

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Better Together

PART

5

TITLE

Praying for One Another In An Age of Isolation

SCRIPTURE

James 5:13-18



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Good morning to you, Providence. I hope you are well. It's great to see you. My name is Dave, one of the pastors here. And so, if you're a first time guest or been here for a while, it is great to see you and it's great to have you. If you've joined us online, we say good morning to you. And I know a lot of you are over in the other room, so we're grateful for you and thank God for you. And also this morning, Cornerstone Church, our church plant, is gathered just through that door over in a community room this morning, close to a 100 folks that are looking to go out this Easter to plant a church up in Wakefield, northern part of the city. And so, we're excited for them and I say welcome to them as well.

Well, if you have your Bibles, let's go. James 5. And if you don't have a Bible, we encourage you. There's some underneath the seat in front of you. You can take that, you can have that as a gift. But James 5 is where we will be. And today we finish our series called Better Together, where in recent weeks we walk through and we have seen how God created us as relational beings. One of the first things God says after creating humanity was it's not good to be alone. And culture tries to create ideas that fuel community, but it only leads to further isolation. And the stats are staggering. Loneliness is sweeping across our land like a tsunami. Culture creates all this technology that seemingly is connecting us and creating community, and it's only carrying us further into isolation, loneliness, and depression. Just last week, New York City, New York City came out, its mayor made this statement declared social media a public health hazard and an environmental health toxin.

Now I thought that might start like in Rocky Mountain, make its way up to New York. But to have this city thriving, living in this world of technology to make this declaration, it's a public health hazard. See, listen, relational living is losing ground due to a screen that screams, we are so connected and yet we're so fragmented. One writer on culture writes this in one of the chapters says, "We are designing technologies that give us the illusion of companionship without the demand of friendship. Eye contact is so rare. We are learning to be alone together." But it's in Christ, is it not? This good news, this gospel that we preach every single week. This good news of Christ coming to rescue us, to redeem us, to reconcile us to the Father, to restore us into a relationship with him?

We were born in this way where we rebelled against God and God put a verdict on humanity. It's the death penalty and it awaits all of us. And yet there's hope, and mercy, and grace because Christ has lived a life that we could not live, and die the death that we deserve, and was buried and rose from the dead on the third day to bring both hope for eternity and health and healing for everyday living. And it's in Christ that we have a greater capacity to enjoy community as he intended to honor one another, to forgive one another, to accept one another, to out-serve one another.

Listen, listen, Christ. Christ didn't come in pixels. He came in flesh and blood, and dwelt among us. He creates this amazing community that is truly better together. There's no community in the world like that of the church, even with its mess and imperfections. It is better together. Listen, even the animal kingdom. Think about the animal kingdom for just a second.

Think about the birds. The birds in the air as they fly, they fly in a flock. They fly together. They're flying in such a way that they're strengthening one another. Some move up front and lead the way, and the other draft behind. And then others, they move themselves to the back and they fly south to warmer weather, but they

do it together. Think about the fish. The fish of the sea, they swim in a school and they swim in a school because to a larger fish, primarily like a shark to its eye, it looks as if it's a larger fish than himself. So, he won't mess with it. This is how they stay protected. Buffalo, they travel in a herd, they travel together primarily so the enemy won't attack. And yet when they wander off into isolation, when they wander away from being together, the enemy looks to attack.

And when you isolate as these buffalo isolate, it usually doesn't go well. And so, listen, when we run together, it's better. It's beautiful. It builds community that is stronger and it shines the hope of Christ brighter to a lost world. If these lights were all cut off and I asked one person to cut their flashlight on their phone and they did, you could see it would pierce a little bit in the darkness. But if we all cut it on, it would be bright so we could see. So, it is when we run together, living in community, honoring one another. It's a light to a dark world. And so, today we're going to look at this, how praying for one another, praying together in an age of isolation continues to build this robust community that God uses for his glory. And so, let me pray for us and we'll dive in.

