

# **PRAYER, PRAISE AND HEALING - PART 1**

## **Is anyone among you suffering?**

**Dr. Derek Morris**

Preaching passage: James 5:13a  
Subject: What a believer who is suffering should do  
Complement: pray  
Exegetical idea: A believer who is suffering should pray.  
Homiletical idea: **When you are experiencing hard times, cry out to God!**  
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to pray at all times, including times when they are suffering.

### Introduction

We are about to begin an amazing study on a powerful passage from the Word of God. And I'm excited! Over the next four weeks, we will carefully and prayerfully study a life-changing passage from the New Testament book of James.

But first, let me give you a little background information. Open your bible to the book of James, near the end of the New Testament, and look with me at James 1:1-2. "....."

Who is this James who writes an epistle which bears his name? He simply identifies himself as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is it James, the brother of John, one of the sons of Zebedee? No. According to Acts 12, that James was martyred, shortly after the death of Stephen. So this epistle of James is not written by James, the brother of John.

What other James do you know in the early Christian church? Well, there was another disciple of Jesus named James. His name is recorded in Luke 6:15. James, the son of Alphaeus. But that is about all that we know of this James. He was one of the twelve. And there is little evidence to suggest that he was the author of the epistle of James.

There is another James. His name is mentioned first in Matthew 13:55. He was one of the brothers of Jesus. It's interesting that his name is mentioned first, even before Joseph, who would have been the first-born, named after his father according to Jewish custom. These men

were step brothers of Jesus, children of Joseph by a former marriage, and thus older step-brothers of Jesus. And why is James mentioned first? A good question. This James, step-brother of Jesus, eventually becomes a believer! Along with his other brother, James accepted that Jesus was more than just his step-brother. Jesus was his Messiah. Dr. Luke tells us in Acts 1:14 that the brothers of Jesus, which would include James, were present with the other apostles in the upper room as they prayed together for the coming of the Holy Spirit with power. And James becomes the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem.

We find evidence of James' leadership role in several New Testament passages. Look with me at Gal 1:18-19. "....." And then in Acts 15, we find James mentioned again in connection with the importance Christian council in Jerusalem. After extensive discussion at the council, Luke records, in Acts 15:13, "....." What do James' words reveal? He is in a position of authority. A leader.

Many Bible scholars believe that it is indeed this James, leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem, who authors the epistle of James. While not identifying himself at the beginning of his epistle as "the brother of our Lord," James needs no formal introduction. He is obviously well known by all of the believers. He simply refers to himself as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you may be aware of the fact that the Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, did not appreciate the epistle of James. In fact, Luther referred to this book as "an epistle of straw." Luther was so passionate about the message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, that he saw no place for the practical counsel on Christian living of James, who pointed out that faith without works is dead.

But there is a place for the inspired testimony of James. It is part of the whole counsel of God. Study the four Gospels. Read the apostle Paul's powerful letters like the book of Romans. Read the rest of the New Testament, and read the Hebrew Scriptures. But don't discard the practical counsel on Christian living in the epistle of James.

At the close of his epistle, James asks 3 questions. We will consider the first question today, the second question next week, and we will take the last two messages to look at a vitally important third question that James asks his readers.

So, if you're ready for a life-changing study of God's inspired word through His servant James, let's turn our attention to the first question that James asks in James 5:13. James asks, in James 5:13, "Is anyone among you suffering?" Please note, before we dig anymore deeply into the text, that this question is addressed to believers. Is anyone among you..? And while this epistle is primarily addressed to Jewish Christians, "the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad," there is a powerful message for Gentile Christians as well! Is anyone among you....?

The translators of the NKJV, from which I just read, translate the next word "suffering." How does this question read in the KJV? "Is anyone among you afflicted?" What does it say in the NIV? "Is anyone of you in trouble?" Do you notice anything interesting from those 3 translations? Each one translates the last word differently. What does that tell you? It's probably not a very common word, and the meaning is not clearly defined. The verb that is used here is  $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ . It's a combination of two words:  $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ , which means bad or evil, and the verb  $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ , which means to suffer. So this verb,  $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ , literally means "to suffer evil", "to suffer bad thing", "to suffer misfortune".

