

Read also Genesis 6:5-10. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

When you heard the story of Noah, did you hear God's heart?

"The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. (He saw violence everywhere, everyone corrupt to the core.) So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. *It broke his heart*" (Genesis 6:5-6, 11).

So he decided to wipe them off of the face of the earth.

It was a tough, terrible day. His poor creation was ruined. God had thought it was so good, but he saw nothing but human evil out of control.

Except that Noah was different.

"God liked what he saw in Noah. . . . Noah was a good man, a man of integrity, Noah walked with God" (Gen 6:8-9 *The Message*).

I hope that God sees us as seeking Him, just like Noah.

We know no one seeks God ALL the time; we are not naïve. We all have our ups and downs. So how are we to stay on the upswing? Well . . .

You hear a sermon.

James is about to preach you a sermon. He is going to address the issue. So hear his sermon.
READ James 4:1-10

James says, hey, we've got some problems. We need to turn around here. We must stop doing one thing and start doing something else. We need to change. That's why it's a sermon.

Sermons always call you to turn to God once again, because we tend to fall away. John Calvin called it "human depravity." I went on the internet and searched for "human depravity" and found a nice website called "Reformation Heritage Books." The first book that was advertised was *The Doctrine of Human Depravity*. It was on sale. I looked further and found a number of books. All of them were on sale.

Human depravity is evidently not a top seller.

It's easy to deny that there's a battle within; that we struggle with conflicting desires; or believe that we can't do anything about it, we just have to give in—perhaps that's the conclusion of James' congregation. They were quarreling. They were praying for all the wrong things. They were doing stuff that James said they should be crying tears over.

I can remember getting in a fight with my brother when I was young. He would tell on me, my mother would confront me with words like, “wipe that smile off your face, young lady!” James said to his church—it’s time to wipe the smile off. You should be ashamed.

The quarreling had gotten really bad. Scheming and jealousy abounded. Vicious intentions were aroused. James told them *the problem starts within you*. He said *you are born with this worldly spirit that's the source*. It's human nature.

What do you think? Can you overcome all those icky intents like evil desires, anger, and even murder?

There's a struggle going on inside us, James says. There are these seductive voices that draw us away from our faith.

The Bible from start to finish says those things will make you double minded.

What do you think? Is this a struggle that we cannot overcome?

James names the struggle “adultery.” He's not talking about an actual affair. The word means “unfaithful people.” He uses that word because we believers are to think of ourselves as married to God. We are God's beloved.

Listen to Isaiah:

“For your Creator will be your husband; . . . He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth. For the LORD has called you back from your grief -- as though you were a young wife abandoned by her husband.” (54:5-6).

Listen to Jeremiah:

This is what the LORD says: “I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness. In those days Israel was holy to the LORD, the first of his children. All who harmed his people were declared guilty, and disaster fell on them.” . . . “What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves” (2:2-3, 5).

This describes the struggle. It went on in Noah's day, it went on in Isaiah and Jeremiah's day, it went on in James' day, and it continues in our day. Our culture wants to be divorced from God.

We have this spirit within us which pulls us toward the things of the world and beckons us to divorce God's authority. But there's good news—God has put his spirit within us and it counters the worldly pull. James says,

“God gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires” (v.6).

So we are not depraved once the Spirit of God enters us; we have great hope to overcome the struggle.

James says our hope is—repentance.

Repentance means stop doing one thing and start doing something else. It is both negative and positive. We must let go of something negative in order to grasp something better. That something better is *friendship with God*.

He's very clear on the negative that we must let go of—the greed, the jealousy, the anger, the unfaithfulness, in order to be a “friend of God.”

James says:

1. Submit yourself to God.
2. Resist the devil.
3. Come close to God.
4. Wash your hands.
5. Purify your heart.
6. Humble yourself before God.

We cannot do all these things and then waffle in public. Noah's culture was full of evil, jealousy, ill intent, and violence. Noah was quite different. He did not waffle. He did not give in to the culture. He was concerned with obeying God.

So we stand strong by submitting our opinions to God, hard as it might be. God is quite clear about the necessity of loyalty to Him.

Are you studying the Bible so you are aware of God's opinions? We learn those values in two excellent Sunday school classes. We learn those values on Wednesday nights in Conversation with God, in the Spanish Bible study, in youth group, and in choir. Studying together strengthens us.

We stand strong by resisting the devil.

James gives us this great promise: we can successfully resist the devil.

How do you recognize the devil? If you hear a condemning voice, or a voice that whispers you are worthless, or a failure, or says you can't overcome something, it is the devil, for God builds you up. Tell the condemning, negative voice to sit down and be quiet. If it tells you you need to meet your needs outside of God and His ways, tell the voice to vamoose. Martin Luther used to silence the devil by singing hymns because he said the devil hates music.

We stand strong by drawing close to God.

When you draw close to God, He will immediately and graciously draw close to you. Freely call on Him. Say things like, “I want to understand your ways. What do you mean by this Scripture? Help me to see what I should do in this situation. The Bible is full of people who sought God and God drew near to them. We can all experience God's presence.”

We stand strong by purifying our hands and hearts, for God is a holy God.

Bottom line is to be friends with God we need radical willingness to seek Him at a time when God's ways are not popular. We need radical commitment to follow His ways when our culture finds Him distasteful. This is the way we humble ourselves before God. When you give yourself to God, you receive the greater gift. His powerful presence. That will make you strong.

AMEN