

James 5:13-20

"Prayer For The Suffering, The Sick, & The Sinning"

The book of James is both practical and profound. 5 Ch's that are absolutely stuffed to the gills w/what real time Christianity genuinely looks like.

& As we enter this final portion of the book of James, it's no exception as he closes out by drawing our attention to the importance and the power of prayer. Throughout this letter James has had a lot to say about what we say; the power of our words. Our words can help people or hurt people, build them up or tear them down, encourage them or discourage them, our words can break hearts or bring healing to the soul. People can be won *to* Christ, or turned forever away *from* Christ through the power of speech.

Though often times our tongues are used as instruments of criticism, complaint or condemnation; James reminds us that we do well to crucify the flesh & use our tongues as instruments of prayer for *man* & praise to *God*... There is no *need* that prayer cannot meet & no *problem* that prayer cannot solve...

Prayer is a *high* privilege, it is a *holy* privilege... It was as your Lord & mine hung there on the cross, bleeding out & suffering for the sin of the world that He *lifted up* His voice (the bible tells us that it was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon) & cried out, "It is finished!"

... And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit... What was finished? The work of redemption, the payment for the penalty of sin had been paid in full, now the gap between sinful man & a Holy & righteous God had been bridged through the sacrifice of Christ. And we read, "*Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*"¹ Not from the bottom to the top as though man did it, but from the top to the bottom as though God did it, reaching down (as it were) & destroying that which formerly discouraged man from coming into His presence. What you may or may not know is that the veil in the temple was the "wall" (if you will) that separated the holy place (the main sanctuary) from the most holy place, (where the presence of God dwelt).

& Into the most holy place only the high priest could go & at that only 1 time a year on the Day of Atonement. But now God was saying, the veil has been torn, access has been granted into My presence at anytime you like through the sacrifice of J.C. We don't come to God on the basis of our own righteousness (because we're not righteous), but on the basis of the finished work of J.C. on our behalf; we come to God in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith in Him.

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Mk 15:38). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The book of Hebrews tells us, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,"*² We have access to God 24/7/365, through the blood of J.C. & we err exceedingly if we're not persistently bringing our prayers & our praises to God...notice.

Vs 13-14

Truth be told, prayer is the most powerful assistance that we can offer one another in times of trouble, or turmoil. Prayer truly is an evidence of care. It speaks to the fact that I'm willing to bring the needs of your life before the Creator of the universe and having His attention I petition Him on your behalf... that's radical!

But before we talk about praying for others, James says that its appropriate to be praying for ourselves. He says, "Is anyone among you *suffering*?" The word suffering there (perhaps your bible says "afflicted") points to really any kind of trouble or trial, it could be a physical affliction, it could be trying circumstances, it could be a spiritual struggle, it's a very broad term. If you're going through tough times, suffering from some sort of hardship, James says, "Pray".

The word "pray" here is an imperative verb in the present tense.

What that basically means is he is exhorting us (commanding us) to pray & not stop praying. "Let him continue to (or continually) pray." We're looking here at a persistence in prayer. Not a one time "prayed about it" kind of thing. But a "I'm praying & praying & praying over it" kind of thing. It's like when Jesus said, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* Matthew 7:7 Those verbs, "ask, seek, knock" are present tense verbs. Jesus is saying, "Ask & keep asking, seek & don't quit seeking, knock & keep knocking." Don't give in, don't give up. It's like when God said, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*³ When you place all of your heart into something there is *passion* & there is *persistence* involved. If you're determined to be the best musician you can be, you will persistently pursue excellence on that instrument, or to be the best athlete, or the best at your particular trade or profession, you persistently pursue it. We call that "putting your heart into it."

Jesus said, & James echoes that when it comes to our prayer lives, we're to be putting our heart into it; there should be passion, there should be persistence. If you're struggling, if you're suffering...pray (& keep praying).

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Heb 10:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Je 29:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now that doesn't mean necessarily that God will deliver you *out of* your struggle, but that He will be *w/you* & give strength *to* you to endure your trial so that *you* will *grow* & that *He* will be *glorified*. In the words of James (4:6) "But He gives more grace..."

