

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. Open with me in your Bibles this morning to James Chapter 5 and we are going to be in the last half of this chapter. Today we conclude this series that we began nine weeks ago as we have looked through the book of James bit by bit and section by section. Not verse by verse because we would be here for another two or three years if we actually went into every detail, even though that it is fun to do sometimes. But I hope it has given you an appetite for the book of James and that it has encouraged you to continue to study and mine the many important messages for the church today that the half-brother of Jesus gave to those who were reading this the very first time.

You know some weeks in ministry are a lot of blessing when someone trusts Christ, someone gets reconciled, someone takes big steps forward in discipleship. And those are just positive weeks that we get so excited about when we see positive things going on in other people's lives. And then there are other weeks, weeks that are heavier, weeks that are harder, and these periods in ministry coincide with periods going on in other people's lives.

I am sure that you have experienced it too. There are times when it seems like everything is going well, you get the raise, you get the new office, your kids are making great progress, your marriage is in top form and your walk with the Lord is fresh and vibrant. And then there are those other times when it just seems like everything you touch turns the fan the wrong way and it just seems like there is just no stability and no good news. And you are just kind of hanging on hoping to be able to survive this period of discouragement.

I have to tell you in all honesty this has been a tough eighteen months. It has been a tough year, and also quite honestly this was a tough week at Life Fellowship on several different levels. I hope it was a great week for you, but some folks had a really, really tough week. Many of you know our Discipleship Pastor, Brad Milks, and his wife, Kristin who leads our ladies ministry. They have over the last couple of years gone through a couple of losses in the hopes of expanding their family. They have four wonderful kids, and they were hoping to add another one or two, but a little over a year and a half ago they lost one that was about four months along.

Last year they lost another one fairly early in the pregnancy about three months along. Then we found out very unexpectedly that Kristin and Brad were expecting another baby, and everything was coming along and doing real well, so they announced it. But very tragically last week the baby went to heaven as it was stillborn. So we have been walking alongside of Brad and Kristin this week, and I know many of you love them very deeply, they have made a big influence on your life and you have been praying for them and for the baby. They are at home recovering today after the baby was delivered on Thursday, and they just plan to have a private family service for it with their families. You know when you walk with someone you love through a tragedy even though we are in ministry we are also human too. And so there is one side that says, 'We

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

trust God. We are building our life on Him, and on the other side there is the human side that says, *'Why? We prayed, things were going well, what happened?'* And sometimes those two emotions collide.

I want to tell you this, the policy we have for the church is an excellent insurance plan but it has a very, very high deductible. And now for the third year in a row the Milks have gotten hit with the max of that deductible which is \$8,000. So next Sunday when you come to church we are going to receive a special love offering for the Milks at the back of the church and I just wanted to let you know that. We will also open up a portal on the website and we will send you out an email on social media if you want to give electronically as most of us do anymore. I just wanted to make you aware of that.

They need their privacy right now so please don't drop in on them, but if you want to send a little note or email that is perfectly fine. I did want to let you know that we are going to try to bless them as a church because they have a big family and these medical expenses year after year have really taken a toll on them.

Also last week we got the shocking news that a young 24 year old man named Jacob Koury, who grew up in our community at Lake Norman Baptist Church, was very tragically murdered on Wednesday evening with no known reason. He was roommates with a couple of our guys from this church. And again we can say, *'What?'* This doesn't happen to us; it happens to other people and we read about it in the newspaper and see it on the news. I have talked to several of you this morning that knew Jacob and loved him. He was at his small group on Tuesday night, and on Wednesday night he was killed. And they don't even know who killed him, and it rattles us. It can't do anything less than that, if it doesn't there is something pretty wrong with us.

