

James on Sickness, Suffering and Wandering

by Shane Idleman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in suffering, cheerfulness, and worship, and highlights the significance of forgiveness and release from guilt and sickness.

Duration: 32:38

Scripture: Proverbs 28:13, Jeremiah 6:16, Matthew 6:15, Matthew 18:15, Hebrews 4:16, James 5:13-16, James 5:19-20

Topics: "Suffering And Prayer", "Repentance And Forgiveness"

Description

This sermon from James chapter 5 delves into the topics of suffering, prayer, anointing oil for healing, and the importance of turning back to God when wandering from the truth. It emphasizes the need for confession, repentance, and the power of faith-filled prayer in saving the sick and covering a multitude of sins. The message highlights the consequences of sin, the importance of forgiveness, and the role of the Christian community in helping those who have strayed to return to God's path.

Transcript

If you have your Bibles, you can turn to James chapter 5. I'm going to be finishing James tonight because it all flows together. I tried to divide it up a little bit, but it all flows together. James chapter 5, verse 13.

And I'm going to warn you up front, this is a controversial topic because we're talking about wandering from the faith. We're talking about anointing oil. We're talking about healing.

We're talking about a lot of things that people, well I think it means this and I think it means this. And what I've found and what I've tried to do, even though it's hard at times, is to let the Bible speak for itself. And let it tell us exactly what He's talking about.

And we don't want to throw in too many things that aren't here, but I think we can unpack quite a bit of this. So James chapter 5, verse 13. Is anyone among you suffering? So are you suffering tonight? And this is not sickness.

In this passage here, this is suffering. This is going through a challenging time. This is going through maybe persecution or difficulties at work or difficulties in your home.

Are you suffering? Here's the answer. Let him pray. Let him pray.

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 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. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Elisha was a man with our nature, with a nature just like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And it did not rain on the land for three years and six months, and he prayed again. And the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the air of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. Wow. There's a lot there to unpack.

And he was basically bringing up Elisha to show that he was just like us. Sometimes we think of these Bible heroes as, oh, these almost angels. And Elisha is just like us, a man with the same type of passion, and God used him.

Why? Because the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man or woman availeth much. Effectual, meaning it's effective, it's fervent, it's passionate. And the more you live right, the better you pray.

I'm convinced of that. King Ahab lived at the same time of Elisha, and their prayers carried a lot less power from King Ahab than it did Elisha. Men who live well pray well.

Now, it doesn't mean that a person on the street who doesn't know God can't pray, and God won't hear him, of course it will. But there's something with living right and being holy and set apart for God that the weight of our prayers carry more weight. When we're close to God, we know what to pray for and how to pray for certain things.

So let's look at each point. Suffering, again, this is trouble. The answer is prayer.

But what do we do? We either lash out or we simply grin and bear it. I don't know about you all, I'm just going to grin and bear it this week. I'm going through it.

And we get upset or we hold it in. We lash out or we retaliate. And that's not the answer.

When you're going through suffering, when you're going through persecution, just take it to God and let him fight the battle. Much easier that way. And you'll accomplish much more when you let God fight that battle.

And there's suffering sometimes on Facebook. You get in arguments or debates or persecution, and we don't know really anything about persecution. What James is writing, the setting, is severe persecution.

But if something is happening, it's difficult, finances, losing a job, all these things, suffering, take it to prayer. And don't become bitter. Don't become mad at God.

There's not a month that goes by that I don't hear about somebody that got bitter at God because of what they're going through or what God allowed or what God didn't do. And instead of taking it to prayer, they become bitter. So if you're going through trouble, suffering, the answer is prayer.

Nervous breakdowns is usually what happens or walking away from God. Now the good thing about suffering is affliction can lead us to humility. Those close to God have endured much affliction.

So if you look at affliction and persecution and suffering as the mechanism to draw you closer to God, it can help you get through it. Because, okay, Lord, I'm going to rely on you as I go through this. And you build a deeper relationship with him.

