

## James: A community of solidarity – James 5:7-20

Sunday 4 October 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.



### What's Inside

*On a computer, you can click these links*

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## Call to Worship

Elissa Scott

Hi everyone – I hope that you have all had a good week!

Wherever you are when you are linking into this resource, be that in the midst of craziness and chaos at your dining room table, in a favourite chair with a cuppa or outside taking in all of the smells and sights of Spring, I hope that this time will be a real blessing to you.

So – Week 4 of exploring the book of James. Over the past few weeks, I've really appreciated hearing people's stories of endurance, resilience and wisdom as we have pressed into what James is encouraging us to do. And as we have heard the overall theme from James that emerges is centred around patient perseverance.

Today we are going to turn our focus to James Chapter 5:7-20 and explore the concept of empathy and authentic relationships as strong foundational bases for creating connection and community. It's a great space to push into particularly given the unusual situation that we find ourselves in with COVID19 where, because we are social beings made for interdependence, we are craving connection but because of the pandemic we now have to be more thoughtful about how this can happen.

Let's turn to the idea of empathy – what is it and why is it so important for connection.

Renowned American social worker and researcher, Brené Brown, has studied the concept of empathy over many years and her learnings about what it means to be truly empathetic are particularly helpful. Rather than me talk us through this though – here's a clip from Brené:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw)

### **Transcript of the Youtube clip (if viewing the clip is not an option):**

*So, what is empathy and why is it VERY different than sympathy? Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection. It's very interesting.*

*Theresa Wiseman is a nursing scholar who studied very diverse professions where empathy is relevant and came up with four qualities of empathy.*

*Perspective taking - ability to take the perspective of another person or recognise their perspective as their truth.*

*Staying out of judgment - not easy when you enjoy it as much as most of us do.*

*Recognising emotion in other people, then communicating that.*

*Empathy is feeling WITH people.*

*I always think of empathy as this kind of sacred space. When someone's in a deep hole and they shout from the bottom... And we look and we say, "Hey!" And climb down...*

*Sympathy is, "Ooh!"*

*"It's bad, uh-huh?"*

*"Uh... No. You want a sandwich?"*

*Empathy is a choice and it's a vulnerable choice. In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling. Rarely, if ever, does an empathic response begin with, "At least..."*

*Yeah. And we do it all the time because, you know what? Someone shared something with us that's incredibly painful and we're trying to "silver lining" it. I don't think that's a verb, but I'm using it as one. We're trying to put a silver lining around it.*

*So, "I had a miscarriage."*

*"At least you know you can get pregnant."*

*"I think my marriage is falling apart."*

*"At least you have a marriage."*

*"John's getting kicked out of school."*

*"At least Sarah is an A-student."*

*One of the things we do sometimes in the face of very difficult conversations is we try to make things better. If I share something with you that's very difficult, I'd rather you say, "I don't even know what to say. I'm just so glad you told me." Because the truth is, rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection.*

*Elissa Scott*

**So, empathy is a choice and it's a vulnerable one. It's not a default response.**

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*To achieve empathy we need to walk in someone's shoes, stay out of the judging zone and listen, recognise emotion in another person that we may have felt before, step into that and then communicate that we can recognise that emotion. Empathy is at the heart of the Christian message and serves in a profound way as a key to understanding who God is and who Jesus is.*

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I don't know about you but some days I reckon I can nail empathy but other days I can slip into that zone, where my patience is down, my internal voice is screaming, "why can't they just get over it!" or, "why do they want to tell me this!" or, "I don't need this in my life right now!" and I'm judgemental in my thinking and I'm not as empathetic as I could or should be.

But what I have appreciated in further exploring James is that we are encouraged to live consistently with what we have learned in Christ. We are encouraged to be patient, to not grumble or judge and to be compassionate even when we are in challenging situations, when we are tired and when there's pressure on us. And we are challenged to be courageous and committed to having authentic relationships. These are what sit as the foundation for building connected community.

