

**Better Together: Real Community**  
**Sermon 6-24-18**  
**By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**James 5:13-16**

<sup>13</sup>Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

**Manuscript:**

(Play video at <https://www.iamsecond.com/seconds/chip-and-joanna-gaines/>) Joanna: “I like comfortable, I like predictable and you push me.” Chip: “She knows me in a way that has caused me to stop acting.” If you want to know what community looks like, look no further than your marriage. Look no further than a healthy, Godly, marriage. Through the testimony of Chip and Joanna Gaines, we see this beautiful synergy taking place. We see two souls who care deeply for one another share their flaws, their hopes, their dreams together. If you’ve ever watched their show “Fixer Upper” on HGTV, I think what many people find endearing about them is that there is a genuine nature to their interaction. It’s playful and yet honest. It doesn’t feel contrived or forced. This is who they are and they are doing what they love. Chip pushes Joanna to risk a little more, Joanna gives Chip the ability to be more fully himself. Andy Stanley says, “Like you, they [the others within Providence. The others within Abundant Life] they are looking for a community that spurs them into growth and a meaningful relationship with God and others. Challenge yourself to be open and transparent. Let these people know who you really are.” Just as Chip and Joanna shared genuinely with each other and to the rest of the world who they are, God is also calling us to share genuinely who God has created us to be.

In James 5, James is also calling us to live in genuine supportive community with one another. “<sup>13</sup>Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.” God has called each of us to different gifts and actions in the life of the community. If we are suffering, we should share our suffering with Christ through prayer. If we are experiencing joy, there is no reason that we should hide such joy. We should sing praise and give God our

adoration. God isn't looking for your fake expressions or your Christian platitudes. God wants genuine and real expression of faith with him.

<sup>14</sup>“Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” One of the interesting ideas that Biblical Scholar Luke Johnson raised on this passage, is how will the faith community react to those who are sick? Johnson believes and so do I, that this is one of the greatest markers of a mature community of faith. Will the community simply ignore the sick, the ailing and the suffering? Will the Christian community ignore someone's sickness? And I'm not just talking about physical sickness. It could be mental or emotional sickness. It could be someone who is deeply hurting emotionally. Think about all the suicides and the opioid epidemic in this country. People are deeply hurting in our world. I would take Johnson's argument a step further. It's not only, how will the faith community react to sickness (mentally, emotionally or physically), but does it foster a space where it is welcomed to share such ailments? To be transparent about those ailments? Because a faith community can't react to someone's ailments if they know nothing of the ailments. Now, we might all say, “Yeah...we have that kind of Christian community.” But before you jump to that conclusion, take a hard look. When was the last time you shared your emotional, mental or physical struggles with another member of the church? Admittedly, I was sick the other week. I was out for three days with a fever due to an infection. I never called anyone from the church to come pray for me. I never reached out for help. I didn't rely on my brothers and sisters in Christ to pray on my behalf. And when was the last time someone else from the church asked you to pray for them due to a physical or emotional struggle? If we're asking ourselves, at Providence, “do we have real community?” James makes it quite clear that a real community of believers is one with genuine sharing of what's happening in our lives.

But that's not the only marker. James takes it a level deeper at the end of verse 15 and starting in verse 16, <sup>16</sup>“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” Another marker of real community is a confessional community. A group of Christians who are willing to admit their sin to one another and to Christ. Notice that in verse 15 it says, “...anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” In the course of the biblical narrative, there are times where the Bible directly links physical sickness with sin. But here in James, the indication is that sin could be connected with the physical condition, but it also may not be connected. When I look back to my broken leg story, my broken leg was connected to my sin. So my confession was part of my healing process:

physically, spiritually and emotionally. But there are other times where physical sickness is not because of our sinfulness, but the result of living in a finite, fallen and sinful world. Now, God can heal our sickness and God can use our sickness for His good, but God doesn't always cause our sickness. But more importantly, how will the Christian community respond? James says, "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." Do we believe our prayers are powerful and effective? Who is going to step-up and pray for these individuals who need the support of the Christian community called Providence? Some may be waiting for me, the Pastor. But it doesn't have to be me. Sometimes I'm selfish and ignorant to those who need the healing prayer of the righteous. That's when some of you may need to play your part and have the courage to support another member in our community. I can't carry the full weight of the community. In fact, I would be doing you all a disservice if I even tried to carry all of the weight because I would crumble beneath its weight. I need all of you to come together and support each other. I need all of you to be genuine with one another and to pray for one another.

