

Spiritual health

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[0 : 0 0] I'm away over the last number of weeks and we're really grateful to have been able to spend! time in different parts of the country as a Tipperary man. I'm not sure about my timing in terms! of coming back here the Sunday after Tipperary beats Cork in the hurling so a big win for Tipperary last Sunday in the hurling and I guess for Cork it means a lot of soul searching and what went wrong last Sunday as they played against Tipperary in the hurling and of course the reality is that if Cork respond well to the loss if they respond well to what went wrong they will come back as a stronger healthier better team and one to be feared in future hurling championships if they can reflect and think about what went wrong and hold their hands up and say this is what I did wrong they contributed to the loss they will come back stronger and healthier and better for it and the reality is that I mention that not to rub in the victory I'm from Tipperary but because this is kind of what

James is thinking about when he speaks to the churches that are scattered around different parts of the ancient world in the first century he is speaking to people who get it wrong not in hurling but in church life together people who sin against each other in verse 16 he mentions the sins that we commit against each other people who wander from the truth in verse 19 if one of you should wander from the truth and so what James has in mind here and what we are to have in mind is sickness so he has just been speaking about physical sickness in the previous verses and now he is subtly shifting to think about spiritual sickness or soul sickness and so he wants us to know how to bring about healing in spiritual sickness in relationships in the church that have become ill or unwell and as we listen to this what we need to realize is that we are just like James's first listeners so we sin against each other and at times some will wander from the truth but if we can hear what James has to say then we can be healthier and stronger as a result of taking his word on board and so that's what we want to think about this morning and so we'll think firstly about how to bring about healing when there is spiritual sickness in ourselves and then we'll think about bringing about healing when there is spiritual sickness in somebody else so let's think first of all about how to bring about healing when we see spiritual sickness in ourselves and we see this in verse 16 James says confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed and what we need to realize as James says confess your sins to each other is that even though they are dearly loved brothers and sisters as he has called them repeatedly throughout the letter even though they are believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ as he has called them in chapter 2 at the very same time they sin against each other they sin against God and against each other and as James says this he highlights it as a one another problem that in churches you have people who are dearly loved brothers and sisters believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ and at the same time we sin against each other we hurt each other and we need to confess our sins to each other

Now it's worth drawing our attention to what James doesn't say James isn't saying that we are to ignore God in this James is well aware that it is against God and God alone in one sense that we sin as David says in Psalm 51 or as we read in Mark chapter 2 the question is asked who can forgive sins but God alone and of course it is against God and God alone that we sin that's a given that's a given James is taking that as a given that is it is against God that we sin and against God that we need to confess our sins he also doesn't say that we are to confess our sins to a church leader or to a pastor or to a priest what he says here is confess your sins to each other to one another and so as somebody who is in church leadership for me or for John or for Philip the other elders here we will gladly speak with you and hear if there is something going on that you need to confess to another we will gladly hear that and think it through and pray it through we would be glad to assure you of Jesus forgiveness but we can't forgive a sin that somebody has committed against another and so ultimately we would say what James says here which is confess your sins to one another and that goes for all of us elders included in the church family so James isn't saying that we are to confess our sins that we've committed against somebody else to a church leader or a pastor or a priest to seek their forgiveness he's also not speaking about just confessing our sins generally to each other and so sometimes it happens you might be in a bible study or something like that and god puts his finger on something that's going on in your life and you're there with brothers and sisters and you want to acknowledge before god and before them that this is something you're really struggling with that you're falling into this temptation and that can be a good thing that can be a healthy thing to have that openness and honesty with each other but that isn't what James has in mind here what he is talking about here is saying that if we sin against someone else that we are to go to them and confess our sin to them to acknowledge to them what we have done wrong to them and if you've been with us with

