

BLUEPRINT

FOR A FAITH THAT WORKS

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
James 5.13-20 | September 1, 2019
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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we conclude our series in the book of James. As we have seen this summer, this early Christian letter outlines a blueprint for a faith in Jesus that is not passive – on the contrary, true Christianity works for good in the world.

As this younger, half-brother of Jesus concludes his letter, James makes abundantly clear how every season of life presents an opportunity to grow in our life with God. As John Calvin explained, “[James] means that there is no time in which God does not invite us to himself.”

II. Connecting with One Another

How do you react when things are going poorly?

How about when everything is coming up roses?

III. Study the Text

a. Read James 5.13-16.

James presents us a blueprint of how to center our lives upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. In these verses, he narrows his focus on a few specific experiences we may have.

Why do you think he addresses these things?

How many different experiences can you find in these verses? How would you explain them in your own words?

b. “Is anyone among you in trouble?” James asks.

What kind of trouble do you think he has in mind?

The affliction James alludes to can prompt a variety of responses. How do you usually respond to these things? Why do you think that is?

c. James instructs us to pray during times of trouble. But what should we pray *for*?

Should we pray that God will remove the difficulty?

Or should we pray he gives us the grace to endure it?

Why?

d. James then instructs us to sing during times of happiness. Why can we sing so easily when things are going well?

Let’s dig in a little bit: Should we *only* sing when we’re happy? How can singing be a Christian discipline we learn even during difficult seasons?



- e. In verses 14-15, James instructs those who are sick to request prayer and anointing from church elders.

Why do you think sickness prompts James to instruct believers to contact church leaders? Is sickness different than “trouble” or “happiness”? If so, how?

- f. James writes that “the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.”

What do you think this means? Does the prayer and anointing of elders necessitate a miraculous healing?

- g. James alludes to the possibility that sin prompted the disease. While this *can* happen (see 1st Corinthians 11.30), it is not a necessary connection (see John 9.3) – and we should be very, very careful about alluding to it.

Why do you think James brings this up?

Do you have a Christian friend to whom you can confess your sins? Why do you think confessing our sins to another *person* – not just God – is helpful for our spiritual growth? What does James say?

- h. Read James 5.17-20.

Here James gives an example of what he’s been describing, alluding to the story of Elijah in 1st Kings 17-18. While Elijah was faithful in prayer, if you read the story you’ll also notice that he was praying *in accordance with God’s will* – not his own (like Jesus’ taught us to pray!).

How can we be tempted to pray for things that aren’t necessarily God’s will?

What should we do about that?

- i. Why do you think James ends his letter with those last two verses?

After all that James has discussed, what do you think he means by “wander from the truth”?

IV. Pray

- a. Thank God for His Word and especially the book of James, specifically offering gratitude for the ways it has helped you grow in a faith that works,
- b. Lift up those you know who aren’t currently walking with the Lord,
- c. Ask God to help you pray and praise through all seasons of life!

V. Digging Deeper

- a. For examples of how to pray during times of trouble, turn to Paul’s prayer in 2nd Corinthians 12.7-10 and Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane in Matthew 26.36-46.
- b. For examples of those who sing in the midst of trouble, read Job 35.10 and Acts 16.25.

