

**Message #19****James 5:13-15**

Life is interesting. At times it is an emotional roller-coaster. One day things are good and you are up. The next day things aren't so good and you are down. Life is filled with twists and turns; highs and lows. That is the way life really is.

Solomon really zeroed in on life when he said in Ecclesiastes 3:

There is a time for everything that happens in life:

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace.

That is life. That is how it really is and that is how it really works.

Some people have a real problem coping with life. What the Bible says is that the real key to coping with life is God. Specifically, the key to coping with life is communication with God. This is exactly what James teaches in this text:

**IN ALL KINDS OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE, THE KEY TO SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS IS TO MAINTAIN PROPER COMMUNICATION AND PRAYER WITH GOD.**

This point is so simple. It is so missed. It is so needed. God needs to be in our lives all the way through our life. We need to be communicating with Him in all circumstances in life.

That point was one James wanted to communicate. There are three verses here that describe three separate circumstances that do occur in life:

**CIRCUMSTANCE #1 – You are suffering. 5:13a**

The first circumstance that James describes is someone is suffering. The word “suffering” is a very rare Greek word, which is used here and also in II Timothy 2:9 and 4:5. In II Timothy 2:9 Paul uses the word to describe the fact that he literally suffered negative and hard things for his commitment to Jesus Christ and his communication of the Word of God. In II Timothy 4:5 he uses it to describe hard things that must be endured due to one's faith and proclaiming God's Word.

The actual Greek word indicates that one is suffering bad and even evil things. We would assume that this believer is suffering because of His commitment to God and to Jesus Christ and His Word.

In the life of a believer, there will be suffering. You will not escape it. James already said that in **James 5:10**.

These believers were not perfect, but the fact they were believers put them in a suffering context. Now when you are suffering what do you do? **Notice what the text says, “you must pray.”**

Do you see that? In times of suffering the one suffering must pray. It is good to get others praying with you and for you, but you yourself must pray.

In the tough times in life or in the tough hours of life, this is what we must do. What are you supposed to do in crisis moments in life? What do you do when your health fails? What do you do when your financial picture changes? What do you do when someone negatively makes life difficult? **YOU MUST PRAY.** You, yourself, must pray.

Prayer is a very appropriate and personal response and privilege in times of trouble and trials. God wants His people praying to Him when they are suffering. God wants His people to have such an intimate relationship with Him that they talk with Him in any situation. There is real coping power that comes through prayer.

I guarantee you this, most people who have personal nervous breakdowns are not personally praying much. There is therapeutic healing that God gives to one who prays.

### **CIRCUMSTANCE #2 – You are happy. 5:13b**

Now the second circumstance that is described is things are going good and you are happy and successful. There will be moments in the Christian life when things will be going well. There will be peak moments of prosperity.

One of the real dangers in those kinds of moments is one can forget about God. Things can be sailing along so nicely that one can begin to think in ways that leave out God. James did not want that happening, so he said when you find yourself in merry moments of life, don't forget about praising God and worshipping God.

The noun “praises” is the noun “psalms.” Singing the psalms was a part of the early worship services. In fact, the book of Psalms was the hymnbook of the nation Israel. Luther said of the joyful praise Psalms that “..you look right down into the heart of saints, and behold all manner of joys and joyous thoughts toward God and His love.”

This is what James was after. In the good times and in the high moments of life, keep worshipping and exalting God. Go to hear God's Word and sing God's praises. In the low times of life, pray. This is the way you handle circumstances.

“Mr. Watson, come here I want to see you” are historic words. Two rooms away from Mr. Watson a bottle of acid had spilled onto some clothes. There was a man in the room who was making a final adjustment on an experiment that he was about to try in Boston on March 10, 1876.

While he was preparing the experiment, he spilled some acid on his clothing and yelled, “Mr. Watson come here I want to see you.” Mr. Watson, who was two rooms away, heard every word. You see, the man in the other room was speaking into a box he had invented called a telephone and when he uttered those words, Mr. Watson heard them, and the man’s dream, who was in the other room, who was Alexander Graham Bell, became a reality.

His dream was to design something that would enable men to communicate with each other at any time in any place.

That was exactly what James was after between God’s people and God. He wanted them communicating with Him at all times and from any place.

God wants us communicating with Him when we are suffering and when we are flourishing. But He also has one more circumstance to present.

**CIRCUMSTANCE #3** – You are sick. **5:14-15**

We come to a text that has been misunderstood and frankly butchered in the religious world. The Catholic Doctrine of Extreme Unction which says if a priest goes into a room where a person is extremely sick and anoints him or her with oil or water and prays for him, reciting some special prayer and he does that before the person dies, then that person will go to heaven.

Now what is being discussed here is physical sickness and physical healing. This is not discussing spiritual sickness and spiritual healing. Many have concluded this refers to saving a lost soul, but nowhere in the Bible are elders involved in saving a lost soul. Every individual is responsible to believe on Jesus Christ to be saved and no place are Elders required for spiritual healing. In fact, if a believer sins, all he must do is confess the sin to God and he will have spiritual healing (I John 1:9).

