

# SMALL GROUPS

LIVING HD



## Contents

### (Part 4–6)

Small Group material lovingly adapted by former Bishop Rev. Themba Mntambo.

- iv. Forest Fires and Fruitful Fields
- v. Conflict, Christ & Community
- vi. Patient and Prayerful Expectation
- vii. *\*Additional reading on Chapter 5, The Prayer of Faith*



# FOREST FIRES & FRUITFUL FIELDS

James 3:1 – 18 (1 – 12)

Taming The Tongue

## INTRODUCTION

In the third chapter of his Epistle, James now seems to be moving in a very different direction after his teaching on deeds, which concluded, “faith without deeds is dead.”<sup>1</sup> (2:14-26). But in fact, this does flow out of his teaching on works or deeds. Is James saying that the words that come out of our mouths may well constitute works?

Going back to chapter 1, James twice mentioned the importance of our speech:

- “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,” (1:19).
- “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.” (1:26).

## Opening Discussion

Paul writes this in Romans 7:15 – 20:

*15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. [a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

We all experience this conflict within us. It is not simply a schizophrenic condition, but a spiritual conflict and condition that we must confront.

How have you found relief from this state in your life? How do you continue to overcome this?

---

<sup>1</sup> James 2:26

## Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we live within the restless and relentless tension between sainthood and sinfulness, life and death, good and bad, light and darkness. We are pulled, yes, even dragged from one state to the other, and we often feel powerless. Our cry is like the cry of your servant Paul. Like him, we desire only that which you desire and want for us and from us. We confess that we are not able to tear ourselves away from the clutches of sin, death, and darkness, and to enter the place of life, goodness, and light. Help us, loving God, give us strength to overcome all that is in conflict with your will. Give us the assurance that when we cannot overcome, we have your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who is victorious over all that drags us into a life of sin. Help us to claim his victory as our own, for he won it for us. This we pray through him who suffered so that we may not suffer, who died so that we may not die, who lives so that we may live eternally in victory. This we pray, and this we trust because we have him as our Saviour. Amen.

## Scripture Reading

James 3:1 – 12

## Unpacking the Scripture

### **NOT MANY SHOULD BECOME TEACHERS: (JAMES 3:1-2)**

**Verse 1a:** *“Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers”*

Teaching in the times of James was a high-level office in the church. Paul In 1 Corinthians 12:28 lists it third (after apostles and prophets) in the list of eight offices or gifts that he mentions. The office of teaching was regarded as important because:

- Teaching requires diligence. The teacher was and is still required today to be diligent in learning and gaining knowledge of the subject matter to be taught, and whatever knowledge and information the teacher acquired had to be presented as truthfully and as reliably as possible.
- A teacher could then and can still today influence the students’ minds. The teacher has the power to lead students to the right, or to the wrong paths. We all know that a student led and taught wrongly might find it difficult to return to the right path. Such is the power of influence a teacher has.

This may not be the best example, but for what it is worth, please receive it. Many years ago, I showed interest in the game of golf, and a colleague in the ministry offered to teach me. I trusted him and he took me through the paces – how to grip the club, how to take a stance, how to address the ball (I thought the ball was supposed to be hit, but he told me it was to be addressed), how to swing the club etc. The short version of my story is that I could never play a good game of golf. I sought help from a professional and was surprised at the number of things I was doing wrong, the things my colleague taught me. They were all wrong. It has taken me a long time to correct all the faults. I still find it difficult to do the right thing on the course – but I am getting there. Oh! That colleague takes the credit for having taught me to play golf. I do not have the heart to tell him that he taught me all the wrong things. I am grateful though that he introduced me to the game.

Perhaps James here is sounding a warning that some people might be attracted to the office of a teacher for the wrong reasons. In James’ day, a teacher had considerable status and influence, so a person drawn

to teaching because they desired the status and the power to influence others was in danger of focusing on selfish considerations rather than the welfare of his or her students. Do we not have a whole string of popular pastors, prophets, evangelists who have emerged because they saw the opportunities to enrich themselves. So, James advises, “Not many of you should become teachers.”

**Verse 1b:** *“because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”*

It is true that when we aspire to great responsibility, we must expect to be put under greater scrutiny, and much will be required of us; we will be subject to heavy criticism (from people) and even heavy judgment (from God). Did Jesus not warn us that: *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*<sup>2</sup> With regard to the possibility of leading someone astray, Jesus said: *“It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”*<sup>3</sup>

It is also true that teachers are required to lead by their personal conduct as well as their teaching. A teacher can lead people astray by personal example as easily as by instruction. Ministers and Pastors are deeply aware of this responsibility, and their congregations certainly expect them to lead and teach by personal, good example. Sometimes they stumble and fall and can only depend on God’s grace and the people’s gracious love to rise again and try to be and do their best. Would this warning about heavy judgment apply to parents too? I think so. Children learn much of what they know from their parents, for good or ill. Will God not hold the parents responsible if they lead their children astray?

Thirty years ago, the church from which I retired established a Fathers’ Group. They used as a guide to their meeting a book by Ron Rand titled “For Fathers Who Aren’t In Heaven”. This group met weekly, at 06h00 on Fridays. They held one another accountable for their role as fathers and husbands, and if one of them stumbled, he could come to the group to seek help and support. They would speak the truth to one another in love and grace, and many of them today still attest to how this group enabled them to be the best fathers they could be. Would it not be wonderful if many such groups could be established in our churches?

