

## James

### Lesson #18, Chapter 5:12-20

As we come to our last lesson in James, please read Chapter 5 before beginning this lesson. Be sure to ask the Lord for His help in your study because there's so much to learn and understand in this section!

1. Summarize the flow of thought in verses 1-11.
2. Verse 12 starts with a contrast that clearly links it with the previous instruction. What command is given in verse 12? Why is obedience to that command so important (verse 12)?
3. How does verse 12 line up with what we've studied in verses 1-11?
4. Explain what kind of "swearing" we're dealing with in verse 12. See also Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22; 2 Corinthians 1:17-20.
5. Living under trial and suffering can wear down the spiritual robustness of even the most mature believer. What oaths or vows might we be tempted to make when life is hard, and our hearts are weighed down in trial? See also James 1:13-17.
6. Continuing with the theme of patient endurance while suffering (5:7-11), James then gives what advice in verse 13? How are both responses wise counsel when we're in the midst of affliction? See also James 1:2-5.

7. Verses 14 and 15 give us the opportunity to do some amateur sleuthing and apply important Bible study principles in the process. Words usually have a range of meanings, which is why it's important to remember *the context determines a word's meaning*. In verse 14 we have, "Is anyone among you *sick*?" Another way that word has been translated is "*weak*." Then in verse 15 we read, "and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is *sick*." The word translated "sick" in verse 15 is a different Greek word than the one in verse 14. Another way the word "sick" in verse 15 can be translated is "*grown weary*." Write out verses 14-15 and insert "*weak*" instead of "sick" in verse 14 and insert "*has grown weary*" in place of "sick" in verse 15.
  
8. How does translating those Greek words as *weak* and *grown weary*, rather than "sick," change the meaning of verses 14-15? And how does that alternate translation fit the context of the passage better?

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*Take the time to read the sections below as Ron Blue, and then John MacArthur, provide helpful insights into our passage:*

Ron Blue writes, "James asked a third question and then answered it fully. **Is any one of you sick?** A great deal of misunderstanding has resulted from these verses. Some seem to teach from this passage that full physical health is always just a prayer away. Others have found in this passage justification for "extreme unction" (a practice begun in the eighth century). Still others have tried to relate the process outlined by James to the modern practice of invoking God ("pray over him") and using medicine ("anoint him with oil")—prayer plus a physician.

The heart of the problem lies in just what James meant when he referred to the "sick." Actually there is no reason to consider "sick" as referring exclusively to physical illness. The word *asthenei* literally means "to be weak." Though it is used in the Gospels for physical maladies, it is generally used in Acts and the Epistles to refer to a weak faith or a weak conscience (cf. Acts 20:35; Rom. 6:19; 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:9–12). That it should be considered "weak" in this verse is clear in that another Greek word (*kamnonta*) in James 5:15, translated **sick person**, literally means "to be weary." The only other use in the New Testament (Heb. 12:3) of that word clearly emphasizes this same meaning.

James was not referring to the bedfast, the diseased, or the ill. Instead he wrote to those who had grown weary, who had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of suffering. These are the ones who **should call** for the help of **the elders of the church**. The early church leaders were instructed (1 Thes. 5:14) to “encourage the timid” and “help the weak” (*asthenōn*).

James said that the elders should **pray over him and anoint him with oil**. It is significant that the word “anoint” is *aleipsantes* (“rub with oil”) not *chriō* (“ceremonially anoint”). The former is the “mundane” word and the latter is “the sacred and religious word” (Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, ninth ed. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950, pp. 136–37). “Therefore James is not suggesting a ceremonial or ritual anointing as a means of divine healing; instead, he is referring to the common practice of using oil as a means of bestowing honor, refreshment, and grooming” (Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138. July/September 1981: 264). The woman “poured” (*aleiphō*) perfume on Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:38). A host “put oil” (*aleiphō*) on the head of his guest (Luke 7:46). A person who is fasting should not be sad and ungroomed, but should “put oil” (*aleiphō*) on his head, and wash his face (Matt. 6:17). Thus James’ point is that the “weak” (*asthenei*) and “weary” (*kamnōnta*) would be refreshed, encouraged, and uplifted by the elders who rubbed oil on the despondents’ heads and prayed for them.

For the fallen, discouraged, distressed weary believer, restoration is assured and the elders’ **prayer offered in faith will make the sick person** (lit., “weary one”) **well** (i.e., will restore him from discouragement and spiritual defeat), and **the Lord will raise him up**.

