

Craig – Pray! **(James 5:13-20 April 2, 2017)**

Over my years of ministry I have seen many precious saints afflicted by devastating trials.

At times it seems to come in wave after wave – just as they seem to be through one trial – another one batters them.

And yet – they persevered – they stayed faithful – they were beacons of joy amid the storms.

And I have asked them – how were you able to endure these trials with such grace?

I can tell you that without exception their answers went something like this:

It's not me. I could **never** have endured this in my own strength. But I prayed – and God was faithful to empower me in a way beyond anything I imagined.

Last year I had the privilege of driving Peter Jensen – the former archbishop of Sydney – to and from our church camp.

On the drive up, Peter asked me for my testimony and then he gave me his testimony.

We talked about family members and people we had ministered to who had wandered from the Lord and then been marvellously restored.

He said this:

You know Craig, I have invariably found that in such cases – someone, somewhere was praying faithfully.

Last week we saw baptisms. Two of those testimonies in particular talked about a time in the wilderness – but a time with many family, friends and pastors praying – before the Lord brought them back and restored them.

Prayer is incredibly powerful.

This morning we come to the end of James – and I want you to realise that this passage and its focus on the fruit of prayer is a perfect, fitting way to wrap up this book.

Let me begin by reminding you of where we have been in James. We have seen that the point of the book is that:

Trials are a blessing from God to approve our faith and produce good fruit.

We have seen that in chapter 1 verses 2-18, James talks about the effect trials and temptations have on us.

He told us that when we encounter trials our response will lead us down one of two paths.

Either to sin and death **or** to fruit and life.

Then, from chapter 1 verse 19 to the end of the book – James gives us a picture of what true fruit will look like in our lives.

When trials have led us to maturity – our lives will look like this:

1:19-27	The fruit of obedience
2:1-13	The fruit of impartiality
2:14-26	The fruit of works
3:1-12	The fruit of words
3:13-4:3	The fruit of peacemaking
4:4-12	The fruit of humility
4:13-5:12	The fruit of submission
5:13-18	The fruit of prayer

This morning we are looking at the *eighth* and final fruit – **the fruit of prayer**.

But here is what I want you to understand.

When a trial enters your life – whether you endure to fruit and life **or** if you waiver and spend time on the path to sin and death – if you finally end up in glory – the power to persevere to the end ultimately has come from above.

No one makes it to fruit and life by their own strength.

James wants us to know there is a fruit given by God for us to tap into divine power to enable us to persevere – and that fruit is **prayer**.

I am convinced that at least in the modern western church and perhaps in much of the church in all times and places – the awesome power of prayer to aid us in our spiritual battle is so often undervalued or even neglected.

Our point this morning is simple:

Prayer is a powerful gift to praise, to empower and to rescue – so use it!

Brothers and sisters – preparing this sermon has made me feel somewhat hypocritical – because utilising the awesome power of prayer has not been one of my greatest gifts.

So, I want you to know that everything I say this morning – is first and foremost for my own heart – and you get to listen in as I minister to my soul.

Here is what I took away from this text.

There are times when I have been struggling – with trials, with sin, with life – and I have gritted my teeth and tried to endure and it has nearly killed me.

And James would say – *Craig* – **pray!**

You can't do it in your strength. God is standing ready with every spiritual resource and aid – but you aren't availing yourself of this blessing.

There are times when I have seen remarkable providences of God in my life – power to endure that is beyond me.

And James would say – *Craig* – **pray!**

Pray songs of praise for such blessing.

There are times when I have watched beloved people in this church struggling, sinning, hurting – and I have gritted my teeth and tried to help them and counsel them and admonish them – and it has nearly killed me.

And James would say – Pastor *Craig*, Elder *Craig* – **pray!**

You can't do it in your strength.

And I guarantee – I am not the only one here who has struggled – and failed to pray – really pray.

James would say to us all – **pray!**

He told us – we have not because we ask not. We struggle on, we suffer on – when the power and strength is there for the asking.

Paul urged us to pray at all times in the Spirit.

