THROUGH IT ALL
JAMES // REAL RELIGION
James 5:13-20 // Shannon Popp
July 24, 2017

CRAIG: Hi Mission Hills. I am so excited to be able to introduce to you our guest speaker for today. David Hegg is a man after God’s own heart, but he’s also a man after my own. I met David at a conference not too long ago. And it turns out that our Weekend Experience Pastor, Danny Oertli, also knew him. And so, as we were looking for somebody to fill the pulpit this weekend, Danny reached out to him, unbeknownst to me. But when Danny suggested that he would be a great guy to preach this concluding passage in the book of James, I immediately went, “Absolutely he would.” I am so excited that he’s gonna be able to be here today and teaching. The last passage in James is kind of a controversial passage, and so I love David’s heart. He actually reached out to me with a paper that he’d written on the interpretive issue and I went, “That’s exactly how I feel about it.” And so I’m able to say without any hesitation that you’re gonna be getting great theology, great Biblical exposition today. And I give what he has to say today two thumbs up. And I think you’re gonna be so blessed by what God has to say to you through David as he unpacks God’s word at the concluding passage in the book of James. So I wanna ask you to give him a warm welcome this morning. This is David Hegg from Grace Baptist Church, in Santa Clarita California.

DAVID W. HEGG: I just got to tell you after that introduction, I can hardly wait to hear myself. That’s the second-best introduction I’ve ever had. The first one, I was in Wisconsin, speaking at a men’s conference. And the guys who ran the conference...I don’t even know how they heard about me but they invited me to come and I came. And I was sitting in the front row, the first night. And one of the guys got up and said, “You know, as we were putting this conference together, we just wanted to get a great theologian, a great expositor, a great preacher, a great man. But since we couldn’t get Jesus to come, David’s gonna speak.” That...I was sitting there cringing, almost as much as I’ve been cringing.

This is the fourth time I’ve heard Craig. You know, Craig is a new friend but a very very helpful friend. And we met at a Converge pastor’s conference, and we gravitated toward each other. I think it’s because we have more hair on our chins than on our head, I’m not sure. But he’s a great man. And I’m very honored to be in a pulpit that he normally occupies. But what’s even more exciting for me, is knowing Craig, then I know you. I know that you are people of the Book. That the Bible has is been the foundation for 75 years here at Mission Hills. That’s an amazing understanding of what perseverance really is.

And you’ve been studying the book of James. It’s all about perseverance. And it’s even more important now because the culture in which we live in our United States is really becoming less, and less, and less a friend to our worldview. And more, and more, and more an obstacle to the idea that Jesus is Lord of all and that the theology of knowing Christ ought to put together a ethic that makes us...well, it makes us conspicuous in this world. So I just trust that if God gives us 75 more years, the Mission Hills and Grace Baptist where I’m from, will continue to be a church that walks in the grace of Christ, and extends the love of Christ surrounded in the truth of God’s word. That’s who we are and I know that’s who you are.

So I invite you to take your Bibles, in whatever form you have them. I know as a preacher, it used to be...I got a little upset when I saw people on their phone, then I realized they had the text on the phone. And I’d love you to turn to the book of James Chapter five, we’re gonna look at the last section. My good friend Craig, left town and left to me, this very controversial subject. And so I hope that you’ll give me just a little grace.

You’ve been watching, you’ve been a living, you’ve been walking, through the book of James. And you’ve been seeing I think, week after week after week that James is telling his readers, “You know what, living in this world, there’s a lot of danger zones for Christians.” And he starts enumerating them. He talked about tongue control three times. He talked about partiality, about hypocrisy, about worldliness, and greed. He talked about self-sufficiency, that all of these things are our temptations to those who
follow Christ. They're kind of pitfalls. If we walk too close to the edge, we can fall off. But he asked us to persevere. That's the theme of James, isn't it? Back in chapter one and verse two, “Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces long suffering.” Produces perseverance. In chapter one verse twelve, he said, “Blessed is the man who perseveres.”

