

# The Needs Of Our Youth

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Date: 27 January 1980

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[ 0 : 00 ] It may come as somewhat of a surprise to you to know that my mind and my heart have been given very much in this past week to the preparation for the annual meeting which comes on Tuesday night.

And I know that there is some anxiety, similar perhaps to a race course, when people are wondering who's going to win the race as to who's going to be elected to high office in the parish of St. John.

So what I want to do this morning for you is to tell you that after all the elections are done and all the returns have been counted, there still remains a ministry which belongs to each one of you.

And this is the thing I most long to share with you. The administrative tasks of running this parish are terribly important, but there is a ministry which is even more important.

And each one of you is required by reason of your confession of faith in Jesus Christ to share in that ministry. May I ask you to turn to it in the scriptures.

[ 1 : 08 ] And it's found beginning on page 215 of the New Testament section of your Blue Q Bible.

And it's the epistle general of James, and it talks about this chapter 5 and verse 13, page 215 in your few Bibles.

Let them pray over him.

Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed.

[ 2 : 45 ] The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effect. Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit. My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, someone brings him back.

Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

So you find there three or four areas for ministry. The first is the man who is suffering.

And it's quite apparent from the scriptures, so you may not find this acceptable. One of the great advantages of suffering, if God has seen in his wisdom and grace to cause you some, is that you will find that as an inspiration to pray.

[ 3 : 58 ] One of the realities of suffering is that you become much more conscious of people around you and of their predicaments and their hardships. So one of the great sources of prayer in any church is not the fat, well-fed, and recreationally oriented person, but the person who has a burden of suffering themselves.

This becomes for them the goad, if you want, to pray for others. So the person who suffers is to pray.

Then the cheerful man is to join the choir. That could be interpreted that way, but that's a rather particular application.

But the fact of the matter is that the cheerful man is to sing praise. So that's an important ministry within the church, to sing praise.

And I think it's terribly important that if you end up, one of the sort of discoveries of the charismatic movement in the church is the tremendous compounding of a sense of joy and well-being and thankfulness which comes from singing praise.

[ 5 : 18 ] That's why it's of the greatest importance to me that when you come to church on Sunday, you recognize that you come with a heart full of cheer and goodwill and health, and you want to join in singing praise.

And that the function of the choir and their ministry is to help us in fulfilling that function of singing praise. And if there is no place in your week where you have the opportunity to sing the praises of God, then you are poverty-stricken in a very important area.

And one of the things that we need more and more to do as a congregation is to provide an opportunity to sing praise. Because I trust that many of you are cheerful people, and therefore your need is to sing praise.

And it's not to come into a congregation and be filled with sorrow and sadness and lugubriousness. I'm not sure what that means, but it's so effective a word that I couldn't stop using.

But it's to find opportunity to give expression to the thankfulness and cheerfulness in your heart by singing praise. So that's the second thing.

[ 6 : 44 ] The third thing is for the person who is sick. Now, when you're sick, one of the things that happens to you is that you're not very well able to minister to yourself.

It's a desperate thing seeing people who are seriously ill, trying not only to overcome their illness, but also striving to minister to themselves by some form of psychological manipulation.

What they need is other people to surround them with praise and with prayer and by ministering to them so that they can, in a sense, relax and allow the processes of healing to take place.

But look what it says about it. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Did you know that in this parish there is some oil right up there in that mysterious cavern which is kept there for the purpose of anointing the sick?

[ 7 : 57 ] And the purpose is that when somebody very much desires to be anointed, because the onus is, in a sense, on the sick person to ask for it, not on the minister to impose it, but for the sick person to ask for anointing and then for one or two or more of the members of the church who have responsibility to go to that person and anoint them with oil.

And the simple service for the anointing of the sick is found in the prayer book. Now, our brothers of the Roman Catholic Church have somewhat queered the pitch here by what they call the sacrament of extreme unction.

And people suspect that when you come to anoint them with oil, you're virtually saying goodbye to them, and therefore they're not very happy to see you.

Well, I think scripturally, the purpose of anointing is not a final farewell to the ordinances of the church, but in fact is an anointing of the sick for the purposes of them being healed or made whole again.

And it's one of those differences of doctrine and tradition that have grown up over the years and I think lost touch with its roots. So the sick person is to ask for this anointing, and this anointing is to be given not as a farewell, but as a means, a God-ordained and scripturally endorsed means of praying for the healing of the sick.

