

205 transcript

James Early:

Hey there and welcome again to the Bible Speaks to you podcast. Thank you so much for listening today. I'm really excited about today's episode. I'm going to be talking with Robin T. Jennings. Robin, welcome to the show.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you, James. Pleasure. Great.

James Early:

It's great to have you here. Robin is an ordained Episcopal minister and has been in the ministry for over years. He's written three books on spiritual growth, and I love the titles of these books, and I'll have the links in the Show Notes page. Here are these titles:

[*May You Live in Christ: Spiritual Growth Through the Vision of St. Peter*](#)*

[*The Door to Renewal: Spiritual Growth Through the Mind of St. Paul*](#)*

[*A Letter to the Church and the Next Generation: Spiritual Growth through the Witness of James*](#)*

His whole focus is on helping individuals as well as churches and give them the spiritual tools they need to participate in the divine nature of Christ. I just love that. Robin is a graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary and has an advanced degree in spiritual direction from the Shalem Institute in Washington, DC. Robin enjoys bringing the practices from the Christian spiritual tradition into the contemporary world of everyday life. That's what we really need. We've got to make this relevant today. Robin was named as one of the top religious leaders in his community by the Louisville Magazine, and he and his wife, who live in Louisville, Kentucky, have been married since 1972. I did the math, Robin. That's like 51, 52 years. That's awesome.

Robin Jennings:

Who's counting? James? Yeah.

James Early:

That's amazing. And they have had four sons, unfortunately, one of whom is deceased, three daughters in law and six wonderful grandchildren. They love spending family time with them. As I said, Robin and Mary live in Louisville, Kentucky, but they love to travel and lead people on pilgrimages to religious sites around the world. In a nutshell, this is just me kind of putting all this together. I would say. Robin has spent his life helping people take the message of Christ and live it in their daily lives.

Robin Jennings:

Amen. Thank you.

James Early:

Yeah. Robin, again, I'm so grateful to have you on The Bible Speaks to you podcast today.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you. As I say, it's a pleasure, but also an honor to be with you, James, and your audience.

James Early:

Well, thank you.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you.

James Early:

I really resonate with what you're doing, Robin. And one of the things I focus on with my podcast and my prison ministry and everything I do is getting back to the original Christianity, the original message of Jesus. What did he want us to do? How did he want us to think? How did he want us to live? How did he want us to love people and interact with Him? How did he want us to treat ourselves? Paul says we have the mind of Christ, and that means we need to live and act like we have the mind of Christ instead of the mind of Adam, I'll say, yeah, I feel like that's kind of where you are, too, and I love that. I'm really intrigued by your books, all of them, especially the book on James and how it relates to the church today. But before we get into that, I would love for you to give my listeners a little insight into what got you involved in the ministry way back so many years ago and maybe share some of your experiences in helping people or churches in their spiritual journey. You're all about spiritual growth.

Robin Jennings:

Well, and I'm also trying to focus that word spiritual on Christian spiritual growth because you know as well as I do, James, when we talk about this next generation, they're spiritual but not religious, and it's really important to begin clarifying that. And I do. I mean, I'll say, hey, that's cool, you know, tell me about what it means to be spiritual. And that's where we go off track. So then my job, not job, but calling, really, is to say, guess what? I'm both spiritual and so then I begin to tie that discussion into the focus and the attention of Jesus and how that really has shaped as through the power of the Holy Spirit, the formation in my know it's that kind of yeah.

James Early:

Yeah. Well, so how would you then define Christian spirituality as compared to the general? It means so many different things in the world today.

Robin Jennings:

But sure, you said it right at the beginning, having the mind of Christ. I mean, I think as you place your confidence in life, in the Lord, it is that transformation that takes place where it is mind, heart, soul, and body that gets transformed. And it's really again, how do I want to say this? It's not private. It's not just about me, myself and I. And look what I've got. I've got Jesus and you don't or something like that, but it's personal because it's affected my life. And let me tell you know, and I think that's one of the things and don't get me started on this, James, but it's one of the things where Episcopalians are so buttoned up, I guess you're going to quote me, but have a hard time with witnessing, you would call it. I mean, sharing the really, I think that's one of the gaps that is at work or a bridge that needs to be made with this next generation is what difference does Jesus make in, your know, that kind of thing. Yeah.

James Early:

So I'm curious what got you started in the ministry?

Robin Jennings:

Oh, yeah. Back to your original question.

James Early:

Yeah, well, tell me about your calling.

Robin Jennings:

Okay, 25 words or less. Yeah. I'm not being light about this as much as just it's loaded and takes me back almost to my high school days. I played football, basketball, baseball, anything that had to do with sports and competition and winning and all of that kind of stuff, and trophies. And all the good things that go with being a high school. How do I say it? Just a guy. A guy.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

And here we go. You talked about our marriage for 50 years. My wife, guess what? She changed me. I became a good person.

James Early:

Oh wow.

