



Draw Near to God

THE LETTER OF JAMES

READING & INTERPRETING JAMES

The Epistle attributed to James encourages the readers to meet life's difficulties in a spirit of joy, welcoming testing of faith as a part of growing in discipleship of Jesus.

How can we understand these words in our time?

What does it mean to move through struggle, and transition with joy, without romanticizing or dismissing our own or others' suffering?

How do we live out an active and just faith in Jesus Christ, and faithfully follow the way of living he taught?

How do we draw near to God in the midst of conflict, uncertainty, or trouble?

These scriptures offer practical wisdom, encouragement, and grounding reminder of who we are in Jesus Christ, how God has called God's people to live.

As we continue to discern a way forward in a time of pandemic and in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, the letter of James points us to a wise and peaceful common life and teaches us to have active faith.

Scholars think that the writer of James is offering a corrective to misinterpretation and application of Paul's theology of grace by faith alone.

In the Jewish tradition and earliest Christian traditions, faith was inherently active, and belief in God was entirely connected to just action. A profession of faith through words or ideas without corresponding action would have been a non-existent concept.

A close reading of the epistle to the Romans does not support a split of intellectual affirmation of doctrine and failure to act in accordance with that doctrine's ethic. It seems that the churches have taken Paul's teaching as a license to relinquish their ethical responsibility. James offers this letter of wisdom and encouragement in response.

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

James was a contested addition to the biblical canon, with concern about authorship (likely not the brother of Jesus as claimed by the letter), as well as theological content.

Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, is perhaps the most famous critic of this epistle. In the Protestant Reformation, there was resistance to any idea that one could buy or earn God's grace. Luther was concerned about the exhortations to act, that the teachings of James set up Christians to believe that they had to earn God's favor through specific behaviors. He set this epistle against the writings of Paul, rather than seeing the two perspectives as complementary parts of one whole.

Life in Christ and our sanctification is not one or the other—belief or actions—but it is the unification of grace, faith, and ethical living as disciples of Jesus.

Faith in God is more than a set of ideas, but a whole way of being. We continually seek to grow in faithfulness to God's way of love, even as we know that we do good only by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and repent and accept God's grace and guidance when we fail.

James calls us to draw near to God, giving every facet of our lives to following Jesus. As we draw near to God, we will find that God is drawing near to us. As we accept the epistle's invitation to this abundant life of transforming faith, we will meet God's presence, comfort, and courage in new ways.

Using this study guide

This study guide was created to accompany the St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chattanooga, Rector's Forum study of the Epistle of James. Whether you missed a week of meeting and want to catch up, or prefer to use a paper guide rather than join the digital gatherings, may this resource support and challenge your faith as we continue to worship, pray, serve, and follow Jesus during this time of pandemic and social isolation.

The chapter sections of this guide include the full text of the epistle, broken up into thematic sections with commentary and reflection questions following. The translation used here is the New Revised Standard Version. You can learn more about what Episcopalians believe about the Bible and see other translations approved for use by our denomination at episcopalchurch.org/bible.

Each chapter outline is followed by a notes page to jot down prayers, reflections, and questions.

At the end of the guide is a bibliography of biblical scholarship and other resources for continued learning.

A note about the cover art,
Christ as a Clock
by Marc Chagall, 1957

From MasterWorks Fine Art Gallery:

Chagall depicts Christ as a clock in this captivating Le Christ a l'horloge... By representing Christ crucified as a clock, Chagall is presenting the suffering of the Jewish people. Displayed with the broken menorah that the horse is carrying and the self-portrait of Chagall as the man in the corner reading, Chagall is trying to express the plight of the Jewish people and how it withstands time. The inclusion of mothers with children however denotes hope, and in this touching and deeply symbolic work, we can feel Chagall's hope.

Marc Chagall's paintings of Jesus offer a fascinating social perspective on Jesus as a Jew. Chagall's work reflected on his Jewish and immigrant identities, and explored modern styles in painting. The Epistle of James is written to God's people in diaspora, dispersion from their home and former ways of faithful living and worship. This image of Christ offers an artistic lens for considering James' message of faithfulness to living our identity in God through strange times, ethical challenges, and worry of our mortality.

