

**June 24, 2018**  
**James: Finishing Well**  
**James 5:13-20**

***Real faith in the real world***

The story goes like this ... *"There was a tradesman, a painter called Jock, who was very interested in making a penny where he could, so he often would thin down paint to make it go a wee bit further. As it happened, he got away with this for some time. Eventually the Baptist Church decided to do a big restoration job, including painting the building. Jock put in a bid. Because his price was so low, he got the job. And so he began erecting the scaffold and setting up the planks, buying the paint and, yes, I am sorry to say, thinning it down with turpentine.*

*"Jock was up on the scaffolding, painting away, with the job nearly completed. Suddenly there was a horrendous clap of thunder, the sky opened, and the rain poured down. The thinned paint from all over the church washed off. Jock was knocked clear off the scaffold. He landed on the lawn among the gravestones, surrounded by telltale puddles of thinned and useless paint.*

*"Jock was no fool. He knew this was a judgment from the Almighty. So he got on his knees and cried: 'Oh, God! Forgive me! What should I do?' And from the thunder, a mighty voice spoke ... 'Repaint! Repaint! And thin no more!'"*

It's a foolish story. And yet there's a profound lesson, here, isn't there? *"Jock was no fool ... he got on his knees and cried, 'Oh, God! Forgive me! What should I do?'"*

The book of James is about being a real Christian in the real world. It's about the kind of faith that can respond to our cries of, "Oh God, what should I do?"

- It's about trials and temptations
- It's about listening more than talking
- It's about walking your talk
- It's about talking your walk
- It's about finding your place in the world
- It's about handling money wisely
- And it's about prayer

Fundamentally the letter of James is about prayer. That's where it starts (James 1:1-8). And that's where it ends (James 5:13-20).

## ***Why is prayer so important?***

In the real world, what we really need is a relationship with Jesus. We need his companionship on the journey of life. And the foundation of our relationship with Jesus is prayer!

Think about it! The most important things in our lives are our relationships! And the key to those relationships is communication! I have had the privilege of talking with several couples who have reached their fiftieth anniversary, and a few who have had their sixtieth. They represent a wide range of income, employment status, and influence. But they all have one thing in common ... whether it was my plumber grandfather or the couple who were both medical doctors in Edmonton ... the common denominator was that they had learned to share themselves through constant communication and companionship.

One of the principles of relationships is that they grow as people communicate! Companionship is not something that just happens. It grows over time as we put time and effort into it. Our relationship with Jesus grows over time, too, as we put time and effort into it. Here are some principles for good relationships which we can apply to our relationship with Jesus:

We spend time together. Companionship is built on time – quality time – spent together. Every married couple needs one good visit daily. Even if you have to write it in your day timer. We need a good visit with God daily, too. Even more, as a couple you need a date – real time together – periodically. And as a person, you need to spend some real time with God.

In our relationships, we yearn for total mercy and forgiveness. That's the nature of unconditional love (1 Corinthians 13). That's the kind of love Jesus offers to us. There are times in our lives when we need to get on our knees and cry, *"Oh, God! Forgive me! What should I do?"* We need to hear God say to us, *"Repent, and sin no more!"* Every relationship has its ups and downs. In our relationship with God, He and His love never changes, but ours may. We may wander away. But he remains faithful.

We are honest with one another. When things are good, we say so! (*"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."*) When things are bad, we say so! (*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."*) When we say, in our wedding vows, "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health," we rarely really think through what that entails. But those same phrases apply to our relationship with God. Jesus is always with us. And we need always to stay faithful to Him.

Being a real Christian in the real world isn't for cowards! It isn't for the faint of heart. But it is an exciting journey! There are ups and downs. James brings before us Elijah, the first great prophet of the Old Testament ... "a man just like us" (James 5:17). Elijah

had his ups and downs of faith ... mountaintop experiences of spiritual success in a spiritual battle with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), and deep valleys of spiritual disaster when he, like Robert the Bruce, took refuge in a cave (1 Kings 19). Elijah was just like us! But in the end, his prayer was "*powerful and effective*" (James 5:16). Why? Because he kept at it! He never gave up on communication with God. He persisted in his prayers.

Perseverance ... faithful companionship through ups and downs of life ... that's what's it's all about.

### ***Finishing well***

We want to finish well. We want our relationships to finish well. But sometimes things happen; we drift apart ... James warns us that that can happen in our relationship with God, too. We can wander. We can wander from the truth. The sad story of many of the great heroes of the Bible ... David and Solomon for instance ... is that they didn't finish particularly well. Their early years were their glory years. Their later years, as they became "secure," were marred by a "wandering" from faith. When tough times came again, they had lost touch with God. And they did not finish well.

The challenge in any relationship is not to "grow apart." To keep the communication and the companionship growing and alive. To finish well.

A beautiful prayer for this kind of relationship is this ancient Irish prayer:

*Lord of my heart, give me vision to inspire me,  
That, working or resting, I may always think of you.*

*Lord of my heart, give me light to guide me,  
That, at home or abroad, I may always walk in your way.*

*Lord of my heart, give me wisdom to direct me,  
That, thinking or acting, I may always know right from wrong.*

*Lord of my heart, give me courage to strengthen me,  
That, among friends or enemies, I may always proclaim justice.*

*Lord of my heart, give me faith to console me,  
That, hungry or well-fed, I may always rely on your mercy.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from empty praise,  
That I may always boast of what you do.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from worldly wealth,  
That I may always look to the riches of heaven.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from great strength,  
That I may always seek your protection.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from vain knowledge,  
That I may always study your Word.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from unnatural pleasures,  
That I may always find joy in the wonder of your creation.*

*Heart of my own heart, whatever may befall me,  
Rule over my thought and feelings, my words, and my actions.*

We need Jesus, in better and in worse times. In sickness and in health. There are occasions in our lives when we need to get on our knees and cry, *"Oh God, I'm sick! Sick at heart! Sick in body! Sick of life! What should I do?"* We need to hear Jesus' words of comfort, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*(Matthew 11:28)

There are times in our lives when we need to get on our knees and cry, *"Oh God, I'm thirsty! Thirsty for real satisfaction! Thirsty for a real relationship with God!"* And we need to hear Jesus' words of invitation, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*(John 7:37-38).

There are times in our lives when we need to get on our knees and cry, *"Oh God, I need direction! I need light! I feel like I'm wandering around in darkness!"* We need to hear Jesus' words of promise, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*(John 8:12)

Perseverance and prayer ... faithful companionship through ups and downs of life ... that's what it's all about. That's faith for real world. There's no promise in the Bible that life will be easy (despite the promises of some media moguls). There is promise after promise that the One who can give you rest, the One who can give you living water, the One who is Light of the world, will always be with you. Over the mountaintops ... through the valleys ... Jesus is there.

With perseverance and prayer we can finish well! Jesus journeys with us. In all ways. For always.

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