Yesterday morning I was getting ready to go to do something with my son who is home from the Marines for a few days when my phone dinged. It was a message about one of our men who used to sit right back there. He was a great guy who has been recently struggling with age and dementia. Yesterday morning he had foot surgery, real minor foot surgery. He had to wait till after the surgery to eat anything, so when he got home he was really hungry. His daughter fixed him something to eat, he got choked on his food, and now today he is in heaven. And I am like, *'How does this happen?'*

You know there just has been wave after wave after wave. Three weeks ago when I was preaching I asked you to please pray for my dear friend Paul who leads a ministry in Myanmar and who had Covid. Remember I talked about Paul and how hundreds of pastors looking for leadership went to Paul's seminary. He had a children's home there as well, and his own kids were still living at home. And Paul went home to be with the Lord from Covid at fifty years old.

This week I got a message from my good friend Noel in Cuba. We support him and have been part of his ministry as he oversees forty pastors in Cuba. The Cubans are

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

basically starving to death there, and now Noel and his two sons all have Covid. One of his sons was supposed to get married, but the government shut everything down because of the protests, so they had to cancel the wedding. A bunch of other pastors there also have Covid and there is no oxygen, no medication, and no one is able to even get one single antibiotic pill. As Noel was sending me messages this week and I was sending them back I could hear in his voice that he had no doubts, but he had great weariness. He had huge fatigue, and he would cough and cough as he tried to talk and to give encouragement to me on the phone. He would try to encourage me through these recordings he was sending to me, even though he was very sick himself.

This morning as I was prepping a little bit for the sermon, I always look at the headlines, and I saw that the Taliban was now on the outskirts of Kabul. And simply because the Americans said, *'You really don't want to tick us off until we get our folks out of here,'* the Taliban had temporarily stopped there. But if they wanted to they could come all the way into any place they wanted to. This is not a political statement, it is just reality, but for twenty years our guys have bled and died there, and in a matter of hours the women and girls of that country are going to be thrown back a thousand years.

They are pulling girls out of their homes and using them for prostitutes for the soldiers at the age of twelve. And these little girls and women are every bit as real as your mama, your sister, your daughter and the person sitting right next to you. These are real people, and they are going through that right this minute. They are in their closets shaking, daddies are holding their daughters wondering what is going to happen in the next twenty-four or forty-eight hours, with every bit as much love in their hearts as you have for your own loved ones.

We are getting messages now from the believers who found Christ because of American soldiers, so believers all across the country now this week face execution, certain execution because they follow Christ. And their message to us is, *'We will not run, we will not run. We believe.'*

That is a pretty heavy way to start a message, isn't it? It is pretty heavy, it is pretty tough, but I want you to understand we are not the only generation that faces this. We are in a broken world. We are in a world filled with sin, and the battle that is raging all around us, whether we ignore it or are aware of it, whether we want to focus on it or whether we want to deny it exists, it is a battle between God Himself and Satan. It is between right and wrong. It is between good and evil. It is between eternal life and eternal death, and it rages this moment all around us. And every generation has at times in their journey had to stop and contemplate the reality of what is going on in our created world, and determine what we are going to cling to, what we are going to believe, how we are going to survive, what is really real, and what happens next.

This is part of the framework to which James is speaking when he is writing this passage. So I want us to look again at James Chapter 5 beginning in verse 13, as he is

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

kind of closing out his letter. Remember James is speaking to the Jewish believers who are scattered now. They are no longer in Jerusalem, but scattered as they have been chased out of town by the Romans and the Jewish leadership. And James says this beginning in verse 13:

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

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. 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

Now one of the reasons our church has a heritage of being serious about the systematic study of Scripture is because there is just so much false teaching all around us that can come out of the sloppy handling of the Word of God. And as a result people end up confused and disillusioned, frustrated at times, or sometimes worse they walk away and deconstruct their faith. They are ex-evangelicals which is the new phrase that is coming on.

So as we start off with this passage and we get into it I think some of you are going to be a little surprised at where we will end up with this passage. I want you to understand that this is part of why we preach the Word, why we teach Scripture in a systematic way. This is why we go beyond clichés and rah, rah inspirational sermons. The Word of God inspires, but it also educates, informs, and holds us accountable. And we need to understand all of that together as we study.