And then last week you started in chapter five verse seven and you learned that this perseverance takes patience. That we are waiting for Christ to come because when he comes, our worldview will finally be validated. I don't know if you’re like me, but man I wish that the truth of God’s Word would be pervasively understood in our world. But it’s not gonna be. Not until Christ returns. And then you see down in verse eleven of chapter five, “As you know we consider blessed those who have persevered.” And he talks about the perseverance of Job.

And that brings us to the very last section. And here’s my question for you. If you’re James and you’re writing to a number of people that you know and you love who are scattered, and are asked to live out the life of Christ, you know, in an unlovely sin-drenched world, what would you end with? And that’s what makes this last section so controversial. I’m gonna read it for you and then I’ll explain to you why I do not think that this has to do with physical illness, but rather deals with spiritual weakness.

Follow along as I read. In verse 13, “Is anyone of you in trouble? You should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is anyone 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. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again, he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My brothers and sisters. If one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

And the way that reads, the way the NIV has translated the words, it seems very apparent that it’s talking about physical illness. And if someone has the ‘flu or cancer or anything in between, then what should happen is the elder should come and anoint them with oil, and pray a prayer of faith and they’ll be healed. That’s what it appears to be saying. I wanna give you three reasons why I don’t think that that’s what James is saying. Now, you don’t have to believe what I tell you. Right, you’re not responsible to me. In about five hours I’m gonna get on a plane and go back to where they believe me. Kidding.

But what I want you to understand is, as we approach the Bible, we’ve to understand that it doesn’t mean what we think it means. It means...meaning begins with, what did the original author intend the original readers to understand from the words that he used. So we have to ask ourselves, “What is James saying at the end of his book?” And up till this point, he has not been talking about the body at all. He’s been talking about the spiritual vitality of the heart that is able to stand up against the temptations to sin. And so it appears to me that it would be kind of an anomaly if he ends talking about physical illness.

Let me give you three reasons why I think that. The first one has to do with the words that he uses. And the key words in this text, if we understand the original language, don’t always mean physical illness. There are three that I’ll talk about. The first one is the one that’s translated “sick”. Now, in our day, and in the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That Greek word is predominantly used to describe someone who is physically ill. And that’s because, in the Gospels...there’s two main themes in the Gospels. Who is Jesus and what did he accomplish? And in the who is Jesus part, it’s, is he the Messiah? And so as you know, the Old Testament kind of had an audit list of what this Messiah would do. The blind would see, hey good, you guys are well taught. The deaf will hear. The lame will walk. And all of those are demonstrations of the power that God the Son, would have his Messiah to reverse the curse. Because the curse comes in and brings disease and death. So what does Jesus do? He goes around healing diseases and raising people from the dead.
And so you’d expect that this word, asthéneia, when it’s used in the Gospels, speaks about physical illness and it does. But when we get to the epistles, which are written to the church, it’s primarily used to describe those who...I wanna say are spiritually weak. The better word for me would be spiritually despondent, fragile, even confused, frustrated, because the circumstances of life over time have caused them to kind of enlarge the separation between them and their Savior. Some of you maybe have gone through that. All of us have known someone like that. And I think that’s what it’s talking about. The second reason I believe that, is down in verse 15 when it says, “The sick person.” You would think that the word “sick” in verses 14 and the word “sick person” in 15 would be translating the same Greek word but it’s not. The one in verse 15, the Greek term there is never used of someone who is physically ill, in the Bible.

In fact, all of the standard lexicons define it as weary, as fatigued, as despondent. And it’s used in Hebrews 12: 3. You’re familiar with Hebrews 12, you know where it talks about we’re gonna, “…persevere and run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of our faith. Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. And has sat down at the right hand of God.” And then in verse three, it says, “So consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not…”, here it is. “…grow weary or fainthearted.” That’s the same word.

