

# James 3:13-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, open up your Bibles to James chapter 5. Quick confession, I'm a little short of breath this morning, but we're going to be okay.

! So that just means it might take me longer to get stuff out because I have a smaller airbag this morning. So if you have to cut out, feel free. Anyway, let's pray together. Lord, we're just grateful for a chance to be gathered together as your people and in your presence to worship you through singing, through fellowship, into the hearing of your word and putting your word into practice when we leave. So we just offer this time to you and have your way with it. In Jesus' name, amen. We're coming to the end of the book of James. Some of you are glad because it's been brutal.

We've been really convicted by many things that James has said. So at the end of this letter, James is sort of doing what many faithful pastors over the centuries have done. I've heard stories of particular pastors who would look out over their congregation in the morning and just make eye contact with people and just look around simply because, not because they were trying to intimidate or scare people, but because they wanted to like see what the eyes told about the members of their congregation. Were they broken? Were they not doing well? Were they cheerful? And it seems like that's what James is doing here. But at the end of his letter, he's asking that question, how is the word of God going to reach the people of God and seeing different categories of people that are among them worshiping and hearing God's word. So let's read our passage together. James 5, we'll start in verse 13. He says, is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. And he prayed fervently that it might not rain. And for three years and six months, it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit.

[ 3 : 05 ] So we'll stop there. And there's one more message next week that will wrap the letter up. But as I said, James is sort of, you can see it punctuated by the use of this word four times. Anyone, anyone, anyone, anyone. He's asking the spirit of God to use the word of God to minister to the people of God for the glory of God. And so different categories of people that he's addressing in a pastoral way. But really simply, this would be point number one. Point number one is the gift of prayer, the gift of prayer. So throughout this passage, he mentions prayer or pray at least seven different times.

So it's very evident that this passage is crystal clear about one thing, prayer. And it can be a controversial passage. I know it makes some people in reform circles uncomfortable, which I kind of, you know, can enjoy personally. But but it is a it can be a controversial passage, but it doesn't have to be. Let's just take the text as it is, is simply saying pray and prayer. So that is the main point. And the point of this is to emphasize that prayer and faith are intimately intertwined with each other. You can't separate faith and you can't separate prayer from one another. And so James has gone at length to tell us what real, authentic, authentic, actual faith looks like. And now he's also saying that real faith is expressed through prayer, through a praying life. So both both out of our desire to love God and want to be in his presence. That's one reason why we pray, just not because we need something, but because we want to actually be with God. But also, prayer is a demonstration of our humble dependence on God in every situation. So our profession of faith should be under question if our knees are soft and smooth and from prayerlessness, if we are not praying. Jonathan Edwards, my man from back in the day, cool wig, he he said about this, he said, a holy life is a life of faith. The life that the true Christian lives in this world. They live by faith in the

son of

God. But who can believe that a man lives by faith who lives without prayer, which is this natural expression of faith. Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is to life. And to say that a man lives a life of faith is in every way inconsistent and incredible as to say a man lives without breathing. So prayer is a natural expression of faith. And throughout scripture, we are called, encouraged, commanded to pray, to have relationship with God. In short, for all of us, just a reminder that prayer, that prayer in essence is just speaking with and talking to God as a beloved parent with fear and reverence and love and protection. It's a constant communion with God where we exchange our thoughts and our desires with one another. Paul wrote in Colossians 4, continues steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. And 1 Thessalonians 5, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the spirit. So God affords us every reason and every occasion to pray in the scripture. So throughout this passage in James 5, it's a divine call to both personal prayer and corporate prayer.

So we must pray. Another Puritan that I appreciate, Samuel Chadwick, he said, the one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from our prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at all our toil and mocks our wisdom. [ 7 : 43 ] But he trembles when we pray. I wonder why. So that's this number one, the gift of prayer. Prayer is mentioned seven times in this passage. That's what we're talking about. So number two is the occasions of prayer. The occasions of prayer. And we see this in verses 13 through 16. So if we're careful, we have eyes to see here, we'll see that James particularly has four different categories of people that are kind of in his head at the moment. So the first one you'll see in verse 13 is suffering.