When the people of Christ live like Christ with each other, amazing things can happen. I think about the Woman at the well in John 4. "...[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.<sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." [Jesus is offering more than she is asking]<sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" [She recognizes that Jesus is offering more than what she thought she needed. He's speaking deeper into her soul.]<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." [She realizes that Jesus has the real stuff. Jesus has what she has been ailing for all along. The real healing stuff.]<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" [Jesus is naming the ailment so that

she believes what he is offering is true. Jesus knows her in deeper ways than she thinks.] <sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” <sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” [She believes]

<sup>27</sup>Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” <sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. [You may think that she was scared off, but that’s not the case. Far from it.] She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” <sup>30</sup>They left the city and were on their way to him. <sup>31</sup>Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” <sup>32</sup>But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” <sup>33</sup>So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup>Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. [Jesus sees that there is ripe opportunity to offer a healing word within the community and outside the community] <sup>36</sup>The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup>For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” [Now back to the woman at the well.] <sup>39</sup>Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup>And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup>They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Imagine what could be created if we were in-tune with the Spirit of God and we were able to speak the healing power of Jesus into the lives of the community. Imagine people from Providence Corner coming to faith in Christ. Imagine our own people finding healing power. Imagine the blessing that could abound in our

interactions with Abundant Life. This woman was sick, emotionally and spiritually speaking, and Jesus offered her living water. She came to belief in Him and then went and did what...she testified! She told her friends and her neighbors. Her brothers and sisters. She shared her encounter with Jesus to all those who would listen. This formed a new community. One that followed after Christ. And these were Samaritans!! People that Jewish people shouldn't interact with. Imagine what could happen if we would share our story. For months now, many of you have had the practice of sharing your story with us in worship. And many of you will have the chance to do so in the future. If you haven't already done so, it's now the time to share that story beyond Providence Church. It's now time to share that God-given story with Abundant Life. All of you have a wonderful story that God has given you. He has done some powerful stuff in your life. He has lead some of you back from the brink of death. He has brought some of you back from abusive relationships. He has healed your wounds from broken relationships. God has done some awesome stuff in each and every one of your lives. Imagine what could happen if we shared those stories with others. Imagine the wisdom many of you could pass on to another generation of believers. Imagine how your story could impact the stories of Abundant Life. And vice versa. Imagine how as you hear their stories how they might impact you and encourage you in your faith. Robert McKee says, "Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, career, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact."

True community. Real community happens when we are willing to share our lives with others. When we are willing share our vulnerable stuff. This is where something new is formed. This is where trust is built. When we are willing share a part of ourselves with others, we become part of something much deeper and much more beautiful. Christian community then goes beyond just the casual acquaintance. It goes beyond just maintaining appearances. It goes beyond putting on that "I have it all-together" smiling face. Deep Christian friendship. Deeply rooted faith is formed when we open ourselves up to new relationships in the community of faith.

When we tell our story or we hear the faith story of another, five things tend to come up that might help you as you recall and develop your testimony, according to Andy Stanley. "Practical Teaching": Somehow over the course of your faith journey the Bible and the scriptures came alive to you in a new way. You may have known the Bible and God for most of your life, but all-of-a-sudden you were awakened. Like, I know many of you have had a great faith formation experience growing up in the faith and may not have a particular moment where you decided to follow Christ, but because of the good faith formation, you came to follow Christ very gradually and incrementally. Others of you have had