That's how people who went through things can look back and they love the Lord because God has brought them through certain things. And then he goes to the complete opposite. If you're cheerful, then fuel that joy, fuel that cheer.

Sing praises to God. Worship God. You have to fuel that joy.

Here's what happens many times when people are blessed and they're cheerful and things are going well, God goes in the back pocket. I don't need him anymore. I need him with that suffering stuff.

But I don't need him when things are going well. So when you're cheerful, when things are going well, sing to the Lord and let that joy fuel that motivation to continue serving him. So also with that, draw closer to God, not further away.

Doesn't that happen? You've got the job, the money's coming in, let's go to the movies, let's dine out, let's not go to church anymore. Everything's going good. When really, we need to take that and put it back to God.

So you have the suffering, you have the cheerful, and then he says, if any of you are sick. Now there's a lot here. Let him call for the elders of the church would mean to me that this is probably a pretty severe sickness.

It's not if I have a cold or my back hurts. The person is not heading in a good direction. The sickness has overtaken them.

And they need to actually call for the elders of the church and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. So God is allowing sickness here, or it's a demonic attack, or it's a condition of our fallen nature, of our bodies. It may be self-created, it may have just happened because of genetic predispositions, or just our body in general.

So think about that with sickness for a minute. Either God does allow it, which happens because we're going to get to in a minute, chastisement, or a demonic attack, or a condition of our body. Our bodies just fall apart.

Sometimes it's not the devil. The devil's not after this, and the devil's here, and the devil's here. Not all the time.

Sometimes it's just our own body. So that's why we don't know where the sickness is coming from sometimes. So he says, 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.

Now, I don't want to talk too much about oil, but oil represents who is doing the healing. Oil often represents the power of the Holy Spirit, or the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The oil would flow, and they use oil for healing and different things.

So to anoint a person with oil in the name of the Lord, it's just a representation, much like communion. So you don't have to carry around oil and the powers in the oil. The oil is representing, Lord, in your name, we're praying for healing, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we're anointing you with oil.

So if people do call on the elders, we would do this. It's not a practice we do at every Sunday because it's here. Go call to them, get them, it's a person requesting it.

The severity is now warranted it. And there's nothing wrong with praying for a person, and you take oil you'd usually put on their forehead, or somewhere on their shoulders, and just pray for them. We're just obeying scripture.

And if you read commentaries, they're all over the place on what this means. What could mean this, and there are healing properties of oil, but it's not saying put oil on a wound. It's not saying eat the oil.

It's not saying, so I think it just represents that you're praying in Jesus' name, and we're asking for the work of the Holy Spirit in this life. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. Now the question comes up, well why aren't a lot of people healed? Why isn't, what it says right here, that the faith of the elders, and the faith of this prayer will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

So I'm hoping I can kind of unpack that as I go through. So let's start with this. As I said, men who live well, pray well.

The effectual fervent prayer of a man, in right standing with God, prevails a lot. So what he's saying here is, I'm probably going to get ahead of myself, but it's okay to put this in context. This person is sick as the result of sin.

If you put it in context, there is sin that is, it's a besetting sin that they are not repenting of, and God is using it as chastisement on the person. So go and get the elders, the elders come in, spiritual leaders of the church, they're prayed up, they can sense the will of God, and they go through it, and the person confesses, and confesses to what the sin is, and the elders pray for that person. And because the sin was connected to that, healing takes place.

If I just summed it up in one minute right there. And that's where they're going with this. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed. So it's confessing to one another.

And this is interesting, when I wrote that article about Roman Catholicism, and the priesthood, and how it's not biblical to go to the priest, and not to God go to these priests, and they would use this verse, confess one another, but when was the last time you saw a priest turn around and confess to the other person? That's what it's saying, confess to one another. It's not used to support a confessional behind this thing, and confessing to a priest, and then the priest takes it to God. God says go boldly to the throne of grace, confess to God your faults, but if there are faults against one another, you confess your sins to one another.

