

## James 5:13-20

### "Pray, Pray, Pray"

Throughout this letter, James has placed no small emphasis upon the way we use our tongues. So it serves as no surprise that as he winds down/wraps up, he exhorts us unto it's *highest* use: prayer, praise & persuading others unto godliness.

But the *primary* emphasis of this passage (by far) is placed upon prayer (being mentioned 7x's in Vs 13-18). He exhorts us to pray over our suffering, to *seek* prayer in times of sickness, we're to pray & intercede for one another... & we're to pray *fervently*. Meaning, not hyper-emotionally, & not mechanically or absent mindedly, but sincerely, passionately, from the heart.

Essentially, the common thread woven throughout this section of scripture is that regardless of the goings on in the Christian's life, he/she should find themselves gravitating toward God in the midst & as a result of it... As the song goes, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry, *everything* to God in prayer..."

If you remember right, in the previous Vs James was encouraging the believers to trust in the Lord in the midst of hardship. To realize/recognize that though we're *in* the world, we're not *of* the world & that as a consequence, things aren't always going to go our way so long as we live here. We'll suffer wrongfully. We may be oppressed, treated harshly. We may be taken advantage of... but we're to wait patiently/prayerfully (expectantly) upon the Lord, Whom when He returns, will settle every account, right every wrong & balance the scale of every injustice.

### Vs 13-15

Do you see what I mean here? Whether I'm suffering, satisfied or sick, as a believer I'm to turn my attention toward God (be it in prayer or praise).

Now, we should make the distinction between "suffering" & "sickness". When he speaks of "suffering", it kind of connects us to the previous passage. The idea is one of being afflicted, suffering evil, you're being subjected to a situation which sets circumstances against you... Remember back in Vs 9? The exhortation was that we not grumble *against*, or gripe *at* one another. (Which is so often the kneejerk response when we feel like we're getting the raw end of the stick). But James is saying, "Don't be one who's always *complaining*. Instead, be one who's always *praying*." If you believe you're being treated unfairly, if someone (or something) is afflicting me... I'm to pray.

Peter put it this way, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*<sup>1</sup> The idea being that if I truly believe that God cares for me, then I can give *to* (or cast *upon*) Him all that concerns me knowing that ultimately, He will take care of me.

Now. Does that mean (or somehow imply) that God will always deliver me from my present suffering? No. God *can* deliver me. Sometimes God *will* deliver me (or remove whatever is afflicting me). But there are other times that rather than *deliver* me (or remove said affliction from me) that He chooses rather to supply the grace necessary, *enabling* me to endure. God may be growing my faith, teaching me deeper humility (or any number of things).

Perhaps you can recall when Paul sought the Lord to remove *his* affliction. & Paul sought Him, sought Him again, & sought Him again. But the Lord said to him, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*<sup>2</sup> Then Paul said, *“Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*<sup>3</sup> Paul, actually came to a place whereby he would readily receive affliction if it meant that Christ would be magnified & glorified (all the more) in his life. So, whether the Lord chooses to remove it *from* you, or He chooses to supply grace sufficient *for* you, either way we’re to take it before the Lord in prayer.

If that’s *not* you. You’re *not* suffering, you’re *not* being afflicted, in fact, you’re quite satisfied at the moment. Things are going great for you... what should *you* do? Sing psalms. Translation? Give God praise... Suffering should elicit prayer. Sufficiency should elicit praise. Either way we turn our attention to the Lord.

Of course, the situation could be reversed. The suffering can give God praise, the satisfied can/should seek the Lord in prayer. (Perhaps you recall [Acts 16] when Paul & Silas were wrongfully beaten & placed in stocks, put in jail in Philippi. What did they do around midnight? Unable to sleep, sitting there writhing in pain, they opted to give God praise & sing psalms in the night). So let’s not see the way James laid this out as a hard/fast “only” option. You can pray & give God praise wherever life finds you! His point here is that there’s never a time that justifies us not setting our sights *on* or seeking *after* the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 5:6-7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 12:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 12:9-10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I also want to point this out. The word translated “sing psalms” here in Vs 13 (used 3 other times in the NT, Rom 15:9, 1 Cor 14:15, Eph 5:19) is a word that literally means to “strike a chord” or “twang the strings of a musical instrument.” He’s saying, “Is anyone cheerful? Hey, strike up the band!”

