



Let Us Pray

James 5:13-18



Three Particular Circumstances

Read James 5:13-18. In verses 13-14, James mentions three particular circumstances that his readers may experience.

❑ Suffering. “Is anyone among you suffering?” (5:13a) You should *pray*.

1. In what specific ways does prayer help in times of suffering and trouble? (1:5; 4:8)



❑ Cheerfulness. “Is anyone cheerful?”¹ (5:13b) You should *sing praises*.

2. Why? (1:17-18)

📖 “I will praise the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips.”(Psalm 34:1)

❑ Sickness. “Is anyone among you sick?” (5:14a) You should call the church elders² to *pray* over you and anoint you with oil³ in the name of the Lord.⁴

3. Verse 15 says, “The prayer of faith will save the sick person.” However, in our experience, it seems that prayer *does not* always make sick people well. How do we reconcile our experience with verse 15?⁵ (Consider 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Luke 22:39-44; 1 John 5:14-15.)⁶



¹ ‘cheerful’ (*euthymei*) – ‘in good spirits’ whether in good times or bad (Acts 27:22; 25). Actually, the reminder to turn to God is needed more in times of cheer than times of suffering.

² ‘elders’ – leaders of the local church, responsible for spiritual oversight of the congregation.

³ ‘anoint with oil’ – There are various interpretations concerning the function of anointing with oil, including 1) medicinal function (like the good Samaritan in Luke 10:34); 2) pastoral function (practical purpose of outward expression of concern); 3) sacramental function (means of grace); 4) symbolic function (consecration to God’s service or special attention). ‘The fact that anointing a sick person is mentioned only here in the New Testament epistles, and many healings are accomplished without anointing, shows that this practice is not a necessary accompaniment to the prayer for healing’ (Douglas Moo, *James*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans 2000, 242).

⁴ ‘in the name of the Lord’ – invoking the power and authority of Jesus Christ

⁵ Some people have said, if this type of prayer is not answered, it shows that the one praying does not have enough faith – that is, they haven’t believed hard enough. Faith is essential, but the faith exercised in prayer means a total trust in God who is faithful in accomplishing His will; and our will may not match His will. God may sometimes give a person such insight into His will that he/she can pray with great confidence that a certain thing will happen.

⁶ Verses 15 and 16 seem to connect sickness with sin, and healing with confession of sin. Certainly, sin causes spiritual ‘sickness,’ and forgiveness of sin is necessary for spiritual healing. But sin may also contribute to physical sickness (consider 1 Corinthians 11:30, and personal observation). However, it is not true that all sickness is a direct result of individual sin (note the word ‘if’ in verse 15b).

General Principles

James transitions from three particular circumstances in verses 13-15 to general principles in verse 16.

- 📖 Therefore, *confess* your sins to one another, and *pray* for one another, so that you may be healed. (5:16a)
- 4. Verse 16 says, “Confess your sins to one another.” To what extent should we confess our sins to other people or before a group of people?⁷
- 5. Whose prayer is “very powerful in its effect?”⁸ Why? What are characteristics of “powerful” prayer?⁹



An Example

- 6. How is Elijah used as an example of prayer?¹⁰ What is the point of the illustration?

Reflection/Application:

- Where do you turn in times of trouble or sickness? God is the ultimate source of strength, peace, joy, healing, and hope. If you have not entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, you are encouraged to do so. That is the first step to real help.
- If you are a Christian, do you immediately turn to God in times of trouble, trusting completely in Him? Do you turn to God *only* in times of trouble, or do you praise Him at all times? This week, reflect on Luke 11:5-13 and 17:11-19.
- Is there sin in your life that you need to confess to God, and/or others? Sin hinders our prayer and damages our health/wholeness. (*Psalms 66:18*)
- As a Christian, do you regularly pray for others? Is your prayer “powerful in its effect?” This week, reflect on and apply Luke 11:1-13, 1 John 5:14-15, & other verses noted above.

⁷ We should first confess our sin to God. If our sin has affected a group, it may be appropriate to confess sin before that group. Generally, we do not confess specific, personal sin beyond the circle of the sin’s influence. However, sometimes personal confession is made in a group setting if a person believes the general nature of the confession may help others. We may confess personal sin to another person who is spiritually mature and trustworthy for the purpose of prayer support, counsel, and accountability.

⁸ The ‘righteous person.’ This is the person who is in right standing with God, that is, the person who has entered into relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We do not earn answers to our prayers by being good, but God gives grace to the humble. As Christians, we should humble ourselves before God, confess our sins, submit to God, and trust Him to respond appropriately.

⁹ Consider James 1:6-7; 4:3, 6-10; 1 John 5:14-15 and Luke 11:1-13.

¹⁰ James is referring to the story of Elijah described in 1 Kings 17-18. However, we don’t need to read 1 Kings 17-18 to understand the point James is making. He states it clearly enough in James 5:17-18.