

GLENKIRK CHURCH



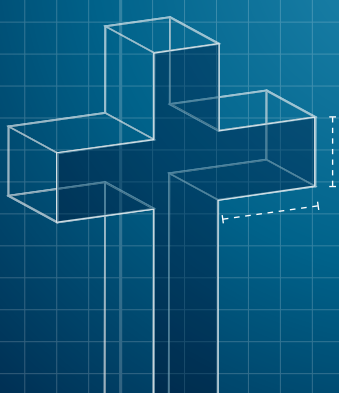
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

OCTOBER 25 - 29, 2021

FAITH WORK

the book of
James



MONDAY

James 3:14-16, 4:1-12; Galatians 5:19-24

Do you ever get upset when feeling “slighted” and/or “your rights are trampled on” by another? When I feel this way, I am wise to consider that there are at least four different explanations:

1) the other person may not even realize their “offense,” unaware of its effect on me; 2) it may be a simple, innocent misunderstanding; 3) the other person may be uncaring or intentional in offending me; and/or 4) I am misguided and/or ungracious in clinging to “my rights.”

Of these, #3 is the least common cause. I do well to remember this when I’m cut off on the freeway or someone pushes ahead of me while I’m in a line at the store. And even if #3 prevails, I can decide not to “press my rights.” Jesus did this, choosing silence before His misguided accusers (Matthew 27:12) and even praying for His executioners (Luke 23:34). Today’s featured Scriptures list the problems underlying #4, which are, sadly, an all-too-common response to “mistreatment.”

Taking offense often symptomatizes pridefulness, which is at the core our fallenness and contrary to a servant’s heart. Pride’s fruits are “*selfish ambition*” (James 3:14), “*enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions*” (Galatians 5:20). Conversely, “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness ... [and] self-control*” (Galatians 5:22-23) My response to “offenses” indicates where my heart is—either close to God or self-absorbed and thereby distant from Him.

Years ago, Glenkirk's former executive pastor, Fulton Lytle, delivered a sermon chocked with wisdom regarding minimizing "*quarrels and ... fights among you*" (James 4:1). His message challenged, "How do you end a confrontation? Surrender—once you do, the conflict ends." Abraham Lincoln, responding to his advisors encouraging him to be more adversarial regarding political enemies, stated: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" (Goodreads)

If you are inclined to be a "warrior"—like me—surrender is hard. But it is the very thing Jesus urged when teaching, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me*" (Matthew 16:24). Easy? Almost never! Liberating and life-giving, a glorious testimony to life in Christ? Absolutely!

QUESTIONS

When we feel offended, what is that often a sign of in us? How did Jesus deal with His mistreatment? What are some graceful ways to end confrontations or "destroy enemies"?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

In the past eighteen months, NHH has lost touch with many of the 87 families enrolled in its program as of March 2020. Probably many have moved out of the area, have a change in life circumstances, or simply don't feel comfortable returning yet. Pray for NHH staff members and volunteers as they long to reconnect with these families.

TUESDAY

James 4:2-3; 1 John 5:13-15; Proverbs 1:28-33

Yesterday we considered pride's fruits, including selfishness, ingratitude, disharmony, etc. Today James touches upon the "vertical" consequences of these: missing God's best due to disconnection from Him. We'll explore this theme today and tomorrow.

James says, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (4:2). Some misapply this Scripture in "name it, claim it" doctrine—the notion that God aims to give us anything and everything we want if only our faith is strong enough to warrant such things. Years ago, Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez* was all the rage, applying a "prosperity gospel" emphasis and practically reducing God to a sort of "cosmic Santa Claus," genie, or short-order cook. God loves to "give good gifts to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:11); however, His aim is our spiritual growth into greater Christlikeness, not necessarily worldly comfort or prosperity. James 4:2 is more about having faith like a child's—recognizing our complete dependence upon God, rejecting the delusion of self-sufficiency accordingly, and gratefully seeking and receiving God's provision.

James follows with a related, contrasting thought—employing poetic Jewish "parallelism"—"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (4:3). This verse builds upon 1 Samuel 16:7: "... the LORD looks at the heart." Selfish requests alienate God; they indicate the idolatry of self-worship, the corrupting essence of America's "me first" culture. Such appeals ignore that "your heavenly

Father knows [what] you need” (Matthew 6:32)—we need to trust God to *“give us this day our daily bread”* (Matthew 6:11) and focus upon seeking His good and perfect will.

