

Friends we've arrived at the week we've been waiting for. The final sermon from the book of James. The conclusion of our series Jim Time. If you're like me, you've left here with some pretty sore spiritual muscles as we've made our way through this letter. I also hope that like me you are feeling a bit more fit in your walk of faith.

Today's concluding passage is going to give us something we haven't experienced much as we've studied this letter. There really won't be any yelling or scolding from James. James will actually show his down-to-earth side. James lands his letter with a focus on prayer and his well-known guidance on healing prayer. He also teaches us about confession, and restoration. In his final words, he offers his thoughts about how a church family, like us, should respond to our different seasons of life. Seasons that can and will offer things like suffering, joy, sickness, and even spiritual wandering.

Our passage starts with a call to prayer. "Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

We are to pray in all circumstances. Not just in the midst of suffering. Not just when we or someone we love are sick. When we are cheerful. God needs to hear from us too! Let's try this for a moment. Who can call out something they are cheerful for?

Prayer belongs in every part of life. Prayer keeps us from rejoicing alone or carrying burdens by ourselves

In the next verse, James shares the recipe for praying when someone is sick in vs 14. "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."

Let's start with what this prayer is not. It is not a spiritual emergency button only to be pushed when nothing else works. Prayer should be a normal part of our walk with Christ. As a member here at St. Johns, prayer is part of our commitment in our membership liturgy.

Also, do not expect a prayer for healing to be some kind of show. We are not praying as if we control God. A healing prayer is a humble prayer. A prayer of someone who says to a church, “I need prayer” and it’s the church responding to that person saying, “We are here for you”.

Did you know though that there are people who suffer quietly, thinking they do so in the name of strength? “I don’t want to be a bother to anyone.” “This really isn’t that serious.” “I don’t want people to feel sorry for me.” “I’ll be fine.”

Real strength asks for prayer. It’s like someone offering help when they see someone carrying a heavy box. Pride says, “No, I’ve got this.” Faith says, “I don’t have to carry this alone.” Asking for help, asking for prayer is not a sign of weakness. It’s an act of faith shouting loud and proud.

But what’s all this anointing with oil stuff anyway? Would you like to know a little bit of the backstory of this practice? Whew...thanks for asking for a longer sermon.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, **olive oil considered the primary medicine for treating illnesses**. Medical professionals and ordinary families alike used it as a universal treatment.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? The Samaritan poured wine AND oil onto the victim’s wounds. Wine served as an antiseptic. Oil was the soothing balm.

Ancient physicians like Hippocrates prescribed olive oil for over 60 conditions including things like muscle soreness, skin infections, joint inflammation, and fevers. The Greek word James uses for "anointing" is *aleiphō*. It referred to the **physical rubbing or massaging of oil** into the skin, for things like preparing for an athlete for an event.

With James Jewish upbringing and instruction of Old Testament traditions, he would expect his readers to know that oil also represented **holiness, authority, and the Holy Spirit**.

In the dry, hot climate of the Ancient Near East, **skin care was a health necessity**. Oil was used as refreshment. It was part of the hygiene of the day. A good host would have oil available as a

sign of hospitality. Remember how Jesus rebuked his dinner host Simon for not having oil available for him.

When James suggests anointing with oil, he's not declaring any kind of magical properties in the oil. The key to this whole prayer is offering it in **"the name of the Lord"**.

James goes on to say in vs 15, "The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." This is a promise to be heard with reverence and humility. God can heal. God answers prayer. The answers to our prayers are always in the God's hands. Can you imagine if we were in charge of that control? This prayer of faith is not faith in our own certainty; it is faith in the God who is merciful, wise, and sovereign.

James also connects prayer with forgiveness: "If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." Like Jesus, James is not connecting sickness to sin. Healing came first. But knowingly doing what is wrong is a burden. It's a pathway of stress and anxiety. It fractures relationships. It leaves us spiritually weaker. Sin is happiest when we want to hide all of this too. The good news, the gospel invites us out of hiding. In Christ, confession is not the pathway to shame; it is the doorway to grace.