**Verse 2a:** *“We all stumble in many ways.”*

The word stumble is often used in the New Testament to mean stumbling or falling into sin. James’ statement that we all stumble echoes Paul’s, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**<sup>4</sup>

**Verse 2b:** *“Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.”*

There are many ways to stumble (to fall into sin), but James highlights one, stumbling in word:

- Saying things that offend unnecessarily.
- Saying things designed to wound another person.
- Saying things intended to deceive.
- Saying things that would lead another person astray.

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:48

<sup>3</sup> Luke 17:2

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23

Our tendency toward this sort of error is so common that James declares that the one who has not stumbled in word must surely be perfect. Anyone able to thoroughly control his or her mouth is almost certain also to be in perfect control of his or her body. How we all wish to be perfect, but John Wesley in his teaching on Christian Perfection says it is possible to arrive at it, but it is not by our ability, rather it is a gift from God. Wesley describes Christian Perfection as perfect love for God and for neighbor.

**THE TONGUE IS SMALL BUT BOASTS GREAT THINGS: JAMES 3:3-6.**

*Verses 3 and 4: "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go."*

James brings in a series of metaphors from common life that illustrate how little things can control large things. In this case, a bit (a hand-sized piece of metal) inserted into a horse's mouth makes it possible to control the whole animal. Or a ship's rudder is small when compared to the size of the ship, but the rudder permits the pilot to control the ship, even in the face of fierce winds.

**Verse 5a:** *"Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts."*

This is the point. Just as a bit can control a horse and a rudder can control a ship, the tongue is small but "boasts great things." The tongue has much about which to boast. It has a profound effect on the person who speaks, and to the person at whom the words we speak are directed. It can dramatically enhance the reputation of a gifted orator but can also do irreparable damage to a person who is too quick to speak and too careless in what he says. Our words can also have a profound effect on other people.

**Verse 5b – 6a:** *"Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire,"* This is the third metaphor. A small campfire that has not been completely extinguished can burn down a forest. Think of the recent fire in Cape Town which destroyed much, including an important library at the university. A tiny spark, from a tiny matchstick destroyed much.

Just so, the words from a person's mouth can be unimaginably destructive. Adolf Hitler comes to mind. A mesmerizing orator, he used oratory to sway crowds and to gain power. He then used that power to start a war that ultimately cost the lives of fifty million people. It seems too much to attribute this much unrighteousness to the tongue, but James is simply following Jesus' lead. Jesus said: *"What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."*<sup>5</sup> But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."*<sup>6</sup>

**Verse 6c:** *"It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire,"*

These are effects of an undisciplined tongue. Even though small, such a tongue can poison the whole body and destroy lives, even as a small fire can destroy a great forest.

**Verse 6d:** *"and is itself set on fire by hell."*

---

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 15:11

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 15:18 - 19

In other translations, the Hebrew word “Gehenna” is used for “hell”, and in the Old Testament, Gehenna was the place where the wicked were punished. Just as a matter of interest, the name Gehenna comes from the Hebrew, *ge Hinnom*, which means the Valley of Hinnom. This was a valley near Jerusalem where human sacrifice was sometimes practiced<sup>7</sup> and where rubbish from Jerusalem was burned in fires that never cooled. This valley, therefore, stands as a metaphor for a place of eternal, fiery damnation. It is this fire of hell that gives the tongue such destructive power.

### **NOBODY CAN TAME THE TONGUE: JAMES 3:7-12.**

**Verse 7 and 8:** *“All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”*

Certain animals are capable of being tamed: Dogs, cats, horses, cows, etc. and even large and dangerous animals can be tamed; elephants are used for transport in some parts of the world, lions and tigers have been used in circus shows. Sadly, some of these animals have to go through enormous torture to get them to submit to human control. Dolphins and killer whales are used in aquatic shows to entertain humans in environments to which they do not belong naturally.

The writer makes the point that it is one thing to tame a wild animal, but to tame the tongue is an entirely different thing. In fact, he suggests that it is impossible to tame the tongue. The word restless in this instance means that the tongue is unstable or unsettled, the opposite of rock-solid. We cannot predict when and where our tongue is likely to hurt others and us in the process.

I remember standing in a check in queue at the airport, soon after the 9/11 episode, behind a lady who was being checked in. The attendant asked her the usual questions such as whether she packed her suitcase herself, that no one asked her to carry something for him or her etc. She replied correctly to every one of the questions except when she was asked whether she had any sharp instruments in her possession, to which she replied that indeed she had a sharp instrument in her possession, her tongue. The check in attendant either did not hear the last two words of the passenger, or that she was not blessed with a sense of humour. She then asked her to remove that sharp instrument and surrender it to her. The lady then replied that she could not do so. Suddenly airport security appeared to remove the lady from the queue. Much protest came from the passenger, but the security would not listen. “I was only joking”, she said, to which one of the security people replied, “we do not tolerate such jokes madam”. Later I noticed that she was after all allowed to go through, probably after much explanation and serious warnings. The tongue can get one into deep trouble indeed.

The tongue is not only restless but is a restless evil. A restless person is one who will persist seeking to do what the heart has told them to do. They will not cease their efforts until the goal has been reached. If evil were a person, it will not cease until it has caused hurt, brokenness and much suffering. It is **“full of deadly poison.”** We know that a small amount of deadly poison on an arrow tip can kill quickly. Shooting our tongue is like releasing deadly poison, which has the power to hurt.

**Verse 9:** *“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.”*

---

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Kings 23:10

James presents us with an irony. We bless God with our tongues, and we curse people, made in God's image and beloved by God, with the same tongues. The truth is that if we curse human beings, made in God's likeness (the image of God), then by that action only, we curse God. Did God not say after creating all things "Behold, it is very good"? Therefore, treating any person as less than what God intended them to be is truly to stand in opposition to the goodness God created for us and in us. How do we treat our neighbours, our employees, or even our enemies?