Robin Jennings:

Good. Yay. They have a way of doing that. But in all seriousness, what it did is it taught me something about love and caring for another person and those sorts of things in general. But actually after college we both went to the same school, Center College in Danville, Kentucky, small liberal arts school. That was part of the change and sensitivity that I had to something greater know, being a college person, I won't go into great details, but I was from Chicago. In fact, my wife is from the south, she's from Tennessee and she said she'd never marry a Yankee if this gives you any idea of my calling. I had to really clean my act up. Yeah, but I went back to Chicago and I worked at an Episcopal boys home and it was for kids that were classified as I think it was then, mentally disturbed or something emotionally disturbed maybe, but good golly. When you went through their files, who wouldn't know the life that they had up in right? And this was by the way, the south side, the tough side of Chicago. I was a suburban white kid from the north side. I had really the care of 7th and 8th grade boys. Those are big kids, James. And every day there was a fight in my cottage where I was the supervisor. And when I say know, they were throwing punches and of course yours truly would get in the middle and it was a brand new ballgame. From then on, I'm bringing all this up because there was a lot going on. Well, like today in the world, you had Martin Luther King's assassination in Chicago, the Democratic convention in Chicago, I'm going back into the late 60s now. All the turmoil that went on with Vietnam, just on and on and on it was going. And these kids not weren't just acting that out but there was just thank God they didn't have guns and the drugs like today to the extent that they have today. But it still was not an easy road. And there was, thank God, a chaplain where I was working at this residence. And long story short, in conversation with him, usually in the evening over a cup of coffee or something, he would say to me, usually at the end, you're really asking some good questions. And he said have you ever thought of going to seminary? The answer was no, I never thought of that. Are you kidding? So I called my dear fiancé, now my wife, and I said hey, what do you think about going to seminary? And she said after a silence, I thought maybe we'd go to church. It was one of those kind of conversations like, Are you kidding me? But we did. And by the way, we were told not to go to seminary, get married first, get a job for a couple of years, typical wait. But young people, they don't want to wait. Right? And so we did. We got married, went to seminary. And with respect to the calling, it was more of a response to the questions that were internally going on in my life, if that helps. It was more this dialogue that was taking place between me and God and then the formation of Christ in my life.

James Early:

Well, so what were some of these questions that you were dealing with?

Robin Jennings:

What in the world's going on? Yeah, look at today. I mean, just the turmoil and the troubles that people were facing. And by the way, again, I don't want to say I had a life of luxury, my dad, we were cared for, but it was suburban Chicago. There was not the violence, though. Let's say it was a life of sports, right. Following the Chicago Cubs. That was my life. James, it wasn't necessarily

that great back then, the Cubs, that is. But it was again, the questions, more social questions, but then got very personal quickly. What are you going to do about it? What difference can you make?

James Early:

There you go. I think that's really an important question we all have to ask ourselves. You talk about how things were different back then. Now, having been an Episcopal minister for over 40 years, how has your work as part of the ministry, how has that changed? Have people's needs changed? Obviously, society has changed. All this stuff you were mentioning with the guns and the violence, but how's that adapted to the times we are in today?

Robin Jennings:

As you ask this question, I'm thinking of a million people rolling before my eyes. It's one of those kind of things.

James Early:

Wow.

Robin Jennings:

The kinds of pastoral encounters and interactions that you have with people, but then also with God through all this and again through the faith in Christ, as well as where the Holy Spirit is leading us and guiding mean, all these kinds of things are so much a part of the ministry. It's not a job, it's not a career. Again, it is a calling or a vocation, but at the same time, it's life with God in a way that I really treasure and continue to. As you can tell by this day, though, I'm not necessarily in a church, and I'm not going to say tied behind bricks and mortar and a pulpit, but when you're in a church, which is where I was for over 35, almost 35 years, people say, how did you do it for all those years? And you grow where you're planted. I mean, it's one of those kind of things. So I did grow, but stayed in the same place. But now I'm out and about. And here I'm having a podcast with you. It's a much larger well, as they say today, a platform that I've really enjoyed, books included and speaking and teaching and all that kind of thing. Now, your question again, how has it changed?

James Early:

Yeah. The way you have ministered to people in their needs, how has that changed?

Robin Jennings:

Okay, so in the parish ministry, there's the parish it's right before your eyes, right? And yes, each person comes in with their own story to tell. I mean, that's one of the things I think I was so aware of from the get go. You learn to begin to focus on where people really find themselves living this life and then why they're coming to church, what they're looking for, what they're seeking. And

that began to change, too, in not large respect, but with changing generations, the vocabulary changes. Oh, it's not quite as wrote or as simple as turn to page so and so in your prayer book, and there's the answer. Or in the Bible, and then, of course, you're getting text messages today. Or I used to answer the phone. It's no longer that kind of thing.

James Early:

Well, the needs, though, don't you feel like the outward logistics has changed? But don't you think the basic needs are the same? We need to know God.

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

We need to learn what love is.

Robin Jennings:

Yes. A thousand times yes. And then I can't remember when it came out, but a couple of weeks ago, I think the Wall Street Journal had an article on how the church is emptying out. Typical media sort of thing. It's one of those depressing articles to read, but it's why they're not coming back to church. Gen Xers or Z's, whatever age group they were writing about why they're not coming back. I think it was Gen X because they're so busy, why they're not coming back to church after COVID right, was, I think, the gist of the article. And as I read the article, I can't quote it exactly, but it was my needs aren't being met, or my needs can be met anywhere. I'm a believer, I believe in Jesus, but I don't have to do that at church. I can do that anywhere else. I want to know that kind of thing. I mean, it was not cavalier, but it was sort of just church. Isn't that necessary now here I'm a minister, thanks a lot. But I'm not promoting my job or the church necessarily, except let's talk about and giving God the know. We were talking about needs, and one of the needs, the fundamental foundational needs we have is to give God glory. And how do you glorify God? I think it was Ignatius long ago who said one of his exercises, the question of how have you glorified God today? And I think that to me is the name of the game that I really push that button hard now with so many people who kind of don't just cry and go, wow, this kind of thing, or I don't like the church or it's this or that. Let's talk about glorifying God and how that might be done. And certainly is so important, I think, to be able to praise God, thank God, give God the glory.

