

## “Living Faith Prays Continually”

Week 11 - James 5:13-20

March 20, 2022

### Introduction - James as Pastor

Tim. Pastor.

*Joke - if you came late tonight don't worry your watch isn't wrong. Doing things differently tonight. I'm going to preach now, and then we're going to have a longer time of response at the end, it'll make sense once we're there.*

**James 5:13-20.** (If you've been paying attention, you'll notice we skipped vs 12. There's a handout in the bulletin on why that is. Don't read it now, read it later ok). **PRAY.**

We're closing our series on James today. Hope the past 11 weeks have been a blessing to your discipleship to Jesus.

One of the things you start to notice when you read through a lot of the NT is that endings to what are often called epistles, or letters - James, Ephesians, Galatians, books like that - can feel sort of rushed and disjointed.

**Stories growing up.** Growing up, one of the dreams that I had was to be an author. I wanted to write stories. So whenever we were on a long trip or car ride somewhere, to pass the time I'd think - I should write a story. So I would start writing and I would develop the most elaborate into a 10-year old can come up with. I would set up all of this character development and back story for like 5 pages. But then we would arrive at our destination, or my hand would start cramping or I'd get bored, and I wouldn't want to write anymore so I'd just write "And then they all died. The end." I have stacks of really good intros to stories that all of a sudden end with - "they all died, the end."

And sometimes the ending of NT epistles can feel like that. Obviously without all the "they all died" part. But it can feel like chapters of long drawn out repetitive arguments that end with - oh and this and this and this. Say hi to that person. Tell that person to stop preaching heresy. I'll maybe visit sometime soon, we'll see. Alright, the end.

And the ending of James can feel that way too. When you read 5:13-20 you can start to think - did he just cram a bunch of stuff in at the end? **I don't think so.**

One of the things we didn't really talk about much over the past few months, that I think is particularly pertinent for tonight - is that first and foremost **James is a pastor** who deeply loves this church. You see glimpses of his pastoral heart throughout the letter - as he encourages them in suffering, as he warns them in sin, as he confronts them in pride.

**And I think nowhere is James' pastoral heart more evident in the letter than in the ending.**

As he wraps up everything that he has been writing, what is on James' heart and mind? **People.**

And this is important because, and I think you know this but we can often forget → **Church is the people.** A church is not a building. A church is not events, or classes or programs. A church is not an entity or an organization - **a church is a people.**

We get to welcome some new members into our church family at the end of the gathering tonight. These folks are not committing to an organization. They're committing to a group of people. Church is the people.

And so James ends his letter with his heart set on loving and caring for the people.

He wants to know → **How are the people?**

So he's going to ask some questions. He's got 5 questions he's going to ask in these last 8 verses and they're all questions centered on - **"How are you? How are you?"**

**So here's what I want to do tonight, in the footsteps of James - I want to ask us some questions and see where we're at. I want to ask you the same questions James asked these followers of Jesus some 2,000 years ago and give you the same invitations He gave to them as well.**

It's going to feel random. Each of these 5 questions is like a mini-sermon in and of itself, but I just want you to pause before the Lord and be honest with yourself, with Him, with those around you - where are you right now?

We'll take them one at a time...

**13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.**

### **Question #1 - Is Anyone Suffering? Pray.**

Garrison did an excellent job last week breaking down some of the theology behind our suffering, if you missed it go check it out. I don't want to just recap everything he said last week instead let me tell you about my week.

**Asheville.** One of the rhythms of my life that I've started over the past couple of years is trying to take semi-regular trips up to the mountains. There's this retreat center I go to every so often just outside of Asheville to pray and be with the Lord for an extended period of time.

And one of the things I try to do during that time is put into practice this invitation in v13 - Are you suffering? Pray. The past 4 months or so, probably starting beginning of December-ish have been pretty tough. I don't want to oversell it like - "worst 4 months of my life." But there's been suffering. I've been taking my share of punches, feeling pretty beat up by life.

And so I'm walking along this little river they have there just trying, not well by the way, semi-distracted, tired, hate being vulnerable. I am just like "God, here's my heart. Would you heal it? Would you take this? I can't carry it. I think this is what I'm supposed to do is just tell you about it and let you know that I trust you to heal me and to give me joy."

So I'm walking and I'm praying this, and the Spirit moved in me, proved to be the great Comforter that He is...