## Question 2 – Digging Deeper

Can each person in the group take a moment and think about who was burned recently by the words of their own tongue and share the story.

**Verse 10:** *"Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be."*

James restates the irony he presents in verse 9. How can good and evil have a common source? James does not say that blessing and curse cannot come from the same source (the tongue) but says that such a thing **ought not to be**. It is true that our speech gives expression to the feelings of our hearts and the thoughts of our minds. Our hearts and minds harbor both good and evil. The prayer of confession we offer at the beginning of our communion services has these words:

"... we have sinned against you (God) and against our fellow men (brothers and sisters), in thought and word and deed, in the evil we have done  
and in the good we have not done, ..."

This prayer is an acknowledgement that whatever wrong we do link our whole being, our thoughts and words and deeds.

The apostle Paul experienced this inability to control the things that cause pain to himself and others.<sup>8</sup> On finding himself in that sinful state, Paul recognizes that he could only appeal to God for help.<sup>9</sup> To gain control of our tongues, we need to seek God's help in eliminating the evil in our hearts and minds. The Good News then is that while James seems to lament the evil of the tongue, and appears to see no solution to the problem, there is in fact a solution. We can appeal to God for victory over all that seems to take control of our lives. Thanks be to God!

**Verse 11 - 12:** *"Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring? **Can a fig tree, my brothers, yield olives, or a vine figs?"***

This is the first of three contrasts that James uses to illustrate the inappropriateness of a tongue that pronounces both blessings and curses (v. 9).

- Fresh water and salt water cannot come from the same source,
- A fig tree cannot produce olives...
- So also a tongue should not pronounce both blessings and curses.

---

<sup>8</sup> Read Romans 7:15 - 20

<sup>9</sup> Romans 7:24 - 25

### The Challenge/Action

How can you make amends to anyone who might have been hurt by your words? Confess your sin to God and pray that God give you courage to call, write or visit the person to seek forgiveness, and if possible, make a gesture of restitution. You may wish to let the group know that you have done this, and together pray forgiveness from God.

### Question 3 – Reflection

What are some practical ways in which we can “tame” the tongue daily?

### Closing Prayer

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock, and my Redeemer.



# CONFLICT, CHRIST AND COMMUNITY

## James 4:1 – 12 Submission to God

### Opening Discussion

Paul invites us to take the example of Jesus in conducting our relationships with one another. He writes in Philippians 2:5 – 11:

*“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

How important is it for you to follow the example of Jesus? Have you sought to follow this example in times of conflict? What is the cost of following this example?

### Opening Prayer

How majestic are your ways, great God of life! We worship you and give you honour and glory, not that you need us to give you anything, but by your grace you receive, graciously, whatever we offer to you. Receive us today as we gather in your Word, help us to receive one another in love. Just as we humble ourselves to you, help us to humble ourselves before one another, let us hear and take to heart the words of your servant Paul to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” Help us to clothe ourselves in humility, that peace, love and grace may reign among us – in our church, our homes and in our community.<sup>10</sup> Amen.

### Scripture Reading

James 4:1 – 12

### Unpacking The Passage

**THE HUMBLE CHARACTER OF A LIVING FAITH: JAMES 4:1 - 3**

**Reasons for strife in the Christian community.**

---

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from “A Guide to Prayer for All Who Walk with God”, p. 350

**Verses 1 – 3:** *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

James describes the strife among Christians with the term's quarrels and fights (the King James version uses stronger language - **wars and fights**). Indeed, often the conflicts that happen among Christians can be bitter and quite hurtful.

Bible Scholars agree that James here refers to an internal **war** within the believer, driven by the lusts of the flesh (carnality) instead of being guided by the Holy Spirit, because it is impossible for two Christians, both walking in the Spirit to live with quarrels and fights among themselves. One of the reasons, and I think the main reason for Christian quarrels to be so intense and hurtful is that the warring parties often believe that God is on their side, not on the side of the other party. The parties at war will often base their arguments on some Bible passages or doctrinal base. How do you argue with someone who will say, "It is in the Word of God (the Bible)", or that "God spoke to me..."? Once someone is convinced that "it is in the Word", it is nigh impossible to reason them and get the person to hear another view. But we should not give up on people who differ with us, we should persist in seeking agreement, and trust the Holy Spirit to help us learn to live together, love one another regardless of our disagreements.

## Question 2 – Digging Deeper

What do you think are some of your "triggers" that bring you to a point of conflict with others?

James describes the kinds of desires that lead to conflict.

- *Covetousness* leads to conflict (you desire (lust) and do not have)
- Anger and animosity, leading to
- Hatred and conflict (murder).

He uses some strong words in these verses, one of which is "kill". He intends to compel his readers to realise the depth of the evil in their bitter hatred toward one another.

Misplaced desires, or desires for pleasure (covetousness) fuels conflict among the people, and even leads to acts of murder. But there is a sense of futility in coveting, it leads to murder, but the murderer will in the end not get the things for which they covet. One of the great preachers in Methodist history, Charles Spurgeon writes this, *"The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to obtain their object." This is the tragic irony of the life lived after worldly and fleshly desires; it never reaches the goal it gives everything for... This fundamental dissatisfaction is not because of a lack of effort: If the lusters fail, it is not because they did not set to work to gain their ends; for according to their nature, they used the most practical means within their reach, and used them eagerly, too."*

The reason these destructive desires exist among Christians is because they do not seek God for their needs. James reminds us here of the great power of prayer, and why one may live as a "spiritual pauper", simply because they do not pray, or do not **ask** when they pray.

