



SEA CHANGE
CHURCH

THE CURRENT

Storm Proof: A Study in James · S2E3

Brought Low, Lifted Up

A 7-Day Study

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

James 4:7–10 ESV

Pastor Joe Brandi · October 25, 2026

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

James 4:10

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week, The Current walks through a piece of Sunday's passage: a short verse study, encouragement, journal questions, and a daily prayer.

Take one day at a time. There's no need to rush.

DAY 1

Tapping Out

JAMES 4:7 ESV

"Submit yourselves therefore to God."

VERSE STUDY

The passage opens with a single command that carries everything after it: submit yourselves therefore to God. The Greek word, *hypotassō*, means to place oneself under another's authority. The Hebrew picture that stands behind it is even more physical: to bow down, to lie face down, to worship. Submission in Scripture is not a grudging nod. It is the whole person bending low before God.

Most of us do not love that word. The message reached for an image from jujitsu, a sport built around making an opponent submit, where the only way out of a hold is to tap out and admit we are beaten. Plenty of people try it and quit, not because it is too hard physically but because they cannot stand being in that vulnerable position. Something in us, especially in a culture that prizes independence, recoils at being told what to do.

Joe was honest that there is a little rebel inside every one of us, believers included. It shows up when we read Scripture. We love the comforting passages, and we quietly skim the hard ones, or let them pass without letting their weight land. Thomas Jefferson famously made his own version of the Gospels by cutting out the miracles and keeping only what suited him. Few of us would go that far with scissors, but many of us do something similar in practice.

James's "therefore" ties this command to the verse just before it: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submission is not the price of admission to God's grace. It is the posture that receives it. Tapping out before God is not defeat. It is the beginning of being lifted up.

TAKE HEART

Recognizing the rebel inside is not a reason for despair. It is the first honest step of submission. God is not surprised by our resistance, and he does not wait for us to stop struggling before he welcomes us. The same God who calls us to bow low has promised grace to the humble, and he meets every honest surrender with more of it.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Which parts of Scripture do we tend to skim past, and what might it look like to let them land this week?
2. Where is the little rebel inside most active in our lives right now?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!"

Psalm 143:8–10

ACTION CHALLENGE

Choose one passage of Scripture this week that we usually avoid or skim. Read it slowly each day, and ask God what submitting to it would look like in practice.

NOTES

DAY 2

The Law of Liberty

JAMES 1:25 ESV

"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

VERSE STUDY

Submission sounds like the opposite of freedom, but James does not see it that way. Back in chapter 1 he calls God's commands the perfect law, the law of liberty, and he promises that the one who does it, not just hears it, will be blessed in the doing. God's commands are hard to obey, and yet they are beautiful, because they come from a beautiful and holy God.

The Reformers worked hard to understand how so many laws in Scripture fit together, and they spoke of the law's uses. It restrains evil in a society. It works as a mirror, showing us our sin and our need for a Savior. And it serves as a guide for those who already belong to God, a path that leads somewhere good. It is that third use James has in view here. Imagine a world where everyone actually lived by the Ten Commandments.

One example from Sunday was hospitality. Peter writes, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9), and most of us have been in a home where someone truly practices it: every need anticipated, every guest made to feel welcome. We leave feeling glowing, as if we had tasted something of the love of God. Compare that with the pizza-box-and-bring-your-own-drinks gathering, and the difference is plain. When God's law is lived from the inside out, it is a beautiful thing.

Obedience can also open doors we could not open ourselves. Proverbs says, "A gift in secret averts anger" (Proverbs 21:14). Many of us have been stuck in a conflict that no amount of reasoning could untangle, until a simple command of Scripture came to mind and we tried it. A small, quiet act of generosity toward someone who was angry can restore peace that arguing never would. That is the law of liberty at work.

TAKE HEART

God's commands are not a cage built to keep us small. They are the shape of a good life, given by a Father who knows how we were made. Every time we take one small step of obedience, even an awkward or costly one, we are walking into freedom rather than away from it. The blessing James promises is found in the doing.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. When has obeying one of God's commands brought peace or freedom we did not expect?
2. Which command in Scripture do we tend to treat as a burden rather than a gift?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways."

Psalm 119:33–37

ACTION CHALLENGE

Practice one of God's commands on purpose this week. Invite someone over and show real hospitality, or give a quiet gift to someone with whom things are strained.

NOTES

DAY 3

Right in Our Own Eyes

JUDGES 21:25 ESV

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

VERSE STUDY

The world does not want to submit to God. A famous song celebrates doing life on our own terms, and the tune is lovely, but the mindset is the opposite of James 4:7. We can coat things so smoothly that we barely notice they are anti-God at the core.

Resistance to God is often less intellectual than it appears. People raise objections, and some are sincere, but frequently the deeper issue is simply that no one wants to be lord of their life except themselves. Many who come to faith later in life can look back and recognize it: the reasons given for keeping God at a distance were real, but the root was a heart that did not want to be told what to do.

