

SLIDE CHRISTMAS EVE & SLIDE NO LONELY PEOPLE

WELCOME JAMES SLIDE

Alright, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to James chapter 5. James 5. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to James 5. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, James 5 will be on page **1013**.

INTRODUCTION

Well, we've made it! Today is week 12, and the last week in our journey through the book of James.

- Has it been good for you?
- Man, it's been good for me.
- No matter how long you walk with James, he'll challenge you!

So, no quippy intro...let's just get into our text. James 5 starting in verse 13

JAMES 5:13a

[13] Is anyone among you suffering?

EXPLAIN: SUFFERING

Now this is a rhetorical question. Ok?

Remember, the people who James is writing to are new Jewish Christians who are suffering greatly because of their faith in Jesus.

And so, the answer for them is, “YES!”

- *“Yes, James!*
- *You know we’re in trouble!*
- *That’s pretty much all you’ve been writing to us about.*
- *We’ve got real problems!*
- *We started following Jesus and life didn’t get easier...*
 - *it got harder!*
- *They’re killing us!*
- *They’re persecuting us!*
- *We’ve got trials.*
- *We’ve got temptations.*
- *We listen to the word,*
 - *we can’t do the word.*
- *We’ve got faith,*
 - *but we don’t have works.*
- *We’ve got no food...*
 - *we’ve got no jobs...*
 - *our pet’s heads are falling off!*
- *We’ve got real problems, James.”*

But the answer for us is yes, too.

- Notice, he’s not asking if YOU are suffering...
- he asks **is anyone AMONG you suffering.**

And so, the answer is ALWAYS yes.

So, James asks:

JAMES 5:13

[13] Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

EXPLAIN: CHEERFUL

Now, the second question, **is anyone cheerful**, is easily misunderstood. Cause it's sometimes translated, "is anyone happy"...but I think that's a poor translation.

- You see, the Greek word there...
- means "to be of good courage" OR "to take heart".

It only shows up one other place in the New Testament, that's in Acts 27.

- The Apostle Paul is on a sea voyage,
- But the ship they are on gets caught in an incredibly bad storm.
- And the sailors start freaking out.
 - They toss the cargo overboard.
 - They toss their tackle overboard.
 - And when the guys who make their living on boats,
 - start freaking out on the boat,
 - you're know it's bad!

That'd be like on a Southwest flight...

- you hit some turbulence...
- and the flight attendants break out the little liquor bottles...
- and throw down a few...

It's like,

- "Uh oh! Did you pay attention to the safety talk?"
- I didn't either!
- When are those air masks supposed to fall down!"

So, the sailors realize they aren't going to make it...that the ship is going down. And to them, Paul says:

SLIDE ACTS 27:21b-22

"Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. [22] Yet now I urge you **to take heart**, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

Right there. It's the same word. Take heart! **BLANK SLIDE**

This isn't some cheesy 1980's Bobby McFerrin-ism...

- "hey guys, don't worry...be happy!"

NO! He's saying,

- *"take courage.*
- *Take heart."*

That's what's meant by **be cheerful**.

TRANSITION

So, James isn't saying,

- *"Some of y'all have it real bad...*
- *while others are killing it."*

No, he's saying,

- *"There are people among you suffering.*
- *And some are taking heart.*
- *In the midst of their suffering they're taking courage."*

But what if you're not?

What if you're just getting the trash kicked out of you in your suffering?

Well, look at verse 14:

JAMES 5:14-15

[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 one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

EXPLAIN: SICK

So, James isn't giving three categories of people:

- those who are suffering...
- those who are cheerful...
- and those who are sick.

No!

- All are suffering.
- Some are mustering courage in their trials.
- But verse 14 is the counterpoint to the one who is cheerful.
- The text says, **is anyone sick.**

And, that is a good translation.

- This word does mean sick,
 - as in physical sickness.
- But it also has a wider meaning than just physical sickness.
- The word is often translated, “*weary*” or “*weak*”.

