

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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Submit Yourselves, Therefore, to God

James 4:5-7

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you, we praise you for your goodness, we praise you for the gift that you are, and this morning, Lord, at this part of the service where our worship consists of opening up your book, we pray that your Holy Spirit would accompany us in that, we pray that we would have the gift of your Holy Spirit opening up our eyes, particularly since there's some parts of this scripture that are difficult, and I pray that you would give us your grace, your wisdom, your insight and your ability and that your word might again become a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, our text this morning really, it's a difficult one. It's James 4:5-7, which says: *Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives more grace. That is why scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Let me explain first what I mean. This is a difficult text. Again, I'm talking about the first part, *do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us*, this is a difficult text primary because it's extremely ambiguous. Grammatically and content wise, James has produced one of the most difficult to translate passages in the entire Bible. I looked at eight different commentaries trying to arrive at a consensus, and they were almost evenly divided. They're divided because there's questions that linger about this particular passage. Does the word for "spirit" in this text, does that refer to the Holy Spirit of God or does it refer to the fallen spirit of man? Well, the fact is we can't tell. And if James is referring to the Holy Spirit, then he is speaking about the Spirit of God jealously protecting his Holy Spirit within us. And then verse 5 says *he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us*. However, if James is referring instead to our fallen human spirit that God has allowed to dwell in us since the fall, then he is speaking about our human tendency towards jealousy, towards envy, and the grace that he sends to us to help us to deal with that. You see, the Greek text has no punctuation and so it leaves the question very open. But however, the context seems to point towards the words that James chooses, they seem also to point towards a simple understanding of the text is saying, *Or do you*

think scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? Or as one commentary paraphrased it: Humans tend toward envy, but God gives grace, and that seems to flow with the next verse, verse 6, it says: But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

If you recall, James has just taken us down this road where pride and selfish ambition and worldliness has produced fighting and quarreling and passions that war within. We've been looking at James 4:1-4 which says: *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Well, those are the symptoms of the disease that James has uncovered in his congregation. Now he is going to suggest to us a cure. He says: *But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

That's a biblical principle. Let me give you a classic example of that principle in action. This is Luke 18:9-14. You'll be familiar with this, it says: *He (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Now, speaking of the tax collector, Jesus says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other." You know, if I were to rephrase that statement into a question, it would be this: Which man went down to his house thinking, thinking that he was justified? Which man's blindness in this situation convinced him that he was okay, that he was the one who was justified? I think we all know what the answer to that question would be. You see, there's something unique about the sin of pride. It not only cripples you, but it cripples you in such a way that you don't realize that you have been crippled. It is also

the reason why God's opposing the proud and giving favor to the humble is so easy to miss. We just have an incredibly difficult time casting ourselves into the role of the proud; and until we are willing to, we will never seek a cure to a disease that we don't think we have.

You know, I remember a conversation I had years ago, and this is when I ran a cabinet shop, you know, and I was speaking with an employee of mine and I'd always worked very hard to present a good Christian witness to anyone who had ever worked for me, and this guy was a very intelligent but a very bitter unbeliever. And in the course of our conversation, he made this observation, he said, "Surely you know that you have a gigantic ego." Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather. Me? I mean, I'm the good Christian business man, I'm the Sunday school teacher, are you suggesting that I have a gigantic ego? Moi? I mean, obviously this guy was hopelessly misinformed. He had no idea the extent of my humility. What he was making painfully obvious to me was that neither did I. You see, pride is a sin and an attitude that hides in clear sight. After all, it doesn't need to hide if those whose sin it is are already blind. You see, we look at the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and we see in the Pharisee what seems to be this over-the-top ego. I mean, how could someone look around in the very temple itself and say how much better he is than

all the rest? How could he just stand there and catalog all of his spiritual accomplishments without realizing how prideful he sounded? Well, here's the catch. The parable doesn't say that he said anything. You know, if you look at verse 11, it says, *The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus.* You know, we just assumed that it was out loud. Virtually all of his ego-driven testimony could have occurred deep within his thought life. Now, everything that the parable said about his prayer could have flashed through his mind in a second as he was looking at a hated enemy. Now, given that possibility, I suddenly found myself quite capable of being that Pharisee. I mean, he said, *'God, I thank you I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'* I thank God that I'm not like certain people. I've done that before. He said, *'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* I've even gone over in my own mind things that I -- things that I think I have done well and right. Again, if this is all going on inside your mind, I think we're all kind of guilty of that. How is this any different from what the Pharisee did?

