A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Prayer and the Church

Living It Out · Book 10



Studies in James, James 5:13-20

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Trinfinity Enterprises

Prayer and the Church

Studies in James | *James 5:13-20*

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Prayer and the Church

Studies in James | James 5:13-20

Passage	James 5:13-20
Big idea	Prayer runs through every part of church life: comfort in suffering, healing for the sick, honesty with each other, power with God, and going after the one who wanders off.
Memory verse	James 5:16
Session length	60-75 minutes
What to bring	Bible (SLB), this handout, pen.

Before You Meet (Leader Prep)

For the leader only. Read the passage at least twice during the week and pray for the group by name.

I know what happens when a believer tries to walk through hard seasons alone. In my lowest season, a pastor and a few trusted men made the difference. I wrote this book for churches and small groups that want prayer to be more than a quick item on an agenda. When a church prays for its people, nobody has to carry a burden alone.

In my lowest season, I did not need speeches. I needed a pastor who would listen and men who would stand with me. God uses His people to steady someone who is barely holding on.

- Read the whole letter of James in one sitting. It takes about 15 minutes, and you will see the themes come back around in chapter 5.

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- Read 1 Kings 17:1 and 1 Kings 18:41-45 so you know Elijah's story before the group gets to James 5:17-18.
- Read the Leader Notes. The questions on anointing with oil and on confession can bring up different church backgrounds in the room. Be ready to keep it respectful.

Opening (5-10 minutes)

Before we talk about this passage, we need to know who James was writing to. He tells us in the first verse: "To the twelve tribes which are in the dispersion" (James 1:1). These were Jewish believers in Christ scattered outside their homeland. In the very next verse he calls them "my brothers" (James 1:2) and tells them to "Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). Only believers would be told to count their trials as joy, and only family gets called brothers.

The whole letter is about holding on through hard times without wavering. In chapter 5 James comes back to that theme: "Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). Then, as he wraps up his letter, he talks about one thing over and over. Here is a hint: it is PRAYER. Prayer shows up in every verse from 13 to 18.

Icebreaker: Who is someone who prayed for you at a time you really needed it? You do not have to share the details.

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The Passage (10 minutes)

Have one or two people read the passage aloud.

> **James 5:13-20 (SLB)**
>
> [13] Is anyone among you suffering hardship? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. [14] Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. [15] And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. [16] Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous ***man***, being at work, prevails much. [17] Elijah was a man of like nature to us, and he prayed with prayer that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the earth ***for*** three years and six months. [18] And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth sprouted its fruit. [19] Brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back, [20] let him know that the one who turns back a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Setting the Scene (5 minutes)

Who wrote it	James, a half brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19) and a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:9). Most of the early church held this view; a few scholars think it was written by a later follower in his name.
To whom	"The twelve tribes which are in the dispersion" (James 1:1): Jewish Christians living outside Israel, many of them poor and under pressure.

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When and where	Written from Jerusalem before James was put to death in about A.D. 62. The Jewish historian Josephus records his death (Antiquities 20.9.1). Many scholars date the letter in the 40s, which would make it one of the earliest books of the New Testament.
What comes before	James 5:1-6 warns rich people who cheat their workers. James 5:7-12 tells believers to be patient until the Lord comes, like a farmer waiting for rain, and to let their yes be yes.
What comes after	Nothing. Verse 20 is the last verse of the letter. James ends without a goodbye, which makes his last words about bringing back a wanderer stand out.

What It Means (15 minutes)

Who James is talking to

Look at who James addresses in these verses:

- Verse 13: each believer on their own.
- Verses 14-15: the elders of the church.
- Verse 16: the whole church, everybody praying for everybody.

So this passage is about prayer, and specifically about four things: prayer and comfort (verse 13), prayer and restoration (verses 14-15), prayer and fellowship (verse 16), and prayer and power (verses 16-18). Then James closes with the one who wanders (verses 19-20).

Verse 13: Prayer and comfort

If anyone is suffering, James says "Let him pray" (James 5:13). Whenever we talk with God, His presence brings the comfort we

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are looking for. That does not mean the suffering stops. It means the Lord comforts us in the middle of it when we cry out to Him.