There are a lot of folks who will take a verse here or a passage there or a phrase here and they will twist it or simply just misunderstand it. And they will use it like gospel when it has really nothing to do with what God is really saying in that passage. Let me give you an example of that from a recent news clip that I found. And I am not mocking this lady, but I am saying that this happens a lot. Listen to this:

*“I believe this is God’s work and there is a wonderful Scripture about the security of elections that I want to read. Maybe some of us have never heard this before. It is II Peter 1:10. **“Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if you do these things, ye shall never fall.”** I love that Scripture because this is what our watchers do.”*

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

All right, this is a testimony of a well-meaning lady who is standing before a Senate subcommittee at her state level, and she is trying to work on election reform. Again, this isn't a political statement at all; this is why she was there. And she takes a verse of Scripture that has the word 'election' in it and uses it as an application for political elections. No! I am trying to be kind, but no, that is not what that verse is talking about, not in any way, shape, or form. I am sure she is sincere. I am sure she is earnest and really believes that. I don't know the greater context of what she is doing, and she may have a very valid point she is trying to make, but it is a misuse of the Word of God to use and to twist the real meaning of this verse. That is why studying Scripture in its context is so important.

So let's go back to this passage and I think what we are going to find in this passage is that we view prayer and we view this passage in such a super narrow way sometimes that we miss the blessings of the full context and the full opportunity that is here. And we also miss our responsibility within it. Let's take a look at it as I just read the first few verses again, then we will pick it apart a little bit, and then I am going to give you some principles.

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

Now there are some legitimate questions that rise from the various perspectives on this passage, and I think it is going to be important that we study it and understand its context. Many of my Pentecostal friends for instance, take this verse as a guaranteed promise that this is going to happen. If you call for the elders and they anoint you with oil and pray over you, you will be healed. And if you do not experience healing in that moment it is because you lack sufficient faith.

Maybe you wonder if people really believe that and the answer is yes they do. Within the last thirty days I have spent time with two different people who showed me this verse, or referenced this verse, and expressed frustration over the fact that they had not experienced the physical healing that they had anticipated. And they were questioning their own faith.

Years ago when I was pastoring in Florida there was a mother who was in her late twenties or early thirties that was dying a horrific death with breast cancer. And she died doubting God because this verse didn't play out as she had anticipated that it would. And she felt like she had done her best, she had been faithful, she had confessed her sins, and that either God didn't love her or she was unable to have enough faith to get the healing.

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

It was a great tragedy and it caused all kinds of repercussions in her family because she really hadn't understood the context of this verse.

Some of my Catholic friends see this as evidence of support for what was once called 'the sacrament of extreme unction.' They have now changed the term but it is basically a healing sacrament, and it is one of several sacraments that Catholics practice. And it can only be performed by a priest. So they take this sacrament that can only be assigned to a priest to be able to come and do this anointing. And again this is a very narrow context in which they apply this.

Others lead with another impression, and a lot of my evangelical friends believe this, that the prayers of church elders are somehow more powerful and more special. That church elders have a greater standing with God than anyone else, and if they pray then that is like a double prayer. Or if they pray it has surety to it. And they think if they could only be elders, so they aspire to that. And I want you to understand that contradicts so much of the rest of Scripture which says that we all can come boldly to the throne of grace, that we all have access. "***There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.***"

So while our elders have a special role in the body, and they have a special calling upon their lives, they don't have more access to God than anyone else who is a member of His family. And yet people sometimes misunderstand this. So it is important that when we see these questions, we see a passage like this that we get into alignment with what God is really saying. Remember one of the first rules of hermeneutics, one of the first rules of Bible study is this – not all Scripture is written TO us but all Scripture is written FOR us. So when we understand that principle we need to ask, "*who was this Scripture written to?*"

Now who was the "anyone" in verse 13, when he says, "***Is anyone among you suffering?***" Who is the 'anyone' and who is the 'you' that is being referenced here? And we know because we answered it earlier on in our study that these are the Jews of the diaspora. These are the Jewish people that walked with Jesus, who saw His testimony, heard His story, and trusted Christ as Savior. And then they were the ones who faced persecution from both the Romans who occupied Jerusalem and also the Jewish leadership who didn't want their system threatened. So they were dispersed all across civilization, up into Greece and all across Asia Minor.

