

THE FOOLISHNESS OF SLANDER

James 4:11-12 *Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him, speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you - who are you to judge your neighbour? (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Some think that talk is cheap: it costs nothing and yet with a positive spin it can sell products, make money, and persuade others of almost anything. That kind of talk, like many other ways of getting to the top, relies on others being pushed to the bottom. And so words are also used to put other people down. All those words have to do, is to cast doubt on an opponent's integrity. It is possible to use truth in an evil way, as well as slanderous lies. Slander (or more accurately 'evil speaking') is an evil art. It does not tell the whole truth, so that somebody's reputation can be injured. It is a weave of truth and lies that come from a malicious heart, with the intention of making it difficult for another person to function properly in society (including business and church).

James says that such talk should never be found among Christians. It is wrong because God is the only judge and His law is the only way of measuring what is good or bad. If believers make their own judgements for their own gain, not only are they arrogant (presuming to know God's mind) but their hearts are sterile. They neither show impartial judgement, nor can they show mercy. So they are not keeping God's law themselves, and are therefore at risk of His judgement. Far from understanding that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' ([Rom 3:23](#)), they think they are morally superior - what fools. As James has already taught in this chapter, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' ([James 4:6](#)).

Yet pride continues to undermine the fabric of believers who are not humble before God. Slander is heard too often, even in the gossip that is dressed up as 'being concerned' for a fellow Christian, or as a 'matter for prayer'. The way some Christians gather, like vultures over the carcass of a fallen saint's reputation, is disgraceful. So too is the way some believers do business or practice their profession. Their proud hearts make them unable to judge fairly nor to be merciful in supporting the weak. If you know people like that, pray for them (following the instructions in [Gal 6:1-5](#)). But if today's passage is about you, then repent; and be humble to ask the Lord to help you change your heart. It is far more important than the next promotion or pay rise.

Prayer: *Lord God Almighty. It is only through your mercy and grace that I can come to You. So please forgive me when I judge myself better than others; or when I put others down, so that I may be exalted. Thank You that Your Word tells me how wrong it is, and yet gives me the opportunity to humble myself and repent. Help me to change in my attitude towards others at work or in the fellowship, so that Your righteousness may rule where I live and work - because I desire You to have all the glory. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

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THE FOOLISHNESS OF CONFIDENT FORECASTS

James 4:13-14 *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Somebody recently said that you cannot mix Christianity with business, or let your faith interfere with your professional life; because it might offend people. While that is the mantra of some officials in increasingly secularised Europe, is a foolish idea. The rest of the world knows that your family, tribe, business and art-culture are shaped by what you believe in, and that the secularist gods of power and money have no power in a crisis. James also understood the world of trading, and the reality of life, but from God's point of view. A business plan is important, but without the Lord it cannot prosper. And however much you earn, you will leave it all when you die.

They say that 'success breeds success'; that assumes that yesterday's triumph is the launch-pad for tomorrow's enterprise. It may, but equally, it may not. Those who boast of tomorrow's achievement share three characteristics with the devil, as he taunts and tempts. Neither know what will happen tomorrow; both use their predictions to suit their own manipulative purposes, but neither can guarantee their quoted outcomes. Only the Lord knows the future. Apart from the normal business hazards of critical cash-flow, market confidence and competition; there are personal issues of health, family stability, accidental catastrophe and natural disasters which can bring the world crashing down around your ears.

The Christian should not do business blindly as though he/she does not know God. Those who trust in Jesus will commit their work to him as much as their family and church. The only certainty for everybody is that we will all die, but the believer is not working against that inevitability, but towards it! The godly Christian is looking forward to the final appraisal with Jesus, and giving Him the glory for all His grace and mercy and help and strength. The secular Christian fears that moment, when all the success of earth will mean nothing, and an answer will be demanded for so much vain boasting that brings no credit to God's eternal kingdom. So, what sort of a Christian are you?