In a moment we are going to hear two great worship songs brought to us by the Hammonds. Before we do let's pray together:

*Lord*

*Thank you for the numerous examples you have given us of empathy. So many people approached you for comfort and healing and you touched each one with your patience, words and grace. Increase our capacity for empathy and help us to see each's person's situation as you would. Help us to lean into vulnerability and develop authentic relationships. Give us courage to listen more and talk less and to love more and judge less so that the power of deep connections is felt throughout our community. In your name we pray*

*Amen.*

## Song: Build My Life

Worthy of ev'ry song we could ever sing  
Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring  
Worthy of ev'ry breath we could ever breathe  
We live for You

Jesus the name above ev'ry other name  
Jesus the only one who could ever save  
Worthy of ev'ry breath we could ever breathe  
We live for You  
We live for You

Holy there is no one like You  
There is none beside You  
Open up my eyes in wonder and show me who You are  
And fill me with Your heart  
And lead me in Your love to those around me

I will build my life upon Your love  
It is a firm foundation  
I will put my trust in You alone  
And I will not be shaken

CCLI Song # 7070345

Brett Younker | Karl Martin | Kirby Kaple | Matt Redman | Pat Barrett

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## Song: Faithful Now

I am holding on to faith  
'Cause I know You'll make a way  
And I don't always understand  
And I don't always get to see  
But I will believe it  
I will believe it

You make mountains move  
You make giants fall  
And You use songs of praise  
To shake prison walls  
And I will speak to my fear  
I will preach to my doubt  
That You were faithful then  
You'll be faithful now

I am standing on Your Word  
I'm calling heaven down to earth  
And You will fight my enemies  
And this will end in victory  
And I will believe it  
Yes I will believe it

And I know that I know You never fail  
Yes I know that I know You never will

CCLI Song # 7137533

Eddie Hoagland | Hank Bentley | Jonathan Smith | Mia Fieldes

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## Bible Reading: James 5:7-20 (NIV)

*If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections*

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned. Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore 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.

Elijah 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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

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## Message: Zoom Panel

Kaye Reid, Ken Morgan, The Moody Family & Deb Brewster

### **Kaye Reid:**

During lockdown we have missed being in community with other people, and this is appropriate because we are made in the image of God, and like the Trinity, we are made to be in community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, has this to say regarding the ideal and the reality of community:

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*“The person who’s in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

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In James chapter 5 we have read about some of the challenges and some of the gifts of being in community.

What does mature community look like and how can we understand it from a family systems perspective?

What are we aiming for and what are some of the pitfalls and positives?

### **Ken Morgan:**

At its heart, Family Systems theory is based on the idea of two competing drives in humans: Togetherness and Individuality. Maturity is the ability to manage these two for the good both of the collective and the individual.

Humans are an incredibly successful species because we’re social mammals with almost infinite capacity for differentiated specialisation. No other creature comes even close for our capacity to develop such a diversity of unique capacities and use these specialisations collaboratively to overcome challenges and achieve goals. Humans are utterly unique in our capacity to use collaboration and difference to our advantage. No other species can perform symphonies and make iPhones.

Yet these two advantages have shadow sides. The instinct for togetherness, to herd, to ‘group think’ can impinge upon our differentiation as individuals and the instinct for individuality can undermine the common good. We’re vulnerable both to suffocation and isolation. Can we be authentic selves in mutually beneficial collaboration with the rest of the community?

James 5:7-20 offers us some clues:

### **V 8-9 Patience in the face of suffering. Individuality instead of self-centredness.**

Anybody can be patient in a paradise. Real patience is being able to hold your position and convictions in the face of unpleasant feelings, in the face of being provoked, in the face of the pressure of the group, in the face of opposition.

Our interdependence in community is the secret of our success, yet that same community irritates and aggravates, imposes and impinges and thereby provides the grist for the mill that helps us to become Christlike. The temptation, as the text says, is to grumble to third parties. We might also cut ourselves off or get into conflict.

Developing muscles of Christian emotional maturity is about being able to live up to our ideal of becoming Christlike and fulfil our individual functions as an active and connected part in the community. It's about sticking with our principles and responsibilities even when things don't go our way and people hurt our feelings.

Maturity comes from telling the truth to ourselves, rather than reacting.

### **V 16 Confession of sin and prayer for healing – mutuality instead of the Herd mentality**

The ways of Jesus are not really compatible with the ideal of the rugged individual. Back in the garden God declared that solitariness is not good for a human. We're social beings, made for interdependence. Interdependence is not just about getting the most out of our complimentary specialisations. It's also about coming to terms with our deficits, our vulnerabilities our brokenness.

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*We can't become Christlike in isolation – we need both the irritation of the community to create endurance, and the consolation of the community where we can be honest about our weakness and failings.*

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Maturity comes from telling others the uncomfortable truth *about* ourselves rather than pretending.

### **V 19-20 Individual and collective responsibility: Accountability and restoration instead of live and let live**

We in the church are generally unwilling to make other people uncomfortable. Yet as a community we have a responsibility to speak up when others drift into ways that are counter to the ways of Jesus. It's not that we're responsible to *fix* the other person, but our silence is a kind of tacit permission and our failure to speak up is a failure of our mutual commitment to follow Christ in community.

