

The Healing Power of One-Anothering Prayer

Epistle of James
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Turn with me in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of James, James 5. We're continuing to look at verses 16 to 18. The title of the message, I settled on "The Healing Power of One-Anothering Prayer." Last week I was kind of double-minded about my title which is not good when you're preaching through James, to be double-minded. Anyway, so I settled on that, it's the healing power of one-anothering prayer. We talked about interpersonal, I think one-anothering is a better title, the healing power of one-anothering prayer which is described in James 5:16-18.

We've said that as we've looked at this passage, this entire passage covers verses 13 to 18 that the healing that James is talking about is spiritual healing. He's not primarily focused on physical healing. It doesn't fit the context of the whole letter. It doesn't fit the context, really, of the New Testament and the clarity that is coming that Jesus' healing ministry of healing physical diseases in his earthly ministry was to be a sign that is a sign to point to the reality of our need for spiritual healing; that he came not to save the world from just to save sinners in this present dark age from the maladies of physical illness, no, he came to save us from the malady of sin that has led to every other problem.

So he's dealing with spiritual healing and throughout the Bible that metaphor of healing is used to show that God is interested in healing us in our soul. You know, a passage you might just put down to read this week would be Psalm 107 and particularly verses 10 to 20, and what you'll see there is language that resonates what we're gonna read in just a moment in James, that is, the language of healing, language of saving out of spiritual distress.

The word "heal," actually, that is found in James 5:16 which we're about to read, is also found in the Greek translation of Psalm 107, the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In Psalm 107:20 it says that God sent forth his word and healed them and the healing that he gave was not of a particular sin or particular disease or malady, physical malady, it was the effects of their sin and rebellion, the spiritual darkness that they were in, the chains, the bondage. That's the healing James is talking about in this passage, spiritual healing.

Another example of that is Isaiah 57:15-19. We could go on and on and I just want to give you these two. They're really wonderful passages. Isaiah 57:15 is one of my favorite verses in the prophecy of Isaiah where he says, "For thus says the high and lofty one whose name is holy, who lives forever. I dwell in the high and lofty places and also with the one who has broken spirit and is lowly." So God whose name is holy, who lives forever, who dwells in the high and lofty place, also comes down to dwell with the broken-hearted and contrite and he goes on to describe this person. He speaks of sinners who've rebelled against him and he says twice in verse 18 and 19, "Though he has done this, I will heal him. I will heal him." Same verb in the Greek translation of Isaiah 57 that we're gonna read in James 5:16, the same Greek verb.

So healing was a metaphor for what needs to happen to the soul and that's what James is talking about, spiritual healing, and so we're talking about, then, the healing power of one-anothering prayer, the spiritual healing power of one-anothering prayer. Before we read the text, I want to mention one other thing by way of introduction and that's the key word "one another" in the text. You're gonna hear it twice. We are to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another. This is one of the key terms in the New Testament. I worked through the New Testament verses again and found 55 verses that describe places where we're either directly commanded or it's implied that we're supposed to do something for one another, 55 times, 15 of them are to love one another starting with John 13:14 and 15. Jesus on the night before he was crucified he says, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another," and that repeats again and again in Romans, and certainly in 1 John and other places we're told to bear one another's burdens, we're told to encourage one another, we're told to teach one another, admonish one another, so that the New Testament sees the growth of the Christian, growth in our spiritual life as a joint project; that no man is an island is especially true in the church of Jesus Christ; that if you're going to be all that God wants you to be, you must be involved in one-anothering relationships and you and I are called to be helping every other believer that we can be all that they can be by the grace of God.

We have a responsibility to shepherd one another and this is what James is calling us to, to see the power that will happen in our lives, that we are experiencing at times spiritual maladies, times of weakness, ineffectiveness, discouragement, defeat, that are there and will be there until we get involved in this kind of relationship with other believers. He doesn't mean this is the only means of grace, being under the word of God, hearing the word of God preached as a means of grace and so it's a means by which God blesses us with his grace, your own Bible reading, your own prayer, your own meditation essential means of grace, essential but not sufficient. We need one another. That's what James is saying.

