

James: Faith That Works – Part 12

Dependent on God, Connected to One Another – James 5:13-20

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – March 29, 2026

Introduction

- This morning is the final installment of our series, which we have called “Faith That Works.” I trust that it has been helpful for your spiritual growth and theological understanding. In this short and powerful letter, James has challenged how we respond to trials. He has exposed how we deal with temptation and pressed into how we treat people, how we use our words, how we make plans, how we handle money, and how we endure suffering. He has covered a lot of ground.
- Over and over again, he has confronted the gap between what we say we believe and how we actually live. He has shown us that real faith, saving faith, is not just something we claim we have; it’s something that shows up in how we live. It shows up in endurance, in obedience, in humility, and in action. *Faith that works . . . works in faith.*
- As James comes to the end of his letter, he gives us a picture. A picture of a church in real life. A church where people are hurting, and others are rejoicing, where some are physically weak, and others are weighed down by sin, where some are quietly struggling, and some are beginning to drift away from the truth.
- In other words, a church that looks a lot like ours. And instead of giving us a different solution for each situation, James shows us what a healthy church looks like. It is a church where people turn to God and to each other. The suffering person doesn’t isolate; they pray. The sick person doesn’t hide; they call others in. The sinner doesn’t pretend; they confess. And the church doesn’t ignore the wandering; it goes after them.
- *This passage is a call for dependence on God and connection with one another.* Because everything James has been calling us to in this letter, every command, every correction, every challenge, was never meant to be lived out in our own strength or in isolation.
- *It was meant to drive us to God and draw us together.* Because faith that works is not just active, it is dependent. And it is not just personal, it is shared.
- So as James closes his letter, he shows us what real faith looks like when it is fully lived out: *a life that leans on God and a church that refuses to let each other walk alone.* A mature and healthy church becomes a praying, confessing, restoring community in the power of His Spirit with the urgency and expectation of the Lord’s return.
- So listen to how he brings it all together as we turn to James 5:13-20 (page 1045), before we walk through the passage together.

James 5:13-20 NIV

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Faith Responds to Every Situation with Prayer

James 5:13 NIV

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

- James begins by placing a mirror in front of us. “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.” These are not only questions; they are categories of life. Are you suffering? Are you under pressure? Are you overwhelmed? Then pray. Don’t panic, don’t control, don’t withdraw, pray.
- Then he addresses another category. Are you joyful? Are things going well? Then praise. And here is the truth: one of the clearest indicators of spiritual maturity is that *you take everything in life to God*. Not just the hard things, but the good things too. This is abiding. His words in us, and our words in Him. His life in us, and our life in Him (see John 15). He is the God who walks with us in all seasons of our lives and through all things of our lives (see Ps 23).
- This way of living is all over the Bible. **Philippians 4:6**, “**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**” Every situation. And in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** says, “**Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.**” That is the life James is describing.
- James is showing us that prayer is not reserved for emergencies, and praise is not reserved for Sundays; both are meant to be the ongoing rhythm of the dance of a life that depends on God. Because suffering tempts us toward anxiety and control, while joy tempts us toward independence and forgetfulness. And both, if we are not careful, can pull us away from Him.
- But faith responds differently. Faith brings everything, both pain and pleasure, back to God. There is no category of life that is meant to be lived apart from Him. Prayer was never meant to be like a fire extinguisher, where we break the glass when things are out of control. Prayer is meant to be a life preserver, where it sustains us, supports us, and connects us to and with and in God and to and with each other.

Faith Invites the Church into the Struggle

James 5:14-15 NIV

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

- James does not stop with personal prayer. He moves us into something bigger, something communal, something even more powerful. “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church . . .” Notice what he does not say. He does not say, “Handle it on your own.” He does not say, “Figure it out privately.” He says, call the church. Call your community, call your leaders.