One of the few things Satan really fears is prayer and James was someone acquainted with the power of prayer.

An ancient historian tells us this about James:

He was wont to go into the temple: and he used to be found kneeling on his knees, begging forgiveness for the people – so that the skin of his knees

became horny like that of a camel's, by reason of his constantly bending the knee in adoration to God, and begging forgiveness for the people.

James was a man who knew the power of prayer.

Now, before I come to the text – I need to point out that these concluding verses of James – while they are awesome – are perhaps the most difficult in the book.

They have spawned all types of strange teachings in the Catholic Church, in charismatic churches – but also in some evangelical churches.

These are hard verses to translate and to interpret.

There is a big – a really big part of me that just wanted to say – this is my view – do your own study – like my view – don't like my view – that is cool.

But, because these views lead to such different understandings of the passage – and because I get asked about this passage a great deal – I am going to spend a few minutes showing you the main views.

I want to point out that there are a number of legitimate – but quite different ways to understand these concluding verses.

All of the views recognise you have brothers or sisters who are struggling.

Clearly at least part of this section deals with them struggling *spiritually*. They are spiritually weary or wandering from the faith and need restoration.

The burning question is this – is there *also* a part of this section dealing with them struggling physically and needing healing of the body?

For the sake of time – I want to say that in my opinion, two views stand out as the most likely. These views divide the passage up like this:

5:13-15a The power of prayer in physical restoration

5:15b-20 The power of prayer in spiritual restoration

5:13-20 The power of prayer in spiritual restoration

I have to tell you up front – it is **very** hard to be definitive which way to go here.

In the *first* view – we are dealing with healing someone with serious *physical* illness – cancer, debilitating injury, that type of thing – up to the first part of verse 15.

Then when James says – **if** he has committed sins – from that point on we are dealing with *spiritual* issues – sin and wandering from the faith.

The *second* view sees this *whole* passage as dealing with spiritual issues.

Depending on the English translation you have – it makes one or the other look more likely.

For what it is worth, I lean toward seeing this whole passage as dealing with **spiritual** healing.

But here is a very brief idea of the problem. Look with me at James 5:14–15:

Is anyone among you **sick** (*astheneo*)? ... And the prayer of faith will **save** (*sozo*) the one who is **sick** (*kamnonta*).

The problem is that these three Greek words – we have two different words translated as sick and one is the normal word for save – all can **all** refer to either *spiritual* healing **or** to *physical* healing depending on the context.

If we use the most common, literal translation for these words – we get an idea of what we are dealing with.

Is anyone among you **weak** ... And the prayer of faith will **save** the one who is **weary**.

As I weigh the evidence of the word usage:

I would say the *first* word – the one I translated **weak** is a bit of a wash – it could legitimately be physical or spiritual healing. The Gospels use this word for physical healing and the Epistles mainly use the word for spiritual healing.

The second word – **save** – is usually used for spiritual salvation in both the Gospels and in the Epistles. But, in the Gospels – it also very frequently is used to mean physical healing.

The *third* word – the one I translated **weary** – leans toward spiritual sickness because that is the way it is used the only other time we find it in the Bible.

When words can be translated either way – you need to look at other factors – in particular the context. So, I want to look at these quickly.

Here are the three main reasons why many – in fact probably the majority – see this passage as referring to **physical** healing:

1. The only other time the phrase “*anoint with oil*” is used is in Mark 6:13 and there it is almost certainly deals with physical healing.
2. James seems to lean very much on the Gospels and in the Gospels these words are heavily oriented towards physical healing.
3. The use of pray over may indicate a sick bedridden person and Elders praying over him.

A number of these are strong points.

However, in my opinion – and I stress it is just my opinion – I believe that other factors make spiritual healing James' more likely intent.

1. For me, the context of the book is huge. Context is such a key factor in interpretation.

James is written to Christians who are struggling under trials and as we have seen again and again – these trials have caused some of them to waiver in their faith.

James repeatedly urges them to persevere, to endure, to remain steadfast.

In the verses right before this James has urged them to suffer patiently until the Lord comes.

