

Spiritual Passion

Realistic to the very end, James is about to bring his practical letter to a close. With the reality of Christ's return before us, he urges us to press on with spiritual passion—with patience and persistent prayer.

1. What have you found yourself praying about the most during our study of James?
Pause and pour out your heart again to the God who hears and answers prayer.

Prayerfully **read** James 5:12-20. Invite the Holy Spirit to ignite in your heart a renewed passion for the Lord, the Almighty God.

2. Record the number of times the word “prayer” or one of its synonyms is used in the last eight verses of James.

James 5:12 is the first of several reproofs and admonitions that close out this epistle. **Reread** and observe this verse carefully. Consider how 5:12 connects with the previous contexts in James and with the immediate context of this passage. Consult Matthew 5:33-37 as well.

3. Write out your interpretation of James 5:12 (without consulting commentaries if possible).

Writing from a heart of compassion to his “beloved brethren,” James’ emphasis on prayer provides a fitting climax to his letter.

4. Note the various times or conditions under which James tells us to pray (James 5:13-18).

Someone has rightly said: “through prayer, we *hallow every pleasure and sanctify every pain.*”
Reread and linger over James’ words in 5:13-18.

5. How does heeding James’ admonitions in 5:13 lead to a balanced prayer life?

The concept James is addressing in 5:13a is prayer in times of general distress and trouble. “Sufferings” can include physical illness, but here he is suggesting something much broader.

6. Why is a strong commitment to prayer essential for enduring affliction and suffering?
Look at Luke 18:1-5; 22:39-44 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 for added insight.

7. James’ counsel to those who are happy or cheerful, “*let him sing praises*” is in the present tense, which implies that such prayer should be an element of daily life (5:13b).

Take a moment to give thanks and “make holy” the good things God has given to you today!

James moves now to the specific circumstances of the person who is sick. This section has been the focus of much misunderstanding over the years. One of the problems lies in what James meant when he referred to the “sick.” It should be noted that the Greek word translated “sick” is a general term that literally means “to be weak.” The term can denote spiritual, physical or mental weakness. There is good reason to interpret “sick” in a more general sense in this passage, not referring *exclusively* to physical illness. The weak here could be those that have been defeated in spiritual battle—who have lost the ability to endure their suffering and who may be physically or mentally broken and in pain. This rendering seems to be more in line with the context of this passage and the book as a whole.

Another clue comes from the Greek word James uses for “healing,” which includes the elements of emotional, physical and spiritual healing.

8. From James 5:14-15 consider the following:

a. Who is the initiator of prayer in this situation? Why is this important?

b. Who does the praying? What is noteworthy about the spiritually strong believer praying for the spiritually weak or sick? Also consider Galatians 6:2.

9. What does it mean to you that God is intimately concerned about healing the brokenness of our lives? When have you experienced God's healing touch?

10. Although James connects sickness and sin in 5:15, is sin always associated with sickness? What evidence do you find in James 5:15; John 9:1-3 and Job chapter 1?

Another factor that makes this passage intriguing and difficult to interpret is the fact that James makes an unconditional statement: "*And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.*" (NIV) Taken in isolation, this statement seems to be saying that sick believers can *expect* physical healing through the prayers of the elders. But the testimony of Scripture is more complex. See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 for example.

We can resolve this interpretive dilemma in several ways:

- 1) For the discouraged, distressed, weary or fallen believer, restoration is assured and the elders' prayer offered in faith will make the sick person ("weary one") well.
- 2) The "prayer offered in faith" by the elders could be a prayer in which they have the absolute conviction that it is God's will that this particular sick person be healed. This type of faith is a spiritual gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9. The restoration of health would naturally follow only when it is God's will to do the healing.

11. a. What additional privilege have we been given as believers when we are in need of spiritual restoration (5:16a)?

- b. Under what conditions can believers be open with one another?

There is something remarkably uplifting about fellowshiping with other believers and carrying each other's burdens in prayer.

12. Describe a time when God clearly ministered to you through the fellowship of believers.

James concludes this section on prayer by reminding us of the great power of prayer! **Reread and memorize** James 5:16a.

13. a. How would you define a “righteous person?” Why are their prayers powerful?

b. Does a righteous person always receive what is being asked for? Explain.

Pause and Reflect: The prayer James refers to in 5:16a is literally *fervent, energetic, and passionate*. Do your prayers reflect that spirit?

To further demonstrate the power of righteous prayer and make sure his readers understand his point, he illustrates it with a popular Old Testament prophet. **Reread** and ponder James 5:17-18.

14. How does this example from Elijah’s life encourage you in your own prayer life?

As James brings his letter to an end he turns to the situation of a believer who has wandered away from the truth. **Review** James 5:19-20. This is his final word to us if we are going to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. *Notice how tenderly and hopefully he writes these sentences.*

15. What great effects can result from our continued participation in God’s redemptive plan?

Throughout his letter James has set before his readers the wonderful character of God! He is the God who desires our perfection and completion (1:4), who gives generously without reproach (1:5), the source of all good gifts (1:17), who gives grace to the humble (4:6), and who is always at hand (5:8), nearer than the very trials we are going through.

16. As you have gazed upon our living, redeeming, life-giving God, and listened to our “beloved James” how have you been challenged to live out your faith more passionately?