So that's essentially the theme is in the title, the healing power of one-anothering prayer. So let's read the entire context, verses 13 to 18. We're focusing in on verses 16 to 18. Verse 16 is really where this comes to clarity. This is what James is calling us to, to take advantage of the healing power of one-anothering prayer. Let's begin reading at verse 13. James 5.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 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 earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to You and we acknowledge our great need of grace. We acknowledge that we are weak, that we need Your power. We pray that Your Holy Spirit would grant us the power to see and understand the Scripture that we have read, that we will consider, and that You will apply it to each heart and it will produce the fruit that You intend in our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now last time we looked at the doctrine of this verse. I said that that was really what we talked about. There are two main points and last time we looked at the doctrine under four subpoints, today we're looking at the second main point of the passage which we're gonna look at under three points today. So it's like last week we had four points. Let me just remind you quickly of what we said that verse 16 is teaching, what's the doctrine, the instruction for us.

We saw, first of all, the precepts. The precepts in the passage were two commands in verse 16 where we're instructed to confess and we're instructed to pray. We're called to be confessing our sins to one another. We talked about the present tense verb in Greek doesn't mean present tense time, it means ongoing continual action. That's the main emphasis of the Greek present and so the idea is to be continually confessing and be continually praying, be continually confessing to one another and be continually praying for one another. It means to have relationships where this is an ongoing part of our lives, really opening up to another brother or sister in Christ. That was the precepts, so be doing this. Be confessing. Be praying.

Then we said the promise is there. He says, "Do this so that you will be healed." That's the promise, that there will be spiritual healing, and we mentioned that it's spiritual healing because I shared with you that the two times that the word "sick" occurs in the English translation of this passage, that you really, the Greek words are ambiguous; they don't necessarily mean sick. The first word, actually, is more often translated "weak. Is any among you weak? Then let him call for the elders of the church." The second time the word "sick" occurs in verse 15, "and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick," it's actually a word which pictures exhaustion; it's to work to the point of

exhaustion. So he's talking about people who are spiritually weak and spiritually worn out; they're overcome; they've become ineffective. So the promise, though, is that if you do what I've told you to do, James is saying, if you commit to praying, if you commit to confessing and you commit to praying, then there will come a point where God will bring healing and the promise to heal is a promise of some kind of decisive breakthrough. It may not happen the first time you pray, it may not happen the 10th time you pray, but it's going to happen if you keep confessing and keep praying there will be definite marked blessing of God in your life, healing will happen, spiritual healing.

So that's the precept and the promise, then we said the principle he gives us as why this happens is he says, "Listen, the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much," that is, the prayer of a believer, that's who he's talking about, an average believer and this is clear because of what he says in verse 17, "Elijah was a man with like passions just like us and he prayed and this happened." So he's saying, "You as someone, if you have a believer pray for you then you have a righteous man praying for you and the prayer of that righteous man is mighty when they continue to effect that opportunity to pray for you in a specific way." That's the principle, so be confessing, be praying. You will be healed because prayer moves heaven and earth and he gives the example of Elijah. So it's the precept, the promise, the principle, and the proof was Elijah as the example.

Now that said, that was last week but just to put it in context now, how do you apply that? What are the implications of that doctrine? That's today's message, the implications of this doctrine, and there are three that I want us to consider this morning. The first thing that I think this text just makes very clear to us is the weakening effect of unconfessed sin. The weakening effect of unconfessed sin. The essential problem that the person in verse 14, "Is anyone among you weak?" is anyone so weak, overwhelmed, distraught by the difficulties in their lives, overcome, unable to even pray almost for themselves that they call for the elders of the church, how did that happen? The implication is it happened because of sin. At some level it's about sin.

The reason that you become weak, now you can, we all go through affliction but if you're going through affliction properly you're getting stronger. Yeah, you have moments of weakness, you have moments of being overwhelmed, but that there's progress because as James said at the beginning of his letter, "Hey, count it all joy when you encounter various trials for the trial of your faith produces endurance, and endurance produces proven character, and proven character has its way that you become perfect and complete." Affliction makes you stronger but when affliction makes you weaker, why is that? It's because of sin and that's one of the reasons God brings affliction is part of the whole way you get stronger is affliction always reveals our sin.

