

## Two Essential Care Ministries

James 5:13-20

**James - taking truth to struggle, pastoring us...**

Pastor Shane expounded James 5:7-12 wonderfully last week.

I know you all appreciate Pastor Shane's ministry here at IDC.

- **I take special delight in it because I have known Shane since he was about 12 years old.....** When we were about to move here to start IDC, he called and wanted to be part. As the core team was developing, and as we were about to launch our first worship service at a public site, we were dividing responsibilities among ourselves. We began talking about the "**Safety and Care Team**" ... I scanned the room, and pointed out Michael and Joseph quickly, and skipped over Shane. **Now, Shane's brother is a Navy Seal. I've also known him from his childhood days. He would be a good Safety and Care guy**, but that's not what I thought of with Shane! Shane asked, "**What about me? What are you trying to say?**" I said, "**Well, you can be on the Care team!**"

Today, I want you to see from this text that **if you are part of the IDC community, then you are on the Care Team!**

The elders (pastoral leaders) are singled out in this passage; but the entire church is also given responsibility (v. 16, "one another," and 19-20, "anyone" "someone").

James highlights two "care ministries of the church" as he closes this letter:

**(1) the ministry of prayer (13-18), and (2) the ministry of restoration (19-20).**

James is a pastor and he cares about his people. That's what it's about: people.

### **#1: The Ministry of Prayer (5:13-18)**

Remember, one of the nicknames of James was "**Old Camel Knees.**"

- The book opens (James 1:5) and closes with teaching on *prayer*.

#### **A. Instruction for Prayer: Pray in All Seasons (13-16)**

**Prayer is mentioned in every verse** in verses 13-18!

- It's easy to get distracted by various questions here, but don't miss the big idea! **Pray!**

James hits the basic experiences of life – *happy*, *suffering*, and *sick*.

**"How you all doing?"**

#### **i. The Season of Suffering (13a)**

- "Are you experiencing anything bad?" **Have you prayed about it?**
- James opened his letter talking about "**trials**" (1:2f; last week: 7-12).
- **The Psalmists are regularly wrestling through this – hard things happening to God's people. "How Long Oh Lord?" they ask.**
  - **Maybe you are asking this about a bad job, a tough financial difficulty, an illness, or your never-ending college or seminary degree!**

- The Psalms would be a great place to begin your prayer in suffering, as about 1/3 are laments. Read the Psalms. Memorize the Psalms. Jesus had memorized the Psalms.
- As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the people would have been singing Psalms 113-118, the Hallel Psalms.

When trials come – **Complain?** No. **Get angry at God?** No. **Fight with others?** No. **Pray.**

**What are to pray about?** Look at the book context of this command.

- Pray that you could count it as **joy** (1:2-3).
  - Recount how God cares his children, and that he is working out his gracious purposes even in the midst of trials.
  - **Believe that God can make a bad thing, a glorious thing!**
- Pray for **wisdom** in the situation (1:5)
- Pray for faithful **perseverance** (1:12)
- Pray that you will **not fight** with others (4:1ff).
- Pray that you can be **patient** in the trial (5:7-12)
- Pray that God would **remove the trial** or grant you **strength to endure**.

## ii. The Season of Cheer (13b)

You may think everyone's suffering, but no. Some of you are cheerful.

- **Some of you got engaged – to a person you actually like!**
- **We had a wedding here yesterday!**
- **Soon these folks will be in category one (suffering), but for now they're cheerful!**
- Some people aren't cheerful because they're suffering; some people aren't cheerful because they're not grateful.
  - I get cheerful when I consider what God has done for me.
  - I love my wife. I love my kids. I love this church. I love the kids in our church. I love the old people in our church – last week one of our older saints said, **“We old people are taking over this church! We're going to keep you young guys straight.”** Amen. I love our middle aged people.
- There's a lot to be cheerful about if you will stop and consider the blessings God has given you.

When happy – **Smile?** No. Though you might want to give that a try! **Rub it in our faces?** No. James says: **“Sing praise.”**

- This is a **command** – sing praise.
- This command is throughout the Bible isn't it, esp in Psalms? Praise God in song.
- **Praise breaks the power of idolatry; it lifts us from despair; it glorifies God; it can encourage those around us.**
- Do you do this? **Do you sing praise?**

## iii. The Season of Sickness (14-16)

Again, there's a call to pray. But this one comes with a longer explanation.

