

# Confess Your Sins to One Another

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 7

James 5:16 11-8-2015

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Summary: The body heals itself. For a broken church culture to be restored, we must confess our sins to one another, pray for one another, and restore one another. Confession brings healing by removing the illness-causing problems that come with guilt, bitterness, and hypocrisy, as well as removing God’s chastisement, and ending the fights. For reconciliation, confess sinful actions (and the underlying heart sins) to the ones affected. For restoration, confess everything to those who can help you. Use information you get about people to pray for them. And especially pray the Scriptures.

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**James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

## Introduction

## The Body Heals the Body

After 10 years of faithful service, our refrigerator died last week. The only way to fix it would have been to replace the compressor. That's how it is with most things that break down – you have to replace the broken parts. But a living body is different. The body heals itself. We could give our refrigerator 3 weeks of bed rest and it would still be just as broken as ever. But a week or so ago I cut my thumb, and now it's just fine. When I got that cut, my body first sent platelets to that area to stop the bleeding, then white blood cells to kill germs, then fibroblast cells, which have the ability to form new skin and other damaged tissue. The body sends all those things to that area, and now - no more cut. You break a bone, and after a while it's not broken anymore. The rest of the body comes to the rescue of that broken part and restores it to health.

The closing section of the book of James is about how to restore a broken church culture to good spiritual health. Throughout the book, James has been diagnosing all kinds of problems in the church, and now here at the end, he's telling us how to restore what's broken. But the solution isn't to call an outside repair man to come and replace the broken members with better ones. We are more like a body than a machine. Scripture calls us the body of Christ, not the refrigerator of Christ. When something is wrong in the church, the solution James gives us is for all of the various parts of the body to bring healing to the sick parts. If you fall into sin, the whole body should move toward you – not away from you. We all come close, and all the platelets and white blood cells and all the rest come and fight against the infection of sin, destroy the germs, and restore what's broken. At one time or another, each one of us will be the laceration or the broken bone in the body, and the rest of the body will have to come around and bring restoration. Your spiritual life is a community project.

## Helping One Another Find Forgiveness

In fact, even forgiveness of your sins is a community project. Look at what happens to the guy who calls the elders to come pray in v.15:

**James 5:15 If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.**

How does that happen? He gets sick, the elders pray, and he ends up forgiven. “I thought your sins are only forgiven when you confess them and repent of them through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. How can the prayers of other people play a role?” We see something similar in Mark chapter 2, where the 4 guys couldn't get their paralyzed friend to Jesus because of the crowd.

**Mark 2:4 they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”**

Why doesn't it say, “When Jesus saw that man's faith, He forgave his sins”? Why the friends' faith? Has all that stuff about confession and repentance been cancelled – all you need now is someone else to have faith for you? No, everything the Bible says about confession and repentance still stands. The sick guy in James 5:15, who is forgiven after the elders pray – that guy *did* confess his sins. It doesn't mention that, but we can figure it out logically from the **therefore** in verse 16. Verse 15 says he will be forgiven, then verse 16 draws the conclusion: **therefore confess your sins that you may be healed**. The implication is that he also confessed his sins.

So where do the elders fit in? The sick guy did confess his sins, but evidently that didn't happen until the elders came and prayed for him and anointed him and refreshed and encouraged him and exhorted him and did all they could to bring about spiritual restoration where it was needed. My guess is that the same thing happened with the paralytic in Mark 2. Maybe his faith was faltering and weak, and he was caught up in sin, but his friends' faith was so strong and steadfast and resolute and insistent that by the

time they managed to get him to Jesus, his faith was stimulated and fortified. Look at v.15 again. That phrase translated **if he has sinned he will be forgiven** is an interesting phrase. Literally it is:

**if sins he has committed, it will be forgiven him.**

The word **if** reminds us that this illness may or may not be a result of sin in his life. We shouldn't automatically assume sin, but it is one possible scenario. And the scenario that James is pointing us to is one where the sins are plural - maybe a period of sinning or a specific group of sins that are having a single consequence of this illness.