James Early:

Yeah, I know what you're saying. And you can certainly do that in your little private prayer chair at home.

Robin Jennings:

Sure.

James Early:

But there is something powerful about doing that collectively, I think, amen in community.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you, James. And I'm not just saying that as a preacher.

James Early:

There's something powerful. We're not all little islands unto ourselves. I think sometimes people have been hurt in church and they don't want to get involved in that way. But church in the right way can be a real support. I have a sister in law who has gone through a real tough time in her life, and her church just stepped up to the plate and beautiful was there every minute for her.

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

That's what church ought to be about.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. And not only the pastoral care that goes with it, but then I keep coming back to worship that's derived from the word worth. So when we're worshipping, we're doing something of worth. It's worthwhile. It's valuable, really. I do find that so uplifting. And I can go into church, and now I can because I'm retired. I can go in grumpy. Then you get into worship and a good hymn and it's not entertaining either. I mean, I hope you hear it. This perspective is that it really is important, not simply for the psyche, but for our spirit and for our you.

James Early:

Know, Jesus said something interesting about worship in John, chapter four. He said God was looking for people to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Robin Jennings:

Amen.

James Early:

I think sometimes people don't like church because they're only caught up in the outward rigmarole, the outward rituals, the ceremonies, and some churches have more of that than others. But I think sure, even the churches that don't think they have ritualistic approach, they still have their ways. They do things.

Robin Jennings:

You've got 1 hour.

James Early:

1 hour.

Robin Jennings:

Quick.

James Early:

Get it all in there. But he said we need to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

It's about our spiritual relationship with God and praising Him and seeing his worth, seeing our own worth in his eyes. Back to that idea of worth and rejoicing in that. It's interesting because when he tells the woman at the well of Samaria about worship, he said it's a plural thing. God is looking for those it's plural. It's not just a private thing.

Robin Jennings:

Right.

James Early:

I think there's that sense of community that's really important to worship.

Robin Jennings:

Yes. In the south, we say y'all.

James Early:

Yeah. I'm from Texas originally.

Robin Jennings:

Okay, so you understand?

James Early:

I understand y'all totally. What do you think in light of all you've just said about church and where a lot of people are not coming back to church. What do you think the needs of the church are right now in general?

Robin Jennings:

The needs of the church or the needs of the parishioners?

James Early:

What does the church, as a church need to what do we need to do as the collective body? I'm not talking about our individual needs, but I'm saying what do we need to do as a church body to be a better part of society, to let our light shine better for Christ, all that stuff?

Robin Jennings:

Well, there again, it's loaded, James. But look at the church as a community of faith and look at what happened during COVID when we were shut down. Sure. Many clergy were able to adapt. I think I would have jumped out a window, a first floor window, if I had to go through all the gymnastics and contortions they went through during that period. Oh, my gosh. It was really tough and tough on clergy.

James Early:

Oh, it was.

Robin Jennings:

That's where part of my heart, as you can tell, goes in the ditches. Yeah, it was tough going. So streaming on, we go like we are right now. Except that there again, it gave people the opportunity sort of to drink coffee and sit in their pajamas and read the paper and watch TV and listen to the sermon at the same time. Right. So to your question, the sense of community was lost in the church. People just felt isolated. I think they're saying now one of the big number one concerns emotionally for people is loneliness, being lonely and what that looks like and what that means and how that's now impacted society. I serve on a board that does work, a faith based board that does work with all kinds of emotional issues and certainly chemical dependency. Louisville's the heart of a lot of this drug traffic that's going on. They go through Louisville to get to West Virginia. They go through Louisville to get to Indianapolis. They go through Louisville to get to

know and gangs. So back to your original question. There's a darkness, certainly, that's out there. And so where's the light? And I think this is what a community of faith offers. Well, of course, we talk about hope and faith, love, all these things that are so important to us. But there, again, to have the connection with other people that are believers, it really does reinforce or strengthen our faith and certainly the commitments and convictions that we bring to every know.

James Early:

You talked about you're in the Episcopal Church. You said Episcopalians aren't the best at letting their light shine sometimes and sharing their faith.

Robin Jennings:

Stop it.

James Early:

I don't think that's just Episcopalians. A lot of people are a little hesitant sometimes. What's the answer to that? I mean, what have you found effective to help people, to encourage people to not be afraid to share their faith, to help kind of get out of their comfort zone? And share their faith.

Robin Jennings:

Well, the Bible is the Bible. And so with that said, yeah. You don't necessarily need to club someone over the head with a Bible verse immediately. But at some point, if people want to hear a word from God, well, why don't we start with the Bible? That's, again, what guides and directs our lives. So if people start knocking on my door, like, what makes you tick? I've got to respond quickly to the importance of the word. Right. It's sort of the baby steps or the way to begin with each person and back to know. When we start talking about James, one of the emphasis, the emphasis that I place certainly in that letter of James is he was the first mentor to the church. And that's what we need today, are mentors, people with wisdom. James, you, me.

James Early:

That's right.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. People who've been around the block and are willing to then, you know, all this stuff with artificial intelligence and social media and television and streaming, all that. Wow. What that does to the mind and what that does to the ideas and thoughts and images people carry around the junk that's in their head. And so here again, to be able to listen to zip it and be quiet and try to focus in and hear what people are saying and what's going on in their lives and then provide some kind of a response that helps them take the next step.