For many people the hardest objection is the problem of pain. How can a good and powerful God allow suffering? A well-known film from the 1990s has a moment where a grieving brother, after a tragedy in war, cries out that he hates God. Many of us, believers too, have felt something like that after a loss. The message held two things together: God is good no matter what, and he is not distant from pain. Jesus was mocked, beaten, crowned with thorns and crucified. We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

This is an old pattern, not a modern one. In the days of the judges, Scripture sums up Israel's long decline in one line: there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. James's first readers knew the right beliefs. James grants that they believe God is one, and they do well; even the demons believe that, and shudder (James 2:19). Yet the letter lists the ways they were not living it out: favoring the rich, neglecting the needy, unbridled tongues, quarreling, boasting, withholding wages. It is an uncomfortable list, because most of us can find ourselves somewhere on it.

TAKE HEART

Our questions and our pain do not push God away. He invites us to bring them to him honestly, as the psalmists did again and again. The God who allowed his own Son to suffer is not indifferent to ours. Even when we cannot see his reasons, we can trust his heart, because at the cross he has already shown us what it looks like.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where are we most tempted to do what is right in our own eyes rather than submit to God?

2. Is there a loss or a disappointment that has made it hard to trust God's goodness, and what would it look like to bring it to him honestly?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

Psalm 13

ACTION CHALLENGE

Read through the list of sins James names across his letter (partiality, an unbridled tongue, quarreling, boasting, neglecting the good we know to do). Pick the one that hits closest to home and bring it to God in prayer each day this week.

NOTES

DAY 4

The One Who Submitted

ROMANS 7:24–25 ESV

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”

VERSE STUDY

Why do we find ourselves on James's list? Because we have a sinful nature. We are made in the image of God, and we are also born into sin. James describes how it grows: each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire, and desire, once it has conceived, gives birth to sin (James 1:14–15). One of the words Scripture uses for sin is *anomia*, lawlessness, living as though God's will and commands do not govern us.

True believers do want to submit to God, but none of us does it perfectly. Paul describes the struggle with painful honesty: he does not do what he wants, but does the very thing he hates (Romans 7:15). Most of us know the moment when words come out that we wish we had never said, and we realize they came from somewhere real inside us. His cry for someone to deliver him from this body of death is the cry of every honest believer. And his answer comes immediately: thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Only one person has ever submitted perfectly to God. Jesus did not simply arrive and go straight to the cross. He lived a life of active, perfect obedience, loving God and neighbor fully, succeeding where Adam failed, where Israel failed, and where we fail. Then, as the spotless Lamb, he bore our sin. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is the heart of the gospel. When we put our faith in Jesus, our sin is laid on him and his righteousness is credited to us. We are not only forgiven, we are counted righteous: justified not by our perfect submission but by his. And then the Holy Spirit begins the slow work of sanctification, gradually conforming us to the image of the Son and giving us a heart that actually wants to submit. Anyone who has finally said “you’re right” after being lovingly corrected has seen that work in progress.

TAKE HEART

Our standing with God does not rise and fall with how well we submitted this week. It rests on the perfect obedience of Jesus, credited to us by faith. That frees us to be honest about our struggle without being crushed by it. The Spirit who lives in every believer will not leave the work unfinished.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where do we most identify with Paul's words, doing the very thing we hate?
2. How does it change our week to remember that we are counted righteous because of Jesus' submission rather than our own?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, The General Confession (Daily Morning Prayer, Rite Two)

ACTION CHALLENGE

Pray the General Confession slowly each morning this week. Then read Romans 7:14-8:2 in one sitting and notice where the chapter break turns from struggle to hope.

NOTES

DAY 5

Hold the Line

JAMES 4:7 ESV

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

VERSE STUDY

We are called to submit to God and to resist the one who draws us away from him. The devil is real, and Scripture does not treat him as a cartoon. Peter writes: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The word for resist means to withstand, to oppose, to hold one's ground, the language of soldiers holding a line against an advancing enemy. And soldiers never hold a line alone. One of the clearest points of the message was that we were never meant to resist the devil as isolated individuals. Hebrews calls us to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). The line holds when we stand shoulder to shoulder.

The devil has methods: temptation, deception, accusation and division. Temptation and division may be the easiest to spot. Accusation and deception often hit believers hardest. For a child of God, a constant stream of negativity and condemnation, endlessly replaying past failures, is not the voice of the Father. Sometimes it takes a friend to point out that the voice we have been listening to is a lie.

Resisting is not mainly about focusing on darkness. Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12), and the more we submit to God, walking in the light, loving righteousness and walking in love, the less ground the enemy holds in our hearts and in our sphere of influence. Notice the order in verse 7: submit first, then resist. The promise is that he will flee.

