

THROUGH THE BIBLE: JAMES 3-5

Several years ago a cartoon appeared in Leadership Magazine. It showed a marquee in front of a church...

The message board was advertising... “The LITE Church: 24% fewer commitments, home of the 7.5% tithe, 15 minute sermons, 45 minute worship services, we have only 8 commandments - *your choice*. We use just 3 spiritual laws and have a 800 year millennium.

Everything you’ve wanted in a church... and less!”

This is the church James addresses - Christians with *a zero-calorie, low-fat, watered-down faith*.

It’s been said of today’s church, “The Gospel has become so diluted, if it were a medicine it would heal no one, and if it were a poison it would harm no one.”

It’s tragic when a church dilutes the demands of the Gospel to make it more palatable to society’s tastes.

It’s called “*easy-believe-ism*” or “*cheap grace*.”

It’s the idea that saving faith is nothing more than responding to an altar call, or mouthing a prayer, or signing a card. Jump through a few religious hoops and you’re saved for all eternity. *You got fire insurance!*

The book of James tells us that’s not faith. True, legit, saving faith *leaves behind tracks*. Real faith shows up in real ways in a person’s life. We’re saved by faith alone, but *faith that’s real is a faith that works*.

Chapter 3 begins with a word to pastors and teachers. Jewish teachers were called “rabbi,” which means “my great one.” The Hebrew community revered its teachers. Under Jewish law the duty to help a rabbi exceeded even the duty to provide for parents.

Needless to say with such privileges the Jews had no shortage of people desiring to be teachers. People oblivious to the responsibilities saw it as a cushy job.

Since early Christians maintained the same respect for their teachers as did the Jews, the Church was also vulnerable to shady teachers with wrong motivations.

Sadly, this is still a problem. When folks find out I’m a pastor, they’ll often say, “Oh, I wish I were a pastor and worked just one day a week...” *If they only knew!*

Yet there are pastors who’ve been attracted to the ministry, not because they’re called by God, but because they’re looking for an easy job. James 3 starts with a warning for anyone who aspires to be a teacher..

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

A teacher wields incredible influence. A plague hangs on my office wall, “A teacher touches one’s life forever.”

A pastor passes out the bread of life. He traffics in spiritual, eternal truths. What a great responsibility!

A pastor’s worse sin is to make the Bible boring.

God holds a teacher to “a stricter judgment.” A Bible teacher has to be accurate, appealing, and authentic.

Are you correct in what you say?

Do you say it in an effective way?

And do you back up what you teach by how you live?

You can't say, "Listen to what I say, but don't do what I do." That's a hypocrite, not a teacher. A teacher gets no credit for teaching the Bible if he doesn't live what he teaches. *A pastor is held to a higher standard.*

Verse 2, "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires."

If you can control your tongue – *what you say and how you say it* – you can successfully navigate life.

Your speech is the rudder of your life.

Whereas, "loose lips sink ships." The person who speaks before he thinks is headed for shipwreck.

James continues, "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! A human tongue is a slab of meat that weighs just 2.5 ounces. Yet it's your body's strongest muscle. A tongue can do enormous damage.

A single spark from a campfire can burn down a whole forest. Likewise one idle or hurtful word can sour the attitudes of many... even destroy a whole church.

Verse 6, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.

The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” When Satan finds a wagging tongue he sets it on fire to do great damage.

Remember, Samson caught 300 foxes, and tied torches to their tails. He turned them loose in the fields of the Philistines, and destroyed their entire crop.

Likewise, an out-of-control tongue is Satan’s weapon of choice against the church. When the devil finds a loose tongue he fuels it with evil to burn God’s harvest.

“For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” You’ve seen *dancing bears*, and *trained seals*, and *talking parrots* – you can tame beast and bird – but no one tames the tongue.

The tongue can be guilty of extreme contradiction...

Verse 9, “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.” We enter the sanctuary together to praise God; then when we leave we cuss out the driver who cuts us off in the parking lot... James tells us, “My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

“Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?” A tongue is a spring - a fountain. Its source lies deeper. In Luke 6:45 Jesus says, “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

The tongue is the spigot of the heart. If your heart is holy and yielded to God your tongue will follow suit. A heart filled with the Spirit will produce kind, pure words.

“Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.” *Love for God and hurtful words* out of the same mouth is as incongruous as olives on a fig tree. What spews from the fountain reveals the source.

Verse 13, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” In Chapter 2 James told us that real faith is a faith that works. But good works need to be accompanied by wisdom! You can do the right thing the wrong way, or at the wrong time – and you can undermine the good you’re trying to do.