Father in heaven, we bow before you and bend our knee, both in heart, mind, to acknowledge our dependence on you today. We pray through the power of your word, that you would use your word to not simply inform us, but to transform us to the likeness of your son. God help us. And so, many in our day and time, maybe even in this room, it feels like it's a crowded room and yet we feel so far away, isolated, lonely, sick physically, spiritually drained, whatever it may be, God. Use this time to build faith and to magnify the worth of your son, Christ Jesus himself. We pray it in his name, amen.

So, James 5:13. I want to start there and read to 18, and I want you to notice the word that will repeat itself multiple times in some six verses, the word pray or prayer is used seven times. So, let's lean in together. "Is anyone," verse 13, "Among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call 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. And it may not rain, and for three years, in six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit."

So, three truths this morning I simply want to walk us through that will help us to be a people who live in community, doing life together as we are called to pray for each other. So, number one is this, Christ calls us to constantly pray for ourselves in the lows and highs of life. So, Christ calls us through his word. He calls us. Riding through James. James is the half-brother of Jesus. So, Jesus is born of a virgin, Mary, and then Joseph and Mary had children after that. One of those children were James. And he lived with him. He didn't come to faith in Jesus until after the resurrection. Now he's a pastor pastoring to a church that's displaced. It's dispersed all over Jerusalem. They're under intense persecution and he's writing to them, encouraging them that Christ, He calls us. This is the way of life to pray for ourselves in the lows and the highs. Notice in verse 13, he says, "Is anyone suffering? Is anyone suffering? Is anyone cheerful? Pray and sing praise."

Is there anyone suffering in this room today? Is there anyone cheerful in this room today? Christ calls us to pray and to praise. John Piper, a pastor in Minnesota, he says it like this about why maybe there is not much prayer happening in our day and time, as stats show it's declining. He says, one of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the last day that prayerlessness was not from a lack of time. Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. Maybe praying more than scrolling. He says, listen. He says, "Is anyone suffering?" What is this suffering he's talking about? I mean it's persecution contextually in the text in this audience that he's writing to, it's spreading. James himself will be martyred eventually for preaching the gospel. And he says, "But if anyone is suffering, let them pray."

Here's the temptation in our suffering, in our pain. The temptation is to fall into self-pity, and sink into isolation, and run from the people of God and God himself. Or you could fall on Christ and his people, and be strengthened. Listen, listen, prayer becomes to the soul what air is to the lungs and food is to the body. You can't last long without either. Listen, physical appetites, they're the attributes of a living body, not a corpse. And spiritual longings to talk with and to Christ belong to the soul made alive to God. Listen, if you have no desire to pray, you could be on a steep decline in your spiritual life or it could be evidences that you don't belong to a soul made alive to God.

And so, James would speak a word to us this morning to say, listen, if you are suffering to lean in, don't lean away. Lean on Christ. Paul, the apostle Paul who wrote half of the New Testament, he would say words like this as he would plant churches and strengthen churches. He would write back to those churches. And so, he would say in 1st Thessalonians 5:17, he would say to pray continually. To let it be like the air that goes into our lungs to keep us alive. Prayer is the dependence upon God that keeps us striving forward in faith. He would write other churches while he was in prison in Rome, he would write to the church at Colossae in Colossians 4. He would say this, he would say, continue steadfastly in prayer. This is as significant as food is to the body. Prayer is to your walk with God.

In Philippians 4, Paul against in prison in Rome writing to the church of Philippi, he says this. He says, "Anxious suffering. Listen, don't be anxious about anything, but in every situation, in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving." So, thanksgiving is the envelope in which we present our request to God, always giving thanks to God for his kindness, and grace, and mercy to us. He says, "Present them to God." He says, "Don't be anxious in anything, but in everything present your request to God and the peace, the peace of God." Notice what the text says, "The peace of God, which transcends our understanding, all understanding." You can't even describe or explain this type of peace that comes from God when you present your request to God, when you're living a life of anxiety and isolation.

