

3. It's reported that a preacher in the deep south of the U.S.A. prayed this before the sermon: "Oh Lord, give Thy servant this mornin' the eyes of the eagle and the wisdom of the owl; connect his soul with the gospel telephone in the central skies; 'luminate his brow with the Sun of heaven; possess his mind with love for the people; turpentine his imagination, grease his lips with 'possum oil, loosen his tongue with the sledge hammer of Thy power; 'lectrify his brain with the lightnin' of the word; put 'petual motion on his arms; fill him plum full of the dynamite of Thy glory; 'noint him all over with the kerosene oil of Thy salvation and SET HIM ON FIRE. Amen!"...

- How important are our words and techniques in prayer for others?
- Discuss what is essential in prayer and distinguish what may be helpful and what may be unhelpful in other matters to do with prayer for others.

4. Do you pray when things are going well, or when God has given you good character and strength to stand firm? How can we include praise in our prayer life more regularly and effectively?
5. How can we deal with the tension of not being judgemental (4:12) and yet being encouraged to correct a brother or sister who is in error (5:19-20). To what extent are you your "brother's keeper" in the church? What role might prayer play in these matters (Hint: see chapter 5:17-18)?
6. What kind of relationships would be required to be able to carry out the instructions in verse 16?
7. Which of these situations where prayer is said to be a priority do you most need to work on in your faith and Christian living?

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This study was written by Rev. Steve Webster of St. Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn (Vic. Australia) and may be reproduced for small group bible studies.

# The letter of James

## Patience, Prayer & Suffering

*Consider these thoughts on asking God for what we need...*

"I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of those about me seemed insufficient for the day."

*Abraham Lincoln*

"There are two tragedies in this life. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it."

*Oscar Wilde*

"Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits and blessings which Thou has borne for me. O most merciful Friend, Brother, and Redeemer: may I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly."

*St. Richard of Chichester 13th century*

"Give to a pig when it grunts and a child when he cries, and you will have a fine pig and a bad child."

*Danish Proverb*

"To pray is to change."

*Richard Foster- Celebration of Discipline*

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions"

*James 4:3*

"When people do not mind what God says to them in His Word, God doth as little mind what they say to Him in prayer"

*William Gurnall*

"The Third Petition of the Lord's prayer is repeated daily by millions who have not the slightest intention of letting anyone's will be done but their own."

*Aldous Huxley*

"As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray."

*Martin Luther*

Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come'..."

*Luke 11:2*

## Intro

James addresses too important practical areas of the Christian life in this last section of the letter: patience (or standing firm) under the threat that comes from within (see verses 9 and 12); and prayer that reaches out to the needs of others (see verses 14, 16). The very conditions that require patience seem to produce impatience, and verses 1-6 set the context of the outward pressures upon his chief audience. The question is, can the church stand firm and not descend into in-fighting under pressure? Can we Christians live out our faith steadfastly and display the qualities of the Gospel and even go as far as praising God, praying to God, and caring for one another when the heat is on?

## Need Patience Desperately? James 5:1-12

1. Read over 5:1-11. Into what two sections is this divided, and what two groups of people are addressed? Summarize the different warning given to the different groups.
2. What do verses 7 - 9 suggest about the time in which we live and the expectations we might have for life? (Hint: see 1 Peter 1:5-9)
3. How does our society encourage impatience?
4. Verses 1-7 speak of those who “hoarded wealth in the last days” (vs. 3). What is the relationship between materialistic selfishness and patience? (scan Matthew 6 & 7 for clues)
5. Share any stories you may have of anyone known to you who has patiently and prayerful persevered under pressure. What struck you about their character and their testimony about God?
6. Consider the negatives in verses 9 and 12\*. What are some contemporary examples of these kinds of unhelpful actions in times of difficulty that we might identify and reject?

\* “swear” does not refer to bad language, but to the making promises in someone’s name to convince people of the truth of the promise. Jesus refers to this matter in Matthew 5:34-37. Casual oaths under pressure can be careless and could lead to taking God’s name in vain. James calls for honesty in speech rather than conventions of persuasion.

## Prayer- Who ya gonna call? James 5:13-20

Note that James has a community in mind as he writes throughout the letter. It is therefore helpful to ask as we read, “How would my church function better today if we took this teaching seriously?”

1. James mentions several different situations in which prayer should be a priority. Can you identify them from the text?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 13a
  - \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 13b
  - \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 14
  - \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 15b, 16
  - \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 17-20

In verse 13, the word that James uses for trouble is the same word used in:

- 2 Tim. 2:9 to describe Paul’s imprisonment in Rome
- 2 Tim. 4:5 to challenge Timothy about the hardships of Christian Ministry
- and earlier in James 5:10 to describe the experience of the O.T. prophets who spoke out in the face of opposition (e.g. check out Jeremiah’s bio in the Old Testament)
- In particular, verses 1-6 of James 5 revealed that some wealthy Christians had caused suffering for others by the selfish misuse of their riches. “Trouble” for 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians was often a very physical experience with little material comfort or networks of opportunity.
- Generally speaking, James has chosen a word well known as describing all kinds of afflictions and trials people can face.

The same Greek word for “sick” in verse 14 is used of those close to death in other parts of the New Testament. For example:

1. · The **royal official’s son** in John 4:46, 47
2. · **Lazarus** (John 11:1-3,6), **Dorcus** (Acts 9:37) both of whom died from their conditions
3. · And **Epaphroditus** (Phil. 2:26, 27) who was near death.

James is referring to people with a serious illness; perhaps bed-ridden, hence the reference to the Lord “raising” the sick person up in verse 15, and the reference to the elders praying “over” the patient.

2. By implication in James, is there any situation in life in which prayer is not a priority? Look further at...
  - Jesus own teaching (Matt. 6:11)
  - The Apostle Paul (Acts 16:25; 1 Tim. 2:1; Phil. 4:6; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17, 18)
  - 1Thes 5:17-18 says: “pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”