Here, James associates wisdom with “*meekness*” or restraint. Wisdom doesn’t bowl a person over with the truth. It picks its timing and works gently, sensitively.

“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” *God’s wisdom and earthly wisdom* differs. Earthly wisdom divides, and pits people against one another. Its envious, self-seeking, and egotistical.

Earthly wisdom creates factions and friction. Man’s wisdom is always a win - lose deal. Someone ends up on the top, and someone ends up on the bottom.

Whereas, God’s wisdom is a win - win proposition. Both parties benefit from the proposal, or the solution.

One year my daughter, Natalie, played in the softball championship. The rain started in the 2nd inning, and didn’t let up for an hour-and-a-half. We were miserable.

It was the perfect opportunity for League officials to crown co-champions. *This was softball for little girls. Let everybody go home happy!* Instead, they played in the mud just to get a winner. Trust me, nobody won!

God's wisdom would've looked for a way to benefit everyone. Man's wisdom tortured all to honor a few.

Verse 16, **“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”** Earthly wisdom breeds confusion. Everyone looks out for # 1.

In WW 2 Navy personnel coined a term that became infamous - **“snafu.”** It's an acronym for the phrase, **“situation normal, all fouled up.”** Today, the Pentagon has a new term, **“fubb”** - or **“fouled up beyond belief.”**

This is what we get when we follow man's wisdom.

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure...” or without duplicity - no ulterior motive or hidden agenda.

“Then peaceable,” (or peace-loving) **“gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”** Man's wisdom looks out for self-interest. God's wisdom looks beyond selfishness to what brings harmony and unity.

God's wisdom is gentle - not demanding or bossy. It's merciful and unbiased. It finds a way to make healthy and righteous compromise. It keeps the peace.

Wow, those of us living here *below* need wisdom from *above!* In our marriages, with our kids, in our church, in the workplace – we need *heavenly wisdom!*

Chapter 4, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” This earthly wisdom - this envious, self-seeking logic - is responsible for the conflicts around us. *But James is even more specific in his diagnosis...*

“Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” The Greek word translated “*pleasure*” is “*hedone*” - from which comes the term “*hedonism*” - that pleasure is life’s chief purpose.

This is certainly the philosophy of our society.

It’s been calculated that, “each week in the United States: 12 million golfers vie for tee-times, 9 million tennis players compete across the nets, 4 million skiers glide down the slopes, and half a million hunters and fishermen comb the woods for racks and recreation.”

Yet when you live strictly for pleasure you eventually come in conflict with the people around you.

Harmonious, healthy relationships require giving, and commitment, and sacrifice, and unselfishness, and humility - things that aren’t necessarily pleasurable.

A hedonist will end up in broken relationships.

Verse 2 tells us, “You lust and do not have.”

Samuel Johnson once issued the challenge, “Of all that have tried the selfish experiment, let one come forward, and say that he’s succeeded. He that makes gold his idol, has it satisfied him? He that’s toiled in the fields of ambition, has he been repaid? He that has ransacked every theatre of sensual enjoyment, is he content? Can any answer in the affirmative? Not one!”

King Solomon tried the selfish experiment. Gold, ambition, sex – he tried it all – yet in Ecclesiastes 2:1 he concluded, “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity.” James tells us the end result of the pursuit of pleasure is *“you lust and do not have.”*

“You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.”

We fight and kill and covet to get the other guy’s stuff, rather than simply ask God for a similar blessing.

Don’t lust just ask.

This sums up the last 3000 years of human history. It’s been estimated that over the last 3100 years only 286 have been without a war some place in the world.

This means that only 8% of human history has been a time of peace... For every two minutes of peace in the world there’s been an hour of war... I’ve heard it said, *“Peace is that one glorious moment in the world’s history where everyone stands around reloading.”*

Countries battle, neighbors bicker, companies try to bankrupt each other. The world vies for each other’s resources rather than asking God for His blessing.

It’s like two brothers fighting over a candy bar, rather than asking a good and gracious father for another.

Verse 3, *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

So often, even when we do ask we ask with the wrong motivation. Our concern should be *God's glory* not our *own pleasure*. Let's not "*ask amiss*" or selfishly.

James says in verse 4, "*Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*"

Notice, James doesn't mince words.

When we're born into God's family we take a vow of allegiance to Jesus. We agree to love Him with our whole hearts - and make Him the object of our desires.