And this happens sometimes in the hospital homes, where I'll go and I'll visit patients, and there's somebody in there with either a heroin overdose, or drugs, half of them are alcohol related, and different things, and they begin to confess, and I even would say, you know what, I haven't been perfect. I've blown

it my younger years as well, and I didn't walk a perfect line. It's this position of humility and confession, and actually the person, it really helps them to see, oh, okay, this person isn't perfect.

We're confessing our faults before each other, one another. Now faith, the faith of the, I'm sorry, the prayer of faith will save the sick. So what is the role of faith? God gives the elders this gift, or he gives the person this gift of faith during this time.

So it's a unique setting where a person is sick because of sin, and they are probably dying, and the elders come in, and the sin is confessed, the elders pray for this person, and healing takes place. And if it was always God's will to heal, we would never die. Have you ever thought about that? This person's 65, they're having heart problems, okay, pray for them, they're healed.

Now they're 75, and they're having cancer, pray for them, they're healed. Now they're 90, and they're having, their heart's failing, well, pray for them, and they're healed. It would always be, they would never die.

Okay, so healing isn't automatic all the time. And it's an interesting topic, a topic that I have not fully understood. Because you do see people being healed, but often, more often than not, you don't see people being healed.

And people say, we don't have enough faith, or you didn't have enough faith, or the person didn't have enough faith. And it goes back and forth. The bottom line is God's sovereign plans will prevail, and you want to line up with the heart of God.

So when elders go to pray, they want to seek God, they want to pray for God's wisdom in this area, to hopefully lead this person to repentance. And this is why it's not an absolute, but when sin is connected to the illness, that's what he's talking about here. Now you can look at sin's connection to illness in Mark 2, 5, John 5, 14, John 9, 2 through 3, 1 Corinthians 11, 30, yeah, 11, 30, there's connections.

Hezekiah, I think of in the Old Testament, there's connections with sin and illness. Now, before you get upset, I'm not saying that everybody who's sick, it's because of sin, or we'd all be in trouble. Because we all sin.

Now, there, God will use chastisement. In these different scriptures I read, it looks something like this. If a person's caught in sin, and it's a besetting sin, they're not confessing it.

They're just like, well, I don't care. I'm just gonna ride this out, whether it's lying, whether it's sexual sin, whether it's drug use, and different things. God's warning, he's convicting.

Don't do that, don't do that. I love you enough, I love you enough not to leave you there. So then he brings chastisement.

One way is to humiliate people. One way is to get caught, they get arrested. One way is to do something like this, where the body is afflicted because of the besetting sin.

So if there's an area in your life that you know God is wanting you to take measures on and get rid of, I would suggest that you get rid of it and not keep playing with it. Oh, yeah, but this or that. We make excuses, and God convicts.

He convicts you right now in your heart. The Word of God convicts. You know it's not right, and there's no really joy and peace.

Remember having the joy of the Holy Spirit and the peace of the Holy Spirit. And these things will impede us, and they'll take away from what God wants to do. So often, sometimes he will bring sickness because of this sin that's not being confessed.

Now this is different with somebody struggling with something, and they're confessing it, they're repenting, God help me with this, they're getting help. And then they fell back six months later, God's like, okay, now you got cancer. You know, it's more of a besetting sin that the person is not dealing with, and God loves us enough to chastise us.

And that's a hard concept for some people. Like, whoa, that's not a loving God. But he loves us enough to, like with your kids, you give them a little spanking, right? Hopefully, maybe some of you do.

Do they do that anymore? I don't know. A little swat. Remember my mom would grab something off the tree, and oh, I'm in trouble now.

And just right on the butt, you know, just swatting. Chastising, not to do that again. Shane, don't go up on the roof again.

You're gonna get a little switch there. And God does that as well. In different situations.

So I would encourage you, if you are in a situation tonight, and you know it's not of God, you know it's not good, you know it's something you need to take care of, take care of it. Because we need to stop confusing His patience with His approval. Many times, God's patient with us, so He must approve of it.

Not necessarily. Guilt can also cause sickness. Guilt can cause sickness.

I went just online. You can even look at psychology websites. And they'll have headlines like this.