James Early:

I think that's really a sign of spiritual maturity and wisdom to say what you just said about listening, because most of us find it easier to talk than listen. It depends on what kind of person you are. But you may think you have all the ideas that somebody needs. But if you're not really listening to not just their words but what's in their heart, the things they're not saying, listening for the issues that are way down deep, then you'll know what Bible story to share or what experience from your own life to share and how you worked through something. It seems almost like an oxymoron if you're going to share your faith while you're just listening to them. But that's really the first step to know where somebody is.

Robin Jennings:

Again, the role or the characteristics of a mentor is to model, provide a model. You might shy away from that thinking, who am I? I can't be that. But you can. And I think our age really does need to provide. And you've heard this so many times in families that are broken in various communities. Is there's no father? Right? What kind of structure does that family have? The mentor can provide and offer some sense of value and morals and models and convictions and beliefs and things at that level that you usually don't pick up on social media. There's more to life. There's more to life.

James Early:

Right.

Robin Jennings:

And let's start to get into what Jesus calls the abundant life right there again, that's this life with God that we can talk about, and I think you and I and others got to do, right?

James Early:

Right. So let's talk about this idea of spiritual mentorship. Let's say somebody comes to you even, like, in official capacity, wants you to be their spiritual mentor. I mean, I know from dealing with a lot of people sometimes and myself too, sometimes you just want a quick fix to your problem. But the real issue is maybe they or I need to grow spiritually. And you use the word spiritual renewal on your website sometimes. I love that sense of spiritual renewal, spiritual growth. How do you encourage people to and they're coming to you for help. So you're not just picking some straight person off the street, but someone's coming to you specifically for help. How do you encourage them to get past just wanting a solution to the problem, to actually realizing the real need is for spiritual growth and spiritual renewal?

Robin Jennings:

Once again, you sort of begin where they are and start with what their concern is. And as you well know, kind of the question behind the question behind the question is what you're trying to get to or the concern.

James Early:

Right.

Robin Jennings:

You got to start to unpack, as we would say. But that is not an overnight or a quick fix kind of thing. Speaking of Kentucky asbury seminary. Well, they had a revival. Those are my people, James. So here's what happened is when you talk about spiritual renewal, 50,000 or some I can't remember the number. This is a little two lane seminary street, one stoplight. The Asbury police are like, what are we supposed to do with all these cars, all these people? It was crazy. One of the professors, a friend of mine, Winfield Bevins, was talking about it. I said, was this like Woodstock? Was this out of control? Was it crazy? And he said, no, not at all. He said, it was organized by the spirit.

James Early:

Wow.

Robin Jennings:

And I looked at him cross eyed. I'm like, what are you talking about? And he said, Robin, he said people were coming in to volunteer. People were coming in to clean restrooms. People were passing out water. Domino's showed up. Chick-fil-A showed, know, to help with the mean. Out of nowhere. They hadn't planned any of this stuff. I mean, they had planted the seed, right? Anyways, I'm off track here, but it's back to your question about where do you begin? I think he told me where people were coming for well, first of all, to see if God would show up.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

I mean, that's what these kids wanted. Where's God? Come on, bring him on. I want to meet him. Wow. And so, look out. This is the real deal, is where I'm going with this. Then so many of them were seeking some sort of conversion. May not be their words, but my word and yours, they were looking for a change, transformation, some new direction in their life, right? They didn't know which way to go, how to go, where to go, all this kind of thing. So they were basic fundamental questions. And then if there was I'm trying to think if there was a third category oh, you ready for this? It was forgiveness. I mean how deep is that and how important is that and how much a part of our life that is, right? And here again, how do I want to say this? They had lived sort of a life of repression and now to flip it around, found the importance of confession, being able to reveal what's going on inside of them. Because they did team up and they had know that part of it did get organized quickly and they were able to minister to those coming through in ways so that here we

go back to winfield said to me, he said, now the church has got to open its doors because these kids are out looking around wondering what's know. So it's not just a crusade where you get sort of the quick bumper sort of thing. And I'm not saying that about crusades because we sponsored Billy Graham here one of the last times in Louisville and it was terrific. But the spillover to churches is not always a quick connection. You've got to again be out there and let them know you're welcoming kids with tattoos and earrings and all the stuff. That's not necessarily mean, but at the same time we can talk their talk and be able to respond to their needs.

James Early:

You brought up a really important question because I think more and more people of all ages really are seeking answers on a deep spiritual sense than they ever have before, in a long time anyway because the traditionalisms and the little pat answers just don't work anymore. And so you have all these people that don't look like the perfect little church member from 1950. When they show up to your church, do you recognize them as an honest seeker for truth? Do you recognize them as someone who has a heart looking for Christ in their lives or spiritual answers or trying to find God and in a relationship to God? Or do we say oh my gosh, they don't look like us and do we shut the door on them? Yeah, I have a prison ministry and I work with the inmates. And so when those people show up to church, is a church willing to say oh gosh, we're so glad you're here? Or do they say, oh you're different.

Robin Jennings:

You sit over here. Well there you go.

James Early:

Let's jump into the Book of James now because James addresses these questions. I love the Book of James.

Robin Jennings:

Good.

James Early:

James says if and I'm just paraphrasing this obviously, he says if the rich guy comes with a gold ring on, you say oh you sit in the best place you're. Showing partiality. You're too aware of the outward appearance of things instead of their heart. And I asked you earlier, what do the church need right now? I think as a church in general, we all need to be more aware and alert and awake to all of God's children and how they may ask questions differently from us. They may appear different from us, but they still are children of God that need to feel God's love.

Robin Jennings:

Right.

