored.

- 2) **Israel was called for nearness with God.** Since, because of our sin, all mankind is cut off from God’s presence and far off from him, he calls us to himself to be near to him.

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,

¹ Genesis 2:8, 15-17; 3:8-9.

² Genesis 3:23.

I have chosen you and not cast you off;"
10 fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Isaiah 41:8-10 (ESV)

Abraham is the first person called a friend of God.³ God chose Abraham and made a promise to him that his offspring would be those called to draw near to God. Israel was far off from God—"at the ends of the earth," but God was gracious to Abraham and his offspring and he called them to himself. He invited them to draw near to God because God had chosen them to be his servants. Therefore, he promised them that he would be near them; to be with them, to strengthen them, to help them, and to uphold them with His "righteous right hand." Clearly God wants his people near him, *so close that they can touch Him*.

- 3) ***Israel was delivered to be near him.*** God delivers his people from bondage to darkness and slavery to sin so that they can be near him in light and holiness and freedom. After leaving Egypt God led Israel to Mt. Sinai, where they camped near Him.⁴

The LORD called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."
Exodus 19:3-6 (ESV)

God wanted the people of Israel to know that he had chosen them, that he loved them, had called them, and "***brought them to Himself***" to be His "treasured possession," His cherished people, among all the peoples of the earth. *God wanted his chosen people to be near him*. He loved them and rescued them and brought them near to himself. He did not do this for any other nation of the world. He brought Israel alone near to himself. Israel is an example of God's particular love. God has a particular love for his called and chosen people.

We also learn, through people like Rahab—who was not an Israelite, that this particular love is open to any and all who would put their faith and trust in God.

³ 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23.

⁴ Exodus 3:1-2.

- 4) *God persistently called Israel near to Himself through his prophets.* That God yearns for his people to be near him can be seen in His persistent calling to them by the prophets throughout Israel's history.

David said to his son, Solomon,

"If you seek him, he will be found by you..."
1 Chronicles 28:9 (ESV)

David also wrote in a song to the whole of Israel,

"Seek the LORD and his strength;
Seek his presence continually!"
1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)

Zechariah said to Israel,

"Return to me, says the LORD of hosts,
and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts."
Zechariah 1:3 (ESV)

Isaiah said to Israel,

"Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;"
Isaiah 55:6 (ESV)

Through Jeremiah God says to his people,

¹³ "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, declares the LORD..."
Jeremiah 29:13-14 (ESV)

Summary

Surely we can see that the Lord God wants his people to be near him. He loves His children and desires for them to be near to Him. He invites us to draw near to Him.

B. How to Draw Near to Him

If the answer to our first question is, Yes, God desires his people to draw near to him, then this begs a second question, How do we do that? How do we draw near to God? The point of James 4:4 is that being a friend of God *IS* possible. Thus, how do we draw nearer to God in this new year? James gives us five steps to drawing near to the Lord.

1. **Receive his Holy Spirit.** Drawing near to God cannot be accomplished by mere human will power alone. We require divine assistance. We need the help of His Holy Spirit.

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?"

James 4:5 (ESV)

This verse is complicated (some scholars claim this verse is the most difficult to rightly interpret in the whole letter⁵). We do not have time this morning to engage the scholarly debate on whether or not the word 'spirit' (*pneuma*) refers to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. The word itself could refer to either.⁶ However, Paul uses nearly identical language to speak of the the Holy Spirit dwelling⁷ within us. This fact, along with the context of James 4, causes me to conclude that James is referring to the Holy Spirit, not the human spirit.

Notice that the Spirit who dwells within us, does so because "*he has made [the Spirit] to dwell in us.*" God has caused His Spirit to dwell within us. This is similar to what Peter says when he explains that "*He has caused us to be born again*" (1 Ptr 1:3). *Unless the Holy Spirit dwells within you, then you will never draw near to God.* No one is a child of God who has not first received the Holy Spirit of God. The apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear in his letter to the Romans, wherein he explains, "*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him*" (Rom 8:9). "*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons*⁸ (i.e. children) *of God*" (Rom 8:14). The first step in drawing near to God is receiving the Holy Spirit of God.