I remember as a child my mom and dad would constantly tell me...always hold on to the handle bars when you're riding your bike. Well, I was the only kid on our block who didn't ride my bike without hands. And they noticed. Plus, our street had this great hill. What could possibly go wrong with riding down it on my bike with no hands just once. Gravity and physics got in the way. My bike veered to the side of the road and hit the curb. Because it was downhill I was going very fast. So fast that when I hit the curb my bike stopped, but I did not. With scrapped knees, elbows and chin I headed back to the house. But I didn't want help from my parents. I didn't want them to see that they were right. But if my wounds didn't get treated, they wouldn't heal very fast. I grimaced when I saw the medic come out.

Confession is the act of bringing our wounds into the open—not to be condemned, maybe to sting a little, and then to be cleansed and restored by Jesus.

Now about confession...James has something to say about that in vs 16. Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. This was not a call for careless exposure or public humiliation. Confession is not an invitation to take a confession heard and post it all over Facebook or Nextdoor. James is calling us to be an honest, wise, and grace-filled community. Sin wants to grow in secrecy; healing begins when truth is brought into the light through repentance, mercy, and prayer.

James uses a powerful example from the Old Testament to demonstrate the effectiveness of faithful prayer. He turns to the one, the only Elijah the Prophet. From Vs 17 & 18. Elijah was a human like us, 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 the heaven gave rain, and the earth yielded its harvest. For all you Bible nerds out there, this story can be found in 1 Kings 17 & 18. This story is like having that key you've been looking for to a box that has something important in it. The key itself is not that special. It works because of the lock it fits. There are times when our prayers are going to feel small, weak, ordinary. But that's our human mind talking. To God, our prayers are extraordinary and guess what. God just happens to be an extraordinary God able to do extraordinary things, am I right?

We're now at the last words of this letter from James. How will he close this letter. What will he have to say? James decides it's time for a rescue mission: "If anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back..." The church is not only a place where people receive prayer; it's a place where we go after the wandering with love. We aren't just here to welcome "believers". Church family, we are here to welcome people looking for restoration and recovery.

This is restoration that's not about winning an argument. It is about saving a soul from torment. It's about assuring them that God's love and forgiveness can and will cover a multitude of sins.

No one is immune from drifting away. I'm living proof of that. Start missing church. Of course I had an important reason. Stopped praying. Stopped studying the bible. It was only a matter of time for serious compromises to become ok with me. Compromise after compromise. On the

outside I looked like your normal, everyday girl. Successful even. But inside I was a mess. I started to think that I was beyond hope. Too much shame to be able to come back to God. But God wasn't done with me. Because of a rock bottom moment, I was forced to look in the mirror. And I realized how far away I was from the person I wanted to be. I was determined to turn things around. Determined to change my life, no matter the cost. The road to reconciliation was painful. But now I like the face I see in the mirror a whole lot better.

Church family, we know they're out there. Others, feeling the way I did all those years ago. Waiting for just one person to reach out, to pray, and to welcome them. To let them know that nothing can separate them from the love of God.

Shepherds don't wait for lost sheep to find their way back to the flock on their own. They go looking. They call. They search everywhere, even dangerous places. That is the heart James commends to the church: not careless judgment toward the wandering, but active love that goes after them for the sake of themselves and their restoration.

So there you have it Church family! Our dramatic conclusion to our Jim Time series. A reminder that our walk with Jesus is sustained by prayer, strengthened by community, cleansed by confession, and marked by restoration. We don't need to be people pretending that we are never weak. We're a church family who knows that we can bring weaknesses to God and each other in the name of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I'm going to pray when I suffer, I'm going to sing when I rejoice, I'm going to call for help when I am weak, I'm going to confess when I sin, and I'm going pursue the wanderers. Why am I going to do that? Because the Lord hears, the Lord raises up, the Lord forgives, and the Lord restores.

Let us pray.