

# **James: Practical faith for followers of Jesus**

**Connect Group Bible Studies  
Autumn Term 2026**



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# Introduction

James was the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church. He wrote the letter of James (probably in the early to mid 40s) to Jewish Christians who had been scattered because of persecution, hence the greeting: "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" in James 1:1. The letter of James is intensely practical, showing what genuine faith looks like in everyday life.

We are at church for an hour or two on a Sunday morning, but we are called to be followers of Jesus right through the week. And it is in the ups and downs of our daily lives that our faith gets tested, as we go through trials and temptations.

As we study the letter of James together, may we grow in the practical outworking of our faith, so that our lives and our actions may reflect the way of Jesus more and more. Amen.

# **Session 1: James 1:1–18**

## **Following Jesus through trials and temptations**

### **Key idea**

- We can face trials with faith, resist temptation with confidence, and live with an eternal perspective, because our heavenly Father is good, generous and faithful to us.

### **Icebreaker**

- What are the greatest pressures (causes of stress or strain) that you face in your daily life?

### **Read James 1:1-8 – Trials that produce perseverance**

James begins with a surprising command: 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds' (verse 2). He isn't saying that we should enjoy suffering, but that we may find joy in what God is doing in and through us when we go through times of suffering.

Trials may reveal our weaknesses, deepen our dependence on Jesus, and develop our perseverance. Through trials, God can shape us into people who are more like Jesus.

### **Discussion**

1. Can you think of a time when God used a difficult experience to grow something in you?

2. James doesn't just say, simplistically, 'try to be happy' during difficult times. Instead, he says 'consider it pure joy' when we face trials. What might it look like to respond to a difficult situation **with Jesus** rather than simply trying to survive it?
3. Read Hebrews 4:14-16, which speaks of how Jesus experienced temptations and suffering. How can these verses encourage us when we face trials and temptations?

James gives us a practical response to difficult situations: ask God for wisdom. Rather than asking God to make our problems disappear, James tells us to ask God for wisdom about how to live faithfully in the midst of our problems.

4. How should we go about seeking God's wisdom (verse 5)? What resources has he given us?
5. How should we understand the command to 'not doubt' and the image of a wave blown and tossed by the wind in verse 6. Is it ok to have questions and struggles in our faith?

## Practical application

Christian wisdom involves learning to see life from God's perspective and then living accordingly. We may not always know what we should do, but we can follow Jesus's example of looking to the Father in all situations.

- When something difficult happens, try praying something like this: "Jesus, I don't necessarily enjoy this, but I trust you. What are you wanting to grow in me through this time of trial?"
- Is there a **specific situation** about which you need to pray for wisdom this week? Instead of praying 'God, please make this problem go away' we can also pray 'Give me wisdom to know how to honour Jesus in this situation'.

## **Read James 1:9-11 – Our circumstances don't define our worth**

Here, James talks about the poor and the rich. It's not that money is inherently bad or that being poor is virtuous. Rather, James challenges us to see ourselves according to God's kingdom, rather than according to our social or financial status.

Jesus completely overturned worldly ideas about status and worth. Our identity isn't based on our success, wealth, popularity, or appearance.

### **Discussion**

1. In what ways might money and possessions influence our sense of worth and identity?
2. How does knowing that our sense of worth comes from Jesus change the way we think about 'success'?

### **Practical application**

- If Jesus were completely sufficient for your sense of worth, what would you worry less about?
- What would it look like to hold your money and possessions more lightly?

## **Read James 1:12-18 – Trials aren't the same as temptations**

It is important to distinguish between trials and temptations. James says that the person who perseveres under trial is blessed. He then says, 'When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me"' (verse 13). God allows us to go through trials, but he does not entice us into sin. James describes temptation as beginning with our own desires. Desire gives birth to sin, and sin ultimately leads to death.

In Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus was tempted in the wilderness but remained obedient to his Father. So we know that Jesus understands temptation. This is really encouraging! Jesus doesn't just tell us to resist temptation. He has resisted it himself, and is with us when we are tempted. So when temptation comes, we can run towards Jesus rather than hiding from him.

## Discussion

1. Why is it important to distinguish between difficult circumstances and temptations to sin?
2. What does James teach us about the progression from desire to sin?
3. What temptations tend to become stronger when we're tired, stressed, lonely, angry or disappointed?
4. How can we help one another pursue holiness without becoming judgmental?