The phrase **it will be forgiven to him** comes from the book of Leviticus. That exact phrase is used over and over all through the book to describe what will happen each time the priests offer a sacrifice for some individual who has sinned.<sup>1</sup> Someone sins, he goes to the priest, the priest offers a particular sacrifice, and then it says, **it will be forgiven to him**. So by using that familiar phrase from Leviticus, James is calling to mind something that is analogous to the priestly intercessory atonement offerings. He is saying that just as the priests interceded and brought God's forgiveness to the broken sinner, so we in the body of Christ fill that same function for one another. We bring God's forgiveness to those among us who have fallen into sin. And we do so, not by offering a sacrifice, but by helping them believe. So the strength of our faith and our prayers might make the difference between that person being forgiven and healed, or not.

When the modern-day faith healers try to heal someone and it doesn't work, and they are so quick to blame the sick person for not having enough faith – they need to re-read this passage. The faith that brings about the healing in James 5 is not the faith of the sick person, but the faith of the ones praying for him. Why don't you ever hear a faith healer say, "This person didn't get healed, evidently *my* faith isn't adequate?"

If someone is in sin, he is to blame for his own sin – no question about that. But before I get too enthusiastic about pointing the finger at him, I need to face the fact that maybe, if I had been more faithful to pray, and I had done a better job nurturing and stimulating his faith, he wouldn't be so messed up. We bear responsibility to rescue one another from the clutches of sin and to restore one another from the consequences of sin. And that happens through mutual prayer and mutual confession of sins.

## **Confess So You May Be Healed**

Verse 16 is clear – confession brings healing.

**16 Therefore confess your sins to one another so that you may be healed.**

How does confession bring healing? Several ways.

### **Confession Relieves Guilt**

Unresolved guilt and secret sin can do all kinds of damage to your body. In Psalm 32 David writes about that time when he had secret sin.

**Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.**

Unconfessed sin takes a toll on your body.

And medical research has verified that. (Once in a while, science actually catches up to Scripture.) Studies have shown that ongoing, unresolved guilt feelings weaken the immune system<sup>2</sup>, make you

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<sup>1</sup> For example. **Leviticus 4:26 He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and it will be forgiven to him.**

<sup>2</sup> In one study, test subjects were asked to write about traumatic experiences for which they felt guilt. They were assessed before and after, and they found that after recalling something that made them feel guilty, they had elevated levels of various hormones and chemicals that weaken the immune system. In another study, researchers at the University of Hull found that levels of

susceptible to all kinds of sickness, and decrease your mental abilities.<sup>3</sup> But when there is confession, those medical problems go away.

## Confession Softens Bitterness

They found the same thing with broken relationships. Carsten Wrosch, professor at Concordia University, found that ongoing bitterness toward someone puts your body in a high-stress mode around the clock, and your body wasn't designed for that.

So it results in all kinds of illnesses. Dr. Charles Raison, from Emory University, found that when you are bitter toward someone, the damage to your heart and other organs are just as severe as the damage from smoking. It affects hormones, your autoimmune system, metabolism, blood pressure, organ function, it can result in panic attacks, and in some cases it causes hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which is a thickening of the muscles in the heart, and that can be fatal. All from bitterness.

## Confession Cures Hypocrisy

Dr. David Eagleman is a neuroscientist at Baylor College of Medicine, and he says this:

When you have a secret, there is an actual, physical conflict in your brain between the part that wants to tell and the part that wants to keep it secret. He says, "Your brain does not enjoy this stress. Those living duplicitous lives live with the stress of keeping a whole section of their life secret from the people they see every day. The fact that their brains are marinated with stress hormones impairs the body's ability to remain healthy.

And the solution is confession. James Pennebaker at the University of Texas used blood tests and EEG measurements to examine the physical effects of confession. And he found that if test subjects confess their secrets to a doctor, or even write them down for someone to read later, it decreased the level of stress hormones in the body, and they had fewer health problems.<sup>4</sup>

## Confession Removes Chastisement

And beyond the basic physical benefits of confession is the spiritual side. Confession brings healing by removing God's chastisement. If you are sick because of the sin, then when you confess and repent of that sin, there's no more need for the chastisement. In 1 Cor.11 the people were sinning against God in the way they took communion, and because of that sin, God was judging them with sickness.

**1 Corinthians 11:30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.**

If we would judge our own hearts, find the sin, confess it, and repent of it – then there would be no need for God to bring sickness into our lives.

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immunoglobulin A, associated with strong immunity, plummeted when test subjects admitted to guilty pleasures ( [http://newconnexion.net/articles/index.cfm/2007/05/Health\\_Risks\\_of\\_Guilt.html](http://newconnexion.net/articles/index.cfm/2007/05/Health_Risks_of_Guilt.html)).

