

# Studies in James

## Lesson 20

### Suffering, Sickness, Sin and Healing

#### INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the most controversial issues of our day has to do with DIVINE HEALING.
  - A. Some people travel half-way around the world to get into touch with those who CLAIM to have the gift of healing.
    1. One such man is simply known as John of God, who is quickly becoming known throughout the world as a divine healer.
      - a. What's so interesting about John of God is that he lives in a remote village in Brazil, hours away from the nearest city of any size.
      - b. He claims that the healings he performs comes by God channeling through him the powers of well-known deceased medical doctors (all of whom were Latin American), and even claims that when he was only sixteen the "entity" of King Solomon entered his body and enabled him to perform a divine healing.

2. Last year ABC PRIMETIME LIVE, and it's co-anchor John Quinones, traced the story of four persons who came to John of God for healing.
  - a. In the end, one man was actually able to medically confirm that a rapidly progressing brain tumor had actually decreased in size – one medical authority said that the tumor may have simply "burned itself out" – which sometimes happens with certain kinds of tumors.
  - b. But the other three persons either showed no significant improvement, or their condition actually worsened from the lack of proper medical treatment.
  - c. One of those was a young South African woman who had been diagnosed with breast cancer.
3. Imagine yourself seated on an airplane next to this woman as she tells you the story of John of God, and that she's traveling to this remote Brazillian village to be healed.
  - a. She tells you how her doctors advised her to undergo surgery and then to followup with intensive chemo and radiation therapy, but instead, she has decided to place her faith entirely upon God working through this world-renowned healer.
  - b. Then she turns to you and asks, "What do you think about what I'm doing?"

(1). HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THAT QUESTION?

4. Testimonies abound of men and women who claim that they have been miraculously healed by placing their faith in such men as John of God.
  - a. Sadly, in the case of this woman, the followup report that was done months later showed that her breast cancer had spread significantly – and yet she was preparing to make another trip to Brazil to visit John of God.
- B. But what does the Bible say about the subject of miraculous divine healing?
  1. Could it be that the claims of those who have been healed are authentic?
  2. And is it God's will that everyone be healed?
  3. Well, I believe **James 5:13-16** will give us some assistance in FINDING those answers.
- C. But, let me say a couple of things first about what I PERSONALLY believe – and I believe most of you probably believe the same way:
  1. I BELIEVE in divine healing – but I DO NOT BELIEVE in divine HEALERS.
  2. I BELIEVE in faith healing – I DO NOT BELIEVE in faith HEALERS.

- a. I believe that God through His providence, and in His sovereign grace and power, CAN reach down and change a condition that put's a person back on their feet for years, and DOES that APART FROM any individual who claims to have certain powers.
3. Let me give you a good example of this from the New Testament:
    - a. **Philippians 2:25-27** – *Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; 26 since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*
    - b. Even though the apostle Paul had been blessed with the ability to miraculously heal others, there is no indication that Epaphroditus, who had been ministering to PAUL'S needs, was healed miraculously.
    - c. But there should be NO QUESTION about the healing of Epaphroditus being DIVINE – Paul said, *he was sick almost unto death; [and yet] God had mercy on him.*

4. I DON'T ascribe this event to a MIRACLE, but I FIRMLY BELIEVE it was God's DIVINE RESPONSE to the prayers of the righteous.
  - a. HOW God does this is a COMPLETE MYSTERY to me.
  - b. I have ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA HOW God accomplishes this, but I BELIEVES HE DOES.
  - c. Otherwise, WHY do we spend time praying for the sick?
- D. So, with all this in mind, let's take a moment to consider the text from James together.

1. **James 5:13-16** – *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

**BODY:**

- I. To begin, there are FIVE FOUNDATIONAL FACTS we need to understand that will help us in our study of **James 5:13-16**.

A. First, we need to understand that the scriptures speak of TWO

CLASSES OF SIN:

1. There is the sin of ADAM – which has had an impact on mankind ever since those days in the Garden of Eden by introducing sin and death into the world.
2. Then there are the sins of YOU AND ME – which are committed through our OWN disobedience, and have a direct impact on OUR OWN lives (although they may ALSO impact those around us).