And the words from one of my favorite hymns as a kid popped back into my mind. Such a fitting invitation I just wanted to read them to you. *What a Friend we Have in Jesus* by Joseph Scriven (1855). This is what it says:

**What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.**

**Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.**

**Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.**

James asks, "Are you suffering? Are you in a dark season? Are you in pain, is it a difficult time for you? Are you hurting? Broken or beat down? Do the circumstances of your life feel hopeless?"

**Pray.** Pray. Take it to God. Take your burdens, your sorrows, your suffering to the Lord in prayer.

Go for a walk, or a run, or a drive, or sit in your room and unburden your heart before the Lord. Be honest about your suffering. Be honest with him about your pain. Believe in the invitation of the Lord's prayer which invites us to come to Him as a Good Father who loves His children. Seek His heart.

**Is anyone suffering? Let him pray.**

**13 (cont.) Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.**

### **Question #2 - Is Anyone Cheerful? Sing Praise.**

Is anyone happy? Word → Passion, courage, excitement. Would anyone say - "I feel like I'm in a good season. There's some abundance, joy, laughter, excitement. The Lord has been kind - circumstantially or in my times with Him. There's a closeness to Him, there's an abundance in my life."

What do you do? **Sing! Sing! Sing prayers of praise to God!**

Step into the gathering, get in your car, turn up the volume and let's get after it! Throw those arms up, shout for joy, I don't know, maybe clap a little, say "amen". Rejoice and sing to God!

***Can I just pastor us for a little bit? I'm going to need you to hear my heart on this one, ok.***

I don't think we're very good as a church at doing the whole "is anyone cheerful?" thing. I think it's genuinely one of our biggest weaknesses as a church. We tend to really lean into the "is anyone suffering?" - we're good in that camp - we tend to struggle on the "is anyone cheerful?" thing.

Many of us past couple of years:

- Personal suffering
- Collective Suffering - pandemic, war, inflation, racial injustice

But there does seem to be a trend in which we don't take very seriously as a church the commands and invitations to rejoice and be cheerful in the Scriptures. We really struggle with the "anyone cheerful let's sing" part.

***Now, there are a couple of reasons for this, I want to go in on lots but for time let me just hone in on one, particularly because it relates to singing.***

I think a big reason why we struggle to be joyful + cheerful as a church and to express it with the commands of James - "let him sing", again not the sole reason, but one of the biggest is that we are collectively pretty **anti-performative religion**.

Here's what I mean by that - A good chunk of us grew up with, or have a background with some pretty bad church experience and expectations. When you showed up to church you were expected to be dressed sharply, well put together, with a smile on your face - Someone asks how you're doing you reply "God is good all the time!" And they reply back - "All the time God is good!" (just me?)

And we've rightly said - "no, we reject that. That's not correct." We highly highly value people being honest about where they're at and how they're doing with the Lord. Honest about their sin, honest about their struggle and their suffering and their pain. We fight really hard to be a church where you can come in and be where you're at and not have to put on a facade or act like you have it all together.

And I want you to not mishear me - I love that. I love it. I love that we have a culture where folks can be honest about their sin, struggles, suffering and hurt and pain. ***I want us to fight for that and never lose it.***

But what can happen if we're not careful, is that we can then come under the impression that if someone says or acts like they're doing well - well they're just lying or fooling themselves or us.

- So we get to engage the heart time in CG and someone's like - "To be honest y'all, it's been a really good week. Lord has been kind, here's some evidence of that." And our first gut response is like - "Why are you performing? Why are you not being honest? Are you hiding or are you just unaware of your sin? Why don't you want to share?" And sometimes - yeah that's because they don't want to share or think about or engage with their sin and brokenness and they should. But sometimes it's legitimately been a good week, Lord has been kind and gracious.
- Or we can come to a gathering, and someone in the pew a few rows over is like getting after it. I mean amens, clapping, arms all over the place - and we can have this air of false maturity that's like - "Why are they doing that? They just want others to notice? They're just performing."

***And I think what can happen is we can create a culture of suspicion around joy in our church. That if someone is rejoicing or cheerful it's because they're immature, naive, or fooled.***

But that's not the invitation from James. James doesn't say - "Is anyone cheerful? Well you better take a second look at your life because you're probably missing some sin or suffering or lying to yourself and you really should be sad instead."

Nope. What does he say? SING! SING! PRAISE THE LORD! HAVE JOY! GIVE HIM PRAISE!

