

Well, our message today comes from the book of James. The letter of James. And James was a common name in the Roman Empire. We have James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, and James, the son of Alphaeus. But the author of this letter was probably James, the brother of Jesus.

Now, James was not always a believer in Jesus, but he became one of the church's most significant leaders after he encountered Jesus after encountering the resurrected Jesus. So James is writing to a community that there is some conflict there, some conflict over class discrimination. And these the Jews that he's writing to are kind of scattered about. So there's a lot of subjects, there's a lot of topics in James's letter, but all point to the everyday qualities of the life of a Christian. So things that we do as Christ followers.

Now we're in the fourth week of our sermon series, Anxious for Nothing, and James's letter starts with encouraging words. I guess we can call them to help us walk through these difficult times when we face these anxieties. So James says right away, My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it all. Joy. Nothing but joy.

All right. How many of you woke up this morning and said, Praise God, I am feeling anxious today. It is going to be a good day, right? We don't normally say that we but we all have trials. We all have anxiety at times, but we don't usually consider it pure joy, as some translations put it. But James is addressing a community that is separated. There's these tensions between the rich and the poor and the oppressors and the exploited.

But he writes that regardless of your status or your state of mind, we are one in Christ Jesus. And we, because of our faith in Jesus, we should come together because of what we are doing for one another. And it should not divide us. So James's instructions are to the believers of the world, right? That that are that are seeking, that are dealing with pressures and challenges living in these uncertain times. And his instructions are what it looks like to live in God's identity as God's people.

So, James, his letter is really about putting faith into action, practicing our faith, doing our faith. So in the second in the second chapter, it says so faith by itself, if it has no works, is the right faith or works has been a question and a debate for theologians and church leaders since the beginning of the church.

Even James and the Apostle Paul kind of had some discussions around it. James's emphasis was faith that works, and Paul puts an emphasis and his teaching on faith alone, we gain salvation.

So in James Chapter five, near the end of the letter, it's not a very long letter. We James gives us instructions on what we should do in certain circumstances of our life. So starting at verse 13, in chapter five, are any among you suffering? They should pray, are any cheerful. They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Because of our faith in Jesus.

So we do right. We pray, we sing, we call for help. We confess our sins. We anoint one another. We pray for one another. Now, conflicts are a thing. They were a thing when James wrote this letter of They are a thing. Now, there's these tensions that we live in, in just by being alive. Right. Is it better to have faith or

works? Is it better to be rich or poor? Jesus did say blessed are the poor. Is it better to give or is it better to take?

Now let's use this for an example. This give and take idea. Now, I remember when I was little, my grandparents got married when I was five, and they had in their bedroom this coin bank hanging on the wall. And it was a place where they at the end of the night, where they collected their change and they put it in there. And on the coin bank it said, What's his is mine and what's mine is mine. And no matter what side you put the coins on. Right, it would end up on the wife's side. And I thought, you know, as a little kid, I thought it was kind of funny, but I'm not really sure I understood it was a joke. I really actually just thought it was unfair to my grandpa because I heard that the key to a good friendship or a good marriage or a good partnership is an equal amount of give and take. Or at least that's what I thought I heard.

So when we think about give and take, let's start with give because that's an easier one, right? We say it's better to give than to receive in Acts 20:35.

It says in all this, I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for He Himself said, it is more blessed, blessed to give than to receive. And we also say that we should give without expecting anything in return.

Jesus says in Luke Chapter six instead Love your enemies, do good and lend expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great and you will be children of the most high, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. It's really hard to give without expecting anything in return.

And even in this passage that I just read, it's like, okay, we're supposed to lend without expecting anything into and in return, but we will be rewarded so we lend. We don't expect anything, but we know there will be a reward. Right? Doesn't make sense.

But this is what we are supposed to do. We are called to do that. But it's hard it's hard to to give without expecting anything in return. Bishop Barron, he has that podcast. It's one of my favorite podcast. It's called Word on Fire. And there's just kind of short, easy to listen to sermons. And I listen to him quite often.

And a few weeks ago he had a sermon and he described two chieftains who essentially wiped out their own tribes with hospitality. So here's what happened. The story goes that one chieftain entertained another chieftain with a lavish meal and expensive gifts. Now this put the receiving chieftain in an unfavorable position. So he returned the present with an even more lavish meal and more costly gifts.

And until the two tribes were essentially destroyed by trying to outdo one another with generosity. The Chieftains had the giving part down. But I think what is hard for all of us to understand is, is it okay to take now we live in an independent society, especially compared to other cultures. We send our kids out of there, out of the house. Earlier, we put our extended family in care centers more often. We have a society that urges and judges others if they can't make it on their own.

If someone receives assistance to pay for their bills. Sometimes we say things like, well, they should get a second job, or they shouldn't have had more kids than they could afford. Right. Receiving or taking something can be really embarrassing because we as a society have made it so. Now when you're on the receiving end of a gift. Right. It's it does it does feel like you have to do something in return.

We send thank you notes. There's usually kind of this feeling that we get when we receive a gift, like an obligation to return something. If someone gives you a Christmas gift or sends you a Christmas card, sometimes we return one back to them, simply out of obligation. But what, if any, relationship or partnership or community? There are times that one partner or one person needs more than someone else. And then there are other times where we can give more than we can at other times.

It's not biblical thinking that giving and taking our 50/50 shared responsibilities. What if you have nothing to give right now? Right.