James Early:

That's what James is addressing, one of the things he's talking about.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Show no partiality. Show no partiality. I mean, that just, that runs through part of my love for James and the reason for writing the book. Again, back to your initial question about my calling. The first church where I was assigned in becoming a priest as an associate was at the cathedral in Memphis. And it was big, know, beautiful cathedral, beautiful building, all the organ and the choir and all the stuff that goes with it. And I obviously fell in love with the liturgy and the pomp and here, I mean, big time. However, there were only a few people there because it was following the assassination of Martin Luther King, remember? I mean, was there in Memphis.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

And this church took an active role, or the dean of the cathedral did at that time, and it split the, know, white flight, all that kind of stuff was there. So our job was not show no partiality, but let's talk reconciliation. Reconciliation. That was really hammered home all the time I was there. However, and this is the long story short, at the altar was an inscription that said, Hallelujah hosanna. And I thought, you know, that's kind of weird. I didn't know what it was. It was in marble. It finally started to ask around what it was. And it was this order of nuns that came from New York to minister to people in Memphis following the yellow fever. What was that, 1870 something?

James Early:

Wow.

Robin Jennings:

Mother Constance, those were her last words was, Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. But where I'm going with this again is what that did was kind of just put that inscription on my heart, praise the Lord, but also their witness of being doers of the word. Here's where I'm going, James. Back to James.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

Be doers of the word. Yeah. And that was the church being seen. Oh, by the way, that was 1870s. Do you remember the Civil War?

James Early:

I don't remember it personally, but I remember the dates. It's just a few years after, like, five years later.

Robin Jennings:

There you go. Memphis was devastated. No cotton, no slavery. I mean, they knew nothing what to do. In comes the yellow fever. Devastating, to say the least. So this is where they came to minister, these women from New York and bear witness again to the faith and to this day are remembered there at the church. And by the way, the church has come back. So that's a good story.

James Early:

That's beautiful, man.

Robin Jennings:

It was tough times. Yeah.

James Early:

Let's talk about this whole be ye doers of the word. I love when James brings that out. I know when I was in high school and started getting serious about my faith, I had friends that say, oh, you're saved by faith, you're saved by grace, you're not saved by works.

Robin Jennings:

Right.

James Early:

And I always came back to James. I thought, well, wait a minute, James has a few things to say. Well, and Jesus, too said, it's not enough to call me Lord, Lord. It's only those who do the will of my Father in heaven who experience heaven. There's this sense of doing. And I think sometimes those verses are passed over by, oh, you just have to believe. But James is saying, yeah, the faith is important, but you have to put your faith into practice. You have to got to do something with your faith or it's dead.

Robin Jennings:

Right.

James Early:

It's just a bunch of words.

Robin Jennings:

Well, and this is the preacher in me, James, I talk about the root and the fruit. And the root is faith.

James Early:

I like that. I like that.

Robin Jennings:

Hold on to that.

James Early:

Yeah, the root and the fruit. That's a really good analogy, because if you have a live root, you're going to have fruit.

Robin Jennings:

Amen. Yeah. And what kind of fruit, too? And so that then bears the call of the Holy Spirit. And all of this, again, greater understanding of our faith and character of the faith and the way it looks, the way it tastes. What kind of appeal is there to it.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

I mean, if it's rotten fruit, if it's rotten fruit, who wants it? Right.

James Early:

Sometimes as a church, I think we have to cut away some of those rotten roots, some of the dead wood, and that's hard. That's the way we've always done it. Or maybe we've veered off a little bit from what Jesus really wanted us to do. And we've gotten so used to that. We have to get back to what Jesus said.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. And there's no better person. James is as close to the heart of Jesus, and in fact, scholars are now saying his letter was probably written in the early 40s, which would make it one of the earliest letters, obviously, in Christian literature. I mean, you can't beat that. Plus, people say, oh, well, his Christology, or he doesn't talk enough about Jesus. You don't see that in the letter. Excuse me. Read the Sermon on the Mount, chapters five through seven of Matthew, and then open the letter of James and then let's talk.

James Early:

I totally agree. He's putting it in a fresh language.

Robin Jennings:

Well, and also, if I could interrupt for 1 second, because you got me going. But also, if James was in the 40s and you look at Mark, late 60s, Matthew in terms of dating, that's 30 years. James was as close to Jesus ten years from the crucifixion, what you're getting is oral tradition. This stuff is live and in person. You see what I'm saying? I mean, it's really fresh. So that's where I jump up and down.

James Early:

That's a good thing to remember about James, because it's kind of back toward the end of the New Testament, and I think it's kind of skipped over sometimes.

Robin Jennings:

Oh, yeah.

James Early:

Now, what is the current feeling about who James is or was? Because when I was a kid, I thought, oh, it meant James the Apostle. But it's not James the Apostle.

Robin Jennings:

No. That's a beautiful question, really, because that again is what part of what got me started was in the early start of the 21st century? Dan Brown. Remember DA Vinci code?

James Early:

Everyone was into that.

Robin Jennings:

At the same time, they discovered an ossuary. I write about this in the introduction, or I think chapter one, I can't remember, but they found this ossuary in Jerusalem, which was really restricted, only was done during the period as far as Jewish history in that first century. So it obviously was a first century ossuary. And on the top of it it said something like, James, brother of Jesus, son of Joseph. And you go, Whoa, this is it. We found it. And they went crazy. I mean, the media, television, magazines, archaeology today, I mean, everyone jumped on it and said, this is incredible. But also it started to upset several things and I won't go into it for your listeners today, James. But it was like Jesus' older brother. And you go, Wait a minute, I don't know if you're following my drift, but how can it be the older brother? I thought Jesus was born of a know, this kind of thing. So you had to really read through this stuff and say, wait a minute, let's run this. So long story short is what the theory is. And there's all kinds of stuff writing, but during this period in particular, it got a little crazy. Where they came back is it was a stepbrother of Jesus that Joseph had probably been married, his first wife died, left him with a handful of boys and girls. Because when you read in Scripture, they talk about brothers and sisters who met know in Scripture they talk about Jesus's brothers. So, I'm not making this up.