Is guilt getting the best of you? How emotions can cause disease and illness? What are the physical effects of guilt? Something interesting, when we're caught in the sin, do you feel great? Was worship wonderful, and you just love church, and everything's great, or it's hard to even look people in the eye? I hope I don't run into them, and we live this life of we're guilty, we feel bad, and somehow that guilt, and even unforgiveness, these toxic emotions harm the body. So some of that guilt we're feeling, the sin, and it can bring ailments to the body, and actually hurt us physically. And if He has committed sins, He will be forgiven.

This word forgiven will be let loose. So if this ailment is due to sin, God says, when you confess it, you repent, you'll be let loose of that, and be healed of it. Matthew 6.15, if we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive your sins.

And people are like, oh, that's a pretty hard verse. I don't quite understand it. Well, let's start with what we do know.

Okay? As a believer, as a believer, you are forgiven. You're set free. You're forgiven by God.

So this verse then, if we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive us. As believers, did you know you can still hold in unforgiveness? Don't leave me up here hanging, because I know I can. And if I'm not going

to, okay, there's somebody that really hurt us, I'm not going to forgive them.

Well, that says God will not forgive us. Really, what I believe this is saying, if you look at the word study, and you can look at the Greek language and the different things, cleansing and release take place when we forgive and we allow forgiveness. So when God forgives us of what we've done, there's cleansing that takes place.

There's freedom. The joy is returned. But if I'm not going to forgive that person, then God is going to hold that release over me, and I'm going to feel this weight of this responsibility of holding that against the person.

He's not going to forgive me. He's not going to let this go. I'm still going to feel the guilt, and I got to let this go, but I'm not going to forgive this person.

I've got this God also pressuring me to forgive. So once I forgive, He releases that, and the floodgates open of joy and peace. So it has nothing to do, in my opinion, you know, about salvation.

If we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive us. Now, you could take this out a little bit and say a person who truly has been born again, the Holy Spirit in you wants you to forgive others. So you could say if a person doesn't want to forgive, they never forgive, then have they truly been saved? And then if not, they haven't truly experienced God's salvation, God's forgiveness.

So it's an interesting concept there, but we do know that we can't forgive, we can't refuse forgiveness, and it's been hard. There are people who have had to forgive, people that have molested them. They've had to forgive people who have cheated on them and taken things, and it's not an easy process.

But anytime that I'm confronted with something like this, or I'm talking to people, I'm often reminded that if God in Christ Jesus forgave us, there's really no excuse. There's really no excuse. We want to hold it in because we think if I forgive them, then that will mean that they were right and I was wrong.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with that. Forgiveness just means I'm releasing this unforgiveness I have. I'm letting it go.

I'm setting myself free. I'm not going to be held by this toxic emotion anymore. I'm releasing it.

And that's what forgiveness is. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. Now, if we look at the context, if anyone among you suffers, if anyone among you is cheerful, if anyone among you is sick, as I'm reading this, I think he's talking about if anyone from among you, like we can even say in this body of believers, if anyone from among you wanders from the truth and somebody turns him back, he will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

So we can't take out the fact that he's been talking about a person who is in sin, then the sickness is the result of sin, and then now in context, if you turn that person away from that sin, you will save that soul from death. So the imagery is this sin is getting worse and progressing and getting worse and progressing and eventually will lead to death. And you go to that person, you pray with that person, you lead that person to repent to that sin, they're wandering from God and they turn back to God, you save that person from death.

Now, and again, this is different theology. An Armenian, a person who believes that a person can lose their salvation, may take this to mean that a person is wandering from truth, they lose their salvation, but you pull them back and you save that soul from that. Or somebody, a Calvinistic persuasion, would say you can't lose your salvation, so this is dealing with somebody who is a believer.

Well, putting those aside, just the context of the person being in fellowship and everything I just read, leads me to believe that this person is a believer who's wandered from the truth. And soul here in the Greek is *psuche*. Does that word sound like anything? Psychology? It's spelled close to that, *psuche*.

