

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Drawing Near to God

by Dan Trygg

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:7,8

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” Hebrews 4:16

“...we might draw near with honest heart, in full assurance of faith, the hearts having been [blood] sprinkled from a spoiled conscience and the body having been washed in pure water ...” Hebrews 10:22

“Therefore He is able also to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:25

Many of us have been tossing about James 4:7,8 in our discussions and words of encouragement to each other. I know, as I have talked about this passage with others, it has mostly been in the context of spiritual warfare. I have emphasized how we need to *first* draw near to God, *then* we will be in a safe, secure and strong place from which to resist the devil and his minions. The question then comes up, or *should* come up, “How *can* someone draw near to God?” On what basis can I approach God, and how should I come near? What should my attitude be? What should my purpose in coming to Him be? What can I do to keep myself in conscious contact with God?

First of all, it is important to remember Who it is we hope to approach. This is none other than the Living God, the Creator of the Universe, the One “who alone possesses immortality and who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). He is the Holy One, high and lifted up, ...the Consuming Fire (Isa. 6:1-4; Heb. 12:29). It was not by accident that God appeared to Moses in a blazing fire from a burning bush, ...or that He instructed him to take off his sandals, for even the ground *near* where *He* was had become holy ground, ...or that God warned him to not come too close, ...or that Moses recorded that he “hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Ex. 3:1-6). It is not surprising that Isaiah wrote, “Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless. ‘Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?’” (Isa. 33:14). When Isaiah himself saw a vision of God’s glory, his reaction was, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). **It is so important that we clearly understand who God is. If we think he is Father Christmas, we are not going to come with the kind of reverence, humility and respect that He deserves and demands.** He is *not* Santa Claus; He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the One whose spoken voice terrified the Israelites, when He spoke with them from Mount Sinai (Ex. 19,20). **He is *not* to be taken lightly, or trifled with. He is to be honored, revered and respected.**

Secondly, we were created for God, to glorify Him (Isa. 43:7). The Bible tells us that all things were created through Him and for Him (Col. 1:16; Rom. 11:35). **The very purpose of our existence is to bring Him honor. A key element of that created existence was intimate fellowship with God.** In the garden of Eden, before the fall, God would personally walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Human beings are so significant to God that He would *personally* take time with them *each day!* Isn’t that amazing! Yet, that has always been and remains His desire. The story recorded in the scriptures is that God indeed calls us into relationship with Him, and that He cares for us immensely. He knows our very thoughts and is intimately acquainted with all our ways. **God intended for us to be in relationship with Him, to keep Him in our thoughts, and live life from Him as our Source.**

Thirdly, sin disrupted that divine order, and humans came to seek their *own* deification, instead of giving God His due place in their thoughts and lives. Paul described it this way: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Rom. 1:21-23). **As they did not see fit to acknowledge God, or keep Him in their thoughts, they became more selfish, and their lives came to be more and more divergent from God’s intent for humankind** (Rom. 1:28). In the book of Zephaniah, we read how the starting place of Jerusalem’s corruption and demise was because **“She did not heed the voice; she did not receive the correction. In the Lord, she did not trust; to her God she did not draw near”** (3:2). They became a people who “draw near with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, while their hearts are far from Me...” (Isa. 29:13). Religion had become an empty shell, ...a dead, external form with no living substance. These

people did not *want* to really know the truth. Paul says that “they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness”, and **the wrath of God was set against all irreverence and unrighteousness that arises from that disregard of the truth He reveals to them** (Rom. 1:18).

Fourth, God made a way for us to find redemption, hope and restoration in our relationship with Him.

(a.) **He came as a man**, to live among us and experience the weaknesses of living in a body of flesh, in a world beset with corruption and temptation. **He was tempted in all areas as we are, in ways that are similar to our own experiences, so that He is now able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses** (Heb. 2:17:18; 4:15,16). Even though He never actually gave in to these temptations, He understands *experientially* the kinds of things we go through, so that He has compassion on us. Consequently, **He encourages us to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace**, in order that we might take hold of compassion, and we might find grace to help us in time of need.