Can I tell you the only difference between me and the Pharisee? Can I tell you what it is? It's our scripture this morning. *But he gives more grace. That's why scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."* You see, it is possible to

be looking for God's grace in all of the wrong places. You know, we think of God's grace as meeting a physical or a material need, we get a healing from a sickness or a relationship, we get a job or an opportunity, any of dozens of good things begin to happen as a result of God's grace, and all of these things are real, we have all experienced them, we've all seen them. But understand as well that God's purpose for each of us is to be shaping and molding us into the very image of his son, a son who learned obedience through suffering. What if the grace of God is more often than not a blinking red caution light that he places over areas of our lives that are nothing but pitfalls. You see, by God's grace I heard my employee when he said that I had a massive ego. You know, I thought I had tamed that beast, I thought I had put that ego in its place, but God evidently saw otherwise. And God used this person to get me to see that my vision of my ego and my understanding of my own humility or lack thereof still needed a lot of attention. How shocking to me ten years ago. It is not the least bit shocking to me now.

So how did I go from being shocked by an accusation to being absolutely convinced that it was rooted in a truth that I just couldn't see? The answer is verse 6: *But he gives us more grace.* Now, we call that particular grace sanctification. Sanctification is nothing but a deconstruction of the old man and a reconstruction

of a new man or woman made in God's image. And the centerpiece of that old man is pride; and you know, it doesn't matter if your footprint is large or small, you still have to deal with the issue of pride. That is why scripture says: God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. That's what sanctification is all about. You know, many times I compare our sanctification to the process of peeling an onion. And when you peel down to a brand new layer of an onion, it's all bright and it's clean and it's new and it's shiny but, you know, if you set that onion out, it's going to get dinged up and dirty. Our sanctification in some ways is a lot like this onion. God reveals to us some new truth and some understanding and we accept it and we accept that grace and suddenly we understand where we are, and we feel bright and clean and new, and suddenly after a while, that layer that's out there begins to get dinged and dirty; and then God starts the process all over again. It may be a layer of pride or lust or greed or any of the other defilements that God is committed to ridding us of. And when we finally discover and remove that dinged and dirty layer, we feel clean, we feel renewed, we feel ready to go. And we really have no idea, but the fact is God sees all of the layers that we have all at once. He's just committed to removing them one by one by one. You see, our entire Christian life is spent discovering layer upon layer of stuff that starts out fresh and clean only to eventually get dinged up and dirty. And the secret of being able

to understand that as a blessing is knowing that God has already seen every single dinged and dirty layer that we will ever be presenting to the world. No sin that you and I have ever committed will ever, ever be a shock to God. Ephesians 1:4 says: *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* That's knowing that if you are one of his, he chose you before the very foundations of the world to make you holy and blameless in his sight. So all of the remodeling and all of the peeling that God does in our lives is not accompanied by the frustration and the anger and the disappointment that it would be if this was an earthly parent who was trying to raise us. Instead, it's accompanied by a love that has never, ever been diminished by our sin. That's why I've always described it as holding these two truths equally, and that is: God loves you, and what? You're full of it.

