

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

AUG 30 - SEP 3, 2021



MONDAY

James 1:1-8; John 7:1-5; Acts 1:12-14

Today's devo kicks off Glenkirk's teaching series in the book of James. This week's theme: putting faith to work amidst suffering.

Interestingly, though this son of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth eventually led Jerusalem's fledgling Christian church, James was originally cynical regarding Jesus' ministry and mission. "[James' epistle is noteworthy] because it comes from [Jesus' half-brother] ... James ... was raised in the same home ... [and] grew up with the Lord Jesus. ... He joined with ... three other brothers—Joseph, Simon, and Judas—in opposition to the Lord Jesus during the early days of Jesus' ministry. James was finally converted ... after the resurrection [when] the Lord appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)." (Ray Stedman)

Like his half-brother, James experienced wrongful persecution—he died in a manner reminiscent of Jesus' execution. "Eusebius tells us that in about the year 66 A.D., 'James the Just' ... was pushed off [the Jerusalem temple's] pinnacle by the Jews ... [provoked by] his Christian testimony. ... The fall did not kill him, and ... he managed ... to pray for his murderers. So, they finished the job by stoning him to death ..." (Stedman)

Despite earlier unbelief, James came to embrace Jesus' teaching. "If you take [Jesus'] Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), and the letter of James ... you'll see more than a dozen exact parallels. ...

James listened to the Lord Jesus and heard these messages.” (Stedman) “James outlines the faith walk through genuine religion (1:1-27), genuine faith (2:1-3:12) and genuine wisdom (3:13-5:20) ... [He issues] a challenge to faithful followers of Jesus Christ to not just ‘talk the talk,’ but to ‘walk the walk.’ ... [James debunks] the idea that one can become a Christian and yet continue living in sin, exhibiting no fruit of righteousness. ... Good works are not the cause of salvation, but ... are the result of it.” (GotQuestions.org)

James’ personal story is encouraging—it reinforces that our prayers for and loving exchanges with unbelievers may have greater impact than we know. His post-conversion works and words convict us to walk and act faithfully despite persecution, criticism and inevitable trials. You may have a “pre-Christian James” or two in your family or network. When did you last share Christ with them lovingly?

QUESTIONS

What appeared to turn James from a doubter to a follower of his half-brother, Jesus? What are some parallels between James’ death and Jesus’ death? How does James’ story encourage you in witnessing?

PRAY FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES (KENYA)

Living Room’s hospital in Eldoret is needing to expand some services to better serve the community that surrounds us. Please pray for wisdom as we make decisions and provision.

TUESDAY

James 1:1; Amos 9:8-11; Matthew 25:31-3

James 1:1 refers to the dispersion of Jews among the nations—the “Jewish Diaspora.” Via Joseph’s fraternal betrayal and resultant events (Genesis 37, 39-47), God kept the Hebrews together in Egypt—separated from other surrounding, corrupting influences. As Judaism formed, Jewish laws and rites compelled ancient Jews to separate from Gentile ways. Why, then, would God disperse Israel, sending many away from the Promised Land to the “uncircumcised”?

One reason relates to Israel’s own unfaithfulness, the people’s pursuit of foreign idols and resultant, corrupted worship and behavior. God allowed wayward Israelites to reap the consequences of their sinfulness. Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, relocating these tribes and assimilating them—the hated, “mixed-heritage” Samaritans were a byproduct. Babylon exiled thousands from the Southern Kingdom in 597 and 586 BC, many Jews never returning to Israel. Finally, in 70 AD Rome sacked Israel, destroying the temple along with biblical Judaism, killing or scattering many.

In a powerful display of the brilliance of God’s ways, however, Yahweh also used the diaspora for kingdom-building. “By the time of Christ’s coming ... [there were] more Jews living outside of Israel than in it. ... God had allowed—even orchestrated—the spreading of millions of Jews throughout the Roman Empire to serve as a key part in the rapid spread of the gospel. ... Because

the Jews already knew the Old Testament, the background was set and the timing was perfect for the gospel to spread throughout the nations.” (GotQuestions.org)

Will God regather historic Israel? Some say that He has already started, commencing with national Israel’s reestablishment in 1948. Others consider the Christian church the “true Israel,” comprised of the faithful Jewish remnant and believing Gentiles. One group believes that Israel’s regathering climaxes amidst the yet-future “end times,” whereas the other hold that Jesus Himself commenced the associated regathering via His first coming mission.