& I love this because there’s a group of people out there who believe that musical instruments are of the devil. That if you sing in church, it should only be acapella. No instrumentation. They say, “Well, we don’t see it in the N.T.” Even though the psalms are laced with instructions “to the chief musician on a stringed instrument”. Even though the psalmist exhorts us to praise the Lord w/flutes & trumpets, stringed instruments & loud clashing cymbals. (People always interested in “turning it down”, what can I say, God likes it loud! 😊). But the point is that the word James used here (& Paul used in Rom, 1 Cor & Eph) means to sing accompanied by music. Give God praise in the assembly!

& I love this because the tendency that we as people have when things are going good is to kind of forget about God & start walking in the confidence of our flesh. That’s why Moses warned the people of Israel just before they entered the Promised Land, not to forget about God... It’s why David said, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:”*<sup>4</sup> It’s not uncommon to see people in the sanctuary who are really going through something, just praising God w/all that they are (offering up a sacrifice of praise)... & Someone who has it relatively good to be just kind of standing there, waiting (it would seem) for the time of worship in song to just be done... But where’s the gratitude, where’s the praise, where’s the humble heart of thanksgiving? Whether we’re suffering or satisfied, we should have a “God-ward” focus. He’s to be the focus of our heart be it in prayer or in praise.

#### Vs 14

Few things here. #1 Let’s note that the initiative is to be taken by the one who is sick. (& Btw, this isn’t speaking necessarily of a head cold, though we’re glad to pray for you regardless. The idea here is immobilized, weak, bedfast, maybe in the hospital, you’re missing work, you’re truly down & out. You’re sick.)

But you’d be surprised how many times we catch wind of someone being upset that they were down & no one came to pray for them. But what they *don’t* tell you is that we never even *knew* they were sick! No one reached out, no one let us know! We don’t have E.S.P. 😊 & I’ll even take it one farther. Don’t presume that because so & so knows, that I do to.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 103:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

If you haven't made it known, (called the church, called for the elders), then don't be upset when none of us show up. & We note that it's not just the pastor. It's the *elders*, plural that are to pray. (& Here's another deductive observation. **This passage assumes you're *in* & attached *to* a corporate assembly of believers that function's w/structure & order. In other words, James is assuming that believers go to church. You can't call for the elders if you don't have a church home...**) & The elders are to anoint the sick w/oil (in the name of the Lord) & pray over them.

Now, what's this "anointing him w/oil" business? Couple possibilities & honestly, I believe it probably includes both. First, we realize that the anointing of oil throughout the O.T. was emblematic of the coming upon of the Holy Spirit. So, there's a real sense where the anointing of the sick w/oil (though there's nothing mystical/magical about the oil) is an emblematic action that simply says, "God, we look *to* You. We trust *in* You. We're submitting to & asking *of* You that You would pour out Your Spirit, that You would touch & heal Your son/daughter through the power/Person/presence of Your Spirit."

**However, there's another use for oil both in scripture & known throughout the ancient world & that is it's use *medicinally*. & Honestly, that's the word that James uses here. You see it in Mark 6:13, Luke 7:38. You see it taking place in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34). & So the other thought is, have the elders pray & don't neglect the best medical attention that's available to you.**

Again, I think there's room for both. You're praying for God to heal, you're asking for *miraculous* attention, but you're also not neglecting *medical* attention. Ultimately, be it medically, miraculously, all healing comes from God. Who gave man wisdom to discover medicinal helps? So, call for the elders to pray. Seek the Lord in His mercy & take your medicine. God's will be done.

### **Vs 15**

**One reason it's good to have multiple people present praying for you is that, should the Lord choose to miraculously heal you, the man isn't magnified, but God is glorified! If there's a few of us praying & God moves & heals... Who was He moving through? Who knows, praise the Lord!**

Now, I want to be transparent w/you here & just let you know that there's a couple schools of thought w/this Vs. One lends itself to being only a physical experience. (If someone prays in faith, God heals, the sick is raised up, simple as that). & Certainly the context can include that. But clearly God doesn't grant physical healing w/every prayer.