You know, a few months back we looked in James at how grace is associated with hearing what God is trying to tell us, when he's trying to tell us how full of it we really are. When he said in James 1:19: *Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.* We spoke about the importance of being quick to hear, that we are -- that we are willing to tune our ears to hear something we may not want to hear in the first place; that we would be slow to speak, that we resist

the urge to defend ourselves when we hear God speaking; and that we be slow to anger, that we understand who we are in Christ so that anger doesn't short circuit our ability to hear when God is telling us we're full of it. James in that scripture gives us a trilogy of texts to prepare us for a "therefore" that is coming next, and it's the key to sanctification. You see, when God looks at us through the lens of his perfection, he sees every one of those layers, every one of the entire bit of the onion all at once. He sees what James sees when he tells us to: *Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Now, imagine that. God looks at you and me and he sees filthiness and rampant wickedness. But the good news is that God still loves us. God loves you, and you're full of it. You see, it's absolutely critical that you hold both thoughts as equally important, because if one or the other becomes dominant, I've said it many times, you will grow spiritually sick. You know, if the dominant thought is only "God loves me," you will become a self-absorbed, self-centered 21st century North American evangelical. That's not a good thing. You see, it has become the gospel, however, that most evangelicals preach and much of the world hears. "I am a living, breathing human being, therefore God loves me." I mean, we all know that God is love, and because God is

love, he loves everyone everywhere indiscriminately. That's not what the Bible teaches at all.

And what about the other extreme? You know, if your dominant thought is only "I am full of it," well, then you become the victim of what's known as "worm theology." I am nothing but a worm. You know, it's a jarring shock to learn the extent of our own personal wickedness. I get that. I understand that. But you know, we can use that information to either lower our assessment of ourselves and our sin or to raise our assessment of our Savior and the price he paid for our sin. And if that knowledge doesn't lift up the love of Christ, it is only going to bring down our view of ourselves. We will despair, we will begin to doubt that God could ever love someone as full of filthiness and rampant wickedness as us. But if you hold both of these truths equally, then you know that you are loved and accepted completely and totally by the grace of God even though you also know that you are full of it.

And how do we hold both of these truths at the same time? Well, Romans 5:8 says this, it says: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the acceptance and the approval that ended in the Garden of Eden, that was restored at the cross, and is presented to us as a gift, and when we fully understand that, we really are full of it, full of

self, full of pride, full of a blind self-seeking that wants only to worship myself, and yet -- and yet for some wonderful reason known only to God, God has chosen to fix his love on you and on me. When we understand that, we truly understand when James says: *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*, he's not exaggerating, he's not speaking in hyperbole. You see, every one of us is filled with filthiness and rampant wickedness, yet God loves me, and I'm full of it.

So when James says in James 4:6: *But he gives more grace*, it's understood that it is that very grace that enables us to identify the sin of pride or ego that is hiding in clear sight. *Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* Accept the grace of God when it is pointing you towards a pride or ego that you might not see that could cause you great harm, and God will give you even more grace and more wisdom. Refuse the grace, and the harm that you will experience as an inability to see the harm that you will experience.

In John 9:39, *Jesus said this, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."* Some of the Pharisees therein heard these things, and said to him, *"Are we also blind?"* Jesus said to them, *"If you*

were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say 'we see,' your guilt remains. You see, it's not blindness here that condemns; it is willful, unconfessed blindness, a blindness that comes from a refusal to see that condemns. And all of that can be traced to the sin of pride that hides in full view.

But he gives more grace. That's why scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." You see, the key to grace for all of us that can is humility. It is a truth that also seems to hide in plain view. I mean, it is so counterintuitive, we have a hard time believing that it is true. What God is saying here is the more humble I am, the more willing I am to take on the risk of disappearing, the more God will be determined to exalt me. That's what he says in Matthew 23, he says: Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. You know what God is saying here is take the energy that you would have used trying to get noticed or appreciated and instead just put your trust in me and I will give you the only notice that matters. If you truly believe that, it would revolutionize your life. And the next verse goes straight to the heart of what it means to live for Christ. It is James' prescription for finding this humility. In James 4:7, he says: *Submit yourselves, then, to God.* There you go. Do you want to find that humility? *Submit yourselves therefore to God.*