CHAPTER 1

"My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing."

The opening verses of James set up a challenge to the reader to see the trials of life as an opportunity to live in commitment to the joy of our faith, to grow in wisdom and character, and to stay firm in faith. The author says, "whenever you face trials," not "if you face trials," indicating that struggle is inevitable for human living.

We might hesitate at this encouragement to be joyful. Is this a way to ignore pain or tell people to just cheer up? But Christian joy is not understood to be happiness or the erasure of pain. Joy is rather a sense of assurance of God's presence and provision. Joy is grittier than happiness. Joy sees the hard things honestly, and chooses to look for grace, hope, and connection in the midst of them.

James is best read as descriptive, not prescriptive. It is not that struggle and suffering are being glorified, but that somehow, even in the worst and hardest times, God is present. Somehow, we make it through life's tough stuff, look back, and see that God's Spirit was sustaining us and accompanying us all along.

How have you seen God's care or presence with you during a difficult time? Could you sense God in the moment, or did it take time and perspective?



"If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord."

The author goes on to encourage asking God for wisdom. This recalls the example of King Solomon in 1 Kings 3. When God told Solomon any request would be granted, the king asked for holy wisdom, and received it in abundance. He then became, as the story goes, the wisest man to ever have lived, the wisest man on earth. Time in prayer and reflection with God, both individually and with the community of God's faithful people, is a great way to grow in wisdom and insight, or receive encouragement and strength as we navigate difficult circumstances in life. We can trust that God is speaking to us as a community, and trust that the Spirit's gift of wisdom and guidance is joyfully given. It honors God to go to God in prayer with the concerns of our lives.

What's the best piece of wisdom or advice you've ever received? How do you recognize wisdom when it comes to you or is formed in you?

James warns against doubting or double-mindedness when we ask God for wisdom, describing it as being tossed around like a wave. We know from the story of Jesus' healing of a boy with a demon that God does not condemn honest struggles with belief. When Jesus said to that boy's father, "All things can be done for the one who believes," the man replied, "I believe; help my unbelief!" He believed and doubted all at once, but nonetheless was still turning to Jesus. We can trust that God welcomes our questions and is present in our doubts. It is human and a reasonable part of the seasons of life to ask questions, to doubt, to wrestle with how we understand God. And still, we know that we can take those doubts and uncertainties to God, and God's Spirit will be with us, offering wisdom and companionship in our questions.

What is a big question or doubt you have or have had in the past?

"Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away."

This is James's first statement on economic justice, a theme that receives more attention in chapter 2. This image of the flower wilting and the reversal of high and low echoes the magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) as well as Jesus' words about refraining from worrying on material things (Matthew 6:28). The concerns of economic status and privileges of wealth have no place in the Christian community.

"Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him..."

No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved."

God is our faithful companion during struggle and pain, and through times of temptation. In James, this temptation might be: to forget our deepest values during hard times; to speak unkindly or boastfully; to refuse to live into God's principles of economic abundance and sharing; or failing to remember our Christian commitments in the way we navigate conflict with one another.

God does not bring any of those temptations to us or lead us into sin or struggle. God does not deceive or trick us. James points out that these evils lead to death, not the abundant life that we are offered in following in Jesus' way of love.

"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

Rather, God is unchanging in God's goodness, the source of our being. God is rooting for us. God wants us to flourish. God never brings suffering to God's people, but meets us there with wisdom, comfort, and guidance.

"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls."

How do we live as the first fruits of God's creatures? Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, embracing God's word in us. James focuses on the power of our speech to either harm or heal, make us more like Christ or move us further from God's hope for God's people. For this epistle, our speech to each other has the potential to reflect the word planted in our souls, the Word of God, Jesus.

Think about a time when someone listened to you really well. How did that person show you God's presence, God's Word?

When we hear and receive God's word, Jesus, we are completely transformed in how we treat each other, how we live our lives.

