

Sunday Bible Study Lesson: July 19, 2020
James 5:13-18

As we study these verses, it is important to remember that the Christians reading James' letter are persecuted believers who are doing their best to endure a difficult situation. We recall that James begins his letter advising the believers to count it **all joy** as they are experiencing trials and the testing of their faith. This section of the letter gives us a look into James' heart.

The main focus of **James 5:13-18** is that **prayer is powerful and appropriate in every situation in life**. In fact, **prayer is mentioned in every single verse, from verse 13 through verse 18. These verses are the climax of the letter.**

In **verse 13**, what is James' advice to the person who is suffering? _____

What is his advice to the person who is cheerful? _____ Based on this verse, complete this sentence: James calls on believers to pray _____

In **verse 14**, what three things does James tell the sick to do? _____

Elders were spiritual leaders in the church, and anointing with oil was a first-century custom. Using the oil **in the name of the Lord** was a symbol used to represent the healing power of the presence of God. Praying **in the name of the Lord** also meant praying according to His will.

As you read **verse 15**, what questions do you have? _____

The first part of **verse 15** assures the believer that the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. James is admonishing the believers to pray in faith--believing that God has the power to heal. **There is more than one interpretation of this verse.** The literal interpretation is that God will restore the health of one who is sick. Another interpretation is that when James states that the sick person will be restored and raised up, he is referring to the ultimate restoration and raising from death to life eternal.

Was one of your questions, **"Why doesn't God heal everyone?"** We have all prayed for the physical healing of others. Think of the thousands of prayers that have ascended to heaven on behalf of just one person who was sick. People prayed in the name of the Lord. They prayed in faith--believing that God could heal. Yet, the person was not restored to health here on earth. It was not God's will that the person be healed in this life. The healing and restoration took place in the person's heavenly home. We might ask: Did God answer the believers' prayers for the sick person? Some say that God answered those prayers by receiving the person into Heaven--restored and raised up.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. How many times did Paul ask God to remove the thorn of suffering from his flesh? _____ What was God's response? _____

How, then, did Paul respond to God's answer? _____

Paul prayed in faith, but God did not choose to remove his infirmity. God answered Paul's prayer; however, He answered it with "no," or "not yet." When believers pray in faith for the sick to be healed, sometimes God miraculously heals a person here on earth. Sometimes, as in Paul's case, God answers with "no" or "not yet." Often, God answers the prayers of the faithful by restoring and raising up the person in Heaven.

Was another of your questions, **"What is the relationship between sickness, sin, and forgiveness in verse 15?"** Some physical ailments can be a result of personal sin. For example, a person who harbors bitterness toward someone may find that he or she has chronic depression, ulcers, or other physical ailments. Note that James says, **"and if** he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." The **"if"** here indicates that not all illness is the result of sin; however, if that is the case, God can restore a person physically as well as spiritually.

There is yet **another interpretation of James 5:14-15. Could it be that James is not referring to physical sickness in these verses?** This is John MacArthur's interpretation. Although most translations from Greek to English use the word "sick," MacArthur points out that the Greek word *astheneō* can be translated "weak" or "feeble." MacArthur reminds us that the believers were weary and beaten down. He refers to the beginning of James' letter when James says, "Count it all joy when you experience various trials" and the "testing of your faith." Thus, MacArthur suggests that James' true meaning was, "Is anyone among you weak?" In MacArthur's interpretation, James is saying, "If you're suffering, pray. If you've hit bottom and you're weak, and the power's gone out of your life and out of your prayers, and you're overwhelmed with the persecution and the trials and the struggles, then go to the spiritually strong and let them pray over you." The spiritually strong come alongside the weak to lift them up.

In **verse 16**, what does James tell the believers to do?

Why does he tell them to do those things? _____

In this verse, James reminds all believers of the need to remain healthy by making amends for any wrongs they have committed and by forgiving anyone who has wronged them. The result is that the believers will be made right (righteous) before God. **Note that once a person is right before God, his/her prayer can accomplish much.**

In **verses 17-18**, James illustrates the effective prayer of a righteous man, the prophet, Elijah by reminding the believers of Elijah's prayers.

How does James describe Elijah? _____

James was emphasizing that Elijah was not a super human being. He was just like they were.

What happened when he prayed the first time? _____

What happened when he prayed the second time?

Elijah knew what to pray for and when to pray for it because he was being led by the Holy Spirit at a time when the rulers of Israel worshiped idols and turned their backs on God. God answered Elijah's prayers in miraculous ways. Chuck Swindoll states that, "A righteous believer today can be in tune with the Spirit's leading and know how to pray, when to pray, and what to pray for. But even when we don't have a clear sense of God's leading in a matter, we can always pray for the things God has told us to always pray for explicitly in the Bible" (*Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary*, p. 129).

The fact that Elijah's prayers altered the cycle of nature should encourage us to pray with the conviction that our prayers can alter our lives and the lives of others.

In summary:

No matter what our circumstances---distress, elation, sickness, sin--we should pray.
(Remember that singing praises is a form of prayer.)

As members of the Body of Christ, it is essential for us to maintain a forgiving and a forgiven relationship with one another and to pray for one another.

Prayer:

Dear Father,

You alone are worthy of my praise and worship. I thank You for Your faithfulness to me and to our fellowship of believers. I want to draw closer to You and to know Your will for my life as You reveal Your truths to me. Please reveal to me any sin in my life that would interfere with my relationship with You or with anyone else. Please strengthen our fellowship as we lift up one another in prayer. May I pray earnestly with faith, and may I prove to be a support to those in need of prayer. Father, teach me to pray without ceasing--to make prayer such a natural part of my day that I include You in my thoughts intermittently throughout every waking hour. Teach me, Lord, to be still and listen for Your Holy Spirit as He speaks to me. I pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