He says, when you present it, notice what happens. The text is fascinating. What the text does, it says it's going to do something when you present, so don't be anxious, but by prayer to present these requests to God, the peace of God, which transcends all, it's saying it's going to do something. It's going to guard your heart. So, it's going to fortify the fortress around your heart where you feel things. So, if you're feeling anxious, there's a way that God's provided not to remove the anxiety but to get you through the anxiety.

And this is what he says. He says that the peace of God will guard your heart. This is at the core of who you are, where you feel things. And then he says, and the peace of God will guard your mind in Christ Jesus. This is where you think about things. So, he's not going to remove the anxiety. He's going to provide a way through the anxiety. By presenting a request to him, the heart is guarded, the mind is guarded, and the arrows of anxiety, and isolation, and loneliness that are shot at you every single day won't hit you. They'll land all around you, but they won't pierce your heart.

He says to let every thought be taken captive to obedience to Christ. See, prayer is so significant this morning in Providence. It's this dependence on Christ. It's this communion with Christ. It's talking to Christ. It's growing in Christ. It's an attitude of the way you breathe, the way you would talk to him. Driving down the road, eyes open, talking. Talking out loud. I'll talk out loud to Christ. All the time. People at the stoplight are looking like, "There's no one else in the car. He's strange." And I'm like, I'm just talking. I'm just having a relationship with him. Crying out to him, asking for help, praising him.

And listen, one pastor theologian says, of the late 1800s, early 1900s, Samuel Chadwick said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." When you're suffering, lean on him. Don't run from him. And when you're cheerful, James addresses this as some are. We surveyed the land here. Some are cheerful, some are suffering. Every single week it's happening. In other weeks it's going to be the opposite. Those that were cheerful are suffering. Those who are suffering are cheerful. This is the way of life. Life is hard. It's intense. And the temptation, if the temptation when suffering is to isolate and be lonely, which sets you up for massive attack by the enemy. When you're cheerful, the temptation and when things are going well is to be self-reliant and self-praise rises.

And what happens is, it creates a garden in your heart where pride grows and it rises like a tree that only produces rotten fruit and nobody wants to be around you. James is saying, listen, don't sing your praises. Sing his praises. Psalm 9 says, "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart. I will tell of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you. I will sing the praises of your name." Martin Luther, one of the reformers of the Reformation and the Protestant Reformation, he would say this, he says, "I have so much to do today that I should spend no less than three hours in prayer." I said that right. "I have so much to do today. I should spend no less than three hours in prayer." We have so much to do today that we spend three minutes in prayer. Ask why anxiety has consumed us by 9:00 A.M.

Listen, pray. Let me encourage you. Let me just encourage you with a simple, using the word prayer. Maybe like, "How do I even get into this, Dave?" Let me just encourage you with this, the word prayer, P-R-A-Y. Just to walk you through the idea of each letter, each letter, the first one for pray, let's just say pray. You would pause and pray. So, to pause in a culture that never stops, never slows down, like cut the phone off and put it down. You can make it five minutes without it. And pause, just to pause for a moment, and just breathe, and reflect, and then praise God. Give thanks to him. Just give thanks. Just start thanking him. Make a list of things. Then as you're entering into just a time of a prayer with God, maybe to repent, maybe there's something that you've been struggling with or something that you've done recently that you just want to ask for

forgiveness.

And the beauty of the Bible, what it teaches is that when we ask, he forgives. He's a forgiving, loving, merciful God that meets us with mercy and grace. And then to rejoice and give thanks for that. And then to ask, to ask what's on your heart. Family, marriage, kids, job, whatever it may be. To ask. To ask him. Say, "God, this is desire. This is what's on my heart." But also ask to say, "God, will you help me align my life with yours? I'm not trying to fit you into my life. I'm trying to fit my life into what you're doing. You're making your name known to the ends of the earth. And so, I want to leverage my life. I want to live my life today that somehow some way, I could impact the nations all around the world. I could pray. I could pray for your spirit."