- James first directs the elders, and then the church in general.

## 1. A Regular Pastoral Ministry (14-15a)

**Sick** - the word is “**weak**” – a broad term, physical, mental, even a tormented conscious.

- In verse 15a, he uses a different word to mean “**wear out**” – that which causes exhaustion.
- James has **a serious condition** in mind.
- Further, James seems to imply someone who is **bedridden**.
  - Clue 1 – Pray “**over them**” (14) – only appears here.
  - Clue 2 – “**the Lord will raise them up**” (15)

When I such a condition, request “**the elders of the church**” and let them pray over him **anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**” (14).

- The **elders** – He doesn’t say, “call the **apostles**.”
  - They had particular healing powers it seems in the book of Acts (Peter’s shadow healed people! Paul brought Eutychus back to life!).
- **These are the ordinary elders – that is the pastors.**
  - Pastors/Overseers/Elders are used interchangeably in the NT. (cf., Acts 20)
  - We don’t have pastors and then a board of elders.
  - We have **pastors/elders/overseers/shepherds**.
  - There’s a difference in a German Pastor and German Shepherd when you are talking about dogs! Moises: “I got bit by a German Pastor.” (“Maybe I was a bone in his former life!”)
- When **someone is seriously ill ... very sick, bedridden, critical condition, then call the pastors for prayer.**
- Please note, James is **not** saying **get rid of your doctors!**

The elders are to pray for “**healing**.”

- He doesn’t say flashy “**miracles**.”
- **Sometimes God heals slowly, and over time.**
- Healing is a gift from God. At times, God is pleased to use our prayers to bring healing to people.
- The power is not in the elders, but in God.
- Sometimes God uses our prayers to heal people, giving a preview of the coming kingdom; sometimes He doesn’t heal. But we are to pour out our hearts to him.

“**anoint with oil in the name of the Lord...**” (14)

What is this about?

- It’s not **medicinal**. Oils may help w/ certain conditions, but that’s not what James has in mind.
- It’s **sacramental**. In some traditions, this text is used as basis for the priest to pray and remove any remnant of sin to strengthen the soul to die. **But this passage isn’t about dying, but being healed.**
- It’s **symbolic of consecration**. Perhaps even symbolic of the Holy Spirit’s power.
  - **The elders anoint the sick person with oil, as a sign of setting them apart to God, and as a means of stimulating faith in everyone.**

- Some of my sweetest memories of pastoral ministry have included this practice (though it happened more at my previous churches).

**Qualifier: You don't have to have oil to pray for healing.**

- This is **the only text in the NT that mentions this** instruction, though the apostles do it in Mark 6:13.
- **And there are many examples of people being healed apart from oil.**
- **It's not magical.**
- **You can use it, and we do from time to time.**

**This specific context doesn't seem to be in the corporate gathering, though.**

- **It seems to be at a person's home, or a hospital.**
- **The person can't get to "church" (gathering) – so the church (gathering) comes to him or her.**

**15a: The important thing is that *it's the Lord that heals!***

- **"The Lord will raise him up."** – a great choice of words – in this life or the next!
- **The Lord will heal all his people sooner or later.**

**The other important thing is that you "pray in faith."** That is you believe God works through the prayers of his people!

- The **"faith"** seems to be the faith of the **elders**.
  - **They must believe that God is bigger than the sickness!**

**2. A Spiritual and Communal Ministry (15b-16)**

- In verses 15b and 16 James brings up the topic of **sin**.
- Healing has a spiritual dimension to it, as well.
- **In 15b**, in the process of praying for this sick person, **James assumes that confession of sin is part of the prayer time. "If he/she has committed sins, he/she will be forgiven."**
- **In 16**, James directly exhorts the church (**"one another"**) to confess sin to one another.

**In James' day people tended to over-spiritualize sickness;** that is, many believed virtually all sickness was a result of the person's sin.

