

Good to be with you for another week of James. I don't know about you but this is a tough book we're winding down. Over the years, we have worked through James and I want to remind you of the tough topics:

- How to live our lives as servants rather than demanding to be served.
- We talked about considering our trials as joys.
- Not just hearing the Word but doing the Word.
- Not being judgmental but extending mercy.
- Walking in works that reveal faith.
- Being doers of the Word and not hearers only.
- Watching our mouths.
- Pursuing true wisdom rather than false wisdom.
- Pursuing godliness not worldliness.
- Learning to walk in humility.
- Seeing money rightly.
- Last week I spoke on the importance of walking in patience.

As we've seen these topics we realize that you don't have to know Greek & Hebrew in order to see these topics for what they are and apply them. My guess is that when we read these we've said, "Yes, Lord. I see it. I'm going to do this. I want this for my life." Of course, this is easier said than done.

What James, as he's ending the letter, is trying to draw our attention to is he's trying to give insight into maturing our relationship with Christ in a way that truly strengthens our obedience.

I've told you from the beginning that James is a tough book. It's a tough book because no matter how long you've been following Christ and no matter how mature you are, James is going to put you in your place, he's going to boop your snoot. If you live to be 120, you will read passages in James and feel like you have a million miles to go in your obedience to Christ.

That's why it's important to remember this series is about growing in progress, not perfection.

I think James wants to **help his readers know that a strong communion with God actually will empower obedience in a way your will is simply not going to bring about.**

There is a lot here but there's four ways James teaches strong communion with God in this text.

1. **THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER AND PRAISE.**

Look at v.13, Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

As you hear this passage you might think, "*here we go, pray and sing...got it*". Yes, that's in this text, but I want us to give consideration to how we think about prayer and praise, because I think all of us know about prayer and praise. I don't think I'm going to say, "*Hey, we should be praying,*" and blow anyone's mind here this morning.

What is it that needs to change in us so we act in it? I think honestly **the thing we miss most often is not the invitation to pray and praise but the invitation to commune with the living God and to boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence.**

Prayer is not just an obligation. It's a delight and a gift for the people of God to commune with their adopting, loving, merciful Father. We see in v.13, "Are you suffering? Go to him. Are you cheerful? Sing praises about him. Are you sick? Gather with others, particularly the elders, and go to him."

Commune with the living God. Have a relationship with him.

Listen to me. Somewhere along the way, bad teaching crept in and said that because you have moral principles and attend a church, you're a Christian...Do not mistake this for biblical Christianity. You've been called to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That and that alone is Christianity. Any other kind of moral construct might look sweet, but it ends in hell.

So how should we think about prayer? I've got **4 things about prayer** I find helpful that I borrowed from D.A. Carson.

First, I think *prayer needs to be planned*. Some of you are like, "Well, that just doesn't seem very natural and organic." I can tell you this. I plan dates with my wife. There is not a human being on earth I love more than Stephanie Russell. My wife is going to be with me to the end, and I plan dates, and in that planning, she has never felt robbed of my love for her. If I went around and asked everyone in this room how their prayer life is going...there is a number of you that would respond with something like, "well, it could be better" ...which is our polite Christian way of saying..." I don't pray like I should."

Plan prayer is a good thing. You know this. We talked about time last week...Long days and fast years...it will get away from you if you aren't intentional. *If I had to guess, there are a lot of you who are going to work out this week, right? You are. You have planned for it. Maybe you're getting on the treadmill, maybe you're pulling out that old VHS of Richard Simmons, Sweating To The Oldies...that's cool...you do you.*

All I know, is that unless you actually go, "When am I going to do that?" chances are you're not going to do that because there are a thousand things competing for your time.

Plan prayer.

Second, *seek out people to pray with*. This is important. Pray with others, learn from them, grow in confidence as others agree with you in prayer.

The only way to get more comfortable with it is by hearing others and by doing it

-Every Friday there are a group of people at this church to pray from 6-6:30a.m.

