

James: Consistency in Love – James 2

Sunday 20 September 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



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Call to Worship

Brendan Petty

This week we step into the second chapter of the book of James in the Bible – looking at consistency in our relationships, inclusion and justice in the ways that we gather and how we treat each other.

Prayer

God, as we connect together in different ways, in different places and at different times, we pray that your spirit would draw us together today. As we engage with the words of James and various stories around it, we pray that you would draw us together, draw us closer to you, and to help us better live out your call and your example as we go about our lives in the world.

Song: Justice

I've heard about the justice of your name
How at the sound of it, all evil fades
I've heard about the love that you proclaim
that covers all the same

As a child I learned stories of your life
Easter time and the first Christmas night
I've been told that you died just for me.
And in your church I've worshipped comfortably.
Maybe it's time to open up my eyes and see.

I pray for justice
For the lost
I pray for peace
For those who count the cost
Of being different
From who I usually see
I pray for justice
For those you love just as much as me

I've seen a church stand against the lost
Say they are different, not worthy of the cross
I've seen the bible
used as a weapon
to control

I've seen your people ignore the one
commandant that stands above them all
To love the lord our God above all else
And love our neighbour as ourselves

To love the lord our God above all else
And love our neighbour as ourselves

I pray for justice
For the lost
I pray for peace
For those who count the cost
Of being different
From who I usually see
I pray for justice
For those you love just as much

I pray for justice
For the first people of my nation
For the lonely ones
locked up in detention
For the one
Who loves differently to me
I pray for Justice
For those you love just as much as me

We pray for justice
We pray for light
We pray grace
We pray for joy
We pray for love
We pray for peace
We pray for healing
And forgiveness
We pray for wisdom
We pray for strength
We pray for change
And for your kingdom
We pray for acceptance
In diversity
We pray for justice
For those in need.

We pray for justice
For the lost
We pray for peace
For those who count the cost
Of being different
From who we usually see
We pray for justice
For those you love just as much

We pray for justice
For the first people of our nation
For the lonely ones
locked up in Detention
For the ones
Who loves differently to me
We pray for Justice
For those you love just as much as me

Ben Graham-Nellor 2020
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Personal Story

Belinda Carter

Belinda shares a significant personal story of a difficult season. It's a story of pressing into prayer, into relationships, and community.

Hi, I'm Belinda Carter,

On 25 October 2015, Mark (my husband) fell off a ladder and was unconscious. Nigel (my son) rang the ambulance and I tried to turn the hedge trimmer off and apply CPR. I rang Mark's parents and told them to pray. I felt an overwhelming sense of calmness in all the chaos. Mark had four paramedics working on him and asking me to hold an IV bag. They kept commenting, "you seem very calm." Thankfully, Mark's Dad turned up and he looked after the boys and I went in the ambulance to the Alfred Hospital. I made many phone calls to ask for prayer and my sister met me at the Alfred Hospital as Mark was transferred from emergency to ICU.

Thankfully, my Mum came home from a holiday in Adelaide and she came every day from Mt Waverley to Bayswater. We dropped off the boys to school and then went to the hospital and stayed all day. I would use that travel to and from the hospital to ring family and friends and give them the update.

Ringwood Church of Christ was amazing, and my wider family all attend different churches and their networks were all praying as well. Mark later shared he felt upheld in prayer. I certainly had prayer surround me. Thankfully, I had close family, friends and co-workers all upholding me.

The drive from home to the Alfred was still not possible for me at this stage. I felt so far away and needed to get home and support my boys. Paul refused to come in and visit Mark, so it was often a juggle to give Paul and Nigel the support they needed.

Family and friends asked how they could help. I think I became very specific for what I was asking for and called on the wider community to step in for support especially on weekends, as I wanted to be with Mark all day. I called on friends to take the boys out and learned not to feel guilty about being specific. Paul had trouble understanding that I couldn't leave the hospital every day so I could collect him from school. I found it hard to be everyone to everybody. Not possible.

I found it exhausting to keep in touch with my wider network as people wanted daily updates. I could ring the hospital and get updates overnight. At first, I would have to say what I'd seen during the day so they would know I was talking about Mark, and not giving information to strangers. It made me really question society that strangers would ring and enquire. Thankfully, my family are nurses and especially my older sister who told me to ask specific questions.

I used support offered from the hospital. The support worker was able to give out cheap carparking vouchers and she organised Centrelink payments. I work part-time and prior to this Mark and I would have to declare each fortnight how much we earned. Thankfully, the support worker organised it so I didn't have to do that.

As Mark made slow improvements, I asked the staff what I could manage to understand. Each day the staff would answer my questions. At the Alfred there were many staff and the head doctor would change weekly. I would ask to speak to them when sometimes they had done their rounds before I came in.

On Sundays I would go to church but leave before the last song as I found it exhausting to share how Mark and I were both coping. I loved the continued prayer and love and support but found it too hard to tell the same story continually.

