

GLENKIRK CHURCH



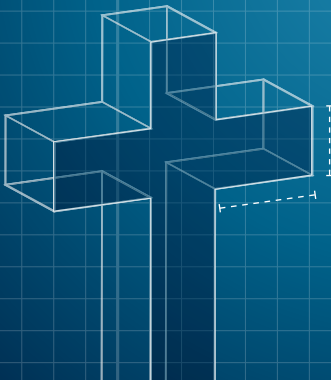
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

NOVEMBER 15 - 19, 2021

# FAITH WORK

the book of  
James



# MONDAY

**James 5:12; Acts 5:1-11; Exodus 20:16**

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This week concludes our James series. As shared earlier, James's epistle closely follows Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, wherein He deepened the meaning of the Law to emphasize the heart underlying our speech and behavior. Today's theme provides one example: *"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil"* (Matthew 5:37 ESV).

Many of us are wired to hedge, to avoid being "pinned down" at all costs. Such people are reluctant to answer directly, giving vague or evasive responses so as to maintain "wiggle room." I have the opposite problem: I tend to strive for absolute clarity whenever possible so that I can "plan well and make good decisions." The legalist in me wants to say to those favoring indirectness, "See, James affirms my orientation in James 5:12; Jesus does the same earlier in Matthew 5:37!" But my tendencies have their own tradeoffs: a need to be right, over-planning at the expense of joy, and an inclination toward the delusion of self-sufficiency.

Here is David Guzik's context for James 5:12: "Many Jewish people in the time James wrote made distinctions between 'binding oaths' and 'non-binding oaths.' Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of 'crossing your fingers behind your back' when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned. The Bible does not forbid the swearing of all oaths, only against the swearing of deceptive, unwise, or flippant oaths."

Early church spouses Ananias and Sapphira learned about wrong-intended, misleading commitments the hard way. Their “hedging” surpassed mere vaguery—they pledged deceitfully in order to appear generous and righteous among fellow churchgoers, demonstrating a toxic combination of pride and hypocrisy. God, who “cannot be mocked” (Galatians 6:7), took them as an object lesson for the fledgling church.

Is “your ‘yes’ ... yes and your ‘no’ ... no” continually, or do you tend to waver when asked to commit? Open-mindedness, particularly to make room for the work of the Spirit, is commendable; however, consciously deceiving another is not. “It is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18)—so should it be for us!

## QUESTIONS

What are some of the problems with being evasive in responding to others? What are some of the potential problems with being “too direct”? Why did God take the lives of Ananias and Sapphira?

## PRAYERS FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Pray that God would protect and bless Operation Christmas Child drop-off locations across the U.S. Millions of shoebox gifts are brought to them during the week of November 15-22, 2021.

# TUESDAY

James 5:13; Psalm 61:1-5; Psalm 100

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“James not only begins and ends his epistle with references to trials, but he also begins and ends with prayer as the instrumental means for managing trials.” (Thomas Constable) Are you satisfied with your prayer life? Is seeking God your first instinct or generally a last resort? James reminds us that prayer—talking with God and listening attentively—and praising Him are oxygen for Christians.

Why does the Lord delight in our prayers and praise—is He needy? God, being perfect, has no unfulfilled needs. However, as an expression of His infinite love, He desires communion with us. Prayer and praise benefit us, renewing our spirits while deepening our grasp of God’s attributes—His holiness, majesty, lovingkindness, goodness, righteousness, etc. “Praise is a vital part of a life surrendered to God, and it gives credit where credit is due.” (GotQuestions.org) “Few things undergird perseverance more effectively than prayer. In the final analysis, a persevering life is also a prayerful life.” (Constable)

The Psalms—the Bible’s prayer guide and hymnal—are our wonderful resources. *“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint. ... Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! ... For you, O God, have heard my vows”* (Psalm 61:1, 2, 4, 5). *“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! ...*

*Come into His presence with singing! ... Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name!”* (Psalm 100:1, 2, 4).