James is writing this letter, that would be copied and re-copied and re-copied and sent all throughout the churches that were springing up all over civilization, to these Jews. And he was saying that he wanted them to understand something, and he began going through and talking to them as his brothers and sisters. That is the answer to the 'who' James is writing to specifically.

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

Then there is another question in there and that is what is meant by the word 'suffering?' "***Is anyone among you suffering?***" We have to remember again that English is the far less precise language than was the Greek. So looking at the Greek word here, which is the word '*kakopatheo*,' we realize that it is something that we need to pay attention to, because in this case, in this verb form it literally means suffering. And usually when this word is used, '*kakopatheo*,' it generally is not in reference to a physical illness but to those who are experiencing and enduring evil treatment.

It could be something that is being done at the hands of others. This would be an obvious part of his dialogue. Who is he talking to? He is talking to people who were literally run out of their homes for their faith. They were literally tossed out of their jobs because they trusted Christ. This word could be translated, if we were to use kind of a modern English vernacular to it, for those who were being bullied, those who were being abused. That would be an appropriate translation of this word.

In verse 13 James gave a very clear directive. What are you supposed to do when you are abused, when you are bullied? What are you supposed to do when you are emotionally being 'under the gun?' He said they had to pray. Now we are going to unpack that a little bit more, but I also want to note that when James says that we are to pray, "***Let him pray***," this word 'pray,' and again I am an English teacher so tenses mean a lot to me, and this word in the Greek is a present linear tense. To help you understand what that means, it simply means 'to pray and pray and keep praying into the future.' It is linear like a straight line moving forward.

So here is what James is saying, '*Don't pray and walk away from it. Don't sprinkle magic prayer dust over it and say, 'Completed the task, now I am good to go.'* But rather it is when you are hurting, when you are suffering, when you are abused, when they are coming for you, when you don't understand life, when you are depressed, when you are discouraged, pray and pray and pray as you walk, pray as you suffer, pray as you experience abuse, pray and pray and pray.' Now don't misinterpret what I am saying, this is not a command that says if you are being physically abused in your marriage that all you have to do is pray. This is not saying that.

What it is saying is this, part of enduring the tragedy of living in a broken world is to be in touch with God and to hear from Him and to share with Him and to connect with Him. And if you are doing that apart from prayer, if you are going through these things apart from prayer, it is going to be worse for you. It is going to be harder for you. It is going to be more confusing for you. It is going to be more painful for you. You must pray when you are going through stuff.

Now here is the dilemma. If you are praying with expectations that are in alignment with what God wants to do, or how God is working, or how God works generally, it is going to lead you to be disillusioned. It is going to lead you to being frustrated. And I will confess to you at this moment that I struggle with this sometimes.

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

I do. You know we talked about election and I have struggled with that. I struggle with the foreknowledge of God and His sovereign authority. I struggle with concepts like predestination that I see in Scripture that I can't get my mind around because I am finite and God is infinite.

I was with Paul in Myanmar just eighteen months ago. Rick and Diana Wilson, our missionaries out of Life Fellowship, had known this man for decades. People have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in what Paul was raised up to do in a country that just a little less than a generation ago was as dark as North Korea and Afghanistan. But because for this time they had democracy in place we raised this man up and there were hundreds of Burmese pastors of the Chin Tribe that looked to Paul for leadership. There were little boys and girls sitting with empty bowls waiting for him to fill them up. There were students sitting with blank notepads in classrooms waiting for him to teach them.