After dealing with the problem of not praying and asking God, James addresses the problem of selfish prayer. He warns that when we do ask, we should not ask God with selfish motives. We must remember that the purpose of prayer is not to persuade a reluctant God to do what we want. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with God's will, and in partnership with God.<sup>11</sup> Charles Spurgeon writes this about selfish prayer; *"When a man so prays, he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires; nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous, but a large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds."*

#### **A REBUKE OF COMPROMISE AND COVETOUSNESS AMONG CHRISTIANS: JAMES 4:4 - 5**

**Verse 4 – 5:** *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?"*

Adulterous people is language used in the Old Testament when God spoke to people attracted to some form of idolatry.<sup>12</sup> James saw the people's covetousness as idolatry and "friendship with the world".<sup>13</sup> He regards friendship with the world as enmity with God, recognising that we cannot both be friends of this world system in rebellion against God, and friends of God at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

The strong statements James makes here remind us that all was not beautiful in the early church. They had plenty of carnality and worldliness to deal with. One writer warns us that we should not over-romanticise the spiritual character of the early church, by the same token we should not over-romanticise the spiritual character of the church today. We must always remember that the church is composed of us "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail."<sup>15</sup>

A member of a church went to see the minister to tell him that he was leaving the church to join another down the road. The minister inquired why the member decided to leave, to which the member replied that the church at which he was worshipping, and now leaving was not the best, that he was going to join a church with very good Christians. In reply the minister told the member that he was correct, that the current church was full of sinners, so he bid the member farewell and wished him all the best. As the member left, the minister then said, "You are indeed joining the perfect church, but as soon as you arrive there, it will no longer be perfect, at least they will have one sinner in their midst."

**Verse 5:** *"Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?"*

This verse is a little difficult to understand, but there are three possible meanings.

- First is that the indwelling presence of the Holy **Spirit** has a jealous yearning for our friendship with God.

---

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:10

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 3:8 – 9; Ezekiel 6:9, 16:32, 23:37, and Hosea 3:1

<sup>13</sup> See Colossians 3:5

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 6:24

<sup>15</sup> Hymn 8 (Methodist Hymn Book), Hymn 28 (Hymns & Psalms).

- Secondly, it could mean that God is *jealously yearning for the devotion of our spirit which He put within us,*
- Thirdly, that the *Spirit within us convicts us and leads us to a jealous yearning for full devotion of our hearts to God.*

Either way, the sense is much the same, for indeed God yearns for our devotion, even when God really does not need it, and we too yearn for God in our lives, as Saint Augustine said *“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee”*.<sup>16</sup>

James goes so far as to speak of the people as adulterers and adulteresses. He agrees with the many passages in the Old Testament that tell us God is a jealous God.<sup>17</sup> The idea here is that God loves us with such a passion that God cannot bear any other love within our hearts. Just think of the inner pain and torture inside the person who is betrayed by an unfaithful spouse. This is what the Spirit of God feels regarding our world-loving hearts.

### **THE SOLUTIONS FOR STRIFE: IN HUMILITY, GET RIGHT WITH GOD: JAMES 4:6 - 10**

**Verses 6 – 10:** *“But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

The same Holy Spirit convicting us of our compromise will also grant us the **grace** to serve God as we should. This is a wonderful statement, “but He gives more grace”. It stands in strong contrast to the previous words, doesn’t it? This is the contrast:

- We are weak, and God is strong.
- We are proud, God is gracious.
- We are constantly erring, God is infallible.
- We are forever changing, God never changes (immutable)
- We are quick to condemn, God is quick to forgive.
- We are miserable sinners; God is only good and holy.

The good news is that it is our weakness, pride, errors, condemning attitudes, and sinfulness which draws God closer to us, only out of his grace. For that we give thanks. Here are wonderful words I once wrote in my notebook, I don’t remember where they came from: *“Sin seeks to enter, grace shuts the door; sin tries to get the mastery, but grace, which is stronger than sin, resists, and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times and puts its foot on our neck; grace comes to the rescue... Sin comes up like Noah’s flood, but grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the ark.”*

At the same time, James reminds us that this grace only comes to the humble. Grace and pride are like oil and water, they do not mix. Pride demands that God bless us because of our entitlement and merits, but grace will not deal with us on the basis of anything in us, good or bad, but only on the basis of who God is. Note that it is not our humility that **earns** the grace of God. Humility merely puts us in a position to

---

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions.

<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 32:16, 32:21; Exodus 20:5, 34:14; Zechariah 8:2

receive the gift God freely gives. So, in the light of the grace offered to the humble, we can only submit to God, or as some would say, to order ourselves under God, to surrender to God as our Creator, our Ruler in whose loving hands we are held.

Here again is what Charles Spurgeon says: *"It is a wonder that the world does not submit to God. "I have heard much of the rights of man: but it were well also to consider the rights of God, which are the first, highest, surest, and most solemn rights in the universe, and lie at the base of all other rights... Alas, great God, how art thou a stranger even in the world which thou hast thyself made! Thy creatures, who could not see if thou hadst not given them eyes, look everywhere except to thee. Creatures who could not think if thou hadst not given them minds, think of all things except thee; and beings who could not live if thou didst not keep them in being, forget thee utterly, or if they remember thine existence, and see thy power, are foolhardy enough to become thy foes!"*

These, I suggest are the reasons why we should submit to God:

- We should submit to God because God created us.
- We should submit to God because God's rule is good for us.
- We should submit to God because all resistance to God is futile.
- We should submit to God because such submission is absolutely necessary to salvation.
- We should submit to God because it is the only way to have peace with God.