James Early:

No, no, I understand.

Robin Jennings:

But they're probably what Mary inherited or was given was this house full of brothers and sisters. And furthermore, Jesus bore witness to James in the resurrection. Tell me what your question was again, because I'm just going off in a direction.

James Early:

Well, I've got several questions, but more than after that, I want to just say as far as the Jesus's brothers and sisters go, I know that's one perspective from some churches because they still think of Mary as the Virgin Mother.

Robin Jennings:

Of course, yeah, but be careful, James.

James Early:

I know I'm going to say how I read the Scriptures and maybe this is heresy to some people but it says that Joseph and I think it's Matthew chapter one, Joseph did not know Mary his wife until after Jesus was born. To me that implies that afterwards he did she was no longer a virgin. They could have had their own children together. Sure it doesn't really say one way or the other.

Robin Jennings:

That's right.

James Early:

So you're really saying that the question was who is James? So he's considered as the half brother of Jesus.

Robin Jennings:

And time and time again in scripture, when the brothers and sisters show up, oftentimes James' name specifically is mentioned, right? And then, you know, something like, oh, the miracle at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, Jesus goes back afterwards with his brothers and sisters back, and here they begin to reflect on what was that all about, that first miracle? And so James is there and also they thought at some point Jesus was insane. I mean that's my words but yeah.

James Early:

They thought Jesus was crazy. Yeah I mean it says that in so many words I forget what there it is in the Bible.

Robin Jennings:

And you know, psychologists get into it and all kinds of projections and things like that. It's not that I look at it as the development, the growth of James as he matures in his own right. And by the way, without again going into detail, but in Acts, where it really picks up more about the story of James in the early church in particular, we find all kinds of different encounters with James in terms of his leadership that are, as a result, again of his faith in Christ. To the point and now I might be getting heretical, James kind of like you said, got pushed to the back of the Bible and just his letter alone. But he was a leader of Jerusalem the church of and no doubt, no doubt he was living in the same house with his mother Mary right? All those guys were there in Jerusalem. I mean I can't imagine how cool that was that early church with these guys working all this through and at the same time the kinds of persecution the issues they were facing. But James was considered the bishop of Jerusalem. Now that didn't transfer over to Peter in Rome or Paul in know because there you're looking at the western part of the church and the development of Roman Catholicism where with Jerusalem and James you're getting a real look into the Eastern Orthodox religion. So interesting begin almost at that point in church history to see a split starting to take place.

James Early:

That's interesting. So one of the things that you, well it's even in the title of your book about James.

Robin Jennings:

Oh it is? Okay.

James Early:

Yeah the thing that you say it's a letter to the church and the next generation now I've never really looked at the book of James through that lens of, you know, reaching out to the next generation of believers. How did you first get that idea? What was it you saw in the Book of James that sort of turned that light bulb on for you?

Robin Jennings:

Well, it was more than a light bulb. It was floodlights and everything. And my job was to get it down to, like, a little candle because I could just devour each chapter. And all I did was I used chapter one as kind of an outliner framework. And by the way, obviously the letter to the church is James's letter to the church because that was one of the first letters to the church. Right. You can see it in my table of contents. And I'm not pushing myself as much as just when you asked about James and what got me going. Be mature, grow up. How's that for the next generation? You can't really say it. You have kids.

James Early:

I read in getting ready for our interview, I read through the Book of James again, which I hadn't done for a while. And it's sort of all over the place. It's just like a bunch of bullet points. Do this, do this. This is something you need to think about. They're not necessarily connected as they go, but as a whole, it's like these are the things you need to think about.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. And like you're saying, it's not necessarily woven together or a literary letter. Some letters are in scripture, but this one does take really, I think, the Sermon on the Mount and from an oral tradition, shoot it to us and put it in writing maybe for the first time. And so what you're getting is a translation. Oh, let's talk about lust. You want it James? Not you, James, but the letter of James, because there he goes. And he gets off on that in ways that is exactly almost like Jesus. And, adultery. You know, you start going down the list of concerns or characteristics that a Christian needs to question and reflect upon. James puts it out there.

James Early:

You know, as you're talking, Robin, I'm thinking of all those things in James, and it's like he's saying, these are the issues that keep your church from being alive to Christ.

Robin Jennings:

Amen. Lust. Awful.

James Early:

Right. Judgmentalness?

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

Partiality?

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

They're moral issues. Usually we think of moral as just be good. Too much sex or drinking or addiction or whatever. But moral is the way we interact and how we think of other people in our relationship with them. And if you're treating somebody like you think you're superior to somebody or you think you're inferior to somebody, that's a moral issue. And James is addressing all these things. He's saying, no, we need to be more Christlike. The answer to all those problems. Really? Be more christlike, guys.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah.

James Early:

So let's say there's a church, and I know a lot of churches are struggling with this. I have actually preached in a little Congregational church near me. It's a very old congregation as far as back to the 1700s.

Robin Jennings:

Wow.

James Early:

But the membership is more elderly. They don't have a whole lot of young people. And you're talking about the Book of James reaching out to the next generation. I know of lots of churches that are kind of in that situation. Their membership is dwindled.