When you think of Paul praying over his thorn in the flesh. God clearly told him that He wasn't going to remove it from him. Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. Do you think Paul didn't pray for him? But God didn't heal him. He says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim, *"Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick."*<sup>5</sup> Again, there's zero doubt in my mind that Paul prayed for him in faith.

& If you chase that trail far enough, if God healed every sickness physically, I suppose we'd only die through some tragic accident because sickness/disease can never settle into our bodies... So though we should pray w/humble confidence that God would heal. Once we pray, we leave it in His hands & trust in His sovereignty.

But notice the words James uses here. He speaks of forgiveness of sin, of being raised up. So, it would seem to me that James is also allowing for a broader, spiritual healing & even looking forward to the resurrection.

Now, I should also point this out. There is a connection here between this person's sin & their sickness. The words "has committed" are in the present & perfect tense. Meaning it's a continual action that they complete (they're habitually about some act of sin) & the results are presently still occurring. In other words, this person's condition is the result of some act that they continued in again & again. Could be sexual disease, could be some fallout of drug/alcohol use... you get the idea. But that's why James says, "If you pray over that in faith (assuming from the following Vs that he/she is repentant), God will heal them & their sins will be forgiven. This person is being chastised, disciplined (it would seem) by God.

So, sometimes sin will bring sickness. But let's not assume that any time someone gets sick or meets an untimely end that it's because of some sin in their life. Sickness *can* be a repercussion of a sin or a lifestyle. But not everyone is sick because of sin & not every sickness is embedded w/unforgiven/unconfessed sin.

### Vs 16

Now. There's a lot that could be said here. But one thing I want you to take home here is the fact that James is telling us that unresolved, unconfessed, unrepentant sin can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We read in Isa 59, *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Ti 4:20]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 59:1-2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James says, “Look, *confession* of sin is healthy for you on every level. Physically, emotionally, spiritually.” & The word “confess” goes beyond simply saying something I did. It means to acknowledge openly & to agree. The idea is that I acknowledge my sin in agreement w/the way God sees it. I agree w/God *about* it, I’m turning *from* it, seeking accountability in regard *to* it.

If your bible says, “Confess your faults” that’s not the best translation. It’s definitely a reference to sins. & When we confess our sins, it opens the door for God to move, to bring times of refreshing, renewing, healing.

Now, this is where we want to be careful w/what it means, “Confess your trespasses to one another.” ☺ Believe me when I tell you, you want to show discretion & wisdom w/whom you confess your sin to. Should you confess your sin, to someone who’s sin is that of gossip... well... ☺ & Again, there’s a lot we could say here, but suffice it to say for now that as a general rule, it seems best to keep your confession limited to the circle of sins impact. “What does that mean?” Listen, you’re an adult, you’re free to share your sin w/whomever you choose (trusting you’re prayerfully pursuing wisdom, healing, deliverance, accountability etc).

If you’ve sinned in such a way that it’s impacted your family, confess it to your family, ask for prayer & forgiveness from them. Listen, humbling yourself before your spouse, your children, seeking their forgiveness, acknowledging your sin & desire to repent is powerful.

If you’ve sinned in a way that’s impacted the whole church, then let’s get it out there so that people know you’ve repented & they can hold you up in prayer.

Restoration/reconciliation is a beautiful thing. If you’ve sinned against an individual, go to that individual... The thing about sin is that it tries to keep you to itself. It tries to isolate you. Confession can break those bonds & restore that desperately needed fellowship. It promotes healing. Both personally & in those whom it’s impacted directly/peripherally. You don’t need to confess your sin to a priest or any other human “mediator”. We’re to confess “to one another”.

But let me say this. If you struggle w/drug addiction or alcohol. Don’t go confess to someone else whom you know to have the same struggle. That’s not wise. It can lead to further sin. Suddenly you find yourselves “struggling” together. But if I’ve sinned against you, you’ve sinned against me. We’re to come together, confess our sin, pray for one another that we might be healed (made whole) before God & one another.