***We have to be able to have our cake and eat it too. Here's what I mean - Our culture of being able to be honest about where you're at when you step into the gathering needs to apply to both the hurting and the rejoicing.***

And we need to do away with our suspicion that if someone is getting after it in worship, hollering, amening, dancing, throwing their hands up in the air - that they're performing or faking or looking for attention or immature.

Listen, if you've been holding back - if you've been intentionally refraining from leaning into the Spirit and worshipping more expressively like you're wired to do or God is inviting you to do, can I just invite you to stop doing that? Will you allow yourself to be joyful in this space if you're actually joyful? You're invited to not care if people wrongly assume things.

What a beautiful picture of how the Bible invites us to be towards God. Suffering? Pray. Feel that emotion. Walk through it.

***But cheerful? Don't deny that either. SING! PRAISE! WORSHIP! EXALT! CLAP!***

***14 Is anyone 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.***

### **Question #3 - Is Anyone Sick? Call the elders and pray.**

Is anyone sick? Is anyone struggling with physical pain or ailment? Anyone got a bad diagnosis? Anyone struggling with mental sickness - depression, chronic anxiety, bipolar disorder? *Call the elders, and let them anoint you with oil and pray.*

Now it's worth pointing out that James here assumes if you're a Christian, you're a part of a local church led by elders, and you have such a relationship with them that you can call them if you're sick to come get prayer. If you're not a part of a local church, get into a local church and get to know the pastors. We'd love to have you here, but if not here then somewhere.

And James says if you're sick, you're supposed to be the one who calls them for help. Don't play the victim - "No one is reaching out, no one cares." Don't do that. Call. Ask for help. James says if you're sick, you reach out for help.

And then elders come and they anoint with oil and pray. The oil here isn't special in and of itself. Oil in the Scriptures for the people of God was used as a means of consecrating (setting apart) someone for a special act of faith. Not required though. Just a good idea.

#### **Look at the promise:**

**15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.**

Alright we've got to slow down here just a second. Two theological issues we need to deal with before we can apply this part of the passage. I've seen firsthand how getting these two things wrong can cause much harm and damage. So let's chat:

#### **1. Sickness and sin are connected.**

Notice what James says in v15 - He'll be healed and if he's committed sins he'll be forgiven. Now, let me explain...

**All sickness is a result of sin.** Here's what I mean by that - because of the sin of Adam and Eve - sin entered the world and everything started to break down. And one of the avenues of this breaking down because of sin is our physical bodies. So all sickness can be linked back generically to the reality of sin and the way it breaks everything in our world.

But the Bible also gives a category for not just sin generically or universally causing sickness, but also sin specifically causing sickness. *The Bible gives this category where we can be physically sick because of unconfessed sin in our lives.*

**1 Cor 11:29-30 - 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.**

So there are folks in the church at Corinth who are sinning and taking communion improperly while they're fighting with each other, and Paul says because of that here's what's going to happen: **30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.**

Their unconfessed and unrepented sin led to physical sickness.

**Now, not always** - sin can directly cause sickness, but not all sickness comes directly from sin. In John 9, Jesus has an interaction with a man who is born blind, and the religious leaders are like - "Hey Jesus, is this man blind cause he sinned

or his parents sinned?" And Jesus says this, **John 9:3 - Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."**

So all sickness comes from sin universally, some sickness comes from sin explicitly, BUT not all sickness is a direct result of sin.

So we shouldn't be "sin hunters" anytime someone is sick. Hey, you got the flu? You been lying or something?? That's unhelpful and unbiblical.

Not all sickness comes from sin in our lives, but sometimes it does. And I think this is important to spend this time talking about because... **This is a category the Bible has that we do not have.**

And that is because we live in a world that tries to continually separate the physical/material world and the spiritual world. So we fall into the trap of believing that I am body, mind, and soul. But they don't really interconnect.

I've got my spiritual part and my physical part and my mental part. All disconnected. But they're not - there's overlap and interplay.

***I think this comes out most clearly in mental health.***

**Depression.** I grew up in a church tradition where if you struggled with depression, it was 100% spiritual. You just needed to confess sin more, pray more, have more faith. Now in response, many in my generation have swung the opposite way - where we can be tempted to think depression is just physical - only a result of chemical imbalances in the brain.