It seems to me that it would be out of context for James to now say – the way to get through trials is not to suffer patiently but to call the Elders to pray that they would be miraculously removed.

While I **do** think we should pray for healing – far more commonly God gives us strength to endure rather than giving us miraculous healing.

2. The terms James uses are almost universally used of spiritual healing in the Epistles and James is an Epistle.

And in particular the word **saved** – James himself uses it four other times – including verse 20 – and in each of these verses in James there is no doubt it refers to spiritual healing.

3. The terms used here are more spiritual terms – **faith, save, raise up**.

It is harder to grasp the connection between these terms and healing.

4. At face value if you take this passage as physical healing – it seems to provide a *promise* that if a prayer of faith is made – it **will** heal the one who is sick.

Most of us here do not believe God **always** heals physical illness. So, you have to work a lot of weasel words in to a passage that does not have any weasel words – in order to explain why physical healing does not always occur.

5. The fact the Elders are called – not someone with the gift of healing – indicates this is a spiritual matter. It is **not** a requirement that Elders have the gift of miraculous healing. But it **is** a requirement that they know how to shepherd the flock and care for souls.

Our Elders are somewhat mixed in their views – but I am one of the ones who see the whole passage as spiritual healing.

Now – at this point – the more charismatic among us are going – man – I wish another Elder was preaching this.

The Bible Church people are saying – whew – thank the Lord it is Craig this morning.

The Baptists are just plain confused.

This passage is tough.

Yes, I see it as spiritual. However, I want to be clear on this. I **do** believe God heals physically. I **do** believe those hurting physically should pray and ask others to pray for them.

I just don't think that is James' primary intent in this passage.

So, how do I understand the burden of this passage?

Look we often talk about this as the **healing** passage. In truth, it is the **prayer** passage.

Regardless of the view you take, James' burden here is **prayer**. If we make that our focus, the other issues become less important.

So here is our outline:

To those suffering – pray! v. 13a

- To the well – sing praise and pray v. 13b
- To the weary – summon Elders and pray vv. 14-15a
- To the wicked – speak confession and pray vv. 15b-18

To those wandering – grace! vv. 19-20

I am only going to cover each point very quickly.

First, he begins with what seems to be a general exhortation to the suffering:

To those suffering – pray! v. 13a

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

What is not readily apparent is that James uses *four* different words associated with prayer in this section.

It seems he is doing his best to impress on us our desperate need for prayer and the power of prayer.

James knows that for many of us our prayer lives are impotent and pathetic.

If we pray:

We pray rote prayers.

If we pray:

We pray selfish prayers.

James wants prayer to be such a regular part of our life that when we are struggling or someone we know or love is struggling – that prayer comes naturally as the first port of call – not the last.

To all of those suffering trials and temptations of any stripe – **pray**.

Suffering is the word James used in verse 10 of the trials and persecutions the Prophets were subjected to.

Remember the context of this book. These are Christians undergoing intense trials and suffering.

Some were handling it well – others not so well.

This suffering had led some to endure and some to wander.

James urges them all to **pray**.

Pray for wisdom, for strength, for hope, for encouragement.

Pray that God might help them to consider these trials as joy.

Pray that God would show them He was in control of their destiny.

Pray that they would cling to the truth of the coming again of Christ.

Throughout James we have seen that trials are a part of life in this fallen world. We don't like them. We struggle to grasp the plan of God in them.

James says – **pray!**

There are so many places in Scripture where we are told this same truth. The Bible is filled with exhortations to pray for grace to endure.

Psalm 86:6–7:

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me.

Philippians 4:6:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Brothers and sisters – as foolish and tragic as it is – the reality is that often we don't pray regularly – pleading for strength and holiness and endurance – until prayer is our last resort.

I watched some interviews with people hit by Cyclone Debbie. They had been told to flee, they were urged to flee – they didn't.

Then when they were stranded and hungry – then they demanded help.

So often we are like that – we only pray when all else fails.

A trial comes into your life. Financial, marriage, sin, illness.

All too commonly our first reaction – is to say – I'll deal with it, I can change, I'll plan, I'll work harder.