A beautiful of this in 1 Peter 1 where he says that the trial of your faith, the suffering that comes in your life, is like the refiner's fire that heats up the raw metal, the ore that's been taken out of the ground, and as it heats up the ore, the impurities rise to the surface and the refiner dresses them off, skims them off the top, and so the metal becomes purer and cleaner. So that's a picture. When we go through affliction, what tends to happen is our sin comes out, what's in our heart, but when we're responding properly, we repent, we

confess, we move forward, but there are times when we don't and that sin then becomes a deeper more profound problem. That's what James is describing.

That's the person who calls for help and he's then saying after he's explained the incredible power of the prayer of faith, which we spent two weeks looking at verses 14 and 15, he then from that says, "Listen, if this is true that when someone is overwhelmed and distraught and they call for the elders and it brings about this incredible blessing, that they are restored, literally saved; that they are raised up; that they are, their sins are forgiven. If this is true, then we all need to adopt as a way of life having people in our lives to whom we confess our sins so that we can be healed before it gets to that point." That's his argument. He's saying if these resources are there, why are we not using them? So that means he wants you to call for the elders of the church when you need them but what he's saying in verse 16 to 18 is do this before you get to that point. Just make it a part of your daily life to be engaged with one another so that you're helping one another. That's the call and so the reason, though, that we need it is, he's saying, "Listen, unconfessed sin was the problem for the believer who's distraught, who calls for the elders of the church and unconfessed sin is a problem in all of our lives at some level." And a lot of times it's because we don't know, we don't even know that we have sin. Sometimes we know it and it's unconfessed and we just haven't dealt with it, other times there are things we don't even realize that we're sinning.

So what James is telling us, one of the implications of this passage is the weakening effect of unconfessed sin. Unconfessed sin leads to you being weak and spiritually defeated, sidelined, ineffective. It stymies progress in the Christian life. Unconfessed sin halts growth. You may be familiar with a verse, maybe many of you memorized it, Proverbs 28:13. It's a verse that would be good to commit to memory. "He who conceals his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes it will find mercy." So if you conceal your sin, you will not prosper. It's essentially what James is saying. "Listen, one of the reasons you're not prospering is you're concealing your sin, you're hiding it."

Something about sin, it grows better in the darkness. It's like mildew. If you expose it to the sun, to the light of the sun, it just can't thrive, and so Satan's desire is to keep us always hiding. It's exactly what happened and it's the nature of sin to want to hide too. I mean, look what happened with Adam and Eve when they sinned, what's the first thing they did? They hide from God. The first thing they did was they hid from one another by covering their nakedness, and then they hide from God. Remember God comes in the garden and he says, "Where are you, Adam?" Now God knew where Adam was but he wanted Adam to see where Adam was and Adam said, "I heard the sound of You and I hid." That is the most, the most foolish, the most ridiculous thing for us to do.

The one thing that we should always do is take our sin to God and that's what Proverbs 28:13 is saying, "If you conceal your sin, you will not prosper." In fact, that word "prosper" is a very interesting Hebrew word. It's a word which means "to make progress." It means "to advance; to rush forward; to succeed." So it's interesting what he describes is that unconfessed sin stops the forward movement, the advance of your life. It renders you ineffective in taking the Gospel to others and it also renders you ineffective in taking

more of the ground of your own heart for the kingdom because there's a sense in which our Christian life, we should always be taking ground inwardly and we should always be trying to take ground outwardly into the lives of others; to be a blessing to others and to give more and more of ourselves to Christ. Unconfessed sin stops that progress.

So its weakening effect, its crippling effect, but when we hide it, progress is halted, we're sidelined, made ineffective, but when we confess it, we find compassion, we find mercy. One of the amazing things is when you go to God, you always find mercy. When you humble yourself before him and you confess to him, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," 1 John 1:9, "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So run to the Lord.

