

Steps Toward Maturity - Part 5

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[0 : 00] Chapter 1 is also the focus of the entire book.

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James is the book of action, the book of doing.

And so we're taking these steps toward maturity. And then today we come to chapter 5. Last chapter in the book. And the key verse here is in James 5 verse 16.

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.

And of course it's understood the prayer of a righteous woman is powerful and effective. The prayer of a righteous person, a righteous young person, also is powerful and effective.

[1 : 12] And I mentioned the different parts of the body that helped me have a visual picture of things. Well today would be the knee. That we bend our knee in prayer.

So follow with me as I read through James. I'll make a few comments as I read through. And then we'll look at the outline. I probably spend as much time in the reading of the, you know, don't feel like, man, he just finished with the scripture.

Now we've got this big outline. I usually say about, you know, half the things in the outline as I'm reading the scripture. So, you know, it's probably half and half. But anyway, James chapter 5, beginning in verse 1.

Now listen, you rich people. Weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted and moths have eaten your clothes.

Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You've hoarded wealth in the last days.

[2 : 15] Look, the wages you fail to pay your workmen who mowed your fields. I guess we could translate that today, who mowed your lawn. The workmen that mowed your lawn are crying out against you.

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You've lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men who were not even opposing you.

Well, we, you know, he just comes right out of the gate here in chapter 5. This idea of the rich people. Well, who are the rich people that he's talking to? You know, James, of course, we're used to reading in the New Testament, you know, a good part of it, from Paul.

And Paul always, you know, clearly identifies who he's speaking to, you know, and he usually begins, you know, with grace and peace. But here, of course, chapter 5 is not the beginning of the book, but the beginning of this chapter.

[3 : 24] Who are these rich people? Well, James does identify that he's writing to the 12 tribes. That's a pretty broad description of the nation of Israel that at this time has been scattered all across the Mediterranean.

He mentions rich people earlier. In that reference, he's referring to people that might, I guess we could say, might be visiting. And, you know, a rich person walks in and we give them a nice seat. Now, I think he says, you know, we usher them down at the front. I don't know that that's the nice seat. And, you know, today's Baptist churches, you know, that would be the back seat. But, you know, gives them a favorable seat.

And then the poor person that comes in, it's kind of like, well, you sit over there. Go over there. But here he's speaking to believers, the rich believers.

And so, you know, we could spend, basically, I like the phrase, if the shoe fits. And I'm trusting that's such a common phrase, I don't even have to finish the phrase.

[4 : 34] You look in here and it talks about how that, verse 5, you've lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

Now, we're regularly hearing today about the haves and the have-nots. We hear today about the 1%. We hear today about the disparity in wealth, that it's getting larger and larger.

And, you know, there's a time and a place to talk about that. But I think we would have to realize that in the United States, we live with great abundance compared to some other places.

A person that would be considered poor in the United States would be considered wealthy in many other countries of the world. And as a whole, we live in great luxury.

And so, really, anything that James says here could apply to each of us. Going on. Well, this idea of the rich reminds me of 1 Timothy 6, verses 17 and 18, where Paul is challenging, command those who are rich.

[5 : 56] Now, he's speaking to Christians here. Command those Christians who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. Now, there are some commands, and then there are some other instances where, you know, it's easy to kind of put down rich people.

And, again, there may be a time and place for that. But here we're seeing that the writers, whether it's James or Paul, are saying, okay, those that are rich have responsibility.

Going on in, well, James said this in chapter 1, verse 10. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wildflower.

Now, you might could make this an argument here that he's just speaking in general terms, that the rich person. But you could also say, hey, he's writing this church.

[7 : 13] He's writing this book to the 12 tribes. He's writing to believers here. And he's saying the rich person discovers their maturity in Christ when they understand that even those riches can put them in a low position.

That the value that they have is understanding that no matter what we have, it pales in significance to the riches of Christ.

James, again, in chapter 2, he talked about favoritism. I've already mentioned that in chapters 2, 1 through 3. But he does make the statement.

Well, okay, the statement here is in chapter 5 where he challenges the rich. He's repeating what Luke's recorded of Jesus, Luke 6, 24, where he said, But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

It also mentions here in verse 1, it says, Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail. That challenge to the rich people is in contrast to what you hear of the rich person in Luke chapter 12, the rich fool, who was going to, instead of weeping and wailing, he's going to eat, drink, and be merry.