- Jesus corrects this idea in **John 9**. "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus says neither.
- In **Job's** life, his friends thought it was because he sinned that all these bad things were happening. But they are wrong (cf, Job 9:13-21; 29:1-30:31).

**In our day, we tend to under-spiritualize sickness.** We don't always see the connection between sin and sickness like the Bible does.

- Before healing the paralytic, Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2)
- Pool of Siloam – "stop sinning, or something worse will happen" (Jn 5:14)
- Paul to the Corinthians – some became sick and even died because they were abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30)
- Herod Antipas died when he tried to play God (Acts 12)

## Conclusions:

- All sickness is a result of sin in a broad sense. The *fall* brought sickness/death.
- But your sin **may or may not be** *directly* tied to your *specific* sickness.
- You should realize that it's quite possible that it is, perhaps more than we realize in our modern day. **You may need more than essential oils, acupuncture, medical care, and whole foods!** You may need repentance!
- But don't automatically assume that a person has cancer because of sin in his/her life!
- **Finally, while your sin may not be the root cause of an illness, your time in bed is a great opportunity for self-examination! Use that time to scan your life.**
- I think we do this instinctively.
  - When you are sick, you feel your sinfulness, you feel the fall of **humanity**.
  - You think about the **poverty of your life**, and your need for grace.
  - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (119:71)

## 16: Confess to "one another"

- James shifts from the elders in particular, to the *church in general*.
- While the elders play a special role in the case of someone who is bedridden and cannot gather together with the church, the emphasis in verse 16 is on praying *with one another and for one another*.
- **The whole church has a responsibility to pray, confess, and intercede.**
- It's not just about the elders, but the community of faith.

## God wants to heal bodies, souls, and relationships.

### "The prayer of the righteous person is powerful."

- Who is the righteous person?
- It's the person that by God's grace and through the work of Christ, are in right relationship with God. And now we are seeking to live a life of obedience.
- That's not just the elders, but the whole community.
- **It's powerful and it works? Do you believe this?**
- **Atheists mock prayer. They say we are talking to "an imaginary friend."**
- Don't be a functional atheist, believe that hears us when we pray!
- "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore, I will call on him as long as I live." (Ps 116:1-2)

## B. Inspiration for Prayer: Pray Like Elijah (17-18)

### **Elijah stands as an example for someone who will pray in faith.**

- You be like, "Yeah right." I have read the story of Elijah – how can I pray like him? He was the mighty prophet of the OT! He's the one who called down fire on the false prophets at Mt. Carmel to show who the real God was.
- But notice: We share a common humanity with him. – "a man like us."
- **God heard his prayers, whether for draught or rain.** (Read about this in 1 Kings 17-18)

## Why Is Elijah an Inspiring Example?

How was he like us?

- We can relate to **his humanity**.
- We can relate to his **times**.
  - Ahab and his wife, Jazabel, were turning people away from the living God.
  - Millions today are turning away from the Living God and trusting in all kinds of functional gods, such as money, sex, success, and entertainment, and false gods.
- We can also relate to **his obscurity**.
  - Elijah was a Tishbite. **Where is that? No one knows.**
  - **One does not have to come from an influential family to be used mightily of God.**
- We are in relationship to **His God**
  - What made Elijah so powerful? **Not his background. Not formal training.**
  - It was his **simple trust in God**. (cf., 1 Kings 18)
  - **Elijah also believed God's word.**
  - Elijah's prayer was a demonstration that he believed God's Word.
  - **God said through Elijah that a draught would come as a means of punishing Ahab and Israel for their idolatry.**
  - And there was a draught. For three years or so.
  - **Although the writer doesn't state that Elijah prayed for the draught, we read in 1 Kings 18:42 that he does pray for the draught to end, after the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, as the people see who the living God is, and the draught ends.**
  - **So we assume he was also praying for the draught to happen in the beginning, and he is praying for it to end later.**
  - All of that demonstrated Elijah knew his Bible. He knew **Deut 28**.
  - He called for what God had already promised.
  - Elijah wasn't asking God to do neat tricks in Israel.
  - He is asking God to do what he said.

