

Pursuing Church Care, Connection, and Community

James 5:16-20

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC Aug. 8, 2021

Please turn in God's Word to the book of James chapter 5, and as you do I want to give thanks to God for the **Sacramento Gospel Conference** held here yesterday. Thanks to all who served!

I want to continue the **conference theme** of the **self and the local church** and apply that to the passage in front of us. TALK ABOUT SELF / IDENTITY

The Babylon Bee had a headline about a man who wants to self-identify by preferred *adjectives* he'd like you to respect: 'Ted Becker never worried much about his pronouns, but [the article says] people use adjectives to describe him that are not at all descriptions he identifies with ... "Here are the adjectives I identify with," Becker put on social media. "Cool, witty, handsome, innovative, fun.' Please use one of these adjectives when describing me." "It distresses me when people use adjectives I don't identify as," Becker later explained. "Like 'creepy,' 'weird,' or 'off-putting.' That's basically denying my existence and trying to genocide me." Many would call that statement 'nutty,' but that is not from Becker's list of approved adjectives... he's trying to work with social media...to enforce'¹

If you don't know, **Babylon Bee is satire**, a joke, not a real story, but reality is there's a lot of nuttiness in our world that wants to let "self" define itself. We prefer to think and speak of ourselves in ways different than scripture.

How we identify raises the bigger issue of identity and self in the scripture.

This is **part of a long train**: self-esteem, self-love, self-help. **Self-identifying** is just the latest car in a train being driven by self. What does scripture say?

- "*lay aside the old self*" (we saw that a few months ago in [Col. 3:9](#))
- Jesus: '*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*' ([Luke 9:23](#), gospel vs. self)
- [2 Cor 5:15](#) Jesus died '*so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*'
- [James 4:10](#): *Humble yourself...* Self is the problem, it must decrease
-

In James 4 the desires of self are the source of problems

Watch out for any words hyphenated with self. Watch out for self in church, how you want it to be. A church is a place to confess sin and self for help. Our identity in James 5 is in Christ and in His community. Notice language in [v. 12](#): *one another, brothers* (family terms), or [v. 14](#) *elders of the church*. Not just when sick, if you're weak, in deep struggle, call for elders to pray.

Let me read [5:16](#) to the end: ¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *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.* ¹⁸ *Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.* ¹⁹ *My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,* ²⁰ *let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

James is concerned with those who go off by themselves. **Lone rangers are dead rangers.**

Wandering lone sheep are in danger away from the fold and shepherding. James is also concerned with those who think they're all alone and by themselves, like Elijah felt when he prayed (our nature is

like his). James is concerned with those who are self-protective and don't confess sin or who'd rather seek help outside the church instead of elders or each other.

Flesh says: be isolating -> Bible says: be inviting help

I need to protect my privacy -> I need protection of accountability

Too humiliating to share with someone I see in church -> Liberating

I can act like all is well -> Confess you're not and need prayer

There's risk in opening up -> There's greater risk if you don't

See discussion guide question #2 on how to overcome that

Chapter 4 says **humility opens up grace, humble self**. Chapter 5 shows how.

I'm thankful for those who have been applying James 5 by confessing sins and struggles and praying for each other (some who've never opened up to church leaders or fellow believers before). I really sense God has us in this passage now to grow us in prayer, care, connection and church community. Several in the last couple weeks have lost loved ones (4 more I learned after last Sunday's announcements, brutal death of a member's nephew out of State). All loss is brutal, and some face brutal reality of loved ones that may not make it much longer. A year ago yesterday my father in law died at our place. Yesterday was Kevin Griffin's memorial (pray for Kathie and family)

There's also hurting families with us for other reasons, spiritually struggling spouses, parents, kids, or single people who may be lonely like Elijah was in this text when he prayed. CA is in a drought, and there's also some in a spiritual drought around us. Some are wandering from the truth, some have wandered away from the church. You may see a real need for healing in a relationship, but there also are sins you can't see that people try to keep hidden. This is a timely passage for us as we come to the last part of the book of James because it speaks to all of those struggles and it gives God's help through prayer, care, connection and community to pursue in a church

This is about the power of prayer by a righteous person (end of v. 16) and prayer in a time of dryness and drought (v. 17). For Elijah it was a real time of depression and spiritual weariness when he prayed the prayer of v. 18. If we're weaker we can soon become those who wander in v. 19, so watch out.

If you're not vulnerable to other believers like v. 16, you're vulnerable to be like v. 19, going astray. If you don't confess to a brother or sister the truth, you may soon wander from the truth into a multitude of sins, like v. 19-20.

OUTLINE (continuing from last week's message):

1. Call for shepherding and prayer in your struggles (v. 14-15)
2. Confess your sins to others for prayer and accountability (v. 16a)
3. **Consider Elijah and the power of prayer (v. 16b-18)**
4. **Care for others in sin by pursuing them in love (v. 19-20)**

3. Consider Elijah and the power of prayer (v. 16b-18)

v. 16 ends with the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availing much. It's powerful and effective. The power in prayer is God's. He works in it powerfully when we lack power. Chapter 1 says if you lack wisdom, ask in faith. Chapter 5 basically says if you lack strength, ask in the prayer of faith. v. 14 uses a word that can mean sick or weak, literally without strength, call for prayer backup from leaders who are spiritually strong. v. 15 uses a word that can mean weary and about to faint or lose heart (same word in Heb 12 for a runner in the Olympics who collapses and needs help to get back up). The image is one down and out, and the prayer in faith of elders can lift up.

