

DG Guide: James 5:12-20

Opening Prayer

Father, thank you for this whole letter, and for the way you've used it to grow us over these months. As we come to its close, do what James prayed for: make us doers of the word and not only hearers. We don't want to walk away just knowing more. We want to know you more, and to look more like Jesus. Help us to be people whose word can be trusted, who bring every season of life to you, who confess honestly to one another, and who go after the ones who wander. Not to earn your love, but because you already love us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Starter Question

Think of a time someone gave you their word and then broke it. They said they'd be there, they said it was handled, they said they'd pay it back, etc. There's a particular sting to that, and the closer the person, the more it stings. What did that do to your trust in them? And when have you been the one whose word didn't hold?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **James ends with a mic drop, not a goodbye.** Don pointed out how strange the ending is. Paul fills his last chapter with greetings and blessings. James just stops. No farewell, no "grace be with you," just four commands and then silence, with a wanderer being carried home. James said what he came to say and left it ringing in our ears: be a person of your word, take every season to King Jesus, confess your sins to one another, and go after the one who strays.
2. **"Above all," be a person of your word in a culture where words mean nothing.** Don said our default disposition is distrust. We sign contracts and read the fine print because a bare word isn't enough anymore. We've even built whole industries around weaselling out of well-made contracts. Into that, James says let your yes mean yes. Don was clear James isn't banning every oath: God himself makes oaths, and Scripture has rules about contracts. The point is to be the kind of person who doesn't need the prop. Even if you sign because the culture requires it, the one signing should know you're held to your promise by who you are, not by the signature.
3. **A trustworthy word images Christ, because God is his word.** Don went underneath the command to the deepest reason it matters. God is the God of his word, and more than that, God is the Word: "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God," the Word made flesh (John 1). He cannot lie. Jesus is the "Yes" to every promise (2 Corinthians 1:20) and "the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Revelation 3:14). So when our word is good, we're imaging him into the world. And when it isn't, we give people a false picture of Jesus. Don tied it to witness: the world sees Jesus by seeing us love one another (John 13), and that starts with whether our actions match our words.
4. **Take every season to King Jesus, and calling the elders is faith, not passivity.** Suffering? Pray. Cheerful? Sing praises. Don pressed that we don't withdraw from God when we're suffering, and we don't forget him once the good times come and only call back when we need something. Sick? Call the elders to anoint you with oil and pray in the name of the Lord. Don underlined that the sick person does the calling, and that calling is itself an act of obedience and faith. It costs something to admit you're not okay and ask for help. The oil isn't magic and it isn't medicine; the power is God's.

5. **The whole healing spectrum is in the room, and where you land is no marker of God's affection.** Over CityLight's years we've seen every outcome: prayed and the cancer was gone two weeks later and never returned; prayed and recovered with surprising speed; prayed and got better through ordinary medicine; prayed and were not healed; still praying and still waiting; prayed and the person died. Don guarded hard against the prosperity gospel, which whispers that real love would mean instant miraculous healing and anything less means you lacked faith. He said he has good friends who've been crushed by that false gospel. We don't grasp for silver linings, because that can crush people too. Our hope rests in the God who is coming to make all things new (Romans 8, creation groaning), and we still pray boldly, because God is good, God does heal, and he told us to ask.
6. **Confess to one another, because we have one mediator and ordinary prayer moves heaven.** Don said Australians are good at private confession to God and bad at honest confession to each other, and he traced that hiding back to the same prosperity-gospel reflex: if my life isn't awesome, I'll bury it so nobody knows I'm struggling. Confession to one another isn't to a priest in a booth; we have one mediator. It's mutual, brother to brother and sister to sister, and it's where healing happens. Then Don landed the Elijah point: Elijah was an ordinary human being like us. God told him to pray, and he prayed, and the sky obeyed. Effective prayer isn't reserved for spiritual elites. God is giving us words to pray too: call the elders, confess, ask a friend.
7. **Go after the one who wanders, because that's what the Shepherd does.** Don said if you've been a Christian long enough, you know someone who has drifted, and there are many reasons: a false picture of God that he never matched, a "promise" they felt God made and didn't keep, or the slow choke of the cares of the world (the soils in the parable of the sower). Jesus is the Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine and came to seek and save the lost, and we image him by pursuing. Our culture says "you do you," "that's your truth," "who are you to judge." Don answered that going after a drifting brother or sister is itself an act of love (Galatians 6:1, restore gently; Matthew 18, go privately; Proverbs 10:12 and 1 Peter 4:8, love covers a multitude of sins). It's not on us to drag anyone back. Our act of obedience is to go.