To solve the problem of our carnal nature, and the strife it causes, James calls us also to resist the devil, and he will flee from us. Here is an encouraging word from James; he does not suggest that the devil or demons be cast out by a third party, instead, he challenges us to deal with the devil as a conquered enemy who can and must be personally resisted. Here is another word of wisdom: *"He who, in the terrible name of JESUS, opposes even the devil himself is sure to have speedy and glorious conquest. He flees from that name, and from his conquering blood."*

Satan can be sent packing by the resistance of the lowliest believer who comes in the authority of what Jesus did on the cross. We may think that we are powerless against the wiles and temptations of the evil one, but we must remember that he was defeated more than 2 000 years ago. The evil one will try, but he will never win.

The call to draw near to God is both an invitation and a promise. It is no good to submit to God's authority and to resist the devil's attack and then fail to draw near to God. We have it as a promise that God will draw near to us as we draw near to God. It is true that when we take our faint faltering steps towards God, God rushes towards us in leaps and bounds, with arms wide open to embrace us, and to shield us from the arrows the evil one shoots at us. ii. What does it mean to draw near to God?

- It means to draw near in *worship, praise, and in prayer.*
- It means to draw near by *asking counsel of God.*
- It means to draw near in *enjoying communion with God.*

Note how this verse also illustrates the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant, God told Moses to not come any closer to the burning bush and to take off his shoes.

Under the new covenant, God says to us: “Draw near to me and I will draw near to you.” Now the distance between God and us is closed, the barrier between God and us is removed!

As we draw near to God, we will be convicted of our sin, and we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. As we come in humility before the holy God; not as self-righteous, religious people, as Jesus taught in Luke 8:10 – 14, then God will lift us up.

### **THE SOLUTIONS FOR STRIFE: GET RIGHT WITH OTHER PEOPLE: JAMES 4:11 - 12**

**Verses 11 – 12:** *“Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?”*

Humbling ourselves and getting right with God must result in our getting right with other people. When we are right with other people, it will show in the way we talk to them and about them. So we must not speak evil of one another and not judge our brother or sister. Slandering or speaking evil of one another is wrong for two reasons:

- It breaks the law that we should love one another.
- It takes the right of judgment that only God has.

So who are we to judge our neighbour?

### **The Challenge**

Do you know of any conflict, or toxic relationships in your community, family, place of work or any other place? How can you intervene in order to bring about peace and restore relationships? If you cannot intervene personally, are there people whom you can call upon to help resolve the conflict? Remember that Jesus teaches us that “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.” Go for it, child of God!

### **Question 3 – Reflection**

What is the hardest part when trying to bring about peace?

### **Closing Prayer**

Holy Lord, you lift up and you lay low, you crown and you dethrone, all for the sake of your Kingdom of justice and peace. Today we declare our desire to be clothed in the garments of humility so that our thoughts and actions will confirm our citizenship in your gracious realm.<sup>18</sup> Amen.

### **The Blessing**

May our Lord who humbled himself and became a servant, strengthen us in holy humility that embraces all with grace and love. Amen.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> A Guide to Prayer for All Who Walk With God, p.350

<sup>19</sup> Adapted from “A Guide to Prayer for All Who Walk With God”, p.351.



# PATIENT & PRAYERFUL EXPECTATION

James 5:7–19 (7 – 10)

Patience in suffering

## Opening Discussion

In my sister's kitchen wall, there hangs a plate with these words, "Lord, grant me patience, but hurry!" We pray for patience when we are faced with challenges and ask God to help us get through whatever the challenge we face, to hang in there, knowing that the situation will change for the better. Another way to look at patience is of waiting, waiting for what is not yet, but we know it is coming. This idea is certainly linked with faith, which the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews describes as, "*confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*"<sup>20</sup>

In which areas of your life do you find yourself struggling with patience? Share your thoughts, if you can, with the group.

## Opening Prayer

O God, our God, we put ourselves before you to receive guidance from your word, give us ears to listen to you and to one another, give us eyes to see you in the faces of our sisters and brothers, give us hearts to love one another, and give us strength to bear one another's burdens. In these times of suffering and fear, of disease and death, help us to wait in faith, knowing that you, and not our present sufferings will have the last word. Amen.

## Scripture Reading

James 5:7 – 10

## Unpacking the Scripture

### INTRODUCTION

The verses that immediately precede this passage speak a prophetic warning to those who say, "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Today or tomorrow let us go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit" (4:13-17), and to the rich (5:1-6). Those focused on profits will find that their life is a vapor that will soon vanish (4:14). Their boasting is evil (4:16). If they know what is good and fail to do it, that is to them a sin (4:17).

---

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 11:1

The rich will soon “weep and howl for (the) miseries that are coming on (them)” (5:1). They will soon find their riches corrupted and their garments moth-eaten (5:2). Their gold will corrode “and will eat (their) flesh like fire” (5:3). The Lord has heard the cries of the laborers whom the rich have defrauded (5:4).

Let us first note that God does not condemn the rich, not at all, and these passages must not be understood as condemnation of the rich and approval of poverty. What kind of God would condemn hard work and hard-earned wealth? God certainly condemns the rich, but for good reason. God condemns those who have been blessed but do nothing to help the poor. We hear prophets like Amos speaking out against those who do not care for the widow and orphan. Jesus spoke against the rich fool in a parable. So, these warnings to the money-hungry and rich are important background to our text because the people to whom James speaks on 5:7-10 have surely suffered at the hands of the people to whom James spoke in these earlier verses.

**BE PATIENT: JAMES 5:7-8.**

*“ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”*

**Verse 7a & b:** *“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming.”*

James emphasizes patience by repetition. He mentions it in this verse (three times) and again in verses 8 and 10. Patience is required, because they have suffered at the hands of the money-grabbers and the rich (4:13 – 5:6).