God has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us and it is by means of His Holy Spirit that we commune with Him. If we are trying to befriend the world by living according to the "*sinful desires that are at war within us*" (Jam 4:1), then we are acting like enemies of God and causing the Holy Spirit within us to be grieved by our engagement in sin. God will not allow His Holy Spirit to long and repeatedly be dragged into our habits of sin. God yearns jealously that His Holy Spirit and our spirit be at peace, that is, that we both love and hate the same things.⁹

How does one receive the Holy Spirit? You ask Jesus to give you his Holy Spirit. Jesus alone has been given the right to, as John the Baptist said, "baptize you with the Holy

⁵ Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 193.

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition, vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 183.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19.

⁸ Or 'sons and daughters.' The Greek word *adelphoi*, depending on context, can mean all siblings in a family, including both male and female.

⁹ Hebrews 1:9; Psalm 45:7.

Spirit" (Mt 3:11), meaning that Jesus alone has the right and authority to plunge you and me into the life of God. Jesus said to his disciples, "*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" (Lk 11:18). If you have never asked the Lord Jesus to give you his Holy Spirit, then do not leave today without going to Jesus in prayer and asking him to give you his Holy Spirit. If you would like someone to help you in this prayer, then go to one of the prayer stations at the conclusion of the prayer service and a member of the prayer team will be happy to pray with you. So step one in drawing near to God is receiving the Holy Spirit and being led by Him.

2. ***Receive His grace, and reject all pride.*** We see this in v.6.

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6 (ESV)

God is a gracious God. He generously gives grace, but He actively opposes proud people. He gives "***more grace.***" We often fail at being led by the Holy Spirit and thus we stand in need of grace. If you are here today in need of grace, then know for a fact He always has "more" grace to give. God abundantly gracious. In 2026 we need to empty ourselves of all pride and arrogance and instead fill ourselves with the grace of God. The Holy Spirit is given to us through grace alone. No one deserves the gift of the Holy Spirit. No one has earned the right to receive the Holy Spirit. No one in himself or herself is worthy of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is given to humble people who fall on their faces before God and cry out for his amazing grace.

God hates pride. He hates it so much that he "***opposes the proud.***" Wherever we allow pride into our lives, there we will find God opposing us. Certainly it is unwise to cause God to oppose you. Therefore, we must reject all pride. We must kill pride in our lives and turn to the Lord who "gives more grace." We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yet, anyone who puts away his pride and humbles himself before God should say to Him something like,

"Father, I am a sinner and I know that I justly and rightly deserve your wrath. But you promised to be gracious to those who humble themselves before you. I fall on my face, confessing my sins, and admitting that I am lost without you. Please save me. Be gracious to me. Forgive me of my sins and wash me clean. Give me the gift of your Holy Spirit and daily help me to walk in your grace."

Receive His grace, and reject all pride.

3. ***Submit to God*** (v.7).

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

James 4:7 (ESV)

James is arguing that you should willingly submit to God because He is a gracious God. God gives more grace therefore, *submit* yourself to him. He means surrender to Him. Stop being stubborn. Stop disobeying His will. Stop thinking that your ways for yourself are better than God's ways for you.

4. *Resist the devil* (v.7).

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:7 (ESV)

Make up your mind today that 2026 will be a year that you stop cooperating with the devil. Plan to resist him. Look back over that last year and see where it was that the enemy was able to attack you. Think about it. Where did you all the devil to have ground in your life? Identify those places, and then plan to make this new year different. Plan to stand against him, rather than to give in to him.

5. *Cleanse and purify hands and heart* (v.8).

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded

James 4:8 (ESV)

James is here calling for a spiritual shower. He is calling us to fill ourselves with the grace of God and then rid ourselves of sinful hands and hearts. We need to get rid of sinful things we do with our hands, and then go much deeper into the work of purifying our hearts. Going the heart means going into the desires that stand behind the actions. Remember that every sinful deed begins first with a sinful thought (see Jam 1:14). If you really want to rid yourself of sinful actions, then you must first fight against sinful thoughts. Paul teaches us to "*take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (2 For 10:5).

6. *Practical ways to draw near to God in 2026*. Throughout the history of the church, we find testimony to some practical steps of drawing nearer to God.

1. *Prioritize attendance of corporate worship services*. Throughout the entirety of Scripture the number one means of drawing near to the presence of God was first and foremost in the context of corporate worship services. David himself frequently spoke of the great spiritual joy and delight that he received from gathering together with God's people in a great congregation (Ps 22:22-26; 68:24-26). Many people report that they sense the Lord's presence with unique poignancy during corporate services of worship. It is for this reason that the author of Hebrews commands us "not to neglect meeting together" (10:25).