Okay. And also in the Old Testament it was, the Hebrew is *nephesh*, and God breathed an *ad* in the breath of life and it became a living soul, living *nephesh*. It's the life of the person.

So you save that person from death and you cover a multitude of sin. So to wander, his name is *P.H. Davids*, he wrote an epistle on James, a commentary on it, the Greek New Testament. He said to wander is to reject the revealed will of God and to act contrary to it, either through willful or deceit of others, including demonic powers.

So to wander here is, I know the right path. How about Jeremiah 6.16? Thus says the Lord, stand in the way and see and ask for the old path, where the good way is, and walk in it, then you will find rest for your soul. So Jeremiah is writing to the children of Israel, children of Israel, come back on the old path, don't keep wandering, come back on the good path, the old path.

What about Luke and Matthew? All talk about the sheep who wanders. And we go and look for a sheep who wanders. A transgression of the law, especially idolatry.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Psalm, Proverbs, a lot of these passages talk about the children of God, the people of God, wandering from God and getting them back to God. That was really the whole role of the prophet. If you look at the major prophets, the minor prophets, were to go and be very bold, very in your face, very confrontational, to get the people to what? To turn back to God, to stop wandering.

So the context here, in my opinion, is a believer who's wandered from the truth, they're stuck in sin, much like a prodigal son. But they said, in Jeremiah 6, but they said, we will not walk in it. God said, I sent watchmen over you, saying, listen to the sound of the trumpet, but they said, we will not listen.

So God is saying, I sent you these watchmen, I cried out to you, but you would not listen. So if we were to sum it up, it's this. This sickness is not caused by wandering from God.

I'm sorry, this sickness is caused by wandering from God. It's a pattern of sin. From alcohol to drugs to lying to slander from sexual sin to the sin of pride.

The warnings, the convictions and the rebukes have all been ignored. So the elders get involved in the hope that confession and repentance take place and that faith-filled prayer will release this person from God's chastisement. The person was heading toward physical death as a result of wandering from God, but now they are restored.

The soul is saved and his ongoing pattern of sin, this multitude of sin, is now covered. This multitude of sin he was caught in, it's not just one little sin, it's a multitude, is now covered because of that person that comes back to the Lord and it's dealt with and it's concealed. Death is the final end result of wandering.

To cover sin is to forgive. To cover the sin. What happened in the garden, Adam and Eve? They sinned and God covered their nakedness, covered that sin.

To me, if you read it, covers a multitude of sin because the repentance took place in the restoration. So here's a closing application. Those in the Christian community who have wandered from the truth need to wander back.

This is maybe a message for somebody here tonight. It's a smaller group, obviously, than Sundays, but if there's an area where you know that God is dealing with you in, don't keep playing with God in this area. Don't keep playing with God.

Take it to the cross tonight during worship, repent, confess, say, God, I need to make some changes and then make the changes. Make them. We know what they are.

So don't keep, use this as a catalyst to make that change. It'll be uncomfortable, it may hurt, you may not like it, but in the end, God will reward you. But number two, I don't want to miss this, the responsibility of the person who knows that a person is caught.

See, once you know somebody's caught in sin, we have a responsibility to go to that person and lovingly challenge them. Go to them. So if I know somebody's caught in sin, I'm not going to say anything.

Hopefully the Holy Spirit convicts them over the next couple of months. I'm not going to say a word, please, no, Lord. No, you don't want to rush to them and be a sin sniffer and point out every little thing.

But we have, I believe it was Ezekiel, God said, when you see the sword coming and you don't warn the people, their blood's going to be on your hands. Now, New Testament, obviously a lot's changed there, but the principle's the same. When we see somebody caught in something, the flesh doesn't want to because it's intimidating.

We don't want to upset people. We don't want to be a jerk. But if we go, listen, I see you're caught in this sin.

You're caught in this lifestyle that's not right. And it's not pleasing to God. I just want to come alongside and help you.

I've been caught before confessing our faults to one another. I can relate. I totally want to be there for you.

