

Undivided mutual care

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Date: 11 November 2018

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Well, a very good morning to all of you. Thank you so much for this invitation to come and, as it were, sum up the series on James chapter 5.

And I have to say it's been quite a challenge for me to try and fit in, and I've enjoyed preparing it. I hope you will benefit from it. Thank you for your fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ over the years.

Before we look at God's word, let's pray together. Our dear God and Heavenly Father, as we come to you, we thank you for your great mercies to us.

We are so grateful that whenever we come together, we can know what it means to be a part of the people of God. We thank you for fellowship with one another. We thank you for the opportunities we have to care for one another.

[1 : 1 6] And we thank you that we can support one another. But our God, we are also conscious that often we are not as supportive and caring as we ought to be.

And there are pockets in the church that sometimes we may even neglect or forget. And so we ask that you will forgive us when we fail and come short of what we ought to be.

But this morning as we come to you, we pray again that you might remind us of the wonderful things we can do together when we are in fellowship with you and with one another.

Help us therefore, that as we come to your word, that your spirit will search our hearts and teach us indeed, that we may care for one another as you wish us to.

And so as we come now, we seek your grace to rest upon each one of us and help us to hear you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[2 : 1 7] Now you may or may not have noticed that James doesn't end his letter in the same way as most letters in the New Testament. I'm not sure if you notice, most letters in the New Testament actually end, whether it's Paul, Peter, John, they all end with a benediction.

At times you actually find out two or even three benedictions. If you don't believe me, you could go home, check it up. Romans chapter 15, 16, I mean, you'll find that there are two or three benedictions in one letter.

But in the case of James, there is no benediction at the end. And it would seem to me that he's far more interested at the end to drive home what he has said throughout his letter since chapter 1, verse 1.

What does he drive home at the end of this letter? Prayer and care in Christian community. Mind you, he's not merely interested in prayer per se, all right?

In fact, the word prayer and prayer, of course, many, many times in this last few verses, verse 13 to verse 20 of chapter 5. He's rather interested in prayer as a ministry within the church.

[3 : 3 8] And that is why he mentions the elders praying for sick person in verses 14 to 15. And so too in verse 16, he says of the need to pray for one another.

And then in verses 19 to 20, you notice he's still very concerned about Christian community, care for one another by looking out for those who are wondering, going astray, as it were.

So clearly, the idea of one another, praying for one another, caring for one another, is at the heart of these final instructions in chapter 5.

And that, as you know, was much needed among the Christians that James wrote to in his day. Why do I say that? Did you remember?

This was a divided community. It was a community where the rich don't mix with the poor. You would have known that. Where the rich are looked up to and the poor are looked down upon.

[4 : 40] It is a community where a brother or a sister have a need and can be sent away without the need being met. So we are told in James chapter 2, verses 14 to 17.

It is a community where jealousy and selfish ambition abound, leading to disorder and every vile practice, according to James chapter 3, verses 13 to 18.

It is a community where there are quarrels and fights even, according to James chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. And the wrong use of the tongue.

You remember? In chapter 3, verses 1 to 12. Why was James so concerned about the wrong use of the tongue? Well, look at James chapter 4, verses 11 to 12.

He says there, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. The use of the tongue in community. The one who speaks against the brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law and so on.

[5 : 43] Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that James was describing the church of his day. But he was.

And if you have been to as many churches as I've been over the past 40 years, you will know that there's not uncommon problems in many churches today. So, you know, James is very straight-talking.

He doesn't sweep things under the carpet. He doesn't think he must say things politically correct. No. He says things as they are so that you and I who read this letter, and, of course, are very prone to such sinful tendencies, will come to our senses and recognize a different pattern of living together by mutually caring for one another, by firstly praying for one another, and then reclaiming, rescuing those who have wandered from the truth.

It is a different way of living together. So, what are we to do for each other in terms of prayer in verses 13 to 18? Well, James begins with a very generous statement regarding prayer in verse 13.