“The Lord Christ invites us to come to Him in all circumstances, with our supplications and requests ... Our prayers must always be offered in submission to the will of God. ... We ought to pray for others, as well as for ourselves ... beseeching the Lord to pardon and recover the fallen, as well as to relieve the tempted and afflicted.” (Matthew Henry)

God delights in fervent, selfless and surrendered, relationship-oriented prayers. *“You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13)

QUESTIONS

What is a “vertical” consequence of pridefulness? What is “faith like a child’s”? What sorts of prayers does God desire?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

The challenge of returning to in-person services feels daunting as there are significantly fewer volunteers serving than in March 2020. Pray for staff and volunteer morale, for the staffing gaps to be filled, and for more volunteers. NHH especially needs “specialized volunteers” who can help with fixing things around its site.

WEDNESDAY

James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; Genesis 19:12-26

Would James, the early Jerusalem church's leader, have a problem with Glenkirk Church's theme, "Called to love God and His world" (www.glenkirkchurch.org)? He wrote, "*Friendship with the world means enmity against God ... anyone who chooses [this] becomes an enemy of God*" (James 4:4), paralleling 1 John 2:15. Might James and the Apostle John view Glenkirk disapprovingly, deeming us "too worldly"?

The church led by Jesus' half-brother included legalistic "Hebrews" and "Hellenistic" Jews embracing Greek culture and worldliness. The Hellenists were more likely to submit to "*friendship with the world*" or "*love [of] the world*" (1 John 2:15). This problem spoke not to relationships with individuals nor witnessing, but to cultural and worldly snares, spawning Monday's and Tuesday's issues. Lot's wife, who longingly looked back upon Sodom as God destroyed it, is our "poster child" here. She was discontented leaving a place judged for its "*pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, [and disregard for] the poor and needy*" (Ezekiel 16:49)—and it ended poorly for her.

The Bible calls us to love everyone (1 John 4:7). However, love does not necessitate trusting everybody nor endorsing all behaviors and attitudes. Though Jesus dispersed the accusers of the "woman caught in adultery" and did not condemn her, He admonished her to "*Go and sin no more.*" (John 8:11) Jesus' mission and ministry met people where they are, but transcended mere affirmation—He came for restoration and transformation, "*to seek and save the lost*" (Luke 19:10).

Glenkirk's former denomination's increasingly "progressive" agenda prompted our transition to ECO in 2012. John and James would likely applaud the ECO move, along with Glenkirk's continuing emphasis upon "becoming fully devoted followers of Christ ... knowing Him, serving Him, finding life in Him, following Him." (www.glenkirkchurch.org) Glenkirk leadership has not emphasized "chasing attendance numbers" nor "political correctness"—and never at the expense of biblical truth.

Our continuing challenge—and opportunity—lies in being “in the world, while not of it.” We are to befriend and love others—whether Christians or not—as God’s image-bearers. Concurrently, however, we are to embody “*truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15) opposing self-worship, other idolatry and worldly sinfulness.

QUESTIONS

What did James and the Apostle John mean when warning about “loving the world”? How can we reconcile these concerns with Glenkirk’s “Called-to love God and His world” emphasis? How can you love someone without condoning their sinfulness?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for discernment as NHH staff supports student recovery from the impact of prolonged virtual schooling. They are navigating the overwhelming academic losses of the students while supporting their social-emotional health. The staff is finding greater numbers of NHH students in need of one-on-one attention.

THURSDAY

James 4:5-10; Matthew 5:1-12

As shared in earlier Devos, James did not follow his half-brother, Jesus, until after the resurrection. However, he clearly listened to Him—much of James’s epistle mirrored Jesus’ teaching, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Today’s James passage reflects the wisdom and truth of “the Beatitudes.”

James wrote, *“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord ... ”* (James 4:9-10). Jesus taught, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5:3-4). Are these calls to misery and depression? How can we reconcile these with Jesus’ promise, *“If you keep my commands ... [and] remain in my love ... My joy [will] be in you and ... your joy [will] be complete”* (John 15:10-11).

“To be poor in spirit is to recognize your utter spiritual bankruptcy before God ... that you have absolutely nothing of worth to offer God ... and can do nothing to deliver yourself from your dire situation. ... [We] must recognize [our] spiritual poverty before [we] can come to God in faith to receive [His] salvation.” (GotQuestions.org) Christian joy is our humble, grateful response to God’s saving provision in Christ. *“God opposes the proud”* (James 4:6) because pridefulness resists the need for a Savior.