The third word is this word to heal or make well, in verse 15. It’s really a word that is usually used to speak about salvation. And it’s the word from which we get soteriology...the study of salvation. And it really means to restore. And so the words don’t always mean physical sickness. In fact, in the epistles, they primarily deal with spiritual lethargy. Spiritual despondency. Second reason is that there’s a guarantee here. If you look at verse 15 it says, “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.” There’s no contingency. Now, some would say, “Well, it’s the prayer of faith.” And that the person who is ill doesn’t have enough faith.” But if you look closely, it’s the elders who are offering the prayer of faith.

And we all understand that the prayer of faith is...James tells us actually. The prayer of faith is something that we pray knowing that God has already promised it. We learned that back in James chapter one. In verse five, he says, “If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, never doubting.” So here’s the thing, he’s saying the very beginning, if you’re going through trials and you wanna know what God’s direction is for you. When you look down the road of obedience, and it looks really hard. It looks cloudy, it looks windy. It doesn’t look like it will get you where you wanna go. It’s not gonna be pleasant, it’s not gonna be as enjoyable because perseverance presupposes obstacles. And you look down the road of giving in to temptation. Sin, good old fashioned disobedience. You look down that road and, “Well, that looks really good. It looks pleasant. No one will know.”

Where I come from we have a lot of people in our congregation who are in the business. That means they make movies or television. We have a lot of set builders. And you know what sets are. You see television, you see movies, and you think that’s a real house. But if you walk behind it, it’s just a facade that’s held up. And what we tell our people a lot is as you look down the road of giving in to sin, what you’re seeing is Satan, who is the best set builder ever. Just like he tricked Eve into looking at that apple and saying, “Well, it looks good. It’s gonna taste good. It’s gonna be...as I like to say, nutritious, delicious and propitious, right?” And it wasn’t. It killed her.

And so when we come back to this prayer of faith, what we’re saying...James is saying is that if you are in a position where you wanna know, “What does God really want me to do?” If you ask for wisdom and if you truly want to know, He’s gonna direct you in the times of scripture, and the meditations of your heart and the work of the Spirit to know what you should do to obey Him. The prayer of faith. Problem here is in this text there’s no contingency. If this were really about physical illness, then we would expect that we could almost eradicate disease in the church.

And yet, the third reason I don’t believe that it is physical illness is I’ve been at this pastor thing for 30 years or so. And I’ve anointed a lot of people or been involved with anointing people as an elder and as a pastor. We sent missionaries to Turkey and the wife had a brain tumor. And we came around her as elders and we prayed sincerely, and we anointed her with oil. And a couple years later, she died. And that’s happened a lot.
And that forced me, about 20 years ago, to back to the text and say, “Lord, what are you really saying through James here?” And I wanna suggest to you that he’s talking about spiritual weakness. About those who are failing to persevere, for whatever reason. So I wanna go back down, go through this text, and look at it through that lens. And you know, if you're mad at me, I'm sorry. Well actually, I'm not.

So I think James is saying, all the way through, “Persevere, persevere, persevere.” And know that maybe those in your community, in your family, maybe even you, who over time find it extremely hard to persevere. And you walk away and you're in danger. You're at a risky place.

It says, “Here’s what you need to do. The first thing. You need to acknowledge spiritual weakness.” Now, when we start in verse 13, we'll actually have to connect it to verse 12. And you studied verse 12 last week, and you realized, you heard that this exhortation, “Above all, my brothers and sisters. Do not swear, nor by heaven earth or anything else. Let your yes be yes your no be no or you'll be condemned.” And what he's saying is you've got to be real about the state of your heart. Don’t cover it up with some oaths or some ritual. You've got to be real about the state of your spiritual health. And then he says, “This is what I’m talking about.” In verse 13, “Let me give you some examples,” he says. He says, first of all, he says, “If you are in trouble...”, and the word there is just a general word for the daily troubles that come. You know, the stoplights aren't lined up just right and your water pump breaks on the freeway and your son didn’t do very well in the math test. You know, and you come home and the toys are everywhere and... my wife and I are “empty-nesters” now, so we have none of those problems. It’s really great when we come back to the house, it's just like we left it. It’s a wonderful thing. We took our son...our last child, to college and Mom made his bed in his dorm room and the kids were gone and we got back in the car and we cried for about five seconds and then we said, “Yes.”