The weakening effect of unconfessed sin. An example of this, a really powerful picture of this is in the history of the conquest of the land in Joshua, Joshua 7. The story is, chapter 7 comes right after the people of Israel take Jericho. Remember the incredible battle of Jericho? March around the city seven times, on the seventh day, one time a day for seven days, on the seventh day, seven times and blow the trumpets, the walls fall down and they defeat this incredible, massive, armed city and they take it in dramatic fashion. Well then, the next place they go is to a little small town called Ai, who the guys that are doing the preliminary scouting again say, "Listen, Joshua, this isn't even big enough deal for us to send out the army, just send maybe 2,000-3,000 guys. No problem. It's very small, no problem, we'll take care of it." They go. He does that, 2,000-3,000 seems reasonable. They go down and they are routed by the people of Ai. Thirty-six people are killed and they chase them all the way back to camp, basically. They're humiliated. The people's hearts melt before them. Joshua is broken-hearted. He goes to the Lord, "What's happening?" And God says, "How can you prosper and succeed when you have sin in the camp?" Well, you see as when they conquered Jericho, God told them that the conquest of Jericho, that all of the goods and the loot is under the ban, that is, you're not to take anything for yourselves. They were going to take the gold, God authorized to take the gold and put it in the temple treasury but everything else is to be under the ban to be destroyed. You're not to take anything. So the Lord's telling them in chapter 7 when they are defeated, it's because someone did not honor that. There's hidden sin. At this point they don't know who's done it. Now we know it was a man named Achan. It was that hidden sin that stopped that incredible forward progress of the people of God.

So we can find ourselves being very effective, growing in the Lord, impacting people for the Gospel, and suddenly find our effectiveness radically hindered and stymied because of hidden sin. That's what James is saying and he says, "Listen, sin is such a powerful enemy, such a deceitful enemy, that we must be vigorous in seeking to defeat it so that it doesn't gain this kind of hold in our lives, and so you must work together to overcome it."

The weakening effect of unconfessed sin. That's the first implication. The second implication is the liberating power of confessing our sins to one another. The liberating power of confessing our sins to one another. He's basically saying confess your sins to one another and because of that, then you're able to pray for one another and you're gonna be healed. So that you've been bound up, you've been in chains, you've been enslaved,

you've been held back, you've been restrained, now you're set free. It doesn't feel like freedom when you're gonna confess your sins. This is the deceitfulness of the human heart. We believe that keeping it secret is better. It's the nature of our, it's the wickedness of our sin nature and the fact that we believe the lie. You can do it on your own. It's better to do that. People won't, they're not, this person's not gonna love you or they're not gonna care about you, they're gonna misuse the information, whatever. Whatever kind of things that Satan can use to keep us from confessing, he will, but when we do confess because he knows that when we do confess we will find the liberating power of confessing our sins. When we confess our sins, we are liberated.

Now I want us to consider under this second point three subpoints. Under point 2 there's an A, B, and a C. I want us to talk about what confession is; to whom do we confess; and why. Those are the three subpoints: what, whom and why.

What is confession? It's important to see the word that is used in verse 16, "confess your sins to one another." It's actually a compound word, the main word is "homolegeo" which is a compound word in itself. "Homo" means "same, legeo" means "to say." So "homolegeo" means "to say the same thing; to agree." Then it has a preposition on the front, "ek," which means "out of," which intensifies the meaning. So it speaks of confessing openly, almost joyfully. In fact, we're gonna see this word has some interesting usage where it's outside the norm of what we think of as confession. It actually can mean praise, to give glory. But what he's talking about here when he says, because it's used with a direct object, confess your sins, he's essentially saying say the same thing about your sin that God says about it. That's confession. Call it what God calls it. No excuses. Label it biblically.

In fact, there's three little things we might say about the what. How can we, what is confession. So there's, we're on point 2A and now it's 1, 2, 3. We could say a lot more about confession but I just want to say these three things. To confess means to label our sin biblically. Very important. There's a small distance between calling it correctly and calling it incorrectly and that small distance makes all the difference. We want to hide our sin. We want to justify our sin. We must call it what God calls it. We have ways of doing this in every area and we say things like, "It was a white lie." That's a way of saying, "I lied but," you know, we speak euphemistically about what we do bad all the time and what we need to do biblically is stand with God and agree with him. It's almost like you come and you stand aside the judge and you agree with him as he pronounces what you've done. You look at, "What do you say about what I've done," and you stand over and you say, "I agree with you. You are right. I lied. I murdered in my sinful anger. I committed adultery in my heart. I was greedy and lustful after the things of this world."