Like some of the book of James, the Beatitudes can feel paradoxical to the natural person. “*Blessed (happy) are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4) ... who hunger and thirst (5:6) ... are persecuted (5:10) ... [and] revile[d]*” (5:11). James pastored two groups inclined to lapse toward feeling that they could “earn salvation”—rules-obsessed legalists and worldly humanists pridefully banking upon their own “goodness.” Thus, his admonition to “*submit yourselves ... [and] draw near to God*” (James 4:7-8).

Poorness in spirit, meekness (strength under control), mercifulness (love-motivated forgiveness), and peacemaking are platforms of kingdom living. Our joy in knowing God and His salvation reveals us as here-and-now citizens of “*the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:10), fortifying our witness to others. “No one goes to heaven alone. Faith is too big for just one person.” (Fr. Barnabas Powell) What “non-citizens” do you know whom you can invite into God’s kingdom?

QUESTIONS

What are some of James’s themes paralleling Jesus’ teaching? What does “poor in spirit” mean? How does it relate to Christian joy?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

NHH staff recently asked the families how they could pray for them. Many parents responded by asking for prayer for their children’s health and schooling. They wanted support for them to meet their goals and ultimately to thrive. Pray specifically for one student, Jayleen, who is in the hospital recovering from a recent surgery.

FRIDAY

James 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Colossians 2:16-18

When reading the epistles (letters) and all Scripture, it's important to understand that topics that are sometimes murky to modern readers were clear to ancient writers and audiences. Context (relevant history and participants' circumstances) is key to interpretation and application.

James challenged, *"Who are you to judge your neighbor?"* (James 4:12), paralleling Jesus' oft-quoted and misunderstood *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged"* (Matthew 7:1) and Paul's writings, *"Do not let anyone judge you"* (Colossians 2:16) and *"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?"* (1 Corinthians 5:12). This same Paul, however, asked rhetorically, *"Are you not to judge those inside (the church)?"* (1 Corinthians 5:12). Is Paul erratic here, contradicting himself, Jesus and James?

There was an early church faction known as Judaizers, believers with Jewish heritage maintaining Christianity's attainability only via Judaism and its dietary laws, circumcision practices, etc. The Judaizers plagued Paul throughout his ministry, prompting his warning against those who were judging *"by what you eat or drink, or [adherence to] to a religious festival ... or a Sabbath day"* (Colossians 2:16). Some apparently were influenced by the emerging "higher knowledge" of Gnostic heresy, thus Paul characterizing *"worship of angels ... [among those] puffed up with idle notions ... "* (2:17).

James's "do not judge another believer" rebuke likely targeted Judaizers, along with anyone judging another's salvation. Paul extended this to not judging unbelievers—sinners sin, and the eternal consequences is God's sole responsibility (1 Corinthians 5:13). Paul's teaching to judge those inside the church, however, addressed comparing the behavior and words of errant believers with their professed faith—while approaching them with the aim to "restore ... *in a spirit of gentleness*" (Galatians 6:1), "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15).

Judging is a significant, super-charged subject. "Don't judge me!" is a popular, contemporary protest. "Tolerance" has been hijacked to mean "affirming and agreeing with"; thoughtfully disagreeing is often labeled "hating." Regardless, Christians must not pronounce judgment on another's salvation. We should avoid judging unbelievers; instead, help them know the Judge whose image they bear. We are to assess, however, the fruit of professing believers—if they appear "off track," graciously help them reestablish abundant life in Christ.

QUESTIONS

When is it wrong to judge and when is judging okay? Why mustn't Christians ever judge another's salvation? How and when are we to judge another believer's "fruits"?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

Prayer for the protection of students, volunteers and staff from COVID-19, especially as they mitigate risks in real time that come with in-person programming. As well, many NHH families live in multiple generation households, and NHH asks for special prayers for older more vulnerable relatives.

Sources

- Abraham Lincoln's quote is from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10667-do-i-not-destroy-my-enemies-when-i-make-them>.
- Matthew Henry's quotes can be found at https://biblehub.com/commentaries/mhc/1_john/5.htm.
- GotQuestion?org's quote is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/poor-in-spirit.html>.
- Father Barnabas Powell's quote can be found at <https://blogs.ancient-faith.com/faithencouraged/2013/12/no-one-goes-to-heaven-alone/>.