Verse 13, suffering. So those who are suffering. To trust God when things are bad, when things are difficult, he says, is anyone among you suffering? Assuming that that's what's going on. So it can be very in form. It can be physical. It could be mental. It could be relational. It could be financial. A great trial that has come your way. To suffer great pain and endure tremendous affliction, as many have in our church. It seems particularly over the last couple of years, we've watched that. James has given the prophets of old a, as an example of suffering. James 5, 10, he's like, as an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Micah suffered imprisonment. Isaiah suffered rejection and eventually was martyred. Jeremiah was rejected and suffered hatred and opposition. No one listened to him.

[ 9 : 36 ] Ezekiel suffered bereavement. He lost people in his life. Hosea suffered marital unfaithfulness. And so they suffered because they were being faithful, right? So we tend to think if I'm suffering, I must not be being faithful. But they suffered as a result of their faithfulness.

So, so if you're suffering, how does James counsel those who are suffering? Look what he says. He says, let him pray.

And how many of you are thinking, okay, yeah, yeah, of course, pray. Right, we got it, pray. But what else? Like, there's got to be something else. Is that all you're telling us to do? That's kind of like weak pastoral advice, James. Like, give us something else to hold on to. And he says, yes, that's what I'm saying.

Pray. Pray. And if we respond that way, there's possibly just two answers of why we would respond that way. Either we've just simply misunderstood James or we've never actually experienced the supernatural relational exchange of God and man through prayer.

And so sadly, if we're not careful to cultivate thankfulness to God for his goodness, we often forget him and slip into self-dependence.

[ 11 : 01 ] We forget of our need for him. We're tempted to forget God when things are good very often. So suffering is often the very instrument God uses again to get our attention because we have forgotten about him.

And so, again, quickly, we get back on our knees in humble dependence on him. So it's going to happen in this world. It's happened to a lot of us. Acts 14, 22.

Through many tribulations, all of us must enter the kingdom of God. So then you may say, okay, like I'm on board. Like let's, let's pray. But James, you're not really telling us what we ought to pray for.

To which he would say, well, I understand you've been reading my letter for months now. But if you remember at the back of the beginning of the letter, I said in chapter one, verse two, You counted all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And steadfastness, let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be complete, lacking in nothing.

[12:13] That's what we ought to pray for. That God uses what he is taking us through. That we are able to meet those trials with joy. Knowing what he is producing in us as a result of those trials.

It brings us to that dependency on God. So in connecting this to our passage, Romans 12, 12, it says, Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. So that's one category, suffering. And then he changes gears in verse 13. And then he identifies the cheerful.

See in verse 13, the cheerful. While some Christians are suffering, others are cheerful. And cheerful doesn't mean cheer up.

It doesn't mean just a happy-go-lucky attitude or outlook on life. What he's trying to say is, be of good cheer. He's in good spirits.

[13:12] Be of good courage. During Paul's shipwreck in the Mediterranean, the angel of the Lord assured Paul that the Lord was with him. And Paul told his shipmates, he said, Yet now I urge you to take heart.

For there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. And so, hey, we're going to be okay. Like, things are okay. So take heart. Be of good cheer. It's actually, I'm pretty certain, a Greek medical language used of a doctor-patient relationship where a doctor may have watched a patient suffer a great deal.

And then finally, they get to that point where they turn that corner and they're actually getting better. They're on the mend. And the doctor comes in and goes, sees him sitting up in the bed, eating, you know, smile on his face.

It looks like he got a shower. Clean clothes on, smile on his face and watching a Western on TV. Gunsmoker, Bonanza.

So then, he'll walk out and say, he seems like he's in good spirits today. That's like what we're talking about. Like, you've turned the corner and you're doing better.

[14:27] And that's actually a part of what we're told in Scripture. When we see Psalm 40, verse 2. But when you come through, you say, what are those of good cheer supposed to do?

Like, what are we supposed to do? Well, James says, if you look, he said, let the cheerful, let them sing praise. You say, wait a minute, I'm not a singer. People don't like my voice.

I usually just mumble so others don't hear me. But James really doesn't care if you're a good singer or not. That's not what the point is. He's saying, sing as a command for we must thank God when things are good.

