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James 5:12-20
What Do We Do?
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Discussion Questions

1. Who have you ever “followed” in your life? How did you become more like them? Why do you think it is important to gather and listen to God’s word to know how we act as Christians?
2. Who have you known that is very trustworthy? How did they make you and others feel? How did they demonstrate being trustworthy?
3. Why do you think people are often uncomfortable praying with people? What helps?
4. What makes vulnerability easier or harder for you? What happens when we confess our sins to each other?
5. How does it feel to wander? How does it feel to come home? What helps people to come home spiritually?

Teaching Notes

Last week James encouraged us to have patience in our pain.

A truly biblical perspective on suffering provides a powerful structure for life when navigating pain or suffering.

James reminded us the prophets suffered and so will we.

We all suffer at different times in different ways no matter how godly or loved by God we are.

This morning James is going to give us several directions in the biblical building code.

These things are aspects or behaviors of building a life, a spiritual house that will stand.

A really important thing about the Bible and the church is that we hear and see what it looks like to be a Christ follower.

Spiritual formation is not just taught, it is caught.

We hear, we see, we understand, we follow.

We are built for relationship with God and others...

..And within that design, the best relationships are real and right...

...They have authentic and actual connection and...

...that connection is right and good and healthy.

So, it is vital for our growth to understand the importance of the word and the gathering together.

As your seasons of life change...

...never stop reading the Word and...

...gathering to hear it and live it out.

In every stage of life, we need to continue to be in God's word and gathering with the church, the body of Christ.

So as we get into James this morning...

... I want to point out what it looks like to follow Christ...

...**Message Title is What do "we" do?**

The Big Idea is...This is what it looks like to have a real relationship with Christ and one another.

5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

Remember, James' earlier comment about the arrogance and foolishness of acting like we know the future... "if the Lord wills".

This verse is also very similar to Matthew 5:33-37.

Jesus has several "you have heard, but I tell you" statements in the Sermon on the Mount.

5:33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all:

Jesus goes on to say not to make oaths by heaven which is God's throne or earth for it is God's footstool or Jerusalem or your head.

James is saying nearly the same thing and adds..

...Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

1. We are trustworthy.

We are honest, dependable, and trustworthy.

We don't need to make oaths or swear for people to trust us.

Cheating, lying, and taking advantage shouldn't be part of us.

But this description is also in the context of suffering..

...And it is a standard practice for people to make...

...deals or promises during difficulties...

...**"God, if you do this...I will do that."**

If you get me out of this problem, I will never lie again.

If you heal me from this sickness, I will tithe every week.

If you save me from this situation, I'll go to church every Sunday.

We do know from Scripture that God takes oaths seriously.

God keeps His word, and if we follow Him, we should keep ours.

The Lord is looking for men and women that don't just make empty oaths or swear vain promises....they are trustworthy.

Next James gives us 3 situations...

...and how we should respond.

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

Suffering, cheerfulness, and sickness.

We all go through different seasons like these.

It is important to know how we as Christian respond.

The first is suffering...

Should we complain, moan, gripe, and feel sorry for ourselves?

Very simply James says pray.

2. We share our suffering in prayer.

Throughout NT we see examples of prayer & we are told to pray.

Some of us very naturally pray.

Maybe you had a home where your parents or family prayed.

Not just rub a dub thanks for the grub...but prayed.

Or maybe you had an inattentive parent and you had to do things on your own...you are self sufficient and think prayer is weakness

Maybe prayer seems like a cop out or a waste of time.

Prayer is not a cop out, weakness, or a waste of time...

...prayer is connection.

Prayer is an important way for us to connect with God and others.

Notice James is not saying pray that the suffering would end...

...He is just saying pray.

Talk to your Father with your family about what hurts.

One of the things that is important about relationship that builds connection is vulnerability.

And when people are trustworthy, we can trust them enough to be vulnerable.

People respect us for our strengths but connect with us through our weakness.

Our weaknesses and struggles are part of what makes us human and help us to connect with God and other humans.

But also, if you are cheerful sing psalms.

If you are stoked, you are rejoicing, things are going well...