We prayed: *'God, you have the power to heal Covid. You have the power to wipe it away just like that. You have the power to raise Paul up, to fill his lungs with oxygen.'* And then I get the phone call, *'Paul is gone.'* And I don't care if you are a pastor who has been in this for forty years, or you are someone who has walked with him, or his wife, or a complete stranger, there are times when you just have to say, *'Why, God? Why?'*

I would like to tell you that I am such an amazing stunning man of faith that when I see those things I can be like Job just because it just flows out of my heart. I would like to tell you that. I would like to tell you that I could say something like, *'The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Naked was I when I came and naked will I be when I die. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'* I would love to tell you that I am in that place in my spiritual walk, but if I did say that I would be lying to you. I have struggled hard with that one.

And there are situations in this room right now that you all are going through that I don't even know about and no one else knows about. Some of you know your jobs are coming to an end, some of you may be going to lose your house, some of you may have a spouse that is getting ready to file for divorce, some of you may have a kid that is breaking your heart, some of you may have gotten bad news from your doctor, and some of you are just exhausted. The journey, the race has taken its toll on you and you wonder why you bother to get out of bed every morning. And I want you to understand the healing that God desires for you begins with connecting back to Him.

Now again, I always want to be careful on this, because I want you to understand that God works through people too. God works through doctors, God works through pastors, God works through our families and our spouses, so I am not saying if you are depressed not to go to the doctor. No, I am not saying that at all. I am not saying if you are being abused by someone in your life that you should just suck it up cupcake. I am

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

not saying that at all. But I am saying that if you are going through stuff right now and that is causing you to have a wall between you and God that your healing will not ever be what it could be and should be in Christ until you do what James was saying, “***Let him pray.***” And continue to pray and move forward in prayer.

Maybe you are of the nature where you hear a song that it helps encourage you. Look what James says next, “***Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.***” And some of you are like that. I am not. When I sing the birds leave because it is not good. But I know some who love songs. I have a daughter who hums under her breath constantly. It absolutely drives me nuts but it encourages her. She doesn’t even realize she is doing it, but she will just be humming a song all the time. And now her daughter does it too which drives me doubly nuts. I don’t understand it, but maybe that is you and it encourages you.

Some of you may sing in the shower. When I do that the grout cracks and the tiles fall off the wall. It is not good. But some of you are naturally encouraged by hearing yourself sing. And James knows that and he says, ‘*Look, if you are one of those people who are cheerful, then go ahead and sing praise. Sing it for you, sing it for others, sing it for God, but whatever you do sing.*’ The word ‘cheerful’ in the Greek is *euthemeo* and it describes those who are well in spirit and who possess a joy filled attitude. Aren’t you glad for those in the world who have that, who manage to find joy?

I didn’t ask permission in advance for this but one of our elders periodically sends me a prayer that he has prayed for me in a text. And it is uncanny how many times God in a moment where I have just been in the mulligrubs or frustrated or whatever, that my phone will ding, I look down at it, and there is this prayer and calmness just comes over me. To be able to receive that knowing that he is reminding me of truth that I hadn’t forgotten but that I was refusing to consider in that moment. This is part of what James was saying to the church. If you are hurting, don’t hurt alone. If you are praising, don’t sing alone. And don’t just visit it every once in a while but make it a part of your life. Do it and do it again and walk in it, revel in it, bathe in it; it is there for you. I will talk about how most of us approach prayer in just a moment but it is not in an ongoing way.

Generally we know that there are two different types of people when it comes to responding to difficulties in our lives. There are optimists and there are pessimists, half full and half empty, criers and singers. But regardless of who you are when you face suffering whether it is abuse or persecution or bullying or physical ailments, the Scripture is telling us here very clearly we are to persevere and we persevere through prayer and praise. Pray for comfort, praise for comfort, and we do so with the idea that it is not to remain with us but to be taken elsewhere.

