

Series: Tools of Faith
Title: Draw Near to God
Text: James 4:7, 8
Key Word: Principles
Proposition: Everyone can draw near to God by applying these biblical principles.

Good Morning everyone. We're delighted that you have chosen to worship God with us today. I invite you to take out your sermon-handout. This tool can be helpful to write down any thoughts or insights that you may want to remember.

As you can see, we're in the midst of a series entitled, "Tools of Faith." We're exploring a short letter penned by James, a half-brother of Jesus. He also led the church in Jerusalem. James teaches us some tools of vital faith.

On May 31st, we took out our third tool to help us build a vital, healthy faith. We learned that a pair of pliers can remind us to hold onto God, tighten our grip on Him for He never deceives us. He gives all that is good. He never changes. And God always gives birth to life.

Vise....They come in all different sizes and shapes. It is usually a mechanical screw apparatus used for holding or clamping something so that work can be performed on it. Vises usually have one fixed jaw and another, parallel, jaw which is moved towards or away from the fixed jaw by the screw. It draws two things together so that a firm hold can be maintained.

Friends, I invite you today to allow life to be a vise, drawing yourself closer to God's heart in prayer. I would love to see us make prayer more of a priority in our life. I would love to see us draw near to God for the people in this community and for our

efforts in drawing others closer to Jesus Christ. Before we seek creative ways to introduce people to the Living Christ, before we develop their relationship with Christ, we need to draw near to God ourselves in prayer. We need seek His loving and holy presence so that our hearts would blaze with the fire of His love radiating onto others. As Paul asked the Colossian Christians to pray for him, I am asking you to pray for this church.

So, the question is: How are we to pray? I believe that our brother James offers us a few key principles of prayer. In order for this church to be the church God wants us to be, we need to apply these principles of prayer.

First, Submit to God. vs 7a James wrote, *“Submit yourselves, then to God...come near to God, and He will come near to you.”* God promises, *“If anyone seeks Me with all his heart, I will be found by him.”* Jeremiah 29:13-14

Submit means to yield or surrender oneself to the will or authority of another. It means to ask others for a decision. It means to be obedient to another. The main condition of successful prayer is seeking God's plans rather than our own. In order for God to work in and on our lives, in and on our church, in and on our community, we must allow ourselves to be a people of prayer.

Bill Wilson, one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, wrote a note to the great psychiatrist, Carl Jung. He said, “You have no idea the important role you played in the forging of the famous 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. You were treating a

man named Roland H., and you said, 'Roland, you're a hopeless alcoholic, there's nothing more I can do for you except take your money, and I don't want to do that.'

"Roland asked you, 'Is there anything I can do?' and you said, 'Yes, there is something you can do. Have a religious conversion. Have a religious experience.' (And Roland H. did have a religious experience, and he became sober. He's a recovering alcoholic.)

"At the same time, continued Wilson, "my doctor told me I was a hopeless alcoholic. And I said, 'Isn't there something I can do?'

Wilson had been reading William James's *A Variety of Religious Experience*, and he noticed at the bottom of every religious experience was that turning your life over to God, that surrender to God. So he went home, and I said, 'God, I don't know if I even believe in you. But if you're there, if you're there, God, will you help me please?' In that moment he knew he was healed. In that moment he knew that the addiction was broken, that he was a free man. Submit yourself to God and He will transform your life, family, our church and community.

Next, Scorn the devil. James said, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" (Vs 7b) Scorn means to express extreme, indignant, contempt...(to look down at someone as being mean, low, unworthy; show disrespect toward authority or perceived authority. It means to refuse or reject as wrong. Our primary interaction with the Devil is very simple: RESIST! Don't hang out with him. Don't converse with him. Don't try to out-smart him. Just RESIST. This verse promises that IF we resist, the devil WILL

leave us alone (at least temporarily). Part of drawing near to God is learning how to “Just say ‘No!’”

Although God and Satan are at war, we don’t have to wait until the end to see who will win. God has already defeated Satan. (Colossians 2:13-15; Revelation 12:10-12) and when Christ returns Satan and all his allies will be eliminated forever. Satan is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit’s power, we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. Scorn the devil. Don’t allow Satan to entice or lure you away from God.