<sup>3</sup> In another study, test subjects had a harder time working a puzzle when they felt guilty ( <http://www.medicaldaily.com/can-guilt-weigh-you-down-physical-tasks-found-harder-when-recalling-regrets-259422>).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.utexas.edu/features/2005/writing/>

## Confession Ends the Fight

So confession brings physical and spiritual healing – and not just to the individual, but to the whole church, because confession stops the fighting. Remember who James is writing to. The people were having sinful responses to suffering.

When pressure came, they were getting impatient with each other, judging each other, speaking against each other, quarreling, fighting – all the sinful responses of the flesh that naturally happen when we are suffering. So this closing section is James' solution to fighting in the church. And a big part of the solution is mutual confession. That will stop a fight. When I stop focusing on the other guy's sin, and starts focusing on my own, and I humbly confess, the fight usually goes away - especially when I not only confess my sin, but I ask the other guy to pray for my restoration.

It could be that the guy in v.14 got sick because he was one of the ones in chapter 2 who was showing favoritism to the rich. And he needed to confess to those poor people, "I was wrong to treat you like a second-class citizen in the church. I was wrong to tell you to go keep warm and well fed without doing anything to actually help you." The people in chapter 3 need to say, "I was seeking that teaching position because of pride and selfish ambition. I caused all that conflict and fighting because of envy and worldly wisdom." The people in chapter 4 need to confess their fighting and quarreling, their selfish desires, their love for the world, the pride, boasting, and judgmentalism. The rich people in chapter 5 need to confess their love of money and oppression of the poor. And the poor people need to confess their grumbling against one another and impatience.

If all those people did that, what do you think would happen to all their fights and arguments? The last two verses of the book are going to teach us about how to restore other people who have wandered into sin. But before you can restore them, you have to confess your own sin. Didn't Jesus teach us that? Before you go up to your brother and say, "Hey, you've got a little something in your eye – let me help you with that," first you get the phone pole out of your own eye.

What would it do to your heart if the next time you got into it with someone, they broke down and said, "You know what - I just sinned against you. Would you please forgive me? And would you please go to God in prayer and ask Him to have mercy on me for sinning against you?" How would it affect you if your spouse did that the next time you had a fight? And more to the point, how would it affect your spouse if you did it? Let's make it a contest – who can confess first?

## Principles of Confession

Now, if you're uncomfortable with James 1:16, I'm right there with you. It's got to be one of the scariest verses in the Bible. Confess my sins? To people? In the church? Yikes. How many of you read that verse and think, *That just sounds like so much fun. I can't wait to get started?* Some of you are terrified to share *anything* with people in the church. Never mind your sins – you are not even willing to open up about anything other than the most superficial things in your life. And so the thought of confessing your sins – that's just over-the-top. We all have shameful, ugly things that go on inside us, and so the thought of full transparency is terrifying.

What exactly is James requiring of us here? Do you have to confess *all* your sins - to *everyone*? All the deepest, darkest, ugliest parts of your life have to be exposed publicly? No, that's not appropriate, nor is it even possible. We could meet here all day every day and there wouldn't be enough time for all of us to confess all of our sins to everyone.

So does that mean we can just pick and choose what we confess? Our natural tendency is to confess in ways that make us look like we are better than we are. And so it ends up being more deceit than confession.

So we don't want to over confess, and we don't want to under confess or deceitfully confess. So what principles from Scripture can help us know how to do it right?

Which sins should you confess, and to whom? It depends on the purpose of the confession. There are two different purposes for confessing sin.

## Reconciliation

One is reconciliation of a broken relationship – where you have sinned against someone and now you are trying to be right with them. So you confess your sin and ask their forgiveness. When you sin against another person, or your sin hurts another person, or does damage to your relationship with them, it's not enough just to confess to God. You need to confess to the people you hurt and ask their forgiveness.

You need to do that for your spiritual and physical health, and for theirs. They need it, because if you don't confess, they might fall into the sin of bitterness or resentment or anger.<sup>5</sup> In Matthew 18 Jesus told a parable of the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant.

**Matthew 18:34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.**

Angry, unforgiving people are in big trouble.

Healing won't come to the church until people forgive you, so you need to make it as easy as possible for them to forgive you. Raise your hand if you want the people who are mad at you to go ahead and forgive you fully. Okay, so if that is what we want, then we should do everything we can to make it as easy as possible for them to forgive.