James covers the good days too: "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13). Good times and hard times both belong in front of God.

Verses 14-15: Prayer and restoration

These verses are about people who are physically sick, worn down and weary. James uses two different Greek words here. In verse 14, "sick" is *astheneo*, which means weak or feeble. In verse 15, "the one who is sick" is *kamno*, which can mean sick but also means worn out or weary. When we are sick we get weary, and when we are weary we get sick.

The sick person is to "call for the elders of the church" (James 5:14). Why can't they just pray for themselves? They can, but God works through the prayers of His people, especially those who walk closely with Him. The elders are the pastors, the overseers, the spiritually mature.

Anointing with oil was common in that day. Olive oil was used as medicine; the Good Samaritan poured "oil and wine" (Luke 10:34) on the wounded man. It was also a sign of being set apart for God. Jesus' disciples "were anointing with oil many sick people, and were healing them" (Mark 6:13).

Verse 15 also says "if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him" (James 5:15). James does not say every sickness comes from sin. He says that if sin is part of the picture, God forgives that too.

Verse 16: Prayer and fellowship

James tells us to "confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). What comes out of praying together and opening up to each other? One word: FELLOWSHIP. Fellowship with each other, and fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Confession to one another does not replace confession to God: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may

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forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confessing to each other adds honesty and accountability among believers. Through that confession comes healing, which ties right back to restoration.

For years I kept my struggles hidden from almost everyone, including a friend of more than forty years. Things began to change when I sat down in my pastor's office and told the truth about choices that had hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. Confessing to another believer broke my isolation (James 5:16).

Verses 16-18: Prayer and power

James closes verse 16 with a line many of us know by heart. In the SLB it reads: "The prayer of a righteous man, being at work, prevails much" (James 5:16).

That is why we go to the elders for prayer, why we ask other believers to pray for us, and why WE pray. Through God anything is possible, as long as it fits His will for our lives. Prayer is how we talk to God, and it keeps us focused on Him.

Then James gives an example. "Elijah was a man of like nature to us" (James 5:17). He was not a superhero. He got scared and ran for his life (1 Kings 19:3-4). But he prayed, and it did not rain for three and a half years. You can read the start of the drought in 1 Kings 17:1, and Jesus gives the same three and a half years in Luke 4:25. Then Elijah prayed again on Mount Carmel, bowed down with his face between his knees (1 Kings 18:42), and the rain came. If God answered an ordinary man like Elijah, He will hear you.

Verses 19-20: Bring back the one who wanders

James started his letter talking to the church, and he finishes the same way: "Brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back" (James 5:19). Once again he calls them "brothers," which shows he has a real relationship with these people.

These last two verses sum up what the whole letter is about: turning a sinner "from the error of his way" (James 5:20) to "save a

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soul from death" (James 5:20). James wrote to people who were drifting under pressure, and he wanted them back. That makes this letter hopeful and evangelistic, written to offer hope to the lost and to the believer.

The phrase "cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20) echoes "Hatred stirs up contentions, and love covers over all transgressions" (Proverbs 10:12). Peter uses the same phrase in 1 Peter 4:8. Love goes after the one who wandered off instead of writing them off.

I see all of God's Word as love. Only a father who truly loves his child would spell out what happens when we sin and go our own way, and then send people after us to bring us home.

I have believed in God since I was a boy, yet I drifted from Him more than once through my own bad choices. God did not leave me out there. He used people, a pastor who listened to me in my lowest season and a wife who would not let me keep hiding, to bring me back. Going after a wandering believer in love is one of the highest callings a church has (James 5:19-20).

Key Terms

Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Elders	Spiritually mature leaders who oversee a local church. In the New Testament they are also called overseers.	James 5:14
Anointing	Putting oil on someone. In Bible times it was used as medicine and as a sign of being set apart for God.	James 5:14

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Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Astheneo / kamno	Two Greek words for sick. The first means weak or feeble; the second can also mean weary or worn out.	James 5:14-15
Confess	To say out loud that you did wrong, and agree with God about it.	James 5:16
The dispersion	Scattered outside their homeland. Often called the Diaspora (Jewish people living outside Israel).	James 1:1

Where Christians Read This Differently

Christians agree that James 5 calls the church to pray for the sick. They put verses 14-16 into practice in different ways.