When you say it the way God says it, that is confession and this is where you want to be hard with yourself. When it's you and God talking about your sin, you want to agree with him completely. "Lord, lay me bare. Show me what I am." Don't try to hide anything from him. Open your heart to him and let him describe it and let the word of God help you, guide you to call it what it truly is. That's confession. It starts with labeling our sin biblically.

So the B or second, no, it's actually B2A2. Sorry. The second part of confession is to take full responsibility for our sin. Not just label it biblically but take full responsibility. Don't blame anybody else for it. The reality is that every time you or I sin, we are responsible 100% for our sin. You say, "Well, you made me angry." That's the kind, this is the kind of cloaking language we use. We say stuff like this, "Honey, I'm really sorry that I yelled but you really made me angry." And actually we're not confessing anything, we're prosecuting them. Do you see that? Or if you use words like "but." You know, "I yelled but you made me angry." Or we'll say sometimes something that's even worse. Well, it's not worse, it's all terrible, but, "If I offended you, I'm really sorry." That's like saying, this is what you're really saying in your heart, "If you are such a sensitive person that what I said might possibly have offended you, then I am sorry that you are such a weakling." Rather than the truth which is to say the other person may well have sinned, often they have. It's usually it's two sinners colliding, right? So there's sin on both sides but their sin does not justify my sin. Never does it justify my sin according to the Bible. If you want to agree with God, you must take 100% responsibility for your sin.

A verse that teaches this really clearly is 1 Corinthians 10:13. Now listen to this, "There is no temptation," that's unequivocal, there is no exception, "There is no temptation but such as is common to man and God is faithful and with the temptation will provide a means of escape." Every time you're tempted, a faithful God is there giving you the way out so if you don't get the way out, whose fault is it? It's mine if I don't. It's not God's. It's not the other person's. Even when people are stumbling blocks, I'm still responsible for my sin. Now God will deal with them about the stumbling block because God, I mean, that's a big deal to be a stumbling block to someone but it doesn't justify my sin.

Take full responsibility. That's what confession is because God says you're completely responsible and so you step over to them and you say, "I agree with you, I am completely responsible." And the third thing, aspect of confession, label sin biblically, take full responsibility, give glory to God. This is one that's not so obvious in the way we think naturally but I think it's in the word and it's definitely in the way the word is used in the Scriptures.

I mentioned the word that we're talking about here is a compound word, eks-homolegeo, and so the usage of that in the New Testament, the 10 times it's used, it varies and at times it's used like this, to give praise; to give honor; to agree with in that kind of way. And I mentioned Joshua 7, I want you to turn over there for a moment, turn over to Joshua 7. This is the story, again, of Ai. Joshua and the people have defeated Jericho, now they've experienced this humiliating defeat at the hand of this small city, Ai. They don't know why God has told them it's because there's sin hidden, concealed sin in the camp and the Lord then exposes it.

It's really interesting how he does it. We know as readers who's done it but the people don't and so it tells us in verse 16 of chapter 7 that God had told Joshua, "Tomorrow have the people consecrate themselves, tomorrow I'm going to show where the sin is." And so what happens is Joshua brings out the people by tribes. "Is it the tribe of Reuben? Is it the

tribe of Simeon? Is it the tribe of Levi? Is it the tribe of Judah?" Yes, it's the tribe of Judah. Now among the tribe of Judah, this is 1/12th of the whole nation, there's a lot of families, which family is it? It's the family of the Zerahites. So he brings out family by family and now this family is identified, it's the family of the Zerahites. Now in the Zerahites, who is it among the Zerahites, the descendants of Zerah, who is it? It's a guy named Zabdi. So now it's this smaller family group and then it becomes obvious it's Achan.

Achan is selected as the one who is guilty and this is what Joshua says to Achan, listen to this, verse 19. He knows that Achan has been, God has demonstrated Achan did something of taking something under the ban and because of that the whole nation has been held back and been defeated. Achan is the one. He's the guilty party. This is what Joshua says to Achan, verse 19, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me." Confess openly. You see, don't hide it from me. But it's interesting in the Greek translation of this particular verse, you might think that the word eks-homologeō occurs in that verse in the Greek translation of this Old Testament verse. You might think where it says, "Tell me now." It's not. It's actually in the word "give praise to Him." Eks-homologeō. By agreeing with God that he's doing the right thing by calling you out and exposing, you are giving glory and praise to him. I think this is what David was talking about in Psalm 51:3 when he said, "Against You, against You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight so that You are justified when You judge and vindicated when You speak. I have sinned and, God, You are right to call me out."