And nothing makes forgiveness easier for them than thorough confession on your part. A great little summary of the biblical principles of confession are in that book *The Peacemaker*.

## The 7 A's of Confession

### 1. Address everyone your sin affected

However wide the circle of offense was, that's how wide the confession needs to be.

If you sinned against one particular person, just confess to that person. If it happened in front of a group, confess to that whole group. If it hurt the whole church, then it's appropriate to confess to the whole church. If it didn't directly affect the whole church, then public confession isn't appropriate. I was in a church once where an elder's high school daughter got pregnant. They had her get up in front of the whole church and confess her sin. That's wrong. Why single her out? Why didn't all the high school students in the church have to get up on the platform and confess their sins of anger or disrespect or foul language or failure to trust in God or selfishness or ingratitude or disobedience to parents? When we treat people differently because of how scandalous or damaging their sin was, that is a symptom of pride – we don't think our own sin is that bad. So the arena of confession should be the same size as the arena of an offense.

### 2. Avoid if, but, and maybe

We don't say, "I'm sorry if I hurt you." We don't say, "I'm sorry but" and then throw out an excuse. We don't say, "I'm sorry but you" and turn our confession into an accusation. Just I'm sorry – I was wrong.

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<sup>5</sup> Last time I read you that verse from Mark 11 where Jesus said when you ask for something, if you believe that you have received it, it will be yours. It's interesting – listen to the very next verse in Mark 11.

**Mark 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.**

There Jesus made a close connection there between that prayer of faith, and forgiving one another. So it's no surprise when James puts the two concepts together as well.

### **3. Admit specifically what your sin was – not just generalizations**

Name the sin using biblical terminology. Don't say, "I didn't respond very well, please forgive me." Be specific about what the sin was. Was it anger? Selfishness? Pride? Lack of compassion? Lack of love? Envy? Don't just say, "I blew it" – name the sin.

And don't just confess sinful actions, but also the underlying sins of the heart that caused those actions.<sup>6</sup> "I was short with you because my sinful heart is more in love with comfort and ease and getting my way than it is with pleasing God and loving you." Confess underlying sins of the heart. Although - let me also give you a caution along that line. If the sin was *only* in your heart, and it didn't come out in your words or actions, then it didn't directly hurt that person, so it's not appropriate to confess it to that person. When someone comes up to me and says, "I've been angry at you for the last two years, please forgive me," - that's not necessarily helpful for our relationship. If you are angry with me and I don't know about it, I would just as soon continue to not know about it. Deal with that sin in your heart before God, and stop being angry at me, but you don't have to let me know about it. If a guy is lusting in his heart after some girl but he hasn't acted on it, it's a bad idea to go up to her and confess that and ask her forgiveness. Just deal with that sin between you and God.

But if it's a sin that has been manifested in your actions or your words or it has actually hurt the person, that's when you confess it to that person. And when you do, make sure you confess not only the action and the words, but also the heart attitudes that caused it, so the person knows that you are really taking this seriously.

### **4. Acknowledge the hurt**

Take the time to really understand how it made them feel. How many of you have had someone come and apologize, but it was still hard to forgive because they have no clue how much damage they did, and how much it hurt, or how severe their sin really was?

The less contrition and sorrow you show over your sin, the harder it is for them to forgive. But when you take the time to really understand how your sin hurt them and how they felt, and you are truly broken and contrite and sorrowful about your sin, the easier it is for them to forgive.

### **5. Accept the consequences**

If appropriate, make restitution. Do what you can to make it right.

### **6. Alter your behavior**

Take steps to change your attitudes and actions. This is especially important if you've committed the same sin against that person a whole bunch of times. It's hard for them to forgive when they know it's probably going to happen again tomorrow and the next day and the next.

But if you can say, "this is the sin that was in my heart, and here's what I'm going to do about it: I'm going to do an in-depth study of this chapter in Scripture, and going to read this book, I'm going to get an accountability partner," or join a men's group, etc. – that shows the person that you are serious about slamming the door on this sin.

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<sup>6</sup> Instead of saying, "I was wrong to lose my temper with you. Please forgive me," you might say, "Not only was it sinful for me to lose my temper, but the reason I lost my temper was also sinful. I was valuing my own comfort more than I cared about you." Or, "When you disrupted my plans, I got angry because in my heart I had made an idol out of my plans and getting my own way."