The Bible gives a category for both. Sin universally affects our chemical wiring and sin specifically affects our hearts and minds before the Lord. It's all interconnected - body, mind, and soul.

This is why, when folks come to me to talk about their depression, I don't just ask physical questions. I ask about if they've gotten checked out by a licensed physician who can look at all the neurological imbalances and all that. I also ask about their sleeping, their diet, those types of things. But I also ask about any unconfessed sin or spiritual rebellion in their lives. How they're doing with spiritual practices.

**Because it's all interconnected.**

So James says - when someone is sick, call the elders, anoint them with oil, pray for healing. And while you're getting this prayer for your physical sickness, make sure there's not some sin behind this as well. Get that confessed and prayed for and forgiven as well.

## **2. We believe God still heals people today.**

I want to make something abundantly clear - at Citizens Church we believe in a God who still heals today. We believe in a God who wants to heal. And so we pray in faith when folks are sick, physically hurt and in torment, suffering in the body - we pray for healing.

And we believe in faith God will heal. But here's what you have to understand - that healing may not come how we want or when we want.

- Sometimes God heals instantly. At the moment of prayer - it's gone.
- Sometimes God heals overtime - through the prayers of His people and His kindness through modern medicine and good doctors, and PAs, and nurses.

- Sometimes God heals at the end when we face eternity. We believe that the resurrection is real and one day, either when we die or Jesus returns our weary and sick bodies will be resurrected into perfection and we will no longer need medicine, surgeries, ibuprofen, shots - we will experience full health and restoration.

**We trust His hand and His timing in all of it.**

And I want to make sure you hear me on this → Some of you have been lied to. You've prayed for healing and someone has had the audacity to say you weren't healed because you didn't have enough faith. And it's extremely hurtful and harmful. And you need to hear me - **that's just not true.**

First, it's not congruent with the text. Who prays in faith here in James 5? The elders. So if you weren't healed because of a lack of faith based on what James says it wouldn't be a you problem, it'd be actually a faith problem with the elder praying.

But second, that's not how God works. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul pleads with the Lord over and over again to take something away from him and God keeps saying no. Not because Paul lacks faith, but because God says → I want you and the world to see that it's my power, not yours. I'm sufficient in the weakness. And so in my sovereign plan, you've got to keep walking through it because this is how I'll get the glory in your life.

And so we in those moments we say, even through tears - "Ok Lord, your will be done."

**Is anyone sick? Get the elders, check for any unconfessed sin, and let's pray.**

Last 2, we'll speed up.

**16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.**

**Question #4 - Is Anyone in Sin? Confess your sins and pray.**

Is anyone in sin? Is anyone rebelling against God? Acting as they shouldn't or not acting as they should? Grab another believer, confess those sins to them, and pray for one another.

Confession is an act commanded in the Bible where we bring our sins out into the open. We lay down before God and before other believers. We learn to name it and acknowledge it - This is wrong. This was wrong in my heart, this was wrong in my life. I have disobeyed God.

James says we do that directed towards God and towards other believers. And this is part of what we try to practice on a regular basis at Community Group. Part of our group time we call "engage the heart". And this is a time not where we share about how annoying our boss is, or what we ate for breakfast, or the funny thing our kid did that week that made us smile.

It's a chance on an almost weekly basis to practice James 5:16 - we confess our sins to one another, pray for one another, and experience healing. This should be happening in your life on a regular basis - so if you're not in a CG, get in a CG. If you are in a CG, check your posture towards this time and how you engage with it.

**Hop over 17+18 we'll come back, go to v19:**

**19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.**

**Question #5 - Is Anyone Wandering? Pray and bring them back.**

Last category - is anyone wandering? Is anyone wandering from the truth, the faith, Jesus? Is anyone throwing in the towel on following Jesus? James turns our eyes outward.

***There's lots of ways someone can wander:***

**Theologically** - start compromising on the gospel. Start compromising on Jesus being the only way of salvation. Start compromising on the Bible being true and authoritative. Start drifting from the truth. Be a law unto themselves.

**Morally** - start compromising on ethics. "I know the Bible says this...but..." Justification for sin. Justification for unrighteousness. Just start to compromise a little bit here and there. Start to wander.

**Relationally** - I've seen this one a lot in ministry. Folks aren't moving on from Jesus, aren't running away morally - just start to sort of slow fade out of view. Stop showing up to things, stop reaching out, stop being invested in the community. Little bit by little bit. Isolation then kills them, but they are never worried about that at first, just start to slowly get disconnected until they're nowhere to be found.