Do you see that? He begins with, Is anyone among you troubled or suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

[7 : 12] Now, by suffering, James means suffering in general. Suffering of any kind. Troubles of any kind. It is no different from chapter 1, verse 2, where he actually talks about trials of various kinds.

All right? One of the amazing things about James is that it's actually a very structured book. All the things he talks about in the first few verses of chapter 1 is repeated in chapter 5.

He noticed that in chapter 1, he talks about the fact that you have troubles. What do you do when you are in trouble? He says, You need wisdom. What do you do when you need wisdom?

You pray. You pray. All right? That's the thing. Now, of course, what does he prescribe for us here? He says, If you are in trouble, pray.

Same thing. Pray means look up to God. Seek yourself. You know, the danger is to turn your back on God and at times even turn against God when you are in trouble.

[8 : 13] You question God, don't you? You wonder why he has allowed you to suffer, perhaps. Why can't God just get rid of your suffering? If he's all-powerful, why can't he just get rid of all suffering for that matter?

And if God is all-loving, as the Bible says, surely getting rid of suffering would be the most loving thing that God could ever do. Now, you would be a very, very rare breed of a Christian if those questions never, ever race through your minds before when you are in trouble.

Faced with such questions, one could easily end up as a skeptic, as many people have. They give up on God. They don't believe in God anymore. Or if he does exist, well, God must be cynical, powerless, cruel.

Now, that is the danger when you are suffering. You begin to think that God is like that. Now, James knows about the danger. That's why in chapter 5, verses 5 to 11, he says, Now, you read all that in the verses before this one.

Do you see that in verses 10 to 11? He says, God is found to be actually merciful and compassionate in our suffering. Very often, we don't feel that way.

[9 : 55] But he is. He's trying to remind us. So pray if you are suffering. Continue praying even when the Lord's answer is slow in coming in your mind. Continue to trust him.

He has a purpose. And don't forget, at the end of the day, he is merciful and compassionate. Now, if you don't discover that about God, you have not actually prayed as you should.

But not only pray. He says, Be cheerful. Be thankful. Give God praise. And can I add this? In the face of suffering.

Now, I think that when we read these verses, we get the idea that if you are suffering, you pray. If you are cheerful, something blessing, things have happened nicely for you, then you actually praise God.

May I add that that may not be the right reading of these verses. The reason I say that is because the word cheerful is often used in the context of suffering. We know this because this word only occurs four times in the New Testament.

[10 : 54] And often it is used in the context of trouble. Be cheerful. Can I turn you to Acts 17 for a moment? Because on three occasions in this one incident, the word cheerful is used in the midst of trouble.

Here is a record in Acts 17 of a shipwreck. Paul was on his way to Rome. After several days of a storm beating down on that boat that they were traveling in, most of the folks on board had given up hope that they were going to live.

And all of a sudden, Paul had a vision. The angel came to him and told him, there will be no loss of life in this storm. And so what did Paul do?

He speaks to the people on board and tells them in Acts chapter 27, verse 22, I urge you, he says, take heart. I like the King James Version.

It says, I exhort you to be of good cheer. Be cheerful. You'll be all right. You don't say that to people who are in trouble, do you? But that's what Paul was saying to these people.

[12 : 09] Be cheerful. You'll be fine. Look at verse 25. Paul further adds, so take heart. The King James Version, have it consistently.

Be of good cheer. For I have faith in God that everything will turn out exactly as God said it would be. And because of Paul's reassuring words, we read in verse 36, then they all were encouraged, or as the King James Version said again, then they were all of good cheer.

So even in the face of a storm, a shipwreck, and the prospect of death, Paul and his fellow travelers cheered up because of God's reassuring word to them through the angel.

Now in James chapter 5 verse 13, is anyone cheerful must be understood in that light. It refers to those who in the face of suffering or trouble have known something of the reassurance of God's love and care, and in the midst of all that, because you know God's love and care, cheer up.

Things will be fine. God is in control. Things are not going to go away because he's in absolute control. He's sovereign. And so if he puts you through suffering and trouble, puts you through your paces, he will ensure that he will get you through at the end.