Prayer: *God of all power and might. Thank You for this reminder to keep my working life inside Your will; and to hold my plans lightly. May I make it my business to keep your Word in my heart as I go to work each day, and to make plans and forecasts with the knowledge that only You know the future. Please alert me to those occasions when I am too sure of future success, so that I may humbly accept Your will. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*

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PLANNING IN GOD'S WAY

James 4:15-17 *Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Planning is not wrong, but assuming that your plans will always be right, is wrong! The world of trading, retail, stock markets and investments are obsessed with guessing the future, but the 2008 credit crisis proved they could not do it. The Queen of the United Kingdom was reported to have asked an economics professor, "It is awful, why did nobody see it coming?" The learned economist replied, "At every stage, somebody was relying on somebody else; and everybody thought they were doing the right thing". You see, because only God knows the future, no human being can be an adequate reference point for anybody else. We all need to submit to the Lord's wisdom (cf [James 1:5-7](#)).

It used to be common in Britain for churches to put the letters 'DV' in their announcements for future events. 'DV' stands for Deo Volente, which simply means 'God willing' or 'if God wills'. It is a way of saying that although we have made these plans, we submit them to being overruled by God. [Proverbs 16:9](#) in the New Living Translation says, "*We can make our plans but the Lord determines our steps*". Wise people understand that: they are careful about planning but are watching to see how the Lord may rearrange the outcome.

As Christians, we know that we should behave like this, but we are too easily swept away by corporate enthusiasm, or the 'vision' of the entrepreneur. When we catch ourselves in boasting mode, it is time to remember that if we fail to do our business in a God-fearing way, we are sinning. However, putting our plans under God's scrutiny is not a bad thing at all; because He really does know best. And He understands the requirements for both disciplined service and the market place; as [Micah 6:8](#) says, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." If that humble relationship with the Lord governs your heart, then you can trust Him to help you each day at work, and entrust the future to Him too.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. You are the only person who can be right all the time. You are holy and righteous in all your ways, and You know the future. Thank You for having plans to integrate Your people into your future; so help me to make my plans with Your wisdom. Yet may I hold them lightly, accepting Your right to divert my course, and that of those around me, so You may have the praise and glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TEARS OF FAILURE

James 5:1-6 *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The 1929 Wall Street crash that preceded the 1930's great depression, and the 2008/9 capital market crisis had similar roots. Although multifactorial, (and economic historians are still not agreed on the sequence of causes leading up to 1930), both crises were fuelled by a greed for wealth and an over-confidence in borrowed money. The consequences were to devalue property, goods and money: but worse, millions of people were devalued as they lost their means of family income, their dignity and their hope for the future.

James speak with amazing eloquence into such a situation. The parallels are staggeringly accurate. Deflation, unemployment and civil unrest coexist with the obscene wealth of those whose greed has become the misery of others. Does nobody care? God cares! The cries of the downtrodden have reached the Lord Almighty. His 'Almightiness' is not always to prevent 'man's inhumanity to man' (as the Scottish poet Robert Burns described it in 1785), but He will bring justice for the oppressed. However it is rather a shock to find that James was accusing rich Christians of being the greedy oppressors.

So, it will do us no harm to examine ourselves. For a moment, dismiss the chorus of 'think positive'. Ask, if we bear any personal responsibility for injustice in our workplace (and alas, to one degree or another, we always do). There are two responses to finding that we are responsible; one is remorse and the other is repentance. Both may involve weeping, but that is where the similarity ends. Remorse is just a hopelessness which feels bad, and dislikes the consequences of past actions; it is marked by unresolved pride. On the other hand, repentance is marked by humility and a willingness to change. If you see your situation mirrored in these verses, which response will you make. The right reaction is to repent - so that God may pour His mercy on you in forgiveness, and His grace to help you change.

Prayer: *Lord God. You see my sins at work, so clearly. Thank You for Your Word today which shows me what I am like, and commands me to change. Help me to agree with Your analysis, and come to you in humble repentance. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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LONG TERM STRATEGIC PATIENCE

James 5:7-8 *Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In the face of many difficulties, the early church needed to know how to think about their constrained circumstances, and the way forward. James is realistic - some things may not get sorted out until we meet the Lord Jesus Christ on the day of His return. That may be described as the ultimate long term strategy, but it is essential. We live between the cross and the crowning day of His appearing as King over all. In the same way that the cross is our reference point for forgiveness, the Second Coming of Christ is the goal to which all our efforts should be directed. That will be the day of our lifetime's assessment/appraisal. No wonder James wanted the churches to understand clearly.

