

Jas27 –Are You Praying? James 5:13-18

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “Are You Praying?” We’re really back in James. I told you last message was really a “set-up” message for this message. We’re going back to James 5, verses 13-18.

We paused last message to make that critically important point that a Christian’s lifestyle must be based, centered, around meeting God daily. I encourage you to watch or listen to that message again, it moved really fast and it is critical.

This message we continue to look at our desperate need to meet God in every circumstance, in every situation of life, the full spectrum of life, to meet him in prayer. The truth is that we as Christians, the majority of the church, need to learn in a much greater way how to meet God in every circumstance. How to experience his presence in every situation. Our desperate need to turn to him, to cling to him. There must be a constant turning to God in the Christian life. There must be a constant interaction, a two-way interaction, with God and the Christian life. There must be a constant dependence upon God in the Christian life. That is what defines the Christian life. Certainly going to church doesn’t define the Christian life. Repeating a thirty-second prayer sixty feet in the air at a stadium doesn’t define the Christian life, though it’s great if you did that.

What defines a Christian life is if we are constantly turning to God, if we are constantly interacting with God. If we show a constant dependence on God in our life, that’s what defines the Christian life. There must be this prayerful communion, this prayerful, experiential interaction with God in every circumstance and situation in life, the full spectrum of life.

Let me share with you a respected New Testament scholar.

D. Edmond Hiebert - says of this text:

James insists that Christian faith finds its center and power in a vital relationship with God through prayer in all the experiences of life. Through prayer the believer habitually lays hold of God’s power for victory amid all these diverse experiences. Prayer constitutes the very heart of a vital Christian faith.

Prayer constitutes the very heart of a vital Christian life. And so I have to ask you, are you praying? If prayer constitutes the very heart of a vital Christian life, then your answer to the question “Are you praying” is pretty serious. Is prayer at the very heart of your Christian faith?

Let's pray. *Lord we just love your Word because you are the Great Physician, your Word is the great scalpel. It's the short sword, the "in close" sword and it pierces going in and it heals coming out. It divides us physically, and more importantly it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. And we pray you would use it on us today, to drain the poison of the world, the poison of the flesh, the poison in our heart. Inspire us, convict us Lord. Exhort us to enter into a life that is vitally, powerfully in constant communion with you in every experience of life. Help us to see that point today. Give us the strength to commit to an all-in prayer relationship with you. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.*

James wants us to know the priority of prayer. James wants us to know the power of prayer in a Christian's life. James wants us to know that we have got to be praying. We have got to be in constant interaction with God. Day in, day out, situation in, situation out, decision in, decision out. How we react, how we respond in all circumstances. And so he begins with the full spectrum of life in James 5:13. He says:

James 5:13 (ESV)

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

Written as very direct, very poignant challenges. Is anyone suffering? Are you praying? Is anyone cheerful? Are you singing praise, which is a type of prayer? James uses the extremes of life's spectrum to get the point across that in every area, in every moment, in every station, in every circumstance in life there is an appropriate response with God. *With God.* Prayer in the difficult times. Praise in the good times. And you know those can be reversed, right? Ask Paul and Silas in prison. We should be singing praise in our suffering and ask James earlier he said ***let the rich man boast in his humiliation.*** And so even when there's good times we should be responding in prayer. More so, maybe.

The point is James is using the extremes to convey the full spectrum of life. And he is saying wherever you are at, are you rightly interacting with God? Is there something pressing in on you today? Are you praying? Are you overwhelmed by some circumstance today? Are you praying? And most of us, if we were honest, we would say "Well yeah, I prayed. But what I really need for God to do is this..."

No, what you really *need* is to be praying. That's what you really need.

I think the problem is how we define what it means to be praying. Listen carefully, please. This is a huge deal. Here's the problem. We are prone to say, "Yeah. I've prayed. I've asked God to fix it. In fact I've asked him over and over and over to fix it. In fact,

I've made it clear exactly how he should fix it, when he should fix it and why he should fix it. Yeah, I've prayed."

