

Intimacy with Christ Through Deeper Abiding – Part 1

Drawing Near: The Path to Deeper Fellowship

1. Brief recap from last meetings. Last meeting we talked about:

- The crucial difference between flesh-powered obedience vs. Spirit-led obedience.
 - Flesh-powered rule-keeping vs. a Spirit-led life rooted in surrender and our new identity in Christ which leads to abiding in the True Vine.
 - If by the flesh = religion / if by the Spirit = relationship
- Learning to live the new life through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.
- Putting **Rom. 8:13** and **Col. 3:5** together. My paraphrase: "*But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you, you will live.*" This is how we obey **Col. 3:5**'s directive of "put to death", not by gritting our teeth in self-effort, but by relying on the Spirit's power to mortify sin and experience true life in Christ.
- How this requires yielding to the Holy Spirit for help which leads to deeper abiding.
- How the virtues we're called to add to our faith in **2 Pet. 1:5-7** align closely with the fruit of the Spirit in **Gal. 5:22-23**. Note: The fruit that the Holy Spirit produces.
- This abiding that is mentioned in **Jn. 15:1-17** has an outflow of all the characteristics that are mentioned in **2 Pet. 1:5-7** and in **Gal. 5:22-23**.
- The difference between trying in our own flesh and failing vs. yielding and letting the Holy Spirit produce fruit and guide our intentionality through faith.

2. Intimacy with Christ is the fruit of intentional abiding.

- a) I want to start with reading **Jas. 4:7-10 (NLT, NKJV, AMPC)**. This is a power-packed passage of 4 verses! I want to break down each verse, but I want to start with **v. 8**. "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*"
 - I want to ask an honest question: How do we reconcile this concept of "*if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us*" with all the scriptures in the New Testament that talk about how **believers are in union with Christ** and how **Christ is in the believer**? You can't get much "nearer" than that. This question is what led me to this study.
 - **Answer:** James is speaking of deeper experiential intimacy through humility → surrender → cleansing and repentance, all of which require intentional steps on our part.
- b) **Jas. 4:8** is a call to repentant action: (*There is a lot to unpack in this one verse!*)
 - "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" → intentional pursuit of God's presence through humility and repentance, met by His gracious response.
 - "Cleanse your hands" → outward behavior.
 - "Purify your hearts" → inward motives.
 - "You double-minded" → stop trying to love both God and the world. (**Hinders abiding!**)
- c) In Christ, you are "seated in the heavenly places" (**Eph.2:6**). However, **Jas. 4:7-10** addresses the experience of that reality—moving from having Christ "in" you to actually "abiding" in Him.

3. The Distinction: Union vs. Communion

- a) To understand how we "draw near" to someone already living inside us, we have to look at the difference between Union and Communion.
 - **Union (Position):** When you believed, you were joined to Christ. You are "in Him." This is a fixed, legal reality. You cannot get "closer" to God in terms of your acceptance; you are already 100% accepted in the Beloved and are in union with Him.
 - **Communion (Abiding):** This is the relational intimacy. Just as two people can live in the same house but be "miles apart" emotionally because of an argument, sin creates a "relational distance" even while our "legal union" remains intact.
- b) One thing that is at the root of **Jas. 4:7-10** is true humility and true repentance.