Nothing financially or emotionally or spiritually, maybe. And all of those things. You are bankrupt. Is it okay to take. Well, love God, right? God is love. Love does not keep a record of offenses, and neither should we. Sometimes we think, Well, I gave this and so I'm expecting this in return, or, well, I gave this, and now it's someone else's turn to give.

But the church was created for for God's mission, for God's purpose. And part of that mission is to be there for one another, to care for one another. If we revisit the passage in James Chapter five, listen to it again. It says, Are any among you suffering? They should pray, are any cheerful. They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

So what? What we need in a moment is what we do right? When we are feeling anxious. We should take action. Right.

If we're suffering, we should do something. We should. We should pray. If we're cheerful, we should do something. We should sing and praise. And if we don't feel like we have enough faith or we need something more than. Than our own selves can handle, we call a faithful friend and ask them to pray for us. We call the pastor or church leader or others if we need additional care or support. That is what this community is here for to help one another. And it goes beyond me and the staff and the church leaders. Right. I certainly cannot handle caring for everyone on their own. This is why we have groups like the prayer team and the friends, friends and Faith where they call and they go to hospital visits and they send cards. Right.

We're all in this together. But also, we know that sometimes anxiety can be a more significant mental illness. And so sometimes as the community, we just walk alongside and help and support in helping you find what you need if you can't find it within the community. Seeking help, finding support from others, telling someone is not a sign of weakness. It's not a sign of weakness. It's what the church was created for.

And again, we're not experts in everything, but we sure can walk alongside people and support and love them and pray for them and help them.

So this passage in James in Chapter five is what we need. We do what we what we need and different circumstances call for different things. So let's just take just a second here to have a little reflection, to kind of take an assessment like where have you been in your life? Right.

Where have you been in the past? And where are you right now today? And today, are you at a place where you can give? Or do you need to take? God desires for us to give when we have it and we give it with joy and we take when we need it. And we take with thankfulness. Because regardless of your circumstances, your faith community should be there for you. But we don't always get it right. Right.

We don't always do a good job of giving what we have. When we have or taking what we need, when we need it. And the point of worshipping community is, is not to come in and to fill your bucket. Right.

Come in and sit unnoticed so you can just leave and have your bucket filled so that you can continue on with the rest of your week. The church is where you take what you need when you need it and give all you can. When you have it. Now, if you don't feel like you have the right relationships right now to ask when you need help. Consider joining a small group. Now, now, maybe you don't have what you need in this community.

Maybe it is part of the dysfunction of a community. That certainly could be the case. But it also might mean that you need to take that step to build those relationships. We have a lot of small groups starting up in in the fall right after Labor Day, but we actually have some that are starting even sooner than that.

And I want to tell you about those here for a second. We have two small groups that are starting here this week. One of them actually starts today, and it is for parents of middle schoolers and high schoolers.

And it is a place it's going to meet right in between the services. So right after this service and it is a place for support, right? A parenting teenagers is difficult and sometimes we have more to give and sometimes we need a take. Right.

And this kind of group can be a place where we can give advice and take advice. So we invite you to join that if you have kids in that age range. We also have a college age group starting. So that 18 to 23 year old group that kind of that time where your life is transitioning.

So if you are in that age range or you know someone who is in that age range, let us know. And we would love to invite them to start meeting with others who can just walk with each other on their journey.

That's what we want. Now maybe you are feeling like you are. You know, you don't really need a small group. You're in a good place right now. Well, maybe God is calling you to be a leader of a small group.

And being a leader does not mean that you have to be a biblical scholar. It means that you can communicate and you can gather people together and walk with people on their journey. So let us know if God is calling you to be a life group leader. Sometimes as Christians, we live in this this feeling or this state of we just want to escape reality. Sometimes Christians judge others and think, well, if everyone would think like I do or they would see it my way, then suffering and evil would vanish.

We think that sometimes and at the beginning of this sermon series, we talked about Jesus's words that if we continue in his word, we will know the truth and be set free. But what we are free from is our own self concern. We are we are not free from responsibility, but we are actually free for responsibility to others.

Frederick Beckner, an author and theologian, says that this way.

He says the best moments any of us have as human beings are those moments when for a little while it is possible to escape the squirrel cage of being me. Into the landscape of being us.

I love that imagery that that we that that the me the selfishness becomes something different when it becomes us. As coveted church members. We vow to care for one another. We vow to take care of each other. We use our gifts to support one another without a share our gifts and empathize with others lifting them up when they need to be lifted up. And we also are in a place when we vow to be a church member, we vow that we will allow others to carry us when life becomes too difficult with no obligation in it.

Our faith carries us through in prayer and in action, in faith and in works. And when we don't have faith. We have each other. And then when we have the kind of faith that can move mountains, we carry others. That is what a good church community looks like. Faith that moves from me to us. Would you join me in prayer? Holy and loving God. Thank you. You sing about gratitude today and we stop and just give you thanks for. For you and who you are. We pray that we would be able to give when we are in a position to give, that we would allow the Holy Spirit to disengage us just a little bit.

And God, when we have nothing to give. When we. We need something. I pray that we would all be able to seek others in this community to find support, to find love, to find encouragement, to find prayer.

God, you are a good God. And you know what we need before we ask? Walk with us on this journey. Help us to be the community that you longed for us to be. Your mission is for us to care for one another, to build each other up so that we can go out into the world. And we could share the light in the world. God, walk with us. Be with us. Guide us. Teach us. Show us your love. Your love. God, we say this in Jesus name.

Amen.