B. Second, the scriptures ALSO speak of TWO RESULTS OF SIN:

1. As for the sin of ADAM – It brought about the introduction of disease and death into the world.
  - a. **Romans 5:12** – *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...*
2. And, as for the sins of YOU AND ME, the result is alienation from God – our sins separate us from being in fellowship with God – a form of SPIRITUAL death.

C. Third, the scriptures also speak of a LINK between PERSONAL SINS and SICKNESS, and even a LINK between PERSONAL SINS and DEATH.

1. For example, King Saul (of Old Testament times) drifted further and further away from God until, in his deepest moment of depression and failure, Saul committed suicide – falling on his own sword.
2. David was so overwhelmed by the guilt of the sin of adultery and murder that he was plunged into the very depths of depression and despair.
  - a. **Psalm 38:1-10** – *O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! 2 For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. 3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. 6 I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. 7 For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. 8 I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart. 9 Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. 10 My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.*

b. But David knew the only way to CURE all the PHYSICAL and EMOTIONAL pain he was suffering was to CONFESS the sins that were CAUSING the physical and emotional pain.

(1). **Psalm 38:17-18** – *For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me. 18 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.*

(2). When you read **Psalm 51**, you're reading David's heartfelt confession to God for all he had done. And what was the result of this confession?

(3). **Psalms 32:1-5** – *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

(a). The NIV and New American Standard Version say, *and you forgave the GUILT of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)*



- D. Fourth, just as the scriptures teach there sometimes IS a direct link between SICKNESS and SIN, the scriptures ALSO teach there are times when there is ABSOLUTELY **NO** RELATIONSHIP between PERSONAL SINS and SICKNESS.
1. **John 9:1-3** – *As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*
  2. The most effective way to cure a sickness that is NOT related to sin is through the PRAYER OF FAITH, and through the use of the BEST MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY available.
- E. And finally, and perhaps the one fact that is MOST difficult to understand and accept is the fact that the scriptures teach it is NOT ALWAYS God's will that someone be healed.
1. For example, the apostle Paul had the gift of healing, and yet:
    - a. He had to leave Trophimus in Miletus, where Trophimus remained sick. **(2 Timothy 4:20)**
    - b. Paul himself battled an undisclosed illness which went unhealed – he called it a *"thorn in the flesh"*. **(2 Corinthians 12:7-10)**

2. It is a popular belief in our day that it's God's will for EVERYONE to be healed.
  - a. This belief is based on a BLATANT PERVERSION of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the ministry of Christ.
    - (1). *"...and by His stripes we are healed."* **(Isaiah 53:5b)**
  - b. However, this verse is referring to SPIRITUAL ILLNESS not physical.
    - (1). Jesus died so that we might be healed SPIRITUALLY.
  - c. This is the same idea expressed by Peter.
    - (a). **1 Peter 2:24** – Speaking of Jesus, *"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – BY WHOSE STRIPES YOU WERE HEALED."*
  
- II. Now that we understand these FUNDAMENTAL FACTS, let's notice that James presents THREE CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE and he tells EACH WHAT THEY SHOULD DO.
  - A. First, James presents THE SUFFERING: *Is anyone among you suffering?* **(James 5:13a)**
    1. The term *"suffering"* means "in distress, or afflicted."

2. This can refer to someone who is plagued with ANXIETY, or who is undergoing MENTAL or EMOTIONAL ILLNESS, or ANY OTHER difficulty for which there seems no answer to immediate relief.
- B. The second category is THE CHEERFUL. *Is anyone cheerful? (James 5:13b)*
1. This refers to those who are HAPPY, SATISFIED and enjoying GOOD HEALTH.
    - a. It may seem ODD that James would have to give some advice to CHEERFUL people – but he did.
    - b. Sometimes people who are cheerful – who are happy and genuinely satisfied – are looked down upon as being "shallow," "superficial," and "faking it."
    - c. But it seems that James wants the CHEERFUL to NOT feel guilty because it never seems to rain on their parade, and when it DOES, they're able to see the HUMOR in it and laugh.
  2. We need to thank God for people like this because they help the REST OF US take life a little less serious than we do. They teach us to watch the flowers grow on rainy days.
- C. But the THIRD category James speaks about is THE SICK. *Is anyone among you sick? (James 5:14)*

