

What Would Jesus Undo? Pride

James 4:4-10

Sunday, May 10, 2026

What would Jesus undo? This is the last Sunday in this sermon series on the things Jesus would undo in our lives. And, I just want to remind you one last time why we're asking this question.

The question of what would Jesus undo is directly related to the question of what Jesus would do, if he were me. And you know the reason we ask the WWJD question: b/c he lived the perfect life, the kind of life we were all created to live as creatures created in God's image; a life lived in God's love.

But we also know from personal experience that actually doing what Jesus would do is hard. Darn near impossible to do consistently and habitually. And that's because we are fallen. We've chosen to reject the life of perfect love and dependence on God in favor of a life where we are in control; a life where we know better than God.

Which is why God sent Jesus; so that through his life, death, and resurrection we could have the opportunity to once again live the unbroken, bountiful and eternal life we were created to live; so that by entrusting ourselves entirely to God through Jesus, we could receive God's Spirit and then, over the course of our lives, work with that Spirit to be transformed more and more into the image of Christ; so we could become the kind of people who just naturally do what Jesus would do.

But, as we've discussed, that transformation requires undoing. With the Spirit, we've got to unlearn and undo the broken ways our culture has taught us to think, speak, and act.

And today's scripture passage, Jesus' little brother James is talking about one of those things: pride.

Now, I think we've got a tendency to think our struggles are unique. We may think the early church, the church of James' day, had it all together. But if we thought that, we'd be wrong.

Last week we talked about priority; how we can only have one *real* priority—there can only be one thing occupying the top shelf in our life—and that thing is God. James puts it this way in our scripture for today: "friendship with the world is *enmity* with God, ... whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an *enemy* of God." Pretty clear, right?

And the reason James says this is because some of those early Christian churches he was responsible for were having a problem with their priority. They were having a problem putting God first. They were apparently following their culture's understanding of a successful life: having more power, more status, more money than the folks around them. They were apparently still concerned with being seen as better than the folks around them. In other words, they were still struggling with pride.

And so, James doesn't hold back. He calls them "adulterers." Let that sink in. Because they continue to follow the culture's values instead of God's, he compares them to unfaithful spouses. For James, faith is not an open marriage. There can only be one true partner, and that's God.

And James lays out the consequences of their unfaithfulness; of their pride. It isn't that God dislikes pride or would prefer that we not practice it. According to James, "God *opposes* the proud." He's saying that pride represents a fundamental break in our relationship with God.

And, as is often the case, there aren't that many differences between their situation and ours. Like James' fledgling churches, we still struggle with that fidelity to God thing. We still struggle with following the world's values instead of God's. We still struggle with thinking we know better than God. We still struggle with pride.

Which begs the question, what's so bad about pride that it separates us foundationally from God. Is it really that bad?

Well, the short answer is "yes." But first, I just want to make sure we're all on the same page. Because there's pride and then there's pride. Being proud of your kids for their athletic or academic performance, or being pleased that you were able to get that work project done on time and under budget, that isn't what James is talking about here.

He's talking about thinking you're better than other people. And according to theologians from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas to Martin Luther, that kind of pride is the root of *all* sin. Which, when you think about it, makes sense. Because it actually goes deeper than just thinking you're better than other people. It traces itself back to the first sin: Adam and Eve thinking they knew better than God and eating the forbidden fruit. It boils down to thinking you know better than God. Because God created *everyone* in God's image. God loves *everyone*. So, when you judge yourself better than someone else, you're saying you know better than God. Pride makes

me the center of the universe. It makes me the arbiter of good and bad. It puts me in the place of God. And so, as James says, it's really bad.

And when we think about pride, most of us can quickly call to mind a few (or maybe a lot) of folks we know who suffer from pride. But I think for most of us, that's a pretty limited number. And, of course, none of ourselves are like that, right?

But here's the thing. Pride isn't just bad, it's subtle. In fact, if you ever think you've finally conquered pride, that's a pretty good indication that you haven't. Pride is a lot like an onion. Every time you think you've finally conquered it, every time you peel back one layer, you discover another, deeper one, right beneath it.

So, here's a little test. It isn't comprehensive, but it might get you thinking. Do any of these signs of pride ring a bell in your life?

Are you really independent? You can do life quite well on your own, without help from anyone else? Even God?

Do you always need to be right? Does your sense of identity depend on you having all the answers?

Are you a workaholic? If you don't work 24/7, the earth is likely to fall off its axis?

Do you have difficulty with forgiveness? And is this because deep down, you don't believe YOU need forgiveness?

Here's one we all struggle with: prayerlessness. You're so important you don't have time for God.

And here's a really tricky one. Do you think you're worthless, of no value? If God thinks you're worth loving—and He does—doesn't that mean you think you're smarter than God? CS Lewis said true humility isn't thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

So, what's the answer. Well, I just said it: Humility. As the apostle Paul says in chapter 2 of Philippians, it's having the mind of Christ, who, being God in human form, didn't consider equality with God as something to be exploited but instead emptied himself, becoming a servant, even to the point of death.

But here's the thing. Just as we can't *decide* to become less greedy, less hypocritical, or less judgmental, we can't just *decide* to become humble. That doesn't work. We can't just decide to start doing the kinds of things Jesus would do.

So, what's the answer? Well, in today's scripture, little brother James gives it to us. "⁷ *Submit yourselves* therefore to God ⁸ *Draw near to God*, and he will draw near to you."

And how do we do that? Well, it's what we've been talking about this whole series: spiritual practices. Spiritual practices like prayer, service, generosity, are the things through which we draw near to God. They are the ways we repeatedly, routinely submit ourselves to God. Time spent with God in prayer and worship, time spent serving God by serving others, time spent imitating God through generosity, these are opportunities for us to, in the words of the song, "fix our eyes upon Jesus" instead of on the prizes of power, status, and money that our culture would have us focus on. These are the raw material that we provide to the Spirit residing within us, through which that Spirit is able to build up our spiritual muscles so we can become more

like Jesus; so we can become the sort of people who just naturally do the kind of things Jesus would do if he were us.

And as we participate in these practices, we will naturally begin to recognize we have no basis to live in pride. The more we experience the majesty and power and pure love of God, the more we come to understand just how much we have yet to learn, and how little basis there really is to distinguish us from our fellow human beings. As they say, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I come to understand there is absolutely no basis, other than in my own head, for me to consider myself better than or worthy than anyone else.

And, in fact, as we spend more time with God, as we spend more time serving God, as we spend more time imitating God, we begin *not* to think less (or more) of ourselves, but to think of ourselves less; to focus more of our time, attention, and abilities on God and on others; to love God and love people. In other words, to do the kind of things Jesus would do if he were in my shoes.