Friend, don't neglect the church's resources and reinforcements!

There's power in prayer, but again it's **God's power in our weakness**. That's why I think after v. 16 on the power at work when the righteous pray, v. 17 gives the example of Elijah. Consider Elijah, v. 17: *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours ...* James doesn't want us to look at Elijah as a super hero, with prayer as his super power. Elijah had the same nature as us, and just like v. 14-15 he had struggles and weakness, physically and emotionally.

Why did he pray it wouldn't rain? And why does James bring that up and not his prayer to resurrect the widow's son or his praying down fire from heaven at Mt. Carmel (arguably more powerful illustrations)? I think in this context James wants to actually highlight when Elijah struggled bodily and spiritually (like v. 14), but also he prayed for drought to get their attention and to restore God's people who had wandered from the truth (like v. 19). Elijah wanted to turn them back. Israel wasn't confessing their sins to one another or praying for healing like v. 16, they weren't calling on his name like v. 15, they weren't humbling themselves like chapter 4 says we must.

God told **Solomon** in 2 Chron 7:13 "*When I shut up the **heavens** so that there is no **rain** ... or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ if my people, who are called by **my name**, will **humble themselves** and **pray** and seek my face and **turn** from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will **forgive their sin** [like James 5:16] and will **heal their land** [5:16]" (NIV).*

That's what Elijah prayed for and God did that for 3.5 years to get their attention, to humble them, to turn and heal and forgive sins and they confess them. We're not OT Israel with its land promises, but we have the same nature as Elijah and his people, and God still sends plagues for that purpose. He can also cause things to dry up financially or afflict physically to turn us.

When David didn't confess, his spiritual strength dried up (Ps 32:4)

Prov 28:13 *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.* **APPLY FURTHER**

Don't give up on people and don't give up on praying. It was 3.5 years of drought in this case, but God's purposes were at work. Look at James 5:18

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

That literally happened in the OT, but remember James 5 is also about NT believers who are spiritually in need of refreshment from above they pray for so they can bear fruit. v. 7 applies this idea to being patient and v. 8 says strengthen your heart. v. 10 says remember the prophets (Elijah was one).

Specifically when Elijah prayed for rain he was in a low point like v. 14

TURN BACK TO 1 KINGS 18 AND LET'S READ FROM THAT STORY

James 5 talks about people needing prayer for restoring or being lifted up from physical or spiritual or even emotional weakness. Elijah is our nature

DISCUSS CONTEXT OF DROUGHT, BROOK, WIDOW, MT. CARMEL

In 1 Kings 18:37 Elijah prays: '*Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that **you have turned their hearts back.***'³⁸ *Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*³⁹ *And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."*...

But from that mountaintop experience, he comes to a low point as Jezebel makes him #1 on Israel's most wanted list. He's a guy with a nature like us. Look at **19:3**: *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.*⁴ *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And*

he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, **O LORD, take away my life**, for I am no better than my fathers.”⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “**Arise and eat.**”⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a **cake** baked on hot stones and a jar of **water**. And he ate and drank and **lay down again**.⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “**Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.**”⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and **went in the strength of that food** forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”¹⁰ He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, **even I only, am left**, and they seek my life, to take it away.” [In v. 18 God says]. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal ...

God calls him out from his pit of despair and from his pity party

Elijah had a nature like ours and he thought he was all alone, but God says I have a remnant of 7,000 who haven't bowed. In ch 18 he was weak, all bent down with his face in his knees praying and then God sends rain. Elijah was weary but God lifted him up and restored him and gave him strength to run. That's the language of James 5:15, weary restored and lifted up by the Lord.

He didn't want to leave his cave, he thinks hide or suicide

In ch 19 Elijah's distressed and depressed, he has no strength, an emotional low point, and he wants to give up on life and die as he prays. But the Lord comes in prayer to refresh him and to even meet his physical needs (that's what oil meant in Bible times). It wasn't just prayer it was practical needs, too. Medically speaking he needed water and sleep and God shepherds him to that and provides that along with food to strengthen. **Oil** in James 5 was **for medical needs** that shepherds of a church might bring along with prayer

James 5 calls us to that pattern and you can go back to James

James says Elijah was “subject to like *passions* as we are” (KJV, *emotions* like us). If we pray with the same earnestness and fervency to the same God, mighty change can take place in our spiritually dry world today.

It may take years (like that drought) but be encouraged by Elijah's story. And when people struggle like him, help them rest or be refreshed, make sure they're sleeping and eating, and help them rise for the journey ahead

Consider Elijah and the power of prayer—God's power as we pray for help.

Last point:

4. Care for others in sin by pursuing them in love (v. 19-20)

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Who is 'among you'? (note v. 14, phrase for those under elders of church).