[13 : 38] So cheer up. So if you are suffering, pray. If you are cheerful in the midst of your suffering, don't forget to please praise God for that.

Now, having dealt with prayer in general, James goes on to a specific example of prayer for one another in verses 14 to 15. Is any among you sick, he says, let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Now, here is James providing a specific example of what it means to be praying for one another. And he thinks of a sick man. Can I put it like this?

I could stay a long time with these two verses. Because it is a happy hunting ground for various groups of people for their kinds of teaching.

For example, the Roman Catholics base their teaching of extreme unction. You might ask me, what is extreme unction? When you are about to be dying, you call on the priest, the priest will come to you, anoint your head with oil, pray for you, and of course, in preparation for you to mati.

[15 : 10] Then, there are those people who feel that these verses promote the right of every Christian to be healed, and insist that there is a prescription for all divine healing.

They base their teaching on these two verses. Now, rather than running through the whole gamut of all the different teachings by these different groups, don't you think it is wiser to discover what James actually says here?

So, what exactly did he say? Number one, he says that the sick person he refers to seems to be suffering from a serious illness.

serious enough for this person not to be able to go and receive prayer from the elders. Do you see that? Rather, he or she has to call for the elders to come and attend to them.

So, this is not just a minor complaint. Can I put it that way? This is not that you've got a headache or you've got a cold and you want the elders to come and pray for you. Okay? This is something much more serious.

[16 : 18] This person is, from what I read, seems to be bedridden, is not able to move and he's in serious condition. Secondly, the one who is sick is to call for the elders to come and pray.

The initiative, the responsibility rests with the sick person. It does not rest with the elders. There is no indication here, can I put it that way, that the elders are to run around with bottles of oil healing any and everyone.

Okay? No. No. The elders are not even asked to arrange a special meeting or event for everyone who is sick to come and be anointed with oil and pray it over for healing.

No, no, no, no. The elders are to come only when requested by the sick person to go and pray. And the sick person is to make the request.

Thirdly, when called upon, the elders are to go and pray for the sick person and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. Now, we're going to come back to the matter of prayer, all right?

[17 : 22] For the sick. But for now, note the use of oil to anoint the sick. That is nothing miraculous about the oil. We know that from verse 15.

Why? Because it is the prayer of faith which brings recovery to the sick person, not the oil. Granted, oil is sometimes used as medicine.

I don't know if you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the man who was robbed and then bitten by the robbers, the Good Samaritan came by and applied oil and wine on his wounds.

All right? In Mark 6, verse 13, we read that the 12 apostles went out and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

And yet, at no point are we told that Jesus actually taught them that that was what they should do, number one. Number two, we also know that the Lord Jesus Christ gave them his authority and power to cast out demons and heal the sick.

[18 : 33] So why then the oil? You still ask the question, correct? The answer is found in a phrase in verse 14, in the name of the Lord.

They are to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord. Now, that phrase is used one other time by James in chapter 5, verse 10, to refer to the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

So when the prophets speak in the name of the Lord, what do we mean? Well, when they speak in the name of the Lord, they speak with his authority. They speak according to his will.

You cannot say that they spoke in the name of the Lord unless they speak according to God's will. Am I right? So clearly, the anointing of the oil is symbolic of the authority God has given to the elders to pray, and not only that, to pray according to God's will.

It is a visible expression of what the Lord has willed for this sick person and has authorized for this sick person.

[19 : 43] Now, that will have implications as we will soon see. So the person is seriously ill, number one. He is to take the initiative to call for the elders to come and pray.

The elders, when called upon, are to attend the sick person by praying for him and anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, number four. And this is crucial.

It is the prayer of faith of the elders that heals the man, restores the man. Nothing is said of the sick person's faith.

Can I put it that way? Contrary to many faith healers who insist that unless you as a sick person need faith to be healed, we are told here it is not the faith of the person who is sick, it is the prayer of faith of the elders.

What does this mean, this prayer of faith? Can I suggest what I think it is? Remember how the elders are to anoint the sick person in the name of the Lord.