-Maybe you're like me and are not a morning person but can do late. Let me know, we'll start a prayer meeting at 11:30p.m...*we'll call ourselves the NIGHT HAWKS, it'll be great!*

-If you're not in a Small Group, take that connection card in front of you and mark that you want more info. Your Small Groups family will pray with & for you.

-Westwood members, call your Deacon and let them know what prayer request you have. They'll pray right there on the phone with you...[you can sit at home in your pajamas!](#)

Seek out people to pray with...

Third, [develop a system for your prayer lists](#). If I lost you at *system*, you're not Type A at all... I know when I say *system*, there are certain ears that perk up and other people just make a hissing noise and black out. In the end here, I'm talking something that can be as simple as what I do.

My system is very basic and it's just the "notes" app on my phone. I meet with guys on a regular basis and we give request which I write down. When I see that request answered, I don't delete it, I mark a line through it. Over the past year I can look at my notes and they tell me two things, the first is what my people need in prayer. The second is a lineage of faithfulness where I can see how God has responded to the cries of his people.

If creating some type of system feels too stuffy and all that for you, I would ask if planning a vacation with your family feels too stuffy and you just jump in the car and see where the road takes you? No... We're just talking about discipline that should lead to an empowered maturity.

Fourth, [Pray through Scripture as much as possible](#).. Here's what Donald Whitney says on prayer. "I have enough confidence in the Word and the Spirit of God to believe that if people will pray using Scripture, in the long run their prayers will be far more biblical than if they just make up their own prayers. Why is that? We tend to say the same old things about the same old things. And without Scripture to shape our prayers, we are far more likely to pray in unbiblical ways than if we pray the thoughts that occur to us as we read Scripture."

I love this quote because he's tying our prayers to the Word of God, so you don't necessarily have to separate those two things out. As you're reading the Word of God and come across a sentence and pray that for your child. You might see something about the character of God that hits my heart in a way that drives you to praise Him.

We want to tie our prayers as best as we can back to the Word of God. I'll end with a quote from Martin Lloyd Jones "Of all the blessings of Christian salvation none is greater than this, that we have access to God in prayer." Let's make sure we're being faithful to this task.

Moving on in v.13

Singing. "Let him sing praise." So, why when we're joyful should we sing praise to God?

The Lord is inviting you into something deeper. Two quick things on singing praises to God.

1. First, [singing digs deep roots](#). In Colossians 3:16, the Bible says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Singing digs deep roots. C. J. Mahaney calls singing and worship songs "take-home theology".

I love hearing children from this church sing songs about Christ. I was sent a video this week from a little girl who was at home just singing a couple different VBS songs we just had this week. I listened to it half a dozen times because while she might not know it, she's joyfully singing doctrine. When you sing these songs, you are singing biblical theology. Surprise! "I'm not a theologian." Really? Why don't you just sing this song for me real quick?

All of a sudden, you're in the deep. It's "take-home theology". We sing together, and it's accessible and easy. What a gift that is for adults and children.

2. **It builds others up.** Like some of you I've been to church conferences where we're singing this fantastic song and the guy backs off the mic and you just hear a flood of people lifting their voices. There is something soul-stirring about the voices of many coming together.

That's the importance of prayer and praise in the Christian life. I'll go much quicker through my other points so let's look at the second.

2. **ESTABLISHED LEADERSHIP.**

Look at v.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.**

So in addition to communing with God through prayer and the singing of praise,,, you also have this, "Hey, are you sick? Then call the elders together. They're going to anoint you with oil," which in the NT, oil was often used for medicinal purposes and while there's no magic in the oil, it also stood as a visible pictures of God's healing power. **I know all you essential oil users are like, "That's right. Tell'em, Pastor."**

What you have happening is a community that is locked into one another and pursuing him together. We see another argument for belonging to a local church is that in moments of suffering and sickness, we pull together. We walk together. We commune with God together. In this text, he says, **"Call the elders."** So if you don't belong to a local congregation. Who are the elders? Do you randomly pick elders from a bunch of different churches and have them come?"

No, the community in which you live, you call the elders together and then you pray together. The Bible tells us in other places you weep together and then you rejoice together. This is a call to community. God has ordained care and established help for you in the church. The presence of Elders in the body of Christ is a sure sign of God's love for you.

