

19th July, 2026

The paper-version Service



St Andrew's
Church



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks
Responding to God's Love



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

Amazing grace (how sweet the
sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to
fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall
fail,
and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

Through many dangers, toils and
snares
I have already come:
'tis grace has brought me safe thus
far,
and grace will lead me home.

The earth shall soon dissolve like
snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine.

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read James 5:12-20, Matthew 5:1-12 – Living Faithfully

James ends his letter as he has written it, with practical advice for everyday Christian living. His final theme is prayer. I approach this subject with hesitation, because prayer is an area of Christian living in which I have often felt inadequate. Many Christians feel the same: we can easily assume that everyone else knows the secret of praying well while we somehow do not. I wonder whether I had a healthier understanding of prayer as a child than I do now. Children simply talk to those they trust – prayer is not meant to be much more complicated than that.

James does not spend time explaining a technique for prayer. Instead, he assumes that his readers already know what prayer is, and simply tells them to pray in every circumstance of life. He concentrates not on “here’s how to do it”, but on “do it!”.

He begins by reminding believers to speak truthfully and not misuse God's name (James 5:12), echoing Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 5:34–37. Honest speech itself is part of a life lived before God.

Then James applies prayer to a series of very ordinary situations. Is anyone suffering? Pray (v.13). James does not promise that suffering will immediately disappear, but he directs us towards God rather than away from him.

Is anyone cheerful? Sing praises (v.13). It is easy to remember God when life is difficult; perhaps it is harder to remember him when everything is going well.

James then speaks about sickness (vv.14–15). I find these verses difficult because they do not always match my experience. We have all prayed sincerely for healing without seeing the outcome we hoped for. Yet James still encourages the church to pray for the sick, entrusting them to God.

He also links prayer with confession and forgiveness (vv.15–16). When Jesus healed, he often also forgave. Not every illness is the result of

personal sin, but James emphasises the importance of healed relationships with God.

James points to Elijah as an example of effective prayer (vv.17–18). Although 2 Kings does not explicitly describe Elijah praying before the drought, he was a man who lived in close fellowship with God. James reminds us that Elijah "was a human being like us." The effectiveness of prayer lies not in extraordinary people but in an extraordinary God.

Finally, James urges believers to bring back those who have wandered from the truth (vv.19–20). Helping someone back to Christ is one of the greatest acts of love we can ever perform.

As N. T. Wright writes, "In prayer the Christian stands at the overlap point of heaven and earth, of the present and the future." It is an extraordinary privilege that even I can stand at that point. Bruce Duncan describes prayer as "attending to God"; I have found this works best when I am living in continuous conversation with our Father, referring every thought to him just as it occurs.

Duncan entitled his book *Pray Your Way* – there is no single correct technique, so perhaps all the people who seem to be doing it right are just doing it their way. My mother did not converse in the same way with all her numerous children. We all spoke to her as came naturally to us. So we should all speak to our eternal Parent as comes naturally to our relationship with him. Short "arrow prayers", fleeting "butterfly prayers" (from my butterfly mind), and even the old saying that "to work is to pray", can all have their place.

Some things that have helped me are using written prayers (in my case, those in *Common Worship*), finding a regular place and time, writing notes to focus my thoughts, using symbols or objects to prompt reflection, and above all accepting that I do not have to pray exactly as anyone else does. James is less concerned with *how* we pray than with making sure that we do.

7th Sunday after Trinity: Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd:

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: August 19th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: July 22nd and August 26th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at
<https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>