(b.) **He was appointed to be a better priest than the old Levitical priesthood, introduced a better hope, and became the guarantee of a better covenant than the OT Law, by offering Himself as a better sacrifice to completely remove sin, once for all** (Heb. 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23-28). We have been sanctified, or dedicated and set apart unto God, *once for all*, by the offering of the body of Christ Jesus on the cross for us (Heb. 10:10). This voluntary offering of Himself so completely dealt with all our sin that the scriptures declare, “For by *one* offering He has perfected *for all time* those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). **Jesus is God’s gift of grace. He provides the basis for our being able once again to draw near to God.** In summation of the complete salvation made available in Jesus, the writer of the Hebrews recounts what God has done, “...since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, but a new (lit., ‘freshly-killed’) and living way, ...and since we have a great priest..., let us draw near with honest heart, in full assurance of faith...” (Heb. 10:19-22). **The phrase, “let us draw near” is a powerful expression in Greek. The grammar indicates “the possibility is available to us, so let’s do it!”** Literally, it means, “we might draw near”, but the implication is “C’mon! Let’s go after God!” It’s like if you were someone who has waited outside the stage door to catch a glimpse of your favorite star, and the manager sends out a pass inviting you and your friends to come back stage for a personal visit. The pass says you “may” go back stage. Are you going to go? Yeah!! **God has made the way open, removed every barrier, and has extended the invitation to you. You might now draw near to Him. Are you going to do it?**

(c.) **He gave us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us as both a life source and communication link to God.** The Spirit reveals to us what Jesus has done for us, and helps us to practically apply it in our experience (Jn. 16:13-15; I Cor. 2:12). It is the Spirit who gives us life (Jn. 6:63; II Cor. 3:6). When we keep in step with His leading, and respond to His inner promptings, we experience freedom, and express the righteous character of God (Gal. 5). **He testifies within us that we are children of God, and calls us back into intimate relationship with God, our “Daddy”** (Rom. 8:15,16; Gal. 4:5-7).

Fifth, so how do I draw near to God? What does the word of God say? Here are some things we can do:

(a.) **“Submit therefore to God”** (Jas. 4:7). The word translated as “submit” literally means to “arrange yourself under”. In other words, come under God’s authority and purpose for your life. **Arrange your life so that He is first and foremost. This is such a simply stated proposition, but it really is a life changing orientation.** If you arrange everything under God’s will and purpose for you, the implications are *huge*. It means *thinking about* Him and His will. **It means learning more about Him, and purposefully looking to discover what He wants. It means attempting to communicate with Him in prayer and meditative listening.** Psalm 50:23 says, “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright, I will disclose the salvation of God.”

(b.) **“Cleanse your hands, and purify your hearts, you double-minded”** (Jas. 4:8). This means “putting off behaviors and attitudes that are displeasing to God”. **If you want to draw near to God, you need to stop doing things that are repulsive to Him.** It is amazing the lengths people will go to in order to be attractive to other *people*! Isn’t a real, personal relationship with the King of the Universe worth putting aside some selfish, sinful behaviors and attitudes? That really *is* the question, isn’t it? A **“double-minded” person is pulled in two directions. You need to decide what you really want, and pursue that. God will only share Himself with those who put Him first.** Now, it is important to emphasize this is not some kind of “works righteousness”, where you try to clean up your act in order for God to forgive you. NO! We are saved and made clean by God’s grace provided through Jesus. No, this is not about salvation, this is about developing intimacy with God. *If you want to get close with God, make that your focus, and He will help you put aside those things that get in the way of closeness with Him.*

(c.) **“Oppose the devil”** (Jas. 4:7). One of the ways to open communication with God is when we get involved in Kingdom business. **When we respond to God’s call to action, He makes His resources available to us.** We also “clear the decks” pretty quickly. Things we were struggling to put aside are quickly jettisoned. Spiritual warfare, or actively serving Christ, clarifies our perspective, and motivates change. When we draw near to God, He will respond.