So confession is not just saying, "Yeah, this is what I did," but it's really acknowledging the Lord, his law is righteous and holy and he's right to point his finger at me and he's right to bring temporal judgment upon me, discipline upon me. "You are right." That's what it means to truly confess. Label it biblically, take full responsibility, and then give glory to God. "Lord, Your ways are right. I used to think," we all justify our sin, whatever especially if it's a sin pattern you have in your life, you've learned to justify it and then you go to the point of saying, "No, I will no longer justify it. God is right. That is evil." It's not just white lies, it is evil deceitfulness. There's idolatry at the root of that. I'm worshiping something other than the living God. It's as bad as me sitting over, bowing down to an idol. That's unthinkable to most of us in the West. We can't relate to that. It's not a part of our culture. But that's what it is when we commit sin. Sin is idolatry and when you see it that way, it makes you hate it and you give glory to God when you acknowledge that. So give glory to God. That's what confession is.

Now the second subpoint under point 2, the liberating power of confessing our sin, not just what about confession but to whom. Our verse is interesting. Now confession, the ultimate person we confess to is always God. Like David said in Psalm 51, "Against You, You only have I sinned." Relatively speaking, he had really sinned against Bathsheba, he had sinned against Uriah, he had sinned against the people that he's over, sinned against his family. He had sinned against a lot of people but he says relatively speaking, "Against You only have I sinned because You are so holy and I am so wicked and other people are

wicked, so it really, it's a smaller thing horizontally when I consider the magnitude of my sin against You, a holy God. It makes everything else pale in comparison."

That is true but James in James 5:16, he's not talking about that essential part of confession. He says confess your sins to one another. Now he doesn't mean confess your sins to one another and don't confess them to God clearly. Of course you're gonna confess them to God but isn't it interesting that he says confess them to one another? What he's getting at is there's something profound that happens in this one-anothering relationship; that God has willed to work through relationships, human relationships in our lives. As we talked about, all the one-anothers in the New Testament, the fact that we are made in the image of a Triune God, that has incredible implications; that the one God who has created all things out of nothing is in his essence three distinct persons in one God. One substance, three persons. That means he's always existed in relationship and when you look at the Bible, what you see is God the Father doesn't do anything independently of God the Son. God the Son does not act independently of God the Father. God the Father and God the Son don't do things without God the Spirit. There is always perfect harmonious working together in the accomplishing of creation and redemption and providence. All three persons of the Trinity working together, you are created to image that. You and I, we're made relational beings to be in relationship. This is why he said it is not good for man to be alone. It's not just about the marriage relationship, it is about that, yes, one man and one woman for life, no doubt about it. That's the clear teaching of the Bible. That's his intent for the family, but it's also that we are to be in relationship with other human beings; that we're to work together to give glory to God, and that now on this side of the fall as sinners, we need to work together to help one another keep looking to Christ. We need to help one another understand our hearts. We need to help one another see our sin.

The reality is I can't see my sin the way somebody else can see it. It's kind of like spiritual myopia. Sin is part of it. Is myopia near-sightedness? Nobody's arguing. Okay, well, if it's not, supply the right word. Anyway so, oh, no, far-sightedness is what I'm going for. It's not, we have spiritual far-sightedness, that is, I can see your sin, I can't see mine.

So if I can't see mine, I need some help seeing mine and you need help seeing yours and this doesn't mean we're supposed to go around like referees, blow the whistle, throw a flag constantly, "No, you're out of line here. You're out of line there. You're out of line there. Man, I'm a good referee." No, we're to love one another but we're to be in relationship, caring for one another and love one another enough to confront one another about our sin. This is what God intends. We're never gonna get there.

