**Life in the Family of God**

**The Word**

Read together James 5:13-20

**The Big Idea**

We are the family of God. We are called to bring our heavenly father into every circumstance of our lives in prayer, and we’re called to love, encourage, and look out for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Where specifically do you see the currents of ICD (individualism, consumerism, and digitalism) playing out at Grace and in your own life that creates obstacles to fully entering into the family of God as described in this week’s passage?

2. How should we make sense of James’ sure confidence in answered prayer (along with Jesus’ similar confidence – see Matthew 7:7-11 and John 14:12-14 for examples) in light of our regular experience of unanswered prayer?

3. On Sunday we considered Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” To what extent should we consider ourselves our brother’s keeper? What amount of weight should we feel for the spiritual health of our brothers and sisters in the church family? How should that play out practically?

4. So much of this passage is about prayer: our individual prayers to God, the prayers of the elders, and our prayers for each other. What is one tangible way you could lean more deeply into prayer as individuals or as a small group in the coming weeks?

5. If you have time, consider reflecting on the book of James as a whole. As you look back on this series, what is one thing you’ll remember and still be working hard to live out a year from now?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

The ICD currents dominate our neighborhoods. Based on your interactions with your neighbors, what is your sense of their felt need (or not) for more community with their neighbors? That is, do you sense they’re longing for deeper relationship with neighbors, or are they content with the way things are?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. James’ comments are based on the foundation that we are family (“brothers and sisters” – v. 19)

1. When we were spiritual orphans, God rescued us and adopted us into his family and filled us with his Spirit

2. We now belong to God and to one another as family

 B. Cultural currents push against this reality of family

 1. Individualism, consumerism, and digitalism

2. These currents free us from tradition, authority, and community, but they leave us more anxious, depressed, and isolated than ever before

II. The passage

A. Going to our heavenly Father with all of life’s events (v. 13)

1. In the full spectrum of human experience (from “in trouble” to “happy”), we are called to engage God in prayer.

2. “There is no time in which God does not invite us to himself.” – Calvin

3. Jesus is the greatest example of this

a. Every experience of his life was lived in intimate connection with his heavenly father. He did not experience life as a “me” but as a “we”

b. Likewise, we are encouraged to experience our lives as a “we” acknowledging God’s constant presence with us in all times.

B. Going to God in prayer through the elders in sickness (v. 14-15)

1. These verses raise a handful of questions that are difficult to answer

a. What’s the exact purpose of anointing oil?

b. What is the connection between sickness and sin?

c. What do we do with James’ apparent confidence that the sick person will always be healed?

d. And is he talking about physical healing, spiritual healing, or both?

2. But at the most basic level, the encouragement is to not face serious sickness alone, but to call on the elders (local church leaders) for prayer.

C. The power and effectiveness of prayer (v. 16-18)

1. Elijah had the same fallen human nature as us, yet God heard and answered his prayers in a powerful way.

2. This doesn’t guarantee the answer of all our prayers, but the example is there to encourage us to go boldly to a Father who is eager to hear and answer his children’s prayers.

3. Sometimes it feels like prayer is the least we can do for someone, but when we consider God’s desire to answer prayer, maybe prayer is the most we can do

D. Confessing our sins to each other and praying for each other (v. 16)

1. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, so we don’t need to go to a specialized priest for confession.

2. This feels scary and threatening to most of us, but as family we are called to be honest and vulnerable with each other. While it’s scary to confess, it can be such an honor to receive someone’s confession and pray for them.

E. Go after our brothers and sisters when they are wandering (v. 19-20)

1. Our culture says “live and let live, that person’s decisions are none of my business,” but life in God’s family says otherwise.

 2. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Yes!

III. Conclusion

A. There are structured ways to lean into God and one another in prayer and support at Grace

 1. Small groups

 2. Hands of Grace ministry (online under Resources/Hands of Grace)

 3. Sunday morning prayer team during service

 4. Email prayer chain: prayer@gracefellowshipchurch.org

5. Wednesday morning 7am zoom prayer: zoom link online under Resources/Pray With Us

B. But most of family life happens in very unstructured, organic, and relational ways