In our 'instant' age, nobody likes to wait (Western style credit cards are one example). But the farmer must wait for his crops to germinate, develop and then mature, before he can get any income at all. He cannot accelerate the growing/maturing process, except to allow the rain to reach the plants and give it time. Neither can he control-out the hazards of failed rain. He has to wait. And there is a significant time delay between the investment (of seed, and the labour that goes into soil preparation and sowing) and the mature crop. Farmers around the world still carry this responsibility of an unguaranteed investment - and for some, crop failure can be catastrophic for the welfare of family, business, tribe or country.

However the Christian can be 100% confident that the Lord will return (cf [Acts 1:11](#)); and after He does, the painfully disturbed nature of this sin-parched world will never trouble the Christian again (cf [Rev 21:3-4](#)). So 'patient waiting' is the rule for every Christian - although waiting is not to be passive, but active. Jesus told a story in [Luke 19:11-27](#) (do click the link and read the story online): He made the point that those servants who believed their master would return, were eager to engage in his business ; but the lazy one had no such confidence and did nothing with the money he was told to invest. The farmer in today's verse plays his small part, although he recognises that the timing and value of the harvest is out of his hands (a useful note for elders, evangelists and pastors!). So are you waiting expectantly for the return of Jesus? If so, are you getting on with His business in a way that he will approve?

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for this reminder that the return of Jesus should shape our long term life-strategy. Help me to do my work today with the thought of needing to account to Jesus when He returns. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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GRUMBLING LIKE SNAKES IN THE GRASS

James 5:9 *Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and many other languages*

Grumbling seems to be a natural habit; most people do it a bit, while some make it their trademark. But God sees it differently: in the wilderness 14,700 people died because they grumbled (read the fascinating story in [Numbers 16:1-50](#)). Their death was a warning to Israel, but Jesus also warns the disciples (cf [John 6:43](#)), Paul affirms the same warning to the church in [1 Cor 10:10](#); so does Peter ([1 Pet 4:9](#)), and Jude ([Jude 16](#)). The Bible tells us that grumbling is a bad business, which God will punish.

'Grumble' comes from an old Dutch word meaning 'to mutter'. Although four different Greek words are translated 'grumble' in the NIV, they convey similar ideas of low key, low volume, murmuring discontent directed against others. Those who are skilled in grumbling, ensure that they spread their discontent quietly so that their contribution does not stand out from the crowd. In the [Numbers 16](#) story, the grumbling started with 3 main people, but in the end almost 15,000 had taken part. Grumbling has all the hallmarks of Satan's subtle, and apparently 'concerned' lies against God's character (cf [Gen 3:1-5](#)); but God was not fooled.

Alas, grumbling is a contagious disease. A few muttered words of discontent can soon spread like a forest fire (cf [James 3:5-6](#)). In the same way that sin crouches in the darkness waiting to strike, so muttered words lie in the back of people's minds until an opportunity comes to unseat an enemy. That is why we need God to speak to us about it, so that we can recognise our sin, repent and start a new mouth-style (and the same applies to VOIP, texts and emails). Especially, we must not mutter about fellow Christians, and if we hear it we should rebuke it. What we learn in the church will prepare us for life at work: however if we learn grumbling from other believers, we will do the same with our work colleagues. What a shameful way to deface the gospel of God's grace! So, if you are doing it, repent and stop. If you cannot stop, confess it to other believers and ask to be accountable to them, before you start a fire that you cannot stop.