We try and deal with it in our own strength.

Sometimes God is gracious to foolish sheep and we do manage to deal with it.

More often we struggle on – and only when things get desperate – when we realise – I can't do this in my own strength – only then do we pray – and at that point it is a prayer of desperation.

I have sat across from so many hurting, desperate, struggling men and women – and I ask – have you prayed?

Oh yeah – but – only recently. Only as a last desperate resort. Not throughout the struggle.

Brothers and sisters, God wants you to be a man or woman of prayer.

He wants you to turn to Him **first not last**.

So often in marriage counselling – one person has been struggling for some time – business failing, porn, relationship trouble with a colleague – and only when it blows up or comes out does the spouse find out.

The spouse is hurt – why didn't you tell me? I wanted to bear this burden with you?

Even more so does God wants to be there for you.

We are so proud, so individualistic, so stubborn – we keep thinking I can deal with it.

God longs for us to go to Him *first*.

Are you suffering? – then pray!

After this generic address, James speaks to *three* different groups.

First:

To the well – sing praise and pray v. 13b

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

To understand what James means there are two words we need to look at.

This word *cheerful* – most lexicons use the translation *encouraged*.

The only other use of this word in the New Testament is in Acts 27 where Paul is on a ship in the midst of the raging storm and urges his fellow passengers to be **encouraged to endure**.

The other word is *sing praise*.

This is a word that is only used in the New Testament of singing prayers of praise to God.

Putting this together – it seems James is saying – *if* God answers your prayer and gives you encouragement to endure in the midst of the storms of life – *if* you are doing well in the trial – **then** you need to pray songs of praise.

The Bible tells us this is what we are to do. Psalm 98:1:

Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

This is Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned in Philippi – but singing hymns of praise.

We saw in Philippians 4:6 that in **everything** we are to give thanks.

This is the Christian who encountered the various trials of James 1 – and by the grace of God they endured and bore fruit.

James is a wise pastor.

He knows that often when God grants our prayer and gives us those sweet times of encouragement whereby we endure and we find joy amid the storms – often we breathe a sigh of relief and forget to thank God for this blessing. We forget the power came from above.

James reminds us – when you are doing well in the storm – **sing!** Sing those powerful, prayerful songs of praise to the God who answers prayer.

Do you sing songs of praise for the God who saves?

This is something the world doesn't understand.

If good stuff happens to them – they take the credit or perhaps declare it is karma.

They don't sing songs of thanks.

But, the Christian knows – it is **all** of God. If we endure – it is the Lord. All I have is Christ.

And so we gather every week to sing songs of prayerful praise to our glorious Saviour who has given us one more week of life and strength to endure and to serve Him.

I trust you realise many if not most of our songs are in a sense prayers from the heart.

I love singing with you. We are meant to sing together.

So many of the Psalms are prayers of praise for endurance, strength, rescue.

Psalm 18:

I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. ... In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. ...

For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.

I thank God for you brothers and sisters because you **do** sing.

You know:

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.

In Christ alone, My hope is found.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.

And so you sing!

If God is blessing you amid the trials of life – if He is providing the power to endure – if you are doing well – **sing!** Take time to sing prayers of praise for such provision.

Don't be like the thankless pagans who never pause to thank God above.

If you don't know what to sing – sing the Psalms, sing the hymns!

Just sing!

Listen if there is one person in this church who shouldn't sing – it is me. I can't hold a tune to save my life. I'm dreadful. Even after my wife gave me singing lessons – I am so off key.

Sometimes I am so bad some family members have whispered – just mouth the words will you.

I can't – I **have** to sing.

And so should you.

James then moves to address another group.

To the weary – summon Elders and pray vv. 14-15a

Is anyone among you weak? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is weary, and the Lord will raise him up.

Is anyone among you **weak**?

In my understanding, James is speaking of a Christian who is desperately weary in the struggle.

Things are not going so well.

They are struggling to endure.

They just can't consider their trials as joy.

They don't know how they will get through today let alone persevere to heaven.