So, yes, this means physical sickness. But even more...

- it means being sick of being sick.
- It means being sick and tired.

In their suffering...they're sick and tired of being sick!

You ever been there?

- Things aren't going well...
- And you just can't muster the cheer...
- the courage to move forward?

To that person James says, **call for the elders.**

TRANSITION

So, this is how James is ending this letter.

- He addresses those who are suffering...
 - Some are handling it for the moment...taking courage.
 - While others are worn out...sick and tired.

And what does James tell those people to do?

- Pray.
- Sing praise.
- And call the elders of their community to come alongside.

And what I want to do is break those things down for us.

POINT 1: PRAYER

So, he first says to pray. **SLIDE PRAYER.**

- You ever tell someone about your real troubles?
 - Your real sufferings?
- And their response is, *“Hey, maybe you should pray....”*
 - *“Hey, maybe I ought to pray for you! How ‘bout that!?!”*

See, sometimes we think this answer is too simple...or too lame...or too obvious.

And so, to some,

- you might hear James’ answer, **“let him pray,”**
- and it’s almost offensive to you.
- Because you already know that!

I doubt any of us are thinking,

- *“What?!? I had no idea I was supposed to talk to God!”*

You see, many of us, in our suffering, move away from God and seek peace elsewhere. But James says, **“pray.”**

You try everything in your own power to get some relief...

And then you say... *“Well, all that’s left to do is pray.”*

- No!
- That’s the first place to run!

Do you see prayer as your first line of defense, or your last resort?

APPLICATION: CRAZY STUFF

Listen to me, I know we have a number of younger/newer Christians here.

And I hear from you that you like coming to Fathom...

- cause you feel accepted.
- And the people are so friendly.
- And the music is inspiring.
- And the preaching is down to earth and biblically deep.

And yes and amen to all those things, ok?

- But I want you to know...
 - just no bait and switch here...
- we believe the crazy stuff.

You're like, "*What do you mean?*"

I mean, we like all those things, too...but we believe the crazy stuff.

- Listen to me...we believe that when we pray...
 - God actually responds.
- Prayers aren't just throwing some good thoughts out there,
- or getting ourselves in the right state of mind...
- NO!
 - We believe that the almighty, sovereign,
 - creator of the entire universe...
 - hears us...
 - and responds to us.

That's crazy! We believe the crazy stuff! Do you?

APPLICATION: HOW TO PRAY

Please fight against the temptation roll your eyes when James says,
"Are you suffering? Pray."

You say, *“I don’t know how to do this...I don’t know how to pray.”*

I’ll give you three quick prayer tips.

To pray more effectively,

- you need a TIME,
- a PLACE,
- and a PLAN.
 - I tried to make it three P’s,
 - but I couldn’t figure out a “P” synonym for time.
 - Period? Nah.

TIME

You need a set TIME in your schedule to pray.

You’re like,

- *“Well, that doesn’t feel very intimate...”*
- *it feels kinda forced and scheduled and rigid.”*

But listen, that’s ridiculous.

So, I love Maryse Martin more than any person on this planet...

- and I schedule dates with her.

I set aside time to be with her,

- and in that, she has never felt robbed of my love for her.

You need set-aside TIME for prayer.

- When is it you will pray?

Because without a set-aside TIME,

- things are gonna come up that get you busy,
- and by the end of the day
- you'll find yourself going,
- *"Did I even pray today?"*

Tell me I'm a liar.

That's what happens!

So, for me, my prayer time is first thing in the morning.

- I'm a morning person.
- My eyes pop open and I'm ready to go!
- So, I want those first quiet minutes...
- to be spent in prayer with my Father.

You need a set TIME for prayer.

And I'm NOT saying that throughout the day you don't continue to communicate with God or pray more.

- I text with Maryse all day long!
- While I'm at work...
 - just lame little GIFs...you know!
- We have set dates,
- but then we text and talk throughout the day.