Difficult circumstances and suffering can cause us to doubt God's goodness. But James says, 'Don't be deceived... every good and perfect gift is from above...' (verses 16-17). God isn't the source of temptation, he is the source of all goodness. And the greatest gift is implied in verse 18: God has given us birth through the word of truth. We have the gift of new life in Jesus. The gospel gives us the best evidence of God's goodness.

1. What circumstances can make us doubt God's goodness?
2. What 'good and perfect gifts' have you have received from God?
3. How does Jesus' death and resurrection help us when the circumstances of life don't seem to make sense?

## Practical application

- Think about your own **temptation pathway**:

Trigger → desire → temptation → choice → consequence

Ask yourself, how could you interrupt the cycle? This could include praying immediately, contacting a Christian friend, removing yourself from the situation, and remembering God's promises to you. Read and keep hold of **1 Corinthians 10:13** as an encouragement for these times.

- Make a simple **God is good** list. Each day, write down something (big or small) for which you can thank God. Don't just include your immediate circumstances, but also things that remain true even when things have gone really badly, such as: Jesus loves me, I belong to Christ, I am forgiven, I have the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has defeated sin and death, I have eternal hope.

## Closing thoughts

The goal of persevering through times of trial isn't to become tougher people. It is to become more like Jesus.

When circumstances lead us to doubt and feel that God has forgotten us, the gospel says: Look at Jesus. God has already demonstrated his love for you.

## **Session 2: James 1:19-27**

# Hearing Jesus and putting his word into practice

### **Key idea**

- Following Jesus means more than hearing his word, it means putting it into practice.

### **Icebreaker**

- What makes you angry? And when you become angry, how do you deal with it?

### **Read James 1:19-21 – Be quick to listen**

Our anger often comes from pride, frustration or wanting to be right. James reminds us that we are called to respond differently.

Jesus listened, showed compassion and responded with patience, even when he was mistreated.

### **Discussion**

- Look at verse 19. Which do you find hardest: listening, speaking less, or controlling your anger?
- How could you respond more like Jesus in difficult situations?
- Is there something Jesus is currently asking you to change?

## Practical application

James tells us to put away sin and 'humbly accept the word planted in you' (verse 21). We can't genuinely follow Jesus while refusing to let his word challenge us.

- Before responding when irritated, pause, pray and listen. You could pray something like this: 'Jesus, help me understand before I try to be understood'.
- Identify one thing you need to confess, stop or change this week.

## Read James 1:22-25 – Don't just listen to the word

It is important to get to know the Bible well. But Bible knowledge isn't the end goal. Living Christ-shaped, obedient lives is.

Jesus taught that a wise person is one who hears his words and puts them into practice (see Matthew 7:24-27).

## Discussion

- Reflect on the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27) in relation to our passage in James 1:22-25.
- Why is it that we can become good at Bible study without actually changing to be more like Jesus?
- What truth from this passage needs to become action in your life?

## Practical application

Whenever you read a Bible passage, ask yourself:

1. What does this passage show me about God?
2. What does this passage show me about myself?
3. What does God want me to do as a result of this?

## **Read James 1:26-27 – Put faith into action**

James warns about failing to control our tongue, which reveals what is going on in our hearts. And he describes genuine faith, acceptable to God, as caring for the vulnerable and living a holy life. Jesus exemplified both of these: he moved towards the marginalised, whilst also calling people to repentance and holiness.

### **Discussion**

1. What would Jesus-shaped speech look like at home, at work, online?
2. How could we show Jesus' love practically to vulnerable and marginalised people around us?
3. What does resisting worldly influence look like for us?

### **Practical application**

- Before speaking about someone who isn't present, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it loving? If not, don't say it.
- As a Connect Group, is there a practical need you can respond to this week?

### **Closing thoughts**

James challenges us not simply to be people who know about Jesus and his teaching, but people whose words, relationships, choices and actions are increasingly shaped by the character and the way of Jesus.

# **Session 3: James 2:1-13**

## **Seeing others as Jesus does**

### **Key idea**

- Follower of Jesus must not show favouritism, but value all people equally and treat them with mercy, dignity and love.

### **Icebreaker**

- Can you think of a time when you have been discriminated against or treated unfavourably? How did it make you feel?

### **Read James 2:1-7 – Don't show favouritism, remember the values of God's kingdom**

James challenges the church about treating a wealthy visitor better than a poor person. This isn't just about bad manners, it's about judging people by outward appearances and worldly status.

James reminds us that God often chooses those whom the world considers insignificant. Our culture can value people according to wealth, influence, appearance, education or success. But Jesus saw people differently. He consistently welcomed those who were overlooked by others: the marginalised, the poor, and sinners.