The next part of the passage can create some confusion. “***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.***” Now again when many people see this it is

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

reasonable to look at it and think it is about physical healing, and it is, but not exclusively. Here is the thing we need to remember, God is sovereign. If God wants to heal you He can heal you. Make no mistake about that. If it meets His glory, our good, His agenda, His plan, there is nothing He cannot or will not do. Whether it is raise someone from the dead, or heal someone who is sick, or answer whatever miniscule little prayer we think is insignificant, if it is part of God's plan He is quite capable of doing it, and periodically He does.

However, we all live and exist in a broken world. And the story that is unfolding is not complete. The story that is unfolding is not just about us. The story that is unfolding is well beyond our comprehension; therefore at times we must do what we do in faith, trusting God for who He is, what He can do, and what He determines He will not do. Every person that was raised from the dead in the New Testament that we read about also eventually died. You do know that, right? They were raised from the dead but eventually they did die. Every person that was miraculously healed, every person who was blind, every person who couldn't walk, every person who was deaf, all those people eventually died. The healing was temporary because we live in a broken world.

But for a purpose and for a season and for a specific reason God in that moment chose to intervene. Now there is no rhythm or rhyme to it. I don't understand why eleven out of the twelve disciples had to lose their lives. These were good and godly men. I am sure that people prayed that they would be spared from their executioner's blade. I am sure that happened over and over and over again, and yet eleven out of twelve of them died. Why did John not have to die? They tried a couple of times and it didn't work, so why in the world was John selected? I don't know. Why is it that I have prayed over people I deeply loved at times, anticipating that God would hear our prayers and heal them, and then I had to do their funeral the next week? Why did that happen?

Why were there other times when I prayed over someone and God would give them another ten years or twenty years? Why did that happen? I don't know. I do know this, I know enough about God that I can trust Him on the days when I see His hand work out the way I wanted it to, and also on the days when it didn't work out the way I wanted it to. And that is because He settled that once and for all at Calvary. He doesn't have to keep proving His love for me. He doesn't have to keep proving His power to me. He doesn't have to keep proving His authority to me. God has already settled that when he allowed His Son to die for me and then raised Him again the third day and He has forgiven my sins, and given me eternal life. He has taken care of that. So it is kind of rude, quite frankly, to keep asking God to prove it to us again. *'If you are really who you are, come on God, show me. Make this comfortable for me. Make this easier for me. Make this go away.'* When we play games with God like that, it is because we have not stopped and contemplated and prayed over who He is and what He wants to do.

I think this is part of the message of James and it is interesting when we unpack these verses. James says, "*Call for the elders,*" and we do this. We do call for the

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

elders, and we would encourage you to call for the elders. The elders love doing this; it is part of our ministry. We would urge you if there is something going on in your life and you would like someone to pray for you, please let us know and we will schedule a time with you. We have done it with some of you sitting right here in the past. And we will continue to do that.

But let's break it down a little bit. The word 'sick' here is from the Greek word *astheneo*. And eighteen times in the New Testament when it is translated from *astheneo*, it is the word 'sick.' And that means 'physically ill.' However there are fourteen times when this exact same word is translated as 'someone who is emotionally or spiritually weak.' So eighteen times this Greek word *astheneo* is translated as referring to an illness and fourteen times it is translated as someone who is discouraged, down, feeling emotionally weak or downtrodden.

And I can show this in verse after verse like Acts Chapter 20 and verse 35, Romans Chapter 4 and verse 19, Romans Chapter 8 and verse 3, and Romans Chapter 14 and verses 1 through 2. In each of these cases it is talking about someone who is just emotionally exhausted. And in the epistles which were written by the Apostles it is only referring to physical sickness three times. All the rest of the times it is talking about the sufferings of life, enduring the difficulties of life. And in many cases it is best translated as 'being weak,' as in worn down, weary, depressed, fatigued, defeated.