But I still set specific time to connect intently with her.

You need a TIME.

PLACE

Second, you need a PLACE for prayer.

- Man, I know this is going to sound rigid as well,
- but I'm pretty convinced that human beings thrive
- on habits and patterns and places.

Remember when Jesus is praying in the garden, on the mount of olives, on the night before he is crucified?

- You ever wonder how Judas knew
 - exactly where to find Jesus
 - that night to betray him?

Well, Luke 22:39 says: **SLIDE** And Jesus came out and went, **as was his custom**, to the Mount of Olives.

- It was his custom to go there.
- Jesus had a PLACE where he was accustomed to pray.

BLANK SLIDE

I've got a PLACE where I pray. In my family room...

- It's my prayer chair.

I sat in it this morning as I prayed through this sermon!

- And there's not anything extra cool about the chair.
 - It's not really that cool at all...
 - it's got a floral pattern on it.
 - So, whatever!
- But I sit in it every morning during my prayer time.
- It's my PLACE.

PLAN

And then you need a PLAN for prayer.

And listen, I know when I say plan,

- there are certain ears that perk up
- and other people who just vomit and black out.

You're like,

- *"I can just talk to God whenever I want to..."*
- And yes, you can.

But remember in Matthew's Gospel when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray,

- and Jesus wasn't like, "Pshhh...just pray whatever you want."
- No! He said, *"Pray like this...our Father in heaven..."*

So, I think you need a PLAN...

- for what you'll do during your prayer TIME,
- in your prayer PLACE.

So, for me, I write out my prayers in a prayer journal.

- I do that because just sitting with my eyes closed
- is a recipe for my mind to wander and get lost in thought.
- So, I center myself on my journal,
 - and I pray for lots of different things...
- but I have a PLAN.

POINT 2: PRAISE

So, when you're suffering...PRAY.

But James then goes:

- *"If you're cheerful..."*
- *if you are taking heart in your trials...*

James says to sing **SLIDE PRAISE**.

"What could possibly be even more uncomfortable than praying?"

- Singing.
- Singing with other people.
- Singing praises to God.

I had a gal come to Fathom years ago, and she started to bring her unsaved husband with her.

And I grabbed lunch with him one day, and he says to me,

- *"Chris, I really like your preaching.*
- *I like how you explain the Bible.*
- *I feel like I'm learning stuff every time I come...*
- *but I really, really hate the singing time.*
- *It's just so uncomfortable.*
- *And what the *bleep* is with people raising their hands!?!"*

So, can we admit it that this one is a little weird?

A bunch of people singing together...lifting their hands...

when else does that happen in your life? Bronco's games? Not this year!

- But remember what I said about prayer,
- cause it applies here, too.
- We believe the crazy stuff!

Listen, those two songs we sing before the sermon and after the sermon...

- it isn't like being at a concert, ok?
- It's not a concert...
- it's actually an opportunity for you to participate...
- and lean into the Lord.

Singing is a place where your faith is developed.

James is like,

- *“are you suffering...*
- *and surviving...*
- *then sing!”*

You're like,

- *“give me something deeper!”*

He's like,

- *“there isn't anything deeper!*
- *Pray and sing!”*

If you caught this revelation, you would never be late to church again!

- You know, when I'm done preaching,
- and the band comes back up here...
- that's not your chance to dip out of here.

NO! It's time to dig deeper.

ILLUSTTATION: SUBARU

When I was a senior in high school, I had been a believer for about a year,

- and I was so hungry for God's Word
- that I started attending a Saturday night church

- where they preached through the Bible, kinda like we do.
 - I just couldn't get enough.
 - I wanted to understand as much about God as I could.

Well, one Saturday night, as I was driving home from the service,

- I was put on a CD worship music in my Subaru.
 - College students: a CD is like Spotify on a frisbee

But in the midst of singing worship songs in my Subaru...