This is why the pursuit of pleasure or profit is a betrayal of that vow. James calls it "*spiritual adultery.*" Our hearts belong to Jesus, not the world's pleasures.

Verse 5, "*Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?"*

The Holy Spirit is jealous for our affections.

He's insulted with our flirtations and infatuations with the world. God requires our unrivaled affections!

"*But He gives more grace.*" Living in a world full of allurement and deception how can we resist temptation and reserve our hearts for Jesus? "*Grace!*" And God "*gives more grace...*" God fills our hearts with His love.

"*Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'*" Proverbs 6:16 reads, "*These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him.*" And at the top of God's list is "*a proud look.*"

God resists the proud. Think you can do it on your own, and God will let you try. But admit your need, and God will give grace – *His enabling, empowering love.*

“Therefore submit to God.” The word translated “submit” is “hupotasso.” It means “to arrange under, to line up behind.” To “submit to God” is to arrange my life around His Word - get my desires in line with His will.

Puritan pastor Richard Baxter’s last words were, “Lord, what You will, where You will, when You will.” This should be our motto not only in death, but in life!

Verse 7, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

“Resist” is a military term. It means “to stand against” as in hand-to-hand combat. Don’t run from the enemy.

In Ephesians 6 we’re told to clothe ourselves with the armor of God, but the one part of the body that’s not covered is *the back!* That’s because there’s no retreat, no running scared. We’re called to “resist” not “retreat!”

Resist in Jesus’ name, and Satan is forced to flee!

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Notice the couplet. “Resist the devil” and he’s forced to flee - “draw near to God” and He’ll draw near to you!

Author Kent Hughes writes, “There are two views which the Christian ought to pursue with all that he has: *the devil’s back, and the face of God.*”

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” Don’t be double-minded, or caught between opinions. Be 100% in... with Jesus.

Once, I read about a gang of bank robbers that paused before their planned heist in order to pray. They wanted God to bless their burglary. *How silly!* You can't serve God and commit a crime at the same time.

That's being "*double-minded!*"

But neither can you truly follow Christ while living with someone who's not your spouse... or cheating on your income tax... or stealing from your company... or lying to your boss... or gossiping about a neighbor...

Verse 9, "*Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*"

James isn't disallowing laughter. Proverbs 17:22 tells us, "*A cheerful heart is good medicine.*" It takes 72 muscles to frown, but only 14 muscles to smile. Obviously, God wants us to smile more than frown.

When James tells us to "*lament, mourn, weep,*" he's encouraging us to be serious about our repentance. Our willingness to do whatever God wants should be heartfelt. There's something phony about coming to the altar to weep and pray and confess our sins, then 30 minutes later be out in the foyer telling silly jokes.

James is saying, "*Don't laugh when you ought to weep... and don't weep when you should be laughing.*"

Verse 10, "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*" *Promote yourself* and you'll rise as high as *you can go*. But *humble yourself*, steer yourself clear of the spotlight, and the Lord will promote you to a place to which only He can exalt you!

“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” God alone is judge. When we judge another we put ourselves in the place of God.

Verse 13, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.”

None of us knows what tomorrow holds. We’re foolish to be dogmatic, and set our plans in concrete.

When you say, “I *will* do this” or “I *will* do that,” you’re being arrogant. You’ve forgotten that God is control, not you. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns...

It’s been said, “Life is like fighting a gorilla. You don’t rest when you get tired. You rest when the gorilla gets tired.” There’s a lot in my life that’s beyond my control.

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” Your life, and my life - is like a puff of warm breath on a winter’s day.

We’re here today, gone tomorrow.

How can we speak definitively about the future when there’s no guarantee we’ll even wake up tomorrow?

“Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” Its okay to make plans as long as we acknowledge God’s overarching sovereignty. As

James puts it, *“if the Lord wills.”* As Thomas A. Kempis use to state, *“Man purposes, but God disposes.”*

The Puritans were fond of the Latin expression, *“Deo Volente”* or *“God willing.”* The early Methodists would sign their letters with the initials, *“D.V.”* or *“Deo Volente.”* *Their plans* were contingent on *God’s plans.*

One of the keys to success in life is the ability to adapt and be flexible. The realization that God is sovereign - and controls my circumstances - helps me to maintain the right attitude toward life’s uncertainty.

The old saying it true, *“The bend in the road is not the end of the road if you’re willing to make the turn.”*

Verse 16, *“But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”* It was a stormy night at sea as the battleship plowed through the fog. The captain saw a light off the port bow. It seemed to be closing in...