It's not shifting the subject from prayer to singing. He's saying that singing is a form of prayer to God. Psalm 40, verse 2.

You'll see this example. He said, God drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

[15:32] He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. So a healthy Christian believer is one who sings. A healthy church is a singing church.

And I'm thankful that we have that going here in our fellowship. And so it's easy, though, to lose focus in our minds on the things.

We focus on the good things that are given to us, and we forget the one from whom they came. But praise causes us to lift our eyes from those good things to heaven, to God, from where those good things came from.

That's what praise does. It lifts our eyes above just the gifts to the giver. And so as we sing, it's adoration to God.

It's praise to God. It's prayer to God, not entertainment for man. And in Ephesians 5, 19, characterizes spirit-filled Christians as addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with their heart.

[16:44] And so I ran in some good charismatic circles in my earlier Christian life, gospel-believing, Bible-believing, but disagree with them on certain things.

But I remember in my early Christian life, I was like the really serious-looking John Wayne reserve. And I was with them at a Bible study, and they had some music, and I was just doing foot tap. Then something was just convicting. Like I just wanted to praise God. I wanted to sing, and I thought people are going to think I'm stupid. But everybody else looks stupid anyway, right in that context.

So I went from the toe tap to the chair dance. Then eventually lifted my hands to the Lord. It just kind of happened.

I wasn't like, hey, I'm going to lift my hands right now so people will see me. But the freedom of just crying out to God and expressing to Him my gratefulness for carrying me through.

[17:53] So don't hear it as a license just to go crazy. I'm just saying like it was, we're told to sing praises to God. So there's enough of us here, enough good voices here to drown out your bad voice if you're worried about that.

So just let it out later on. So that's what we're called to do. So third category, he says sick in verse, I think it's verse 13. No, verse 14.

Verse 14, is any among you sick? So this is a call to an accessory prayer. One of the most evident effects of living in a world wrought with sin is that our bodies are slowly falling apart, slowly decaying.

We will one day die. It's a sickness, diseases, and infirmities are a reminder that we do not possess life in ourselves as God does.

We become weak and vulnerable and feeble. There's no greater reminder that we are not sovereign and that we are not immortal. We are fallen humans made of flesh and will soon vanish like a vapor.

[19:09] So sickness befalls us mainly because it's one of the temporal consequences of our sin. It's going to happen. It's what happens to believing people and unbelieving people.

Even those who are maybe experienced temporary healing, they're eventually going to fall apart again one day. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but as far as I know, he's not walking around again today.

Something happened where he died. So what does James say to do when we are faced with the awful curse of sickness?

He says, verse 14, Let him call for the elders of the church to pray over them, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

So the elders of the church aren't necessarily faith healers. That's not what we're saying. But 1 Timothy says elders should be able to teach the Word of God, be men of godly character to lead.

[20:06] But James here says that they also should be able to pray and intercede for those that have been entrusted to their care when they are sick. So I know that's been a major emphasis in our elder group to start carving out more time, not just to talk about members, but to pray for our members.

And so if you notice, though, this is someone going to the elders saying, I need prayer. It's not the elders going, who are we going to, you know, seek out today?

So and that doesn't mean that other faithful believers can't pray for healing of the sick. It's just by nature of the role of elders, they ought to especially be able to pray for the sick.

The Bible says the elders should pray for healing, should be anointing them with oil. And so even though oil can be medicinal, I think because it's saying in the name of the Lord, it's a visible way of setting someone apart symbolically for the Lord's intervention.

In the Old Testament, we find that anointing with oil was representative of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon a person. That's 1 Samuel 16, 13, when David was anointed.

[21:23] Oil, therefore, I think is an appropriate symbol or image for God's Spirit. Since it is God's Holy Spirit who carries out the work of ministering to others through the believer, including that of healing.

And so Jesus, when he sent out the 12 to minister in his name, it says, They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

However, though, I don't run too far with this. It doesn't mean go nuts about oil. It doesn't mean people selling in a market this holy sanctified oil that's going to like somehow do something for somebody.