Scripture Reading

Read James 5:12-20

Discussion Questions

Your Word (v.12)

1. Read v.12. Our culture runs on distrust: we sign contracts and read the fine print because a person's bare word isn't enough. Where do you see that most in your own life, at work, in friendships, in family?
2. James isn't banning every oath; he's after people who don't need the prop. What's the difference between someone whose word needs propping up with "I swear" and someone whose plain yes is already enough?
3. One great reason for keeping our word is that God is his word: "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God" (John 1:1), and Jesus is the "Yes" to every promise (2 Corinthians 1:20). How does it change the way you think about keeping a small promise to know that a trustworthy word is part of how the world sees Jesus?

4. Be honest as a group: where has your own word gone cheap lately? What would it cost to rebuild it on the small things this week?

Take It All to God (vv.13-15)

5. Read v.13. Three different seasons, one direction: suffering, pray; cheerful, sing; sick, call the elders. We tend to withdraw from God when we suffer, and forget him when things are good. Which is more your temptation, and what would turning toward him look like in the season you're actually in right now?
6. Calling the elders is an act of obedience and faith, not passivity, and that the sick person is the one who does the calling. Why is asking for help and submitting to prayer so hard for us? What makes it an act of faith rather than giving up?
7. The oil isn't magic and isn't medicine; the power is God's, and the prayer is "in the name of the Lord." Why does that distinction matter? What goes wrong if we put our trust in the oil, or in the elders, rather than in God?
8. The healing spectrum: Where you land on that spectrum is no marker of God's affection for you. Why is that line so important to hold onto, and why is it so hard to believe when you're the one not yet healed?
9. Don warned hard against the prosperity gospel, the idea that real faith always produces healing and that anything less is your fault. He also said we shouldn't grasp for silver linings, because that can crush people too. Where do you feel the pull of either one: the "if I just had more faith" voice, or the rush to make every hard thing mean something tidy?

Confession and Elijah (vv.15b-18)

10. Read v.16. Australians are good at confessing privately to God and bad at confessing honestly to each other. Why do you think that is? What would it take for confession to one another to become normal in this group rather than rare?
11. Our hiding connects to the prosperity reflex: when life isn't awesome, we bury it so nobody thinks we're struggling. Where do you notice that instinct to withdraw and only reappear once you've sorted things out? What does that cost us as a family?
12. Read vv.17-18. The whole point of Elijah is that he was an ordinary human being like us, not a spiritual elite. How does that free you to actually pray? What's one thing you'd pray for more boldly if you really believed the God who answered Elijah hears you too?

Go After the One Who Wanders (vv.19-20)

13. Read vv.19-20. People drift for many reasons: a false picture of God, an unmet "promise," or the slow choke of the cares of the world. Have you watched someone drift like that? What did it look like, and what made it hard to say anything?
14. Our culture says "you do you" and "who are you to judge." Pursuing a wandering brother or sister is itself an act of love, modelled on the Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine (Luke 15). How do you tell

the difference between loving pursuit and being intrusive or self-righteous?

15. Galatians 6:1 (restore "with a gentle spirit") and Matthew 18 (go privately). He also said it's not on us to drag anyone back; our act of obedience is simply to go. How does that take the pressure off? Who is the one person you already know you should go after?

Personal Reflection

- Where has my word stopped being something people can stand on? What's one promise I can keep this week that I'd normally let slide?
- What season am I actually in right now, suffering, cheerful, or sick? Am I taking it to God, or carrying it alone?
- Is there a burden I've been hiding because I'd rather people thought I had it together? Who could I make it known to?
- Is there one real thing I need to confess to a trusted brother or sister, and ask them to pray over?
- Who has drifted that I've quietly decided is none of my business? What would it cost me to go to them gently?

Group Commitments

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to as a group:

1. This week, watch your speech the way James says to: do what you said you'd do, and stop propping your word up with "I swear" or quiet exaggeration. If your reliability has slipped, rebuild it on small promises kept, and tell the group how it went.
2. Name the season you're in and take it to God deliberately. If you're sick or in deep struggle, do the hard, faithful thing: actually ask someone, or the elders, to pray over you. Don't wait until everything else has failed.
3. Bring one hidden thing into the light. Pick one trusted person in this group, confess one real, specific struggle this week, and ask them to pray for you.
4. Memorise James 5:16 together and text one another midweek to check it has stuck.
5. Each name one person who has drifted, and commit to one gentle, no-agenda reach-out this week: a message, a coffee, a visit. Come back and tell the group what happened.