What would happen if the people do not exercise patience? They possibly would take matters in their own hands in an attempt to wreak vengeance on those who have injured them, or to suffer silently and allow their anger to eat away at them. Neither of those alternatives would be helpful at all because the rich and powerful usually have people at their disposal to protect them, and the first victim of anger is likely to be the angry person.

What is the meaning of “the Lord’s coming”? It may mean the second coming of the Lord, or the coming of God’s judgment on those who have oppressed the poor—and the resultant vindication of the poor.

The traditional answer is that *parousia* equates to Christ’s Second Coming. The problem with that is that Christ’s coming had not occurred yet, so the people to whom James was writing died without receiving the vindication that would happen with the Second Coming. But we need to remember that *parousia* was an ordinary Greek word that meant “coming” or “arrival” or “presence”. Paul uses it in the New Testament to refer to his own presence<sup>21</sup> in Corinth, and Philippi. He also uses it to refer to the presence of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus,<sup>22</sup> and Titus<sup>23</sup> and to the coming of the lawless one.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:10, Philippians 1:26; 2:12

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:17

<sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:6

<sup>24</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:9

It is easy to lose sight of these ordinary uses of *parousia* because the word is so often equated with Christ's Second Coming. Scholars today often write about the Parousia (capitalized), assuming that readers will understand that they are talking about Christ's Second Coming. However, as noted above, the word is used in the New Testament in other ways, as well as to refer to Christ's Second Coming. Therefore, it is entirely possible that James was telling these Christian brothers and sisters to be patient until God would come to judge the rich who victimise the poor, and to vindicate faithful people who had been victimised by the rich.

Whether James intends *parousia* to refer to Christ's Second Coming or the coming of God in judgment, he is assuring these Christians that God is in charge and that the day will come when they receive vindication. One of the passages in the Bible which made an impact in my life is 1 Peter 21 – 23. There are times when we are treated unjustly that we want to hit back at the ones who treat us unjustly. I had often to remind myself of these words, and I have been able to restrain myself, and to entrust myself to the one who judges justly. I can testify that the one who judges justly has not disappointed me.

**Verse 7c & d:** *"See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains."*

This is the first example that James uses to illustrate the need for patience. Being a farmer requires great patience. A farmer must prepare the ground and sow the seed, and must then wait for the seed to sprout, and then wait even longer for whatever was planted to ripen. In some cases, such as when planting an orchard, farmers must wait for several years to get their first harvest. If the farmer were to become impatient and to replant too quickly, he or she might never see any fruit from his or her efforts.<sup>25</sup>

Note that the word "rain" does not appear in the original Greek text, but "the autumn and spring" obviously refer to the early and late rains that come during those seasons Palestine<sup>26</sup>. Farmers would plant crops to take advantage of the early (Autumn) rain, then the late (Spring) rain would bring substantial growth of the crop.

**Verse 8a & b:** *"You too, be patient and stand firm, "*

Just as the farmer is patient, so also these Christians must be patient and stand firm. Standing firm implies a kind of rock-steadiness. So, James is telling these Christians to be strong in the face of adverse circumstances. In today's South African expression, we might say "hang in there" or "vasbyt". There is another Afrikaans word James could have used if he were from our country. He would say they should have "deursittingsvermoe" – the ability to stick it out whatever the circumstances. They also needed to stand firm with the knowledge that the Parousia, the coming of the Lord is nearby.

## Question 2 – Digging Deeper

What are your thoughts on the statement "Patience is an important spiritual discipline to be practiced daily"?

---

<sup>25</sup> See Matthew 13:24 – 30, Luke 13:6 - 9

<sup>26</sup> See Deuteronomy 11:14

How often do people look at a Christian going through difficult times and wonder how he or she is going to get through the storm. They wonder further when they see the person facing whatever storm is raging. They wonder further how the person comes out of the storm looking good and stronger. They ask; how did he do it? The thing is, they do not know that all along, the person heard and believed the word of God to “be patient and stand firm” Are you perhaps going through some storm in your life? God will give you that sense of deursittingsvermoe that was given to people throughout the centuries.

### **DO NOT GRUMBLE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER: JAMES 5:9-10**

**Verse 9:** *“Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”*

The word “grumble” brings to mind occasions in the Old Testament where the Israelites complained about God and Moses,<sup>27</sup> but the concern here is Christians complaining about each other. When everything is working well, we have no reason to blame anyone? But when we are suffering adversity, we look for a cause, and are tempted to blame those nearest us. That is counter-productive, because in adversity we need to be mutually supportive rather than mutually destructive.

James implies that those who resort to blaming behavior will be subject to judgment. This is consistent with Jesus’ comment in the Sermon on the Mount, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you”*.<sup>28</sup> One of the things we should learn when things go wrong is to ask not **who** is wrong, but **what** is wrong. We shift the focus from people who may have done wrong, to the problem that needs to be solved. In this way we commit to work together towards resolving the problem, and in the process prevent conflict from brewing and growing.

James intends to let us know that judgment will come from God (see also 2:13; 4:11-12). However, we also know that when we get into a judging mood, we usually incur disapproval from the people around us, so people who judge others can expect judgment from both God and other people.

Judgment is nearby, says James, just on the other side of the door, ready to be exercised when we judge others. The judge on the other side of the door will also come to vindicate those who have suffered injustice at the hands of the rich, and to condemn the oppressors.

**Verse 10:** *“Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”*

The first example James gave of patience was the farmer (v. 7b). Now he offers the prophets as the second example. People often persecuted prophets, because prophets delivered God’s message of judgment, a message that people did not want to hear (Matthew 5:12). Some might say the prophets were **not** an example of patience, they would rather be regarded as exemplars of faithfulness, but not patience. Let us see why this may be so.