[8 : 46] Jesus challenges him in this parable in Luke 12, verse 13. Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Jesus responded, Who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator between you and your brother?

Then he said to them, Watch out and be on your guard against all kinds of greed. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And then he told this parable.

The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. And he thought to himself, What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.

And then he said, This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods.

[9 : 47] Now, up until that point, this man has not done anything wrong. He's got fertile ground. God has blessed that fertile ground.

He has grown crops. He's had a wonderful harvest. He's being a good steward and said, I've got to build a bigger barn to take care of the harvest. And so up until that point, there's nothing been wrong.

There's nothing on face value wrong with having money. But then he begins to show his true colors in verse 19. And he says, I built this big barn.

And I filled this big barn with the harvest. And I will say to myself, You have plenty of goods laid up for many years.

And then right here is where the shoe falls. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.

[10:54] That was the turning point right there. He worked hard. The land produced. He was a good steward. He was a good business person.

He was practicing, you know, good principles. And he had this harvest. And he expanded. Nothing wrong with expansion. But then he came to that point when he said, Basically, what was he saying? I've arrived. And where do you arrive at when you say you've arrived? When I say, or when I think, or when I imagine that I would think, I've arrived.

I hope I'm not that much different than you. But when I say that, or when I think I might say that, I'm thinking that I've reached the point to where I, and I don't know that I would ever think this, or I would ever really want this, but this is where I get, I don't need God anymore.

Now, I honestly don't think I would ever say that. But I might say kind of a step or two below that, I can do a little more about what I want to do now.

[12:21] Oh, I'm still going to serve God. I still love God. I still believe in God. I still am a believer. But I can downshift a little bit and just do a little bit of coasting.

Coast in God's direction. But I can do a little bit of coasting. And that's where he got in trouble. So anyway, this whole idea where James is coming at the rich people and challenging them. Wealth has always been a common challenge to walk with God. Hosea prophesied this in chapter 13, verse 6 of Hosea.

He's prophesying, so he's speaking from the voice of God. When God said, when I fed them, they were satisfied. When they were satisfied, they became proud.

When they became proud, they forgot me. So I guess that really gets to the heart of it there. The danger of forgetting about God.

[13:39] Well, going on in verse 7, be patient then, brothers. So the first challenge here is about this, you know, the materialism. You're really talking about greed.

Do you know what the antidote to greed is? One of the significant antidotes to greed that God has given to us.

It's called, it starts with a T, it's called tithing. Tithing is, I'll throw a couple other terms out here because one will resonate with you.

If you're a mechanic, if you like to work on engines, tithing is a governor. It holds down the power. Tithing, it's the antidote if you're in the medical. It will take care of the greed. Do you know why? Because tithing is taking a handful of this stuff you have.

[14:54] A handful. Taking a handful of your stuff and it's pitching it out. Taking a handful and it's giving it to someone else.

Now, again, James is the book of action. We can talk all day long about faith. But you know what faith is?

Faith is reaching in and taking a handful of what you have and letting go of it. That is faith. because that is saying, why am I reaching in here and taking a handful of this stuff?

It's because I realize this stuff is not mine. And I'm going to let some of it go because it's not mine.

Also, taking a handful of that stuff is recognizing that I have to seek God and determining what I do with this stuff.

And I'm turning some of this back over to God. That is an antidote to greed. Because when we are greedy, man, we're sweeping up the crumbs and we don't want any.

[16:23] You know when you get worried, now, there's a bell curve. Like so much of life, there's a bell curve. You know, if you don't have much, that is a difficult position to be in.

And I've read these studies before. They've tried to come up with a, you know, what's the best amount of money to have? And I read something just maybe a month ago.

It was like about, about \$70,000 to \$100,000 was kind of the sweet spot. You know, it takes money. If you don't have much money, life is hard.

But you know what? Believe it or not, if you have too much money, there are challenges to that.

Because if you've got too much, guess what?

You're worried about. You're worried about losing it. You're worried about somebody taking it from you. But if you've got a good amount, but not a whole bunch of, but you've got to, you know, there's kind of a sweet spot in there.