Really? Do you really think that is the correct definition of prayer? Demanding that God fix things in your life over and over again? God sent his Son to die in your place in order for you to have an experiential, intimate relationship with him for now and for eternity. Do you really think that Jesus Christ bore your sins on the cross, gave you his righteousness, so that you could have the ability to repeatedly ask God to fix everything? Do you think that's it? Because if you do, you think too highly of yourself, I say gently and cautiously. Jesus didn't die to enable you to demand that God fix everything in your life. Is there a chance that Jesus died for more of a relationship with you than your continual requests to make things like you want them? Yeah, there is a chance. And not only a chance, it's guaranteed.

Do you know what one of the most defining statements in a horizontal relationship is? In a great long time marriage or long time friendship one of the most defining statements is this – "We have been through so much together."

My son, the platoon unit that he was in combat with, the unit that he lost friends with, the unit that he wondered who or if someone was going to die every single day, the bond that he has with those men are like no other bond. Makes it difficult on his wife, even on his family. Because he has been through so much that when a relationship is in the fire and there's a commitment to cover each other and to take care of each other, that relationship is forged like steel.

That's how Jesus defines the marriage relationship. The word "cleave" in its greatest sense means "*to become one.*" That's why Jesus said "***What God put together let no man tear asunder.***" Because, here's the deal. If you go through the hardest, most difficult times with your spouse or in another relationship, that relationship will come out forged like steel, unbreakable.

Here's my point. Is there a chance that is the relationship Jesus Christ wants with you? Is there a chance that Jesus died to have more of a relationship with you than just being there to cover you and give you what you want? Is there a chance that he desires to have that forged like steel relationship with you that you go through whatever you go through you go through with him, and you come out stronger in him? There's not just a chance, it's guaranteed. Jesus wants you to know that he'll always be with you, no matter what. He will never leave you. He will never turn his back on you. He will never let you down. He wants you to know that with him that you will get through anything, *with him*. Not by

him fixing it, but by you being with him in it. That's what James is talking about. That's the kind of prayer he's talking about. That relationship doesn't come from you snapping at God, sending him a quick "tweet." "Hey, fix this pal. Hey, don't make me tell you again I need this fixed."

That doesn't work with your spouse and it certainly doesn't work with God. What Jesus wants is for you to say, "Jesus be here with me. Meet me here, Lord. The bullets are flying and I'm not sure what's coming at me. I need you with me. I need you to be here in the fire with me. I need you to walk with me. I need you to be my strength. I need you to be my peace. I need you to be my victory. What I need is you. I need you personally; I need you with me right now. That's what I need. I don't need your blessings, I need you. I need you Jesus. I need to have a real, tangible, experiential, transforming relationship in communion with you."

That's prayer. And that's what binds you together with Christ in every circumstance in your life. Not just difficulties and hardships, but of course the mountaintop experiences also. Which is why verse 13 says ***If you're in the Valley – PRAY if you're on the Mountaintop - SING PRAISE.*** In any case, in any situation your communing relationship with God is your relationship with God. The amount that you commune with him and walk with him through the circumstances of your life is the amount that you are a Christian. That's the truth. It's a good test. We must be in constant communion. The constant communion of prayer with God. Walking with him in every circumstance, in every situation. I know I keep saying it. I wish I could talk more about praying praise. I've done that in "The Fundamentals" series, so you can get that series and study about worshiping God's word.

I really want to take this verse to talk about something big. I just want to unpack this. I just want to rest on this. Here's why. I talk to so many people in difficult situations in life. Honestly, it's the majority of my week. Talking to people in rough, difficult overwhelming situations. Not because I am seeking them out, but because they think they have no other options, they have nothing left. They have to call the pastor. I get people coming to me and saying, "I really need you right now."

And that's good; I'm not saying it's bad. I want you to come to me. I really do. Here's my prayer for you. Here's my desire for you. Every time I meet someone who is in the fire, it's great when I sit with a Christian and seek God together with them and trust God together with them. It's a real blessing. But here's my desire. Are you meeting God in the midst of this trial? Are you meeting God in the midst of this circumstance? Are you sensing his presence in the midst of the fire that you're in? Are you sensing his grace sufficient for the need? All of my questions revolve around how are you and God doing in the midst of the trouble that you're in.

