

## James 5:13-20

**What does James say to do when facing trouble (which refers to suffering from any source) (v. 13)?** Pray. Suffering should elicit prayer while abundance/favor should elicit praise. But the bottom line of our prayer should not be for God to get us out of the mess we're in but rather that He would be glorified in the midst of our trouble.

**What are we supposed to do when we're happy (v. 13)?** Sing songs of praise to God. **What are we supposed to do when we're sick (v. 14)?** Call the elders. **What will they do?** Pray over the sick person and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

**What do these different responses to life's conditions tell us about God?** He wants to be brought into all the changing seasons of our lives, not just when the going gets tough. He wants us to enjoy and recognize Him when things are going well (which is easy to forget). He wants us to acknowledge that we are totally dependent on Him. That's the way He has made us.

**Why bring in the elders? Do they have a special hotline to God? What's the point James is trying to convey?** He is referring to mature believers in a right relationship with God, not young Christians, e.g. the righteous man of v. 16.

The fact that the ailing or weary person was to call for the elders and not the doctor gives us a clue that this person's sickness somehow connects with some spiritual condition (v. 15). A physician is called to provide medical attention. The elders need to deal with the spiritual factors affecting the sick person, if any, since they have a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the flock (Hebrews 13:17).<sup>1</sup>

The Greek word for *sick* here can mean physical maladies, but in Acts and the Epistles it is also used to mean weak faith or a weak conscience. There can be moral or spiritual issues in the midst of sickness and suffering. Verse 15 says "if he has sinned" which suggests a need for confession and repentance. The Lord will raise him up (restore him) which suggests spiritual healing.

**What kind of oil (v. 14)? Is canola OK? What is the importance of oil? Does it do anything?** Oil can be medicinal in purpose—or symbolic of the Holy Spirit in His healing ministry (1 Corinthians 12:9). The healing power was not in the oil but rather in the prayer.

**What will be the end result of prayer and anointing (v. 15)?** Healing and forgiveness. Healing can be spiritual or physical or even delayed. Difficulties in deciding what exactly is meant by anointing should not cause us to overlook the main point of verses 13-18, which is prayer. It is prayer— not anointing alone—which leads to the healing of the sick person. Benjamin Franklin reportedly said, "God heals, and the doctor collects the fee."

There is no basis in Scripture for the popular idea that praying in faith means praying with confidence that something will happen just because we pray (cf. 1:5-6; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Faith always must have the Person or promise of God as its object in order to be effective.<sup>2</sup>

**What determines if healing will occur? Oil? Earnestness? Faith?** God ultimately determines if and who and when He heals. "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*" (Exodus 33:19). God in His sovereignty makes that determination. Healing does not depend on us to have enough faith, to be fervent enough, etc.

To summarize, then, we believe that verses 14, 15 apply to a case where a person is sick as a direct result of some sin. When he realizes this and repents, he should call for the elders of the assembly and make a full confession to them. They should then pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. They can pray for his recovery in faith, since God here promises to heal the man.<sup>3</sup>

**Application: Is all sickness bad? What possible value/purposes might sickness have?** Sickness can make you face your mortality, draw you closer to God, give others a chance to minister and use their gifts. The way Christians face sickness can be a godly witness to the world.

**We are urged to confess our sins to each other (v. 16). What would be the possible value of doing that?**

Accountability. Human reassurance of God's forgiveness. Primarily, James meant that when we sin against someone else, we should be prompt to confess this sin to the person we have wronged.

**What else should we do (v. 16)?** We should pray for each other. The greatest assistance any believer can offer another is faithful prayer. Prayer is evidence of care and concern. A mutual concern for one another is the way to combat discouragement and downfall.

**Are you a righteous person (v. 16)?** Yes! Romans 3:21-22: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Physical healing is linked with spiritual restoration. Notice how James links together confession, prayer, and healing. It is a clear intimation of the vital connection between the physical and the spiritual. Man is a tripartite being—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess. 5:23). What affects one part of him affects all.<sup>4</sup>

A paraphrase of v. 16 might read, "The prayer of a man whose heart is right with God works wonders." A righteous man's prayers can accomplish much in the spiritual and physical deliverance of someone else as Elijah's praying illustrates (vv. 17-18).

**How was Elijah a man just like us (v. 17)?** He was a sinner in need of a Savior. He had the same kind of frail flesh as us. He was subject to the same weaknesses and infirmities as other men. He was chosen by God to do a job which gave a great purpose to his life—but his life was not perfect. 1 Kings 17-18 show us a total lapse in Elijah's faith.

**Why did Elijah's prayers work?** They were an act of obedience. They aligned with God's will. They glorified God. Elijah confidently made his audacious petitions to Jehovah because he was conscious that they were in harmony with the will of God. Praying, in line with the will of God, is a sure foundation for effective prayer.

**Who is the wanderer (v. 19)?** A Christian brother who has wandered away from the truth either in doctrine or practice. These who have wandered and lost their way are the "sick ones" of the church family. Wandering ones need to be brought back to the fold. James referred here not to evangelism but to restoration.<sup>5</sup>

**Who has the responsibility to do something if a brother is wandering from the truth?** Fellow Christians. This verse also ties in with what James had just said about the privilege and duty of prayer. Any believer, not just the elders, can help a brother back into the right way.

**What are some practical steps we can take if we see a brother wandering?** Start praying for him. See him as a ministry. Invest some time in him. Devote effort to helping him. Show him you care unconditionally.

Application: **Are you capable of wandering? How can you prevent it?**

**What does it mean to cover over a multitude of sins?** The repentance of the reclaimed sinning believer results in the forgiveness (covering over) of his or her sins. This description of forgiveness goes back to Old Testament usage, where the biblical writers described sin as being covered over when forgiven. Such usage was understandable for James, who was a Jewish believer writing to other Jews primarily (1:1). However, with the advent of the New Covenant, our sins are not merely covered over but are washed away completely....forgiven and forgotten by God (Hebrews 8:12).

In summary, James is all about developing maturity in the life of the believer. This letter is a road map. If we follow James' directions, we will become mature believers.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on John, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2244.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 835.