James over the last couple of months you'll know that there were things going on in the lives of the churches that James is writing to that needed confessing to each other so James in chapter one speaks about being slow to anger and so the implication is that if we are quick tempered and we have become angry with somebody that we need to go and confess that to them and to apologize for it and to say sorry for it it was wrong of me to speak like that to you I was short with you I was abrupt with you I lost the plot with you or another example from earlier on in the letter is when James says that we treat different people differently because of their appearance how they are dressed the amount of money they have in the bank and so if we find that we have done that to somebody James says we need to confess that to them to acknowledge to them that this wasn't right of me to treat you differently and so James says that we are to confess our sins to one another because this is how the relationships are healed this is how relationships are healed you've seen I'm sure at times where sins aren't confessed and what happens is the distance grows and sometimes people will leave a church or move elsewhere and there's no healing there what James says when we confess our sins to one another there is an opportunity for healing many years ago I said something to a friend of mine that was really very hurtful and at the time I felt bad about it because of how it reflected on me because I like to be thought well of and so at the time I felt bad because I was thinking well what did they now think about me that I would say this but over time I started to feel bad because I realized that this had hurt the person and that was something that caused me sadness and regret and I confessed it to God and I acknowledged that before God and I knew God's forgiveness for it but I prayed for an opportunity to be able to speak to the person about what I had said and amazingly in God's kindness 20 years pass and I bumped into the guy a couple of months ago in a shop in Cork five-minute conversation we hadn't seen each other maybe once in 20 years and we were able to have a good conversation I was able to say it to him that I'm sorry and I said I don't know if you even remember this but I'm sorry for what I said all those years ago and he graciously said don't worry about it it's fine and what it meant was there was healing in this relationship now that wasn't a deep and meaningful relationship really but James here is speaking to brothers and sisters who are beloved who are believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ and he's saying to them the way to bring about healing in the life of a church family is to confess our sins to one another that when we do this we reflect to each other we have an opportunity to reflect to each other the forgiveness that we receive from God and not only does James says we're to confess our sins to one another he says we are to pray for one another in verse 16 pray for each other so that you may be healed and you realize what a wise man James is because the moment that you consider having to confess something to somebody that you have done wrong to them that you realize the prayer that is needed that your heart would be in the right place as you say this

that their heart would be in the right place as they hear this that you would be praying for their good for God's blessing for that you'd be praising God for them asking God to prepare their heart and of course it's not only that if we have something to confess to somebody that we would be praying for them but that if somebody has confessed something to us that we would pray for them that we would pray and thank God that they were willing to take the risk to confess a sin to us where they have wronged us because it can be risky it can be make or break that we would be praying for the person that whatever gave rise to the sin would be dealt with that the devil wouldn't get a foothold in their lives that we would be praying for the person who has confessed something to us that they would not only be assured of our forgiveness but that they would be assured of God's forgiveness and you know when this happens it is a powerful thing

[12:13] James wants us to realize the power of this he says in verse 16 the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective and he gives us an example of that in verse 17 when he speaks about Elijah this prophet from the old testament he says Elijah was a human being even as we are 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 crop and when you hear that you think wow i wish i could be like Elijah but James's point is not we should wish that we could be like Elijah that where we have this prayer life that we can pray for rain to stop and it stops and pray for rain to come and it comes what James wants us to realize is that we are like Elijah we're frail human beings like Elijah he says verse 17 Elijah was a human being even as we are and what he's highlighting there is not Elijah's greatness or power he's highlighting the fact that Elijah was just human fragile and frail he became discouraged he became hungry he became thirsty he wondered what on earth god was doing at times and yet god answered his prayers and you realize that it wasn't that Elijah was powerful and effective but as James says in verse 16 the prayer is powerful and effective because it is the same god that we pray to that Elijah prayed to that gave these amazing answers to prayer and you think okay well i'm gonna pray so that it's gonna stop raining and if we think that we've missed the point because James is saying what's more amazing than the rain stopping or starting is when there is healing in the relationships of God's people where there is no earthly reason for healing to be brought about