Oil itself doesn't heal anyone any more than wet water regenerates somebody at baptism. It's just a symbol, a mere symbol, and that's all. Oil merely represents the healing power of the Holy Spirit to come upon a sick person.

So you can write down Psalm 103, 1 through 5. But one of God's desires, one of the things that he can do for us, if he pleases, is to heal our diseases.

[ 22 : 39 ] And so I think no one will disagree that God does still heal. You can leave the gift part of that aside. All of us believe that God can and still does heal.

So by verse 15, he points out the prayer of faith. He says, The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

So what is the prayer of faith? Excuse me. The prayer of faith is not some special, wholly set-apart category of prayer.

It's just simply taking God at his word, believing him, and asking him to affect what he's promised to do. It's holding on to specific promises that God has given and resting in that.

If it is his good pleasure, he will fulfill those promises in that particular instance. The prayer of faith, again, is not this special category. But on the other hand, if we say we love God, we believe in God, yet we just utter fancy words in our prayer but don't actually believe anything we are saying, James would call us double-minded.

[ 23 : 56 ] Earlier on in chapter 1, verse 6, James says, Let him ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. So hear me.

Yes, God is sovereign. God is all-knowing. He works all things after the counsel of his will.

Ephesians 1. However, in God's mysterious providence, he has for some reason ordained our prayers as a means of accomplishing his good pleasure, accomplishing his will.

But if we just have a lot of theological rhetoric, but are faithless in our prayers, we should not expect anything from God. Jesus once visited his hometown of Nazareth.

And this is one of the most mind-blowing verses to me. He visited Nazareth, his hometown, where people rejected him. And check this out. This is the Son of God, okay?

[ 25 : 07 ] Mark 6, verse 5. It says, And Jesus could do no mighty works there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

And he marveled because of their unbelief. So meaning like he possibly could have or would have done more, but the people's unbelief, he stopped.

That's a mind-blowing verse. And the writer of Hebrews enforces this, Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.

So, however, if we pray in the Spirit-filled faith, it will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. Physical healing, when the Holy Spirit functions in that way and brings temporal, underlying temporal, temporal restoration of health as a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

It's just a foretaste, a reminder that one day we will be freed from our physical weaknesses. And it points towards a greater fulfillment to come. And so God can heal through medical intervention.

[ 26 : 27 ] It's been me. I've had more oil dumped on me than McDonald's french fries. And many godly men and women praying for me to be healed. But I also have known and seen God heal instantaneously.

I've seen both. And I don't know why he chooses to in certain situations and chooses not to. But if you want to underline and remember just one phrase today, apart from the Scripture, Spurgeon said, when you cannot trace God's hand, you must learn to trust his heart.

And if we know God, we know he's making the right decision. We know that what he's doing is good, even though we can't see it, even though we don't know exactly what he is doing.

Calvin said, prayer enables us to explore the riches which are treasured up for us by our heavenly Father. There is real contact between God and man where he may enter the upper sanctuary, appear before him, and claim his promises.

So, verse 16, there's a possible hindrance to prayer here. It calls for those, it says, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

[ 27 : 53 ] So, it's possible, it's possible because one of the verses is falling, that someone who is harboring unconfessed sin, sin that is blatantly evil, sin that they're being convicted by, and then

they go and ask for prayer and God doesn't do anything.

It's possible that that very act of harboring unconfessed sin is a sin itself against God and just an act of open doubt and rebellion against God, even as you're asking for prayer.

It could mean that, but it also could just mean that as believers, we're still going to fight sin, we're still going to struggle with sin, and we ought to confess those to one another, bear those to one another, and pray for God to sanctify us in those areas.

And there's hope, 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so, remember though, that just because you might be sick or suffering, it doesn't mean that you've committed necessarily a particular sin that's caused you to be sick.

It could be, but remember John 9 where they asked Jesus about the blind man. Was he blind because of his sin or his parents' sin? And Jesus says, neither. He's sick so that God's power might be displayed through him.

[ 29 : 16 ] So, although sickness is caused by sin in general, a particular sickness is not necessarily from a specific sin. Thirdly and lastly, sorry, we're trying to land the plane here.