TAKE HEART

The enemy roars, but he does not have the last word. In Christ we are declared righteous, adopted, and hidden with him. When accusation gets loud, we can answer it with the gospel, and we do not have to answer it alone. God has given us one another so that grace can speak louder than the lie.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Which of the devil's methods (temptation, deception, accusation, division) do we feel most often, and how does it usually show up?
2. Who stands in the line with us, and whom could we encourage this week?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, Collect for the First Sunday in Lent

ACTION CHALLENGE

Reach out to one person this week with a specific word of encouragement grounded in the gospel. And if an accusing voice has been loud for us, share it with a trusted friend and ask them to help us answer it with truth.

NOTES

DAY 6

Draw Near

JAMES 4:8 ESV

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

VERSE STUDY

Here is one of the most generous promises in the letter: draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. It is also a question about practice. What does drawing near to God actually look like in our week?

There is always noise: the noise of the phone, the noise of the inbox, the noise in our own heads. Drawing near takes commitment and practice to get free of it. The message asked a pointed question: do we ever turn off our phones when we are spending time with God? Even with the Bible open, a stream of messages, none of them bad, can keep us from really being present.

It can also take longer than we expect. Many of us sit down with Scripture, read for five or ten minutes, and feel nothing. Sometimes peace comes only after twenty-five minutes of quiet, and in a hard season it may take hours of letting the Psalms wash over us before our hearts feel lifted above the clouds. If that is true, why do we expect to draw near in five minutes? The saints of every age, from King David onward, made a habit of getting alone with God, and they did not have a phone buzzing in their pocket.

Isaiah heard God say, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). The psalmist calls us to be still and know that he is God (Psalm 46:10). Drawing near is not about earning God's attention. He is already near and has promised to draw nearer still. It is about clearing away enough noise to notice him.

TAKE HEART

God is not reluctant to meet with us. His promise is that when we take even one step toward him, he draws near to us. On the days when the quiet feels empty and the peace is slow to come, his presence is no less real. What is objectively true of every believer in Christ, that we are near to him, can become something we feel as we keep showing up.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the loudest noise in our lives right now, and what would it take to step away from it for a while?
2. What has helped us draw near to God in the past, and how could we make room for it this week?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, Prayers and Thanksgivings 59, For Quiet Confidence

ACTION CHALLENGE

Set aside one longer stretch this week, at least an hour if we can, with our phones fully off. Open the Psalms, read slowly, and stay with it past the point where we would normally stop.

NOTES

DAY 7

Brought Low, Lifted Up

JAMES 4:8–10 ESV

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

VERSE STUDY

James shows how we draw near. The first way is repentance: cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. The phrase has deep Old Testament roots. Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? He who has clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3–4). Clean hands speak to what we do: our actions, our conduct, how we treat others. A pure heart speaks to what we desire, love, worship and trust. The priests of Israel washed their hands and feet whenever they came near the altar (Exodus 30:19–21). In the same way, a life of drawing near to God is a life of daily repentance.

Anyone who has worked on an engine knows that ordinary soap does not remove grease. Even heavy-duty hand cleaner leaves dark lines under the fingernails. Our efforts to clean ourselves are a little like that: real, but never complete. Or think of a small scrape from childhood that seemed like nothing, until it became infected and had to be cleaned again and again before it could heal. God does that kind of patient work in us. The blood of Christ has cleansed us once and for all, and there is still a daily washing the Spirit does as he applies it to our lives.

The second way is grieving our sin: be wretched and mourn and weep. James is not banning joy. He is warning against a casual, laughing attitude toward sin. God is love, and God is holy, holy, holy, and both truths stand at once. When we draw near to a holy God, we stop excusing sin or getting used to it and begin to mourn it.

The third way is humility: humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Jesus said the same: whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12). He is the one who was brought lowest of all and raised highest, and he promises to wash us with clean water and give us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:25–26). The practical takeaway for the week: grieve our sin. Stop excusing or minimizing it, and take it seriously because it grieves God. And know that Jesus is always ready to hear our confession. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). He brings us low so that he can lift us up, in himself.

TAKE HEART

Being brought low is never the end of the story with God. Every honest confession is met by a Savior who has already carried the sin we are grieving. There is a lightness on the other side of repentance

that nothing else can give. Today is a new day, and the One who humbles us is the same One who lifts us up.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Is there a sin we have grown used to, excused, or minimized, that God may be inviting us to grieve?
2. Is there a relationship where repentance might mean reaching out to ask forgiveness this week?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Psalms 51:1–2, 7, 10–12, 17

ACTION CHALLENGE

Take time this week for honest confession: name a specific sin before God without excuse, and then receive his forgiveness by reading 1 John 1:9 aloud. If that sin has hurt someone, reach out to them and ask for forgiveness.

MEMORY VERSE

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

James 4:10

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