

LEADERTREKS **SERMON SERIES****MARK OF A DISCIPLE**

Disciples of Christ draw near to God and his people through obedience and worship.

SCRIPTURE

JAMES 4:1–10

SERMON OVERVIEW

God wants us to want to be in a relationship with him and with others. In this lesson, your students will come to understand the importance of drawing near to God. As we draw near to God, he draws near to us. Not only does this work individually, but it also works when we seek God together. This lesson will remind students that community in the body of believers really is worth it and show the benefits of drawing near to each other in community, seeking God together.

OPENING**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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ICE BREAKER QUESTION

- What's something you've done alone that would have been easier or more enjoyable with friends?

MESSAGE

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.

READ JAMES 4:1-10**POINT 1: Your main job is to show up**

Have you ever tried to be friends with someone who just didn't want to be friends with you? It takes two people to make a friendship. Both people have to want to be in it. That's how it is with your relationship with God. You are made in his image, and he deeply desires a friendship with you, but he'll never force his way in. God wants you to *want* to be in a relationship with him. He's not asking you to work for his favor; he just wants you to know and love him. James reminds us to humble and submit ourselves to God. And when we do, he promises to draw near to us.

POINT 2: Drawing near to God helps us live in unity

The people James was writing to were acting more like enemies than friends. Their fights were caused by their ungodly attitudes and behaviors. Instead, James urged them to seek God in humility. As we submit to and draw near to God, he transforms our hearts to be more Christ-like so we can live at peace with each other. Imagine if every believer was humble and submissive to God—fighting selfishness, resisting temptation, and confessing sin. Our relationships with others would be more unified, loving, and peaceful!

ILLUSTRATION: There's an old folktale about a traveler who arrived in a village after a long journey. He was very hungry and tired but had nothing to eat. He hoped the villagers would share their food with him, but the villagers were selfish and refused. The traveler started to tell the villagers about his special stone that makes wonderful soup. This piqued the villagers' interest! He said all he needed for his soup was his stone, a pot, and some water—but he wouldn't mind if the villagers wanted to contribute. Soon, the interested villagers brought chicken, carrots, onion, mushrooms, and more. The villagers didn't know it, but they were working together to make a wonderful soup that would feed everyone in their village, including the traveler.¹ The traveler could've simply gone to a more generous village, but he decided to stick around and encourage them to come together. When a difficult situation arises in the body of Christ, sometimes the most beneficial thing is to stick around and encourage each other to seek God together.

When a community of Christ-followers commits to encouraging one another to pursue God, unity grows. God did not create us to follow him alone. Instead, he wants us to be unified as his body, the church, and as his family. Living in this type of unity is one way we can worship God.

POINT 3: Drawing near to God works best in community

When you make a new friend, you start hanging out with their friend group. If you don't make an effort to get to know the friend group—and vice versa—the new friendship might not last long. But if everyone welcomes and invests in each other, even stronger friendships are the result. The Bible tells us that we need others to help us follow God (see Prov. 27:17, Ecc. 4:9–12, Heb. 10:24–25). We are truly better together, encouraging and supporting each other as we collectively draw near to God.

ILLUSTRATION: It's opening night of the biggest movie of the year. You've bought your ticket early; you're wearing your themed gear. You can feel the excitement in the theater—everyone's been looking forward to this as long as you have. It's wonderful to experience a big event like this in community. Sure, sometimes it's nice to go see a movie alone. You get to act and react exactly as you please without being concerned about anyone around you. But who is there to laugh at the same jokes as you? Who jumps at the same scares or is tender during that perfect story resolution? You want to be able to feel the energy and excitement in the room as everyone experiences the story together.

In a similar way, worshiping and drawing near to God personally is a wonderful thing, but we also should practice doing this together. Sometimes it's just better to experience things in community.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Use this prompt to wrap up your message and leave your students with a challenge to apply.

- How unified is your Christ-centered community? How can you help grow that unity?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Pick a few questions from below to discuss. Close with prayer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are ways that you might try to build a friendship with someone?
- What does it look like to draw near to God?
- What are some things that might keep you from having a close relationship with God? Look for specific examples in the passage.
- What are some things that might keep you from having a strong relationship with the people around you?
- What is your favorite group activity or experience?
- What might it look like to worship God together vs. worshiping God alone?
- Why is it important to worship God and grow in our faith in community?
- How can you work together with your friends to strengthen your relationship with God this week?

PRAYER

Close by praying or invite someone to pray for your group.

Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.

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¹ "Stone Soup," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 1, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Stone_Soup&oldid=953051775.