

The Importance of Drawing Near

- Ron Stullenbarger -

James 4:8 contains a profound promise of God. It says, *"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."* The first time I read this I thought this verse seemed backwards. Doesn't God do the drawing? Isn't God the one who's constantly pursuing us?

After diving deeper into the meaning of James 4:8 I discovered an important truth that's foundational to living in communion with God: the door of God's heart is always open to us. His love is always for us. His presence is always available. The Father turned away from Jesus as our sins rested squarely on His shoulders ensuring He would never have to turn away from us.

To draw near to God is to simply open our hearts to what was always available. It's not that God ever withholds His presence from us. It's that He never forces us to abide in Him. If we want to go our own way, He willingly and patiently waits for us. And the moment that we turn our hearts back to Him, He is there to fill us with a revelation of His loving nearness and unwavering devotion.

In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer describes two veils. The first veil was the veil between the Holy of Holies and the world that was torn at the death of Jesus, signifying the availability of God's manifest presence to all. The second veil is the veil of our own hearts that is our decision to tear by God's grace.

Whether it's the effects of sin and shame or a lack of understanding that is available to us in Christ, all of us have the ability to veil places in our hearts. All of us can shield our beliefs about our identity, our possessions, or our relationships from the abiding presence of Jesus and live apart from communion with Him. We all have the ability at any given moment to go our own way and miss out on abundant life.

But the truth is that the Christian life isn't about our ability to abide in God perfectly, but about God's grace to draw near to us in response to repentance. God has no expectation that we would live this life perfectly. He remembers our frame and knows we are dust (Psalm 103:14). What He desires from us is to allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate any parts of our lives that aren't His, that we would be quick to repent and enjoy His grace-filled presence once again. God is not angry with you for veiling your heart. He knows better than you do the reasons you aren't letting Him fully in. His heart is filled with compassion for you that you might live to experience His grace rather than strive and condemn yourself for your imperfection.

Take time to tear the veil of your own heart, draw near to God, and experience the glory of His manifest presence.