So here is what I want you to hear from me this morning. I don't know exactly what James is saying here but it is within the realm of possibility that we are looking at this way too narrowly, and saying, '*Okay, if I get cancer I am calling for the elders.*' And it might be that we need to be calling for others to pray for us a whole lot more frequently about a whole lot more things. In other words when we are spiritually weak, what should we do? We should call for the spiritually strong to walk alongside of us. That is what we need to do.

When your kids are at the kitchen table and they don't understand the math problems, what do they do? They call for big brother, big sister, mom or dad, and ask, '*Can you help me with this? Can you walk alongside of me?*' God wants us to do things spiritually. When we are hurting, when we are weak, when we are discouraged, when we are tired, when we are sick, when we are in pain, when we are grieving, when we are confused. Don't do it alone, call for someone else who is a little further down the road in their journey, who you know is spiritually strong, who you know loves you unconditionally and say, '*Sit with me awhile.*'

It is so interesting that this word 'anoint' is here, and most of us think immediately of the anointing of the kings where they would take a little bottle of oil and pour it on their heads. That is actually not what it means. The word anoint means 'massage.' Get this, elders hang on for just a minute, basically it is saying, '*Hey are you feeling overwhelmed and really tired. Call the elders to give you a good massage.*'

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

How many of you have ever had a massage? I was of the group that said, *'Don't touch me,'* for many, many years. Until I got my first massage and then I was like, *'Wow! That really helped.'* By the way this was written in a day before Advil, and there was no ibuprofen in those days. I remember an older lady in my church – I shouldn't have called her old because if she were still alive she would have punched me for that because she never thought she was old a day in her life. But she was literally in her late seventies or early eighties, and she would look at me sometimes and say, *'You have a headache, don't you?'* She could like see it, like she was a seer of some kind. She would grab me by the back of the neck and start working her thumbs up and down my neck. And I have to tell you that for a few seconds I wanted to punch her, but then all of a sudden it was like she had broken up a knot or something and I would feel relief.

What was that? It was a physical touch. You know stress and tension causes pain, it causes your shoulders to tighten up, and sometimes you just need a hug. Sometimes you just need a back rub. Sometimes you just need someone to come alongside of you and tell you it is going to be okay. Someone to remind you that you are loved, and that God is there for you, that He journeys with you, and we just need to persevere and keep on persevering. Literally part of what this verse is saying is we need to let people come alongside of us.

The word translated here is 'save or raised up,' and in other translations it is 'heal.' It does not necessarily mean a literal physical healing, but it is metaphorically used in other passages to describe being restored, being rejuvenated. It can be an assignment of forgiveness as in reconciliation. There are lots of things in our life that are broken that God desires to restore, to heal, to encourage us with, so that we can go on to the next step. The emphasis here in this passage is primarily to encourage, comfort, restore, bless one another, pray for each other, and praise the Lord together in the midst of adversity. The mature should encourage the oppressed, the joyful should minister to the discouraged, and the community itself should be vibrant and interactive and engaging so that no one feels isolated from God in their difficulty.

And when we are studying this passage I have seen too many times in my own life how frequently I have committed prayer malpractice. I do things in prayer that aren't right. Often my prayers are from desperation, almost frantic because I have waited that long. My prayers are often as a last resort not the consequence of thoughtful planning. Our prayers are often a laundry list, *'Lord, do this. Give me that. Take care of that. Notice this,'* instead of a conversation.

Who among us wants to have a conversation with someone we supposedly love and we say, *'Okay, I want the dishes washed, the yard mowed, the oil changed in the car, and your room cleaned up.'* No one wants that. Why would we think that is good with God? *'Well Lord I brought my list for you today. I hope you live up to my expectations. I will be checking later to see how you did.'* Now we may not be that crass, but in fact sometimes that is what we sound like. Our prayers are often more about receiving than

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

alignment. Often they are more like demands rather than requests or entreaties. And often they are more about our physical condition than our spiritual condition.