[20 : 51] That means that the elders themselves must be persuaded within themselves that it is the Lord's will to heal this sick person. they must be convinced, convicted by the Lord that this is his purpose.

The Lord will raise him up, so says verse 15. Do you see that? So, this is the Lord's will, the Lord's action to raise that person up from the sickness.

That's the emphasis. So, the procedure recommended by James here, may I add, is not a guarantee that everyone who is sick and calls upon the elders to come and pray for them is granted healing.

Rather, as the elders come, they are to wait upon the Lord to find out what his purpose is for this brother or sister who is sick, and if they are convinced that his will is to heal this person, then they should pray by his authority that he or she will be healed accordingly.

now, if that is not the case, if we think that this is a guaranteed healing, then we actually have to assume that this is an SOP.

- [22 : 13] You all know what is an SOP, isn't it? Standard Operating Procedure for every church for divine healing. Do you get what I'm saying? What I'm saying is that if this is a standard operating procedure for divine healing, can you imagine, number one, how busy your pastor and elders would be.

Every sick person could come to them and say, please come pray for me, and then they all will be healed, is it? Number two, think about it like this.

If that is the case, do you know what will happen to our church? There will be no sick person. Because it's guaranteed. But if that is so, isn't it strange, isn't it strange that it is never prescribed in the rest of the New Testament?

If this was indeed the granted SOP for divine healing, shouldn't it have been mentioned more often than once? Furthermore, isn't it strange that Paul did not prescribe it for Timothy, who had a weak stomach?

why advised Timothy to drink some wine to help with his stomach in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 23? Why didn't he tell Timothy, call the elders, pray for you and your stomach will be okay?

- [23 : 42] And then, when Trophimus, an assistant of Paul, was left in Miletus very, very sick in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 20, why didn't Paul say, well, make sure that Trophimus called on the elders to come and pray for him and then he'll be all right?

What about Epaphroditus, whom Paul said in Philippians chapter 2 verses 25 to 27, that he was so ill that he almost died? Why didn't he tell the elders to go there and pray for him, anoint him with oil, so that he won't have to die?

Clearly, this was not an SOP for guaranteed divine healing.

Rather, if and when the Lord has persuaded the elders that it is his will to heal someone who is sick, then he would give them the faith to pray for the recovery of the sick person.

That's the prayer of faith, a faith given by God, confirmed, affirmed by him that this is his will for the sick person. And so the elders should have their confirmation in their hearts to pray accordingly.

- [25 : 00] Now, you might disagree with me. That's fine, but I'm just giving you my take on the matter. Now, one final thing James mentions in verse 15, and if the sick person has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

That if is very important. if his illness is somehow related to a sin or some sins. For not all illnesses are linked to sins.

Let me just say that very clearly. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught so in John chapter 9. Referring to the man who was born blind in John chapter 9, his disciples had asked him in John chapter 9 verse 2, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

And Jesus' answer was very plain. It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. And that means that not all diseases, not all sicknesses, illnesses, are due to a particular sin you have committed or sins you have committed.

okay, agreed, diseases, illnesses all came about because of the fall of man into sin. But there is no direct link always between a sin and an illness or a disease.

- [26 : 28] That's the reason why James adds that if, if and only if he has committed sins that are related to his disease, then the eldest prayer of faith would not only raise him up, make him well, but rather in raising him up, would also confirm that by raising him up, his sins have been forgiven.

All right? Now as you can see, we are wading through very, very dangerous waters here. All right? But there's a lot more I could say. I've got limited time, so I trust that has helped you a little bit.

The question that may remain in your mind is, Dr. Ong, shall we practice this still in our church today? Today? My answer is why not?

Isn't praying for a sick member certainly a part of the responsibility of elders? It is. Obviously, we need to approach it with the same realism James has spelled out here.

Both the sick person and the elders must not expect that this is an SOP for granted divine healing. If that is kept in mind, then surely this practice would be a wonderful expression of a loving and caring community where the elders are sensitive to the needs of the members under their care.