And what they say is, “Whatever. I need God to fix this.”

And I smile and say “I know you want God to fix it, *he knows* you want him to fix it. He heard the first hundred times you told him. He knows. But what if God wants something more? What if God wants something more than to fix the circumstance that you find yourself in? What if your relationship with God (listen carefully) is actually more important than the circumstance you’re in? What if what God wants to do in your relationship with him is actually of way more eternal value than him fixing your circumstance? What now?”

What if in your relationship with God is actually the fix to your problem? *What if inside your relationship with God is actually the fix to the problem?* Let me say this, which is one of my favorite “-ism’s.” God is not as interested in fixing your circumstances as he is in using your circumstances to fix *you*. And so every time we face a circumstance we’re like “I am on the wheel again. The potter’s coming with that cutting tool!”

You know that one where they touch it and the clay falls off. What if every circumstance you say, “God what do you want to do? What do you want to do to me? What do you want to do in me? What are you changing in me? How can I meet you in this circumstance in a way that is more valuable than you fixing this circumstance?”

What if you were to approach it that way? I tell you what; we’d be transformed into victorious, mature Christians. That’s exactly what would happen. Here’s what we generally do: “I’m leaving that church.”

I don’t know why it always comes down to that. So I just want to talk a little bit about why we have such a hard time building a right relationship with God in prayer. *It’s because of our natural tendency to address God out of our own understanding.* And to address God out of our own desires. If we go to God based on our own understanding and based on our own desires. If we go to God based on our own understanding and based on our own desires I can assure you that our relationship with God is stunted. Stunted! It stunts your growth. Every time you go to God based on your own understanding and your own desires you are not growing. You are not interacting. You’re not developing your relationship with God. It stunts it. It stops it. It impedes it. It prevents it.

Here’s what you need to know. The purpose of prayer is to not get your will done in heaven. The purpose of prayer is to get God’s will done on earth in your life. And so we approach prayer with “This is my prayer, heaven. Listen up and get aligned with it.”

And God is like, “I have enough grace for you.”

But here’s the purpose of prayer. “God, what I need to change is not my circumstances but my heart. What I need Lord is not my will, but your will. I need to know how to pray

in this circumstance because I don't know how to pray. Your ways are so much higher than mine. Your thoughts are so much higher than mine. I don't even know where to begin, Lord. All I know is that what I feel naturally and what I want naturally, it's not you. It's me. It's my flesh. And what the world is influencing me with is not you. It's the world. All I know is that if I come to you based on my own understanding and my own desires, then I am not lining myself up with your will. I'm not joining you in what you desire to do. I am not growing in relationship with you."

Step one. You cannot approach God based on your own understanding and your own desires, because they are almost always not God's. Instead, the purpose of prayer is to align our heart with God's, not his with ours, but ours with God's. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with God's. To get our will in alignment with God. So how do we do that? Number one is we know we don't do it naturally. We don't just come up with how we feel and take that to God because it's our flesh, or it's the world, or it's something else. There's only one way that I've found that is a sure fire, guaranteed way to align your prayers with the will of God. That way is by the Word of God. "God, what's your will?"

God spent 1,500 years and forty authors writing sixty-six letters to you so that you could know his will. You ought to read it because his will is in there. "I don't know what the Lord wants for me. I'm pretty sure he's telling me to leave my spouse and go marry the girl I met at the convenience store."

I'm pretty sure he's not. Pretty sure. "I'm pretty sure God's telling me to destroy that pastor in that church, because they wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do."

I'm pretty sure he's not. Someone is telling you that and it's a spiritual being, that's for sure. It just doesn't happen to be God.

How do you align your will with God's? How do you align your heart with God's? The Word. It's the Word. We have got to learn to pray according to God's Word. *We have to learn to pray according to God's Word.*

Three top spiritual disciplines for me personally. Top three spiritual disciplines,

#1) Meditating on God's Word.

