

**Intro:** I am very excited to celebrate baptism with you today! Baptism is a beautiful external picture of what God does inside every person who receives Jesus as their Lord. Complete identification... Died with Christ... Raised to new life. Cleansed from Sin...

We are going to celebrate and we should... but I want to sound an important call to ensure that the significance of today's celebration does not end today but continues for weeks, months, and years into the future of the lives of these five people. What do I mean?

Every person who follows Christ needs his grace to grow and make progress as his follower. That is true for these five people, and it is true for all disciples! Now, one of the primary ways he encourages us, strengthens us, and helps us grow is through other Christians. Everyone who is adopted by God as sons and daughters, now belongs to the spiritual family known as the church, and it is the responsibility of family to look out for one another and care for one another.

The Bible instructs us to love one another, serve one another, be kind one another, rejoice & weep with one another, and many other things. These are all part of the job description of every Christian and this morning we are going to see two of those highlighted as we finish the book of James.

### **“Prayer & Care: The Job of Every Christian” James 5:13-20**

**The Point: Every Christian should joyfully exercise the responsibilities of prayer and care for one another.**

#### **I. Exercise prayer for one another's physical and spiritual needs (5:13-18).**

- James began his letter with a call to prayer: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all...”
- James concludes his letter with a strong call to prayer. Every verse in 13-18 mentions prayer.
- What is prayer? Prayer is fellowship with God through communication with him.
- **“Prayer is the spiritual pulse of the renewed soul; its beat indicates the healthy or unhealthy state of the believer.” - Octavius Winslow**
- In prayer, we bend the ear of the Almighty and tap into divine power. That is why prayer has been called a “revolutionary tactic.” - Blomberg
- You want to move people? Pray. You want to effect change? Pray. The great missionary to China, **Hudson Taylor said: “Learn to move men, through God, by prayer alone.”**

Let me give you five encouragements regarding prayer from these verses:

#### **1) Pray at all Times (13)!**

- Look at *verse 13*. “Is anyone among you. . . ?” When we suffer, *we should* pray.
- When we experience the good times of blessing and joy, *we should* praise.
- In other words, when times are tough, pray. When times are great, pray. At all times, Pray!
- Did you realize all of the songs we sang this morning were in the form of prayer? We when sing, we are praying, communicating the expression of our hearts before God.

T: James goes on to say in *verses 14-15*, “Is anyone among you sick? . . .” The elders are to . . .

## 2) Pray with Faith for Healing (14-15).

What do we learn from these verses? For starters, the elders are called to pray, because this is a serious illness.

- The fact that the elders must go visit him, that they are to pray over him, and that the hoped for result is being raised up, seems to indicate this person is sick to the point of being bedridden. This is no small sickness.
- That's why the elders must pray with faith and anoint this person with oil. Let's address those in reverse order.

### OIL

- Have you ever been a part of a church that used oil to anoint the sick? I do not believe I have been unless my pastors practiced it without my knowledge.
- Why are the elders instructed to anoint with oil? It was normal practice in the first century to use oil for medicinal purposes. That is one reason some people believe this practice was purely medicinal and would not see a need to continue this today.
- BUT others see a spiritual and symbolic purpose. Just as kings and priests were anointed in the OT as a sign of God's presence and as an indicator of them being set apart for God's "special attention and care," so this oil represented the same truths.
- After processing the arguments more closely and praying through this, I believe James is calling for the elders to perform a physical action that carries symbolic significance.
  - Why? For one, the focus of the elders action is prayer. The grammar bears this out: "let them pray over him" and as they are praying, the subordinate task (as marked by the participle for you English majors out there), is anointing with oil. The anointing goes with the praying.
  - Additionally, this anointing is to be done: "in the name of the Lord."
- Though I have never personally practiced this, I am always happy to have my understanding and practice corrected by Scripture and plan to do so in the future.
- Now, should you call for the elders in the case of every sickness? Gotta little cough... We love you, but don't do that. :)
- Cough persists for months, call us! :) Listen, we absolutely want to know when you are sick; we want to care for you; we want to encourage you; we want to ask God to heal you; and if the occasion calls for it, we will anoint you with oil as a means of signifying God's special care.
- Another question, does this mean God will heal every time the elders pray in faith or you pray in faith? No!
- Remember 4:15. "If the Lord will... we will live and do this or that."

T: Here's the bottom line: We should care for the sick among us, pray for healing, and we should expect God to heal in accordance with his will. That's why we must . . .

## 3) Pray with Faith in God's Power (16-18).

- *Read 16-18.* THERE IS POWER IN PRAYER, BECAUSE WE PRAY TO A POWERFUL GOD
- Let me ask you: Do you pray with hesitation or expectation?
- As v. 16 says, "the prayer of the righteous person has great power as it is working." The righteous person is the person who possesses the righteousness of Christ.

Some of you may be thinking: well, I pray for healing, but I don't see many people getting healed.

- In fact, some people will say, “If you have enough faith, you will automatically see powerful healing. If you pray and someone was not healed, well, then, you must not have had enough faith.”
- Let me say, with love, that’s bogus! If healing was guaranteed based on the strength of the prayer, I guess Paul was a man weak in faith. Three times I pleaded... I guess Jesus in the Garden...
- And let’s not lose sight of one important fact: God cares more about our spiritual healing than our physical healing, and so should we.
  - Every person who God heals eventually will die. Let that sink in. Physical suffering may be temporarily alleviated, BUT to die without Christ is to experience eternal suffering, which will never be alleviated.
  - That’s why we care for physical and spiritual needs. I can give you a cup of cold water. That’s nice. But I can share Christ with you and you can receive the water from which you will never thirst again! MMM.

T: So James says, pray with faith in God’s power, and don’t miss this!