**That's the prayer of "faith."**

- The prayer of faith is **not** "a name it claim it, blab it and grab it" request.
- **It is trusting in God's Word, as you pray.**
- **It is asking the Father to do something that the Father delights in doing.**

**How's your prayer life?**

- 1. Believe God answer's prayer! Pray for yourself! Pray for healing! (Psalm 103:1-5)**
- 2. Feel free to request prayer from the elders when seriously sick. We will come to you and practice this text.**
- 3. Come to the prayer room when you need prayer.**
  - **Prayer Room** – Prayer team made up of elders and members praying for physical and spiritual needs.... 3-4 people per service available...
  - **There will always be a place to go and a person you can pray with**

#### 4. Pray in Growth Groups

- A great reason to make small group a priority: the ministry of prayer.

#### 5. Ask people to pray for you, and ask people how you can pray for them.

- Don't avoid seeking the prayers of others out of **pride** (because you don't like asking for help), or because **you fear disappointment** if healing doesn't happen.

### #2: The Ministry of Restoration (5:19-20)

The letter of James doesn't end like a typical letter. It's a summons to action. That's a fitting conclusion to this book of action!

James bring up a new topic, but not totally unrelated.

The family of God should pray together for the sake of the sick,  
and the family of God should work together for the sake of the straying.

19: "My brothers" – James' favorite expression.

"If anyone among you" (5:19) sounds like someone in the community of faith.

"wandering from the truth"

- If anyone is wandering away from godliness, from Christ-likeness.
- The truth is something to be *done*, as well as something to *believe*.
- The nature of the wandering here seems to be **very serious, i.e., they are on a ruinous and destructive path.**

**Some wander away theologically.** They stop believing the essentials of the faith.

**Some wander away morally.** They rebel against God's Word.

**Some wander away relationally.** They get out of community.

**Result:** They are **vulnerable**. The wolves will come.

If you get out of community, and you get out of Scripture, then you will wander.

"bring them back"

- Ever had a kid run away? When I was little, they knew where I was. (Other ex: Kmart)
- You don't just sit around! (Example: KMart). There will be some of the faith family that will stray for the truth of the gospel.
- They will wander off into sin. Sometimes shameful and tragic sin.
- We must avoid "slandering" them (4:11-12) and gossiping about them.
- You also should avoid saying, "Well, they should come home." Yes, they should be they are the one's straying. You have to go get them.
- We should do this gently according to Galatians 6:1, not in arrogant self-righteousness.

**5:20** – “will save his soul from death and “cover a multitude of sins”

**That is, the straying person.**

**God alone does the actual saving, but God uses his people in the restoration process.**

**God uses his people to point the straying to the mercy of Christ, who forgives and restores sinners.**

**When you are truly converted, you are sealed and secure.**

- **But how does God protect us from ever wandering away from Him?**
- Well, he works through our **affections**, through his **Word**, and by His **Spirit**.
- But we must also include the fact **that He uses his people** to help us persevere.
- He uses his church.
- **If you get out of the Word and out of community, you will wander away.**

**This is one of the reasons we have a high view of the church – we need each other!**

- **Becoming a member of a church is an act of humility; it’s saying, “I need someone to know me, and come after me when I stray because I know that I am prone to wander, prone to leave the God I love.”**

**James is the little brother of Jesus**, and he only wrote one letter.

**And what’s on his mind in the end? Those who wander away. He’s a shepherd**

**So then, if you are part of this faith community,  
then you are on the care team.**

**Know some who are sick? Know some who are straying?**

- **Lift them up.**
- **Bring them back.**

**Praise God we have a good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, Jesus.**

- **Jesus loves his people. He came after us when we were far away. He leaves the 99 and goes looking for the one.**
- **He gave his own life for the sheep. He rose for us.**
- **He makes us righteous and now we can pray. We have access to the Father.**

**What a privilege to be part of his people, and take part in these care ministries.**

**And what hope we have, as we consider that one day there will be no more need to pray for healing, and there will be no more sin that we can commit.**

**He is coming, not on as the Galilean carpenter on a colt, but the next time as a conquering King!**

**He will put all our enemies under his feet, and we will have total shalom – total physical, spiritual, and relational healing.**



**Until that day, by the power of the Spirit, let's pursue faithfulness as the people of God.**