- all the Bible crammed in my head from the sermon just clicked!
- And I found myself weeping.
 - Which is strange behavior for a 17-year-old guy.

I literally had to pull over because I was crying so hard as I sang!

TRANSITION

Church, we believe the crazy stuff!

- And I don't want to come across as some emotional,
- anti-intellectual guy here.

We need our brains, and we want to go deep into this stuff...

But there's just something that happens when we sing PRAISE!

I think we're waiting for James to give us something more...

but he's like:

- *"PRAY...*
- *PRAISE...*
- *do these things!*
- *They help!"*

POINT 3: PEOPLE

And then he says,

- *“If you’re at that place of breaking...*
- *If you’re sick and tired...*
- *if you’re sick of being sick...*
- *then call the elders*
- *and have them anoint you with oil*
- *and pray for you.”*

The third thing to do when suffering, is to involve **SLIDE PEOPLE**.

- What you have here is a community,
- who in moments of suffering and sickness,
- pull together.
 - We walk together.
 - We commune with God together.

In this text, he says, **call the elders**.

This implies that you actually belong to a local community with elders.

You need some PEOPLE!

- You call YOUR people together.
- And they hit you with that oil.
- And they join you in prayer.

This is a call to community!

Now, some of you Baptists and Presbyterians and Lutherans hear oil,

- and you start getting a bit uncomfy.

Like, I freaked you out enough last week

- when I asked you to pray with open hands on your lap...
- but anointing with oil?
- The only thing you anoint is your burrito with green chili!

But we believe the crazy stuff!

The oil, it symbolizes the Holy Spirit.

- And we believe that when you PRAY...
- and PRAISE...
- with PEOPLE...
- crazy stuff begins to happen!
 - Healing.
 - Wholeness.
 - Forgiveness.

TRANSITION

So, you need PRAYER, PRAISE, and PEOPLE when suffering is upon you.

BUT then James adds something that makes us even more uncomfortable as western evangelicals in verse 16.

JAMES 5:16-18

[16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it

did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

EXPLAIN: CONFESSION

Now, this might just be the craziest thing we talk about today that we believe. We believe in the power of **SLIDE CONFESSION**.

And confession is something we don't like to talk much about in our Evangelical circles. Why?

Well, there are two reasons, I think.

First...it's because confession means taking that next step of vulnerability.

- Prayer requires vulnerability.
- Praise requires vulnerability.
- Including people requires vulnerability.
- But CONFESSION...now that's going too far.

And as American Evangelicals we are far more individualistic in how we see things of faith than the Bible does.

There are two ways confession goes, vertical and horizontal.

- And we're good with vertical confession...
- confessing to God,
- with an acknowledgement we've messed some stuff up.

But here's where I think American Christians sometimes get hung up.

- We think, *"I just tell God and I'm good."*
- But James is calling us to confess to one another.

Your confession should go horizontal.

The second reason why confession is hard for us is that

- we have some pop-culture
- pseudo-Roman Catholic images
- that flash in our heads
- about a little confessional box where you go...
- and you get in there with a screen between you and the priest.
- And you say, *“Bless me father, for I have sinned.*
- *It’s been three months since my last confession.”*

And in kind of a reactionary spirit, we’ve thrown the baby out with the bath water when it comes to confession.

So, listen to me here.

- Confession isn’t a Catholic practice...
- IT’S A BIBLICAL ONE!

James says, confess your sins to one another,

- but nowhere does James indicate
- that this should be turned into a formalized system
- of a Christian confessing their sins to a priest.

EXPLAIN: PRIESTHOOD

Then what is James proposing?

Well, there is a doctrine known as the PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS.

- This is a Protestant doctrine.
- And it basically says:
 - that all Christians have access to God’s throne in prayer
 - and all share as members in a “royal priesthood”.

And what James is trying to tell us is that **we are all priests to one another.**

- Anointing with oil,
- interceding for one another,
- receiving confession from one another.

These are all activities of the priests.