We hold our tongues because we know that making the other uncomfortable will cause us to feel uncomfortable ourselves. It's easier to just talk to a third person in 'prayerful concern'.

Maturity comes from having the courage and commitment to telling the truth *about* others to their face.

In summary, according to family systems, maturity is shown by tolerating the unpleasant feelings that arise from living with one another while taking responsibility for our own behaviour. For the follower of Jesus, that means:



- Being patient with people: resisting the impulse to grumble, to cut off, and to gossip
- Being open with people: admitting out need for prayer, for forgiveness, for healing
- Being candid with one another: humbly and courageously speaking up when they drift into error or sin.

### **Kaye Reid:**

Thanks, Ken, for sharing this family systems perspective, bringing clarity and highlighting the key challenges that we experience in community, particularly the pull towards and away, and the invitation to being patient, open and candid.

Let us now ground this theory in a personal story from the Moody family.

### **Personal story: The Moody family**

So, we have just finished Term 3 home schooling. If we were to survey the family members asking for words to describe home schooling, it would look something like this:

- “Garbage.”
- “Everyday is the same.”
- “Missed my friends.”
- “Terrible.”
- “Arrrrgh.”
- “Hard to keep each other motivated.”

When we started home schooling, we didn’t realise that it was going to provide an opportunity to provide support for our community. This is a bit of our journey. We certainly haven’t got some earth-shattering epic tale of victory over adversity. No, just some real-world, messy, still-being-formed thoughts from our little home, that we hope brings some encouragement.

Through Term 2 and 3, a family we know have been having a real tough time with serious health challenges. We wanted to provide some sort of support, but, of course, we felt pretty helpless in these restricted times. Although we wanted to help, we also recognised that we were struggling just to do our everyday activities, so what capacity would we have to help anybody else? Sometimes we think helping others in our community needs to be big to make an impact. We think that we need to offer help over a sustained period, and we wonder whether we can actually commit to that.

Well we decided as a family that once or twice a week we would host two additional students into our version of home schooling, just to do our bit to support a family in need. We confirmed that it fitted into the category of “care” as defined by the government. We borrowed one of the trestle tables from the church and set up more home schooling desks. We were hoping, especially on those days when I was working from home, that our internet capacity could cope with five Zoom-type sessions at once.

So, how did this go?

Well, as much as it was a challenge, once we got into the groove, we found that there were some benefits to having friends over. Daniel and Chelsea had someone else to keep them company, to collaborate with, to laugh with.

All four of us had lunch together and enjoyed bike rides whenever we could.

One activity set by school was to build a structure as tall as possible outside. So plastic tables and chairs were assembled, and ladders were added to create a tower reaching over the height of the roof – which came crashing down in heap. But, it was fun.

The days when our friends were here made home schooling just a little more bearable.

Not sure about you, but we wonder whether doing our bit to support others actually makes a difference. We guess it does. We offer up something small, and it takes patience and endurance to track through the time between when we invest and when we see returns, when we see growth. It reminded us of what was spoken in James chapter 5 verse 7.

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.”

The farmer scatters very small seeds, and as Mark chapter 4 says,

“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

We are hopeful that the little seeds that we have sown are helping others. But we know that it actually produced shoots of life into home schooling for us as well. Recently I have read a few excerpts from Bill Hybels book *Making Life Work* at the tea table. Bill was sharing the story about how he had a horrible day of waiting for planes being cancelled and he was feeling really grumpy. As he finally sat on the plane ready to take off a lady with way too many bags was struggling down the centre aisle. He thought to himself, I can’t be bothered to help, but sensed that it was the right thing to do.

So, Bill helped the woman with her bags. Of course, it was clear that there was benefit for the lady, but he reflected on how it made him felt. It was the highlight of his drab day and it confirmed to him the principle behind Proverbs 11:17 – that those who are kind also provide a benefit for themselves.

So, it has helped us to be helpers. Having our home-schooling guests became something we looked forward to. Being supportive encourages our hearts and we anticipate that it produced shoots of life, of green, of hope, of rest, for the family we were helping.

**Kaye Reid:**

Thanks to the Moody family for sharing this story of experiencing community with us and for reminding us that it is OK that remote learning has been hard, and that sometimes we don't even feel like we have any capacity to stretch ourselves towards others.

Let's turn our minds to what healthy, mature community can look like as a church together. Deb Brewster is our Pastoral Care Coordinator and has been coordinating care through these past six months of restrictions and isolation. Deb has a vision for community in solidarity.

What can community look like at Ringwood Church of Christ?