“James has the same advice for both the suffering one and the cheerful one: take it all to the Lord.” (Guzik) “When believers are going through times of trouble, they should not complain...but pray. When they are happy, they should not act foolishly, but sing.” (Bridgeway Bible) “All healing is divine. ... [Moreover,] God’s church is a [praising,] singing church.” (Coffman Commentaries)

Our gratitude for Yahweh’s loving provision—fuel for Christian praise—should coexist alongside “divine discontent” regarding sin’s effects both on ourselves and the surrounding world. Take these to God in prayer, praising Him all the while.

## QUESTIONS

What does “prayer and praise are oxygen for Christians” mean to you? What role can the Psalms play in our praise and prayer life? What is “divine discontent”?

## PRAYERS FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Pray for the Lord to provide all the staff and volunteers needed at each of the eight Operation Christmas Child Processing Centers to allow the shoebox gifts to be sent out in a timely manner.

# WEDNESDAY

James 5:14-16; Mark 2:1-5, 10-12; Acts 9:32-35

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“Over the main portal of the great Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan, N.Y., there are engraved the words: ‘All healing is of God; physicians only bind up the wounds.’” (Coffman Commentaries) James concurs here, while reminding us that God works healing and renewal also through Christian leaders and fellowship.

Some call faith “the currency of heaven.” We are commended to faith throughout Scripture; indeed, “*without faith is it impossible to please [God]*” (Hebrews 11:6 ESV). The Bible gives numerous examples of healings by the prophets, by Jesus, and by the apostles—today’s readings share two examples. However, when faith and healing intertwine, a Christian controversy emerges. James 5:15—“*And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick*”—adds fuel to this debate.

“Some [maintain] that the gift of miraculous healing was limited to the apostolic age, and so this doesn’t apply anymore. ... Others go to the other extreme and say that it is always God’s will to heal. If you aren’t healed, you must not have prayed in faith. ... Mind science cults ... cite [James 5:15] in an attempt to show that we can shape reality by our thoughts.” (Precept Austin)

As with all good things, there can be abuses of godly truth, what we might call “corrupted goodness.” Some sin is a good gift misapplied, e.g., sex outside of marriage. One denomination mishandles James 5:16, compelling parishioners to confess to a church official “for forgiveness.” Faith healers, drawing from James 5:15, promise “you will be healed if your faith is sufficient (and you contribute to this ministry).” Interestingly, though many were healed via Paul’s ministry, the apostle could not heal himself of his own “*thorn in the flesh*” (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

“If you are seriously sick or have [a significant] injury ... call the elders for prayer. [They] will come and talk to you ... [and can] anoint you with oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is mighty to heal. [They] will pray with you, believing that God can and does heal. ... If He chooses to heal you, give Him the glory, because it wasn’t the oil [or elders’] prayers or faith that healed you ... [but] God!” (Precept Austin)

## QUESTIONS

Why does God sometimes choose to work healings and miracles through His people? Why does He choose to heal some and not others? What might a believer facing a serious illness or injury ask of church elders?

## PRAYERS FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Pray for the children who will receive a shoebox through Operation Christmas Child. Pray also for the families of the children. Pray they all will receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

# THURSDAY

**James 5:17-18; 1 Kings 17:1-7; 1 Kings 18:36-45**

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When I was speaking once with Pastor Betsy, she asked me, “Do you regard Christ more in His deity or His humanity?” She was unsurprised by my response: “His deity.” She replied, “Perhaps you’re letting yourself off too easily—what Jesus did in His first coming was as a Man, fully dependent upon the Father and Spirit. Consider what we should be able to do if we lived like Jesus.”

Many Jews seemingly elevate the prophet Elijah to a level approaching Jesus in Christianity. “Elijah the precursor of the Messiah (Malachi 3:1, 4:5) ... is said to be a witness at all (Jewish) circumcisions when the sign of the covenant is placed upon the body of the child. ... In the Talmudic literature, Elijah would visit rabbis to help solve particularly difficult legal problems. ... Today, a place is reserved at the seder (Passover) table and a cup of wine is placed there for Elijah.” (Wikipedia)

“[Elijah’s] ... prayers were bold and he called on God to do the miraculous. ... He prayed for a drought in the land, prayed to raise the widow’s son from the dead and called down a fire from heaven to consume the offering on Mount Carmel.” (Lesli White) Regardless, James—mindful of his audience and Elijah’s stature in Judaism—deemed him “*a man with a nature like ours*” (James 15:17) despite all that was done via the prophet.