#2) Praying according to God's Word.

#3) Worshiping in God's Word.

Meditating, praying, worshiping. We call these spiritual disciplines. A spiritual discipline is just something that you learn to do on a regular basis to stay healthy and grow. Just like you would exercise. It's to stay healthy and develop muscles. Spiritual disciplines. Pray according to God's Word. In my book, number two spiritual discipline is praying

according to God's Word. It's the most powerful way to interact with God and his living Word. And can I just tell you, interacting with God and his living Word lit alive by the presence of the Holy Spirit is the most powerful way for a Christian to be transformed? Period. God has given you the ability to be transformed into his image. We need to take him up on it. *We need to take him up on it.*

When it comes to prayer, we need to pray according to God's Word. I can't teach that here, but I can tell you where we have taught it and how you can learn it. So let me make it clear. You want to pray in accordance with God's will and you want your heart to be aligned with his heart, you use his Word.

You might say, "I don't know how."

That's okay. That's why we call this a teaching ministry. That's what we do here. We disciple people to be transformed into the image of Christ through their own personal relationship with him. I'm going to show you how, at least some ideas, how you can learn to pray according to God's Word.

How do you learn?

#1) Go to the Saturday morning prayer meeting. They pray the Word. They pray scripture.

#2) The message specifically about this is called, "Praying According to God's Word." It's in "The Fundamentals" series. You can get this on the calvarynuevo.org website, or wordbymail.com and it is on the phone app. If you have a smart phone, get the wordbymail phone app from your app store.

#3) I finally started my own praying scripture blog, for you. It's a hard thing for me to do because I stopped writing my devotions down because whenever I write I'm thinking about someone else that's going to read. And so I had to force myself to start writing again without thinking about others. And then I share my devotions with my family because they are really personal. And yesterday, with some technology encouragement from Hank, my son-in-law, I thought, okay, I'll do it. So there is a Pastor Dave scripture prayer blog out there now. There is a link on the Calvary Nuevo home page, to the praying scripture blog where I will pray scripture three or four times a week and I will do my best to not edit it. And if I do a real personal one, I just won't put it up there. But you should go there, because you can see me pray scripture. There will also be a link on the wordbymail.com page and there's a link on the wordbymail phone app under resources.

#4) Learn to use the "Daily Devotion Journal." Find it on the church website, the phone app, or walk back to the connection center and ask for one. Ask for help with discipleship.

#5) Get the book “Praying God’s Word” by Beth Moore. This is a great book. If you go back to the connection center, pay for it, we will order it, send it to your house and it will be there in two days.

I want you to do this. Because every time, one hundred percent of the time, when people do this their lives change. Their life with Christ changes. Their life here changes. They are transformed, just like God promised we would be. So my only job is to get you to do it.

Now, you may say, “What if I open the Bible and it says something about Judas or the Pharisees.” Don’t just open the Bible. But do choose a book, and pray the entire book a section at a time. But we do have three great resources to give you the scriptures to pray. Here’s the deal. You want to say “I don’t know God’s will. I need scriptures to pray so that I can align my heart with God and how to know his will.”

Or you may say, “I need peace. I need scriptures to pray to get peace in this circumstance. I need assurance. I need confidence. I need direction. I need forgiveness. I need to give forgiveness. I need to overcome a sin. Lust, or anger or any sin.”

You need scriptures that are tied to what you need God to do in your life. We have three ways to give you those scriptures.

#1) Scripture By Topic – calvarynuevo.org or the phone app both are under the resource tab. Find the Scripture By Topic guide, pick a topic, open it up and there are thirty scriptures to pray. And don’t just pray the scripture that’s there. Actually open your Bible, choose some scriptures, meditate on it, turn it into a prayer and soak in it. Soak in God’s Word. Meditate on it. Allow God to transform you by his Word.

#2) Ministry Resources – go to calvarynuevo.org under resources, under the ministry resources tab. What’s the circumstance, what’s the situation? It’s there. In there is every counseling resource we could acquire and chop up and put in there to use for teaching so that we’re not breaking any copyright laws. You go on there; it will blow your mind. Ministry resources at calvarynuevo.org.

