

James 5:13-16

“The maturity of prayer”

- I. Intro
- II. Vs. 13 The suffering
- III. Vs. 14-16 The sick

I. Intro

James started the close of his letter to the Jewish believers scattered abroad with the summation and transition word “therefore” which asks the reader to stop and ask what it is “there for”. Like last week’s teaching he moves into the key ingredients for life as believers in our maturity. The last two week we noticed the first if these “patience” as **the purpose of the first coming of Jesus was personal transformation (our salvation followed by our sanctification) and not political transformation. That process was aided by difficulties...pressures from the outside and the inside and that only through endurance...(PATIENCE) could that process produce the right result in our hearts.** In verses 13-19 James’ focus is on “prayer” as an indication of maturity. The connection to this section with the one that proceeded it is a bit unclear as he was offering an alternative to make deals (making oaths) to God to alter ones present circumstances and the alternative is prayer which like “patience” in the above section is mentioned seven times and this time in seven verses. The point James is making to his readers is that the mature believer is prayerful in troubling times. They aren’t to be complaining or trying to make deals about his or her circumstances instead they are “prayerful” as **James takes us through four situations in which when we ask God will answer!** James was famous for his praying as one ancient historian said that his prayers for people were so frequent and long from kneeling in the temple that his knees developed callouses like a camels and

was given the name “Old Camel knees” do to the effect of his praying. How far we Christians of today have moved from this as we have become too busy to pray only doing so when everything us has failed! The answer is to not go out an swear an oath to God but to bend the knee in prayer to God! Our self-reliance on our own ingenuity and strength has taken us away from dependence upon God and the effects are clearly seen in our lives and Jesus Church! Saints in times like this where patience is especially required PRAYER is the key!

II. Vs. 13 The suffering

Vs.13 The first situation James mentions that requires His children to pray is when we or those we know are “suffering”. The word in the Greek means something far different than what we would naturally associate with the word suffering as it doesn’t refer to the sick or infirmed but instead refers to “hardships and distresses”. The NIV renders it this way, “Is anyone of you in TROUBLE?” Trouble involves “mental and emotional suffering”! It is clear that James is referring to this beyond just seeing it in the Greek as he links it with another “emotional response” in the next sentence as he writes “Is anyone among you CHEERFUL”. Much of our lives adversities are not a direct result of sinful behavior or God’s discipline but just life that happens to us as we ask, “Why me?” And when these kinds of trials come upon us there are three things that most of us tend to do during this type of testing:

1. Grumble and complain: Usually to anyone who will be around to listen.
2. Criticize other believers: Usually those who aren’t going through what we believe to be as difficult circumstances as us.
3. Blame God: We can find ourselves embittered towards God.

What we should do is pray and seek God to grant us understanding in the circumstance that He would use it for His glory. Yes, God can and does remove us from the

circumstance but more times than I can count He has **“MOVED” me through the circumstances which has been far more beneficial.** Paul, you will recall, prayed three times that the *“thorn in his flesh”* might be removed but God’s reply was that His grace was sufficient. Furthermore, Paul was told that God’s power was perfected in his weakness. *God often transforms us in or troubles as He turns them into our triumphs!* Jesus Himself prayed three times in the Garden that the cup might be removed but not His will be the Father’s will be done and the outcome was that He was strengthened for the cross to die for our sins. Prayer during such *“trouble”* remind us and those around us that God alone is the **ALL SUFFICIENT ONE!** To pray during seasons like this one is acknowledging God’s sovereign power and connects us to His ever-present nature towards us!

James also includes “PRAISE” as a part emotional need that we have when on an emotional high we ought to Praise God in song. This is for us when we are not experiencing trouble and reminds us **not all of our life is filled with adversity.** **I find this more difficult than prayer as I don’t tend to praise Him during seasons of when life is wonderful nor do I tend to praise Him when I’m going through a trial as James had exhorted when in the second verse of this letter he had said to **“Count it all JOY when you fall into various trials.”**** The joy isn’t in the circumstance, but it is in what it will produce in our lives as we patiently endure! The word for praise appears some 550 times in the bible. The fact that James places it in the same section as prayer indicates that God views it as of equal importance as prayer. In A.D. 111 a Roman historian wrote of what he witnessed about the early church as compared to the Jewish synagogue saying, *“They are in the habit of singing verses as a hymn to Christ as God. While in the Jewish*

Synagogue, since the Fall of Jerusalem there has been no music, but in the Christian Church from the beginning until now they have been praising as they sing of Christ's love." The mature believer can always find reasons to praise God even in the midst of suffering and stress! As Job said in 35:10 God is able to give us "**Songs in the night**"!