Jas. 4:7-10 is often regarded as one of the most concentrated "how-to" guides for repentance in the New Testament. It moves beyond a mere feeling of guilt and provides a tactical roadmap for turning back to God. (Full context: **Jas. 4:1-6** – what to repent from?)
- c) In **Jas. 4:7-10**, James outlines this roadmap to repentance: a process that involves the mind, the will, and the emotions:
 - **Submission and Resistance (v. 7):** Repentance starts with a change in allegiance. You cannot "resist the devil" until you have first "submitted to God." It is a dual-action move: submissively pivoting toward the Creator while actively pushing away the tempter. "Submit" (hypotasso) is a military term meaning to "rank under." Repentance isn't just saying "I'm sorry"; it's a voluntary realignment of your life under God's authority.
 - **Drawing Near (v. 8a):** This is the heart of repentance - a deliberate relational pursuit. While sin creates a functional distance between the believer and God, repentance acts as the decisive doorway that closes the gap. If repentance is the turn that brings us through the door, humility is the ongoing hallway that leads to deeper abiding; it is the posture that maintains the intimacy of our union with Christ that already exists."
 - Regarding "*Draw near to God*," A Precept Austin commentary puts it this way: "*this is a conditional promise. God is always present, but the experience of His presence is reserved for those who actively seek Him. It's a "reciprocal movement": as we take the step, He meets us there.*"
 - **External and Internal Cleansing (v. 8b):** "*Wash your hands*" refers to outward actions (conduct), while "*purify your hearts*" refers to inward motives (sanctification). James addresses the "*double-minded*" person who tries to love both the world and God.
 - **Grief Over Sin (v. 9):** This is the emotional weight of repentance. James uses strong language—"be wretched," "mourn," and "weep"—to describe godly sorrow. It's the opposite of a "*cheap grace*" mentality; it recognizes the gravity of offending a holy God.
 - **The Goal: Humility (v. 10):** The process ends where it began: low at the feet of God. The promise is that when we humble ourselves, He is the one who does the lifting.
- d) While every true believer is already positionally united to Christ and indwelt by His Spirit (permanent union), experiencing deeper intimacy, fellowship, and the felt nearness of God remains a daily choice we make in response to His grace. **This is abiding!**

- Think of it this way: God never moves away from us, but the more we intentionally draw near to Him, the more deeply and intimately we experience His nearness.

e) In recent meetings we have seen that deeper abiding requires intentional cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Scripture calls us to active responses such as:

- put to death the deeds of the body (**Col. 3:5; Rom. 8:13**),
- put off the old self and put on the new (**Col. 3:9–10; Eph. 4:22–24**),
- have nothing to do with sinful desires (**Col. 3:5**),
- flee immorality (**1 Cor. 6:18**),
- add to our faith the virtues listed in **2 Peter 1:5–7**,
- make every effort to grow in Christlikeness (**2 Pet. 1:5**),
- clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness & patience (**Col. 3:12**).

f) All these imperatives are fulfilled not through fleshly self-effort or rule-keeping which lead to failure and frustration, but through a Spirit-led life rooted in surrender, repentance, humility, and dependence on Christ—the True Vine (**Jn. 15**). **This is all empowered by the Holy Spirit as we yield to Him daily.**

g) This intentionality is not legalism; it is the natural outflow of abiding. When we choose to draw near to God in repentance, humility, and faith which lead to abiding and deeper nearness to God, He promises to draw near to us (**Jas. 4:8**). Though Christ is always objectively near—living in us by His Spirit—we can still experience relational distance when we allow sin, busyness, or self-reliance to hinder fellowship. Choosing to abide daily restores and deepens the believer’s nearness to God.

Homework

Jas. 4 is a practical, confrontational chapter addressing the root causes of conflict, worldliness, and pride among believers, while calling them to humility, repentance, and dependence on God. It flows in four main sections, building to a climax of grace-enabled response:

Read through the entire chapter of Jas. 4 and note the following breakdown of this chapter:

- The Source of Conflicts and Wrong Desires (vv. 1–3) ← *Important for full context.*
- Warning Against Worldliness and Pride (vv. 4–6) ← *Important for full context.*
- The Call to Humble Submission and Repentance (vv. 7–10) ← *Focus of this study.*
- Applications: Judging Others and Presuming on the Future (vv. 11–17) ← *A warning!*

Recommended book:

[Union and Communion: A Devotional Study of How the Song of Solomon Reveals a Believer's Union with Jesus Christ](#) by J. Hudson Taylor (originally published in 1893)

↓----below study material for outside of the group meeting----↓

For deeper study:

My question on reconciling the following:

James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” At first glance, this seems to sit in tension with the New Testament’s teaching on the believer’s union with Christ—that Christ already dwells in us, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are inseparably joined to the Triune God. After all, how could we get any nearer than that?

I believe the resolution lies in the distinction between our unchanging position in Christ and the varying degree of our experiential fellowship with him. Through abiding, we can cultivate a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ. Even though He never leaves us, we can feel distant when we allow ourselves to be lured away by the things of the world. In that sense, we remain in union with him, yet we are not walking closely with him.