### **Discussion**

1. Who are we naturally drawn towards? And who might we overlook?
2. What characteristics do we use to decide who we consider to be 'important'?
3. How does the gospel challenge the values by which the world measures someone's status?

4. Where might favouritism be at work in our church, and what can we do to ensure that we treat everyone with equal worth and value?

## **Practical application**

- This week, try to intentionally notice and welcome someone you might normally overlook.
- Ask yourself, do I see this person primarily through the world's eyes, or through Jesus' eyes?

## **Read James 2:8-13 – Love your neighbour and show mercy**

James quotes from Leviticus 19:18 when he says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. He calls this the royal law. As followers of King Jesus, we are called keep this royal law, which Jesus highlights in Matthew 22:39.

Following Jesus means that loving people isn't optional or selective. We shouldn't just love the people we like and overlook those we don't. And James reminds us that we can't pick and choose which commands to obey (verses 10-11). Favouritism is a sin which we need to take seriously.

Then comes the key challenge: "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (verse 13). Because Jesus has shown us mercy, we are called to extend mercy to others. This doesn't mean ignoring sin or pretending that wrongdoing doesn't matter. But it does mean refusing to treat people with the condemnation, superiority or contempt that we ourselves have been spared by God in his grace to us.

## **Discussion**

1. "Love your neighbour as yourself." Thinking of those you know personally and those you don't. Who do you find easy to love? Who do you find difficult to love?

2. Why are we sometimes quick to judge others?
3. How does remembering Jesus' mercy towards us change the way we treat others?
4. Where do you need to show more mercy?

## **Practical application**

- A challenge to take on: Choose one person you find difficult and carry out one intentional act of kindness towards them this week.
- When you are tempted to judge someone, stop and pray: 'Jesus, thank you for the mercy you have shown me. Help me show mercy to others.'

## **Closing thoughts**

The gospel reminds us that we will all be judged, and we all come to Jesus needing mercy. And at the foot of the cross, where we find mercy, there is no favouritism or discrimination. Therefore, we should treat everyone, regardless of their appearance, status or wealth, as someone loved by God, made in his image, and for whom Jesus died.

# **Session 4: James 2:14-26**

## **Having a faith that works**

### **Key idea**

- Genuine faith in Jesus leads to loving, obedient action which makes a difference in the real world.

### **Icebreaker**

- Give each person in the group a slip of paper and ask them to write down their name and a simple act of kindness they could carry out for another member of the group. Put the slips of paper in a basket and invite each person to pick one out randomly. Over the coming week or two, they get to receive that act of kindness from the person who wrote it down!

### **Read James 2:14-19 – Actions not just words**

James asks what good it is to claim to have faith while ignoring the needs of others. This is not a question of choosing between faith and works, and it is not suggesting that we can earn our salvation by carrying out good works. But James certainly does want to challenge the idea of a faith which is only about words and does not lead to practical action. Such faith, he says, is dead.

### **Discussion**

1. Jesus didn't just tell us to love one another, he demonstrated love in action. What examples of loving, costly action can you think of in the life of Jesus?

Reading this passage in James and comparing it to what the apostle Paul says about faith and works, some have concluded that they are contradicting each other. James says that “faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26) whereas Paul is clear that we are saved by faith alone, not by works of the law (for example, see Galatians 3). However, if we go a bit deeper, we can see that there is no contradiction. Paul was clear that faith should lead to action, that we should not carry on sinning (see Romans 6:1-14), and that our practical behaviour should reflect the highest moral standards (for example, see Colossians 3:1-17).

2. Compare what Paul says in Romans 3:28 and what James says in James 2:18. How can we hold these two views together.
3. We cannot earn our salvation, but we are called to ‘work out’ our salvation. Read Philippians 2:12-13. What does it mean to ‘work out’ our salvation, and how might this relate to our passage in James 2:14-19?
4. In verse 19, James refers to belief in ‘one God’ (a reference to the Shema, the key statement of Jewish belief found in Deuteronomy 6:4). This is important but is not enough. It is possible to believe that God exists (even the demons believe this, says James), but biblical faith is more than this. What else is needed?
5. Can you think of some situations in which it is easy for us to say we care about others in need, without actually doing anything about it?

## **Read James 2:20-26 – The examples of Abraham and Rahab**

James refers to Abraham’s obedience to God in offering his son Isaac on the altar (see Genesis 22). Abraham shows us what obedient faith looks like. He believed God, and his faith was demonstrated by his obedience to God, even when that obedience was costly. His actions didn’t replace his faith, they showed that his faith was genuine.