Whatever your view, know this: God is building His church, “not wishing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Upon Christ’s return, regathering and church-building will conclude, with judgment following. Are you ready for Jesus’ return? Are your family members, friends, colleagues and neighbors ready?

QUESTIONS

What is the “Jewish Diaspora”? What prompted it? How did God use the diaspora for kingdom-building?

PRAY FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES (KENYA)

COVID-19 continues to be a big challenge for everyone, everywhere. In Kenya, only approximately 1% of the population have received vaccines. Please pray for protection over the people, for wisdom as we wait and pray for vaccines to come.

WEDNESDAY

James 1:2-4; Job 22:1-11; Isaiah 48:9-10

If “*the LORD is good*” (Psalm 34:8), loving (1 John 4:8), all-knowing (1 John 3:20) and all-powerful (Genesis 18:14), why is there pain, suffering and evil in the world? Such is a principal objection of many. James 1:2-4 answers this, at least in part: challenges and trials promote spiritual maturity in believers. However, such an answer is unsatisfying to skeptics—prompting spiritual growth in a Christian context is unlikely to impress most unbelievers.

Job’s “*miserable comforters*” (Job 16:12) thought they answered the “suffering question” in regard to their afflicted “friend”: they wrongly interpreted that God was punishing Job for sinfulness. Our related lesson: it is unhelpful to speculate why a particular person or his/her loved one experiences disease, pain, loss or even death. God’s ways are infinitely higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9)—forming and sharing opinions regarding another’s personal suffering is perilous and often hurtful.

A general explanation for current suffering and worldly evil is that this originated with Adam and Eve. Their disobedience caused Creation’s fall, inducing the death, pain, toil and trials (Genesis 3:16-19) marring earthly life ever since. Even Christianity’s most hardened critics observe these consequences, even if they refute their source and God’s provision, in Christ, to reverse this curse.

Norman Geisler comments on suffering to harmonize with James 1:2-4: “God sometimes allows us to suffer pain so that we can comfort others’ suffering in like situations. ... If God destroyed all freedom (on earth), He would be destroying all possibility to love, praise, and [draw closer to] Him. ... Without danger, the virtue of courage cannot be developed. Without trials and tribulations, we can have no patience. God has to permit sin before we can experience forgiveness. Higher-order virtues (charity, heroism, sacrifice, etc.) are dependent on allowing lower-order evils.”

Here’s a final perspective on present, earthly suffering and evils: God could end these immediately; He will one day (Revelation 20:14). Had He done this 27 years ago, I would be facing condemnation upon death. If God stopped and judged all pain-causing sin at its source, none would survive to spend eternity with Him. I, for one, am eternally grateful for God’s loving forbearance, mercy and grace!

QUESTIONS

Why is there pain, suffering and evil in the world? How does God use these for His purposes? Why doesn’t God put an immediate end to worldly pain, suffering and evil?

PRAY FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES (KENYA)

On September 28, Juli Boit is launching a book, *From Beyond the Skies*, chronicling her family’s transplant journey. Please pray that God will use the story to encourage and inspire, to create awareness about the disparities related to sickle cell disease in Kenya.

THURSDAY

James 1:5; 1 Kings 3:5-14; Ecclesiastes 12:1, 11-14

Today's focus is the gift of wisdom. Know that God takes joy in providing for His children. "Every good gift you receive is because God loves you. His love for you is so great that He looks for every opportunity to give you a gift. He ... wants you to know that you are loved and valued ... [and that He] is working ... to lead you to abundant joy, peace and life." (Craig Denison)

One of the Bible's most notable examples of God-given wisdom is Israel's King Solomon. His story highlights human wisdom's ups and downs. God prompted Solomon to ask for a gift (1 Kings 3:5); paralleling James 1:5, Solomon requested "*an understanding mind ... [to] discern between good and evil*" (v. 9). God gladly responded with this and more (v. 13) but concluded with a noteworthy condition: "*And if you will walk in My ways ... I will lengthen your days*" (v. 14).

Sadly, this temple-builder—David's son and Israel's third king—spent much of his life sacrificing wisdom for pleasure, prideful curiosity, wealth, power, and other worldly pursuits. Solomon amassed "*700 wives ... and 300 concubines*" (1 Kings 11:3), worshiped and built temples for idols (11:4-9), and stockpiled gold (10:14), chariots and warhorses (11:26).