But that doesn’t mean we still don’t have these frustrations. And that’s what he’s really talking about. He says, “If you’re one of those who are encountering daily struggles, where do you go?” He says, “Go to God. Pray. On the other end of the spectrum, if you’re happy, sing songs of praise.” I was in the mens’ room this morning and a man walked in and said, “Hi.” And I said, “Hey, how are you?” And he says, “I am thankful.” And being a, kinda like the smart alec that I am, I said, “For what?” And he said, “That today is the Lord’s day and I get to come to church.” What was he doing? In a way, he was singing praises. If the joy of following Christ is welling up within you, let it be known.

But then it gets to that special emergency situation. “Is any one of you sick?” And again, the word “sick” here I believe speaks about a level of spiritual despondency, that we realize we're in a position of weakness. We're in a position of risk.

Years ago, a singer songwriter named, Keith Greene. He wrote a song, the lyrics went like this,

My eyes are dry, my faith is old
My heart is hard, my prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to you and dead to me

You know, if we’re honest, we all realize the tendency toward that. But James is talking about something even deeper than that. He’s talking about those times when we look back and we realize we’ve drifted away from God. Let me ask you this. As you look at your life, you look at those times when you know, prayer didn’t really seem as vital. Did it bother you? Did it bother you when you said you know, “Really, I’m reading my Bible a little bit, mostly to check off the boxes of my Bible reading plan, or maybe because somebody is gonna ask me in an accountability group.” But does it bother you in those times when you read the scriptures and it doesn’t have any effect, that you’re actually thinking about what else you have to do that day? Does it bother you when, you know, you just don’t feel like restraining your lust, your pride, your greed? Other evil passions, that more and more you’re starting to rationalize them?

I’ve been across the table, across the living room, from lot of people who’ve said, “You know what? I used to be a Christian I used
to be part of church but you know, my kids had to go here and there. And this happened, my wife got bad medical news and we’ve been struggling. And you know, I just don’t think God cares for me anymore. I’m not sure that...you know, I did all these things for Him and it just didn’t work out and...”

That’s what James is talking about. He’s talking about someone who over time, the pressures of life have just...let me put it clearly. He no longer has the desire to persevere. That’s what this text is about. After challenging us all the way through to persevere, God blesses those who persevere, think about Job.

Now we run into people who because the pressures of life...and some are very real and very painful. They just don’t feel like they can persevere anymore. And they’ve begun to tell themselves, “It’s not really necessary.” Does it matter to us? Well, James says it should. And the first thing we do is ask for help, that’s what he says. In verse 14, “He should call the elders of the church.” So there is in this an initiation that the person who is spiritually despondent, spiritually fragile, at some point, hopefully, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the conviction that the Spirit brings. This person says, “Wait a minute. I am in a risky place. I’ve turned my back on God. I need to be revitalized. What do I do?” Well, in doing so he’s acknowledged, she’s acknowledged, that she’s not in a place where she should be. And so she says, “I need help.” And she calls for the elders of the church.

Now, it’s not so much about office here as it is about maturity. And this is just...the very clear and simple truth here is that James is saying when you are too spiritually weak to persevere call for reinforcements from those who have walked the journey, have lived the life, who have persevered, and continue to be those who pray and who have matured in the life of faith. Call for them.