The captain ordered the signalman on deck to flash a message, *“Alter your course 10 degrees south.”* The message came back, *“Alter your course 10 degrees north.”* The captain grew angry. How dare them...

He sent back a message, *“Alter your course 10 degrees south - I am a captain.”* The return message, *“Alter your course 10 degrees north – I am a Seaman 3rd Class.”* This infuriated the captain even further...

This time he sent, *“Alter your course 10 degrees south – I’m a battleship.”* But the final message... *“Alter your course 10 degrees north – I’m a lighthouse.”*

Like the proud captain, many a person has crashed on the rocks of life because they were *too arrogant*, and *too stubborn*, and *too rigid* to change their course!

As James puts it, “All such boasting is evil.”

“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Since we don’t know what the future holds - *or if we even have a future* - then while we have an opportunity to do good we should do it!

James tells us, serve the Lord while we can. Count for Jesus today - none of us are promised tomorrow.

Chapter 5, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl...”

This is the same Greek word used for the shrieks that come from hell. James warns the rich to “*weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!*”

Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” How foolish! It’s the last days. This world is on its way out. The kingdom of heaven is on the horizon. The riches of this world are about to burn. Yet people are still foolishly investing in earthly treasures.

Understand, the Bible never teaches that money is evil - money is simply a tool for good or evil - it’s *the love of money* that’s called the root of all evil.

Don’t get down on someone just because he’s rich.

It’s said, “Don’t knock the rich man. When was the last time you were hired by somebody who was poor?”

James’ warning is not to the rich per se, but to those trusting in riches. Temporal treasures will corrode and rot. They’ll be worthless in eternity. Two authorities remind us of the futility of riches: [the Bible](#) and [the IRS](#).

Verse 4, “Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” The rich people James had in mind gained their wealth dishonestly. And God saw it...

“You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.” James sees these dishonest landowners as a Thanksgiving turkey being fattened up for judgment.

He says, “You have condemned, you have murdered the just; He does not resist you.” The rich cheated and murdered, and God did nothing to stop them. It appears as if God let them get away with their crimes.

It reminds me of the Wells Fargo agent who stole a single silver dollar from the company every day for 30 years. He’d bring the coin home, and put it in a trunk in his attic. But one day he dropped in his last coin.

The attic flooring could no longer hold the heavy trunk, and that night the trunk fell through the ceiling crashing down on top of the man as he laid in his bed.

The wealthy man who gained his riches through dishonesty and crookedness may appear as if he’s gotten away with it, but he hasn’t! Judgment is coming!

James says verse 7, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.” Today is the day of salvation. Right now, Jesus is extending mercy. But the day is coming soon when the Lord will mete out justice.

When Jesus returns He’ll come to judge the wicked.

“See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

A farmer can't rush the harvest. He has to wait patiently, until the fruit is ripe. Likewise, justice and God's judgment will come, but in His timing not ours.

“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” Time is running out. We don't have a single second to grumble or squabble. We have work to do.

We need to be leading people to Jesus!

“My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure.”

The Bible and church history is full of examples of men who endured hardship awaiting God's promise.

James mentions Job, a classic case of steadfastness in suffering... “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

Job 42:10 concludes Job's ordeal, “And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” The end of Job's life proves you never lose out waiting on God. *Perseverance* always has a *pay-day*.

Verse 12, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes,” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.” James repeats a portion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Here’s where *faith leaves tracks*. Christians need to be people of their word!

In verse 13, James asks, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.” Make prayer *your first resource*, not your *last resort*. Turn *cares* into *prayers*.

“Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” Here’s a disease that is especially common among Christians. It’s called *cheerful-itis*. It’s terminal. There’s no cure.

It begins in the heart and spreads quickly - *soon the mouth smiles, hands clap, arms raise, toes tap, feet dance*. The only relief is *sing!* To keep from exploding with joy – the only release is to sing God’s praise!

Verse 14, “Is anyone among you sick? 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.”

Isn’t it strange? We use being sick as an excuse to skip church, whereas James says it’s a main reason to attend church. *If you’re sick call for the elders...*

Understand, I’m not against doctors. God chooses to heal both *medically* and *supernaturally*. Yet sometimes I think we’re too quick to put our trust in doctors.

The elders don’t ask for your proof of insurance, or charge you a co-pay, or make you fill out endless forms. You don’t have to sit for hours in a waiting room.

The elders love God’s people and have been given the responsibility of praying for those who are sick.

And notice, with their prayer, James tells the elders to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord!