Ironically, this gifted "wisest man who ever lived"—author of hundreds of Proverbs, many chronicled in the Bible, along with the Bible's Song

of Songs and Ecclesiastes—surrendered to foolish self-indulgence throughout his adulthood. Solomon shared his disappointments and related realizations as an older man in Ecclesiastes. Therein he described life “*under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, etc.), or “in the flesh” apart from God, as “*vanity*” (1:2, etc.)—pointlessness that he likened to “*chasing after the wind*” (1:14).

Solomon’s example should not compel us to reject wisdom. God never asks us to “check our brains at the door”—our faith is not blind but reasoned. However, true wisdom is understanding what I don’t know, humbly acknowledging that God alone is wisdom’s Source, and being open and teachable accordingly. Fortunately, God—the Giver of “*everything good*” (James 1:17)—didn’t give up on Solomon. Elderly Solomon longingly advised, “*Fear (deeply revere) God and keep His commandments*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). That is true wisdom indeed!

QUESTIONS

How did Solomon acquire his extensive, worldly wisdom? What are some areas in which Solomon squandered his wisdom? “True wisdom is understanding what I don’t know, humbly acknowledging that God alone is wisdom’s Source, and being open and teachable accordingly”—how will you apply this in your own life?

PRAY FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES (KENYA)

Please pray for Living Room’s 100+ Kenyan staff - they serve patients and families each day. Pray for joy, grace and compassion to do this work.

FRIDAY

James 1:6-8; Matthew 22:15-33; Mark 9:17-24

As a Christian, is it okay to have periodic doubts or nagging questions? Reading James 1:6-8 superficially, one might conclude, “Absolutely not!” However, there are many biblical examples of those whom God used mightily despite their fears and misgivings.

Gideon twice laid out fleece to verify what God had told him (Judges 6:36-40). Moses initially resisted his call, citing limited speaking skills (Exodus 4:10). The prophet Elijah fled from Jezebel’s death threat, even after witnessing God powerfully defeating Baal’s prophets (1 Kings 19). The imprisoned John the Baptist seemingly questioned Jesus’ Messiahship, if only momentarily (Matthew 11:3). Even Jesus Himself appeared conflicted in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39) and on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

There is a huge difference between sincere (“free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings”; www.lexico.com) doubts and questions and those which are agenda-driven—aiming merely to undermine another and/or reflecting hardheartedness toward God. Jesus dealt with the Jewish officials’ varied attempts to trap Him with questions and circumstances—the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and today’s Matthew 22 text share several examples. Never forget: “*The LORD looks on the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7).

“Inquisitiveness and questioning are inevitable parts of the life of faith. Where there is *certainty* there is no room for *faith*.” (Philip Yancey)
“Hiding or suppressing doubt can leave it to fester and eventually explode into unbelief. But doubt can also be [helpful] if addressed properly ... [enabling] me to grow in my faith ... Rather than run from it, use it to your advantage. Bring your doubts to God ... [seeking] answers ... [that] will lead to growth. ... Doubt drives me to study and seek resolution. Doubt also takes me to my knees in prayer, seeking assurance of God’s presence. Use doubt in your own life to move you closer to God.” (Ed Jarrett)

God can handle our doubts and questions. Our faith should be examined—truth always endures legitimate scrutiny. James 1:5 provides excellent counsel regarding where to take sincere questions and doubts: “*If any of you lacks wisdom. ... ask God.*” The concerned father from Mark 9:24 embraced this: “*I believe; help my unbelief!*”

QUESTIONS

Is it okay for Christians to have periodic doubts or nagging questions? How does God use sincere doubts and questions? Where should you take periodic, inevitable doubts?

PRAY FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES (KENYA)

Pray for Living Room’s leadership team as they dream about next steps for Living Room. They desire for God to lead each step of the way!

Sources

- Ray Stedman's quotes are from <https://www.raystedman.org/bible-overview/adventuring/james-the-activity-of-faith>
- GotQuestions.org's quote in Monday's devo can be found at <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-James.html>
- GotQuestions.org's quote in Tuesday's devo is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/diaspora.html>
- Norman Geisler's quotes are from his book, *If God, Why Evil?: A New Way to Think about the Question* (New York: Bethany House Publishers, February 1, 2011).
- Craig Denison's quote can be found at <https://www.first15.org/04/09/your-father-gives-good-gifts/>
- Philip Yancey's quote is from <https://philipyancey.com/q-and-a-topics/faith-and-doubt>
- Ed Jarrett's quotes can be found at <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/salvation/can-a-christian-doubt-god-and-still-have-faith.html>