"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like."

"But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

James calls God's law the law of liberty—guidance and boundaries for living that lead us to freedom and blessing. When we live that law, that true religion, our lives will be marked by caring speech, honesty, integrity, and care for those in need.

Do you think about following God's commands or the teachings of Jesus as restricting or freeing? Why?

A PRAYER FOR YOUR WEEK

Dear God,
Remind me that no matter what I'm going through, you are with me. Your wisdom and Spirit guide me. Give me courage, strength, and peace to speak kindly, be honest, care for others, and stay true to who you have called me to be.
Amen.

NOTES

CHAPTER 2

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors

James is unequivocal in his instructions in the second chapter. Acts of favoritism for the wealthy and powerful, or living to accommodate a few above the rest, calls into question the community's fundamental faith in Jesus Christ. This passage echoes the instructions of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church, instructing the community to wait for and honor each other across their class difference. This economic discrimination goes against the most important teachings of Jesus: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Have you ever been privileged because of your wealth, race, or gender?

Have you ever been marginalized because of your wealth, race, or gender? What is that like?

"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."

James's understanding of good works, of a lived faith, is rigorous, if not harsh. Divine judgment is an uncomfortable concept for most people. But we need God's judgment, because it is fundamentally God expressing concern and value over how we live and treat other people.

Could we say that God loves us if God has no care for how we are together? According to this scripture, we will meet God's mercy when we show mercy to others.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

This echoes Matthew 25, when Jesus teaches that at the final judgment, God will tell those who gave food, company, shelter, clothing, and care to those who need it had given it to God. What is the good of any religion that fails to live out the basic dignity and care of those who are made in the image of God?



"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?"

Again, James is emphasizing that faith is by nature active and transforming, not just claiming an identity or an intellectually approached belief in doctrine.

Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was

reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?

You can read the story of Abraham mentioned here in Genesis 22, and the story of Rahab can be found in Joshua 2. Both of these biblical figures are held up as examples of profound, radical faith in God's promise and provision. Abraham, at God's command, took his son Isaac out and was prepared to make him a sacrifice when he was stopped by God's messenger. Rahab risked her life and betrayed her own community to help Joshua and the people of Israel and is hailed as a matriarch and hero.

Who is someone that you think of as an example of faith? What do you admire about this person?

**The story of Abraham and Isaac can be interpreted in other ways, and might deserve a second look. See the link in the bibliography to "Impossible Ethics" for a clear summary of Soren Kierkegaard's take on this story.*

"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."

James is about as clear as one can be in the concluding verse of chapter 2.. Faith without works, a belief in doctrine that isn't present and influencing every part of our life and being, is like a corpse. For people who are brought to new life in Christ, who are a community constituted by resurrection, this is a challenge to examine our faith and lives, and ask the question of whether we are living or dead in our faith.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR WEEK

Dear God,
Transform my life and faith to be living and active. Turn my heart to those around me. Grant me courage to let go of power and privilege, and wisdom to live into your dream of a beloved and mutual community.
Amen.

NOTES

CHAPTER 3

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits."

The actions of the faithful life James encourages us to take aren't always obviously radical and might even seem easy. This epistle is very concerned about our speech as one key way in which our faith is put into action.

This makes perfect sense for people of the Word. We meet God's Word in scripture and in Jesus (John 1), and at Pentecost the church is commissioned when the Holy Spirit empowers the followers of Jesus to speak and proclaim across difference and language the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

This portion of instruction also warns those who teach, whose words are granted extra authority or audience.



How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Our speech to each other can either build up or tear down. We can either speak life and hope or wound and cut down. It takes discipline and grace to tame our words, to be vigilant that our speech is true, kind, necessary, and timely.

James also points out that our speech reflects the state of our heart. A spring can't give fresh and brackish water and a tree can only yield one fruit. Our words point to our deepest held truths and thoughts, and can spill out things we didn't even realize were in our hearts and minds. Patterns of speaking to ourselves and others are established in early childhood, and can be difficult to transform. But to speak with kindness and truth is part of our Christian responsibility and an outworking of God's presence in our lives, it is both a work and grace that we are called to follow.