I had to choose what was important to keep going at home. I attended primary school assemblies most weeks as they were offering support to both Nigel and myself and my family. I went to work on Tuesday's which was a playgroup and I attended a first aid course, as I work in childcare, so to keep up the qualifications that was sort of a must.

My boys were quite fussy eaters, so I accepted meals but suggested simple meals rather than casseroles. I learned how to use Facebook so I could send out many messages at once, I also learned how to group text. I accepted any assistance, especially with driving. I was coping, but didn't really enjoy driving as I get really nervous getting to places I don't know, especially the city. This did improve over time.

I learnt that you have to be flexible as Mark was often taken for CT scans just as we arrived, and so would have to wait or would use that time for exercise. One day Mum and I went to St Kilda and that was a lovely break.

*I knew I could never repay everyone for their amazing love, support and prayers,
but I appreciated it all the more. I have become a stronger person and
more conscious of asking how I can help.
I've learned to be specific in how people can help.*

I recently had an appointment for myself at the Alfred and drove in, I did this being nervous, but this was an achievement.

Mark moved from ICU to a ward at the Alfred after making huge progress and many meetings to discuss.

On the 4 December, Mark moved to the Caulfield Rehabilitation Centre, he stayed making what felt like slow progress. I'm very thankful again for the love, support and prayer showed.

On 8 January after 75 days, Mark came home.

I grew in that time and became more understanding of how quickly time can go.

While Mark had progressed physically very well, intellectually and emotionally he was totally changed; Mark used to love being on his own but now craved company. We had grown as a family but now realised that Mark's mood affects us all.

Thanks Belinda for sharing, for your honesty, and for the model of faith that it is for us all.

Message - Introduction

Brendan Petty

The letter of James became Scripture – accepted into the Canon – in approximately the 4th Century. A millennium later, it was questioned by Luther as it seemed to contradict Paul's teaching around justification by faith alone – which of course was central to Luther's ministry and understanding of the Christian faith.

James is a practical book. It's traditionally been attributed to the brother of Jesus and it echoes many of the practical teachings that Jesus shared as he went about his life and ministry. However, it's most likely written by someone else, someone part of the tradition and community of James, but someone more skilled with the Greek language than he would have been.

James is addressed to the Jews when they are scattered outside Palestine – the church as they are out and about, doing life. Much the same as we are in 2020! Jesus was calling to remember the Exodus God – the God that is not confined to the temple as the powers of organised religion wanted it to be.

James Chapter 2 introduces more of a prophetic voice to the letter.

Bible Reading 1: James 2:1-4 (NIV)

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Message

Brendan Petty

Here's my paraphrase of this passage:

How can you show favouritism if you believe in Jesus and his teaching? If a person in smart clothing, with a high social status, or who shows they are well-educated, comes into your home – do you make time for them, bring out the best food, try to impress them with your hospitality and your stories? What if you come across someone who doesn't quite smell right, who struggles with relationships or who has evidence of questionable habits – do you give a polite smile and keep walking, do you mentally rehearse an excuse for not sharing your money or your time, do you find yourself wishing they'd just solve their problems? Their addiction? Their homelessness? Their disorder? Their dysfunctional family of origin?

(I do)

Have I not made a judge of myself, using my own fortunes, the narrow parts of my childhood and my inherited wealth and advantage as a template by which to measure the value of others? Am I not, therefore, joining in with the quiet chorus of the world that assumes that God must, in some way, see me as more worthy than another?

Take note of how James starts his response to this (hypothetical) prophetic question ...

Bible Reading 2: James 2:5-13 (NIV)

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Message (cont.)

Brendan Petty

James says, “Listen, brothers and sisters in the faith.”

To address each other as siblings is powerful. Sometimes we visualise the people of our church on an organisation chart, in a hierarchy, with various roles and what leadership and responsibility they hold, especially in relation to others. Or where they sit when (it’s a distant memory!) we gather in a physical space together. Whether they can afford enough quality technology to be seen/heard clearly for a conversation over Zoom (that’s if they have the physical, mental and emotional capacity to connect at all).

However, James chose the imagery of siblings.

I have one sibling, and two cousins who have always lived some distance away. My brother Craig is six years older than me, so I haven’t had the rich and complex experience of multiple close siblings. I know it can be filled with pain, frustration and injustice. Yet at its best, a sibling relationship is one of compromise, of standing shoulder to shoulder, of cheering each other on and (importantly) of calling out unacceptable behaviour.

What a powerful, metaphorical image for us – the Body of Christ.

I, chairman Petty, supreme dictator over the rostering of all contributions and all contributors to the worship resources of Ringwood Church of Christ, am simply and powerfully a brother of one who never has (and never will) show their face on screen. And I, parent in a young family, stretched, tired and struggling to engage with anything “church” am a brother, loved, supported, encouraged and prayed for by those who are fully engaged, without judgement, as a brother.