- The direction is toward others, not away from them. The person who is suffering is not to draw away, but to reach out. We are not to *isolate*; we are to *invite*. And that requires humility. It requires admitting weakness, opening your life, and believing that God works not only directly, but through His people as well.
- And notice who they call, the elders of the church. This is intentional. James is pointing us to spiritual leadership and spiritual community. Because God has designed His church to be a place where burdens are shared, where suffering is not carried alone, and where people are brought before Him together. **Galatians 6:2 says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”** This is what that looks like. A believing community bringing a broken person to God. You need the church, and the church needs you.
- And yet, this is where many of us struggle. We don’t want to bother people. We don’t want to seem needy. We don’t want others to see us at our weakest or at our worst. So instead of calling for help, we carry on, on our own. Instead of inviting, we isolate. But what we often call strength is actually pride masquerading as strength.
- This is the opposite of the kind of faith James is describing. Think about someone in the hospital who refuses to tell anyone because they “don’t want to be a burden.” That may sound humble, but it cuts them off from the very means of grace God has provided. Because God has not only given us Himself, He has also given us each other.
- So the elders come, they pray, they anoint with oil in the name of the Lord, and please clearly understand who is working. “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the *Lord* will raise them up.” Not the oil. Not the elders. Not the words. *The Lord*.
- The power is not in the process or the prayer; it is in God who uses the process and the prayer as His means for His glory. Psalm 103:2-3 reminds us, **“Praise the Lord . . . who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.”** God is the one who heals. Sometimes, He heals physically. Sometimes, He sustains. Sometimes, He brings ultimate healing in eternity. But He responds. That is the point.
- Then James adds something important: “If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.” Not all sickness is caused by sin, sometimes yes, and sometimes absolutely not (see John 5:1-14; 9:1-5). We have to recognize we are integrated people, body and soul, and they can affect each other.
- Sometimes what needs healing is deeper than just a physical body; there are also sicknesses of the soul that must be healed. Psalm 32:3-5 reminds us, **“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away . . . Then I acknowledged my sin to you . . . and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”**
- There is a connection between spiritual honesty and spiritual health, and sometimes physical health. God is not ultimately concerned with restoring the body; He is concerned with restoring the whole person.
- This is what faith looks like in real life. It does not suffer in silence. It does not pretend strength. It calls. It invites. It leans on God . . . and it leans on the people of God. Because a believing community brings broken people to God, not alone, but together. This is one way faith works. Another way is that faith walks in honest confession and restoration.

Faith Walks in Honest Confession and Restoration

James 5:16-18 NIV

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

- James now takes us one step further and tells us to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” This is where the church becomes real. Not polished. Not pretending. Real. Because confession requires honesty. And honesty at times requires humility. It brings what is hidden into the light. And most of us resist that. We would rather manage our image than expose our need. But James connects confession to healing.
- Notice what James does not say. He does not say, “Confess privately,” though that is true (1 John 1:9). He says, confess to each other. Why? Because sin isolates, but confession elevates. Sin hides, but confession brings it into the light. And healing happens through the people of God.
- We confess our sins to God for forgiveness, and we confess our sins to each other for healing. We often get caught in the trap of repeating the same sins, over and over and over again, because the sickness of our soul has not been healed, so we continue in the same pattern of sin. *You cannot be healed from what you are unwilling to expose.* What stays hidden continues to grow.
- And notice the connection, confess and pray. This is not careless sharing. This is wise, relational, Spirit-led care. A community that listens, prays, and restores. Confession is not meant to shame; it is meant to heal. When done rightly, it deepens trust and brings freedom. When avoided, it leaves people stuck and alone. We do the confessing, people do the praying, and God does the healing.
- And then James says, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Not a perfect person, but a righteous one. Someone whose sins are forgiven. Someone walking honestly with God. The power of prayer is not rooted in perfection; it is rooted in relationship.
- To make sure we don’t disqualify ourselves, James gives us Elijah. “Elijah was a human being, even as we are.” In other words, he’s just like you. Same struggles. Same weaknesses. And yet he prayed, and God responded.
- But don’t miss this, Elijah’s prayers were not self-centered. They were tied to God’s purposes. His prayers were part of calling people back to God and restoring what was broken. That is what powerful prayer does. It aligns with what God is doing.
- And his prayers were not answered instantly. He prayed for drought, and it came over time. He prayed for rain, and he had to wait. Again and again, sending his servant, until finally a small cloud appeared. That means even powerful prayer requires persistence. It requires patience. It requires trust in the gap between asking and answering.
- James is not giving us a formula; he is giving us a pathway and a posture. A righteous person. Dependent on God. Praying in alignment with His will. Persisting over time. That kind of prayer is powerful, not because of us, but because of Him.
- The stunning truth is that the same God who heard Elijah hears you. And the same kind of prayer is available to you.
- This is what faith looks like in real life. It does not hide, it confesses. It does not isolate, it invites prayer. It does not pretend, it walks in the light. And as it does, God heals, restores, and strengthens His people.
- This leads us to the final point of the passage. Because faith not only responds in prayer, invites others in, and walks in confession, it also refuses to let people drift away. Faith pursues.