James says isn't it an amazing thing where two people have had a conflict where somebody has sinned against another and one humbly goes and confesses that sin to the other and the other one says i forgive you and i pray for you that healing is brought about in that relationship is far more amazing than the rain stopping or starting and James wants us to realize as God's people that we have this God who works powerfully in the lives of his people that he combined them together over years and over decades not because they're perfect not because they don't step on each other's toes not because they don't sin against each other but because they know a God who has forgiven them so that they can confess their sins freely to each other and know each other's forgiveness and prayer for one another so that they may be healed it's so tempting and so easy to just give up on a relationship to give up on a friendship where we have been hurt or we've been sinned against to throw in the towel to move on to shut down but we draw on this well of God's love and forgiveness that can enable us to do something amazing to confess our sins to one another to pray for one another that we may be healed and when that happens it is a beautiful thing as one author puts it gospel enabled forgiveness is like the secret sauce of christian communities that displays christ's ownership churches aren't meant to be places where people leave after hurt feelings or a few weeks of songs they don't prefer when believers love one another forgive one another and serve one another sacrificially the world takes notice it is a powerful thing when we see this gospel healing in our relationships and so we need to pause and ask the soul searching question where have i sinned against somebody where have i hurt somebody they know it they know it and i know it and i need to take this big risk prayerfully confessing what i have done wrong to them praying for my own heart praying for their heart it is risky because it could go either way but it is an amazing thing when god brings healing through this path of confession and prayer for each other james wants to bring about healing not just in ourselves but also in others he's really pushing us here this big vision of what church life is like he speaks about bringing about healing in others in verse 19 my brothers and sisters if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back so this is not so much that somebody has sinned against us this is that somebody is wandering away from the truth wondering away from god's word wandering away from the truth about who god is about who jesus is about who the holy spirit is wandering away from the truth about who they are about the world around them the truth about church life together and you know james has chosen his words carefully because wandering away doesn't look very dramatic it's not like someone storming out of the room and slamming the door and saying i'll never be back you know that they're gone when somebody does that but wandering away is like when you're on a hill walk with somebody

and something over in the trees catches their eye and they go over to have a look and they say i'll catch up with you and for a while you can still see them but then after a little longer you realize i don't know where they're at anymore i can't see them i actually don't know where they are they've wandered away and it hasn't looked very dramatic but the consequences can be serious and wandering away from the truth is the same somebody who knows their bible knows the good news and they start to wander and it doesn't always look very serious at the start especially in a culture where people are encouraged to be themselves to explore freely to do their own thing but the consequences can be very very serious so what does this wandering away look like well you might hear it in how somebody speaks about the bible or you might hear it as somebody speaks about their prayer life or you might see that they've been absent from church on occasion a little bit more regularly now we need to be careful in how we weigh these things up but those can be signs of somebody wandering away sometimes people are absent from church because they've work or because they're busy with vacations or things like that holidays but you know and i know that sometimes people have been absent from church and we've never seen them again and it is heartbreaking and it's fine if they've gone to another bible preaching church wonderful praise the lord but there are times when somebody wanders away from the truth and you don't know where they're gone and you don't know where they're at and it is so so sad to see it somebody who has known the truth who loves the truth and has wandered away and as we hear this james wants us to realize that nobody is immune from this he says if one of you should wander he doesn't single out particular people in the congregation particular types of people people people with different histories or backgrounds or cultures it's if one of you should wander from the truth and it should frighten us in a good way that in one sense it could be anybody it could be me if one of you should wander from the truth you think of in galatians how the apostle peter needs to be brought back to the truth by the apostle paul where paul has to say to the galatians if anyone preaches to you a different gospel to the one we preached to you even if it's an angel from heaven paul says let him be accursed but james here is thinking about these local churches and he says if somebody wanders from the truth and it can so easily happen like a sheep wandering from the flock and the temptation for instance is to throw stones from a distance to tear down to criticize but when he says if one of you should wander from the truth it should help us to realize there but for the grace of god go i and so we're filled with this humility as we want to see them brought back to the truth the amazing thing is that it's not only that anybody in one sense could wander from the truth but also that anybody could be the one who brings somebody back isn't that so exciting james says if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring

that person back that any one of us could be an instrument in the hands of god to bring somebody back to the truth of the gospel and you hear that and you might think well it wouldn't be me because i'd find that conversation too uncomfortable or it couldn't be me because i might get it wrong yeah we might get it wrong yeah we might have misjudged the situation it wouldn't be me because you know it's very counter-cultural to go and speak to somebody and express our concern for them and there's all these reasons why we wouldn't do this or we shouldn't mightn't do this or mightn't want to do this but look at the reason james gives us that we would want to do this remember this whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins whoa what a way to end the letter what is james saying who saves sinners from death who saves sinners from death who covers a multitude of sins who in fact covers all of our sins it is jesus and his blood on the cross that covers all of our sins and yet james wants us to realize that as we do church life together and pursue each other in love that when we do this we are reflecting a savior who came to seek and save the lost we're reflecting a savior who is like that woman looking for the lost coin who is like the sheep looking for the shepherd who is like the older son who should have been out looking for the younger son and not only are we reflecting him to each other but that we are instruments in his hands in bringing about change in somebody's life so that they might be brought back to what to church yes to reading their bible yes but to the truth of the gospel the truth that jesus has died for them to the truth that jesus has covered their sins the truth that they are children of god jesus work on the cross is finished and yet he continues to work through his people so that what he done has done on the cross is brought to bear in each other's lives isn't it an amazing thing that we might be used by god to bring somebody back to the truth that we could be having a conversation over tea and coffee where we just hear something that they're saying that concerns us a little bit and we just ask the question and we might get it wrong we might be wrong and praise god if we are wrong but whenever anybody asks me probing questions i ultimately want to praise god that they would have this concern so if we have this conversation with somebody well what will happen well if we're motivated by love and want to be humble and realize that there but for the grace of god go i well they still might totally reject it they might politely ignore it they just might not respond to the message

which is a heartbreaking thing if that happens but we need to remember that they're not rejecting us they're rejecting the truth perhaps or they might hear it and they might say thank you for your concern i appreciate that you've taken the risk of highlighting this but genuinely i'm concerned too and i hear you and i realize why you have this concern for me but i've really wanted to be a church i've really wanted to be in my bible more i've really wanted to be seeing more of the brothers and sisters but for this reason or that reason it's been difficult or they might hear it and say you're right you've put your finger on something i have wondered i've been distant from god and i want to come back to him and if that's the response praise god because as james has said whoever turns a sinner from the error of their ways will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins we can be instruments in the hands of god some years ago somebody who was working in uh the student realm and student ministry they shared an email with me that they had received from a student and they checked if it was okay to receive to to share it but here's what the student wrote to the person who had been meeting with them on a regular basis the student said this during the time i was in ireland i was really struggling with my faith and you have been one of the people who have helped me get back on track you helped resuscitate me my heart wasn't open to understanding my ears weren't open to the truth but i've no doubt that the time i spent with you in discussion planted a seed in me three months ago i rededicated my life to jesus i'm now seeking his face wholeheartedly he's breaking the walls i built around my heart and opening my eyes through the blood of christ i am forgiven through him i'm saved thanks be to god we can be instruments in the hands of our savior who has died and given himself for his people if we are trusting him enough and courageous enough to take the risk of asking harder questions when we are concerned for each other's souls it can happen to anybody that we wander from the truth but james says that's not the end people can be brought back to the truth that their souls will be saved and their sins will be covered by their precious savior as a church we're not a perfect church but no church is perfect we sin against each other and from time to time somebody might wander from the truth but god knows this and god has provided for these circumstances and he has given us to each other so that he might do his good work through us in each other's lives that we might confess our sins to each other that we might pray for each other and that we might turn each other back to the truth that is an amazing privilege it is an amazing responsibility and so let's ask god to help us to do this

[30 : 32] and to continue to do this in the days ahead heavenly father we want to thank you and praise you for your word to us this morning and lord we recognize it is counter-cultural to have this level of involvement in each other's lives lord in some ways it is goes against our our human desires lord we want to protect ourselves and we want to not take risks but lord we praise you that you have brought us into a church family and we you brought us into the the people of god so that we might be instruments in your hands in the lives of each other and so help us lord help us to see where we have sinned against each other to confess that to each other in the freedom that we have knowing that you are the one who forgives us help us help us to be praying for each other as we do this and lord we ask as well that you'd help us to be in each other's lives enough that we might see it if somebody is wandering from the truth and lord that we would have the joy and the privilege of being the one who brings them back to the truth of the gospel father we praise you we pray you'd keep us in the days ahead amen