There was a 16th century German theologian named Zacharias Ursinus, and he was asked whether he was able to comply with all that God had required of him. This was his conclusion. He said, "No," he said, "I have a natural tendency to hate God and hate my neighbor." You see, Mr. Ursinus was on to something. I speak all the time about this proxy war that exists between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Now that's the macro war that we are all in the middle of, but there's a micro war that also takes place many times a day within each of us. You see, even as believers, we have a natural tendency to hate God and to hate our neighbors. We find that hard to believe. Fact is, there is a war between God's spirit within us and our flesh, and it is living out that war that takes on the definition of submission to God. For many of us, the first reaction of submitting ourselves to God is one of light-hearted acquiescence: "Submit? Sure, God, you're God, I'm your creature; I am your humble servant." You know, if you think there's no problem submitting to God, then may I suggest to you you have no idea what you're thinking or you're simply not thinking at all. Submitting to God is not like submitting to the speed limit or the building code or the IRS. You know, you submit to those authorities by externally complying with their rules. You may be angry, you may be disinterested, you may be somewhere in between, but you know that submitting is better than resisting

because you know that the consequences of resisting from a speeding ticket to an arrest warrant will be relatively immediate and painful. Well, not so with God. You know, we can and we do resist God all the time with no apparent immediate consequence. Well, it may not be readily apparent, but God's Holy Spirit lives inside every believer, and he will make his presence known when we refuse to submit to God.

You know, when Jesus was about to leave the disciples, he said this in John 16, he said: *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.* You see, refuse to submit to God and God's Holy Spirit is going to convict you, and there will be an immediate consequence in your spirit. However, you just might not recognize it. You know, often times we can misread spiritual pressure and confuse it with many other different symptoms: "I'm depressed. I'm upset. I'm out of sorts." You know, these are all potential ways of avoiding the conviction of the Holy Spirit, potential ways that we can blind ourselves to God. Take a look at Paul's reaction to his own resistance to God, it was swift, it was immediate, and it was readily apparent. This is what Paul said in Romans 7:21, he said: *So I find this law at work: Although I want*

to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? You know, Paul's not wondering here if he has self-esteem issues. Paul knew that he and his God were in conflict. I think it's safe to say that Paul was a lot more dialed in than you or me when it comes to spiritual issues, and he saw spiritual conflict for what it was. It was a failure on Paul's part to submit to God and it made Paul himself absolutely miserable. There's a reason for that. You see, God's Holy Spirit within Paul was contending with Paul's flesh. In this case it was about the sin of coveting. Paul had come up against God's own law forbidding coveting, and he found that he had a miserable time submitting to God and his law. This is what he said in Romans 7:7, he said: *What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.* You see, because Paul knew his God and he knew God's word, he also knew

exactly where his struggle was coming from.

Now, James' constituents, they were not nearly as sensitive as Paul was, so James had to deal with the consequences, and this is how he responds, he says: *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world make himself an enemy of God.* We've spent weeks looking at these words, and they are just a living catalog of what happens when we refuse to submit to God. You know, James says in James 4:7: *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Well, according to James, we seem to get these things perfectly backwards. We resist God and we wind up unwittingly submitting to the devil. So how do we reverse that? How do we submit to God and resist the devil? Well, unlike the speed limit or the building code or the IRS, you don't submit to God by externally complying with a set of rules. We have seen that the Pharisees excelled at that very thing, and Jesus was not in the least bit impressed. In fact, he said this about them in Matthew

15, he said: *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* You know, you and I don't like obeying the speed limit, the building code, or the IRS, but we do it, and we do it not only because we fear the consequences but also because our compliance is strictly external. Anybody can do that. You know, the speed limit, the building code, the IRS, they don't really care what you think, all they care is that you comply. You may hate the government at every level but as long as you still submit to their rules, nobody's going to care. Well, a lot of folks like to reduce faith to that very same level and call it religion. Just submit to the rules. Just do what you're told: Get baptized, join a church, give a tithe, you will have met the minimum requirement for getting into heaven. That's not what submitting to God is all about. That didn't work for the Pharisees, and it's certainly not going to work for us.