I love the story C. J. Mahaney tells about a guy who's sitting at breakfast, he's at breakfast with his family and he sees another guy across the restaurant who's dressed up, he's got his, he looks fantastic, suit's pressed, every hair is in place, perfectly manicured, beard, mustache, and he is clearly preparing. He's going over notes kind of vigorously. He thinks to himself as he sees him early on in the breakfast, "I bet that guy's got a big meeting today. He really looks sharp. Must be some kind of important meeting." Then he

notices a little bit later on that the guy after he's eaten his bagel, he has cream cheese on his mustache and he thinks to himself, perfect suit, perfectly manicured hair, but he has cream cheese on his mustache. So he's gonna go into a meeting, think about that. I'm a, you know, Bill Smith. Here I am to, I'm here to sell you whatever. I'm here to buy whatever. I'm here to get this job. And the first thing all the person can think about is you've got cream cheese on your mustache and it just makes you look like you're an incompetent boob and there's no way I'm gonna hire you. There's no way I'm gonna buy from you. Whatever. So C. J. Mahaney says, "What should I do, tell him? Of course I've got to tell him because if he doesn't see a mirror, he can't see his face."

We can't see our face. We need someone else and we need to as just a part of life to humble ourselves and to be open and inviting for that kind of correction in our life. It's completely unnatural to the old man but it is natural to the new man but it's still, you've gotta fight against your flesh and crucify your flesh because your flesh doesn't want to do it, but if you don't do it, you will not be all that God wants you to be and you will continue to be weak and continue to be sidelined in areas of your life.

So he says confess to one another, to whom. Then why? Why? I've kinda given you part of it there, we can't see, but I think that one of the things that I think that he really is, we see in the Scriptures is we don't have clarity; that this kind of confession, mutual confession, relational engaging of one another and talking about life and talking about the struggles of life, there comes clarity in understanding what's going on in my heart that can't happen any other way. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" To know our hearts is impossible apart from grace and so even as redeemed believers, we still, we struggle to know our hearts.

Proverbs 20:5 says, "The heart of man, the purposes of a man's heart are deep waters." That is why I do what I do, the purposes of my heart. Why I do what I do in certain situations, the why is like something submerged in deep water. You know how you can look and you can sometimes see into the water a little bit, you can tell the first couple of feet down, especially if you're, like if you're in a lake, you can't see anything. That's what our hearts are like, it's more like a lake than the gulf or the Atlantic versus the gulf. But even if you're in the gulf, the purposes of your heart are deep waters. You can't see way down in what's going on in there but a man of understanding will draw them out. You and I need a man of understanding to help us. You need a woman of understanding, you need a Christian of understanding who's looking into the water of your heart and helps you to see what's there.

So these relationships give clarity. What he's describing is this is, it doesn't happen like one time. Let me tell you what's wrong with me. We confess it. We pray. Boom, I'm just over it. Fantastic. It's not this kind of name it, claim it Christianity he's talking about, he's talking about relational walking together, talking about the issues of life, the things we continue to struggle with over time. And remember the verb confess and pray, present tense continuous, go on confessing, go on praying. The idea is you keep talking about life, you keep talking about the failures, you keep talking about the struggles, you keep praying about these things and God gives clarity to the purposes of the heart. You begin

to understand that it's not just that, you know, the reason that we do the things we do, we find the idols at the root. You're able to pull it out by the root and someone else helps you see that.

I mean, like when you start talking to someone and they can look at you and see it more clearly than you can, and maybe you're talking about frustration with something in your family, some family member is really irritating you, and what they're doing is so ungodly and you see clearly what they're doing wrong and this brother or sister says, "Well, why does it bother you so much? Tell me what's going on, why are you so emotional about this? Every time you bring it up, you get really agitated." And so you talk about it and, "Well, let's pray about it." Then you talk about it again a couple weeks later, you're talking about the situation, "How is it going with that?" And you start sharing and they say, "You know, do you think that maybe that maybe what's going on is that the Lord wants you to minister to that person and you just don't want to, you don't want to go to the trouble of it? You don't want to take the risk to really confront them? Or it's you would rather just have ease and pleasure, maybe that's your....?" You see, you're getting to the idol. The real problem, the real reason you're so irritated at that person is they're messing up your life. The real reason that you're irritated with that person, though they're a sinner and they're doing some bad stuff, is they're not worshiping your idol. They're not bowing down to your ease and your comfort and what you want in life.