When is a time that you heard another's speech as particularly loving and showing you God? When is a time that you were hurt by others' speech?

When is a time that you have spoken with kindness and truth?

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace."

This concluding portion of the text offers continued instruction for discernment of speech, this time for understanding what is wise and worth following. For James, the fruit of the community's life is the best indicator of whether their words about God are wise and true, whether their faith is alive.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR WEEK

Dear God,
Make me mindful of my speech, that my words would reflect your Word and offer love, truth, and hope to others. Give me a wise and discerning heart, and teach me to be peaceable, full of mercy, and without hypocrisy.
Amen.

NOTES

CHAPTER 4

"Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures."

James calls attention to the conflicts of the community, and attributes them to desires and unhealth within individuals and the community.

The epistle's conviction that Christians are to be whole, healed, of integrity throughout our lives in accordance with faith, makes a claim not only on our behavior, but on the inner intellectual and emotional life that drives our behaviors.

When we are inwardly struggling, wounded, addicted, and broken, our hurts come out sideways on the people around us. When we are healing from within, God's grace transforms and moves through our behavior and relationships.

How do you navigate conflict in your life? How might God be calling you to new ways of managing conflict and healing your self and relationships?



"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, "God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 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."

James is adamant that the relationships, conflict management, health, and behavior of Christians should be different. It's part of what it means for us to follow Jesus. But even in this rigorous attitude toward faithful living, the letter encourages full reliance on God's grace and empowerment.

Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

Humility and trusting in God's provision to guide our relationships requires us to be honest and humble with ourselves about our own failures and struggles, and extend grace, not judgment, to others in theirs.

This humility thinks not of oneself individually, but the flourishing of all the community.

**Come now, you who say,
“Today or tomorrow we will
go to such and such a town
and spend a year there, doing
business and making money.”
Yet you do not even know
what tomorrow will bring.
What is your life? For you are
a mist that appears for a little
while and then vanishes.
Instead you ought to say, “If
the Lord wishes, we will live
and do this or that.” As it is,
you boast in your arrogance;
all such boasting is evil.
Anyone, then, who knows the
right thing to do and fails to
do it, commits sin.**

This call to humility also involves trusting and honoring God in our finances and our planning. Boasting, planning, and storing up wealth when others do not have enough is unacceptable and shows little faith that God will provide for those whom God has called to a life of radical generosity.

When have you made plans or goals that didn't come to pass? What happened? How might God have been with you through it?

A PRAYER FOR YOUR WEEK

Dear God,
Heal my heart and my relationships. Grant me courage and trust in your provision, so that I might not follow the way of surety and self preservation, but live with faith and generosity to others.
Amen.

NOTES

CHAPTER 5

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

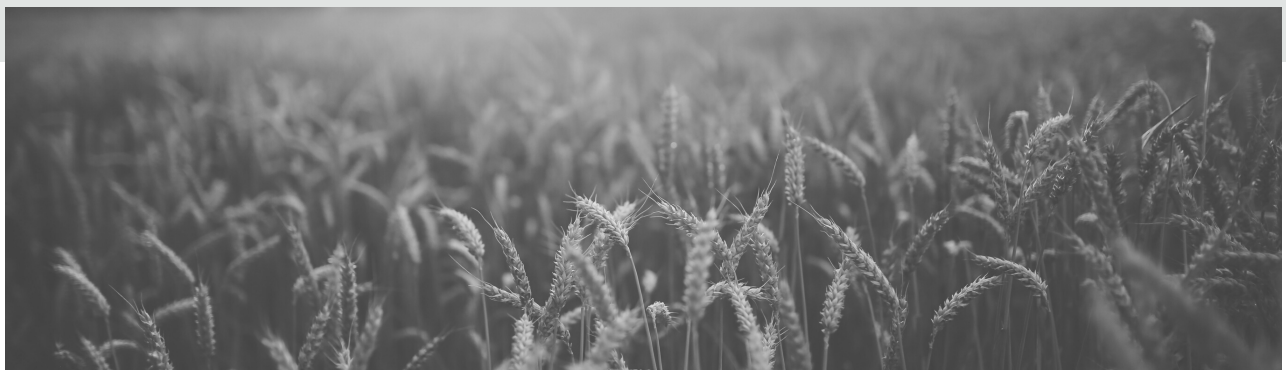
Continuing from the last paragraph of chapter 4, the closing section of James calls the wealthy community members to repent of hoarding up material goods that do not have eternal significance, and abusing the poor and working folks in order to do so.