Here’s the sad thing. Sometimes we’re way too proud. Especially we as men. And we allow our sinfulness to isolate us from the very people that will help us. And what are they to do? Well, they’re to pray over him a prayer of faith. Now, again, the prayer of faith is something that we pray knowing God has already promised to do it. Romans 10:13, “For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord...”, what? “...will be saved.” Right, there is a promise. 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to...,” what? “...forgive us our sins.” Proverbs 3:5,6...one of the first verses I ever learned. My dad is a Baptist preacher so we had to learn verses. And in fact, he taught me, “I’m a Baptist born, and a Baptist bred, and when I die I’m a Baptist dead.” I know.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And don’t lean...” The Hebrew word there has to do with propping up, because “trust,” the word there means to throw yourself full face at the feet of God. To trust Him, don’t be propped up by your own understanding. “In all your ways acknowledge Him and...” what? “...He will direct your paths.” There are a number of these non-contingent non-conditional promises that God makes. And the promise here, the prayer of faith is probably in some ways just a derivative of Matthew 11 where Jesus said, “Come unto me all you who are weary and are burdened, and I will...”, what? “I’ll give you rest.” That’s the promise that’s here.

And so when someone who is spiritually weak calls for the spiritually strong, they pray a prayer of faith reminding that person, “This is what God has promised you if you will turn from your sin. If you will trust the promises, He will give you rest.”

And then there’s this oil thing. Obviously, the oil thing is difficult to understand. But in that day, oil was a means of comfort. It was used in sickness. It was used, sunburned skin, chapped skin. They put perfume in it. It was a luxury to have oil, and to have enough to almost just, you know, bathe yourself in it.

Now, I’ve stepped away from the pulpit because where I preach this is called “a Heggism.” What I’m about to tell you. That means it may or may not be true, but I’m 80%...is that fair? I think James, who was writing very early still in the Old Testament era, uses the idea of anointing to remind his readers of what anointing meant in the Old Testament. When Aaron was anointed...in Psalm 1:33 it says, “How good and blessed it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. It’s like the oil that is coming down on Aaron’s head and onto his beard.” Now, I have a little bit of a beard, and thinking about oil coming down isn’t the nicest thought. But in their case, it was a picture of God’s blessing on Aaron. And on Aaron, the blessing then would flow to the people, because Aaron then was the high priest. The one who represented them before God. And so the anointing here could be a way of reminding the person that God’s
blessing is on you.

So many people who find themselves in spiritual doldrums, actually in the back of their minds are wondering, “Does God really care for me? Does He know what I’m going through?”

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:21. He said, “It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us. He set his seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. It very well could be that James idea here is that, “Look, come to these people and remind them that God loves them. That God is on their side, that He actually teaches things through trial that we can’t learn any other way. But He is for us, and our best option is always to follow Him in obedience. We sing a song in California that’s written by a guy named Steven Curtis Chapman and it goes like this, speaking to God,

You have given us a new name
The sons and daughters of your righteousness
You’ve taken all of our shame
and given us the gift of holiness

And then here’s the part that always grabs me.

Lord, we’re crying out for faith to
believe the words you say
You say we are loved
You say we belong to You
Your grace is enough
nothing more that we can do
You say we’ve been bought by your blood
by your blood
And all that we can say is, “Amen”

Catch that?

God has made promises to us. When He said, “It is finished,” it was. If you’re in Christ today you’re already as forgiving as you’ll ever be. It’s not your work, it’s Christ’s work. And our response to His work is a disciplined, persevering lifestyle that sets its focus on Christ, and holds on no matter what.

And sometimes when we get beaten up by the things of this world, and we start to drift away, and we start to say, “I’m not sure that that works,” what we need is someone to come and remind us that this world is not our home, this is just a prelude to the next. To remind us of what we sang, “All my life is yours, I surrender it to you. I will forever pray,” what? “Have your way, have your way.”

Well, if we move on, we realize that James goes from speaking about this one person to now, verse 16, to speaking to the rest of the church. He says, “Therefore, I want you to learn something,” he’s saying. And what is it? Well, that we need pursue engagement with God and with one another. That we are in this together. So he says, “Understanding that sin will often isolate us from each other, confess your sins to one another.” Now, this does not mean that we dump all our trash on each other. It also doesn’t mean that we need to gain forgiveness by confessing sin to another human being, unless you’ve wronged them. But God is the one who forgives.