But if you don't have a Greek lexicon, you can learn a great deal about this verb by

reading the two other places in the New Testament where this same verb is found. This is how we study the Bible. Line upon line, precept upon precept. We can learn from a Bible concordance that this verb  $\delta\epsilon\delta\epsilon\mu\chi\tau\omicron$  is found in two other texts in the Greek NT. Let's look at both of them! Both of these other usages are found in Paul's second letter to Timothy. Let's look first at 2 Timothy 2:9. Let's start reading from 2 Tim 2:8. "....."

Notice, that Paul gives an example of his misfortune. What happened to him? He was in chains. But I love what he says next! "But the Word of God is not chained!" Someone ought to say "Hallelujah" out there. Even when bad things happen to God's people, the Word of God is not chained. The Lord Jesus Christ is not chained. That's encouraging to me! What about you?

Let's look at the other reference where this same verb  $\delta\epsilon\delta\epsilon\mu\chi\tau\omicron$  is used. 2 Timothy 4:5. "....." Paul is saying to Timothy, "Bad things happened to me. Bad things will happen to you." Endure afflictions. That's the same verb. And what were some of the afflictions that Paul suffered? Listen to his testimony to the Christians in Corinth. 2 Corinthians 11:24-27. "....."

It seems that suffering, affliction, trouble, is part of life's journey, even for followers of Jesus. You know, there are some people who have the strange misconception that if you become a Christian, a follower of Jesus, that the rest of your life will be trouble free, a smooth ride all the way into glory land. Where did they get that idea? Jesus clearly stated in John 16:33, "In this world, you will have tribulation." Not necessarily all the time. But there will come times when you suffer evil, when you will suffer misfortune.

And some of you listening to my voice today can testify that these words are true. Some of you are suffering today. Am I speaking the truth? Some of you are afflicted. Some of you

are in trouble. And if not you, then you know someone close to you who is suffering, don't you?

So it should not surprise us that James should close his epistle to believers by asking, "Is anyone among you suffering?" Without hesitation, we can cry out "Yes!" If it's not you personally, then it's someone that you know and love.

But James doesn't just ask a question. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he gives some counsel. Just one word in the Greek text. Three words in most English translations: let him pray; let her pray. The verb that is used here is the same verb used when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane crying out to His Father. "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me." Jesus was in the midst of suffering, and He modeled for us what we must do. Pray. Cry out to God

That might sound rather obvious counsel to some. After all, didn't the apostle Paul appeal to Christians to "pray without ceasing" and to "continue earnestly in prayer"? Why do we need to be reminded to pray when we are in midst of suffering, in the midst of bad things happening to us, in the midst of misfortune? Let me suggest two reasons why we need to be reminded to pray. First, we may become so preoccupied with our trials that we forget to pray. Let me say that again. We may become so preoccupied with our trials that we forget to pray. Have you ever been in a crisis and you went all day without eating anything? It has happened to me. Just before Paul and his traveling companions were shipwrecked off the coast of Malta, he encouraged them to eat because they hadn't eaten anything for 14 days. They were all on a diet. Or a fast. They were so preoccupied with their suffering that they forgot to eat.

The same thing can happen to us in regards to prayer. It's possible to become so preoccupied with the suffering, so preoccupied with the misfortune, that we fail to pray. Perhaps

that's why James reminds us: Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Let her pray.

But there may be a second reason why James reminds us to pray when we are in the midst of suffering, in the midst of trouble, in the midst of affliction? We may become discouraged and feel like it won't do any good to pray. Have you ever felt like that? Someone gave a powerful testimony this past Wednesday evening at prayer meeting. He had been through a time of suffering, a time of trouble. He could easily have been discouraged and given up on God. But he came to prayer meeting, he asked others to pray with him and for him, and he gave testimony last Wednesday evening that Jesus is making him whole!