Like most of the times at night when I go to sleep, the last thing I'm thinking is, "God, work. Work around the world while I sleep tonight. Do a mighty work through our church planters, from Indonesia to India, to China, to the Middle East, to Europe, London church plant, and church plant in Moldova, and church plant in Czech Republic. Just work, God, while I sleep." And then I'm out. Listen, you could impact the world from your house by praying. And so, ask, align. And then last, yield. Yield. Yield to what? The spirit of God. The word of God. What the word of God, the Spirit of God is trying to teach and say to you. When you yield, you're like, you're coming off of 440 onto Glenwood Avenue. There's this big triangle that says yield. What that means is, you need to slow down to the point to see if anything's coming. And sometimes there's a lot of traffic coming and you need to stop. And so, maybe the Lord needs you to just slow down to the point where you stop and listen even more intently.

Or other times you're coming around and there's a car, and you think if you kick it, you can beat him, and you just go. You just keep moving and you roll. And either way, sometimes you need to stop completely and sometimes you keep going. But you yield to God. And then you put your yes on the table. Whatever he is asking, you simply put your yes on the table. Say, "Yes, today. Today God is I want to live for you. I want to walk with you. I want to enjoy you. No matter what my vocation is, no matter where my path takes me. Today, I want to say yes to being spirit led." When you trust Christ, the spirit of God comes into you. And he, God, he's a comforter, he's a helper. And you're just walking in communion with the Father through the Son, by the Spirit and the spirit of God just lead you as you're walking throughout your day. So, listen, he calls us, he calls us to pray in the highs and in the lows.

But secondly is he calls us to consider spiritual leaders. He calls us to consider spiritual leaders to pray for our sickness and spiritual strain. He calls us to consider spiritual leaders to pray for our sickness and spiritual strain. So, let's do a little word really quick, because some people rip these texts out of context. Verses 14-15 and following. And this is where you end up with healing services on TV, this prosperity gospel, this health and wealth gospel, which is no gospel at all, where it's saying, listen, if God wants you to be not only healthy but also wealthy, that's not in the Bible, that's not biblical teaching. And so, what they do is they'll take texts like this and they'll say, "We're going to have a healing service. We're going to take some oil. We're going to sell you some oil on TV. You pour it all over your head and you're going to be healed."



That's the lie. They're trying to make money off of you. And so, don't buy that oil. Now, if you're into essential oils and you need a little lavender to help the nostrils, I'm okay with a little essential oil. A little lavender to whatever it does and... Whatever. No, essential oils hadn't landed when this text was written. So, just don't fall into that mindset. And even this prayer of healing, let's unpack it. So, here's what's happening in the text. The text is suggesting that someone is homebound that can't even probably move. They're actually calling. They're not at the church. They're calling people from the church to come to them. So, they're calling to come to them. And then the text would suggest that they're going to pray over them. They're probably bedridden. They can't even move. They're completely out. And so, they're asking for the leaders, spiritual leaders of the church to come and to pray over.

And then it says to take this oil. And then what is it? Scholars are on both sides of what this is. And the point of it, the text is not the oil. The point of the text is Jesus, and God, and healing though he brings. But the point of this, it could mean this, it's symbolic in a consecration to the Lord. It symbolizes setting them apart for special attention and care from God. It is not as some traditions hold a sacrament to prepare for death and the removal of sin. Jesus removes sin. And the text pointing to toward healing and hope not death in a funeral. And the second where scholars land, respected scholars land, suggests that the church contextually was under so much persecution that the one that's calling is physically sick, not physically sick, but spiritually weak and have been beaten down by persecution, and that the oil will serve as a medicinal purpose.