[27 : 55] I have a complaint from quite a number of people in Kuala Lumpur that visitation of the sick has become a low priority for many pastors.

pastors. I know someone who actually told me 20 years ago that pastors don't ever visit anymore. How come? Or elders?

Well, maybe we should reclaim this for the church. Maybe it's time we start thinking about what James is saying here and apply it to our church.

All right? But not only that, not only are the elders to care for the members. Do you know that James is very clear that all of us have a responsibility? Not least when relationships in a fellowship like ours are afraid and members are at odds with one another.

James had already spoken about this. The rich and the poor don't get along, you know, and when there's somebody in need, nobody seems to care in the church and so on. And they are, he has mentioned the causes, the dangers of a broken fellowship in this letter already.

[29 : 08] Thus, it is not surprising that as he came to the end of his letter, he reminds us that there is a way to healing broken fellowships. Now, I don't know what your fellowship is like.

From what I know from all these years, I'm very grateful for the way you, you elders have been wonderful in this church, I have to say, the way you have been caring for members. But, you know, for a start, James tells us in any broken fellowship that we have to confess our sins to one another.

You can't do that, can you, unless you are humble enough to admit your own sins. Let's be honest, it is far easier to see the faults of other people, much easier to highlight their faults without noticing that we too have our faults, and very often, and this is the great irony, worse faults than other people, except we don't see it in ourselves.

Now, how can there be any move to genuine confession of our sins to one another if we can't even see those sins in ourselves, in the first place?

How can there be any healing of relationships if we don't own up to our sins, which may have contributed to the falling out with some other Christians?

[30 : 36] Mind you, James doesn't recommend, does he, that when things are broken in a fellowship, we are to confess our sins to the elders. He didn't say that.

Neither did he say that we are to talk about it to some other people. No. What does he say? He says that we are to confess our sins to one another, meaning to the people we have sinned against.

I say that because that's what Jesus teaches in Matthew chapter 5 verse 23 to verse 24. He says that if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

Of course, none of us here would find it easy to say, I'm sorry. Even less to say, I'm sorry and really mean it.

Do you get what I'm saying? Sometimes some people say, I'm sorry so many, many times and still you know they are not very, very sorry. But if there is to be healing in a fellowship like ours, then we must be willing to say I'm sorry and don't let our pride get in the way of saying that.

[32 : 06] Can I say this? God prizes our unity and harmony and peace as a fellowship much more than our pride. And just as pride can get in the way of confession of sins to one another, pride can get in the way of our readiness to forgive one another.

Thus, confess your sins to one another, assume that when we mutually do so, we are not only to forgive each other upon our confession, we are actually to embrace one another with genuine warmth and love.

So there are two sides to the coin here. The willingness, number one, to say I'm sorry, that's part of confession of our sins, and the readiness to forgive each other and to restore each other in fellowship in the Lord.

But you know, James didn't just say that. He goes on to add, and pray for one another. I don't need to explain that. We all know how tough it is to pray with somebody we disagree with.

Am I right? Husbands and wives. Is it easy after a tiff with one another for you to pray together? Or may I add, is it easy to pray for one another at a time like this when you're still hot under the collar?

[33 : 35] Or yes, you might pray, Lord, why can't you make her see my point? Or you might pray, Lord, why are men always like that?

But that's not praying for one another, is it? we are being challenged here by James. Begin by confessing our sins to one another.

Be ready to say I'm sorry, or should I say be the first to say I'm sorry. That can often break the stand off. Interestingly, he doesn't tell us what to pray for, do you notice?

For one another. And the reason for that is that he leaves it to your imagination because the causes of broken fellowship and relationships are so many. What happens when there's a meltdown and a breakdown in a relationship?

You alone, no. You and the person who's offended, no. So when you pray for one another, pray in the direction of the cause of this and the consequences.

[34 : 45] The main thing is to recognize that praying for one another can bring about the healing of the relationship. And not only so, it can be healing for our own souls, taking away the bitterness that we have got and the anger and so on.