Robin Jennings:

Yes.

James Early:

There's not a whole lot of new, fresh membership coming on. How can the Book of James help that kind of a congregation?

Robin Jennings:

Sure. I think, again, internalizing it. And taking what, for instance, James talks about prayer here again. He says, Ask and God will give it to you. All right, preach that. What are you looking for at Church? Well, we want young people. Have you prayed about it? In a loving way. I'm saying, you know, right, let's get started with James. And why would James say that? And who do you think James was talking to then? The whole what does he talk about? Being mature, and complete. You're going to lack in nothing. And you think, lacking nothing? What do you mean, lacking nothing? We don't have any young people here. Everyone's dying off. It's an old church. Have you seen our budget? And you start going on that stuff. We lack everything. And do you know the 23rd Psalm? The Lord is my shepherd, and then what?

James Early:

I shall not want, I shall not lack.

Robin Jennings:

So there you go.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

And you start coming back in ways that preaches, James. And you can see just in our conversation along, you get pumped up and you want to say, Come on, let's know.

James Early:

Yeah.

Robin Jennings:

And everyone sort of yawns and goes back to sleep, except maybe one or two people will come up at you afterwards. And say hey, you know, that was really important. And then you get three or five people, and then all of a sudden, seven or ten people. And now you start getting something going in ways that really is an aspect or part of the mission of the church.

James Early:

You really put your finger on when you said, hey, pray about it. A lot of times we are praying. But back to this collective sense of what church is. I have seen in my church, I've seen in other churches, when the church as a whole prays collectively about an issue, whether it's something a problem in the community or it's a problem they're dealing with.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. Look out.

James Early:

And we set our own personal opinions aside and say, okay, God, what do you want us to do? Be guided by the Holy Spirit. Give the Holy Spirit freedom to do what needs to be done, instead of us thinking, well, this is what has to happen. Getting back to that sense of collective church prayer is very, very powerful. And that's kind of what James is saying. He said, yeah, pray for it, but you got to check your motives, is your motive: We want to be big and important? That's the lust that you want to consume on your heart, that's not the right motive. The motive should be back to what you originally said, to glorify and worship God.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. Yeah. And then to do what you were saying, be doers of the Word, or what James was the real James was saying is to be doers of the Word. But one quick example is our church is doing right now, I gave them a knock about witnessing and sharing their faith, but one way they are doing it is through doing the Word. This Sunday, they're going to be doing it's a program called Building a Bed. And they've got all the lumber and all the stuff to build beds. And you're going, what are you talking about? Well, so many of these homes, as I mentioned, have ten kids in them, and kids are sleeping on floors all over the place, and we're providing beds wow. And teddy bears and a pillow and a blanket, so they've got a place to sleep. It's just this sort of thing that you begin to develop different forms of a mission that really people say, this church is making a difference. Yeah.

James Early:

I think that's what a lot of people would like to have in a church is the sense of ministering to people. They're doing something. I mean, just going and listening to the sermon and the music and the prayers, that can be inspiring or not.

Robin Jennings:

Sure.

James Early:

But if there's a sense of purpose and forward vision for a church, I think it's exciting to be part of something that you can be part yeah. Right. That's doing something that's helping people. That's being doers of the Word, to quote James.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah.

James Early:

Robin, we could go on and on here.

Robin Jennings:

Okay.

James Early:

I hope you and I can keep in touch afterwards. I've just really enjoyed getting to hear your thoughts on this stuff. Is there anything else that you want to add to our conversation that I haven't asked you about or a point you'd like to make in thinking about the Book of James or ministering to people?

Robin Jennings:

And I don't again want to sound like I'm promoting my next book, but James, I'm working on a book right now because it's right front and center on my heart is the importance of the soul. I once was in teaching a class and someone asked me about the soul, and that wasn't part of my lecture, my talk and all this. I thought, what are you talking about? What do you mean? Why are you asking about that? He says, well, talk to us about the soul. Here again, being a good teacher like I am, I threw the question back and I said, what do you know about the soul? And he said, I don't know anything about the soul. You got to tell us. I mean, it was one of those kind of conversations that really stuck to me because I was trying to avoid it, not avoid it, but I didn't really have a ready answer. And that's what I'm working on, because having taken a group to Ireland, we began to think about and follow many of the early saints in that fifth century. I don't know if you're familiar with this. It's called the Celtic Christian. It's a revival, full blown revival that took place, that really spread across and changed the culture.

James Early:

Oh, really?

Robin Jennings:

It was after the fall of Rome. It's a long historical story, but it's a beautiful one in terms of the, you know, just really making a big difference and change.

James Early:

Well, in Ireland, they sent out missionaries to all over the place at that time.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah, yeah. And so I call it Expressions of the Soul. One of the things that caught my attention as I was reflecting and writing on this is loving God with all your heart and your mind and your soul. And I'm thinking, well, wait, I can love God with all my heart. No, he wouldn't know what's on my heart. And all my mind has all kinds of junk in it. Soul. It starts with the soul. The soul is what coordinates and really guides our heart and our mind and our actions, our behavior, our know, our mean. So the soul is the name of the game. And I'll leave you on this one. I was listening to an interview by Elon Musk. If you heard of Elon Musk, he's not in the Bible. He's a contemporary. Okay. Anyways, he talked about he doesn't really know if there is such a thing as a soul or not. And I'm not dumping on him or blaming him or going after him as much, making judgment on him as I'm thinking. That is so typical of the scientific world. It's so typical of the culture that we live in. Artificial intelligence. Great. Now we've got a robot without a soul. We've got to get back to talking about the soul and the importance it plays in our spiritual lives.