Phrase for church in NT: 1 Pet 5: 'I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock among you...'

Acts 6 choose church leaders 'from among you...'

1 Thess 5:12 appreciate leaders who 'labor among you and are over you...'

Who are the leaders you've put yourself under? Membership does that to fulfill Heb 13:17 – submitting to leaders among you to watch over your soul.

If you've never done that, communicated to elders you want to obey that biblical command in this church, if this is your church, do it. **Class on 8/15**

GCBC vows of members: 'To watch over other believers in brotherly love, through prayer, and giving aid in times of need ... submit to the leadership of this congregation and be subject to its discipline [correction, protection] ... To not forsake the corporate assembling of myself together with a gathered church even if it becomes necessary to leave this congregation'.

Conversation I had at memorial – who's your James 5:14. Heb 13:17, 10:25

What does 'one among you wanders from the truth' mean in v. 19?

v. 20 uses a different word for wandering, 'the error of his ways' he needs to be turned back from. He needs to be saved from the destruction of his sin and end of v. 20 mentions a '*multitude of sins*.' This is serious wandering.

Wander in v. 19 is translated '*deceived*' in chap 1. It's translated '*wayward*' (Heb 5:2). 2 Peter 2:15 '*forsaking the right way, they have gone astray...*'

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love

Do you care for others enough to pursue them in love? This word 'wander' in v. 19 was the same word in our scripture reading, translated *gone astray*:

Mt 18:12 says there's '*a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?*'¹³ "*If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.*"¹⁴ "*So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.*"¹⁵ "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*"¹⁶ "*But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.*"¹⁷ "*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*" (NASB)

Don't tell it to the church by gossiping. One-on-one privately lovingly show your straying brother / sister from Scripture why you believe his/her actions are sin and concerning to you, and you'd like to help restore them. If he / she listens and turns back as James says, PTL you've won a brother back.

If you do that and this person in your church family rejects a clear teaching of Scripture and the person is unwilling to turn from clear sin, then it says you can **ask one or two more from your church family (Gal. 6:1)**. **The 2 or 3 witnesses** can establish the facts and help assess where the sinner is at, and if they won't listen to loving pleading, then Jesus says "*tell it to the church*" – the elders have to do this at times as a drastic measure so the church can be informed to pray and plead with him to repent. Church operation rescue.

Mt 18:17 says "*if he refuses to listen even to the church ...*" so the church was told and those who know him are trying to turn him back, but he won't listen even to the church pointing out scripture to him, Jesus says we're to treat him like a pagan or an unbeliever because that's how he's acting. He's to be put out of church if he continues in flagrant unrepentant sin (1 Cor 5)

If a sheep (professing sheep among us) is wandering toward a cliff and we do not do all drastic measures to get its attention, we don't truly love. We can't judge one's heart infallibly but we are to judge clear and dangerous sin by God's Word, and as James says, if we turn one back, we may save from death. Even believers can die as a result of sin, and if the person is not truly saved, and we turn him to the gospel, he's saved from eternal death!

Who's the someone to bring back? (note: not elders in v. 14, it's your job)

GCBC Constitution for 'Members of this church and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church who err in doctrine, or who engage in conduct that violates Scripture... it shall be the duty of any member of this church who has knowledge of the erring individual's heresy or misconduct to warn and correct such erring individual in private, seeking his or her repentance and restoration...'

Am I my brother's keeper, Cain asked? The NT answers yes, you are.

Does v. 20 mean the one who wanders from truth isn't saved? Maybe

In end of v. 20 what covers a multitude of sin? Love in 1 Peter 4. This is loving intervention, correction, and protection we all need in the church

End of Jude: *show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.* (NLT)

Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.
...Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe...
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died.

Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save! His love covers your multitude of sins. If you turn back from your sins, and trust Jesus alone to save you, His life and death and resurrection, your soul can be saved from death. No good works can save, but He saves all who repent and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

He cares for people in sin by pursuing them in love, and calls us to as well.

Let's pursue relationships like v. 16, be accountable, be quick to humbly confess when you have sinned against others in your family or church family. And when others fail you, rather than talk behind their back, you take it in prayer before the face of God. And you pray for each other in the body of Christ (like v. 16 says) rather than complain about the body of Christ (v. 9 says don't). You commit to do your part where others may lack.

Why We Love the Church: Find a good local church, become a member, stay there for the long haul ... Go to church Sunday and worship there in spirit and truth, be patient with your leaders, rejoice when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, bear with those who hurt you, and give people the benefit of the doubt. While you are there, sing like you mean it, say hi to the teenager no one notices, welcome the blue hairs and the nose-ringed, volunteer for the nursery once in a while. And yes, bring your fried chicken to the potluck...invite a friend to church, take the new couple out for coffee, give to the ... offering, be thankful someone vacuumed the carpet, enjoy the Sundays that click for you, pray extra hard on the Sundays that don't...'²

I love Thy church, O God. Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye, And written on Thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given Till toils and cares shall end.

Let's pray God help to us pursue church care, connection, and community

¹ <https://babylonbee.com/news/man-asks-that-you-respect-his-preferred-adjectives/>

² DeYoung, 226-27.