## 7. Ask for forgiveness

Don't just say you're sorry. Saying you're sorry doesn't always mean you believe you sinned. But asking the person to forgive you does.

That is just a really quick summary of those points. If you want to study them in more detail in Scripture, I would recommend the book, *The Peacemaker*, by Ken Sande.

## Restoration

So, who should you confess to, and what should you confess? When it's for reconciliation, confess to the people who were hurt or affected by your words or actions, and confess those specific words and actions as well as the heart attitudes that caused those sinful words and actions. We do that for *their* healing – so they can forgive and get the bitterness out of their heart. But we also confess for the sake of our own healing. We confess for reconciliation, but we confess for personal restoration.

When you're struggling to get victory over a particular sin in your life, or you need restoration from the consequences of sin, you have to get someone praying for you. In that case who should you confess to? Confess to people who will pray for you – whether they were affected by the sin or not.

I think this is what James primarily has in mind here. No doubt there were plenty of broken relationships that needed to be reconciled in these churches that James is writing to. But the main focus seems to be confession for the purpose of restoration. Getting someone to pray for you to be restored and healed – physically and spiritually.

## Prayer Groups

This kind of confession happens every week in the prayer groups. I've never been in a church where there is as much open, honest confession of sin every Sunday morning as we gather together then at this church. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, that may be because it happens so naturally and organically that you don't even think of it as confession of sin. In the prayer groups, we just go around the circle and ask, "How can we pray for you this week with regard to your walk with the Lord? How can we pray for your spiritual life? And at first, if you don't know the people very well, you might give a somewhat guarded answer: "Please pray for wisdom for me," without any further explanation of the situation – which is fine. But what inevitably happens over time is, as you get more comfortable with each other, you do find yourself volunteering a few more details. And finally, when it becomes clear that the group is safe and trustworthy, and they have opened up their lives, you start opening up more. "Please pray for me to have greater self-control with my daughter. Last week I blew up at her at the dinner table, and I'm afraid I'm exasperating her." Or "Please pray that I would have more desire for God's Word. Lately I've really neglected the Scriptures." That's a confession of sin. You might not think of it that way when you say it, and the rest of the group isn't thinking of it that way either, but that's what it is. And I think that kind of natural, organic way of communicating our weaknesses is probably the ideal form of confession. And it brings healing.

## Mentoring and Counseling

Once in a while there will be a situation that goes deeper than what would be manageable in the prayer group. Maybe you've got some very sensitive issue, sexual sin, addiction, a marital problem, and you need some intensive mentoring on a regular basis for an ongoing period of time. And you need to confess some things that just wouldn't be appropriate even in prayer group. That's when you come in for counseling, or begin meeting regularly with a mentor – some form of one-on-one discipleship. Every last one of us hits certain situations in our spiritual growth where we need that. And the more open and honest and transparent you are with your mentor, the more helpful they will tend to be.

This is especially important for enslaving sins or besetting sins. Usually those are the more embarrassing kind, so we are reluctant to confess those. Some of you are sitting there thinking, “No, I don’t need to confess this. I’m just about to turn the corner. I think I’m just about to get victory.” But you’ve been saying that for 20 years. How long do we have to struggle with something before we’ll wake up to reality and realize we can’t do it on our own? Go to someone you trust, who knows the Scriptures, and who is powerful in prayer, confess openly and honestly to that person so that they can pray for you.

And that is a situation where you *do* confess sins of the thought life and of the heart - whether it manifested itself in actions or not. That mentor is not going to really help you unless they know the heart issues that are going on. So be open. And if you are the mentor, you should be open too. It’s a lot easier to be open with someone who is open with you.

## More Confession than Criticism

I love the mutuality of this command – **confess your sins to one another**. It doesn’t say, “The peons should confess their sin to the big shots.” It doesn’t say, “the really dirty, vile, scandalous sinners should confess their sins to the squeaky clean people who have their act together.” No, it’s just everybody in the church keeping it real.

Let me ask you this – how would you like to be in a church where confession is more common than criticism? Sometimes criticism is necessary. It’s not necessary every single time you see something go wrong, but many times it is necessary to point something out. But wouldn’t it be great if for every one time we did that there were ten times when we confessed our own sin or failure or weakness? How many of you would find it easier to receive criticism and correction from someone who frequently confesses his own sin, than from someone who is never wrong?