[17 : 30] But anyway, this idea of greed is the first thing that he challenges with. Then he's challenging them about being patient. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for autumn and spring rains.

You too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you'll be judged. The judge is standing at the door.

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.

You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Reminds me of Lamentations 3, 22 and 23.

You know, with Lamentations, Lamentations and Hosea, you know, it's probably been a while since you've heard a reference out of either one of those books. Those are kind of forgotten books of the Old Testament.

[18 : 30] But Lamentations 3, 22 and 23 is the basis of a very famous hymn. Because of the Lord's mercy, because of the Lord's great love for us, we'll, hang on, let me say this again.

Because of the Lord's great love, His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. The King James says, great is thy faithfulness.

The basis of the hymn that I think we all love to sing. Great is His faithfulness. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

And we can be patient waiting for Him. Verse 12 going on in James 5. Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or earth or anything else.

Let your yes be yes and your no no or you will be condemned. Is any one of you in trouble?

[19 : 38] He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 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.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he'll be forgiven.

Therefore, confess your sins to each other. Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Elijah was a man 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 the crops.

My brothers and again, the implication there is my sisters, if any one of you should wonder 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.

[21 : 05] And it ends. Now, usually in literature we think of we want to start off by telling people what we're going to say.

we want to tell them what we're saying and then we want to tell them what we said. Maybe that's preaching that you're supposed to do that. But we normally assume that the last thing somebody says is significant.

And the last thing that James refers to here in this book of action, this book of our faith should be expressing itself is this idea that we can touch the life of a brother and sister in Christ and challenge them and love them and show mercy upon them to draw them back into the fellowship.

Draw them back into their walk with God. And that can be a significant thing in someone's life.

Well, I want to share quickly then these five things I believe about prayer. And I want to pray before I share that.

[22 : 25] Heavenly Father, thank you for this word. Thank you for this book. Thank you for the Bible that's been inspired by your Holy Spirit that's been protected by your Holy Spirit.

And today, even today, these words speak to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Father, I believe that the great challenge here is to pray.

But there will be other applications people make as your Spirit moves upon their hearts. Help us to hear. help us to understand.

Help us to act on what we know. Lord, I pray you would help us to understand what we don't understand. We do need to seek.

We do need to knock. We do need to ask. But ultimately, Lord, help us to do what we already know to do.

[23 : 42] In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well, I've got five steps that I see here in this chapter to effective prayer. The first one is to deal with sin.

Verses one through six, yeah, we can dissect this and talk about the rich people and who the rich people are and this and that. But basically, what James is saying is you've got to be careful with sin. Greed was the sin of the rich people. We all have a sin and if we're going to have effective prayer, we've got to deal with the sin in our lives.

First John 1 9 challenges us. Really, it challenges, I guess it encourages us. It's a promise. If we confess our sin, he's faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The one I love so much is Romans 5 8. If you've shared with other people, you've talked to other people very often about the Lord, about coming to church, about coming to a Bible study or something.

[24 : 52] I've heard this many times. I wish God would just send me a message. Why can't God just write it in the sky? Why can't he just make it clear?

Well, I think he did that. Romans 5 8 says, but God demonstrated his own love to us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That's pretty clear. That's pretty plain. That's pretty out there. Jesus died for us because of our sin. While we were in our sin, he died for us. And so we've got to deal with sin. And we deal with sin by confessing it. We deal with sin by admitting it.

God knows. God knows your heart. sometimes we think, okay, that's kind of my hope that God does know deep down in there there's okay, but you know what?

[25 : 59] He knows deep down in there there is a wickedness, there's a blackness, there's a darkness, there's a selfishness, and in spite of that, he loves you and sent Jesus Christ to die for you.

And so we just need to be honest with God, and we just need to be open with God, and say, God, you know, here it is. Help, take over, cleanse me.

Second thing, we need to deal with doubt. Basically, that's, you know, again, we could say a lot of things about verses 7 through 12, but he's telling them, be patient. You'll be patient.

That's just another way of saying don't doubt. Don't doubt. You need to believe. James said this in chapter 1 verses 6 through 8.