Perhaps you remember Paul speaking of the abundance of revelations that God had entrusted to him, but along w/that came a "thorn in his flesh", he suffered, he was afflicted physically. What did he do? He prayed. Again & again & again that God would remove it from him. God didn't do it, but what God *did* do was assure Paul of the sufficiency of His grace for his life. We read in 2 Cor where the Lord finally responded to Paul and said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."⁴ So Paul actually came to the place whereby he took pleasure in infirmities, in weaknesses, in reproaches in needs & persecutions & distresses; that the power of Christ might rest upon him & be magnified in him.

So if you got trouble (physical, emotional, financial, relational, circumstantial [car problems... whatever]) take it to the Lord in prayer (again & again & again), we're not talking vain repetitions, but heartfelt pleas/petitions to God in prayer.

That should be the very 1st thing we do, pray, acknowledge our absolute dependence upon the Lord. You can do more *after* you pray, but we shouldn't do anything *until* we pray. We're to cast all our cares upon Him (Peter said [1 Pet 5:8]) because He cares for us.

So if you're suffering, go *before* God & pray. If you're satisfied, bring *to* God your praise! James says, "If you're cheerful, sing psalms!" Give God praise, it's ok to be blessed. We don't all go through trying times at the same time & if you're not & someone else is, you shouldn't feel guilty about it, you should give God glory for blessing your life! Here's the idea, no matter what's going on in our lives, our hearts should be gravitating toward the Lord, whether we feel burdened or blessed we're turning our attention to the Lord...

Vs 14

The suffering should pray, the satisfied should give God praise, the sick should call out to the elders in the church. Now that's not to say the sick shouldn't pray (that would seem to be included w/in the context of suffering, Vs 13).

There are a few things we want to point out here real quick & they are these. #1 If you're sick & desire to have the leaders of the church pray for you *it's up to you* to take the initiative to make that known.

⁴ The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Co 12:9] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I can't tell you how many times it seems someone gets mad or disillusioned w/the fact that myself or perhaps some of the leaders in the church don't come & pray for them if perhaps they're in the hospital or something & I never even knew they were there. Now that's not to say that we'd never show up out of simple concern should we know. But James makes it very clear that church leaders aren't omniscient, we don't know when people are sick. We have to be "called for". Then we are both humbled & delighted to pray over you for whatever your need may be.

Having said that the word "sick" here doesn't limit itself exclusively to physical maladies. More literally it could be rendered, "Is anyone among you w/out strength." & There's ambiguity (perhaps intentionally) as to whether or not the weakness is physical or moral or spiritual. It's a word used in the gospels for physical maladies, however in the book of Acts & in the Epistles it's used to point out a weak faith, or a weak conscience... You might write it down & look at it later; Acts 20:35, Rom 6:19. We read in Rom 14:1, *"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things."* If someone is weak or struggling in a fundamental area, nurture them, disciple them, encourage them, if they wanna debate or fight over non essential issues don't waste your time.

In 1st Cor 8 Paul was talking about their liberty (of eating meat offered to idols) becoming a stumbling block to those who are "weak". Same word.

So is James speaking about physical illness or spiritual &/or moral weakness? Perhaps both, in either case he says, "Call your leadership, have them come over to your house, sit down w/you anoint you (in the name of the Lord) & pray for you, it will refresh/add strength to you spiritually & God just might touch your body physically.

Now where he speaks of anointing w/oil, there's a little confusion there as well. Because some believe this is a reference to the anointing as in being emblematic of the Person & power of the Holy Spirit touching a person's life (& we see such ceremonies in scripture). The problem is that the word James uses doesn't limit itself to the "religious ceremony". It means to rub or wash over & is used in various places throughout the NT to point to a medicinal application. Olive oil carried common medicinal applications in that day. This is the same word that's used in the parable of the Good Samaritan that discovered the man beaten by thieves & poured oil on his wounds & bandaged him up. Same application in Mark 6:13 when the disciple anointed w/oil many who were sick & healed them...