## How to Respond to Confession

So confess your sins to one another. And when that happens, then what? If someone confesses a sin to you, what should you do with it? Pray! Do everything you can to restore them, but don’t forget about prayer.

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

## Pray for Restoration

### The Promise of Healing

I wonder if he had been spending some time in Isaiah 33 right before he sat down to write this book. Remember in ch.4 when he called God the lawgiver and judge? (James 4:12) That way of describing God comes from Isaiah 33:22. And look what else Isaiah says in that same paragraph.

**Isaiah 33:22 For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, it is he who will save us. 24 No one living in Zion will say, “I am ill”; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.**

When the Messiah comes, He will bring 3 things: salvation and healing and forgiveness of sins. And James is talking about those same three things.

**James 5:15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick person If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.**

James is describing the fulfillment of an OT promise. And one thing we learn in the NT about the glorious kingdom of the Messiah is that it comes in two stages. Jesus came once and inaugurated a partial fulfillment of the promises, but the full, total fulfillment will not happen until His Second Coming.

For example, one promise is that you will be delivered from sin. Has that happened yet? Partially. We are delivered from the penalty of sin, but the presence of sin isn't wiped out altogether until the Second Coming.

Do we have a close relationship with God? Yes, much closer than OT saints had, but nothing like what it will be at the Second Coming.<sup>7</sup> Have the mysteries of the kingdom of God been revealed to us? Yes, but now we still know only in part, then we will know fully, even as we are known.<sup>8</sup> That's how it is between the first and Second Coming – partial fulfillments. Already but not yet.

And the promise of healing is the same way. We have it in part now and in full measure when Jesus returns. Some of our Charismatic friends make the mistake of thinking we have 100% now. They think if you just claim healing, and you have enough faith, it's guaranteed you will be healed. We saw last week that's not true.<sup>9</sup> However, in the non-Charismatic world we have gone too far the other way, and there has been a tendency to say when it comes to the healing promises, there is almost no fulfillment in this life. Christians are no different from anyone else in the world when it comes to physical healing. But it would be awfully hard to reconcile that with this passage in James? James doesn't say, "Is any of you sick? Too bad. You have the same chances of being healed as an atheist."

There is a connection in the OT promises about the age of the Messiah between physical healing and forgiveness of sins – physical restoration and spiritual restoration. Jesus reaffirmed that connection in the miracles of His earthly ministry, and I am convinced there is still a connection. Three times in 1 Cor.12 it mentions spiritual **gifts of healings**.<sup>10</sup> And this passage in James 5 brings it right into the ongoing life of the church.

Is it something we are going to major on and put front and center at Agape? No, because the Bible doesn't put it front and center. If you look for physical healing in the Epistles, you will see the gifts of healings mentioned in passing in 1 Cor.12, and this passage in James 5, and that's about it. It's not emphasized much, so we don't want to get out of balance with a focus on that. But we don't want to ignore it either. James 5 is in the book, and if God says something once it's still true. It's part of the promise of the New Covenant and the ministry of the Messiah. It is an important illustration of spiritual restoration, so we should seek physical and spiritual healing from God, with the greatest emphasis on spiritual healing.

## Conclusion

### Pray the Scriptures

So how do you go about praying for someone? You say, "God please heal him," "Dear Lord, please restore her" – that takes 2 seconds. Then what? How do you pray long and hard for someone without it

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Jn.3:2.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor.13:12.

<sup>9</sup> Epaphroditus was so sick that he almost died, and instead of being rebuked for lacking faith, Paul said we are to honor men like him. And Timothy was told to use wine for his frequent illnesses rather than just having faith.

<sup>10</sup> One thing that's interesting about the gifts listed in 1 Cor.12 is that when it comes to healing, the wording is a little different from the others. All 3 times it's mentioned, instead of "the gift of healing," both words are plural: "**gifts of healings**." **1 Corinthians 12:8 To one there is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by that one Spirit. ...28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healings. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings?**

I don't want to make too much of that, because several of the gifts are in the plural. But healing is the only one where both words are plural - **gifts of healings**. And that happens all three times. And a lot of interpreters have taken that to mean that it's a little different from a gift like teaching. If you have the gift of teaching, you can use that whenever you want. Any day of the week, and time, day or night, you can use that gift. But gifts of healings seem to come at certain, select times that God chooses, and it's not something that can just be done at any moment at will. Nevertheless, it seems there are certain people God tends to want to use in a special way to give His gifts of healings.