He said, when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

[26 : 59] That man, that woman, that young person should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. He is double-minded, unstable in all he does.

make up your mind. You know how frustrating it is to deal with somebody that can't make up their mind, whether it's at the restaurant or whether it's at the paint store.

Make up your mind. I don't care if it's brown or blue. Just pick one. well, I think God's saying that to me.

Make up your mind. Are you with me or are you against me? Do you believe me or do you not believe me? Do you trust me or do you not trust me?

And so if we're going to pray effectively, we've got to deal with doubt. Second, I'm sorry, third, pray with faith. Verses 13 through 15, we see here where he challenges them.

[28 : 11] Verse 13, he should pray. That's the action that we're talking about here. We need to be praying. This is, I don't like to get into a lot of language, but this is that present middle imperative where it means let him pray, let him keep on praying.

There's a continuation. There's an ongoing to this. Keep praying because you know what?

Sometimes one prayer, I don't know, sometimes one prayer, I can't say that it doesn't get through.

I can't say that it doesn't work. Any prayer can work, but who knows the heart other than God?

One prayer can work, but there's something about the ongoingness, the determination is.

You need to pray determination is. There's a perseverance.

[29 : 38] There's a testing. It gets back to this whole thing of faith and fruit. And it's easy for some to get offended. Oh, faith, faith alone.

Yes, it is faith alone, but true faith, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, true faith produces works, it produces fruit, and you can't just separate them that cleanly and neatly.

There's a continuation of faith, and that's what we're seeing here, that prayer continues in prayer.

Verse 14 says, anoint with oil. It could be the ceremonial anointing. I mean, it is that. It could even, some even think there could be a therapeutic nature involved in the putting of the oil on the body. Verse 15 says, a prayer of faith. What is a prayer of faith? Now, I just spent a couple of minutes talking about the continuousness of prayer.

[30 : 45] faith. But that's not faith. What is faith? What is the essence of faith? We talked about this a couple of weeks. Faith is Jesus. Faith is a word from God, and where are the best words of God?

In the Bible. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Do you know why I can have faith that I've been forgiven?

It's not because I wept when I prayed that prayer. It's not because I feel a little different when I pray that prayer, because there are some times I don't feel a little different.

The reason that I can have a continuousness in my prayer, and a continuousness in my faith, is because I can point to several promises right here in the Bible that says I will be forgiven if I repent. I will be forgiven if I turn to the Lord. I will be forgiven if I fall at the feet of Jesus and cry out to him. That is how I have faith.

[32 : 00] There's a promise. And so if we're going to pray with faith, we have to be based upon a promise. I can't just make things up. I can't just say, well, God owes me this.

If there's a promise, faith can sprout and grow out of that and produce faith. And so we pray with faith.

Hebrews 11 6 says, and without faith, it's impossible to please God because he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who earnestly, continuously, seek him.

Hebrews 11 6. Romans 4 20 and 21. I've said this several times about Paul talking about Abraham, yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God and was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

Abraham's faith was not that Abraham could do something because he was going to do something for God. Abraham's faith was in that God was going to do it because God had given him the promise, God's promise, and faith has to be based in the word of God.

[33 : 27] 2 Corinthians 12 gives us a little bit about the other side of the coin. Paul, wouldn't you say Paul was a man of faith?

The guy wrote more than half of the New Testament. Paul was a man of faith. Paul shares his testimony in many of the passages.

You know, Romans 7, I think he talks about those things I don't want to do, I do, and the things I do want to do, I don't. That's a pretty personal testimony. Obviously, his salvation, his road to Damascus testimony, is given twice in the books that he's written.

It creeps into his writing here in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7. Paul sharing to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassingly great revelations that God was revealing to him. There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.

[34 : 53] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

Now, how does that match up with James chapter 5 where it says, 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. How do those match up together? At face value, chapter 5 of James makes it sound like anything can be changed.

If we pray hard enough, and then the other side of that part is, or if we're praying real hard and something isn't changed, ooh, we've got a problem somewhere.

That's what it seems to say in James chapter 5. But in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul shares that he was pleading with God to take this infirmity from him.

[36 : 29] And God wouldn't take it from him. How do we reconcile? Another nice biblical term.