So the question becomes: Is James saying to anoint w/oil as an emblem of the working of the Holy Spirit or is he saying, “Pray, seek the Lord & receive the best medical treatment available to you.” I think you’re safe combining the 2 & the ambiguity is more than likely intentional. **If someone is weak morally or spiritually, they should humble themselves, call for the leadership & seek pray... those leaders should anoint him/her & seek the power of the Holy Spirit to restore them, “raise them up” as we’ll read in a moment. If they’re physically sick... same thing, we should seek the Lord, the power & presence of the Holy Spirit to touch their lives, & avail ourselves to the best medical attention we can get.** The bible does not discourage modern means of medicine by any stretch. Luke was a doctor, he would travel w/Paul on his missionary journeys. They would apply oil & wine to wounds to clean them & aid in the healing process.

All healing comes from God, be it from miracles or medicine God works through either means... there is no biblical credence in w/holding yourself or your child from medical means in the name of a miracle from God. Seek the Lord & take your medicine...

I read in an article earlier this week that stated that at least 303 children have died since 1975 after medical care was w/held on religious grounds... it’s a tragedy & there’s no reason for that scripturally... (Rita Swan, director of Iowa based advocacy group, Children’s healthcare is a legal duty).

Vs 15

Is he saying that illness is the result of sin? It can be. It’s not always, but we all know that excessive alcohol brings liver disease, immorality can result in STD’s etc.

Btw something else I would point out is that all these dealings are between the person & the local church leaders, there’s no “Faith healer” no one is going to crusades & paying money to be prayed over. It’s just a simple process that takes place between you & your church leadership.

Now we note here that the prayer of faith is something that happens on the leadership’s part, not the one who is weak or physically ill. What is the prayer of faith? Well we know it’s not something that we conjure up by saying, “I believe, I really believe, I really truly doubly believe!” **The bible speaks of faith as a gift from God; saving faith & then also a spiritual gift of faith, the “move mountains” kind of faith (1 Cor 12:9). So in reality the prayer of faith begins & ends in the heart of God; it comes from God’s heart, is placed in a man’s heart, & is offered back to God in prayer (it’s circular in shape [so to speak]).**

We know that not every prayer to God will result in physical healing. We've already pointed out Paul's ongoing physical problem, Timothy had stomach problems, in 2nd Tim we discover that Paul left Trophimus in Miletus sick. We've already established that sometimes God will allow us to undergo affliction so that we might grow & He might be glorified, that the power of Christ might rest upon us in our weakness.

So there's the totality of biblical context that comes into all this. At the end of the day we call for the elders, we pray, put it in God's hands & He will do as He pleases. It's ours to honor & obey His word, then we know that we don't have not because we've asked not... but rather God's will is being worked out God's way in our lives & that's what we long for. God's will, God's way in *our* lives.

Vs 16

Ok, here's where we wanna be careful right? Confess your sins, or trespasses to one another. Now here's the deal, we know we should confess our sins to God. The bible is very clear, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*⁵ We have no biblical premise to confess our sins to a priest, or a pastor (as the case may be). So what is this "to one another" business?

Here's the deal, sin seeks to isolate us. You can generally tell when someone is wanting to sin, or engaged in sin because they begin to w/draw from fellowship & isolate themselves. The bible tells us (Prov 18:1) *"The man who isolates himself seeks his own desire..."* But *confession* breaks the bonds of isolation... now what does it mean to "confess"? The word "confession" simply means to say the same thing. In other words you agree w/God's word that what *He* calls sin *you* call sin.

Now to get specific; the realm of confession should always be limited to the sphere of offense. We know that no one sins unto themselves, our sin *always* impacts & influences others. & To those whom we've impacted & influenced, we confess. It doesn't bring God any glory for you or me to advertise our sin to someone who otherwise has no clue.

But if I've sinned privately & in so doing it's impacted you, than I need to come to you privately & confess my sin, humble myself & seek your forgiveness. Then there can be healing & restoration between us. *If I've sinned publicly, than I need to confess that publicly & seek forgiveness humbly/openly.* If I'm simply running around confessing apart from exercising discretion; I can cause people to perhaps stumble, which results in more sin...