James also refers to Rahab (perhaps an unlikely example of faith and obedience), who protected the spies who came to Jericho. She had believed in God and what he had done to rescue his people (see Joshua 2:8-11), and her faith led her to take a serious personal risk to protect God's people.

## Discussion

- What can we learn from the two Old Testament examples of faith and obedience that James refers to?

Jesus is the greatest example of faith and obedience. He trusted his Father and willingly went to the cross to suffer and die for us. We are called to respond to Jesus and obey him, not to earn his acceptance, but out of gratitude as those who have received his grace.

- Why is it important to hold grace and obedience together as we seek to follow Jesus?
- What might costly obedience to Jesus look like for you at the moment?

## Practical application

- If you did the icebreaker activity at the beginning of this session, follow it through this week and carry out the simple act of kindness for the person who picked your slip of paper out of the basket.
- We put our **faith** to **work** in response to God's grace to us, which moves us to act out of love for others. Locally, the Christian organisation **Faithworks Wessex** seeks to do exactly what its name implies – to put **faith** in Jesus to **work** through practical action to help and support people in need. They run foodbanks, debt counselling, lone parent support, support for the homeless, and more. Could you put your faith into action by getting involved in work like this?

## Closing thoughts

It has been said that faith and works are like oars on a boat. When rowing, if you only use one oar you end up going round in circles. But if you use both oars together, you will move forward in the right direction. Faith without works, and works without faith, are like a boat with only one oar. Just like the body without the spirit (verse 26), there won't be positive movement or practical action. So, as James says, faith without works is dead.

# **Session 5: James 3:1-18**

## **Speaking words that reflect Jesus**

### **Key idea**

- As followers of Jesus, our words and our conduct should be consistent in honouring Jesus and reflecting his character.

### **Icebreaker**

- Invite someone in the group to speak out a word or short phrase. It can be anything they like, within reason! Then ask the other group members what thoughts or feelings this word or phrase brings to mind. (For example, if someone says 'Marmite' this might result in responses of 'love' from some and 'hate' from others!) Repeat this exercise a few times.

### **Read James 3:1-12 – Recognise the impact of our words**

James warns that those who teach have a particular responsibility because their words will influence others, so they will be judged more strictly. He then compares the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth and a rudder on a ship, and speaks of the serious challenge of taming our tongues so that our speech is consistent and honouring to God.

### **Discussion**

1. Who tends to be most affected (whether positively or negatively) by the words you speak?
2. Reflect on the images of the bit and the rudder that James uses in verses 3 and 4. How do these images help us understand the influence our tongues have over us?

3. Words spoken by family members at home, colleagues at work, and public figures in the media, all have the potential to bless and build people up or to cause serious hurt and pain. Can you think of some real world examples, whether positive or negative, from these spheres of life?
4. Verses 9-12 highlight the contradictory nature of our tongues. In what ways is the tongue contradictory, and what impact might these contradictions have on others?
5. Our worship of God and our treatment of others cannot be separated. Are the words you speak to people (made in God's image) from Monday to Friday consistent with your worship of God on Sunday?

Jesus said that the words we speak reveal what is going on in our hearts (Luke 6:45). The solution isn't simply trying harder to speak nicely. We need Jesus to transform our hearts (the source of our words) through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

6. Have you ever asked God to help you control your tongue? How might God, through the transforming power of his Spirit, want to work in your life, in relation to how you use your tongue?

## Practical application

- Before you speak, ask yourself:
  - Is what I'm about to say true?
  - Is it kind and loving?
  - Will it help the situation?If not, don't say it!
- Is there someone (in your family, your workplace, or at church) who you have been tempted to criticise or complain about. Pray for them this week and find an opportunity to say something gracious about them.

## **Read James 3:13-18 – Choose godly wisdom**

James makes it clear that good, godly wisdom isn't just an intellectual thing. It should influence what we do and lead to good, godly behaviour.

### **Discussion**

1. In these verses James contrasts two kinds of wisdom, which are revealed in the ways we treat others. What are the characteristics of these two kinds of wisdom?
2. Can you think of someone who has inspired you because they embody some of the characteristics found in verse 17?
3. Which aspect of godly wisdom are you most challenged by?
4. If someone criticises or disagrees with you, how do you tend to respond?
5. In what ways might God want to use us as peacemakers in our contexts (verse 18)?