Either way, what does come from God, not the oil, not the elders, not the actual prayer, but what comes from God is in his timing, his healing. The prayer of faith. The prayer of faith is not some formulaic prayer with this special sauce. Now it's a prayer with urgency, sincerity, specificity, and it's to God. The text says, here's the key point of the text. It's in the name of the Lord. This is where this prayer is delivered to God, in the name of the Lord. He's the sovereign one who uses prayers as a means to accomplish his will and not ours.

When we say in Jesus' name, we're asking. The only way we know our prayers reach the Father is because of what Jesus has accomplished in his life, death, burial, resurrection. And we say in his name because we agree with him whatever we're yielding. "Here's the request. In your name, Jesus. You do what you want to do. You do your will. You accomplish your will."

And God, listen, it's amazing the Son of God. Think about this. The Son of God could pray with such urgency that he sweat blood on his last night before he was crucified in the garden of Gethsemane, and he prayed this prayer. Think about this. If he prayed with urgency for a desired outcome and it was not answered in the way he was requested, what's going on? He prayed. If this cup, if this cup, this cup of God's wrath that was going to be poured out on him for the sins of the world, he says, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." Listen, Providence, church family, listen, if the son of God trusted his father on the worst of days, you and I can trust him on any day and lean in to him acknowledging him.

Yes. Listen boldly ask, humbly trust. Christ is the one that saves, has the power to save physically if he so

chooses, and he has the power to do the greater miracle and save spiritually, and strengthen spiritually weak people. Listen, God uses the prayers of others to help us endure to the end, physical healing, spiritual renewal could come to you even today if he so choose. If we would pray. Tim Keller, pastor who's recently passed away of pancreatic cancer just a few months ago from Manhattan up in New York, he wrote a book on prayer. And in opening part of that prayer, it's actually his wife, Kathy, that's talking to him. And they had acknowledged that 9/11 was one of the most intense times to be doing ministry in the city of New York. And after 9/11 happened, the entire city was in what they would say, clinical depression.

And then she's diagnosed with Crohn's disease and then he's diagnosed with thyroid cancer, which would later go into pancreatic cancer, then would actually take his life as God allowed it. But in this dialogue about prayer, Kathy says to him, "Tim, if we were diagnosed with such a lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine, a pill every night before going to sleep. Imagine. Imagine that you were told that if you could never miss it or you would die within a few hours, would you, Tim, ever forget to take it? Would you not get around to it some nights? No, you would never miss. Tim, if we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because all that we're facing, we have to pray." And so, they did for the next 20-some years.

See, Galatians 6 says it like this, to carry each other's burdens. Colossians 1 says it like this, Paul writing to the church of Colossae, and he says to that church in a form of prayer from prison, he says, "Now, listen, I'm praying that God would, through Christ, you would be strengthened. You would be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience giving joyful thanks to the Father." So, listen, listen. Call on your leaders. Call on each other to pray. Call on each other to pray for hope, and for healing and endurance.

But notice third and last we land it is this Christ calls us to confess our sin to each other and experience healing. Christ calls us to confess our sin to each other and experience healing. Now, let's understand a few things theologically. It's only Christ who can forgive sin and as we should ultimately first and foremost confess to him. This is the only time the New Testament where it says to confess to one another. But this confession in community does something. And it's quite fascinating. See, listen, confession destroys deadly autonomy. Living in community with sinful people. A life of confession allows for hypocrisy to slowly dissipate, and holiness and health to rise rapidly. The enemy wants us isolated, lonely.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a theologian in the '40s and '50s, he says it like this. He says, "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him." And so, it's helpful for us to understand a few things around this. It's helpful to know that in the context of this letter, it's the original recipients of this letter. All the chapters prior to chapter 5, you see envy and frustration, and favoritism, and quarreling, and fighting, and slandering, and grumbling, and coveting. So, it's a fractured community from the inside. And it's also being persecuted from the outside. And so, these are prescriptive words from James for that church. And they're principles from James for our church. Listen, if we walked like this, and I'm going to unpack just what it looks like. If



we walk like this, it protects Providence from hypocrisy. It helps us to lean into humility toward each other.