**James says – Does that sound like someone you know?**

What does he say to do?? Call the elders, call your CG Leader, make sure they check in on them? Talk about it with all your other group members? Complain and whine and gossip about how they're not following Jesus like you?

NO! James says → **PRAY, and then GO GET THEM.** Go call them back. Go get them from their wandering. Pursue them. Chase them down. Address the sin, address the failure, address the wandering.

Love them enough to have the hard conversation:

- Hey, I'm worried you haven't been coming to CG for like 2 months. What's up? Everything ok?
- Hey, I noticed you've started down this path again towards this vice or sin issue. What's up? Everything ok?

Listen → God keeps His people. Perseverance of the saints. We believe God keeps those who are truly His by the power of the Holy Spirit. But one of the most powerful tools He uses to keep His sheep is His other sheep! You have the responsibility to care for those who have wandered. To fight for each other's spiritual health and to help keep each other chasing after Jesus.

**Encouragement - v17+18**

Let me end with some encouragement. James' invitation really in all these situations - suffering, cheerfulness, sickness, sin, wandering - his invitation is some form of prayer. Pray. It's in every verse from 13-18, and implied heavily in 19-20.

And I love that he pauses right in the middle of all of this with these 2 verses. Because part of what I think can happen is we can get discouraged in our prayers - do they matter? Does it do any good? And look at what he says:



**16 (cont.) The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.**

For those of us who would doubt our prayers matter, doubt our prayers can be effective - look at Elijah. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours - meaning he was human. He was flawed. He was full of sin and disbelief. He was depressed. He was scared.

And yet Elijah was also saved and set apart by God. He was also declared righteous through faith. And he prayed fervently, non stop, and it didn't rain for 3 years, and then he prayed some more and it rained. **And he's like us!!**

So James wants us to look at Elijah and go:

- I can pray. I'm human like Elijah, and yet Elijah's prayer led to miraculous things.
- I can pray. Because the prayers of a righteous person are powerful. And even though I'm a sinner, I'm declared righteous through faith in Christ Jesus.

So I'm human. I'm flawed. But I'm saved and forgiven and declared righteous through Jesus - so my prayers can be powerful prayers. They do matter. They can effect change.

Why? Because the power of prayer is not in the person praying, the faith they pray with, the oil they anoint with, the words they speak...

**The power of prayer comes in the God the prayers are offered to.**

Our God is powerful, so when we trust in Him, seek His will, seek His face - our prayers will also be powerful. So in all of these situations and circumstances...we pray.

### Immediate Application

Church James 1:22 compels us - **22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

Here's what I want to do. I think this is a fitting way to close this particular passage, this book and this series. **We're going to have some immediate response.** James gives us the blueprint.

So I want to give us space, in just a second the band is going to come back up, they're going to lead us in a few songs. I want to give you space to respond based on where you're at.

- **If you're suffering,** I would invite you to pray. You can pray alone. You can grab someone from your CG and pray. We'll have prayer volunteers in the back of the sanctuary, they can pray with you as well.
- **If you're cheerful,** we're going to have some songs - I invite you to sing. Sing boldly. Sing confidently. Sing with joy in your heart and praise towards God. Not in a half-hearted way, go for it. Give him thanks through your singing for all the reasons you have to rejoice right now.
- **If you're sick,** I'm going to be down front over here on the side of the stage. Come pray with us. Let us pray for you and ask the Lord for healing. Can be something temporary, something chronic. Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual - let us pray for your healing.
- **If you're in sin or feel like your soul wants to wander -** grab someone in your CG, your spouse, and confess and let them pray for you. Bring that into the light, confess it, let them pray - receiving healing from the Lord.

- **If you're not a Christian,** never first confessed your sins to Christ and received the good news of the Gospel - go to the back, grab a prayer team leader, come talk to me down front, let's talk about what it means to follow Jesus and pray.
- **If you know someone who is wandering (theologically, morally, relationally) -** and you've been worried about them, talking about them, but haven't talked to them. Use this time to pray and make a plan for this week to address that with them and have the conversation you need to have in love.

So let's get to work. I'll pray. Band's going to come up. Let's respond appropriately. I'll come up later to lead us into communion. **Pray.**