1. The word "*sick*" refers to those who are "without strength," or "ill to the point of being incapacitated."
    - a. James is referring to those who are SERIOUSLY ill – those who are unable to continue on with the responsibilities of life.
  2. Over the years, brethren have debated whether the "sickness" mentioned here by James is a PHYSICAL SICKNESS or a SPIRITUAL SICKNESS.
    - a. Although I've debated BOTH sides of the issue, I've since come to the conclusion that James is speaking of a PHYSICAL SICKNESS that is directly LINKED to some UNCONFESSED SIN in the life of a brother or sister.
    - b. We need to remember that our brothers and sisters in Christ who are SPIRITUALLY ill (deeply involved in sin) often find themselves suffering from some PHYSICAL or EMOTIONAL illness.
      - (1). David's description in **Psalm 38** of the PHYSICAL pain he suffered because of his SPIRITUAL sickness (because of his sin) is clear.
- III. Now, let's go back and see what James tells those in each of these categories to DO.

A. To the SUFFERING, James says they should PRAY! – *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. (James 5:13)*

1. James doesn't promise that prayer will always result in an END to the suffering.

2. However, we CAN pray for deliverance from the suffering, and if it be God's will to allow us to CONTINUE to suffer, then we can certainly pray for the STRENGTH, ENDURANCE, and the PATIENCE to cope, AND we can pray for those who are MINISTERING to us during this time of suffering.

3. And yet, PRAYING is often the VERY LAST THING we want to do when we're hurting – physically, emotionally or spiritually. That's why we need to remember the admonition of:

a. **Hebrews 4:14-16** – *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

b. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests*

*be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

- B. To the CHEERFUL, James says SING! – *Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. (James 5:13)*
1. Singing is one of the BEST ways of giving praise to God – and we don't need to worry about the quality of our voice, or whether we can't carry a tune in a bucket – because our SINGING and MAKING MELODY to the Lord is in our HEARTS!
    - a. **Ephesians 5:19-20** – *Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
  2. Singing is a NATURAL expression of JOY!
    - a. This is seen over and over in the Psalms of David. When he couldn't contain his joy any longer, he sang.
  3. Singing is ALSO a good way to BECOME cheerful when we're NOT. Just try it sometime, and you'll see!
- C. And finally, James says there is something the SICK must do, something the ELDERS need to do, and finally something the LORD will do:

1. First, the SICK needs to summon the elders (spiritual leaders of the church) – *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church... (James 5:14a)*
  - a. Notice that it's the SICK person who takes the initiative.
    - (1). There's no way OTHERS can know we are sick unless we TELL them.
    - (2). This isn't just a PRIVILEGE, it's a REQUIREMENT of those who are ill.
  - b. It's only after we've announced our needs to the ELDERS (the SPIRITUAL leaders of the assembly) that THEY can become involved in ministering to us.
2. Second, James says the elders need do TWO things – *let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14b)*
  - a. The construction of the sentence in the Greek suggests that one action is done BEFORE the other. It seems to suggest that the ANOINTING WITH OIL goes BEFORE praying.
    - (1). In other words, this verse could PROBABLY be translated, "*Let them pray over him, HAVING anointed him with oil.*"

- b. But even MORE significant is the specific Greek term James uses here for "*anointing*." The word does NOT convey the thought we USUALLY ascribe to it.
  - (1). We usually think of "*anointing*" as a religious ceremony in which oil is poured on the head of someone (ie. David anointed as king).
    - (a). THAT kind of "*anointing*" would be the Greek word "*Creo*," from which we get the Greek word "Christos" – meaning "the anointed one."
  - (2). But the word "*anointing*" used in THIS verse is "*Aliepho*," which means "to apply or to rub something into the skin."
    - (a). The term is used in non-biblical literature to the plastering of walls (i.e. the smearing of something onto something else).
    - (b). In biblical times, oil was used on one who was sick for its medicinal affects.
    - (c). We find this occurring in **Luke 10:34**, when the Samaritan poured oil and wine onto the wounds of the man left for dead by robbers.
- c. In THIS verse, James is NOT talking about a ceremonial anointing, but rather the application of oil by means of rubbing or applying it to the body.