The command to “draw near,” therefore, calls for intentionality on our part. Scripture assures us that God is always near to his people, but whether we enjoy the sweetness of his presence often depends on whether we earnestly seek to draw near to him.

Help me reconcile James 4:7–10—particularly verse 8, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you”—with the New Testament teachings on the believer’s unchanging position in Christ: we are united with him, he dwells in us, and we are already seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Jas. 4:8 has the appearance the God will draw near to us only if we draw near to Him, but that is in tension with the believer’s union with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is already in place through faith in Christ.

Note/Disclaimer: Below are (2) A.I. responses to my challenging question and is pulling from the entire text of the Bible in these versions AMP, AMPC, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASB and NIV, as well as many commentaries, it is always wise to dig into the Word of God yourself and read the scriptures in full context while allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you as you dive in. Ask this same question yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth as you dig into the word for the answers. Use the question above and answer below for deeper study and a starting point for your own study.

James 4:7–10 (especially v. 8: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you”) is **not** teaching that God is distant from true believers or that we must somehow re-establish a broken union. Instead, it’s calling us to **experiential or relational** nearness—deeper intimacy, fellowship, and practical abiding—while our **positional** nearness (permanent union with Christ) remains unchanging and unbreakable.

Here’s how to reconcile this with the New Testament’s overwhelming emphasis on the believer’s union with Christ (e.g., Christ in us, we in Him, sealed by the Spirit):

1. Positional Nearness/Unbreakable Union (Already True at Salvation)

At the moment of genuine faith, every believer is:

- Permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19).
- United to Christ in an inseparable, eternal way (“in Christ” — over 80 times in Paul’s letters).
- Sealed as God’s possession until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30).

Key verses that emphasize this objective, irreversible closeness:

- John 14:20 — “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”
- Colossians 3:3 — “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- Romans 8:38–39 — Nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Hebrews 13:5 — “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

You cannot get objectively “nearer” than this. Christ is **in** you, and you are **in** Him—permanently. The Holy Spirit’s indwelling is the guarantee and proof of this union.

2. Experiential/Relational Nearness (Ongoing Choice for Intimacy)

Even though Christ is always positionally near (and we are filled with His Spirit), we can **feel** and **experience** distance because of:

- Unconfessed sin.
- Worldly entanglements.
- Self-reliance or pride.
- Grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

This is where James 4:7–10 comes in. James is writing to believers who are drifting—fighting, coveting, friendship with the world (vv. 1–4). He calls them to **intentional repentance and surrender** so they can experience the sweetness of God’s presence again.

The flow in James 4:7–10:

- **Submit** to God → resist the devil (v. 7).
- **Draw near** to God → He will draw near to you (v. 8).
- **Cleanse** hands, **purify** hearts (v. 8).
- **Be wretched, mourn, weep** (godly sorrow, v. 9).

- **Humble** yourselves → He will exalt you (v. 10).

This “drawing near” is **our initiative in response to grace**—through repentance, humility, and returning to dependence on Him. When we do, God responds by lifting us into fresh experiential closeness: renewed joy, peace, answered prayer, and deeper communion.

3. This Matches the Abiding Distinction in John 15 and Your Study Notes

Your Meeting 38 notes already nailed this exact tension in the “Double bonus deeper study on Abiding” (pages 8–10):

- **Positional abiding** = permanent union (1 John 4:13; sealed by the Spirit).
- **Experiential/practical abiding** = daily choice to remain in vital fellowship (John 15:4–7).

James 4:8 is the experiential side. We are already grafted into the Vine positionally, but we must **choose to abide** (draw near) daily so His life flows freely—producing fruit, joy, and intimacy. If we drift into worldliness, we wither experientially (dryness, unanswered prayer, lack of fruit), even though we remain in the Vine positionally.

4. Practical Summary

- God is **always near** to the believer objectively (union).
- We can **feel far** when we allow sin or the world to hinder fellowship.
- “Draw near” is our intentional response: repent, submit, humble ourselves, seek Him in His Word and prayer.
- God’s promise: when we take that step, **He draws near** in fresh, tangible ways—restoring joy, power, and intimacy.