---

<sup>27</sup> Exodus 14:10 – 14; 15:22 – 25; 16:1 – 4; 13;15; 17:1 – 7, Numbers 11:1 – 15; 31 – 35; 14;1 – 45; 16:12 – 14; 20:2 – 13; 21:4 – 9

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 7:1 - 2

- Jonah is regarded as the worst in exercising patience. When called to carry a prophetic word to Nineveh, he first ran away, and then obeyed, reluctantly so, because he had no other choice. He eventually delivered God’s message to the Ninevites. When the Ninevites repented, he became angry and asked God to take his life. Patient? Hardly!
- Jeremiah complained that he had become a laughingstock, and that everyone mocked him.
- Elijah was more patient. During a God-given drought, he hid near the brook Cherith where God sustained him with food and water over a period that lasted many months, and he stood up to the prophets of Baal in a dramatic confrontation. However, faced with threats from Jezebel, he asked God to take his life. He then complained to God about the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, claiming to be the only remaining faithful person.
- Perhaps Elisha was better, doing what God called him to do without complaint. Likewise, Amos and some other prophets.

In the end, we cannot judge the prophets. Those who believe they were not patient have their standards with which they measure patience. Such debates are irrelevant considering the work the prophets did in fulfilling their call. Let us rather measure them by the influence and effectiveness of their work, and this what James is doing.

**Verse 11:** *“As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*

James now gives a third example of patience, Job, the man who lost everything, but refused to curse God. Job is an example of steadfastness in faith, even when he had reason to doubt God. His friends could not understand why he would not curse God, but Job knew that the God who had blessed him in the past would still bless him in the future. This calls to mind the words of Psalm 42:3, after the people kept asking the Psalmist; “Where is your God?”, he did not lose hope in God his faith did not wane or falter.<sup>29</sup>

This is the promise God gives to those who are going through trials and tribulations, grief, and loss; *“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten-- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm -- my great army that I sent among you.”*<sup>30</sup>

## The Challenge

Read the whole of Psalm 27, then reflect on the words of the last verse:

“Wait for the Lord;  
be strong and take heart  
and wait for the Lord.”

## Question 3 – Reflection

How do these words encourage you to have patience?

## Praying Together

---

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 42:5 and 11

<sup>30</sup> Joel 2:25

O merciful God, who does look upon the weaknesses of your children more in pity than in anger, and more in love than in pity, look now into the inner secrets of our hearts, and see if there is any injustice that lies within. Forgive us and cleanse us from our sins. Look with grace upon those who have dealt with us unjustly, grant them your loving and gracious forgiveness, that we may all live together in peace, love, and care for one another. Amen.

### *\*Additional Reading*

#### James 5:13–20 The Prayer of Faith

##### Introduction

Chapter 5 started with warnings to the rich, who will soon “weep and wail” for (the) miseries that are coming on (them),” because the Lord has heard the cries of the laborers whom the rich have defrauded (5:1-6).

In 5:7-10, James counsels patience until the Lord comes again; patience like that of a farmer waiting for the rain to fall and the fruit to appear. He also warns his readers not to grumble against one another “so that you won’t be judged.”

He holds up the prophets as an example of suffering and patience.

Now, in 5:13-20, James emphasizes prayer, confession, and the value of redeeming those who have wandered from the truth.

##### Opening Discussion

Most denominations in South Africa, including The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, believe in the principle of the Priesthood of all Believers, thus affirming the value that every member is a minister. How can we as individuals exercise our ministry, especially as it regards prayers for healing and restoration. Do you think you are able to minister to those in need of ministry?

##### Opening Prayer

Lord God, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord was often prompted by compassion to act on behalf of those who were suffering disease, and any other form of suffering. Help us in your mercy to follow his example, to show compassion and love to one another. Let us never ignore the needy of the world, never to look away from the needs of the world. Let us understand that looking with compassion also requires us to take steps to alleviate the pain that prompted our compassion. Amen.

##### Unpacking the Scripture Passage

###### **THE PRAYER OF FAITH: JAMES 5:13-15**

**Verse 13a:** *“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.”*

This verse has a prescription for both ends, if you like, of human emotion; if in trouble, pray, if happy, sing praises.

The trouble about which this verse speaks could be physical, emotional, or circumstantial (being sick, hungry, poor, homeless, fearful or any other type of trouble). James suggests that the antidote for all of this is prayer. One might think the prayer is only about asking God to solve the problems we experience at a particular time, but prayer also entails trusting God for the strength and courage to carry the burdens that might come over us.

The truth of the matter is that when we have been through difficult times, carrying all sorts of burdens, battling through the storms, we emerge from them stronger, with deeper faith and a deeper appreciation of the trouble's others encounter. We also find in our hearts, not only appreciation for other people's trouble, but also the willingness, the heart to lend a hand to others. It is a woman who has lost a child who will stand with another in the same situation. It is one who has experienced hunger who will be willing to share a piece of bread with another hungry person.

Being cheerful depends, not so much on our circumstances, but on the attitude, we adopt when adversity visits us. An old Gospel song has these words:

*When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*<sup>31</sup>

The writer of Thessalonians' prescription is this:

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*<sup>32</sup>

The thought here is not to use prayer as an escape from our troubles, but to focus, not on the troubles but on what God has done in our lives. It is easy to forget God's blessings when we go through trouble, but in focusing on what God has already done, we find the strength to take one more step along the way, we find the courage to rise again when we have been knocked down. One of my older colleagues used to remind us often that "being a Christian does not mean we will not be attacked and knocked down, we will be knocked down, but we will never be knocked out". That is why we will sing songs of praise to God.

