

How long does it take to read the book of James? It is the same number of minutes (12) of commercials you will see on average in one hour of Canadian television. Today we are completing journey through James. At the end of our service last week, I failed to remind you of the **Quarterly Day of Prayer** which was set for this past Wednesday. Please take a **prayer guide** today.

Proposition

When we have a complicated journey we turn to GPS. What about our spiritual journey? In general terms, all of Scripture is a "faith positioning system". And in very practical ways, the letter from James to scattered, persecuted believer helps for **“Navigating Faith”**. Two thoughts stand out from our study...

1. **Double coincidence of wants** – is an *economic term about two parties having something the other wants*. [read more](#) Some followers of Jesus imagine their faith journey this way. They bring faith to Jesus. In response, He provides forgiveness, peace, etc. But following Jesus is spiritual bartering!
2. **Imperatives flow from the infinitives** – as Alistair Begg puts it. [read more](#) There are 54 imperatives (“do...don’t do”) in James. To fulfill these works, we must know who we are. That is why Christian infinitives (“to be” or “you are”) are vital! We used the spoke of a wheel to illustrate this truth.

James is a “general epistle” because the recipients were all the tribes of dispersed Christian Jews from the persecution following Stephen’s death. And his instruction extends to us today. We must not be like *“the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”* (1:6) Rather, God wants His children to grow up! *“Let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence.”* (Phillips, 1:4).

Patrick Hartin writes that *“James’ faith witnesses a dependence upon God, the source of every good gift and the guide who supports those who trust in God.”* (**Letter of James**, Word & World, 2015, 224) So, as those who trust in God, here are four concluding **faith-actions** by which we display a genuine faith. These four commands revolve around the theme of **“Healing and Helping”**. Let’s read **James 5:13-20**.

[1] Celebration – v. 13

This two-part command in this verse is direct and accessible. Are you “suffering” (καθοπαθει; broad term; used as noun in v.9)? Then seek God in **prayer**. Are you “cheerful” (ευθυμει)? Then seek God in **praise**. Both responses approach God with a conviction that He is all-sufficient. Do not think that only blessings nurture spiritual growth. Difficulties are also an opportunity to mature (1:2-4). There is a troubling pattern in the OT: Israel repented, were rescued, rejoiced, but soon forgot God! Watch out for spiritual amnesia! Be disciplined in celebrating God – think of Paul and Silas in jail – whether in a difficulty or a delight.

[2] Compassion – vv. 14-15

Now we are faced with a very specific form of suffering or trouble: “sick” (ασθενει; lit. “weak”). These verses call us to compassionate, pastoral care of one another. James tells us we should be oriented to:

- **God** Believers should naturally turn to God when ill – without Him we turn to despair (eg. MAiD)
- **Leaders** It takes humility to entrust yourself to the spiritual care of others in a time of suffering.
- **Care** Anointing was medicinal but here is symbolic (“in name of the Lord”) of true faith and care.
- **Whole** Physical suffering is tied to the mind and heart; *may* be times illness is corrective (see v.16).

The “prayer of faith” (v.15) can be **presumptuous** or **perfunctory**! Let’s consider this with verses 17-18.

[3] Confession – vv. 16-18

Here we find a rose between two thorns: “confess to one another” (*thorn*); “pray for one another” (*rose*); and “that you may be healed” (*thorn*).

Prayer This is a “rose” because prayer makes sense, at least in principle. The real issue is whether we practice it! James offered the example of Elijah’s powerful and effective prayer in I Kings 17-18. But James is full of commands to pray! He established a pattern in 1:2-6 of patience and prayer as part of maturing. James made 7 references to patience in 5:7-12, matched by 7 references to prayer in 5:13-18!

Confession This is a “thorn” because of misunderstanding. We must consider a balanced approach between two extremes. One extreme of confession is **institutional ritual** in which congregants cower and confess to a human priest. The other extreme is **individual responsibility** in which Christians function in a spiritual vacuum. Yes, there is the personal accountability to God (I John 1:8-10). But both extremes reject healthy, Body-life as taught in Scripture (**One Another Commands**). Of 24 such NT commands, four are found in James. Confession can only be helpful and healing in healthy community.

Healing This is a “thorn” because of inappropriate practice. Some teach that faith is that which the Christian uses to activate God’s power to be victoriously healthy and wealthy. They suggest suffering is not part of the Christian experience – contrary to what James taught. This extreme focuses only on **divine power** to heal. The other extreme almost rejects praying for healing, focusing only on **divine prerogative** to heal. When we are “perfect and complete” in Christ (1:4), we will properly practice “the prayer of faith”. God may, but not must heal. Also, there may be, but not must be sin connected with the sickness.

[4] Correction – vv. 19-20

When mature leaders in the church help to “restore” (καταρτιζετε; Galatians 6:1) they are doing the work of “perfecting (equipping) the saints” (Ephesians 4:12, same Greek term). Paul’s emphasis is on the humility and strategy needed in such a task. First, the spiritual mature must see the value of getting involved in the first place. Second, as James emphasized in verse 20, it is a great blessing see spiritual restoration accomplished. We must be careful to recognize this as God’s work. Remember the farmer (5:7) who is diligent in labor but does not ultimate the seed to sprout! God does that. Ye He delights for His children to contribute so that He will “*save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*” (v.20)

Conclusion – see “Digging Deeper”

In the July-August edition of **FaithToday**, CBC professor Gil Dueck writes about “Our Unsteady Cultural Tree: Is This A Ripe Moment For A Rooted Church”.

A recent article pegs regular church attendance in Canada around 15% which is a sharp decline from roughly 66% in the 1950s. The article says disengagement from church is particularly notable among younger generations. These are well-known trendlines that bring familiar worries. The article goes on to highlight all the ways Canadians are filling the gaps. Wellness culture, a near sacred attachment to nature, various interest groups and online communities, volunteerism and social justice, yoga – each on the rise and each in their own way trying to fill the need for meaning, community, health and moral purpose.

Jesus invites us into an authentic Biblical community in which He delights to presence Himself (Matthew 18:20). For such community to be healthy, we must navigate faith as James has guided us. Today we have the privilege of demonstrating our common life in Christ through the communion celebration.

- **Welcome** – Christian communion has a common Good Shepherd; let’s read Psalm 23 together
- **Warning** – we must examine our hearts at communion to assess our relationship to Jesus and others
- **The Bread & Cup** – Rick give thanks and ask God’s blessing on the elements