& Let me say this. If we feel so led to confess publicly, there's no need to confess details. Simply something to the effect of "I've sinned, I'm beset by it, my heart is to turn from it, & please hold me up in prayer." "I've had bitterness in my heart toward someone in leadership, it's impacting the church, please forgive me, pray for me, I'm going to make it right." (You get the idea) Absolute details aren't needed. *When you read Ps 51, you'll find David's confession. We know that he'd committed adultery w/Bathsheba, he'd murdered Uriah, he'd lied to the people. But he doesn't bring up those details in his public confession. He acknowledges his sin, his desire to be cleansed, renewed & restored... As we read in the proverbs, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."*<sup>7</sup>

& Concerning our text. If someone asks us to pray for them in their sickness. It's appropriate (though I wouldn't say mandatory) to simply (lovingly) ask them, "Is there anything you need to get right between you & God before I pray for you in this?" It's not to infer that there's some unconfessed sin that's plaguing them w/sickness. But let's at least eliminate that possibility.

*"Pray for one another, that you might be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* What kind of prayer is effective? One that is based in fervency & righteousness. – Many times our prayers aren't effective simply because they aren't fervent. Meaning, so often my prayers are ineffective because they're simply lukewarm, or cold before God. (& Though I'd never say it out loud because I'm much to spiritual...) It's as if I'm nonchalantly throwing a request up to God, not because *I* really care about it, but I want God to... Listen, that kind of praying, probably doesn't go much higher than the ceiling. – Fervency isn't me emotionally trying to persuade a reluctant God. It's me falling in line w/God's heart, & the things that are important to Him are important to me...

*As for being righteous. Let's just thank God that we don't come to Him on the basis of our own righteousness, but that which J.C. has provided for us upon the cross. Of course that will be demonstrated in the general pattern of our lives, but our righteousness is not our own, it's provided by J.C. who has loved us & given Himself for us.*

#### **Vs 17-18**

James is nothing if not consistent. Exhortation, illustration. He says, "Listen, when you think of Elijah, you think, "Super saint, powerful prophet, on another level spiritually speaking."

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 28:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But he says, "He was a man w/a nature like ours." Meaning he was absolutely human, nothing special about him in that regard. Tempted like we are, sin nature like we have... same emotional swings/feelings. & If he had a nature like ours, then we can have prayer lives like his. He was righteous by faith & he prayed earnestly & we see the efficacy of those two things... To pray earnestly, literally says, "He prayed w/prayer." Again, he was dialed in, sincere & in tune w/the heart of God.

### Vs 19-20 Close

Speaking of people who stray, who drift, who fall into the miry clay sin & backslide... If any of you step out & turn them around. Reason w/them, persuade them to see their sin for what it is which invokes repentance in their lives... (In other words, you're letting God use your life to minister to others) You've saved a soul from death & covered a multitude of sins.

Confrontation is never easy. But restoration of the one who erred is a powerful testimony to the grace of God & offers hope to others wallowing in the mire of condemnation. It's not redemption that's in view here. It's revival. It's leaving the 99 to seek after the 1 (Matt 18:12-14).

Prayer, praise, persuasion. James would say, "Let's not just grow old, let's grow up." Be the man, the woman that God is calling you to be. He's called you to a time such as this. Stand for Him, serve others, speak the truth in love. Be sensitive to the unction of His Spirit & God will glorified in your life.

### Prayer Points:

God, may we be in stride w/Your Spirit, in tune w/Your heart. & Regardless of our situation may our hearts be turning to You in prayer & in praise. May we refuse to harbor sin, but rather walk in holiness & may You be glorified in our lives.

As we close our time together, I would extend the opportunity to you to turn from your sin today. Granted, today we talked about the need for believers to repent. But if you've not given your life to Christ, you've not turned from your sin to believe on J.C. I encourage you to do so even now. God loves you. Jesus died for your sin & rose for your justification. Believe on Him & be saved.