What this is talking about is the fact that so often, we kind of contain our sins. We have these private secret sins. Last week at Grace Baptist Church in Santa Clarita where I am, usually, we separated all of our services, men and women. And our director of Women’s Ministry preached to the women and I preached to the men about sexual purity.
You know what we find in the area of sexual purity...at least in Southern California? Especially amongst the men, and increasingly amongst the woman, is that pornography is this thread that’s woven through all kinds of lives and no one talks about it.

You see, we have this idea that if we just keep our sins secret, we can deal with it. And what James is saying is the first step on the road to wandering off the path and not persevering, is to kind of live the isolated Christian life.

So when he says, “Confess your sins to one another,” he’s really saying, “Look, for your own protection, for your own growth, have somebody in your life with whom you’re real, who loves you, who has an open door into your life to say, ‘Hey brother, hey sister, you know what? I just kind of noticed maybe some slippage here. I haven’t seen you for a while at the small group. You haven’t been to coffee on Friday morning 6:00 with the guys for a while. I noticed, you know, in our discipleship relationship you really haven’t been keeping up the reading and doing things. Are you okay? I love you. And if there are weak spots, if there are temptations, look, let’s deal with them together.”

Make sure it’s someone who consistently can do what the elders are here to do. And that is, in this text, to remind you that you belong to God, that you’ve been lifted from who you used to be. You now have more in common with Christ than who you used to be. And you have a new nature and you have a new identity. Let’s not live in our used to be. The world needs us to live where we ought to be.

And he says, “Also pray for each other.” This whole section is about prayer. Not just prayer that God would give us this and give us that, but intercessory prayer. Going you know...here’s what I want you to pray for me, if you ever pray for David Hegg again. Pray that I’ll be faithful to my family. Pray that I’ll be faithful to the calling God has put on my life. Pray that I will never wax and wane in my desire to understand God’s Word and to bring it to his people in a way that is accessible, and that the spirit can use. Pray for my heart. And you can pray for my knees too, they heard that I’m 61, right? But I’m not so concerned about my physical health as I am my spiritual fervor. And that’s what we should be doing for each other.

That’s what he’s saying, “Recognize community of the faithful. Recognize that the world in which we live is an obstacle. It’s an obstacle course. It’s like American Ninja Warriors. You guys ever watched that? I don’t know how those people do it.

But the life we live, if we’re being honest and conspicuous for Christ is just as treacherous. And we’re in this together. Let’s help each other. The best protection is the community around us with whom we find encouragement and accountability. Why? Well, he says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” And then he gives us this illustration. In verse 17 he goes to Elijah. Now again, I just have to say this, if he were teaching on physical illness being healed he would have gone back to Elijah’s prayer where he raised the widow’s son. But he doesn’t. In fact, the key here is that he says Elijah was a human being. A man just like us. The Greek text says he had a nature like ours.

And what is that nature? Well, it’s prone to despondency.

I am, usually on Sunday night, after everything’s over. Because as Craig and I know, there’s no scoreboard at the end of a service. And we pastors, we go home...and my wife and I...my wife is over here. We have this agreement after I get done preaching, she says either, “That was good babe.” Or nothing at all.

We preachers are fragile. And somewhere about 6:00 on a Sunday night, my adrenaline that’s been peaked for Saturday services and Sunday services just dies. And I start to doubt all kinds of things. I start to wonder if anything I said made a difference. I start to wonder if I’m in the right place. I start to wonder, “What made me think I could do this?”

And that’s just the symptom, isn’t it?