Prayer: *Holy Lord. Thank You for this warning that You hate grumbling, and will judge grumblers. I repent of my grumbling and ask you to help me to be aware of each time when I mutter discontentedly. May my speech, texts and emails all seek to honour those who You have made and for whom You died. May my work-time conversations be a pleasure to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SUFFERING PATIENTLY

James 5:10-11 *Brothers, 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 consider 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. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Nobody likes suffering. Even Jesus hated the prospect of being the sin-bearer, separated from Father God ([Luke 22:39-46](#)). Yet, suffering for the sake of God, is inevitable for true Christians because we are in a spiritual battle. A Christian teenager once asked a Christian army general, "Is it difficult to be a Christian in the Army, Sir?" He replied, "It is difficult to be a Christian anywhere - if you do it properly!" The Bible records many hardships that came to God's people: it did not mean that He had stopped loving them, but that they were a part of the spiritual battle against unseen spiritually wicked forces. That is the story of Job. It is Paul's testimony too (cf [2 Cor 11:23-29](#)).

Of course, those who do not care much for the Lord or His Word, will opt for the easy life and keep out of harm's way. They will mingle with the crowd and avoid being identified as a born-again Christian. But those who have gratefully received the mercy and grace of God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, know that they must stand firm with Him. They know that they are ambassadors of heaven and children of the King. So when the persecution comes, they follow the example of the Old Testament prophets, and keep on persevering.

Although we now live in a globally communicating basket of nations, there is more persecution of Christians today than at any other time in history. Even once-Christian countries like Britain are rejecting expressions of Christian faith, and forsaking the Bible by which its laws were framed. But we should not be surprised. Those who have no love for Jesus will find ways to despise those who do. The recipe for endurance is not just 'duty and guts', but a total confidence in the compassion and mercy of God. If you face persecution, do not try worldly methods to wriggle out, but humbly stand with Your Lord. Trust that His power will be revealed in compassion and mercy for you - because He loves You and has died for you.

Prayer: *Dear Saviour Jesus. You know what suffering and persecution is like, and yet You chose to endure to honour Father God and love me. Whenever persecution comes to me, help me to trust in Your unfailing love, and wait patiently for Your compassion and mercy. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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SUFFERING WITHOUT SWEARING

James 5:12 *Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No", no, or you will be condemned. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

James has been encouraging the Christian to be patient; trusting Christ and waiting until His will is done (cf [James 5:7-11](#)). Now he looks for evidence of a quiet heart that is confident of God's mercy and grace. The impatient, untrusting or frustrated person may lash out physically when life does not go according to their plan, but more often they lash out with words - swear words. James says that swearing, which takes God's Name in vain or trivialises something sacred, is not right. Jesus said the same in [Matthew 5:34-36](#). How we use our words, in a crisis, shows how much we trust the Lord.

Words are very powerful, they are designed that way. It was with words that God created the heavens and the earth; with words Jesus dismissed demons, healed the sick and taught with authority. With words, the church has announced the life changing message of Jesus Christ which has transformed the hearts and homes of many millions through 2000 years. Words which have God's authority always achieve their intended effect; while untrue words lead to disappointment, despair and destruction (if they are believed). But to trivialise important words, in the heat of frustration or other bad emotion, is more foolish than wearing a wedding dress while gardening, or a white dinner jacket for repairing the car.

Most English swear words are about Father God, Jesus and his death, heaven and hell, or sex (a special gift to humanity). Those who abuse these words show that they have little love for God, the Passion of Jesus, the final judgement or His special gifts. James repeats what Jesus said: words should be used to say simply what you mean - and not more. If you mean yes, say 'yes'. If you mean no, say 'no'. Jesus went on to say that 'anything beyond this comes from the Evil One' (cf [Matt 5:37](#)). No wonder that James says that swearing brings God's condemnation - it is devil-motivated and an inbuilt temptation to despise what is important to God. Although some may say that it does not mean anything, and everybody speaks like that at work - Christians should not swear. It may need several weeks of discipline to get out of a bad habit, but the first step is to recognise that it is a bad habit - and decide that your mouth-style needs to change, with God's help.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. Thank for Your Word which clearly says that swearing is not right. Help me to desire to please you in all that I say, and to honour You by treating words which are special to Your purposes with respect. Forgive me for making light of serious words, and change my heart to want to speak clearly, without duplicity or needing to boost my weakness by swearing. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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GOD OVER ALL THAT HAPPENS

James 5:13 *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Character is rarely fully seen; but over time we can see glimpses of the 'real person'. Although we observe their planned actions - the matters they intend us to notice - it is their reactions that reveal most. In the moment of stress, when we are not in full control of the situation, our words and actions betray us. They show who we trust, who we love and how we intend to face the future. Both trouble and happiness may come to us (there is no need for James to define the many causes of each) but we certainly know when our circumstances make us downcast or happy. The question is, how do we react?