Their faith is wavering – but they have not yet wandered. Their spiritual vigor has waned – but has not quite broken.

They are almost at the point where they can't pray for themselves.

These are the saints battered by trials and wavering between the path of fruit and the path of sin.

They are struggling to endure.

I've been there. The heavens seem as brass.

You wonder where the power of God is to live godly in Christ Jesus.

It is Job when he sat silent for seven days and then lamented:

Let the day perish on which I was born ... why did I not die at birth.

It is David when he cried:

Save me O Lord, for the godly one is gone, for the faithful have vanished.

It is Asaph who was embittered and his feet came close to stumbling as he observed the prosperity of the wicked.

This is the saint who has suffered so many blows – financial, death of a loved one, marriage breakdown, illness – they are losing faith.

This is the parent weeping over their prodigal children and losing hope.

Listen up. If you have been a Christian for more than a year – put your hand up and keep it up.

Now, if you have **never** wandered or struggled in your faith – put your hand down.

If anyone put their hand down – hallelujah – but I tell you – the day of struggle will come.

For the strugglers – there is help. The help starts with prayer.

Now before I get fifty calls this week for the Elders to come – my understanding is that James would say you do this when you have reached the end.

Before that – time – there are things you do.

First – you pray. You plead with God.

If you are still weary – you ask mature brothers and sisters to pray and encourage you.

Romans 15:1:

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

Galatians 6:2:

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 10:24–25:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ... encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Before you call the Elders – you pray – **then** you call the brothers to pray – **then** if you are still struggling – **call the Elders to pray** – and if you call – it is our privilege to come and to pray for you and encourage you.

The Elders will gather to claim the promises of God for you. To remind you of the certain return of Christ.

To pray until hope dawns in your hearts and the joy of your salvation is rekindled.

James then says:

Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Everyone wants to know about the oil.

On my first day of seminary – in my first class – a fellow student raised his hand as soon as the class began.

Sir, sir – there is a question I have been dying to ask a seminary professor.

What is it?

In James 5 – what kind of oil should we use in anointing?

That is your can't wait for seminary question? Well I should imagine the Lord would be just as happy with any oil – I think olive oil would do fine.

What does this verse mean?

Many think this should be translated:

Let them pray over him – **like** anointing him with oil.

The prayer itself is *like* being anointed with oil.

I think that is very possible but on balance I think that real oil is in view.

Oil was a common symbol of divine grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, I think oil was used to indicate that the power actually came not from the Elders but from God.

I don't think the oil was medicinal. There was no power or aid in the oil.

There are no essential healing oils – no specific healing oils.

Rub it on, pour it on – doesn't matter.

The power is from above – the oil is symbolic.

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is weary, and the Lord will raise him up.

There are a few things we need to notice here.

The word James used for prayer in verses 13 and 14 was the usual word for prayer.

The word he uses here in verse 15 is a much rarer word and seems to refer to a fervent petition.

This weary saint has called the Elders and here he earnestly joins his petition to theirs.

When he prays this fervent prayer, God answers by restoring him.

The vast majority of uses of this word – translated **save** – refer to saving a non-Christian – seeing them go from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

However, in quite a number of places this word is used of believers – and in those cases it refers to **restoring** them to spiritual health.

For example, earlier in James we saw this. James 1:21:

Therefore [beloved brothers] put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to **save** your souls.

They are already saved – their souls need to be delivered from the tentacles of sin.

This seems to be the case here. The Christian asks God to restore them and this is a prayer God delights to answer.

We all have those times when we feel like giving up.

We all have those seasons where just living is a struggle.

If you can – read the Word, sing, pray.

If you can't – we are here for each other.

If you are still in the slough of despair – call for the Elders – and it will be our privilege to pray for you.

Then there is a *third* group James addresses.

- **To the wicked – speak confession and pray vv. 15b-18**

When trials come – some do well.

Others grow weary.

And some are enticed to cross the line and fall into sin. They allow wickedness into their lives.

These are the ones who find themselves not just on the path to sin and death – they are in serious danger of actually passing the line from sin to death.