#3) GotQuestions.org – this site rocks. Check it out. There’s a link on the home page of our church site to go there. Download their phone app. Blow your mind. Type in a word, any word that you’re feeling. Up comes a great counseling type article or theology type Bible study article, but in it will have eight or ten scriptures that you can learn to pray.

I know that was a lot of practical stuff. I don’t apologize. It’s a time to say, “Hey Christians, let’s start living like it.”

Here's what you need. You need to know how to find the right scriptures to learn to pray them, and then you need to learn to pray the right scriptures correctly. I've just given you resources to learn to do both. What scriptures and how to pray them. You have all you need for a transforming relationship.

That's what James is talking about in James 5:13.

James 5:13 (ESV)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

I want to give you the living and powerful Word of God, lit alive by the Holy Spirit – do that in the privacy of your own home and you will come out glowing like Moses! ***We all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory into his image by the Lord who is a Spirit.*** Do it man, behold the Lord. Behold his Word. Let it soak into your life and watch what happens. Listen, you need some discipleship in this. So go to the connection center. I know, that was an in depth practical application of the Word of God.

James continues his exhortation to pray in every situation by dealing with praying for the sick.

James 5:14-15 (ESV)

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.

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.

This is a tough couple of verses. Chuck Smith often said, "Let's not trade what we do know for what we don't know."

And so when we come to a section of the Bible where we say, well we don't know. Don't trade what you do know for that. In other words, hold on to what you know and let God hold on to what you don't know. Isn't that a great philosophy to live by? Hold on to what you know, let God hold on to what you don't know.

Here's what we do know. James is not writing a magic prescription for healing. He is not implying that if you follow these steps perfectly that your physical healing will be guaranteed, at least in this life. Instead, in the context of the verses, James is continuing to make the same case; the critical role of prayer. If you're suffering, pray. If you're

celebrating, pray. If you're sick, not only pray but have the elders of the church come and pray. Not only pray but anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord.

So the first thing that we know that we see here, at least in the original text, is we see that it's the one who is sick, it's their responsibility to call the elders. *It's their responsibility to call the elders.* James 5:14. If you're sick, it's your responsibility to call for the elders. That's the way it's written. Many of the scholars say that this implies the first step of faith. This implies the faith to believe that if you will do this that God will move. So you must take the step to call the elders. First step of faith, demonstrating belief in the power of prayer.

And then verse 14 says ***the elders of the church are to pray over him.*** Not because the elders of the church have the gift of healing, not necessarily. They might, they might for that moment (we call that a manifestation gift, the gift of healing) and they might have it for that moment, but that's not why it's written. Because elders are not required to have the gift of healing. They are required to be mature, stable, faithful prayer warriors. And so James is saying go to the guys who have proven that they are mature, faithful, stable prayer warriors. They will pray. And have them pray over you.

It's kind of neat, if you've ever seen us put our hands out and pray over people. When it says pray over them, the picture is laying hands on them or raising up hands over them, that's where we get that practice. That's what the elders will do.

And then it says anoint them with oil. We see this both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's funny to read scholars who are afraid to say that God still heals because they say that well, he's probably speaking of medicinal oil, so that means have the elders pray and you go to the doctor. Yeah, you should go to the doctor. And yes they did use oil as a medicinal ointment in the first century, although that's a bit of a push. This is speaking of oil as a symbol of the presence and power of God in the Person of the Holy Spirit. When we see the anointing of oil in the Old Testament, or the New Testament it's the symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person. That's what you really need. You need the Holy Spirit to anoint you, to engulf you, to overwhelm you. So we anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord.

Again, and this is really important. Watch this. Don't let your superstitious, magic potion imagination run away with you. When you get prayed for by the elders and anointed, it's not some kind of magic thing happening to you. It starts in your heart. The faith starts in your heart. The presence of God starts in your heart. And when the elders anoint you with oil it is not something happening from outside you into you, it's a demonstration – a

symbol – (listen carefully) it's a picture of what's happening inside of you. Just like baptism is. And so when an elder anoints you with oil it's a symbol that the Holy Spirit is already anointing you. It's a picture of the Holy Spirit immersing you in his presence and his power which is what you need if you're sick.