You see, when you reduce submission to God down to an external compliance to a set of rules, you lose sight of what the gospel is proclaiming: That is that God in Christ has forgiven you of a debt that is never repayable by a simple external behavior. You can fast, you can pray, you can sacrifice your entire life and you will never come close to paying a fraction of the debt that God freely

paid for your sin; but there are many, many who convince themselves that they can. You can convince yourself of anything including the notion that the task of the forgiveness of sins is something difficult but doable, and it is not. Forgiving sins was not a matter of God simply looking the other way and saying: "Paid in full." God's perfect justice required that God himself take on flesh, live a perfect life and then be slaughtered in our place in order to say "paid in full." And it's the height of absurdity to think that mere religious activity is somehow going to pay that debt back. Furthermore, when you live by an external set of rules, you can't help but to rate yourself and others by their performance in those rules. You know, the Pharisee in the temple didn't love God like he thought he loved God. The Pharisee loved the Pharisee. God was just a foil that he used to express how wonderful he considered himself to be. The tax collector was a member of a class universally despised by the Jews. They were considered traitors to their own people who sold them out for money. Jesus carefully chose these two people to point out what God sees in genuine submission. See, the Pharisee knew all about submitting to externals. The tax collector, he understood what it meant to be submissive to God. He understood that submission is not a matter of attending to externals, it's a matter of attending to the most internal part of us: our minds. Verse 13 says: *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his*

eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

You see, the macro war between the kingdoms has a micro expression between our flesh and the spirit that dwells within us, and the battlefield of that war is what takes place inside our minds. Submission to God starts first and foremost in your head. Romans 12:1-2 says: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you have may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* You see, you present your bodies as a living sacrifice not by attending to some external form of asceticism or self-denial like the Pharisees did, but by a transformation that takes place inside your mind, *that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* It's one thing to believe God's will is good, acceptable and perfect when things are going swimmingly. It's another thing entirely to believe that when life is not yet through kicking you in the teeth. It is then that you realize that the greatest battle is the battle that takes place inside your mind, and it's a battle that almost always goes unnoticed. At our very best, we revel in the love of God who chose us, who died for

us, who is actively transforming us into the image of his son. At our very worst, we stew in the circumstance that has caused us to shake our fist at a God who we think is either absent, indifferent or powerless.

Submission to God voluntarily places our thought life no longer under the authority of circumstance but under his authority regardless of circumstance. Let me repeat that. Submission to God voluntarily places our thought life no longer under the authority of circumstance but under his authority regardless of circumstance. Now, the Greek word that James uses for submission to God means "to arrange under." It's a protocol that puts God on top and me under that authority. It's the same word that Luke used to describe what happened when Jesus was as a 12-year-old was found in the temple. In Luke 2:45, it says this, it says: *And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* You see, at 12 years of age, Jesus could have begun a public ministry right then and right there. He could have been world famous, but he didn't. Instead, he went home with his parents. He submitted. He arranged his life underneath his parents' life. Luke 2:51 says: *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was*

submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. So here we have the king of the universe, the most brilliant mind the world would ever know, placing his life, his spirit and his mind under the authority of a carpenter and a peasant woman. Now James is calling us to do the same thing: to arrange our life, our spirit, and our minds under the authority of God. And what it is is an active, ongoing commitment to discipline our minds to choose the best about the God we worship and reject the worst that the world, the flesh, and the devil can dream up.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says: For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. So how do we take every thought captive to obey Christ? Well, like I said, to submit to God is to arrange your life under his authority. It's to have a protocol that adapts itself to one goal and that is the supremacy of Christ in all things, including my thought life.