Let me give you these principles and then we are done. Number one – prayer engages the body, soul and spirit; it is holistic. And we need to recognize prayer as that. It is body, soul and spirit. We ought to pray for ourselves and pray for each other with all of those things in mind.

Number two – prayer requires focus and attention if we do it right. When we do it right it gives us clarity. You will hear from God when you pray, and sometimes you will hear from God in ways you didn't expect to hear from Him. He will remind you of truth, and when you pray with someone else often He will remind you of truth through them. The Bible tells us that when two or more are gathered together that is where He is. Remember when Peter was in prison what was going on? They were all together in a room praying so fervently, so loudly that they couldn't even hear the knocking on the door. There was community, there was the buzz of encouragement in prayer with beseeching, reminding, truth telling and testifying going on in that room.

Which reminds me of number three – prayer does involve others; it creates community. Do you know what I aspire to? Pastor Ben and I talk about this from time to time and the other pastors and the elders have talked about this as well. As the spiritual leadership in this church we aspire to see every time we walk through that lobby people just gathered together with their arms around each other praying. I would love to see a line outside of the prayer room with people waiting to go in. I would love to see in the parking lot someone who would say, *'Hey, can I pray with you before we go?'*

How many times do we say to each other, *'Hey, will you pray for me?'* And we say, *'I am praying for you.'* But then we walk away and we never do it. It is almost like saying, *'Have a good day,'* or *'How are you doing?'* *'I will be praying for you.'* But it means nothing. It is empty words. And what might change in our lives, in our community, in our walk with God, in our experience with God, if when we heard someone say, *'Hey, pray for me,'* we would respond, *'Yes let's do that right now.'* It doesn't have to be a four hour meeting; it can be a forty second connection.

There may be something that God says to you and through you in that moment that will encourage both of you. Don't be afraid to do that. At work it is a great way to testify. If someone says, *'I know you are that Christian kind, so would you pray for me,'* just ask them to step some place in private and do that prayer right now. And watch what God does in your heart and in their heart.

Number four – prayer promotes eternal perspective and it provides priority. Sometimes God desires we suffer. He is glorified in our suffering and so are we. We learn things in difficulties that we never learn in ease. Paul said to, ***"Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."*** There are times when the assignment is not healing but

SHOW ME: PRAYER
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 9
Dan Burrell

endurance. It is not relief but it is perseverance. And in that it will be good for us and it will glorify God. We live in a culture that wants no pain and experiences little gain. And sometimes spiritually we have to have our faith tested and tried so that it will give us confidence to face even bigger things later on.

Number five – prayer produces praise and joy because it redirects the heart. In every situation, Paul wrote, in all things we are to give thanks. In all things we can rejoice. “***Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say keep rejoicing.***” And sometimes it is that quiet moment of prayer when the responsibility of adjusting our attitude into alignment with God’s authority in our life gives us that kick, that spark, that reminder that says, ‘*I will not live like I am defeated. I will trust Him in the midst of the valley.*’

Number six – prayer invites unity and harmony; it builds peace. That is why God said to pray for those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you. Pray for your enemies. If we listen and pray for the most difficult people in our lives God will do a transformative work. We expect Him to do it in them, but more often it will be done in us. That is that alignment that prayer calls us to do.

I am out of time and I just scratched the surface. I had two missions this morning. I wanted you to think about prayer differently than you have been thinking about it and I wanted you to broaden your view of prayer. Sometimes our prayer is so narrow it becomes our ‘give me’ list. I am asking you to do this – make it your alignment time. ‘*God let me hear from you that I might willingly yield to what you are doing in me, through me, and around me in this moment. Regardless of my circumstances, regardless of the fact that I am separated, I am hurting, I am confused, I am crying, I am in pain, but even in this moment may you be glorified by how I respond. In faith, in my blindness, in faith I choose to trust you.*’

And watch what God will do.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.