“Providential Relationships” where someone in your life spoke the truth of God in a profound way to you. They deeply impacted your life and maybe even brought you to faith in Christ. They mentored you and helped you develop your faith. I can think of a few of those mentors in my life that were instrumental at certain points. Some of you have formed and deepened your faith greatly through spiritual disciplines. Prayer, fasting, reading scripture and solitude are all forms of this critical part of your testimony. Like, I make a weekly habit of journaling. This has been an important discipline for me to pray and to think through God’s action in my life. Some of you have had “Personal Ministry” experience. Maybe you’ve gone away on a missions trip or workcamp trip. Or maybe you’ve preached a sermon. These experiences are a deep part of your story and testimony. And lastly, “Pivotal Circumstances” have shaped your faith. Maybe you went through an extreme illness. Maybe you lost a loved one at an early age. Maybe you had an extreme encounter with God. These pivotal circumstances may have greatly shaped your testimony or story. Like I’ve said before, when you’re thinking about telling your story you can’t just tell all the good stuff, the high points. And you can’t just tell all the bad stuff. Our lives are filled with ups and downs. It doesn’t make for a good story if there are no ups or downs. Or if it’s all just even-keel. So there has to be a willingness to be vulnerable and a willingness to share part of yourself that may be a bit scary or even uncomfortable. Because this is the stuff that forms Christian community and trust. It isn’t the food. It isn’t talking about the weather. It’s getting down to the stuff the really matters in life. It’s about getting down to the stuff that Christ did for us. As you may have noticed in the insert in your bulletin, I refreshed the set of questions for “Sharing your Story.” I encourage you to reflect on these questions and those of you who have not yet shared your testimony with us, should especially reflect upon these questions:

- Who are the people who have most influenced me?
- What are my greatest successes? What obstacles did I overcome to achieve those successes?
- What are my greatest failures? What did I learn from those failures?
- In what ways has God influenced my relationships, successes and failures?

Share the answers of these questions with others here at Providence and with those whom you meet with Abundant Life.

How do we transmit this story of ours? I appreciate this quote from Rachel Naomi Remen, “Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way the wisdom gets passed along. The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering.” Now, you can go up directly to someone and just start spouting off your story. That’s one way of doing it. It might be a little bold, but you can do it that way. But a much more natural way is to simply hang-out with each other and wait for the right opening to share. This wisdom that many of you

have, these stories that are so rich to share, they will come out around the table. When I think about some of the best and most intimate conversations I've had with others, they usually happen around the dinner table. Either you're just drinking a cup of coffee or you're having full-blown dinner. But stories naturally come out around the dinner table. If we're looking to transmit our story, the wisdom God has bestowed upon us, one opportunity coming up may be to attend the Abundant Life picnic on July 21. It's a great opportunity to sit-down with others and share what God has done in your life. It is a great opportunity to create new bonds of Christian friendship and community. To build something better together. To build the Kingdom of God together.

Donald Miller says this, "We get one story, you and I, and one story alone. God has established the elements, the setting, and the climax and the resolution. It would be a crime not to venture out, wouldn't it?" If we are going to build something better together with Abundant Life, it's going to take sharing our story. Providence Church has an amazing story. The people of Providence Church have powerful stories. And so does Abundant Life. And the only way we have these amazing and powerful stories is by the grace of Jesus Christ. It's because we all know the ultimate story in Jesus. He has saved so many of us. He has forever changed our lives. He has shaped our living every day. The woman at the well testified of the Messiah and the living water that He offers and a whole community of Samaritans came to hear the words of Jesus. Those who are sick. Those who are ailing. If we truly have a strong community of faith in Jesus Christ, we will be a community that fosters transparency and vulnerability among each other. That there is no need to hide anything because we know the saving grace of Jesus Christ and we extend that saving grace no matter the history of the other. We shower them with love and mercy. We lead them to the cross to experience the forgiveness of Christ. That as Providence and Abundant Life illustrate confessional churches, that all may know the power of God's saving grace and mercy. Incredible and wonderful things can happen when we are willing to share our story. We can build a community like no other because we know the one who is like no other, Jesus Christ. By the word of our testimony and by the power of Jesus Christ, we can build the Kingdom of God. We can build something magnificent that glorifies Him. That "the prayer(s) of the righteous [will become] powerful and effective." When we are proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ with our story, who will stand against us? Absolutely no one. Christ will take on the insults. Christ will bear our burdens. When we take care of each other and we share with each other, the majesty of God's Kingdom will reign. We are indeed better together. As we share our story, may God be glorified and may His Kingdom reign. Let's be real together in this community. Amen.