In the previous verse, James said that swearing is not the right way (cf [James 5:12](#)). The right way is to refer everything to the Lord. When trouble comes, it is no surprise to him; He knows and wants to work a solution that will be for His glory and our good (cf [Rom 8:28](#)). If we have a relationship with Him, it should be natural to cry out to Him. When all is well, the child of God will not want to take the glory, but to give thanks and praise to the One who deserves all the glory. That is the key: that God should be glorified - either in dependent prayer trusting Him to act, or in praise for what He has done, and all for His glory's sake (cf [Ps 69:29-30](#)).

Difficulties and nice happenings both generate emotion. How we express that emotion demonstrates our character, either selfish or Godly. The, mainly, Jewish readers of James' letter understood the value in expressing emotion from their hymnbook (the Psalms). Different tribes/nations today may have contrasting cultures of emotional expression, but true Christians throughout the world should be taught to bring their emotions to God; not solving problems alone nor pleasing themselves in the good times, but giving the glory to the Lord. International business culture tends to be self-congratulatory, but the man and woman of God will not refrain from expressing praise to their Master. The secular workplace sneers at humility; but the troubled person is right to humble themselves under God's mighty hand, in the confidence that He will act at the right time (cf [1 Pet 5:6](#)). So, what do your reactions say about your relationship with God?

Prayer: *Father God. I know that all things are in Your hand. Help me to put this truth into practice, today and every day, by bringing all my joys and sorrows to You. Help me to excel in giving You glory and to be so aware of your open ear to my prayers, that I will cast myself upon You. Strengthen my confidence in Your power to act for me, and increase my delight in praising You. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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SICKNESS, PRAYER, CONFESSION AND FAITH

James 5:14-16 *Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he 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 man is powerful and effective. (NIV)*

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James has been teaching us about how to act in times of suffering, frustration, trouble and joy (cf [James 5:7-13](#)). Sickness is one trouble that comes to everybody at some time. Many solutions are offered, from evidence-based medicine to family remedies and tribal customs. Some even seek spiritual power without God's authority, but the Bible forbids that (cf [Deut 18:9-13](#)). As with every difficulty or excitement, James has taught us to bring all these matters to God in prayer (cf [James 5:13](#)). However, although the Greek word for 'sick' has a core meaning in physical illness, it can also be used to describe any kind of weakness and weariness of body, mind, emotions or spirit - including the sickness that stems from unresolved sin.

The afflicted person is instructed to invite the local church elders to pray for him/her (most unwell people find it hard to pray for themselves). The invitation to the elders is itself an expression of faith (and obedience to God's word here), and a willingness to be submitted to God. Anointing with oil is a physical demonstration of faith in God who can restore health by His power. But healing is not an automatic result of a physical rite. Faith and forgiveness are needed too. It is God who gives both. According to the gift of faith received by the elders, so they pray according to what they believe God is wanting to accomplish. Forgiveness also comes from God, but it cannot be granted until sins have been confessed in repentance.

True disciples of Jesus understand that our relationship with Him matters more than anything else. Even our feeling of wellbeing. So the Lord sometimes allows suffering (in Old English, 'suffer' means 'to allow') so that we will trust Him more. The person who is passionate about being in the right with God, will better discern God's will, and so will pray for God to fulfil his purpose in the suffering person's life. And many have given praise for God's remarkable healing power. Of course we are all mortal, and death is inevitable for every Christian at some point; yet the Lord is often pleased to show His power in responding to our prayers, if we are willing to get right with Him.