In the Bible, olive oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The elders are to pour some oil on the person who is sick - on the forehead, or the wound. (*Just a little dab will do you!*) The oil has no magical powers - or even medicinal effects - it's a point of contact for our faith.

Jesus yielded to the will of His Father in [the Garden of Gethsemane](#) - or "[the Garden of the Oil Press](#)."

Like an olive, Jesus was crushed under the burden He carried. His healing power flows from His sacrifice.

The oil of the olive is a reminder of His passion.

Notice verse 15, James adds, "[And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.](#)"

It's the "[prayer of faith](#)," not the oil, that prompts God to heal us. But the oil gives us a tangible target for our faith. We ask Him to heal, but *when?... how?... why?*

[When?](#) When the oil is applied. [How?](#) By the power of the Spirit. [Why?](#) Because the body of Jesus was crushed. His healing now flows through His sacrifice.

Roman Catholics practice the sacrament of extreme unction, where they anoint a person with oil in preparation for death. How ironic... The NT practice is a means of healing, not a precursor for death.

["And \(verse 15\) if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."](#) There are times when a physical ailment is directly brought on by a person's sin. *But not always...*

Job's sufferings were no fault of his own.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was because of his many revelations, not because of any particular sin.

Yet when the sin and sickness are directly related, the forgiveness and healing can occur together.

Verse 16, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

Some physical ailments are psychosomatic. The stress of guilt and shame can have an adverse effect on us physically. Sin can elevate a person's blood pressure - attack his immune system - rob her of sleep.

Often the lines etched in a face are caused by the guilt that's carry in the soul. Secret sins that get buried spiritually find a way of pushing themselves to the surface of our lives in the form of physical maladies.

Sin is harmful to our health.

Some folks suffer mysterious symptoms they've tried to treat with drugs, herbs, and homeopathic cures.

But here's what they haven't tried... They've never taken a ruthless inventory of their sins. They've buried stuff under lies, and cover-ups, and self-deception. *But what if you finally came clean?* Imagine the relief.

Perhaps it's time to confess your sin and be healed.

It reminds me of the freshman in college. On his first trip to the laundry mat, he took his mesh bag full of dirty clothes, and tossed his dirties in the washer.

When he emptied the bag to fold his clothes, he was disappointed. His pants and shorts were still dingy.

An older lady had watched him. She explained if he wanted clothes that were thoroughly clean he had to separate them before putting them in the washer.

And this is how we need to treat our sin. Some people make a veiled, ambiguous, general admission of sin, and wonder why they still feel dirty. A serious confession gets as specific and thorough as possible.

In Roman Catholicism you enter a dark booth and confess your sins to the priest... In psychotherapy you lie on a couch and confess your sins to a psychiatrist...

Today folks go on television and confess their sins to Oprah, or Dr. Phil, or Jerry Springer... But God tells us to go to church, and confess our sins to one another.

True confession is about living an open, transparent life. It's about emptying my closet of all its skeletons - being honest with my weaknesses. Pride causes hypocrisy. Humility allows us be real with our struggles.

God wants church to be a grace-filled, judgment-free zone. A place to be honest, and live in real forgiveness.

Next, James makes us such a hopeful promise. He tells us, **“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”** What an incentive to pray!

It's been said, **“Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.”** God answers the persistent, and God-glorifying, and heart-felt prayer.

And James gives us an example, **“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...”** Elijah was not Superman. He was a normal man – weak and frail – like me and you.

Yes, he stood-up to the prophets of Baal and called fire down from heaven - but afterwards he tucked tail and ran from a wicked woman, “*Jezebel*.” Elijah could stand strong, but he grew discouraged and tried to quit.

Elijah was a *regular guy* who lived a *righteous life*. He desired to please God and knew how to pray. And if you live a similar life, you too can be used by God...

“(Elijah) **prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.**

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” Elijah prayed *passionately*. He prayed *in participation* with God’s will. And he prayed *persistently*. The OT says he prayed 7 times.

At first the rain cloud was the size of a fist. But Elijah believed God. He told his servant to get home - a real frog-strangler, a gully-washer was on the way.

Do you pray *passionately*?

Do you pray *in participation* with God’s will?

Do you pray *persistently*? Remember, **“the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much!”**

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

We need to reach out in love not only to a *lost world*, but to *fallen saints*. Hey, it’s never over until it’s over.

In conclusion, I hope you're leaving tracks.

Do you live what you believe?

Let's adopt James' attitude, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." Be doers of the Word and not hearers only!