That the restoration is spiritual, not physical, is further clarified by the assurance, **if he has sinned, he will be forgiven**. Many physically ill Christians have called on elders to pray for them and to anoint them with oil, but a sizable percentage of them have remained sick. This fact suggests that the passage may have been mistakenly understood as physical restoration rather than spiritual restoration.”<sup>1</sup>

John MacArthur makes similar helpful comments for us as well: “James directs those who are “sick,” meaning weakened by their suffering to call for the elders of the church for strength, support, and prayer.

**5:14 anointing him with oil.** Lit. “rubbing him with oil”: 1) possibly this is a reference to ceremonial anointing (*See note on Lev. 14:18; Mark 6:13*); 2) on the other hand, James may have had in mind medical treatment of believers physically bruised and battered by persecution. Perhaps it is better to understand the

<sup>1</sup>J. Ronald Blue, “James,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 834–835.

anointing in a metaphorical sense of the elders' encouraging, comforting, and strengthening the believer.

**5:15 prayer of faith.** The prayer offered on their behalf by the elders. **save the sick.** Deliver them from their suffering because they have been weakened by their infirmity, not from their sin, which was confessed. **committed sins ... be forgiven.** Not by the elders, since God alone can forgive sins (Is. 43:25; Dan. 9:9; Mark 2:7). That those who are suffering called for the elders implies they had a contrite, repentant heart, and that part of their time with the overseers would involve confessing their sins to God."<sup>2</sup>

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9. What other insights did you gain from those two commentators that helped you understand verses 14-15 better?
  
10. What contributes to our feeling spiritually weak or weary? See Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 11:27-30; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; Revelation 2:2-6.
  - a. Describe what it's like when you're feeling spiritually *weak* and *weary* due to difficulties, persecutions, temptations, suffering, or trials.
  
11. Why would it be helpful to have the elders, the spiritual leaders of your church, come and pray for you when you're feeling weak and weary?

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<sup>2</sup>John MacArthur Jr., ed., [\*The MacArthur Study Bible\*](#), electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1934.

12. Notice that if we are feeling *weak* spiritually, we're told we're to call the elders to come pray for us. Have you ever put that into practice or seen it done? What things might tempt us not to follow through on this instruction? What is the intended benefit of asking the elders to pray for us? See verse 15.
  
13. What is the hoped-for result of anointing a spiritually weak and weary person with oil? See Ezekiel 16:8-10; 2 Chronicles 28:15; Luke 7:44-46; 10:33-34 for some examples.
  
14. When we feel spiritually weak and weary, what promises do we have from God to encourage and strengthen our souls? See Matthew 11:28; Romans 8:26; Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 12:1-3; James 5:17-18 for a few.
  
15. When are we to confess our sins to one another and ask for prayer according to verses 13-16?
  - a. What is the intended benefit of our mutual sharing and bearing of one another's burdens from verse 16? See also Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 12:12-13.
  
16. Notice the reciprocal effect of prayer in these verses. What do you see happening in verses 13-18 as we engage in prayer?
  - a. What picture is painted of the way we are to interact with each other from these verses? What do you notice about *one* of the purposes of our relationship with each other from verses 13-16?

17. What encouragement does James give us, so we'll persevere and engage in this aspect of loving one another? See the end of verse 16.
  
18. What example of effective prayer on behalf of others is then given in verses 17-18?
  
19. What is the point of the phrase "with a nature like ours" (verse 17) in light of this discussion on praying for one another? Consider the context of this paragraph as you answer.
  
20. How is the illustration about Elijah to be an encouragement to us as we seek to minister to one another? Remembering the context here, why do we *need* this grand example of powerful prayer when it comes to encouraging our weak and weary brethren?
  
21. Explain how verses 19-20 perfectly align with the instruction in verses 13-18. See Jude 20-23.
  
22. How are verses 19-20 a fitting epitaph to all James' instruction in this book?

"The essence of James's letter is a call to action (works) that allows truth to triumph over sin and error. This is the essence of everything he wrote."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, [\*Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary\*](#), The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 684.

23. What commands or instruction from this book do you want to keep front and center of your mind and heart?

“Faith without works cannot be called faith. Faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work, it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must be there, but it must be more. It must inspire action. *Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith must manifest itself in works of faith.*”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, [\*Talk Thru the Bible\*](#) (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1983), 463.