And we go to them and we help them come out of it. We have a responsibility. Once you know something, and you know something's brought to the church, and we go, oh, gosh, we don't want to handle that.

We'll just let that, God, please just take care of that. And that does happen in a lot of churches. I can name a dozen around the valley that I know, they're just like, well, hopefully that'll fix itself.

We're not going to get involved. But actually Matthew 18 says you go to a brother who has offended you. Or the church goes to somebody that we know something's happening in the home that's not right, and we go to them and say, listen, we love you enough to tell you the truth.

We want to share God's heart with you. And you come in a spirit of humility, take heed lest you fall, and you confess your sin also. I'm not perfect in this area.

We've got things to work on. So it's this atmosphere of confession and repentance and humility before the Lord, before others. We're not trying to hold and hide these secret sins.

And sometimes God will allow sickness to come in, not just sickness, challenging situations. Finances are failing. My job's failing.

My health is failing. What's going on? You might not be lined up with where God wants you to be. Because as we all know, we usually don't make change, do we? Until something happens.

Doctor says I've got great health. Person's making \$150,000 a year. Going to Cancun next month.

Not much is going to change. But he begins to take things from them, these little mini wake-up calls, or the church will come and say something, or Christians will come and say something, or the Word of God will come and say something to your heart and pierce your heart and get you to turn back to God. So that's the application.

I don't know if there's anybody really in this room that would, with the sickness issue and things, but I know there are people that have wandered from God and wandered off that path. And the heart of God is to get you back on the right path. See, you can never go wrong on the right path.

You can never, you'll never look back and regret and say I wish I would've never took that right path. Nobody's ever said that to me. Have they ever said that to you? Of course not.

But here's what happens. Sin feels good for a season and when the season's over there's hell to pay. Sin feels good for a season and when the season's over there's hell to pay.

But we like to live in this season. It feels good. I mean I talk, one of my areas of ministry is if I go to AA meetings now and then and I bring some of those guys here or I talk to people with addiction, they always get caught back into it because these thoughts, I remember it was so joyful.

Yeah, but now you lost your wife and your house. How did that happen? Yeah, but it just, the buzz was so good it got me. And see it deceives for just a little bit and then it takes back.

It deceives for a little bit and takes back. That's the deception of sin. If it wasn't deceptive, nobody would do it.

So it looks good. Eve, all that fruit, whatever it was, it's not an apple, I don't think, but it looks good to the eye, pleasant to the eye, good for food, it tasted good and desirable to make one wise and she took of it and ate. So you always have to remember that.

Does it line up with God's word? Because sin will feel good for a season. And people get caught in sin. They say, see, nothing's happening.

Nothing's happening. Nothing at all. I mean probably more than anything, I don't do as much anymore.

My mom helps a lot with counseling and pre-marriage counseling. But when we counsel like couples who want to get married and they're living together, and they're still in sexual sin. I'm like, well, this is fine.

We love each other. Nothing's wrong. Nothing's happening.

You talk to them six months later, after the wedding, they all want annulments. I married Satan. Well, you're sure Satan too.

What happened? What was this beautiful little thing that was going on, guys? It's called lust. It's called sin feels good for a season. It's called the devil's going to back off for a while and let you enjoy this season of sin.

But when God says, listen, turn back to me. Turn back to me because this season's going to bring hell. Hard is the way after the transgressor.

The transgressor. When sin finally is full grown, sin, what James also says that we learn, when sin is conceived, right, it brings forth, when desire is conceived, it brings forth sin. And that sin, fully grown, brings forth death.

You've got to abort it. You've got to abort it in the infant stages. That kind of abortion is good.

So maybe that's, for somebody tonight, God is done with wandering. It's time to come back. It's time to get back on the right path.

And I want to encourage you. I've made mistakes myself as well. I've got to always come back to that path.

Lord, I want to have a good attitude and not prideful. I don't want to open these doors to the enemy. I want to follow you.

And you come back to that. And you've got to have boundaries. You've got to have different things.

And God wants us to get back on the right track.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/JsBJA5jWQp0.mp4>

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