But notice – even with serious sin – there is still a way back to the path of endurance and life.

That path is repentance.

1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

James knows the path to restoration runs through confession and prayer and he knows this path is always open.

Look at verse 15:

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

How many times have I met someone who thinks their sins are too great or they have committed the unforgiveable sin.

A couple of weeks back we saw the truth of James 4:6 – **He** gives more grace.

Or as the Puritan Richard Sibbes put it:

There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

Through Christ – though your sins be as scarlet – they **can** be forgiven.

And we access this incredible mercy through confession and prayer.

Verse 16:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Why confess to one another?

Because one of the ways God aids those struggling with sin is through other saints.

The church community is a powerful tool for holiness.

We can't do it alone.

We are meant to bear each other's burdens.

When we know someone is struggling – it is only then that we can help.

Confession initiates the power of another's prayers and it brings accountability.

In any church, there will be many men and women struggling with sin who have never sought help. They keep thinking – I can handle it.

Here is a conversation I have had too many times.

A guy turns up crushed by his losing battle with porn.

How old are you?

45.

How long have you been struggling?

Since I was 15.

15! And you are only coming for help now!

We are so proud, so arrogant, so fearful of what others think – we do not confide our struggles in anyone – until we are crushed or unmasked.

Brothers and sisters – if you are floundering – if sin has you in its grip and you are despairing – find someone you trust to confess to – someone who will pray for you and hold you accountable.

Bear one another's burdens.

The word here for prayer is a variation on the normal word for prayer – but the point is – this kind of prayer is powerful.

Verse 16:

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

There are people in bondage to sin who think it is impossible to gain victory. Nothing can free them.

No! If you have a righteous man or woman praying for you – that prayer taps directly into the awesome power of God.

Develop prayer relationships where you can share your burdens and pray for one another to tap into this awesome power.

Verse 17:

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.

I am so thankful for verses like this.

On one level we often think Elijah is some super-saint.

We read the Old Testament:

Elijah prayed and the flour and oil did not run out.

Elijah prayed and the dead boy rose to life.

Elijah prayed and fire reigned down from heaven.

Who can relate to that?

But after this – Elijah fled and sulked. O God take my life. I am the only one left who has not bowed the knee to Baal.

Woe, woe, woe is me.

Elijah is just like us – flawed.

The point is – the power of prayer is **not** just for super-saints. God heeds the prayers of all His children – your prayers, my prayers.

Praise the Lord that the effectiveness of prayer is dependent on the power of God **not** on our godliness.

Notice verses 17 and 18:

He prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Wow! That is how awesome prayer is.

Prayer can stop the rain for three and a half years.

We would have settled for three and a half days this week.

Then prayer opened the heavens when all seemed lost.

Interestingly enough, James does not mention any of the miracles Elijah did that explicitly mention prayer.

In the miracle of the drought – prayer is only implied.

I think he chose this miracle because it is an illustration that the power of God can bring new life to a spiritually dry heart.

Elijah prayed and rain came into the dry land and it bore fruit.

James' point is that if prayer can open the heavens – it can help a sinner overcome their wickedness.

Whatever your sin – whatever your struggle – prayer **can** lead to repentance and restoration.

No sin is beyond the power of God.

Prayer is a resource, a power, a tool, a gift – that too few of us utilize as we ought.

We forget to praise in prayer when God blesses.

We forget to ask God to empower us when we struggle.

We forget to plead for the souls of the wanderers.

We are so stubborn and individualistic.

We have every spiritual resource in the heavenlies at our fingertips and all too often we fail to use them.

So brethren – **pray!**

As he ends this book, there is one final group James has a word for.

To those wandering – grace! vv. 19-20

James knows some wander so far and are so lost and so broken they won't come to you – they won't call for Elders – you have to seek them out and pray for them.

James 5:19–20:

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 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.

Their souls are heading to death – but they still be saved.

These verses address two groups.

First those who seek wanderers.

I doubt there is a person sitting here who does not have a number of wanderers on their heart.

Children, parents, uncles, school friends, church friends – those who have wandered far from Christ. Those whose souls stand perilously close to death.