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). [1 Jn 1:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So to the extent your sin has impacted people, seek their forgiveness, pray w/one another & there will be healing that takes place. **Prov 28:13** “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”⁶

...Then in writing in how we should pray for the suffering, the sick & the sinning, James reminds us that the fervent (that is passionate/persistent) prayer of the righteous man avails much; it’s effective in it’s nature.

Of course what makes a righteous man is the righteous covering of J.C. imputed to us by faith in Him (as we pointed out earlier). It’s not what we do, but it’s about what He’s done on our behalf. However equally true, if Christ be in us that will be made evident by the way we lead our lives, not in sinless perfection, but the fingerprints, & convictions of Christ & of the Word of God will certainly be evident.

For his illustration of the fervent prayer of a righteous man James points to Elijah, notice.

Vs 17-18

Now we could take some time to develop the character of Elijah, I would refer to you 1st Kings 17 & following. However here is what James wants us to know. Even though we have a tendency to hold these guys up & make scriptural superheroes out of them, the truth of the matter is that they were like you are & I am...

They had strengths, weaknesses, good times, bad times, doubts... but they loved God, had a heart *for* God & availed themselves to be used *by* God. & Elijah prayed *earnestly*, he prayed w/prayer (literally) that it wouldn’t rain & it didn’t for 3 ½ yrs... Then he prayed again & the heavens opened up & the earth brought forth its fruit.

But as your read that story Elijah didn’t just pray once for rain, or twice, or 3xs. He prayed 7 times, he was passionate, persistent, refused to relent, he labored in prayer. But here’s the deal, if he had a nature like *ours* (James is saying) than we can have a prayer life of power like *his*...

But too often our prayers lack fervency (I’m not saying that they have to be charged emotionally) they don’t well up from the heart. We want God to care about things we don’t really care about ourselves. ½ hearted prayers are self defeating. We need to learn to pray from the heart... w/passion & persistence.

Vs 19-20.

We’ve spoken of prayer as it relates to the *suffering*, the *sick* & the *sinning*, we could include the *straying* here as well.

⁶ The New King James Version. (1982). [Pr 28:13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James isn't speaking here about evangelizing the lost, but reaching out to our brothers & sisters who are struggling & sliding back into worldly ways, sinking in the miry clay of sin. He doesn't let them go to their own destruction, he says seek to get in front of them & turn them around.

I would like to tell you that genuine Christians are impervious to sliding into sinful patterns, but that wouldn't be true. That's why Jesus taught the parable of the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to seek the 1 who was straying. Write it down, look it up (Matt 18:12-14)

Christians can "wander" from the truth, from obedience to God's word. What are we to do about that? Reach out, call them, pray for them, if they resist give them their space, wait on the Lord, reach out again. It's not ours to be prideful & think, "Well, I guess they'll figure it out..."

Paul said, *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*⁷

We're to reach out & to rescue those who are falling away; & should you do that you will save a soul from death & cover a multitude of sin.

Their sin will come under the cleansing flow of the blood of J.C. & you will be instrumental in restoring their relationship w/J.C. If you knew someone was getting ready to fall off a cliff wouldn't you warn them? Yet how often we let people wander off into their own destruction & never say a word... The bible says, *"Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins."*⁸

We're not taking about sweeping sin under the carpet, but being available to God to seek out the hurting that they might turn from their sin, confess & find healing in J.C.

Rescue the wounded, leave no man behind... that's the idea, that we might follow the example of our Lord who came to seek & to save that which was lost. We were like sheep who'd gone astray & Jesus turned us from our way; now we're to let Him use our lives to reach out to the wounded, those who are wandering & return (in repentance) them to the fold...

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ga 6:1-2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 10:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Prayer Points:

God thank You for the book of James, how practical, profound & powerful it really is. We want our lives to model Christ, we want to crucify our flesh & follow You. Teach us to be a people of prayer & a people of praise. God we love You, we trust You, we cast our cares upon You, for You care for us. Pour Your Spirit out upon us, & use us for Your glory... & We'll give You praise...

Listen, if you're here & what you need isn't to turn back to Christ, it's to turn to Christ period, than I want to give you that opportunity right here & right now. God loves you, & Christ has given His life for you. The bible says, All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He came to seek & to save that which was lost, you & me. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Turn from your sin, believe in the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.