EXPLAIN: ELIJAH

And this doctrine isn't for some select office of priest...

- or for ordained pastors...
- or people who've been to seminary...
- or even for the church elders alone.

The PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS is for ALL believers.

- This is why James brings up Elijah...
- Elijah was an Old Testament prophet who did some legit stuff!

Now, all of James' Jewish readers,

- would have thought
- that Elijah had some sort of special connection with God
- and THAT's why his prayers were effective.

But James says, **"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours."**

- Elijah didn't have something different or special.
- Pastors don't.
- Priests don't.

There is something powerful when ordinary followers of Christ...

- like you...like me...

when we confess our sins to one another and pray for one another.

APPLICATION

So, what James is saying...

- is that when we are suffering
- and tired
- and weary
- and burdened with sin...

the best chance we have to overcome those things is with one-another.

James is authorizing us to do the things that priests did!

And again, we must be crystal clear.

- James is NOT saying
- that your brother or sister in Christ,
 - while acting as a priest,
- ACTUALLY forgives your sins.

No, Jesus makes it clear that only God can forgive sin.

- No human being can do that for you...

But they can remind you of the truth that your sins have been freely, fully, and forever forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross.

APPLICATION: SELF FORGIVENESS

Now, back to the vertical vs horizontal confession.

- Why do you think....
- we are often more comfortable
- confessing our sins “vertically” to God
- than we are “horizontally” to each other?

Why are we more comfortable confessing...

- to an almighty and holy creator...
- than we are to another fallible human being?

Why is that?

Well, to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

SLIDE *"We must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution..."* **BLANK SLIDE**

This is why confessing to one-another is so important.

Cause we can be self-deceived...

Who are you really confessing to?

TRANSITION

So, this whole closing section from James is about suffering...

- and it is wholly communal.
- *"Pray for one another.*
- *Confess to one another."*

That's because when we suffer, the great temptation is to isolate ourselves.

To quote one author I read this week:

- *"To choose to be alone is to invite sure failure."*

This is what sin does...it isolates us.

- And confession is the only way to overcome sin.
- **We confess our sin to death.**

And this is why, I think James ends this book with the last two verses reminding us that we are responsible to and for one another.

Look at verse 19:

JAMES 5:19-20

[19] My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, [20] let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James says, this is how we help each other live out genuine faith.

- We pray for one another,
- we confess our sins to one another,
- and we even bring each other back when we start to wander.

CONCLUSION

So, how to end?

- How to end this sermon,
- and how to end the book of James?

Well, let's end with James' questions:

- Is anyone suffering?
 - It's time to pray.
- Is anyone taking courage...
- taking heart in the midst of something tough?
 - It's time to praise.

- Is anyone here sick of being sick?
- Sick of your sin?
- Sick of your struggle?
- Weary and broken down?

If you're there today, I'm saying it's time to drag that sin into the light.

- It's time to confess to a brother or a sister...
- who can hold you accountable.

I'm not talking just anyone...ok!

- Someone you trust.
- Someone who you know is FOR you.

This is why, I think, the elders are mentioned.

- We can be that for you...
- or you might have someone else in your life.

But it's time to get out of this crazy cycle you're in where you continue to justify to yourself that you're going to be able to beat this.

- You won't.
- That's why God has given you community.
- That's why God has given us light,
- to shine into darkness.

"Well, what will people think of me if I confess?"

Pastor Ray Ortlund says this:

- *"You can be impressive,*
- *or you can be known,*
- *but you can't be both."*

Some of you aren't tired enough yet to stop faking.

Some of you aren't sick enough yet.

But some of you are...

- and I can tell you from personal experience...
- as someone who has had my sins paraded literally in front of my whole church.

There are few things as freeing as not having to carry the weight of feeling like at any moment you're going to get busted and found out to be a fake.

- There's a freedom there,
- and Christ invites you into that freedom.

That's why we're here!

- To pray,
- and sing praise,
- and confess to people.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

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