[ 9 : 49 ] And so that's the one part of what happens when a person is sick. The other thing that happens, and if you notice this, it goes on to say that if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven.

And of course, this raises a very fundamental consideration. One of the reasons I want to share this with you this morning is that I go to the hospital each week, and I find it an overwhelming experience.

Not a good experience particularly. I feel so utterly weak and so utterly helpless. Now, it used to be that when somebody got sick, that the minister had first right of access to the patient because people didn't have much hope for their physical recovery, but hope for their spiritual forgiveness.

So the minister was the first person to go to the sick person because he may well be on his way to heaven. And we'd like to ensure that that's the direction that he longs to go.

But as medicine has improved and improved, most people who get sick now confidently expect that their doctor will heal them and restore them and that they're not sick enough to need a minister.

[ 11 : 24 ] And so you have magnificent hospitals full of magnificent equipment and endless staff that are there for the purposes of ministering to the sick. And there's all sorts of machinery and all sorts of medicine and all sorts of technical equipment that are there for the purposes of healing the sick.

And the function of the minister is diminished down to the point of almost being negligible. What can he do? And I think that it's a very real question.

Now, the reason I think that we've got this distortion in is that people think that fundamentally their life is a physical phenomenon and therefore healing is a physical phenomenon.

But if you have any understanding of who you are in the scriptures, you will know that you are not a body who has a spirit, but a spirit that has a body.

And that fundamentally you are a spiritual being created in the image of God. And that the whole meaning of your life begins with God and ends with God.

[12:45] And that your physical existence in terms of this earthly body is like going on a camping trip. You have this tent to keep out the elements for a week or two, and then when the week is over, the tent's gone.

This body is considered like a suit of clothes, and it's a fine suit of clothes for the first year or two, and then it gets a bit tattered around the edges, and finally it becomes so old and worn that it has to be discarded.

That's how the body, that's how the Bible describes our bodies. So that spiritual ministry is far more important ultimately than physical ministry.

But the dangers of modern medicine and modern hospitals are that they give to patients the illusion that they can do all for them that needs to be done. But there is a tremendous spiritual work to be done which underlies the very physical existence which we enjoy from day to day.

And that's why James goes on and says, the prayer of faith will save the sick man. The Lord will raise him up. He will be forgiven.

[14:07] All those things are part of healing too. And we need to incorporate that into a ministry to the sick.

And that ministry can be carried on in a formal and superficial way by Pat and I and Ken and Robinson perhaps when he's available.

But it's far too superficial when you consider the number of people who are chronically ill and the number of people acutely ill and the number of people who are mentally ill and the number of people who are spiritually ill within the confines of our parish list.

So that the thing that I don't enjoy about the ministry of healing in a parish like this is how superficial it is. And when I see the care and the thought and the study that goes into ministering to people's bodies, I feel this church as a hospital is superficial and careless about the more important thing of ministering to people spiritually.

That the prayer of faith will heal the sick. That the Lord will raise them up. That sins will be forgiven.

[15:34] This is a great and important work. And it's a work in which all of us need to become involved. The fourth area of ministry that is spoken of here is spoken of in verse 19.

My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

So that here is an even, you would think in terms of the gradation that's in James' epistle, an even more important minister. And that is to take the disciple of Jesus Christ who has wandered away from the truth and to bring him back to it or to bring her back to it.

You know that one of the things that's being advocated and I think practiced in some Anglican churches, not in Canada that I know of, but it's been suggested, and I like the picture at least, though I think we may be a long time from carrying it out.

But at the communion service, the bread is consecrated and the wine is consecrated and everybody receives communion. And then a number of the members of the congregation come and take bread and wine and go to the homes of all the shut-ins in the parish and all the sick in the parish so that before anybody stops for lunch, the whole of the parish has had the opportunity of receiving communion.

[17:21] And that that way it's carried out to everybody. Well, now there is, that's the kind of picture of how it can be done. But that picture really represents another aspect of ministry, and that is that central to the life of the congregation is the breaking of the bread which is the word of life and the distributing of it to the congregation and then the congregation taking it out to those who are shut in, to those who are at work, to those who are too busy to be here, so that in that sense this distribution of the word of God goes out to the whole congregation.