Just as the prayer of faith of the elders can bring about healing for the sick person, so praying for one another can help us to heal our relationships and to heal us when we pray for one another.

Like it or not, am I right to say we are all sin sick? We are sick, we have a sickness called sin. We are all struck by this disease whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not.

And that needs to be dealt with and praying for one another helps us deal with it to an extent. Now the effectiveness and the efficacy of such prayer is reinforced by James in the example of Elijah.

I don't have to tell you the story of Elijah. James tells us that he prayed and there was no rain for three and a half years and then he prayed again and the rain came.

[36 : 04] We all know that. Obviously, James could have chosen any number of Old Testament figures to talk about prayer and the effectiveness of prayer. But he chose Elijah for a good reason.

Number one, he chose Elijah because he was a righteous man. The prayer of a righteous man, he says, is effective. Meaning that Elijah was right with God.

How do we know he was right with God? Because he loved God so much in Israel, even when the Israelites didn't love him. And on top of that, he was willing to die for the cause of God in Israel.

He stood up for God. God in a time when king and people have turned away from God. But that doesn't mean he was sinless, by the way. That doesn't mean he was a perfect person by any means.

We know that because James says in verse 17, Elijah was a man just like us. He has the same nature like us.

[37 : 06] Elijah was liable to the same emotions, the same passions, the same weaknesses that you and I have. Of course, we all think of Elijah as such a wonderful hero. But James is reminding us, no, no, no, no, please remember, he was just like you and me.

How? Elijah could rise to the heights of faith and commitment, am I right? In his initial challenge to Ahab and Jezebel, he just walked into the palace and announced, as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these days except by my word.

Very brave of him. But you know, he could just as easily fall into the depths of despair and depression, because we read later on when he was fleeing away from Jezebel, it is enough now, oh Lord, take away my life or I am no better than my father's.

love. He could be very resolute at times when he confronted the prophets of Baal all alone at Mount Kamal.

But you know, at the whiff of a threat from the evil woman, Queen Jezebel, he fled away like a frightened dog with its tails behind its legs.

[38 : 23] selfless. He could be selfless in his concern for other people. Do you remember how he stayed with the widow of Jeriphoth?

And he actually prayed and they got oil and flour every day. And when the widow's son died, he prayed for the widow's son that he might be raised from the dead, and he was raised from the dead.

Very selfless. But he could be filled with self-pity as well. Did you remember how he complained to God and said, I alone am faithful to you, there's no one else in the whole of Israel.

So for all the ups and downs and so on that you and I know and experience, well, Elijah was no different. He had his ups and downs as well. And yet, and this is a point that James is driving at, ordinary man that he was Elijah prayed and the answer was extraordinary.

Why? Because he was right with God and because he prayed, some of your versions say in verse 17, he prayed earnestly. May I add, that is not exactly correct.

[39 : 40] The way to, it's a funny way of translating this, I know why they translate it that way, but actually in Greek, when you read it, it says, he prayed with prayer. He really prayed.

It wasn't so much he was fervent or frequent in his prayer, as that he genuinely prayed, believing that what he prayed for will come true according to God's will, in line with God's purpose, and therefore will be answered.

And as ordinary as you and I are, like Elijah, do you know, we can have an extraordinary result to our ordinary prayers.

Never underestimate the power of prayer. Prayer is for all seasons, in suffering, in cheer. Prayer can heal and restore the sick when it's according to God's will.

Prayer can bring about healing for fractured fellowships and restore our fractured souls. Prayer can do all that. Pray. prayer. In all circumstances.

[40 : 49] And you might be amazed at what the Lord can do. So are you a praying person? Are you a praying church? A big question for us, right? Now I've gone past my allotted time.

Let me touch briefly on verses 19 to 20. As you can see, James is still very, very concerned about community here. And this is brought out by the phrase my brothers in verse 19.

beloved brothers, my brothers, or sometimes simply brothers, is mentioned 15 times in the epistle of James. When he's teaching them, when he's scolding them, when he's encouraging them, when he's warning them, James calls them brothers and sisters.