Well, guess what? Elijah was that way. Remember his greatest victory. He was asked to participate in a barbecue contest on Mount Carmel. And he won. And in his mind, when God sent the fire from heaven and devoured his sacrifice, he thought that was going to
reunite the country. Because there were 10 tribes up north and two tribes down south. And he had rebuilt the altar with 12 stones and dumped 12 buckets of water over the 12. It was his whole point, he thought that, “God is gonna do this. The people are gonna say ‘The Lord is God.’ Their hearts are gonna be brought back to God. And we’re gonna be one nation again.”

And the next day he got an email from Jezebel saying, “Hey, I’m gonna make sure you’re dead, 24 hours from now.” And he went from hero to sissy, spiritually. And he ran all the way down south to the Negev. And he threw himself on the ground and he said, “Lord. kill me. Take my life, I am no good.”

I think that’s what James is reminding us of. And yet that man, because he was God’s man, when he prayed, God worked.

Now, the prayer that’s being talked about here we don’t have in the Old Testament. We don’t have a prayer that he prayed that it wouldn’t rain or that it would rain again. But the point is that isn’t the prayer it’s that God turns His ear and His life and His heart back to anyone who turns to Him in sincerity, no matter what level of spiritual despondency you’re on.

Lastly. You know what it means when a pastor says, “lastly,” right? In our church, nothing. But here, I’ve got a minute 42, or the tech guys are gonna be mad at me.

So he finishes the book in verse 19 with, “My brothers and sisters.” Just like he started it. in verse two of chapter one. He says, here’s the thing, now that you know the power of incremental despondency, be on the lookout.

He’s basically saying, “You are your brother’s keeper. You are your sister’s keeper in the family.” So he says, “If you see someone wandering from the truth, whatever that means in your setting. Maybe it’s someone who isn’t showing up anymore. Maybe it’s someone you know who’s always complaining. Maybe there’s someone who’s in great pain. They’re going through physical challenges that are really causing them to have spiritual fatigue. Or you see someone’s life is leaking. You know, you have three options, right? You can just let him go and ignore it. Say, “Well, I really didn’t like him anyway.” You can gossip about him. Neither one of those things is honorable, Godly or helpful. Or you can go after him, if you know him, and say, “Hey, can we have a cup of coffee? Can we take a walk together?” And use three words, “Help me understand. Help me understand what’s going on. I haven’t seen you in men’s accountability group. I haven’t seen you in Bible study. I haven’t seen you at services. You used to serve with us and I haven’t seen you for a while. I love you, I’m concerned. Help me understand what’s going on in your life. I just wanna help.”

That’s what it says. That’s what it means. Someone wanders from the truth and you bring him back.

What have you done? It says, “You’ve turned a sinner from the error of his way.” Now, the sinner here isn’t an unbeliever. Believers sin. It’s someone who has taken the path of disobedience and now they are incrementally moving further and further away from engagement with the Holy God. And it says, “You’ll save him from death.” Doesn’t mean that he’s not gonna live anymore. James tells us what he means by death in James 1:16 through 18 when he says you know, “Don’t let anybody say when I’m tempted I’m tempted by God. God doesn’t tempt anybody, but each one is tempted when he is led on by his own desires.’ And when desires are, you know, fulfilled, they give birth to sin. “And when sin is fully grown,” it says, “it brings about death.”

That is that sense of spiritual decay that happens when we allow sin to find more and more place in our lives. So if we see somebody going off, and we love them. And we pray with them and we pray for them. And we remind them of God’s love and God’s redemptive purpose in their lives. And we bring them back, guess what? We’ve saved him from kinds of death that he would experience. And then we’ve. “covered a multitude of sins.” The word “cover” there is an Old Testament concept that on the day of atonement, the high priest comes in and he spills the blood on the mercy seat, and it is seen as covering the sins of the people.

Let me tell you, this is what it means to love the brethren, and the sistren You guys have been doing this for 75 years. My prayer is that God will continue to grant you the grace of perseverance so that you might demonstrate the Gospel in life and lip with both truth and love.

By His grace and for His glory, Amen.