And that the ministry of every member who is able to be here on Sunday is only fulfilled as they take that word of God and give it to others who aren't able for any reason, good or bad, to be here on Sunday.

So you see that these four ministries are given to all of us. They're not peculiarly and privately the property of the ordained ministry.

We represent this ministry and have some authority in authorizing it, but in order to keep things from getting out of hand, but not to inhibit everybody from fulfilling the special ministry that belongs to each one of you.

For instance, and I will just review these ministries that are pointed out in this passage. To anoint and to pray. You're to call for the elders of the church.

[ 19 : 08 ] And if you will look up in the prayer book, the service for the anointing of the sick, you will see that it asks that one or two ordained men be present when the sick are anointed.

And I think that that's important. But even that tends to feel as a kind of futile exercise. Unless we have behind us in this ministry a community of people who are praying.

And who are praying strongly and consistently for the sick. Because it seems terribly important to me that we do pray and that the whole ministry of the church has that kind of solid backing of people who are praying and are concerned for those who are sick in the parish.

It's a terribly important ministry. And without it, the sort of formal ministry that we exercise, or what seems at times rather formal, tends to become shallow and hollow and meaningless.

The second kind of ministry that you can be involved in is where it says, confess your sins one to another. Now, you know that this is a very important part of the life of the church.

[ 20 : 37 ] And I think it uses the same channels that are often clogged with gossip. There's a word of gossip which goes through the parish very quickly sometimes.

In any parish, I'm not pointing the finger at this one. That's something that we have an appetite for. But what James suggests is that there should be a confession which is heard by one another for the sake of building one another up in the faith of Christ, giving to the sick the assurance of forgiveness. And if you look at the end of the communion service in the prayer book, you'll see that this is to be something that goes on regularly among the members of the congregation.

This confession of sins one to another so that from one another you may receive the assurance of pardon and forgiveness.

That's the kind of ministry that we have to exercise to one another within the church. Not scandal and gossip going from ear to ear, but the assurance of life and forgiveness forgiveness and acceptance and love going from one person to another as they, in the grief of their repentance, open the acknowledgement of their sins one to another.

[ 22 : 10 ] It makes a tremendous difference to the life and vitality of a congregation when that in fact happens. When we fulfill that ministry to one another of the assurance of forgiveness of sins, then it talks in the third instance about the prayers of a righteous man and uses the example of Elijah.

And I think that that's true. That there are people who have this special ministry of prayer, but I've talked about that.

The fourth thing is to bring back somebody who has wandered from the truth. And this seems to be terribly important in James' catalogs of ministry.

It doesn't mean in this instance to have wandered from upright and moral behavior. It means to have wandered away from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

To have wandered away from the truth of what God has done in Christ. To have slowly acquired a kind of worldly, secular philosophy.

[ 23 : 34 ] I don't think anybody could watch television for a week without wandering away from the truth just by reason of confusion.

And this doesn't refer to people who stand up and say, I will not believe and walk away with firm footsteps from the confession of the faith.

It refers to sheep with their nose to the next blade of green grass following and following until they look up and look around them and all the landmarks are gone.

So Christians pick up one idea and then another and their mind is undermined by various things they hear and ideas that infect their mind.

And finally they find that they don't know where the truth is any longer. They have wandered away from it. And somebody has to minister to them by bringing them back.

[ 24 : 39 ] And so this is the ministry that has to go on among all the members of the congregation and to the world around us, to the community around us, all the time.

This ministry of prayer, the ministry of confessing our sins one to another, the ministry of bringing one another back to the truth, and that those things are done through personal contact, through phone calls, through visits, through Bible study groups, through prayer groups, through maybe perhaps through our 10.30 Thursday morning communion service, or in whatever way you need to do it.

But that's your ministry. And compared to that ministry, the ministry of being on the church committee, or of being a warden, or of being a lay delegate, is relatively insignificant.

Because unless that basic kind of ministry, one to another, is being carried out, unless there is a distribution of the word of God from one to another, unless there is a distribution of the grace of God to one another, unless there is a hearing of one another, not with the concept of gossip, but with the concept of healing and forgiveness and absolution, unless there is a concern to bring one another back to the truth, then those administrative ministries within the church are pointless.

So I want you to be praying about our life together as a parish, and praying that each of us may take upon us such responsibility for ministry within this congregation as God has given us the gifts and the grace to perform.