Now if we stick with a literal interpretation of this text, there are three observations we may make:

**Observation #1** - This is some kind of sickness in which the healing demands the elder’s presence. **5:14a**

**Observation #2** - This is some kind of sickness from which one may be healed with the elder’s Presence. **5:15a**

**Observation #3** - This is some kind of sickness connected to sin and forgiveness. **5:15b**

Now in the Bible there are at least eleven reasons why God's people get sick:

**(Reason #1)** - We get sick because we have a finite, imperfect body. **Phil. 2:25-30**

Epaphroditus nearly died of exhaustion.

**(Reason #2)** - We get sick because we live in an imperfect environment. **I Tim. 5:23**

Timothy's stomach problem was due to bad water in Mediterranean world.

**(Reason #3)** - We get sick because God uses it to cause us to rely on His grace. **II Cor. 12:7-10**

Paul had some physical infirmity that God let him have to prove grace sufficient.

**(Reason #4)** - We get sick because Satan is permitted to attack to turn a believer away from God.  
**Job 2:3-10**

Job's physical problems were a Satanic attack trying to get him to curse God.

**(Reason #5)** - We get sick so God may glorify Himself by healing us. **John 11:1-4**

Lazarus' sickness was for the purpose of demonstrating the glory of God through Christ.

**(Reason #6)** - We get sick because it is one way God takes His child home. **Heb. 9:27**

God used sickness to take his faithful prophet Elisha into eternity (II Kings 13:14-20).

**(Reason #7)** - We get sick so that God may use it to direct us to do more of His will.  
**Gal. 4:13-14**

Paul's sickness caused him to stop over in the Galatian region because it was God's will for him to preach and teach there.

**(Reason #8)** - We are sick because we do not heed medical counsel and take medicine.  
**I Tim. 5:23**

Had Timothy refused to drink the wine, he would have had the stomach problems.

**(Reason #9)** - We are sick because we take medicine but don't pray.

King Asa had a serious foot disease and he went to doctors and took medicine but refused to pray and he died (II Chron. 16:12-13). King Hezekiah had some disease and he prayed and then took medicine and he lived (II Kings 20:2-7).

**(Reason #10)** - We are sick so we may learn to be a better Christ-like minister to others.  
II Cor. 1:5-6

**(Reason #11)** - We are sick as a direct judgment of God because of sin we refuse to face.  
I Cor. 11:30; Revelation 2:22-23; **James 5:14-15**

**It is this reason here that James is discussing. There is no grammatical break from verses 14, 15 and 16, which means they are all tied together to form a thought.**

There is a physical sickness that no doctor can cure or no medicine can heal. **The sickness is a sickness that is specifically given as a judgment of God to one of His own children because they will not face their sin.**

This kind of sickness can kill and cause death.

Now there are some things we need to see here.

**First**, according to **verse 14**, if one is being judged for sin and is sick because of it, the person apparently has an awareness of it because he/she is to call the Elders in and confess the sin.

So if a believer is truly being judged by God with a sickness that is leading to death, that believer will have some awareness of it. That stands to good logical reason because God is sending the sickness for that very reason.

**Second**, if one were under this kind of judgment, there is a way out. The person must call for the Elders of the church and confess it and the Elders then would pray and anoint with oil. Now the Greek text is emphatic that these are specific Elders of a specific church. So my grammatical conclusion is it must be the elders of the church the believer is in. You could not run to some healing crusade or call some minister to do this. This must be done by specific elders of a specific church. **5:14b**

**Third**, the Elders of the church are to listen to the confession and pray over the person and anoint with oil and ask God to forgive the sin and lift the judgment. **5:14c**

From a grammatical analysis, it would appear to me that each individual elder needs to pray. It is a middle voice verb. The main verb is pray and the participle anoint is in a tense that may mean anoint before praying or anoint at the same time of praying.

Now the results of this kind of prayer are given in **verse 15**.

I want to point out that the “if” clause is third class conditional, which is the clause of future probability. What I understand the “if” clause to mean is if in fact the reason for the sickness is a judgment of God, which it may not be, and if the person calls for the Elders of the church and the Elders do this and it is the reason, then God will answer the prayer, remove the sickness or illness and the sin will be forgiven and the judgment will be lifted.

However, if the sickness is not due to a judgment of God for sin, but is due to the other reasons, the sickness will remain.

Now let's talk through some applications.

- 1) Let's say someone senses they do have some physical infirmity that is a judgment of God and the person refuses to call the elders. Then the judgment stands and you probably will die with it.
- 2) Let's say someone calls for the Elders but the sickness is not in any way due to a sin judgment. The Elders in my opinion have a responsibility to pursue this point.
- 3) It is not the job of the Pastor or Elders to ask people if they want this done; it is the sick person who initiates it. This business of calling people up in front of a church to be anointed with some healing is a sham. This text does not teach anything like that.
- 4) God wants His people talking with Him at all times. God is a gracious God and a forgiving God. He said in the very context of a judgment of weakness and sickness and death that if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged (I Cor. 11:31).

So keep lines of communication open with God and you have nothing to fear.