Finally it says this prayer is to be ***In the Name of the Lord***. In the name of the Lord means to be in accordance with his full character and nature, and in alignment with the person and will of Jesus Christ. And so when we pray, we pray with everything we've got and then we pray *Lord Jesus in accordance with your nature, in accordance with your name, in accordance with your purpose and your will may our prayers be answered*. In essence what we're saying is "Lord we know you already will, but we want you to know we are in agreement with you. Just lay aside anything that doesn't line up with your will and do all that which does line up with your will. That's what we want. Because we want our lives to line up with your will. Not your life align with our will."

Then James 5:15 says ***And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up . . .***

Now listen don't change what the Bible says just because you don't understand it. It says what it says. It's hard core. Here's the more hard core thing; in the Greek it's written as unconditional language. This is a fact. The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. Now, that's hard because we know by personal experience (most of us) that these types of prayers don't always physically heal the person we are praying for. Sometimes they do, but not always. So the great commentators take huge amounts of time and effort and pages, to try to explain two things that we don't seem to see go together. They don't seemingly go together.

#1) There is a prayer of faith. And there is a thing called a "definite article" that means *the* prayer of faith. A specific prayer of faith that absolutely will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up, and that's one of their ideas. Of course the other one is that if you are truly saved today, when we pray for you as elders that you'll be healed, you will be. Maybe not now, but you will be. And you will be completely healed. In fact you're going to get a glorified body. Make sure you're ready.

#2) And so we have a hard time saying, "Yes this is true." And in the full canon of scripture, consider Paul and Paul's disciples and many others who suffered in the service of the Lord who had true faith, in the full canon of scripture and in real life we realize there are those who have true, real, genuine faith that the Lord chooses not to physically heal. Why? If you were God you would know. That's the answer.

Here's what I can say about prayer and healing, please hear me. Complete faith trusts God completely. *Complete faith trusts God completely.* And so if someone says to you, "You don't have enough faith, brother," then you say, "Listen, I have enough faith to actually trust God. To trust his will, his timing, his purpose and his plan. That's how much faith I have."

Don't you ever let someone tell you that you don't have enough faith to be healed. Because demanding that God heal someone because you said so is zero faith in God and a ton of faith in yourself. And if you haven't heard yet, that's backwards.

Here's what we can walk in faith in. That God has reasons, God has timing, God has perfect purpose, God is sovereign in every situation and so we pray as he tells us and then we walk in faith and then we trust him in complete faith and then we look for him to bring about his good. Sometimes that's a miraculous healing and we praise the Lord for that. Sometimes it's more miraculous to see how God works in someone who is not physically healed. It goes both ways.

The end of verse 15 as we read it gets harder. ***And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*** Hey James, why did you throw that in there? Isn't it interesting that he added this to the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up? Now he says if he has committed sins they will be forgiven. There are some assumptions there about confession of sin, about faith in calling the elders, and about prayer – assumed prayer of confession. But let me make it clear. The construction of the verse does not indicate that when someone is sick it is always because of sin in their life. It does not indicate that. However, the verse does indicate that it is possible that sickness is associated with sin. If you've known people, like I have known plenty of them, who live their lives in sin, and then they are sick, you go "Yeah, I can see the connection." I don't know all this, but I know this. In first century Judaism it was very common to associate physical ailment with sin. Sometimes it appeared that Jesus would allow that to be uncontested. Sometimes Jesus would say, "No. It's not because anybody sinned. It is for the glory of God."

And so you cannot say either way. However, the point for James is if there is sin involved in your sickness. If there is sin involved in your sickness the prayer of faith and your confession of sins will bring forgiveness. That's the good news. Not dissecting what it could mean. It's good news to know that if your sin has brought sickness into your life, that confession and repentance and a prayer of faith will bring forgiveness.