We count our blessings, not only when in trouble, but we also develop what someone calls "the attitude of gratitude". When we are constantly aware of God's blessings granted to us, and we sing praises to God, we also fortify ourselves for those times when troubles come around. So pray, whistle a happy tune, count your blessings, rejoice, and sing praises to God.

**Verse 14:** *"Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord."*

In Israel, an elder was typically an older man chosen for his maturity and wisdom to serve in a position of authority (as a representative of the people, governor, judge, or adviser). Scribes and Pharisees were New

---

<sup>31</sup> Guy Penrod; Count your blessings

<sup>32</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16 - 18

Testament examples.<sup>33</sup> The New Testament church continued that tradition. Peter referred to himself as “a fellow elder”<sup>34</sup>, as John also did.<sup>35</sup>

The first duty of the elders to the sick is to pray, and that the prayer be accompanied by anointing with oil in the name of the Lord. Olive oil was the most common, and was used for purposes both secular (food, lamp fuel, and medicinal ointments) and religious (anointing kings, priests, prophets; tabernacle (temple) uses; purification rituals; and offerings and sacrifices). James does not give details regarding the type or quantity of oil to be used, or where it is to be applied. He only says that the anointing should be done “in the name of the Lord.”

Most churches practice anointing for various reasons; anointing the sick as James suggests, for blessings, for protection and any number of reasons. The most important thing is not the type of oil that is used, or where the oil is applied, to whom it is applied etc. The most important thing is that people should be anointed **in the name of the Lord**. The oil itself is not efficacious, it is the Lord who does the healing, the blessing, or the protection. Today we understand that the oil is a symbol that helps us understand what the Lord is doing. Just as at baptism the water is not the main ingredient, but the presence and acceptance and blessing of God upon those being baptised. So also, is the moment of communion; the bread and wine are symbols of Christ’s presence and help us to celebrate what God has done in Jesus.

Care must be taken not to place too much emphasis on the oil itself because we do know that many healings have happened without the use of oil. There may be those who have the special gift of healing, but this gift is not limited to them. Every believer can bring healing to people because it is not they who heal but the Lord. That is why the Scriptures encourage us to pray in his name. We are simply vessels through which the Lord brings healing and blessing to people.

**Verse 15a and b:** *“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”*

It is not simply the prayer that opens the door to healing, but the prayer offered in faith... “the Lord will raise them up”. It is interesting that Jesus uses the same word for “to raise up’ in reference to his resurrection,<sup>36</sup> and Paul uses the same word to speak of our resurrection from the dead.<sup>37</sup> Certainly James uses the word to tell us that the sick person will be raised from his sickbed. We will be taking it too far to believe that James uses the word to refer to the resurrection of the dead.

**THEREFORE, CONFESS YOUR SINS TO EACH OTHER AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER: JAMES 5:16-18.**

**Verse 16:** *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

Our sins are by their nature sins against God, even when we sin against other human beings for every sin offends God, no matter who it is that we have offended. Confession of sin can be:

- To God alone,

---

<sup>33</sup> See Matthew 15:2; 16:21; 26:3; 27:1, 3, 12, 20, 41; 28:2; Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12

<sup>34</sup> 1 Peter 5:1

<sup>35</sup> 2 John 1:1; 3:1

<sup>36</sup> John 2:19 - 22

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:15; 2 Corinthians 4:14

- To the person against whom we have sinned,
- To a spiritual adviser,
- To the church

James' requirement in this verse that we confess our sins to one another suggests that we are to confess our sins to the people we have offended. committed against the people against whom we have sinned. Confession to the entire church would usually be reserved for a situation in which we are guilty of a public scandal that has besmirched the reputation of the church at large. Confessing our sins to one another does not preclude also confessing them privately to God.

Confessing to our Christian brothers and sisters, friends, colleagues, and neighbours when we have offended them opens the door to the healing of relationships.

**Verse 17 – 18:** *“Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”*

James uses the example of Elijah to illustrate his contention that the prayers of a righteous person have great power. The incident to which he alludes is recorded in 1 Kings 17-18, which also tells the stories of the healing/resurrection of the son of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel.

The account of drought and rain in 1 Kings does not mention Elijah praying. The stories of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal do, but we acknowledge that prayer is implied even in this instance.

#### **BRING THE PERSON BACK AND SAVE A SOUL: JAMES 5:19-20.**

**Verses 19 – 20:** *“My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”*

Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*<sup>38</sup> In other words Jesus meant “I am truth personified.” He also said, *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*<sup>39</sup>

The promise is that, when people stray from the faith and we help them to find their way back, we will have helped to save their souls from death. While this could refer to physical death because some sins put a person's physical life in jeopardy, the more significant salvation is spiritual and eternal.

### **The Challenge**

Earlier in this study we described a person who could be regarded as an elder. Do you know people who may be regarded as elders in your church? If not make time to find out and pray for them because their task is enormous, and they need all the support they can have from us.

---

<sup>38</sup> John 14:6

<sup>39</sup> John 8:31 - 32

## Closing Prayer

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ taught us to ask, and it will be given to us; to search and we will find; knock and the door will be opened for us. He further promised that everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.<sup>40</sup> Help us in our prayers to bring those among us who are in need to you in faith, believing that you hear and answer our prayers, not because we deserve to be heard, but that we depend only on your grace and mercy. May our prayers for one another bind us together and bring us all closer to you. Amen

## The Benediction

My Lord, my God, be with me wherever I go, and help me to live out my faith, and let it show by my good deeds.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 7:7 - 8

<sup>41</sup> Adapted from: A guide to Prayer for Those Who Walk with God, p102.