It tells you something of the deep, sympathetic, warm, practical understanding of the needs of the church that James had in his day, and his willingness to identify with them.

Do you and I show a similar concern for our fellowship here? Or are we constantly critical about the church, judging, sniping about her failures and shortcomings in a negative way, unhelpful way?

[42 : 11] You know, James could have done the same. Wasn't that church bad in his day? It was. He could have criticized the church.

But he knows that to criticize the church is to do the devil's work. Can I put it that way? So rather than playing the devil's advocate, James recalls the church to her mission to save those who have wandered from the truth.

Now, most of you may have heard of Operation Mobilization, OM. Lots of churches I know harp on mobilizing their members for mission, for evangelism, for social concern, for full-time ministry.

I'm not saying that's wrong. That's important. But important as that is, James reminds us here that in the church we also need an operation, not mobilization alone, but operation prayer.

we have looked at that. And can I say, Operation Rescue. That's what he says in verses 19 to 20.

[43 : 18] My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, didn't say the elders by the way, please, let him know whoever, not the elders or deacons, everyone brings back a sinner from his wandering and save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

If anyone among you, and it means anyone in a fellowship like this, if you should wander from the truth, the truth as James has highlighted here in his letter, true Christianity is to visit orphans and widows, he said in chapter 1, true Christianity actually is faith with works.

unless it works, it is dead faith, we ought not to show partiality in the church, we ought to keep ourselves unstained from the world, he says later on, we are to live pure lives peaceably with fellow believers.

Now if anyone should wander from all that, if you see that happening with someone in the fellowship, don't wait for the pastor and the elders to do it, please. Be that someone or whoever, who will bring the wanderer back.

So this is a responsibility all of us have. I can tell you as a pastor for many, many years, often I'm the last person to know someone is wandering, do you know that?

[44 : 48] Very sad. People, other people know, they won't tell me, so of course I don't know. The unfortunate thing is when they don't help out, to try and help.

Now, if anyone should wander from all that, if you see someone doing that, be that someone or whoever to bring that person back. Think of all the people who have left this fellowship over the years you have been here.

Ask, where are they now? Do you know where they are? Are they in a Christian fellowship? Not necessarily here, but somewhere else?

Or are they still wandering around? Imagine what it would be like if at the first sign of their wandering, you and I, who know about it, extend a helping hand to them.

Granted, they might not stay at the end still. They might leave, but it is not for want of our trying to help them. The honest and unfortunate truth very often is this, isn't it?

[45 : 58] If fellow believers are making progress, regularly coming for our meetings, beginning to witness, participate in some ministry in the church, we find it very, very easy to be excited about them, aren't we?

Our hearts somehow warm to them because we see growth, we see progress. But if they don't make progress, if they seem to be going backwards, and they are withdrawing from meetings, and sometimes they resign from a ministry they have been involved with, our attitude often tends to be very critical and unloving.

And soon enough, we bypass them, we neglect them, and as a result, we miss out on the very thing that James exhorts us to do here.

That ought not to be. Not if we understand James correctly. Not if we take James seriously. If we do, then we should, we ought to have an undivided care for one another in this fellowship.

May God help us to do that. Let's pray together. Our dear Heavenly Fathers, we come to you, we acknowledge again our great need for you, for each one of us, for our fellowship here.

[47 : 35] We look to you and ask that in your great mercy, forgive us for our failures, but help us to encourage us, stir us up, push us on, that our dear God we may reflect the glory of the unity of the Trinity in our church, where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, where there is no conflict of interests, where they all know their path and roles, in order that they might fulfill the one purpose of redemption for mankind.

redeeming us, rescuing us from hell for heaven, from sin for righteousness, from sorrow to joy.

our God has become to you, help us to be a fellowship of unity, of peace, of harmony, and grant us grace that we may truly love one another and care for one another.

We look to you because in and of ourselves, we are not able to do this. Inherent in us is nothing but sin. Give us Christ's righteousness that we may love your people as he loved his sheep.

We thank you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.