The enemy is tricky; **he is like a lion** lurking in the shadows ready to pounce upon its prey. In the United States, mountain lions are the animal regarded as the number one human predator. **Author and naturalist Craig Childs** was on foot doing research on the lions in the Arizona Wilderness. As he approaches a water hole from downwind, he spots a mountain lion drinking water. The lion does not notice his presence. When it finishes drinking, it walks slowly away into a cluster of junipers.

After a few minutes, Childs walks to the water hole to identify tracks in the mud and record notes. Just before he bends down to look closer, he scans the perimeter, and there among the shadows of the junipers, 30 feet away, he sees a pair of eyes. He expects the lion to run away, but it walks into the sunlight toward him. Childs pulls his knife and stares into the eyes of the lion. **He knows what he must do. More importantly, he knows what he must not do.** He writes: Mountain lions are known to take down animals six, seven, and eight times their size. Their method: attack from

behind, clamp onto the spine at the base of the prey's skull, and snap the spine.

Mountain lions have stalked people for miles. He holds firm to his ground and refuses to back off. If he runs, the mountain lion will be all over him. If he gives it his back, he will only briefly feel its weight while the canine teeth open my vertebrae and pierce the spinal cord.

The mountain lion begins to move to his left, and he turns, keeping his face on it, his knife at his right side. It paces to his right, trying to get around on his other side, to get behind him. He turns right, staring at it...his stare is about the only defense he has.

Childs maintains this defense as the mountain lion continues to try to provoke him to run, turning left, then right, back and forth again and again, now just ten feet away. Finally, the standoff ends. The lion turns and walks away—defeated by a man who knew what never to do in its presence.

Someone said, "Satan is allergic to praise, so that wherever there is massive, triumphant praise, he is paralyzed, bound, and banished." Paul and Silas won the victory by singing in the depth of the Philippian prison and were freed by an earthquake. Jonah worshiped God in the belly of the great fish and was spewed up onto the shore. Worship brings victory! Praise banishes the evil one. Joyous thanksgiving stares down the Enemy. Joyous prayer scorns the devil.

Finally, secure a forgiven life. James wrote, "*Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts.*" (vs 8) The word secure means to make firm, obtain, to get hold of. If we want to draw near to God, we must obtain a forgiven life. Forgiveness is a

key to intimacy with God. It's not that we will never sin. All of us sin from time to time. But when we sin, we must agree with God that our Sin is ugly. We need to turn away from that sin (this is what Repentance means --- we change our minds to agree with God.) Cleansing filthy hands and purifying tainted hearts is how we show we are serious about DRAWING NEAR to God.

Cleanse means to make clean or free from dirt. Purify means to rid of foreign or objectionable elements. When someone you care about is coming to visit, don't you clean up your house? You make the beds; you de-clutter the rooms; you mow the yard. If you're about to see someone important, don't you take a shower, put on clean clothes, brush your teeth, gargle, and then check out your appearance in the mirror before you see them? Let me ask, Is God important to you? Then clean up, spiff up, and get ready for interaction with God.

Imagine for a moment a husband comes home from work one day. As he was going in the house he happens to notice a light on in the bedroom next door. Through the window he sees his wife in the arms of the neighbor. Later she came home and says nothing about the affair with the neighbor. Now the husband already knows she sinned against their marriage vows, and she already knows it too. But is there a real chance for a trusting, open relationship between the two in the future, unless she confesses to the husband that which they both already know?

It seems to me that our relationship with God is like that. When we have unconfessed sin in our lives, which both God and us already know, it damages the

intimacy, the trust in our relationship. Just like in our relationships with others, the rules and energy governing love and trust, apathy and care, failure, confession and forgiveness have a profound and compelling affect upon the quality of our relationships. It's in coming clean that we become clean indeed. Confession secures forgiveness.

Submitting ourselves to God, scorning the devil, and securing forgiveness draws us near to the heart of God. 1816