These are harsh words, but fully in line with the teachings of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus himself, who gave more teachings on economic justice than any other ethical topic. Throughout the Bible, the poor are innocent and righteous before God, and the community is called to unequivocally care for all its members.

Are you financially well off? How is God inviting you to care for others?

Are you an employer? How is God calling you to ethical treatment of your employees?

Are you poor or struggling? God sees you.



Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!

The ever present coming of Jesus, known in Christian theology as the eschaton, serves as a reminder that believers must hang on, persevering in the faithful life that goes against all our human logic of self preservation.

Be true to this call, even in times of trouble, even when it is difficult! God is our judge, and God's perspective on how we live is what matters most.

What encourages you to keep the faith and follow the way of love when it is particularly difficult?

As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

The stories of the prophets, of the matriarchs and patriarchs, and of saints, those witnesses who are the light of Christ in every generation, offer us wisdom and courage to be faithful in our own lives. We can turn to their stories and see how God was at work in and around them, and be reminded that God is with us too, no matter our circumstances.

Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Again, James offers a call to honest speech that builds trust and integrity in the community.

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

In the Episcopal tradition of healing prayer, prayers for the person to experience the healing love of God, prayers for the forgiveness of sins, and prayers for healing and wholeness in body, mind, and spirit are all woven together. These prayers are not for a cure of ailment, but for wholeness and a full experience of God's faithful and gracious presence.

Anointing with oil follows the biblical tradition of the anointing of priests and kings as a sign of the Holy Spirit. Anointing at healing prayer reminds us of the anointing at our baptisms and also calls to mind the anointing of a body for burial. At anointing we are reminded through the physical, sacramental act that God's Spirit is with us now, always has been with us from the start of our journey of life and faith, and will sustain us to death and the life to come. We are held in love and the life of Christ.

How might God be inviting you to healing and wholeness in your life?

How might God be inviting you to pray and care for others?

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

Again, James reminds the reader of past figures of faith to encourage Christians in faithful prayer. This story is fitting at a second level as well. Elijah prayed for drought as a sign against the evil king, Ahab, who abused the people under his care for his own wealth. This is a not-too-subtle reminder that "the righteous" are those who put faith into action on behalf of the poor.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Like the shepherd who goes after one lost sheep or the woman who searches for a missing coin, God doesn't leave God's people behind. Likewise, Christians are called to never leave one another behind, but come together in mutual care, calling each other back to our identity in Christ.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR WEEK

Dear God,
Help me honor your call to economic justice and strengthen me to be faithful. Heal my heart, mind, and body, and make me a healer to others. Give me a sense of your love for those around me, that none would be forgotten.
Amen.

NOTES

Further Reading & References

"The Bible"

<https://episcopalchurch.org/bible>

The Cost of Discipleship

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A Great Cloud of Witnesses

Church Publishing

"Impossible Ethics: A Response to the Sacrifice of Isaac,"

by Aaron Hollander

www.swarthmore.edu/writing/impossible-ethics-a-response-to-sacrifice-isaac

The Jewish Annotated New Testament

ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler

"Mindful Speech: Is It True? Is It Necessary? Is It Kind?"

www.mindfueldaily.com/livewell/mindful-speech-is-it-true-is-it-necessary-is-it-kind/

A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings

ed. Fernando F. Segovia

"A Public Service of Healing," *The Book of Occasional Services*

Church Publishing