And when appropriate, listen when appropriate, not airing all the dirty laundry to everyone, but in healthy settings where sin has taken place against one another, we humbly and wisely ask for forgiveness. This confession, this repentance allows for humility to grow. And it's a life that's better together. This is what he does. This is what happens. And you walk closely with friends, and they know your weaknesses, and you know their weaknesses, and your confessing to one another, and you're encouraging one another, you're praying for one another. Even the way he illustrates it with Elijah.

One quick word about that. We don't have time to unpack it. The point was, Elijah experienced God's power in incredible ways because he prayed to him. And so, what James is saying, "Hey guys, remember Elijah, he had a nature just like us," meaning he was a man just like us. He was a human. And so, he prayed and saw the power of God. You and I can pray and see the power of God. And so, God, he honors this way of life. He honors it. He builds this community that is so strong together. It's better together. And the way he does it ultimately, is that he grants you and I, in our prayers, access. Think about that.

I have a key. I have access to one vehicle on this campus. It's like at Briar Creek because we all had to park away and walk in this morning. And so, just down the road, not Briar Creek. But I only have one key. My key doesn't work to your car. And yet because Christ has blazed a trail and made a way, Hebrews says that we have a high priest who's passed through the heavens. Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. How did he pass through the heavens? It was through the cross on Calvary where he drank God's wrath upon himself, absorbed every drop of it in our place. Its marvelous grace. And because he did that, he's open a way. He's opened a way to have full access, full access to a throne room called grace that we can access 24/7 in time of need, and receive help and mercy from God.

I don't have access to any of your houses. I have access to God because of what Christ has done in his life, death, burial, and resurrection. He's blazed a trail. He's made a way for you to talk to the holy one himself. This is unbelievable. And he's done that because he loves you and he loves me. And so, listen, let us then with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace that we can receive mercy and find grace. And so, a way of application, let's trust Christ for the forgiveness of sins. If you've never trusted him today, I plead with you, beg you, to give your life to Christ. Acknowledge your sin, believe on him, and say yes to him maybe for the first time today. And then let's confess sin and experience healing and harmony.

Yes, he's going to heal all believers one day in the end time of resurrection life. Yes. But there's some healing that takes place now. There's harmony that takes place now. And I know in a room this size, listen, there's suffering and there's some cheerful living. But in a room like this, it's oftentimes good to just be able to pray for and pray with one another. So, what we're going to do something different in our closing time today, but the last two services have been beautiful, how God has moved by the power of his spirit.

So, I'm going to pray, and when I pray, then our team's going to come out. Instead of doing one song, we're going to do two songs. And during those two songs, we're going to have a lot of our leaders down front, brothers

and sisters, all the way across the front here. And if there's a burden, just a burden that's just weighing on you, there's maybe some spiritual weakness or some physical weakness, whatever it may be, we just want to be better together by praying for each other. And so, we would count it a privilege and a joy to pray with you or over you during this time. So, let me pray and then we'll sing.

Father in heaven, thank you for this time. Thank you for the joy to be able to walk through your word. And God, I pray that you would stir our hearts with affections to love you and love your word, and be encouraged today to be a people of prayer. That God, you would just incline our heart to talk, and that you would capture our heart, and that you would guide us in these times of prayer in our homes. And that God, you would allow us to be better together as a community. Build our life upon living in such a way that we honor one another, forgive one another, accept one another, and pray for one another in such a day of isolation. So, God, do a mighty work. You're the way maker. You're the promise keeper. You're the one who brings healing and hope. So, we prayed in Jesus' name, amen and amen. Providence, let's stand and let's sing together as the Lord lead you. Come down and let us pray with you.



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