- **Catholic and Orthodox:** These churches see verses 14-15 as the basis for a sacrament. Catholics call it the Anointing of the Sick, given by a priest to the seriously ill or elderly (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1526). The Orthodox call it Holy Unction. Both also see confession as a sacrament, made through a priest.
- **Pentecostal and charismatic:** Many churches anoint the sick with oil and pray for healing in regular services, expecting God to heal today.
- **Many other Protestants:** Some churches have elders anoint and pray when a member asks. Others see the oil as the medicine of that day and stress that God heals through prayer and through doctors. Most read verse 16 as believers confessing to one another, not as a required sacrament.

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My view: God works through the prayers of His people, especially those who walk closely with Him. He can and does heal, as long as it fits His will. I believe we should call the elders when we are sick, pray for each other, and keep each other honest.

Discussion Questions (20-25 minutes)

What does it say?

1. List the situations James covers in verses 13-16. What response does he give for each one?
2. What does James say about Elijah in verses 17-18? Why do you think he picked Elijah?

What does it mean?

3. Why do you think God wants us to bring others into our prayer life instead of praying only on our own?
4. What is the difference between confessing to God and confessing to one another? Why does James ask for both?
5. Verses 19-20 are the last words of the letter. Why would James end there?

How do I live it?

6. Who do you know who has wandered from the faith? What is one step you could take toward them this week?
7. Is there something you have been carrying alone that you need to ask someone in this group to pray about?

Takeaway (5 minutes)

> **This week:** Do not suffer, fight sickness or carry sin alone. Pray, ask the church to pray, and go after the ones who wander.
>
> **Memory verse:** "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man, being at work, prevails much" (James 5:16, SLB)

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Prayer

Pray for anyone in the group who is suffering or sick, by name if they are comfortable with it.

Thank God that He hears ordinary people like Elijah, and like us.

Ask God to bring to mind one person who has wandered, and to give the group courage to reach out.

Going Deeper (Optional)

- 1 Kings 17-18: The full story of Elijah, the drought and the rain.
- Galatians 6:1-2: Restore a brother gently and carry each other's burdens.
- Matthew 18:15: Jesus' first step for going to a brother who has sinned.
- Psalm 32: David on the relief of confessing sin to God.
- Hebrews 4:16: Come to God with confidence for help in time of need.

Leader Notes

Question 2 (Elijah): James picks Elijah because he was "a man of like nature to us" (James 5:17). 1 Kings 19 shows Elijah afraid and worn out. The point is that God answers the prayers of ordinary, imperfect people who are right with Him.

Question 4 (confession): Confession to God brings forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Confession to one another brings honesty, accountability and healing in the church (James 5:16). One does not replace the other. Remind the group that what is shared in the room stays in the room.

If someone asks "Does verse 15 mean every sick believer will be healed?": Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20), and

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Paul himself was not healed of his thorn (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Prayer offered in faith rests on God's will (1 John 5:14). God may heal now, or He may raise His child up on the last day. Be gentle with anyone who has prayed for healing that did not come.

If someone asks about oil: Share the different church practices in "Where Christians Read This Differently" without arguing for one. The power is in the Lord, not the oil: "the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15).

Sources

Every outside fact in this study comes from one of these. Scripture is from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) throughout.

- Greek words in James 5:14-15: Blue Letter Bible lexicon, Strong's G770 (astheneo), https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/G770/mgnt, and Strong's G2577 (kamno), https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2577.
- James's death in about A.D. 62: Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.1, as summarized in "The Last Days of James," Biblical Archaeology Society, https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/the-last-days-of-james/.
- Catholic teaching on the Anointing of the Sick: Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1526, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P4P.HTM.

Acronym List

SLB: Steadfast Literal Bible

A.D.: Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of our Lord"

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Prayer and the Church

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James ends his letter with prayer. This study walks through James 5:13-20: prayer in suffering, prayer for the sick, confessing to one another, the power of a righteous man's prayer, and going after the one who wanders. Built for one small group session of 60 to 75 minutes.

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man, being at work, prevails much.

James 5:16 (SLB)

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