That's why you're angry with them and when you see that and you confess that, that's where change starts happening and that happens through this kind of relational sharing. It doesn't happen overnight and it happens as get to be more skilled to understand the word. We have to keep helping each other grow in that but it's like the difference between, you know, dealing with the weeds in your yard by running over them with a lawnmower or using weed killer. I've got a lot of weeds in my yard right now. I didn't get the pre-emergent out and so I'm trying to kill them with spray and stuff but I've gotta tell you, when I, there's some of them that I just pull out by the roots and I really relish getting one by the roots. You know, the thing's sitting up like this, ugly, nasty looking thing and you get it and you get it all the way down to the roots and you think, "You are done. You're no longer in my life. Get out." That is what we need to do with our sin. The thing is we can't get to those roots without help. That's what he's saying and it happens when we learn to confess and to pray for one another like this, we start getting to the root and we start becoming a lot more holy and a lot more like Christ.

So that's the why. The final point, the big third major point now. We talked about the weakening effect of unconfessed sin, the liberating power of confessing our sins, the final point is the healing power of targeted prayer, the third implication of this passage, because what James is really arguing, the main thing he's arguing in the passage is the power of prayer. He's telling us prayer is the underutilized resource in your life and having someone else pray for you by being vulnerable to let them know what your struggles are and them helping you identify the things that need to be prayed for, this is what will change everything.

Remember we saw how Elijah, he uses Elijah the example, Elijah prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain for 3 ½ years, and then he prayed that it would rain and the sky poured forth water and the earth produced its fruit. The idea is and the word in the text is the heavens poured forth water, so the idea is prayer moves heaven and earth. The prayer of a righteous man energetically operating continually for a particular blessing moves heaven and earth. If that's true, James is like, "Why aren't you praying for one another? Why aren't you doing this?"

Make this a part of your everyday life. Don't expect immediate, you know, like a microwave oven blessings. No, this is slow cooked. It's like pork roast that you cook for a really good pork roast that you cook for like two days or brisket. I'm sorry. It's getting close to dinner. But seriously, some things cooked longer, the great benefit that comes. He's saying if you will commit to pray like that, if you will commit to pray and to confess and to work together with a long-term view, God will do dramatic things in your life and there's something about when we, when you are working with another brother or you're working with another sister, woman to woman, man to man, or husband to wife, parent to child, you're working together on the problems of the heart and you come to clarity on what a heart issue is and you make that an issue of prayer and you pray and you pray and you pray, something dramatic is gonna happen. In God's time. It doesn't mean you're gonna be finally rid of it forever but you're gonna have breakthroughs that you will look back and say, "That was decisive. That was a decisive time in my life."

This is what Jesus is talking about when he says in Matthew 18:19 in the context of church discipline, which this is like pre-discipline we're doing for each other, but it is discipline because really discipline is good, discipline is what makes you a disciple, it makes you a follower. So in Matthew 18:19, Jesus said after he taught to give the steps of church discipline, he says, "Again I say to you," listen to this, "Again I say to you if two of you, if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask. Again I say to you if two of you agree on earth about anything they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. If two people agree for where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst." That's the context of that familiar verse, that when two people agree about something that God is doing in his kingdom, in your heart, in your life, when you find that kind of agreement, that kind of synergism, he's saying, "My Father will answer that prayer."

And we have the opportunity because we're surrounded by believers who love Christ and he's saying get involved in each other's lives. Work at it. It's gonna take time to find the kind of connections that you need to, but just try to be more generally willing to talk with one another, to share with one another, and to pray for one another, and you will see the glory of God. The same God who saved us by the blood of Christ wants to keep saving us through the power of his word and through the power of prayer.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the instructions of Your word. We thank You that You have not left us without clear direction, that Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our

path, and You want us to take steps based on what we hear from Your word even today to enact what You're talking to us about; that You're putting Your finger on things in our hearts that You want us to do and we pray that You would work now to clarify that, even as we move into the time for the Lord's Supper, may You continue to deal with us and show us how we need to act on what we've heard, not to be hearers but to be doers of the word. May You make us more and more what You want us to be for the glory of our Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.