### **Practical application**

- Jesus perfectly embodied this godly wisdom. He was pure, gentle, humble, full of mercy, but did not compromise on truth. Following Jesus means learning to respond to conflict in the way of Jesus rather than simply reacting according to our emotions. What could you do, when you are next faced with conflict or trouble, to help you respond as Jesus would?

### **Closing thoughts**

At the end of a day, it is good to reflect and ask ourselves, "Did my words help others see something of Jesus in me today?"

Our behaviour in terms of our speech and our actions reveals what is going on in our hearts. And it is through the ongoing work of the Holy

Spirit in us, transforming our hearts, that we grow in godly speech and godly wisdom, so that our lives more and more reflect the grace, truth, love and humility of Jesus. But in this regard, we are all works-in-progress, so be encouraged and keep going!

You may find it helpful to pray this prayer:

- Lord Jesus, forgive us for the ways our words have hurt others. Transform our hearts by the power of your Spirit, so that our speech reflects your grace and truth. Give us godly wisdom so that we may be pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit. Help us to use our words to encourage, restore, and point people to you. Amen.

# **Session 6: James 4:1-17**

## **Submitting to God in humility**

### **Key idea**

- Rather than conforming to the values of the world, as followers of Jesus we need to humbly come near to God, and he will come near to us.

### **Icebreaker**

- Can you think of a time when you became convinced that you wanted something new (e.g. an item of clothing, something for your home, or the latest electronic device) as a result of advertising or peer pressure, even if you didn't really need it or couldn't really afford it?

### **Read James 4:1-10 – Choosing God over the world**

James links conflict with the desires at work within each of us. When people want something and don't get it, they may respond with anger, jealousy, conflict or manipulation. The heart of the problem isn't what is going on around us, but rather what is going on inside us.

### **Discussion**

1. In what ways can selfish ambition and desire lead to unhealthy patterns of behaviour?
2. Discuss verse 3, which suggests that God doesn't answer our prayers when we ask with the wrong motives. How can we seek to have good motives when we pray?

3. James uses strong language to warn against becoming shaped by the values of the world (verse 4). But equally, we are not called to withdraw from the world and live in isolation. How can we remain faithful to God and be positively engaged in the world?
4. "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble" (James 4:6). Read Philippians 2:5-8 and reflect on what it means to humble ourselves, following the example of Jesus.

Verses 7-10 give a challenging but ultimately encouraging picture of what we need to do. The sequence begins with us needing to submit to God, resist the devil, come near to God, then washing our hands, purifying our hearts, grieving and mourning. But when we come in humble repentance to God, the promise is that he will come near to us and lift us up.

5. What does it mean to "resist the devil" (verse 7) and how might we go about this?
6. Jesus has made a way for us to "come near to God". Read Hebrews 4:14-16 (we also looked at these verses in a previous session). How do these verses help us when it comes to "coming near to God"?

## Practical Application

Jesus calls us to seek first God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33) rather than focusing on our own desires. What might this look like for you in your daily life in 2026? Here are some suggestions:

- Is there a particular desire or ambition that has become too big a thing in your life, that you need to place in the hands of Jesus?
- Is there a deliberate act of humility you could practice this week?
- What would it look like for you to intentionally draw near to God this week? Use this time to come in surrender and repentance. As you humble yourself, allow the Lord to lift you up (verse 10).

## **Read James 4:11-17 – Avoid judging others and boasting**

James warns against speaking against others and putting ourselves in the position of judge. God is the one true “Lawgiver and Judge” (verse 12) so we are not to put ourselves in God’s place by judging others. And when it comes to our attitude to the future, he challenges us to humbly submit to God, rather than boasting about our plans.

### **Discussion**

1. We live in a culture that is all too eager to criticise and condemn people when they mess up or make a mistake, regardless of whether all the facts are known (this is particularly the case on social media). Why do you think this is, and what impact is it having?
2. Explore the difference between confronting sin and wrongdoing from a place of love and humility, and judging or condemning others from a place of pride and superiority.
3. What do verses 13-17 have to teach us about how we view the future, and the plans we make?
4. How can we strike a balance in which we wise plans and preparations for the future, yet hold them lightly before God?

### **Practical Application**

- If you are tempted to speak critically about someone this week, ask yourself: what is your motivation and do you know all the facts? Rather than speaking critically, stop and pray for that person instead.
- Is there something good you know you should do but have been putting off (verse 17)? Try to make time to do it this week.

## Closing thoughts

“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” (James 4:7–8).