Thirdly and lastly, the example of prayer, the example of prayer brings up Elijah, our man. He uses Elijah to illustrate how a man with a nature like ours could have a powerful prayer life.

He was a righteous person, not because he was perfect, but this idea that he had a covenant relationship with God and was aware of God's grace and lived in humble dependence on God's grace.

And so, a drought was recorded in 1 Kings 17 through 18. It was a judgment against wicked King Ahab and the nation of Israel for their idolatry and their sin.

And so, God sent Elijah to speak to King Ahab in such powerful words. 1 Kings 17, he says, as the Lord lives, the God of Israel lives, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word as judgment.

[ 30 : 31 ] So, three years and six months it did not rain. And, the nation shut down. Nothing happened. No stimulus package could fix this. It was just dry.

And, it got Ahab's attention. So, he was an ordinary man that God used to eventually send the rain back. But, notice though that James doesn't say that Elijah was this super prophet.

He was this man who was carried away by a chariot of fire into heaven. He was not, he doesn't draw out the fact that Jesus met with Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He simply says Elijah was a man just like us. He had a nature just like ours. And, why I think he did this particularly for two reasons quickly.

We're very tempted to believe that those in scripture were extra holy, super spiritual, and forget that they were men and women just like us. Sinful, fallen, weak.

[ 31 : 33 ] However, the difference is they had a faith and a trust and a powerful, sovereign God. So, it doesn't matter who they were. They were nothing apart from God.

And, we know the story afterwards. Elijah just falls into Great Depression, wants to die, shows his weakness, and in some ways he doesn't really finish well his ministry.

So, James cites Elijah, a prophet who prayed effectively even though he had our nature like ours. He was a mere man, same weaknesses. We're tempted to do that. Oh, that was Elijah. That was Elijah.

That was Moses. That was David. That was Paul. And, we forget that they were men just like us with a nature just like ours. Secondly, I think he brings this up because we're tempted to believe that the amount of prayer or the amount of faith is what causes God to act in answering us.

But, Elijah was one man who prayed a simple prayer. I don't have social media anymore. Thank goodness. I hadn't for years. It's great. You ought to try it. But, remember those like prayer things?

[ 32 : 42 ] Let's get more people to pray and maybe God will like that little prayer things that were just passed on. Doesn't matter. One man prayed a simple prayer. He didn't beg God and he just simply asked God.

And, here's what I'm going to make a connection to before we're done. He didn't just make up his own judgment. Elijah just didn't say, hmm, I think withholding the rain will be a great way to judge Ahab and this wicked nation.

Remember what I said. The prayer of faith is like remembering a promise of God and asking in faith that he would affect that promise. Elijah knew the scripture. He knew that in Deuteronomy 28, the

blessings and curses that are found in Deuteronomy 28, he knew that one of the curses for idolatry is that God would shut up the heavens and not allow it to rain.

So that's simply what he spoke. God's not going to allow it to rain until I say so. And so he believed that promise but we are tempted. There are groups of people out there that we all would harshly disagree with that we say if there's suffering or trials or pain in your life it's because you don't have enough faith in God.

I can count how many times I've heard that. If you just had enough faith you would be healed. It's not God's will that you have cystic fibrosis or if you just had enough faith God would heal you.

[ 34 : 04 ] This is absolute nonsense and it's telling great harm and damage to people in the church. How much faith did Jesus say was required to move a mountain? That much.

And that was his point. And remember it's not faith that moves the mountain it's God that moves the mountain. Your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. And so many ways people have faith in their faith not in the Savior of their faith.

And so that little idea just a little more faith just a little more like there's this big bucket you've got to fill up and God's not going to do anything until you get it all the way up. Just not true.

We believe in God's promises and we ask him to act if he desires if he wills. And remember his will be done is not a cop out prayer. It's not like I don't know what's going to happen so your will be done.

Like we plead with God we believe that he can but then we entrust it to his will because he knows what's best. So are we praying in our Christian lives?

[ 35 : 07 ] Are we praying together? Are we interceding for one another? Are we praying as a church? So see this as an open invitation to God to come back to have this exchange with him together and corporately and pray in faith.

Let's close in prayer together.