“Many people think that the prophets were morally or spiritually superior ... But ... [Elijah] wasn’t. Like us, Elijah needed correction, encouragement and the knowledge that other believers were standing against [God’s enemies]. Elijah wasn’t exceptionally spiritual or superior. He was completely human. Yet, what made Elijah extraordinary was his complete commitment to the will of God.” (White)

Jesus is God the Son. Let’s not make Peter’s mistake at the Mount of the Transfiguration, recognizing Elijah and Moses as if they were Jesus’ peers (Matthew 17). Nonetheless, Betsy was right: the Word of God came to earth clothed in humanity, limiting Himself accordingly. When reasoning “Of course, Jesus did miracles—He’s God!” we underestimate what God can do through any faithful believer, even the likes of me or you!

## QUESTIONS

Do you regard Christ more in His deity or in His humanity? What is one way in which believers might “go easier on ourselves than we should”? How was Elijah “completely human,” just like you and me?

## PRAYERS FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Pray for the pastors who distribute the shoeboxes to the children. Pray that they can be a light to their people. Pray that the Gospel will transform their communities.

# FRIDAY

**James 5:19-20; Colossians 4:5-6; Galatians 6:1-2**

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Judging is a hot contemporary topic; “being judgy” is a recently popular catchphrase. Unknowingly some even vaguely invoke Matthew 7:1 or Romans 2:1 when protesting, “Don’t judge me!” And, indeed, Christians should never judge another’s salvation—that is God’s singular responsibility.

However, we are called to discernment, “the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong.” (John MacArthur) Accordingly, James 5:19-20 reminds us to care deeply for others’ relationships with Christ, like God Himself—“*not willing that any should perish*” (2 Peter 3:9) How can we show loving concern without appearing to condemn others?

Recall that James led the newborn Jerusalem church; his epistle’s audience was also Jewish Christians dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. “James concludes with this because this is exactly what he has endeavored to do through this challenging letter—to confront those who have wandered from a living faith, endeavoring to save their souls from death, by [emphasizing] that they not only hear the word, but do it, because a living faith will have its proof.” (Guzik)

“[A] purpose of all God’s people [is] to turn [others] from their sins ... so that they come back to God and begin to live in accordance with His Law and with His requirements ... [We are to have] concern for [fellow believers] who may [have strayed, as] ... ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23). Sin can bring premature (physical) death to failing believers (1 Corinthians 11:30) and eternal death to unconcerned sinners.” (Peter Pett)

Monday's devo cited the story of Ananias and Sapphira, whom God removed before they could damage the newborn church. However, there are even greater consequences for those not knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Paul provides related, wise counsel: *"Walk in wisdom ... Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you [can helpfully] answer each person"* (Colossians 4:5-6) and *"restore ... in a spirit of gentleness. ... Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:1-2) If we faithfully love God while loving others, the Spirit will assist us. Whom do you know who might be an unbeliever or lapsed Christian? How can you lovingly help them?

## QUESTIONS

Is it ever okay for believers to "judge"? How can we show loving concern without appearing to condemn others? How can you help an unbeliever or lapsed Christian whom you know?

## PRAYERS FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Pray for each National Leadership Team's strategic plan as they prepare to deliver shoebox gifts throughout their country. There are over 170 countries and territories that will receive shoeboxes this Christmas.

# Sources

- David Guzik's quotes are from <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/james-5/>
- Thomas Constable's quotes can be found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/james-5.html#verse-13>
- GotQuestions.org's quote is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/praising-God.html>
- Bridgeway Bible's quote can be found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bbc/james-5.html#verses-7>
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- Lesli White's quotes can be found at <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/who-is-elijah-in-the-bible.aspx>
- John MacArthur quote is from <https://www.christianity.com/theology/what-is-biblical-discernment-and-why-is-it-important-11532182.html>
- Peter Pett's quote can be found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/pet/james-5.html>



Glenkirk Church | 1700 Palopinto Ave, Glendora, CA 91741 | 626.914.4833

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