James 5:16 (ESV)

16 Therefore, confess your sins...

Do you see James is coming out of this if there is sin then you will be forgiven, the prayer of faith? And then he goes right into what we call accountability prayer.

James 5:16 (ESV)

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.

The prayer of a righteous person is effectual. It works. It has great power as it works. Are we seeing this happening in the Monday night Bible study? Yes, and with some power. Maybe not everybody in there, but there's some guys who realize "I need to get real. I need to get real, I need to confess my sin, I need my brothers to pray for me."

There's tremendous power in the confession of sin and in the praying for one another for victory over that sin. I will say two things here. One, this is not describing the Catholic Confessional. We don't really see the Catholic Confessional. There's one thing I like about the Catholic Confessional and that's confidentiality. And it's a critical part and James addresses it here, kind of between the lines. You've got to pick someone who will keep the confidence. But the act of open and honest confession, with a carefully chosen, mature, righteous person avails much. It's very, very powerful. We just have to be careful with who we pick.

And so James tells us who to pick. Right in verse 16 at the end, second sentence. Pick a righteous person. That doesn't mean righteous as in saved by God's grace and through faith and repeating a prayer. Not that kind of righteous. It means your standard of living is righteous. Don't go confessing your sins to somebody who's going to use it to destroy you and the other people around you. They can't keep their lip zipped. They can't do it; they don't have any self control. Don't confess your sins to that person.

Confession should be where sin occurred. Where the sin occurred that's where the confession should take place. In that environment, in that relationship, in that place. However, for you to have an accountability partner, for you to get real and honest and confess your sin and you know that they'll pray for you if they are a mature, right-living, stable, older (generally) Christian, then it is one of the most powerful things. Because the prayer of a righteous person has great power. It is effectual in its working.

James is saying. Are you praying? Are you praying when times are hard? Are you praying when times are easy? Are you praying when you are sick? Are you praying when there is sin in your life, confessing it and having others pray for you? Are you praying?

Because your prayer, your interactive communion with God is the most powerful thing you have to transform your life. Period.

James closes with an example of the power of the prayer of a righteous man.

James 5:17-18 (ESV)

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.

Here's James' point. The Jews loved Elijah. They still love Elijah. Elijah is superhuman. He is superhuman in the eyes of the Jewish audience of James. And James says Elijah was a man just like us. He had the same nature you and I have. Here's what Elijah had that you and I might not have. He had a real, ongoing communion with the living God. He was in tune with God, even though he struggled with depression and fear (that's good news for some of us) he was in communion with God. He was connected with God. And so God was able to use him as a conduit to do supernatural things. Elijah, in and of himself, was not supernatural. But because of his connection to God, God did supernatural things through him.

Now, God may not need us to stop it from raining or make it start raining, but God wants the same type of relationship with us that he had with Elijah. It's a relationship of communing with God in prayer in every circumstance; from the worst circumstance to the best. And learning to align our heart and our will with God's.

The best way I can encourage you to do that, honestly, after saying all this about prayer, learn to pray according to God's Word. Please. I'm begging you. Use the resources you have here in the people and the "stuff" and learn to pray according to God's Word.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, wow, that's a big one. Lord I pray in accordance with your name, with your character, with your nature and your will that anything and everything not in alignment with your will would be disregarded. And that which is in alignment with your heart and your will be regarded. Lord the goal today is for us to say "If I'm not praying, am I really a Christian? If I'm not interacting with God do I have a relationship with him? If I don't meet him on a regular basis can I really say he lives inside me? If I'm not obeying his Word can I say he's my Lord?" And if not, I pray right now that you would do something about it. Do something about it.*

Pray right now. Say, if it is you, *God, that's me. I'm sorry. I thought my intellectual assent to your ideas that I've heard was enough. I hear that it is not. I need a real relationship with you. A real give and take, a real communing of hearts. And Lord, I*

know it comes in prayer. I hear it comes in prayer. Lord fill me with your Spirit. Inspire me to have that kind of a relationship with you. Inspire me, Lord, please. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.