James Early:

That's very interesting. We need to get back to this spiritual essence of who we are.

Robin Jennings:

Bring it on.

James Early:

I couldn't agree more. Robin, I want to honor you for all you've done these many, many years to help people be in touch with their spirituality, to be in touch with Christ, to be more like Christ. And I've really enjoyed getting to know you a little bit and learning about your ministry. I'm going to have all the links for your current three books thank you. In the show notes. And by the way, I don't think there's anything wrong with promoting in the right way amen. What you have done for the glory of God and to help people get to know God better.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you. Thank you.

James Early:

And so I don't have a problem with that word promote.

Robin Jennings:

Okay. Thank you.

James Early:

You're not being a shmarmy used car salesman here.

Robin Jennings:

Thank you. That's a real compliment.

James Early:

Well but you have something of value.

Robin Jennings:

No, thank you.

James Early:

That should be promoted.

Robin Jennings:

Okay.

James Early:

We need to promote those values of Christ.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah.

James Early:

What is the best way for people to get in touch? How can people connect?

Robin Jennings:

Well, I've got, actually, a landing page that is a gift for your audience and your listeners only. It's www.robintjennings.com/guidedreflection. And what that is is really a five week journal that they can download and do further reflection, not necessarily on my books, but certainly on the themes that come out of my books in terms of vision and renewal and bearing witness and then also being

a mentor. And I think it might be something that would be fun. Not just fun, but be helpful for your readers.

James Early:

Whoa. Well, thank you so much. I'll have that link in the show notes, by the way, so people can click on it. That's really important because a lot of us, I don't think of ourselves as mentors to someone else. We like someone to maybe to be our mentor, but at some point, we all should be taking that step in our spiritual progress, because don't you think when you mentor somebody else I know when I help somebody else, it helps me as much I learn as much as they do.

Robin Jennings:

Absolutely, yes. And I don't have all the answers, but I know who. So there you go.

James Early:

All right, Robin, I've got three final questions that I always ask my guests.

Robin Jennings:

Oh, great.

James Early:

And the first one is, if you could talk to any Bible character other than Jesus, who would it be and what would you ask them?

Robin Jennings:

Well, could we start with James? As long as we're talking about, we could, yeah, sure. Really? I would like to ask him about that early church, by the way, some of his issues with Paul, which you'll read about in Acts and his leadership style, if he'd explain more about that, because that's what we need today, is strong leaders. And certainly he reflects one, they called him Camel Knees because of the calluses on his knees from praying. Don't you love that?

James Early:

Oh, wow.

Robin Jennings:

Isn't that great? What a nickname.

James Early:

Well, when you explain what it means, it's better than what it sounds like.

Robin Jennings:

But I want to know more about his prayer life, and I want to know more about his leadership styles.

James Early:

Oh, that's a great answer, thank you.

Robin Jennings:

Big time.

James Early:

Yeah, I love that. I love that.

James Early:

And that makes me curious. Now, second question. Is there any Bible character you especially identify with?

Robin Jennings:

Oh, yeah, probably Peter. Why? Why? He wanted to walk on water. Yeah, he did. For a minute. One step. Yeah. And no, in all seriousness, you look at Peter's life up and down and up and down and up and down and right up to the point, as you know, of the crucifixion, and "I do not know you." And you want to say, you creep, Peter. How can you do that and deny him? And then there again to witness him in the resurrection and go from there is just so profound and so beautiful. Love to be like him. Yeah. Where they had breakfast together.

James Early:

Yeah. What a beautiful way to have that relationship come full circle.

Robin Jennings:

Yeah. Let's put it this way. My life has not been linear and just straight connect the dots, it really it follows a lot of what Peter is about.

James Early:

Yeah, I totally get that. I think most of us can relate to that. Here's the third question.

Robin Jennings:

Make it easy.

James Early:

You've already really answered this one, but I ask it anyway.

Robin Jennings:

Okay.

James Early:

The Bible Speaks to You Podcast is about getting back to the original Christianity of Jesus, adopting the mind of Christ, living the way Jesus wants us to. How would you describe Jesus's original message without all the things we've added in the last 2,000 years, how did he want us to live our lives?

Robin Jennings:

Maybe go to the Good Samaritan. Just off the top of my head. I mean, I think that was such a wonderful parable in its own right. And it just stands alone almost in terms of compassion, being able to care for your neighbor, especially those who've been wounded and you know as well as I do, who hasn't been wounded, and to be able to reach out and offer them some kind of help, whatever it may be. A couple of denari. And then you just go on. You don't have to stay and take credit and sign autographs. You don't need just you're the Good Samaritan, and just keep moving.

James Early:

Oh, that's beautiful. I love that. Robin, I want to thank you so much for taking part of your day to be with me and my listeners. I've just really enjoyed likewise getting some insights into your heart and what makes you tick, and it's just so beautiful to get a little window on that. So thanks again for being here.

Robin Jennings:

James, it works both ways, man. Really. My pleasure.

James Early:

All right. Take care.

Robin Jennings:

All right, same to you. Bye.

Connect with Robin:

<https://robinjennings.com/guidedreflection/>

Robins Books*

[*May You Live in Christ: Spiritual Growth Through the Vision of St. Peter*](#)

[*The Door to Renewal: Spiritual Growth Through the Mind of St. Paul*](#)

[*A Letter to the Church and the Next Generation: Spiritual Growth through the Witness of James*](#)

* Amazon affiliate links