Rather than self-centred lives focused on our own desires, James calls us to humbly submit to God, who promises to lift us up. This can free us from feeling the need to satisfy our desires, judge others, and be in control of everything.

Jesus is the true Judge, but he came not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). Because we have received mercy from Jesus, we should be people who extend mercy to others.

Take time now to thank Jesus for his mercy, and pray for grace to live in humble surrender to him day by day.

# **Session 7: James 5:1-20**

## **Living patiently and prayerfully as we wait for Jesus**

### **Key idea**

- As followers of Jesus, we are called to live generously, patiently and prayerfully as we wait for Jesus.

### **Icebreaker**

- Think about a time when you had to wait for something. Did you find it hard to be patient?

### **Read James 5:1-12 – Avoid oppressing others, and wait patiently**

James strongly warns wealthy people who have hoarded possessions, exploited workers and lived indulgently at the expense of others. The problem isn't having money, it is what we do with what God has given us.

And James repeatedly calls us to patient endurance while waiting for the Lord's coming. Writing to Christians who were living in the face of oppression, James encourages them to persevere, to keep going, in expectation of the Lord's return.

### **Discussion**

1. The circumstances described in verses 1-6 are just as apparent today as they were when James was writing. Where do we see oppression of the poor and vulnerable by the wealthy and privileged today?

2. How could we use the resources God has given us differently, to help and bless others who have less than we do?
3. How might the example of the farmer waiting for the land to yield its valuable crop (verse 7) help and inform us in our waiting?
4. We live in an impatient society that has come to expect our needs to be met rapidly or even instantly. We don't like to wait – for our parcel to arrive, for our meal to be ready, for the phone to be answered. In the midst of all this, how can we cultivate the fruit of patience in our lives?
5. What does it look like for us to “stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near” (verse 8)?
6. James refers to Job as an example of perseverance through a time of great suffering. Can you think of some other biblical characters who showed patience, or others who were impatient?

## **Practical Application**

- Is there something that I am holding onto that I could use to bless someone else with this week?
- During difficult times of waiting or struggle, remember that waiting patiently isn't the same as passive resignation. We wait for Jesus because we know he is coming, he is faithful, and because he suffered and died for us on the cross. And he rose again, so we can be certain that suffering and death will one day be no more.
- Is there someone who is struggling who you could encourage as they try to wait patiently?

## **Read James 5:13-20 – Pray at all times**

James's final words are simple and to the point. If someone is in trouble, pray. If someone is happy, praise God. If someone is ill, seek prayer and

anointing with oil. We are also to confess our sins and pray for each other to be healed.

## **Discussion**

1. These instructions about prayer remind us that prayer is not just about asking for God's help. What other aspects of prayer do we see in this passage (verses 13-16), and how much are they practised in our own prayer lives?
2. These instructions about prayer are to be lived out in the community of the church, not in isolation. How might we grow in prayerfulness as a church, so that James's teaching on prayer may be a natural, everyday part of our life together as a church?
3. What is the significance of anointing with oil when praying for someone who is ill? What experience have you had of prayer with anointing with oil?
4. How can we be inspired by the example of Elijah and his prayers (verses 17-18, see also 1 Kings 18:41-45).
5. The reference to bringing back those who have wandered from the truth (verses 19-20) reflects the heart of Jesus, the good shepherd, and the parable he told of the farmer going out to bring home the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). According to James, why is this so important?

## **Practical Application**

- Before reaching for your phone or trying to solve a problem yourself, take time to pray first, and ask others to pray for you.
- How could you put James's instructions on prayer into practice within your Connect Group?
- Is there someone who has wandered away from church and from faith, who you could pray for and reach out to, to help them find their way back to God (verses 19-20)?

## Closing thoughts

James concludes his letter with very practical teaching which is highly counter-cultural. As followers of Jesus, we are to live generously with the needs of others always in mind. We are to be patient in suffering and put our hope in Jesus who will one day return. And we are to be a people of prayer, who care for one another and look out for those who have wandered away. Which of these aspects are you most challenged by?

We can live this way because Jesus is faithful and Jesus will return. Jesus has shown us the depth of his love at the cross where he died for us, and has given us the gift of his Spirit to guide and empower us.

You could use this prayer to finish:

- Lord Jesus, thank you for your faithfulness to us. Help us to live faithfully as we wait for you. Give us generous hearts, patient spirits, and a deeper life of prayer. As a church, shape us into a community that reflects your love and honours your name, in word and action. Amen.