Faith Pursues the Wandering and Brings Them Back

James 5:19-20 NIV

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

- James closes his letter with a picture that is both sobering and hopeful. “If one of you should wander from the truth. . . .” That means this is real. This happens. People drift. People wander. Not outsiders, but “one of you.” Someone in the community. Someone who once walked in the truth.
- Faith does not ignore that. Faith does not shrug its shoulders. Faith does not say, “That’s their choice.” Faith moves toward the wandering. It pursues. Because wandering is dangerous. James does not soften it; he says this path leads to death. Not just difficulty. Not just struggle. Death. *Sin always takes us further than we think, keeps us longer than we expect, and costs more than we want to pay.*
- But notice the hope, “and someone should bring that person back.” Someone, not necessarily a pastor, not just a leader, *someone*. This is the calling of the *whole church*. We are meant to watch over one another. To care enough to move toward each other when we drift.
- This is not a harsh confrontation; it is a loving pursuit. **Galatians 6:1 says, “If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”** Gently, humbly, and carefully. Not from a place of superiority, but from a place of shared weakness and grace.
- This is not always easy. It is much easier to stay silent. Easier to avoid awkward conversations. Easier to say nothing and hope it works itself out. But love does not do that. Love speaks, love moves, and love pursues. Because love understands what is at stake.
- And then James gives us one of the most powerful promises in this letter: “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” Think about that. God uses ordinary people, in ordinary conversations, to bring someone back from destruction. To be part of someone’s restoration.
- This is not about being the Savior. This is about being used by the Savior. It is God who saves. It is God who restores. But He uses His people as the means. Just like prayer. Just like confession. Just like care.
- And don’t miss how this ties everything together. Faith responds to life with prayer. Faith invites others into the struggle. Faith walks in honest confession. And faith refuses to let people walk away. It pursues.
- This is what a healthy church looks like. Not perfect people, *but a pursuing people*. A praying people. A confessing people. A restoring people.
- Because at the center of all of this is the gospel. We pursue because we have been pursued. **Luke 19:10 says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** Jesus did not wait for us to find our way back; He came after us.
- And now, by His grace, we do the same.

Conclusion

- Here’s where this passage turns and looks right at us. Because it’s one thing to talk about those who are “wandering,” and it’s another thing to ask, “Am I the one who has wandered?” Some of you are not pursuing someone else; you’re the one drifting. Maybe slowly. Maybe quietly. Maybe no one else even knows. But if you’re honest, you’re not where you once were.

- Your heart has cooled. Your prayer life has thinned. Sin has settled in, and you've learned how to manage it instead of bringing it into the light. James would say to you, not with condemnation, but with urgency, come back.
- This is not clean yourself up and then come back. Not fix everything and then return. Come back now. *Because the same God who calls you out is the God who receives you in.* And this is where the gospel meets us. Because everything James has been calling us to—prayer, dependence, confession, restoration, pursuit—we do not do this to earn God's favor. We do this because in Jesus, we already have it.
- Jesus is the One who pursued us when we were wandering. Jesus is the One who bore our sin, not just to cover it, but to remove it. Jesus is the One who opens the way back, not through our effort, but through His finished work on the cross. So when James says, "turn a sinner from the error of their way . . . and cover over a multitude of sins," we know how that ultimately happens. Not by hiding sin, but by bringing it to the One who paid for it.
- So here is the invitation. If you have been wandering, come back. If you have been hiding, step into the light. If you have been carrying sin alone, confess it and be free. Turn to Him. Trust Him. Call on Him. Because faith that works is not perfect faith, it is returning faith, dependent on God and connected to His people. And the promise of the gospel is this: if you turn to Him, He will not turn you away.

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the "prayer" sign at the front of the sanctuary, and in the prayer room next to the offices. Also, you can send your prayer request to prayer@crosspointrockford.com

Questions for Growth Groups

1. James describes two common life situations, trouble and joy (5:13). Which one do you tend to handle without turning to God, and why?
2. The sermon said, "Prayer is not a fire extinguisher; it is a life preserver." How would your daily life look different if prayer became your first response instead of your last resort?
3. James calls the sick person to "call the elders" (5:14). What makes it difficult for you to invite others into your struggles? What fears or barriers do you experience?
4. Read James 5:16. Why do you think God connects confession to healing? What is the difference between confessing to God and confessing to another believer?
5. The sermon said, "You cannot be healed from what you are unwilling to expose." Where can you gain the courage or conviction to bring things into the light? Find someone you can talk to, confess to, and ask for prayer, the sooner the better, with the right person(s).
6. James uses Elijah as an example of powerful prayer (5:17-18). What encourages you about the fact that he was "a human being, even as we are"? How does this shape your view of prayer?
7. James ends by calling believers to pursue those who wander (5:19-20). Is there someone in your life you sense God may be prompting you to gently pursue? What would it look like to take a step toward them this week?