

Sermon: The Power of Community (James 5:16-20)

IN *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. This is Study #16 in Pastor Henry's series on the book of James.
<http://www.cschurch.ca/sermons/inside-out/>
If you have had opportunity to follow many / all of the studies, what has stood out for you in James' teaching? What has been new in your Christian walk?
2. Tell of a time when you have 'wandered from the truth.' Who (or what) guided you back?

UP *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. What does it mean to 'confess your sins to each other'?
How is / can this be done?
Why does James then add the words, 'and pray for each other'?
What does this mean for each person in this setting?
How important is 'confessing your sins... and praying for each other.'
What challenges can these principles present for an individual?
2. Throughout James letter, he gives over 50 commands to the Christ-follower.
Consider how you might need to confess and pray for one another in any of these areas. (e.g. 2:1; 3:10; 4:11)
3. Pastor Henry suggested three key characteristics of a healthy Kingdom Community: (see summary)
How do the following Scriptures demonstrate each of these 'characteristics'?
Genesis 3:8-11; Psalm 73; James 5:19-20; 1 Peter 4:8
4. Writing similarly to James 5:19-20, Peter penned in 1 Peter 4:8, 'Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.' (NLT)
Give examples of who these people might be.
What responsibility do we have for one another?

OUT *Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community*

1. What was significant for you in the story of 'George'?
2. What steps do you need to take to reach out to someone in your life who is 'wandering' from the truth?
3. What do you need to do to become or be a more effective part of 'Kingdom community'? How will you answer God's call to participate?

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

Genesis 3:8-11

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Psalm 73

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. ⁸They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?" ¹²This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. ¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments. ¹⁵If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply ¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²²I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

James 5:16-20

¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. ¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Sermon Study Summary

James summarized his own letter by saying that 'You cannot live the Christian life I've just described in your own strength or on your own. You need to invest in two key relationships.' First, you need the presence and power of God in your life. This is done through prayer. Prayer is not just a part of the Christian life, but 'the' Christian life, for it is the means to cultivating a vibrant friendship with God. Through prayer and daily surrender to God, the Holy Spirit will over time transform us into the image and character of Jesus. Secondly, you are going to need the challenge and encouragement, and the care and prayers of other Christ-followers in your life.

The Christian life is more than putting your faith in Jesus and embracing His grace and forgiveness so that when you die you can live forever with Jesus in heaven. This is only half the gospel. The other half is about doing life with the family of Jesus (the church) and together living and accomplishing the mission and redemptive purposes of Jesus in our world. To do one without the other is to leave one's understanding and experience of the Christian life incomplete.

Pastor Henry tells a story of a man he met after a service. George was seeking meaning in his otherwise unfulfilled life. Over time and after many talks with Henry, George became a Christian, was baptized, took classes at church and attended worship services. He did not, however, join a small group to be in community. Over time other priorities took his time. He did not stop believing, but simply didn't embrace the call to join with other Christ-followers to live out His Kingdom values.

God Himself is a community of three persons. There is no loneliness within the Godhead – only perfect love, delight and mutual servant hood. Humans were created in the image of God and hence are wired for community. We long to belong and be included. However, if that is so, then why do so many people not live in community? Fundamentally it is that we live in a broken world that was made so by our first parents' choices. The first result of these choices was to hide from God and cover up (Genesis 3:8-10). We have been doing so ever since. Ever since then God has been on a mission to bring all people back into community with Himself – and each other. Jesus started this by calling twelve imperfect people to join Him in establishing a caring community and participate in undertaking the Kingdom mission. Later, this community was called the 'Church' – where no one is alone, but everyone is loved, accepted and valued, and where they are called to love, serve, care, pray and reach out to impact the lives of others. Through this they are encouraged and challenged to grow spiritually and keep one another secure in the faith. What then does a healthy Kingdom community look like?

1. A healthy Kingdom community is where I am reminded of God's truth and perspective. It is in community and worshipping together that we can see and experience the truth of who God is (Psalm 73).
2. A healthy Kingdom community is where I am encouraged and free to be open and honest. John Ortberg says, "We live in a world of image protection, where impression management is the rule of thumb." Just consider how people are presented in social media sites. James says that healthy community is characterized by prayer and encouragement, where people are accepted and valued as they are, and can grow, serve and flourish. He then challenges us to put aside the image management and instead be open, real and honest (James 5:16). We all struggle. Because of this we need one or two people in our lives that we trust and can share our struggles with. Until we do, we will never grow far spiritually and be all that God wants us to be, and, in time, will likely wander away from the church. It is not for forgiveness that we are sharing our sins and struggles, but for healing and restoration (emotionally and spiritually) in sharing them.
3. A healthy Kingdom community is where I am challenged to reach out to others (James 5:19). Who are these others?
 - a. Those in your immediate circle that you are close to whom you perceive to be drifting from their faith. Many don't act on these red flags out of fears of being rejected or misunderstood. James says not to ignore them as they may lead to something much more serious later.
 - b. Those who were once part of the church community but have wandered off. Do you judge them unfairly? Are we all not prone to wander? Our ability to live in victory is only by the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God. James challenges us to woo them back. How? Repent of our own sin. Pray for them. Love them however God leads (1 Peter 4:8). Bless and care for them.

What happened to George? Sometime later he called Henry to say he was moving to another city but that he was still growing in his faith and was thankful for all that Henry had done for him. Henry reminded him about the importance of community and joining a good Bible-based church. Years later his story came out. He gradually stopped attending and was later married in a traditional mainline church that his fiancé's family occasionally attended. They worked hard to get what they wanted. However, after a few years they both came to the point of being disillusioned and unfulfilled. She left him for someone else. George had come full circle. After a time of despair and loneliness a friend invited him to church and supper then to his small group where he felt loved and accepted. It was there that he began to experience the 'other half' of the Christian faith – of walking with Jesus daily together with members of His family.