Prayer: *Almighty God. I know that I am a sinner and I live in a sinful world, polluted and polluting others. Help me to confess my sins, to be accountable to godly people, and to submit myself to the eldership of my local church so that my suffering may be relieved in Your will and through Your power. In Your mercy, may I be restored to health so that I may serve you with greater devotion all my days. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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PRAYING IN FAITH IN GOD'S WORD

James 5:17-18 *Elijah was a man just like us. 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. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In the preceding verse, [James 5:16](#), James wrote: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Now he explains how righteous Elijah prayed, as an example and encouragement to us. The story starts in [1 Kings 17:1](#) where Elijah confronts King Ahab (who has forsaken God) and tells him that God would stop the rain for three years. How did Elijah know? He would have known the Jewish law well, and God had said that if His people turned away from Him, He would stop the rain, the ground would become hard and the crops would not grow (cf [Leviticus 26:18-20](#)). So Elijah (a man of the Spirit and of prayer) would have prayed that God should keep His promise.

After three and a half years, God's Spirit spoke to Elijah, telling him to announce that God was going to start the rain again (cf [1 Kings 18:1](#)). And after a confrontation with the pagan prophets on Mount Carmel (cf [1 Kings 18:16-46](#)), the rain started to fall. James says that Elijah was an ordinary man, but one who was right with God. The prophet knew what displeased God, and the penalty for such disobedience. So, in faith and supported by the Holy Spirit, he prayed that God would keep His promise.

Elijah's story of earnest, persistent and effective prayer, at the end of the Letter of James, is in sharp contrast to the half-hearted, double-minded prayer at the beginning (cf [James 1:6-8](#)). The unstable man of chapter 1, does not receive anything from the Lord: the righteous man of chapter 5, sees the answer to his prayer. What makes the difference? Elijah was trusting that God's Word was true and reliable, and that it was right to persist in asking God to fulfil His promises. Elijah's secret was simple: first He read God's Word, then he was grieved by godlessness, then he remembered God's Word, then he prayed in accordance with God's Word and believed that God would keep His promises. God's answer was straightforward: "Yes!" Do you pray like that? Is that how you pray for Your work colleagues, family and church? If not, get back into the Bible, and start trusting that God means what He says: then keep praying until God answers!

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that I do not have to imagine what pleases You, because You tell me in the Bible. Help me to search the Scriptures so that I may pray effectively in line with your Word. May my passion to learn from Your Word each day grow so that I will become a stable and righteous Christian - able to pray effectively for my work colleagues, family, and church. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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LOST SHEEP SAVED

James 5:19-20 *My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

As we have read through James' letter, we have been shown many ways in which we might stray away from following Jesus, and how to come back. Perhaps the pivot point of the whole book is [James 4:7-8](#): *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. A radical change is intended, without which God is not pleased nor glorified; and there is no blessing.*

But what will you do, if you see a friend or colleague whose life has moved away from God's truth? He/she may have had little inclination to read the Bible or to pray or to seek counsel; they are entangled in confusion and hopelessly lost. What should you do? James says that it is a wonderful thing to help a sinner to turn around to face Jesus again. It is the Jesus-way of shepherding, to search out the lost sheep and bring them home again. True repentance and conversion will literally save their life for eternity. And if a Christian has forgotten their first love of Christ, then repentance will lead to God's gracious forgiveness and the path back to serving the Lord (cf [Rev 2:4-5](#)).

So, gently and humbly, recognising your own ability to sin too, bring people back to God's Word (cf [Gal 6:1-5](#)). Encourage them to see God's kindness as well as His sternness (cf [Rom 11:22](#)). Our responsibility is not primarily to help people to feel good about themselves, but to help them to get right with God. James would have remembered Jesus' story of the lost sheep and the determined shepherd (cf [Luke 15:1-7](#)), which shows the shepherd's great delight when the lost one is brought back home ([Luke 15:7](#)). We are called to work alongside the Shepherd; let us not ignore His call. James understood that he must obey; that is why he wrote this letter; and that is why BeaconLight has sent you Word@Work!

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. You have saved me, and sought me out even when I did not want to be found. Please help me to work with you to help You bring back those who have fallen into sin and strayed away from Your authority. Help me to be alert to the people who You are wanting to bring back home into your love and care. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*

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