3. **DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION.**

Look there in verse 15. We also see **the ongoing discipline of confession and repentance.** **"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. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."**

I think one of the big mistakes we make is isolating our lives from the Christian community.

What I mean by that is you have your church life, you have your work life, your home life... Really, our cry as Christians is "Christ who is our life". He is my life.

From the first second as a pastor of this church, I wanted to surround myself with other men and women and keep us before the Lord in accountability. Let us not ever pretend to be more than we are.

Why? Because we're all just one bad decision away from blowing up our lives.

Maybe it's an addiction to pornography. Maybe it's an eating disorder. Maybe you're cutting. Maybe you're really struggling with depression. I don't know what it is. Maybe you're actually flirting or having an affair with somebody at work. I don't know.

There could be a billion things going on across the board, but I'm telling you that the only way to kill darkness is to drag it into the light. You will not win on your own. Right now, you can say, "*Surely, I will*". The reality is you have a kind of false notion of your own strength.

"If I ever were to tell my spouse that I look at pornography, he or she would just never forgive me. I can beat this." Okay. When did you start looking at pornography? "Oh, gosh. I don't know. I was about 13." "You're 37. Do you realize how dense you sound right now?"

I love you, but that's stupid. You're literally going, "I've been working at it for 20-something years and gotten nowhere, but I have it this time." Look. You don't have it. Some of you are going to destroy your marriage before you'll listen. Others of you are going to have to come to utter ruin because if God loves you, he will expose you.

Why not just step into the light rather than just be dragged into it? Come up and talk to one of us when the service is over. Quit hanging onto it. You don't have to hide this area of your life from those you love and care about most. I know it's terrifying but I know you're exhausted from hiding. Step into the light.

Your walk with God is a community project. We have to reject this view of Christianity where we are isolated from other believers. You were not hardwired to attempt to do this by yourselves.

Finally, our fourth point is **the illustration of Elijah**. Look there in 16. **"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."**

Elijah's street cred is legit. He walks in a power, the things he accomplished is amazing.

The temptation is, to say, God answered Elijah...well I'm no Elijah. Doesn't seem to comforting until you pay attention to the words in v.16 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. Underline that! I would invite you to study more on Elijah.

There were moments where Elijah had great courage and there's other moments when this man is in a suicidal depression telling God if he really loved him God would take his life. Now I love the range of Elijah because I can find me in there...somewhere between great courageous faith and suicidal depression, we all happen to live.

This man is like us. Understand, the power in Elijah's life was not Elijah. The power in Elijah's life was God and when I come to God in faith, amazing things will happen.

God treats all of his children the same because all of our lives depict the struggle of faith and all of our lives are evidence for the need of the grace of God.

CLOSING

I would ask you this morning, do you pray...do you really pray? Do you live that radical life where you believe there is that God of love, justice, power, and grace who is near his people and will never turn a deaf ear to their cries?

Are you taking advantage of the resources he has placed in your life? Prayer, signing, Pastoral care, accountability in one another that we would live in the light and not cower in the darkness...Are you actively seeking the help God has established for you in His church.

This certainly isn't an exhaustive list of what God has given us to strengthen our communion with him but I'd say it's a good place to get to work, knowing that we have not mastered all of these areas as of yet.

Your walk with God is a community project, your God has come to make community with you and has placed you in the community of his church so that you would seek and find the help that only He can give.

Father, I thank you for these men and women and again such a beautiful text, maybe a hard text. I want to pray for those in this room who maybe have no relationship with you, for those for whom Christianity is about a code, not about a relationship. I pray for repentance and salvation for that man or woman in this place.

I pray that you might grow us in our prayerfulness and in the discipline needed to patiently wait for your will to be done. I pray that we would be a congregation marked by singing theology that celebrates our union with you.

I pray this week would be an epic ministry week in the life of this church where we love and walk alongside those who are eager to confess and come into the light.

Father, where there are stubborn hearts, I pray that in your love, you would just expose them this week, that you would just tear the roof off of their secret and let it be seen by all for the good of their souls. We love you. It's in Jesus' name I pray, amen.