

The Journey of Faith

James 5:13-20

February 25-26, 2017

This is our final weekend message out of the book of James. This is one of the most relevant, down to earth using the wisdom from heaven, practical, in-your-face books of the New Testament.

The two great themes that run through this book are wisdom and faith. We are called to live by the wisdom that comes from above rather than the so-called wisdom of the world, of the culture around us. We are called to be different. If anyone has wisdom from above, James wrote, let it be seen in how he lives his life.

The same is true with faith. If you have living and active faith and not dead faith, it will also be seen in how you live. You should live according to your faith.

Life is a journey with many ups and downs, but faith must be an integral part of that journey, in fact, our faith should guide our steps and the word of God should light our way.

In our verses today, James connects this journey of faith to the trials, troubles, sicknesses, and difficulties of life. One of the most significant ways faith is connected to life is through prayer. Some of the greatest lessons on faith come through these verses

because these are the practical, everyday challenges of life.

Is anyone among you suffering? Is anyone among you sick? Is anyone struggling with a sin? These are part of the journey of life, but when you bring faith into life, it changes everything.

I. God's Hand is on Your Life

- When you talk about having faith through the journey of life, it really means trusting that God's hand is on you and that, by faith, you trust that His Spirit leads you.

Psalm 139:7, 9-10, Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?... If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.

- But how much does God intervene? Does He keep us from all troubles? No. Jesus said, "In this world you will have many troubles, but take courage, I have overcome the world."
- Does He intervene at all? Absolutely. I can personally attest to the many, many times the hand of God intervened in my life.

Illus - When my wife was ready to deliver our third daughter she woke up one morning with

sudden excruciating pain. It felt like her pelvic bone was broken and she was rushed to the hospital...

To run to the end of the story, several doctors involved said the same thing, “We can’t explain what happened. We have a term for that in medicine, it’s called ‘providential intervention.’” We have a word for that also, it’s called a miracle.

A. Keep looking to God

- Verse 13 – Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.
- In other words, whether you’re suffering or cheerful, turn to God. If you’re suffering, pray. If you’re cheerful, sing praises. Either way, look to God.
- If you’re suffering, pray. Look to God for help.

Psalm 121:1-2, I will lift up my eyes to the hills; where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 50:15, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will honor Me.”

- When things start going wrong many people become discouraged and it's easy to become depressed; and they become fixated on how big their troubles are, but when you pray you're looking to God.
- But when you pray in faith, not only will you look for God's help in the midst of the trouble, you believe that God can use these very troubles to define your life purpose and to reveal Himself in power.

Illus - Our dad had gone through cancer treatments had lost most of his tongue and was getting old and frail so we all decided to take him on one last deep sea fishing trip. It ended up being one of the most difficult days of my life. But God used it to reveal His power.

2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

B. Look to God for healing

- Verse 14-15 - If anyone is sick let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
- Anointing with oil is just a symbol. It represents the Holy Spirit. If someone is miraculously healed, it was not done by men, it was done by the Holy Spirit.

- Does God heal today? Absolutely. There are some who believe there are certain aspects of the Holy Spirit that are not relevant today, but I don't see that in scripture.
- I am absolutely convinced that God does heal today and we should ask in faith believing that our God is able.
- That being said, does asking for the elders to anoint with oil and pray in faith guarantee that someone will be healed? In other words, why aren't all people healed when they are prayed over in faith and anointed with oil? Great question.
- First, God wants us to pray and He wants us to pray in faith believing that our God is able to do amazingly and abundantly beyond all we can ask or even think.
- The natural state of this world is corruption. It is broken and evil and sickness and pain prevail. Yet God intervened by sending His Son to seek and to save that which was lost. He is very concerned about our soul and pursues us that we might be reconciled to Himself.
- God intervenes with a purpose. He sent His Son to be light piercing the darkness. Jesus healed the blind and the lame and those who were sick. These miracles were evidences that

He was the Messiah, these were the ‘signs of the times’ and He expected them to see and understand.