How do we reconcile those two passages? I don't want to take the easy way out, but one answer is the unknowingness of God.

Otherwise described as the sovereignty of God. But you've got to understand, you know, it's easy to say the sovereignty of God. But when you say the sovereignty of God, what you're saying is, I am a tiny little speck and God is the vastness of the universe.

Infinity. When you say the sovereignty of God, you've unleashed great power beyond what we understand.

God and so one answer is, I don't know, but God does know.

[37 : 58] Another answer is, well, one answer could be it's the discipline of God, but it doesn't appear to be that way with Paul.

that is one answer, the discipline of God. There is always that question, yes, if there's something terribly going wrong here, I need to ask God, God, are you trying to show me something? Is there some kind of correction I need to make? That's a legitimate question to ask. That's one of several. people. But it's not the only question.

The other question is, it's kind of, Lord, what are you trying to teach me? Not in a corrective way, but just in a, it's time to go to the next level.

And it's difficult to get to the next level without shedding something. you know, it's a, it's a God thing, it's a biblical, it's a thing that God wove into his creation.

[39 : 15] Mary and I watched a movie last night about the De La Salle football team in the Bay Area of San Francisco, and they won, you know, like 150 games in a row, and it was, but you could see the team being built, the individuals putting aside their individuality, and becoming a team, and not going after personal records, and working out harder, and just, I mean, it's just like, wow, how do you get to that next level, and then you saw them go to that next level, and to the next level, and they could not have gotten there without laying aside some things.

It's just life, the way God designed, and there are times we don't want to go there, but, and the grace of God, we come to the point that Paul came to when he said, well, first of all, God said to him, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Isn't that beautiful? His power is made perfect, perfect, that's the beautiful part, and my weakness. That's not so beautiful. My weakness is not so beautiful. I don't like to be weak. weak. Then, Paul could say, therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me.

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

[41 : 23] That is maturity. And the steps to maturity are letting go, surrender, claiming our identity in Christ, prayer, Galatians 6, I mentioned this briefly when we were going through Galatians, Paul at the end of it said, see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand.

We assume that just that last part of the book he wrote himself, he wrote in large letters, and many assume that the thorn in the flesh was a problem with his eyesight.

Wouldn't it be wonderful for the key figure of the New Testament, the early church, the missionary advancement across the Mediterranean?

Wouldn't it be key that that person had good eyesight to get around? And yet God said, not really. I can do some things through the person that has totally surrendered to me. healing. And so, that's what I think about this issue of healing.

[43 : 05] We can be healed. I would pray to be healed if I were not as healthy as I am. but there are times God chooses not to heal the physical when there is such a miraculous spiritual transformation that can be had.

And then just quickly, let me, at number four, pray with thanksgiving. He says in verse 13, is anybody happy? Let him sing songs of praise. We need to pray with thanksgiving.

And number five, we need to pray with other believers. There is power. I've mentioned this before. We can pray anywhere at any time. But I, and I have had great prayer times by myself, but I have had great prayer times with other people.

There is something about gathering together and praying together. Talks about confessing our sins to one another. I, I think there's a right place and a wrong place to confess your sins.

Usually, I, I have found from the wisdom of others and from my personal experience, whether it's been in my own life or seeing it happen firsthand in the lives of others, you really don't need to share beyond what somebody has been touched by the sin.

[44 : 41] If they've not been touched by the sin, it's usually not helpful to confess to them. Now, that's, that's in a direct confession.

Obviously, if you're given a testimony about some challenges you had in your past and you were sharing that with a general group, okay, that's a different thing.

but this idea of confessing sins to one another, that can be very healthy. It can also be unhealthy. But, obviously, praying together. You know, we're commanded to be baptized because it's about drawing us into the body of Christ.

This is just another expression of the power of public expression. And then verse 19 and 20 he finishes.

[45 : 40] My brothers, if any of you should wonder from the truth and should bring him back, remember this, whoever turns the sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Let's take that spirit. a spirit of reconciliation, a spirit of redemption in reaching out to others. Obviously, there has to be the uncovering of the sin, but weave mercy into that. Weave gentleness into that. Make it clear, but make it compassionate.

it'll do you good and it could do great wonders for someone else.