Such language, despite the risk of sounding outdated (and the risk of forgetting half the humans with unfortunate terms like fraternity), could help us have a culture that fosters justice, and an environment where it’s easy for each of us to lead others and to be led by others – to serve others and be served by others – whether we’re an elder, a person on the fringe, paid, volunteer, new on the block, etc.

In verse 10, James quotes one of the 10 commandments – love your neighbour. Not showing partiality. He says we must keep the whole law ... if we fail on this one point, we fail the whole law. In Stage 4 restrictions, if we pick and choose which restrictions we’ll obey, we’re not obeying the restrictions and we’ve missed the mark.

Activity

Pick up your phone or a pen and paper and write a message to someone you could encourage right now. If you wish, address them as a sister or a brother. Who – in our church, your street, your neighbourhood, the government – could you send an encouraging message to now as you think of them as a sibling?

Bible Reading 3: James 2:14-25 (NIV)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"^[a] and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

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Message (final)

Brendan Petty

This part of James is a little bit famous as a disagreement of Paul's (and Luther's) idea of justification by faith alone. James is saying that we must do good works.

While there is definitely a tension here, and James and Paul are pushing different sides, I do believe they're sides of the same coin.

Paul writes about us being different members of the same body – unity in diversity, the integration of many individuals. He urges inclusion and valuing all people, equal treatment, even if quite different.

James writes about all of us being whole followers, that we need to be integrated within us. He urges inclusion of all people and equal treatment. Our faith is hollow without any works to express it.

Paul says it's good to say, "you are good at praying with people over the phone and I am good at editing worship videos. Yay for us!"

James says it's not OK to say, "you're out sacrificing comfort, safety and security to look after the poor, and I am here simply trusting in Jesus."

James says it's not OK to talk about inclusion, write it in values statements, preach about it, declare it as a personal priority, but then to treat the rich and the poor with different levels of hospitality, to plan things in such a way that the disadvantaged are automatically left out, or to ensure that the powerless are somehow reminded that they're not quite as good/worthy/capable as you are.

It can be hard work changing thought habits and social expectations, to integrate all areas of your life. Yet, imagine the freedom from anxiety of what others think about you – and the mental work of maintaining different perceptions or facts or behaviour in different social compartments of life. To be one, whole person removes the second-guessing of how others will react, the stress of getting invitation lists just right.

James links in with Jesus' parable in Luke 14 – which is below in scripture and song. Here Jesus not only encourages inclusion and equality but actually a preference for the poor, the outcast, the left-behind. For they will inherit the Kingdom of God – if only I (a skilled, educated, white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied male in a safe and wealthy country) could truly believe it.

Song: Excited to be Invited

Everyone's invited
(And) we're so excited
Let's tell it everywhere
We're all invited

Jesus tells a story
About a certain man
This guy could throw a party
The best in all the land
This certain man was ready
To get the party started
He gave invites to his servant
Who excitedly departed

Everyone's invited

(And) we're so excited
Let's tell it everywhere
We're all invited
(REPEAT)

People got their invites
RSVPs came back
Not one of them could make it
Not even Bruce the yak
They all had excuses
They all had things to do
Just got married bought some land
And new animals too

The servant came back with the news
That nobody would come
That makes me mad the master said
Let's think - what can be done
He changed his plans and said
Go invite everyone you find
Hungry lonely homeless people
The sick the deaf the blind

CCLI Song # 7141599
Brendan Petty | Jesse Taylor
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Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What could we (family, church, society, life group) change in order to better include all? (and avoid parallels to James 2:2-3.)
2. Are there things about some other people that you find you judge?

Communion

Brendan Petty - Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fbv.

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

When exploring James 2, I mentioned Paul's writing about the Body of Christ which appears in 1 Corinthians 12 (among other places). Just prior to that chapter is 1 Corinthians 11! Reading from verse 17 (NIV):

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

Then he re-tells the story of Jesus sharing the bread and cup at the Last Supper.

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Let's not use this as a passage of excluding others – or ourselves – from the hospitality of the open communion table. All are welcome to eat. That's exactly the point: we need to slow ourselves down, look within, look over our shoulder, look around the table – and see that we aren't limiting the welcome for anyone else.

As we share our communion elements together, as we stare down the roadmap out of Stage 4 and as we plan for the things that we're eager to do, let's pray for patience ...

Creator of the universe, you imagined, invented and implemented time. A dimension through which all things could travel, but no things could control. A continuum that seems so expansive, so empty, yet so limited and so full. A commodity that cannot be hoarded, or trafficked, or traded. A constant,

steady metronome that keeps us all in time – whether we're hurried or bored. The rhythmic heartbeat of the universe obeyed alike by mathematical scholars and microscopic bacteria.

God of Peace grant us energy to act and patience to breathe. Grant us awareness and wisdom and patience. Grant us consistency in love. Grant us grace for those in our homes, families, workplaces. Grant us understanding of other's perspectives. Grant us ... patience.

Let's eat and drink together – and enjoy looking at each other as we do so. 😊

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!