- When John the Baptist heard of the works of Christ, he sent his disciples to ask of Him...

Matthew 11:3-5, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for another?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

- My point is this; when God heals today He accomplishes His purpose. God intervenes at His choosing. God heals as evidence of His divine power, God heals to stir up faith, and God may heal to confirm the authority of His servants.
- God may also have a purpose He desires to accomplish in a person’s life and so we ask in faith believing that He is able.

C. God heals the soul

- Verse 15 – The elders pray in faith over the one who is sick and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

- Let's be clear that only God heals the sick miraculously and only God forgives sin.
- However, some, and I do emphasize some, sickness is the result of sin. To get right with God and to deal straightforwardly with sin is certainly the point behind these verses.
- Sin *may* cause sickness, but sin most certainly makes the soul sick and the healing of the soul is even of greater significance than the healing of the body.
- This body of ours is just a temporary tent to dwell in and the older you get the more war torn and ragged it becomes, but the soul is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16, We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day

2 Corinthians 5:1-2, We know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed, in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.

- In fact, the older you get the more you groan.

II. Pray Like Elijah

- Verses 17-18 - Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain;... and he prayed again, and the sky poured rain.
- There's a lot to learn about effective prayer from these verses. Several keys jump out at us. Notice that it says Elijah prayed earnestly...

Illus - A father was trying to help his little three-year-old daughter in her prayers. "When you pray, you should pray from your heart and really mean your prayers," he said. Apparently, her prayers had become just repeating the same few words, something like, "God bless our food, in Jesus name, Amen."

He couldn't help but laugh because the next time she prayed, she said, "God, bless our food, I mean *really* bless our food."

A. Faith grows when you hold on

- Faith begins with a word from God. He sent His Son to seek and to save, to pursue sinners and to reconcile them to Himself. God speaks and faith is stirred.

Romans 10:17, Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- Faith begins with a word from God, but faith grows when you hold onto that word in your heart.
- He brings up Elijah as an example of effective prayer. He was a man with a nature like ours and his prayers accomplished much.
- When you first hear that story, it sounds so simple. Elijah prayed and it didn't rain for three years and six months. He prayed again and the sky poured rain. But looking more deeply into the story, there's much more there.

1 Kings 18:42-44, Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees. He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go back" seven times. It came about on the seventh time, that he said, "Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you.'"

- Did you catch that? There's a great insight there. Many of us would have prayed once

and if God didn't answer, they would stop. Seven times he told his servant to go back and look toward the sea. He persisted in prayer.

- God didn't need Elijah's prayer, but God has decided to include us in what He is doing and one way He includes us is through our prayers...

James 4:2, You do not have, because you do not ask.

Galatians 6:9, Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

B. Don't despise the day of small beginnings

- That actually comes out of the book of Zechariah, but it applies to our story here as well.
- The Jews had returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon only to find the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God a mountain of rubble, and they became deeply discouraged.
- God sent a word through the prophet Zechariah to encourage them...

Zechariah 4:6-10, This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts. "Who are you, O great mountain? Before

**Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! ...
“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the
foundation of this temple; and his hands shall
also finish it. ... Who has despised the day of
small beginnings?”**

- Elijah’s servant looked toward the sea and on the seventh time he saw a cloud as small as a man’s fist. Small beginnings, but that was enough, Elijah knew the rain was coming.
- We have a tendency to like the grand finale of something and not the beginning of it. But to God, the day of small beginnings is a beautiful thing.

**Zechariah 4:10, The eyes of the Lord rejoiced to see
the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**

- God likes the process. He wanted Elijah to persist in prayer. He wants us to persist in prayer also. Our relationship to God is deeper when we persist.

**Illus - Isn’t parenting about the process and not
just the grand finale? A day will come when
you can’t play toy cars with them anymore,
when you can’t snuggle while reading a book,
when you can’t wrestle on the floor.**

- For God, the process *is* the point. It’s about growing in your faith and it’s about growing in your relationship to Him.

- Relationship with God is eternal and he's preparing you for it right now.