- d. But this raises a difficult question. Why would the ELDERS be the ones "*anointing*" the sick with oil? Let me at least to ATTEMPT to answer that question without stretching this passage too much.
- (1). It COULD be that James is looking at the elders of the local congregation in much the same way as David looked at the shepherd in **Psalm 23** – where the shepherd would care for wounded sheep by "*anointing*" or rubbing oil into their wounds.
  - (2). This would mean that the "*anointing*" with oil in JAMES would be a METAPHORICAL or SYMBOLIC "*anointing*."
  - (3). In other words, when the elders are confronted with someone who is suffering PHYSICAL or EMOTIONAL DISTRESS as the result of an unconfessed SIN, those elders need to exercise the same TENDER CARE in treating the SPIRITUAL ILLNESS of this brother or sister, as the SHEPHERD in **PSALM 23** exercised in tenderly caring for an injured sheep.
3. And finally, James says when the PRAYER of the ELDERS is offered in FAITH in this kind of situation, then the LORD will do THREE THINGS – all three are found in verse 15.

- a. **James 5:15a** – *the prayer of faith will SAVE the sick,*
- (1). The word "save" (Greek "sotso") refers to being RESTORED, or to a RESTORATION.
- b. **James 5:15b** – *and the Lord will raise him up*
- (1). The word "raise" (pronounced "eg-E-ro") means to waken or rouse, as well as to lift up, and in THIS context suggests the Lord will lift up the brother or sister whose life has been lying in ruin.
- (2). In other words, the Lord helps this brother or sister regain the SPIRITUAL STRENGTH to stand on their feet once again.
- c. **James 5:15c** – *And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*
- (1). James is saying, if the PHYSICAL or EMOTIONAL DISTRESS is the result of UNCONFESSED SIN, those sins will be forgiven.
- (a). Interestingly, the word "save" (Gr. "Sotso") appears in the last two verses of the book. **James 5:19-20** – *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way*

*will SAVE a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

- (b). When a brother or sister is restored to a RIGHT relationship in the SPIRITUAL sense, they are also "SAVED" (delivered) from DEATH in the SPIRITUAL sense.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. Sooner or later, if it hasn't ALREADY happened, you're going to find yourself in one of these three categories of people mentioned by James:
  - A. And it's important that we know how to handle those situations when they arise. Sooner or later, you're going to be in the category of:
    - 1. The SUFFERING – someone who is in DEEP DISTRESS and plagued with ANXIETY or suffering from some EMOTIONAL TRAUMA from which there seems to immediate relief
      - a. When you find yourself in this kind of situation, you need to PRAY.
      - b. We have a High Priest who is touched by the feelings of our weaknesses, and Who can help us find mercy and grace to help in time of need. **(Hebrews 4:14-16)**

- c. And when we pray in these situations, we have the promise that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

**(Philippians 4:6-7)**

- 2. Or, you may be fortunate enough to find yourself in the category of the CHEERFUL – someone who is happy, satisfied and enjoying life.
  - a. When you do, you need to lift your voice in praise – singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. **(Ephesians 5:19-20)**
- 3. But, then there's the possibility that sooner or later you might find yourself in the category of the SICK – someone who is without strength and incapacitated PHYSICALLY or EMOTIONALLY because of some UNCONFESSED SIN that is still lurking in the shadows of your life.
  - a. If you find yourself in this category, call for the elders of the church so they can minister to your needs.
  - b. When you do this, the Lord will:
    - (1). SAVE you – restore you.
    - (2). RAISE you up – help you stand on your feet once again.
    - (3). And, FORGIVE you of all your sins.

II. Nothing is more wonderful than being able to save a soul from death, unless it's BEING the soul who has BEEN saved from death.

A. Is it possible that YOUR soul needs to be saved from death?

1. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ, come to Christ believing that He is truly the Son of God, repent of all your past sins, confess your faith in Him before men, and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of your sins.
2. If you HAVE obeyed the gospel, but you've become infected by the disease of sin, confess that sin and call on the elders to pray for you, and minister to your spiritual needs.