It comes down to do we want to be near to Him. He never moves away from us positionally, but He invites us to move toward Him relationally. That desire itself is evidence of the Spirit’s work in you.

This truth gives both **great security** (He’ll never leave) and **great motivation** (why would I settle for distance when deeper fellowship is offered?). Keep pressing in—He delights to draw near to hearts that seek Him.

Here is another response from a more refined question:

Your question is excellent and gets to the heart of a classic theological tension that many believers wrestle with: How can James 4:8 command us to “draw near to God” (with the promise that He will then draw near to us) when the New Testament repeatedly teaches that believers are already permanently united to Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6)?

The short answer is that Scripture distinguishes between two realities that are both true at the same time:

1. **Positional (or judicial) nearness** – This is unchanging, irreversible, and based entirely on Christ’s finished work.
2. **Experiential (or relational/fellowship) nearness** – This can vary according to our daily walk, obedience, and humility.

Positional Nearness: Already and Forever True

Through faith in Christ, every believer is:

- Permanently united to Christ (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 6:17; Gal 2:20 – “Christ lives in me”).
- Indwelt by the Holy Spirit as a seal and guarantee (Eph 1:13–14; 4:30; 1 Cor 6:19).
- Seated with Christ in the heavenly places right now (Eph 2:6; Col 3:1–3).
- Accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6) and brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).

Nothing can separate us from God’s love or presence in this sense (Rom 8:38–39). Christ has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5; cf. Matt 28:20). This nearness is not conditional; it is a done deal the moment we are justified.

Experiential Nearness: Can Fluctuate

James 4 is written to believers who are in danger of spiritual drift. The context (James 4:1–10) is about quarrels, worldly desires, friendship with the world (which is enmity with God, v. 4), pride, and double-mindedness. These attitudes create a felt distance from God even though He has not moved.

When we harbor unconfessed sin, pride, or worldly affections, we grieve and quench the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). We do not lose the Spirit’s indwelling, but we can lose the joyful sense of His presence and power. Scripture often describes this as God “hiding His face” (Isa 59:2; Ps 66:18) or believers being “far from God” in their hearts (cf. Mark 7:6).

James 4:8 is therefore a call to repentant action:

- “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” → intentional pursuit of God’s presence through humility and repentance, met by His gracious response
- “Cleanse your hands” → outward behavior
- “Purify your hearts” → inward motives
- “You double-minded” → stop trying to love both God and the world

The command to “draw near” is an invitation to return to close communion through humility and repentance. God’s promise that He will draw near is not a threat that He will abandon us if we fail, but a gracious assurance that when we turn back to Him in sincerity, He eagerly meets us with fresh experiences of His presence, forgiveness, and grace (cf. 1 John 1:9).

Helpful Illustrations from Scripture

- **Marriage analogy:** A husband and wife are legally and covenantally one flesh. Nothing can undo the marriage union. Yet if one spouse is cold, distant, or unfaithful in daily affection, the felt intimacy suffers. Reconciliation requires intentional drawing near—apology, repentance, renewed affection—even though the union itself remains intact.
- **Father-child relationship:** A child is always the father’s child by birth. The legal relationship never changes. But if the child is rebellious or distant, the daily enjoyment of the father’s love and presence is hindered until the child returns in humility (Luke 15:11–32 – the prodigal son).

Summary

James 4:8 is not teaching that God’s presence in the believer is conditional or that we must earn nearness. Rather, it is a pastoral call to believers who have allowed sin and worldliness to cloud their enjoyment of the nearness they already possess positionally. God is always near in union; He draws experientially near in fresh ways when we humbly seek Him.

Your own phrasing of the distinction—“unchanging position in Christ” versus “varying degree of our experiential fellowship with him”—is spot-on and reflects the classic Reformed/evangelical understanding of this issue. You’re not alone in this reconciliation; it’s the same resolution offered by teachers across centuries (e.g., John Owen in *Communion with God*, Andrew Murray in *Abide in Christ*, and many contemporary pastors).