turning into meaningless repetition (“Please, please, please, please heal him”)? My best advice on that is to pray the Scriptures. Paul was constantly asking the people to pray for him<sup>11</sup> and he was constantly praying for them. And I am sure one reason why so many of his prayers are included on the pages of Scripture is to teach us how to do it. Use Jesus’ prayers and Paul’s prayers as a model. If you don’t know what to pray, just open up to one of Paul’s prayers – like Philippians 1:9-11. Father, I pray that Josiah’s love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that he may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. See how helpful that is? Isn’t that better than “Dear God, bless my son, lead, guide, and protect. And please get him to clean his room, amen”?

I put an insert in the bulletin (and in the appendix to the sermon notes) that can help get you started. We also have a booklet available that my mom put together titled “Praying the Scriptures.” Those are available at the Welcome Center.

And don’t just limit your prayers to the prayers of Scripture. Pray whatever you learn from Scripture. You read your Bible in the morning, pull out one nugget to put on the front burner and chew on through the day, and that day, whoever you pray for – your wife, kids, friends, the person in your prayer group you’re praying for – pray that verse for them. In your devotions you are reading in Philippians 4:6 where it says, **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Now, whenever you pray for someone that day, pray for that. “God, give my son peace that transcends all understanding.” “Help my husband not to be anxious about anything but instead to pray with thanksgiving.” “Guard my dad’s heart.”

Or you can do the same thing with the last sermon you heard. This week, “Father, I want to pray for my pastor. Please help him learn how to confess his sins – bring to his mind what You want him to confess, and to whom, and in what context. And bring restoration and healing as a result. Help the person he confesses to to forgive and to be helpful and edifying.”

If you pray for the healing and restoration of others, God will heal and restore them, and God will heal and restore you. If we stop tearing each other down, and start restoring one another instead, here’s what will happen:

**Isaiah 58:8 If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.**

### **Benediction:**

Maybe you have fallen into horrible sin and have experienced horrible consequences for your sin. And it feels like your life is ruined. That’s what happened to the people in Joel 2. But when we confess and repent, God is a God who restores. Here’s what He told them:

**Joel 2:21 Be not afraid be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things. 22 Be not afraid for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches. 23 Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten**

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<sup>11</sup> Paul really felt a deep sense of need to be prayed for. See Ro.15:30-32, Col.4:2-4. 1 Thes.5:25, 2 Thes.3:1-2. See also Heb.13:18-19.

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) Of the 7 A's of confession (Address everyone involved, Avoid "if, but, and maybe", Admit specifically, Acknowledge the hurt, Accept the consequences, Alter your behavior, Ask forgiveness), which one or two come easiest to you? And which one or two do you most need to work on?
- 2) If there was a time in your life when healing or restoration came through confession, share that story with the group.
- 3) If you can think of a time when someone's thorough confession made it easy for you to forgive, tell the story (without disclosing the sin they committed).
- 4) When the 1:25 group prays tonight, pray a prayer of Paul for one another (such as Eph.1:17-18, Eph.3:14-19, or Php.1:9-11)

## Appendix: 33 Ways To Pray For One Another

- 1) Ro 10:1 - Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved.
- 2) Eph 1:16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you
- 3) 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.
- 4) 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you,
- 5) 18 [that you may know] the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
- 6) 19 [that you may know] his incomparably great power for us who believe.
- 7) Eph 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
- 8) 17 [that he might strengthen you] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
- 9) And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
- 10) 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-
- 11) that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- 12) 2Th 1:11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling,
- 13) and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours
- 14) and every act prompted by your faith.
- 15) 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 16) Php 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,
- 17) 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best
- 18) and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,
- 19) 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God.
- 20) Col 1:9-12 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- 21) 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord
- 22) and may please him in every way:
- 23) bearing fruit in every good work,
- 24) growing in the knowledge of God,
- 25) 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might
- 26) so that you may have great endurance and patience,
- 27) and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.
- 28) Col.4:12-13 He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.
- 29) Phm 5-6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith,
- 30) so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
- 31) 3Jn 2-4 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you,
- 32) even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.
- 33) 2 Co 13:9-10 our prayer is for your perfection.