You know, picture, if you will, a football team. Their goal is to

advance the ball against the defense, and that produces a protocol, a series of "if.., then" scenarios that makes the game interesting. You know, the offense approaches the line so the quarterback can see what the defense is doing. If they do A, he's going to do B. He comes to the line and he audibles. He changes his plans based on what he sees his opponent doing, and sometimes the defense changes their response to his response. That's what makes the game interesting. Well, our goal in submitting our thought life to the authority of God, that also requires a protocol. It requires a series of "if.., then" scenarios. We have to first identify the thought, and that's a large undertaking. We're going to look at that more next week but for now, just to let me lay that out there, first thing we do is we identify the thought, and we understand the enemy's goal is to get us to hate God, to hate our neighbor, and to hate ourselves; and the thoughts designed to produce that hatred, they're not going to identify themselves. But James tells us: *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* You see, grace and wisdom, it's there for you, it's there for the taking. Just ask. Ask God for the grace to identify these thoughts and you will find a brand new skill set developing in your thought life: You will begin to see these thoughts for what they really are.

Secondly, we want to isolate each thought. You know, Jesus spoke of the way evil spirits cluster and confuse. In Luke 11:24, he said this, he said: *"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."* I think that's true also of evil thoughts. They tend to come in clusters of confusion. "God has rejected me. God hates me. I'm going to lose my job, my health, my life, my property, my sanity." These thoughts also come in bunches. We need to isolate each thought to identify and examine it in the light of God's grace, and finally we need to inoculate it with scripture. See, where he need to apply our own scriptural "if.., then" protocol. You know, if God really does hate me, well then why did he say in Romans 5:8: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* If my anxiety is proof that God has rejected me, then why would he say: *Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.* You see, for every evil thought the enemy can muster inside your head, God has a scriptural response. He's the quarterback. He can audible anything the enemy throws your way. That's exactly how the saints of old treated the thoughts that tempted to overwhelm them. Think

of David's response to the thought of looming death that the enemy was threatening him with in Psalm 23. Psalm 23:4 says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* Now, here's David identifying, isolating and inoculating his thought life. He's placing it under the authority of God: *I will fear no evil; For you are with me.* You know, David did even more than that. And 2 Thessalonians 5:21 tells us: *Test everything; hold fast to what is good.* We need to do likewise.

Have you ever noticed, have you ever noticed that the beauty and the wonder of God's love for us in the death of his son, it usually hits us in little, tiny bursts, you know, it may be in worship, it may be in a message or a poem or a story and suddenly usually just for a moment or so you get a glimpse of the enormity of what Jesus did for us was. For a brief moment the door opens to your spirit and you see what Isaiah meant when he said this of Jesus in Isaiah 53:3, he says: *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

You know, in my life I know that passage opens a door to me of just

what it is that Jesus did. So I hold fast to that. There's been times when a brief vision of what Christ has done for me can flatten me and leave me weeping. I hold fast to that. I find myself caught up like Paul when he begs God, asking in Ephesians 3: *That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Paul is asking for the impossible. He's asking for the grace for us to be able to comprehend the love of Christ. Now he knows that for us, it's like trying to say take a sip of a fire hose going full blast. It is far too huge and far too powerful and we are far too tiny to comprehend it fully, and so we're going to spend some more time on this. We're going to be talking about this again next week. But in the meantime, there is something we can do. We can identify, isolate and inoculate with scripture those thoughts that the enemy sends to us. We can *test everything; hold fast to what is good.* We can arm ourselves for the battle by filling our minds with scripture. We can *submit therefore to God.* James 4:6: *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you that submitting to you involves a great deal of humility, it involves surrendering who we think we are,

surrendering our own pride, our own sense of person hood to you. Father, it means arranging our lives under your authority, it means taking every thought captive to you, it means rejecting those thoughts that the enemy would love to put within us, that we are abandoned, that we are unloved, that God is powerless or indifferent or any of those thoughts. Lord, I pray that you would give us the ability to submit to God, particularly in that area where the battle rages in our minds, in our hearts, and our spirits. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.