2. *Practice praise.* Sing songs of praise to God. Throughout Scripture songs are particular markers of God's presence. The first song mentioned in Scripture was sung by Israel after God was present to deliver them through the Red Sea and to drown the entire army of Egypt (Ex 15). This year consider how you might incorporate music into your life as an expression of your worship of the Lord.

Crossway recently released a new hymnal.

Each week we post the songs we will sing in the eNews.

In both [Apple Music](#) and

In [Spotify](#)



3. *Plan time for private prayer.* Jesus both personally practiced this and commanded his disciples to follow his example.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mark 1:35 (ESV)

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:6 (ESV)

This time will not happen by accident. You will not have this time if you do not plan for such a time.

4. *Mediate on Scripture.* The word 'meditate' means, "to mutter"¹⁰ to speak under one's breath, or repeat quietly to one's self. I started a new Bible reading plan this year and it began with Psalm one and there we find this very admonition.

¹ Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,

¹⁰ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

and on his law he meditates day and night.
Psalms 1:1-2 (ESV)

This was also Moses advice to Joshua as he began to take leadership of Israel following Moses' death.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

This also means that *memorization* is part of mediation.

5. *Obey Jesus' commands.* Consider what Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was betrayed.

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."
John 15:10 (ESV)

To "abide in" means 'to remain in' or 'to constantly be in.' To abide in Jesus' love is found in obeying his commands. Jesus remained in the Father's love by obeying the Father's commands and therefore if we are to remain in the love of Jesus or near to him in love, then we must obey his commands.

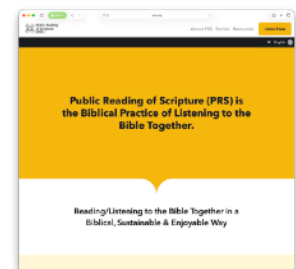
"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."
John 14:23 (ESV)

What an amazing truth! Anyone who loves Jesus, will obey his word. And that person will know, not only the love of Jesus, but also the love of the Father and even more wonderful, "*we will come to him and make our home with him.*" How much nearer to the Lord could you be if you're living together in the same home?

6. *Abide in God's word.* If we are to obey the commands of Jesus, then we must know what they are. The place to find the commands of Jesus one must look in the Bible. Therefore, drawing near to Jesus in 2026 must involve some form of Scripture reading or listening or both.

Listening to Scripture

1. PRSI.org website
2. Weekly 10am class in conference room, led by David Chamberlain.



3. Week day 6am Zoom gathering. Info on how to join is found in the eNews (which you can sign up for by scanning the QR code on the Sermon Notes card)

Reading Scripture

LOOP has link to 21 different reading plans. Open LOOP, look for "Bible Reading Plans for 2026," then tap it. Then tap the middle option, the center link.

That will open up a webpage the will give you plenty of choices to explore.



Conclusion

Do you want 2026 to be a year of drawing nearer to the Lord Jesus?

Do you believe that He wants you nearer to Him?

Are you willing to make a plan for how you will draw nearer to him?

1. Will you ask Jesus to give you his Holy Spirit? And will you follow His lead?
2. Will you receive grace, and reject all pride?
3. Will you submit to God?
4. Will you resist the devil?
5. Will you put away from you everything sinful?
6. Will you take practical steps to draw near to him?
 1. Prioritizing corporate worship services
 2. Singing songs of praise
 3. Making time for private prayer
 4. Meditating on and memorizing Scripture
 5. Obeying Jesus' commands
 6. Abiding in His word

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe God wants his children to draw near to him? Why or why not?
2. In what ways might God's dealing with Israel help answer this question?
3. What does James (4:4-8) explain is necessary for drawing near to God? Which of these is the easiest for you? Which is the hardest?
4. Among the practical ways mentioned as means of drawing near to God, with which three do you most deeply resonate?
5. Describe a time in your life when you felt nearest to God. What was happening in your life? What spiritual disciplines were you practicing?
6. Think back over 2025. What is one thing that has kept you from drawing near to God?
7. Look forward to 2026. What is one thing you want to do to draw nearer to the Lord?