III. Vs. 14-16 The sick

Vs. 14-16 The second area we are to pray is the most common as James asks, "*Is anyone among you sick?*" Many consider this the key passage on the subject of prayer for the infirmed and as such is a favorite verse for the so called "faith healers" so we will examine it closely. First note the use of the word "AND" in verse 15 James uses that word as a connecting word to the specific admonition of praying for the sick which makes it seem as though James had in mind a specific case for his exhortation concerning prayer for the sick.

- A. First, the Greek word for "**sick**" is one that means "**to be without strength**" and indicates a debilitating illness that has so affected their life that they are unable to work.
- B. Second, It appears that the cause of the specific nature of this case was that this person's specific illness had been caused by this person's habitual practice of sin. Certainly not ALL sickness is the result of our habitual practice of sin but there are abuses that we can participate in that will cause our illness. While I believe that all illness is the result of the fall of man I do not believe that all illness is personally because we have sinned and caused our own illness.
- C. Third, take note of whose responsibility it was, as well as the location where this prayer for healing was to take place. "Let him" indicates that it was the responsibility to the sick person to summon the Elders of the Church and they were to be ready to respond to go to where the person was. The prayer for healing was to take place at the home of the sick and there is no evidence that there was ever a "healing service" where the sick were to be brought to church. And when you think about it in light of today's infectious illness why would you want to cross contaminate whole groups of people. That means that all of this false and fake so called healing or anointing services were never a part of the early church!
- D. Fourth, it was the elders or "representatives of the local church body" who had pastoral leadership of the fellowship that were designated to go and pray over the

sick. It was the faith of these men that was called on and not necessarily the sick person. Again, this is important as often those so-called faith healers blame the sick person for the lack of healing when according to this verse the prayer was that of the elders not the infirmed. That the power to raise the sick person up was not the power of the faith of the elder's prayer according to verse 15 but "***the Lord will raise him up***". This ought to shut the mouths of those who want to place the blame of a lack of healing upon the sick as well as silence those who wish to take credit for their faith when someone is healed!

- E. Fifth, in verse 14 we are told that the Elders are to anoint the sick person with oil "in the name of the Lord"! Oil in biblical times was widely used for medicinal purposes, in Isaiah 1:6 wounds and sores were to be soothed with ointment. Jesus referred to such a case in His story of the Good Samaritan who Jesus says was bandaged with pouring oil and wine and his wounds. What's interesting though is that in all of Jesus recorded healings there is not once that He is ever seen using oil in His healing, spit mixed with mud use olive oil NO! While it is proper for a person to ask the Elders to come to them and pray over them and anoint them with oil and God is the One who can still raise the ill; He doesn't always choose to heal the way, in the timing or method that we have requested. Neither does the use of olive oil negate the use of modern medicine as Olive Oil was seen as medicine. In Acts chapter 28 when Paul and Luke were shipwrecked on Malta the father of Publius was very ill and Paul went in and prayed laying his hands on him and he was healed. What's interesting is that the Greek word used to describe this miraculous healing one that describes a miracle where we are told in verse 8 when the Island heard about this they also brought their sick and word used in the Greek there is where we get our English word for therapy which indicates that they practiced medicine of the islanders that God used for their healing. Yet with that said there is no Christian that should approach a Doctor for healing without first approaching God and it may be that God will use the Doctor or He may heal without him.
- F. Finally, we look at verse 15-16 and the specific nature of this man's illness as it related to his habitual sinning. "***If he has committed sins***" is a difficult clause in the Greek as it carries the idea of both persistence and reckless and rebellious disregard to what is destroying their health both spiritual as well as physical. But if those sins have been confessed or agreed to forgiveness of that sin will be granted by God. The purpose of the confession was to isolate the specific offence not to air dirty laundry.

As we conclude this section on the first two aspects of the maturity of prayer it is vital that we take the time to allow the Holy Spirit His proper and rightful place to examine our own hearts that we might be effective in praying for others.