**Deb Brewster, Pastoral Care Coordinator:**

At the heart of community are relationships – authentic, consistent, caring, reciprocal relationships. At Ringwood we long to be the sort of community that James talks about where people feel accepted and loved instead of judged and condemned; where there is unity in our diversity; where we might walk alongside one another and be honest with one another like siblings, as Brendan mentioned last week, shoulder to shoulder, cheering one another on in life and faith; where we can be present for one another; and where our care for one another will be wise, empathic and consistent. In James chapter 2 we are reminded that loving our neighbour is central for a healthy community.

I recently re-read Andrew Menzies and Dean Phelan's book, *Kingdom Communities: Shining the Light of Christ through Faith, Hope and Love*. It was interesting re-reading it in the light of COVID-19. In the Forward we are called to a, "discussion about the ways of being God's people in a time of unravelling: of being a people who are able to discern the bubbling and ferment of the Spirit out of the usual 'church' forms and in the communities all around us." Over the last months many of us have been praying and trying to discern what God is calling us to, and inviting us to become, in this season and into the future. As part of this we have felt guided to find new ways of caring and connecting.

The Care Circle model builds on our existing model of promoting authentic, mutual care within Life Groups and other smaller sized groups within the church community. It encourages everyone to be part of a Life Group as one way of caring for one another and growing spiritually. It adds the idea of allocating everyone in our church to a Geographical Care Circle. This ensure everyone is in at least one Care Circle which is the aim of the model.

A Geographical Care Circle is a group of up to around 25 households of people who live in the same area who can look out for each other and support one another, if and when they choose to. People that live more remotely to others have still been allocated to a Circle. This achieves the aim of breaking our large community (approximately 500 people) into smaller groupings (up to around 25 households) – a more manageable size for building the sort of authentic, mutual, caring relationships mentioned previously. Geographical Care Circles also ensure that our authentic mutual care is inclusive and experienced by everyone. We know that many people in our church feel well connected and cared for, but the level of care and connection is not consistent throughout our whole church community. There are benefits for us and others in getting to know, learn from, support and grow with people of different ages, different demographics, different nationalities, and

people who hold different opinions, but who are all part of the Body of Christ and our neighbourhood.

Being involved in a Geographical Care Circle doesn't need to be as big a commitment as a Life Group. The level of involvement can be defined by each individual and the group as a whole. There is a freedom to explore how you want to care and connect. It might mean praying for people as you walk past their house or drive past the end of their street, or dropping in a birthday card, a note of encouragement, an email, or making a phone call. You might take a meal or a treat to someone living alone. If you are going for a walk you might ring someone to see if they want to come. As restrictions ease people from Geographical Care Circles could meet in a park or a home to do church together. Some might meet regularly at a local café and in so doing support a local trader. You might be able to babysit so a parent can run to the shops or mow a lawn for someone who is unable to do so. There are many options and no pressure to do anything at all. By focussing more locally as a community of believers we are better placed to grow God's Kingdom and to be Christ's light where God has placed us in our neighbourhoods. Dean and Andrew in their book state, "Something deep, authentic and fruitful is going on when people, prompted by the Spirit, attend to their local community."

I believe that God is doing something new and exciting in this time. I pray for God's blessing as you are finding out who is in your Geographical Care Circle, as you pray for them and as you give and receive care according to the Spirit's prompting and your capacity to do so.

### **Kaye Reid:**

Thanks, Deb for sharing this with us and we pray that it will be a blessing to our community and that everyone will experience authentic, mutual care. Let us be united in prayer together.

### **Prayer**

*Kaye Reid*

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

We are so grateful that you did not make us to live in isolation but created us for community, and to be together with fellow followers of you, that we can grow together in serving you and others. As we seek to contribute our part to being a healthy and mature community, we ask that you will give us your patience, your persistence to endure when it's tough, your empathy and compassion, your strength and resilience. Give us your grace to forgive and to heal and to restore.

Let us be there for each other. Let us build a community of trust, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and caring. Let us surround each person with your love and cover each other with our prayers.

Let us be willing to humble ourselves, acknowledging our need for you and for others. Let us receive prayer and share prayer with each other. Thank you that mysteriously and powerfully our prayers are heard.

In the precious name of Jesus,  
Amen!

## Questions for reflection and discussion

Take some moments to reflect on these questions and perhaps you can create the opportunity to discuss them with others:

1. What is an experience that you have had of healthy, mature community?
2. What one thing am I going to do, or think differently about, to contribute to healthy, mature community?

## Communion

*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](https://rngwd.com/communion) or via Facebook live [rngwd.com/fbv](https://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.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

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*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,  
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,  
and they all drank from it.*

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Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.

- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

## Connect cards online

*Click this link or enter it into your web browser [mgwd.com/connect](http://mgwd.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!