...Stop and praise the Lord.

3. We share our joy in praise.

Praise and thanksgiving are ways we connect...

...with the Lord and others.

Proverbs 17:22 tells us, A cheerful heart is good medicine.

If you spend time looking for things to complain about...

...you will find them.

But...If you spend your time looking for things to be thankful for...

...you will find those things and people will be blessed by it.

So share your suffering and your joy...

...Pray about your challenges and sing about your victories...

...These are healthy and helpful emotions to express.

We pray and we praise.

But...What if we are sick?

Call the elders to pray and anoint you with oil.

Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and it was often used in the Bible for anointing the priests, the kings, and temple articles.

This is something that we do regularly.

If you are sick, you can call the elders of the church...

...and we would love to pray for you.

Prayer demonstrates and owns our need for God's help and it is a way we can bear one another's burdens personally.

So whether you are suffering, cheerful or sick...

...stay connected with the Lord.

A relationship with Jesus and Jesus followers is something that should span every season and situation in our life.

James goes on and says...

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

Does God heal people? Yes. Does God forgive people? Yes.

What do we need? Faith!

How much faith does a Christian need?

Enough faith to pray.

If you have just enough to ask, then pray for the Lord's will.

Jesus spoke of mustard seed faith.

It is not the size of the faith that matters, it is the size of that which I put my faith in that matters.

If someone is drowning and they are about to go under...

They don't need faith the size of a boat...

...they just need faith the size of a rope attached to a boat.

Our faith might be small, but our God is not.

So pray and ask, God does heal and God does forgive.

There is nothing too big or too ugly for the Lord.

His grace and His strength is big enough to cover it all.

16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

**So what is the vehicle or process to be forgiven and healed?
...Confession and prayer.**

4. We confess and pray for each other.

Confess usually is homologeo- to agree or say the same thing...

...But here it is a more emphatic word...exomologeo...

1. to confess, to profess
 1. acknowledge openly and joyfully
 2. to celebrate, give praise to
 3. to profess that one will do something, to promise, agree, engage

It is one thing to agree or say the same thing...

...but this carries the stronger idea of profession and connection.

It is within this vulnerability to not just admit but openly and joyfully acknowledge...we are healed and bring healing.

This is apologizing for shortcomings, this is admitting weaknesses, this is sharing struggles, with God and one another.

This is parent to child, child to parent, spouse to spouse, friend to friend, sibling to sibling, person to person.

There are so many things left unsaid.

So many prayers left unspoken.

So many emotions left unshared.

And this isn't healthy for healing.

Much of what we are talking about is vulnerability.

Vulnerability is the birthplace for joy, creative, authentic and love.

- We show our authentic selves.
- We build empathy and let down our walls.
- We forgive and are forgiven.
- We build resiliency and connection.

...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

"Effective, fervent" is really one word: energeo: to operate, work or put forth power, to effect.

"Avails" means to have power or good health.

When you put in the work of prayer and have a real and right connection with God, it is powerful and really healthy.

The example James gives is Elijah the prophet.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

What is James saying?

Elijah was a normal guy.

He prayed according to God's word.

I Kings 18 tells us the story.

King Ahab was a wicked, godless king.

Elijah told him it wouldn't rain until he said.

Elijah got on his knees, put his head down and prayed for rain.

He prayed and told his servant to look for clouds...and nothing.

Seven times they did this until there was a tiny cloud.

And Elijah said, that's it. Rain is coming. And it did.

James closes his letter with this last admonishment.

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

If you have wandered from the truth or if someone you know has wandered from the truth your future is not good.

Our future without God is full of sin and eventually death.

5. We bring people back home.

If you are wandering from a real and right relationship with God.

If you are wandering from gathering together.

If you are wandering from praising and praying, confessing and being vulnerable with God and others.

Today is the day to come home.

Commit to gathering, to praising Him, to confessing your sin, to being vulnerable and real with one another.

This is who we are.

This is how we follow

This is how we build a life that lasts.

The foundation of our spiritual house is Christ...

...and the frame is the the cross...

...that brings us all together in real and right relationship.