Closing Exercise

Go around the group and have each person finish this sentence out loud, kept short: "The season I'm actually in right now is __, **and the way I'll turn toward God in it this week is __.**" Then, if anyone is sick or struggling and willing, gather around them now and pray over them as a group. James says to ask, so ask. Close by reading together: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Worship: thank God that he is faithful to his word, that he became the Word made flesh, and that in Jesus every promise is "Yes" and "Amen."
- Confession: name where our words have gone cheap, where we've hidden our struggles, and where we've decided a wanderer was none of our business.
- Thanksgiving: thank Jesus that he is the Shepherd who came after us when we were the ones lost, and that he heals and is good whether the answer comes now or at the resurrection.

- Commitment: ask the Spirit to make you people whose yes is yes, who bring every season to God, who confess to one another, and who go after the one who strays.
- Boldness: pray boldly for healing for anyone who is sick, and ask God for courage to go after one person who has wandered.

For Next Week

This is the end of James. Before you scatter, look back over the journey together.

- Look back over the whole letter. James opened with "count it all joy" in trials and closed here with a praying, confessing, pursuing community. In between he told us to be doers of the word and not just hearers, to drop our favoritism, that faith without works is dead, that the tongue can burn down a life, that our quarrels expose what we really worship, and to wait patiently for the Judge who is at the door. Don said James can feel like a lot of rules, but it's really God inviting us into his good order, not so we'd work our way up to him, but because he already loves us and wants what's best for us. As a group, share one thing from these eleven weeks that has actually changed how you live.
- Memory verse, James 5:19-20: "My brothers and sisters, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, let that person know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."
- Keep living the four closing commands this week and beyond: be a person of your word, take every season to King Jesus, confess to one another, and go after the one who wanders. These aren't a finish line. They're the shape of a real-faith community, and James left them ringing for a reason.
- A new series begins next time we gather. Come ready.

Leader Notes

- The biggest hazard in this passage is the prosperity-gospel trap. Watch for it landing in two directions. One person hears "the prayer of faith will save the sick" as a guarantee and concludes that the unhealed simply lacked faith. Another quietly believes that if God really loved them, they'd already be healed. Don named both and called the prosperity gospel a false gospel that has crushed people he loves. Keep gently returning the group to his line: where you land on the healing spectrum is no marker of God's affection. God is good, God heals, and God is with you whether the cure comes or not.
- Someone in the room has prayed and buried a person they loved, or is still praying and still not healed. The healing spectrum must comfort them, not wound them. Don't let the group treat healing as a formula or hunt for the tidy reason behind someone's suffering. If the conversation drifts toward "what did they do to deserve it" or "there must be a silver lining," steer it back. James writes "if he has committed sins" with a careful "if"; he never says sickness is always the result of sin.
- Confession to one another will feel awkward, and that's normal. In our culture it can feel like a strange conversation to have. He also said that in the family of God it shouldn't be, and the way through is to go first. As leader, consider modelling it by confessing something real and specific yourself before you ask anyone else to. Keep it safe: this is a trusted group, not a stage, and nobody should feel forced to share.
- Pursuing a wanderer will feel intrusive to a culture trained on "you do you." Don't let the group either dodge the call ("it's not my place") or swing to the other extreme (a posse with pitchforks). Hold Don's frame: gentle pursuit, privately first, restoring "with a gentle spirit." Remind the group it's not on them to drag anyone back; their job is simply to go in love. If naming a specific person feels heavy, let people sit with it rather than performing a quick answer.
- Land the session on the gospel, not the to-do list. The reason for all four commands is the same God: faithful to his word, near to everyone who calls, and a Shepherd who came after us first. Make sure

the group leaves knowing they're being invited into God's good order because he loves them, not so they can earn his love.

- This is the last week of James. Give a little room at the end to mark the journey and to thank God for what he's done over the series. People have been on this road together for months; let them feel it complete.

Or, if you just want a bunch of discussion prompts:

1. Why does James put "above all" on our speech of all things? What does that tell you about how much our words matter to God?
2. We sign contracts because we don't trust bare words. What would it actually look like to be a person whose plain yes is enough?
3. God is not only true to his word, he is the Word. How does that reframe the small, ordinary promises you make and break?
4. Suffering, cheerful, sick: James points all three to God. Which season are you in, and are you taking it to him or carrying it alone?
5. Why is calling the elders and asking for prayer an act of faith rather than giving up? What makes it so hard to do?
6. Where do you land on the healing spectrum Don described, and what does it mean to hear that it's no marker of God's affection?
7. Where do you feel the pull of the prosperity gospel, the voice that says more faith would have fixed it?
8. Why are we so much better at confessing to God in private than to each other out loud? What would have to change for that to flip?
9. Elijah was an ordinary person who prayed, and the sky obeyed. What would you pray for more boldly if you really believed that about your own prayers?
10. Our culture says "who are you to judge." Why is going after a drifting friend an act of love, and who is yours to go after?