*This Power in Prayer is for Everyone.*

- Like a good Jewish preacher, James supports his argument with an example from the OT. (Blomberg) and the great prophet Elijah. He recounts the days of the evil King Ahab where God brought his judgment on the land through three and a half years of drought as recorded in 1 Kings 17-18.
- Did you see how he describes Elijah? He is a man WITH A NATURE LIKE OURS... James wants us to see that we have this same ability to pray powerfully.
- What makes your prayers different than my prayers or Elijah’s prayers? Nothing. Jesus is our access. Period. Not a priest. Not a position. Not experience. Jesus.
- So pray. And Prayer with sincerity, faith, and fervency. Go read the end of 1 Kings 18, Elijah is on his face begging God to send rain. (Servant looks seven times)

T: Finally, we should . . .

#### 4) Pray for One Another (16-18).

- Look back again in verse 16. James seems to zoom out from the specific episode of the elders praying over the sick to a general exhortation to the entire church.
- “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” This should be a regular practice in our lives. We need prayer.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an excellent little book called *Life Together*. It’s on our resource table. In it, he says: **“A Christian fellowship [think church, think Community Group, listen to this] lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me.”**
- We need to pray for one another, and we need to confess our sin to one another. Why confess to one another? Why not just confess to God? We should do so to keep our relationship with God and one another vibrant and so that we can pray for and encourage one another.
- “Man, I’m battling pride in my work, would you pray for me?” “Listen, I really blew it with my roommates, would you pray that I’ll have patience and self-control?” “I’m really discouraged because I’m hoping more in my circumstances than I am in God, would you send me some encouraging Scripture?”

- And what happens? That's right. "Healing. Renewal. Restoration."

T: That pushes us then into vv 19-20. Not only should we pray for one another, James tells us we should also . . .

## II. Exercise care for one another's souls with courage and intentionality (5:19-20).

- *Read 19-20.* Here is James final exhortation. These two verses form, what may feel to us as, an abrupt conclusion to his letter. But they provide an entirely appropriate final encouragement for his scattered church.
- He has encouraged them to persevere under trial and live out their faith, so we should not be surprised he goes on to say: "if anyone among you wanders from the truth..."
  - Who is "anyone"? Those who have some attachment in the church, perhaps they are Christians, or at least profess to be Christians.
  - We are all prone to wander from the truth. As one of the songs we sing says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."
  - When James says we wander from the truth, he is talking less about doctrinal error and more about wandering from the way of the truth.
  - This is the person who deviates from God's will and then persists in unrepentance, which is what makes this situation so serious.
  - Now, let me be clear: every Christian will sin. But Christians will see their sin, be sorrowful for their sin, hate their sin, and turn from their sin. That's repentance.
  - What happens when there is no repentance and wandering persists?
- Our job is to bring them back!
  - Again in *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer states: "**Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin.**" - Bonhoeffer
  - The goal is RESTORATION.. This is why we practice biblical restoration as prescribed in Matthew 18... (also known as church discipline).
- What is the result?
  - "Will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."
  - Are you a wanderer? Has your soul been aged from death? Gospel.... Baptisms...

Let me give you five implications from vv. 19-20. It's my job to be real, so here we go...

### 1. Get below the surface with one another.

- Let's get in each other's business... in the most appropriate of ways.
  - How's your soul? What is God teaching you these days? How are you doing spiritually? Where are you seeing evidence of God's grace in your life?
  - Does faithfulness characterize your life? When's the last time you shared the gospel?
  - We need some courage. Let this be an expectation. This should be every day Christianity.
  - All we are, are people seeking to grow to be like Jesus. We *often* fail, but we are pressing on toward the goal. He's the goal!
- Related to that...

### 2. Be willing to confront one another in love.

- With love and humility, having carefully removed the log in your own eye, be willing to graciously question and courageously correct the unholy actions of your brother or sister. We must seek to win each other back!
- But what is better than reacting when a brother or sister wanders from truth? Being so proactively involved in one another's lives that we never deviate far from God's plan for our lives. Feel me?

### 3. **Be proactive: Be mentored and mentor.**

- We all need someone who is a little or a lot further along in the faith to help us make progress as Christians. I am who I am today, because of God's grace working through people who said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Alan Chamness. Boyd & Susie Phillips, Kevin Hall. Danny Akin. Dwayne Milioni.
- Do you need to be mentored? Shake your head... Then let's go...
- Do you need to mentor? Okay. Let's go.
- Jon Chasteen is our Pastor of Discipleship. He takes the lead in making sure people are progressing in their walk with Christ. He and his wife, Leigh, are in China adopting their little girl Zoe. Let's surprise him when he gets back with this... I'd love to see a large number of you take your **CONNECT CARD** and say, I want to be mentored... and some of you might say... I want to be mentored and I am willing to mentor someone else.

### 4. **Be proactive: Get in a Community Group**

- What is the best way to do life together at RHC? What is the best way to fulfill these "one another" commands in Scripture to pray for one another, care for one another, bear one another's burdens, encourage one another, teach one another...?
- Community Groups... this **interest form**...

### 5. **Be proactive: Pursue Church Membership**

- Why church membership?
  - 1) Covenant together...
  - 2) Pastoral Care...
  - 3) Raise the stakes... Personal Commitment...

### **Conclusion:**

What's your next step? Man I need to get below the surface... Be more courageous in my friendship. Be mentored. Get in a CG. Pursue Church Membership. All of the above!!

James was a pastor who loved his people. He desperately wanted them to experience God's joy and God's blessing in the midst of trial. Exhorted them to live God's Word with everything they had. Redemption Hill, let me encourage you to do the same. Never for a moment will you regret living your life for Jesus.

Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to pray and then before we sing, we're going to hear from three more who are getting baptized today

Pray!