Know that the prayer of a righteous man or woman can accomplish much.

Know the grace of Christ is never exhausted.

Never stop praying. Never stop pleading. Never stop seeking their repentance.

The *second* group is the wanderers themselves.

The prodigal sons. Those who left the path of fruit and life to wallow in the pigsty of sin. Your soul was headed for death – spiritual death – eternal death.

But someone sought you out. Prayed for you, shared with you, cared for you.

Reminded you of Christ and His mercy and love that covers a multitude of sins.

You have heard enough testimonies to know that sitting here this morning are **many** who wandered far, far from the shepherd.

And someone or perhaps many – cared enough to keep persisting.

A parent, a pastor, a friend.

They never gave up on you. They wept for you. They pled your case to the King. They claimed you. They looked for the opportunity to speak Christ's love into your life. And at the right time the Spirit of God showed you where you were headed and you repented.

If that is you – I encourage you – thank God for His undeserved mercy every day – and thank the one who cared enough to pray and seek and go after you.

And then ask – who can I go to.

Which wanderer can I sit with and say – I've been where you are – but Jesus ...

So, as we end this remarkable book – James knows – we are all prone to wander.

I so wish we didn't – but the reality is we do wander.

The day comes to all when we have our dark night of the spirit.

When the day comes – Remember there is help. Job, Psalms, 1 John.

And remember James. This book is filled with wisdom for a wanderer – how to find their way back. The fruits that will enable you to stand in the storm. The wisdom that will enable you to consider trials as joy.

This book reminds us again and again of the amazing grace of God in Christ to forgive and restore wanderers.

And I pray that we will realise we are all wounded pilgrims who will have a day when we need someone to bear our burdens.

We look at each other and say – come on brother, come on sister – I'll pray for you – you pray for me – and by His grace we will make it.

Brothers and sisters, the day will come when the person next to you will need you to step up to encourage them.

And the day will come when you will need encouragement.

And together we will walk that road to the celestial city – our wandering will be done and we will see Him who covered over the multitude of our sins – and the day of eternal rejoicing will begin.

And we will say – I am here only by His grace.

Craig – Pray!
(James 5:13-20 April 2, 2017)

Main Point: Prayer is a powerful gift to praise, to empower and to rescue – so use it!

Please pick a few relevant questions from each section and ensure the majority of the time is focussed on application.

General Questions:

1. What do you see as the main burden of verses 13-20?
2. Do you think that any part of verses 13-20 refer to physical healing? Why or why not? How important is this to the burden of the passage?
3. Why do you think God urges us to pray when He already knows what we need?
4. What is the relationship between prayer and healing the soul?
5. Why should God enabling us to endure lead us to praise?
6. When should you call the Elders to pray? What do you expect to happen if you ask the Elders to pray for you?

Application Questions:

1. How is your prayer life? What are your strengths and weaknesses in prayer?
2. Why is prayer such a struggle for so many of us? Why is prayer something we often go to last rather than first?
3. Do you sing as part of your quiet time or just in corporate settings? If not – why not?
4. Some Sundays – we struggle to sing. What would help you sing prayers of corporate praise better? Does it matter/should it matter whether you like the song or the music style?
5. When you are struggling spiritually what do you do?
6. If you pray, what do you actually pray?
7. Do you have someone you can rely on to share with and pray with? If there is sin involved – do you have someone you can confess to and they will hold you accountable and pray for you?

8. Are there people who are struggling who have asked you to pray for them? If not – why do you think others might not feel comfortable asking you?
9. If you have prayed, asked others to pray and are still struggling would you ask Elders to pray for you or not? Why or why not?
10. If you are struggling with sin – would you actually share the burden with someone else? Why or why not?

Prayer

Have a time of sharing and prayer in small groups.

With discretion – maybe share a couple of ways others can pray for you.

Perhaps share some wanderers who are on your heart for others to pray for.

Please pray for the Elders and Deacons – for our holiness, faith, families and for guidance to shepherd the flock well.

Perhaps there are some who would agree to pray for each other longer term.