**The Invite to pray, praise confess and return– James 5:13-20**

Can you think of a time when someone invited you to go somewhere, or to do something? How did you feel being asked? James finishes out his letter by giving out five invitations to his audience. These invitations are for us today as well.

**Invitation # 1 - When we face trouble and hardship. . .pray vs.13**

Why do you think James highlights this to the people who have been scattered?

***Helpful Notes*:** Our natural inclination when difficulty comes is to try and fix it ourselves. But the reality is, that if we could handle or fix something on our own, we would have no need for God. James is saying, “that’s exactly how some of you are living – as if there is no need for God. We are to pray and seek God for His presence, power, protection and provision. This will help us to endure while we walk through the trial.

* *Look to the Lord and His strength; seek his face always – 1 Chron. 16:11*
* *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Matt. 7:7-8*
* *For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do but our eyes are upon you. 2 Chron. 20:12*

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**Talking it over -Group Study:**

 If you’re in a group going through this study together, go around and have people share if they are going through a time of difficulty and hardship. Then gather around that person and pray for them.

**Invitation # 2 - When we are free of trouble and hardship. . .praise vs.13**

James also highlights that when life is good, we don’t forget about Him, but we praise and worship his great name. **It’s amazing how we have a tendency to neglect the praise of God when things are going well.** James is saying we need to be cheerful in the Lord, showing the world that there is lasting joy in Jesus.

* Praise Him for the assurance of our salvation
* Praise Him for His continued love for us.
* Praise Him for an eternal future that He is preparing for His followers
* Praise Him for His church

**Question:** What are other praises you are thankful for which you can offer up to God?

*I will sing the Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me. Psalm 13:6*

Take a moment in your group, or on your own and lift your voice and sing a song of praise to the Lord.

**Invitation # 3 - When we are sick. . .call the elders vs. 14-15**

These verses on calling the elders of the church and anointing with oil have been abused and taken out of context by many people. I believe in divine healing, but I don’t believe in divine healers. I believe in faith healing, but I don’t believe in faith healers. I believe God in His power and sovereign grace can and many times does heal a person, but it is not through man’s ability, but exclusively from and through the power of the Lord. James is not giving us a formula for healing; he is giving us a biblical way to pray as we help a person who is sick.

**Notice the progression in these verses:**

1. **If someone is sick** (without strength, weak to the point of incapacitated, physically or spiritually) to the point where is may require the church elders or leaders to come to the person and pray over them, asking the Lord for healing.
2. **They are to call the elders.** Why? Because in many churches there is no way that the elders of the church can possibly know everything. We do not know what is going on in someone’s life, so the responsibility is on the one who is sick to call. The reason they call the elders (plural) is for accountability, it’s in humility, it’s also because the Elders are God’s elected representatives to the people.
3. **Pray over them and anoint with oil**. When the Elders come to pray, James tells them to anoint the sick person with oil. The word anoint also means to rub on them. The anointing of oil in the Bible symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are depending on the Holy Spirit’s power to heal if it is God’s will, not in our own power or strength.
4. **The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.** This does not mean every prayer for healing guarantees God will make a sick person well. The prayer offered in faith means we have absolute confidence in God’s will. Sometimes it is God’s will to heal and other times it is not.

*“It is an undeniable face that not everyone we pray for will be healed. But that should not keep us from praying in faith. For God whether now, or in eternity will heal every illness and disease. Our responsibility is to always pray in faith for God to heal someone, and not give up until God makes it clear. The greatest tragedy is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.” F B Myers*

**Digging Deeper:** Take some time in your group to discuss this. If this is confusing, consider inviting one or two of the elders of the church into your group to further discuss.

**Invitation # 4 – When we have sinned. . .confess vs. 16**

*Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

Sometimes when someone is sick it may be because of hidden or unconfessed sin that has not been acknowledged. Sometimes it takes a very serious illness to bring us to a point of confession of our sin and a change in lifestyle. However, sickness is not an indication of sin because James writes: If he has sinned.

**Elijah as an Example vs. 17-18**: Elijah is an excellent example of the power of prayer. He was a man just like us, who had feelings, trials, hardship, desires as we do. Yet Elijah earnestly prayed for it not to rain and it did not rain for three years and six months. Then he prayed again for rain and it did, and the earth bore its fruit. The point James is making - Earnest prayer and fervent prayer equals effective prayer. It works! (See 1 Kings 18:36-38; 19:4)

**Invitation # 5 – When we have wandered. . .return vs. 19-20**

** Talking it over -Group Study:**

Who is at risk here of wandering from the truth?

Whose responsibility is it to help a fellow believer to return? How do we restore a person back to God? (See Galatians 6:1

**Helpful Notes:** James urges Christians to help those who have wandered from the truth to return God. We can do this by taking the initiative, praying for the person, and acting in love by reaching out to that person where he or she is at and bring them back to God. When we bring them back to God, they will be restored to fellowship with God. The person who brings them back to God will have saved a wandering soul from physical or spiritual death, bringing about the forgiveness of his or her many sins

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 **Interpretation – Ask a Question:** What’s the authors main intent or purpose of the passage?

* What truth about prayer is James trying to convey to the church then and now?

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 **Application – Put into practice**

* Out of the five invitations that James gave which one spoke the loudest to you and why?
* Do you know of someone who has wandered from the truth? What is holding you back in going to them in hope they will be restored?



**Praying it through –** Take time in your group to share and pray for one another.

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