We all run the risk of becoming discouraged, or giving up on praying. But James appeals to us: "Pray! Pray! Pray!" James knows the Word of the Lord recorded by the Psalmist Asaph, in Psalm 50:15. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor Me." James knows the Word of the Lord recorded by the prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 33:3. "Call to Me, and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know."

And so James appeals to believers: "Is anyone among you suffering? Is anyone among you afflicted? Is anyone among you in trouble? Let him pray! Let her pray!" And if your heart agrees with James' counsel, then the next question is a practical one. "OK, then HOW should I pray?"

And that is a good question. A vital question. How should we pray when we are in the midst of suffering? My answer would be simple: however you can! Just cry out to God with a sincere heart. It doesn't have to be a complicated prayer. "O Most glorious and resplendent Creator who dwells between the cherubim..." When Jesus was in the midst of suffering, affliction and trouble, He cried out to God, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me.

Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done!” Peter, when he was sinking like a rock in the middle of a lake that was 150 feet deep—he was in trouble! And he cried out, “Lord, save me!” The thief dying on the cross next to Jesus cried out, dying for crimes that he had committed—he was suffering, he was in the midst of bad times. And he also cried out, “Lord, remember me.” That was a prayer. Nothing complicated but an earnest heart cry.

I vividly remember one of the many times that I have cried out to God. I was a close to death as I have ever been. I was driving on a mountain road in western Pennsylvania early one morning. It had just started to rain. And as I drove down a winding road on the side of a mountain I completely lost control of the vehicle. I found out later that a big coal truck had spilled some diesel fuel on the road. But I felt like I was on ice. I hit the guardrail, spun completely around. It must have looked quite dramatic from up above. Then my front bumper hooked onto the steel cable of the guardrail, my car did a handstand and was catapulted backwards upside-down off the side of the mountain. I was 26 years old. I had a young wife and a 10 month old son back home and I wanted to live.

So do you know what I did? I cried out to God. I don't remember if I was even able to vocalize my prayer. But we have a Father in heaven who can even hear out silent heart cry. Am I speaking the truth today? He hears your heart cry today. He hears my heart cry. Wherever we are on this planet, wherever we find ourselves, in the midst of trouble, in the midst of suffering, in the midst of affliction, he hears out heart cry.

Perhaps you're wondering how I survived such a terrible accident. My car was totally demolished, but praise God, my life was spared. And I don't think that I was just lucky. When you find yourself in the midst of suffering, in the midst of affliction, in the midst of trouble,

don't get so preoccupied with the trials that you forget to pray. And don't believe Satan's lie that your prayer is useless and won't accomplish a thing. Pray. Cry out to God. His promises are sure. He will be faithful to His Word. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will be with you in life and also in death. So cry out to Him, and do so with peace in your heart, because He is with you, even to the end of the age.

The message from God's Word is simple: **When you are experiencing hard times, cry out to God!** There may be someone here today, or joining us via our media ministry, and you are in the midst of a time of trouble. You are in the midst of a time of suffering. You are in the midst of a time of affliction. And you realize that you need to pray. You need to cry out to God. I want to invite you to fill out a prayer request card so that we can cry out to God on your behalf. If you are joining us via our media ministry, send us an e-mail. We want to pray with you and for you.

I also want to encourage each one of you to come to one of our 3 prayer services here at the Forest Lake Church. You say, "Pastor, I'm not suffering right now. I don't need to come to one of the prayer services." And I would respond, "Then come and pray with and for someone else who is suffering." We have a prayer service on Sabbath morning at 7:45AM in Room 9, right off the main lobby. We have two prayer services on Wednesday, one at 10:30 AM and another at 7:00 PM. Come to one of those prayer services, cry out to God, let others cry out to God on your behalf, cry out to God on behalf of those around you and you WILL be blessed.

Let this church become what God desires it to be—a house of prayer for all people. Let's hear the counsel of James. **When you are experiencing hard times, cry out to God!**