

James Chapter 5 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "Faith and Patience". I was just going to call it "patience", but I figured no one would understand what it is God wants us to be patience about. Think about my title this way: It is hard to trust in God's promises for our lives when we can't see, touch or sense Him in anyway. Even if we are devout Christians, it is too easy to see the world around us, and wonder if all of this "God stuff" is worth the trouble to try to depend upon daily?
 - a) That leads us to these last 20 verses of this letter. The focus is on our patience with God.
 - b) The easy thing would just be to say, "God is there, have patience to trust in Him, and then life will be ok". The trick is to explain why we need to have patience. That is what James does in this last section and that is what I want to expand upon with this commentary.
 - c) What if you think, I don't have any doubts about His existence right now? Then I would say, "Hang in there, those moments come". It's way to easy to try to live without His help, and say in effect, "You want me to let go of every thought I have and trust in a God I can't sense?" Yes in the sense that God wants us to trust Him with every aspect of our lives.
2. It would help at this point to remember James' purpose for writing this letter. He is writing this letter to believers. Specifically he is writing it to Jewish believers as it was probably written prior to when the early Christian church accepted the idea of non-Jewish people being saved without becoming Jewish first. The book of James could be summed up with this view, "If you are saved, great, then what are you doing about that salvation?" James does not deny one is saved in Jesus alone. James is saying if we are saved, then what are we doing about it?
 - a) That leads us to a discussion about patience. James uses examples such as those who are very rich and don't care about life other than riches. James point to such people is not that wealth is bad, but a lack of interest in the existence of God would show how one's life can be wasted if all we care about is accumulating lots of stuff and not fear His judgment.
 - b) From that negative example of a lack of faith, the letter then focuses on ways we can show that we have patience with God. James uses the example of a farmer patiently waiting for the crops to grow. He also gives bible examples of Old Testament characters that showed patience in their trust in God by their actions.
 - c) In summary, this section of the letter is trying to teach us why having patience is a virtue that all Christians should strive for.
3. OK John, is that it? Just be patient in waiting on God's timing? If it were that easy, James would not have to dedicate this many verses to this topic. If it were that easy, let's face it, we could just sit around, wait for Jesus to return or for us to die, and that would be that.
 - a) If I want you to get one thing out of this lesson, it is not the idea that we just need patience in our Christian walk, but that we have to have trust in God's power in order to have that patience in the first place. I have been emphasizing throughout this entire short study on James' letter the concept that we can and need to draw upon His power in order to be able to live the life that God desires we live. Drawing upon His power is about asking Him to guide our lives for His glory. Then we need to develop the patience to trust in the fact that He is guiding our lives in the first place. That is the type of patience that he is describing in this letter and in particular in this last section of the letter.
 - b) With that said, we are now ready to learn a little more about the topic of patience as God wants us to have both in our dealing with Him and with all other people. My goal is not to make us magically more patience. What I want all of us to understand is patience from God's perspective. It is about learning how to draw upon His power in order to have that patience that God wants us to have the type of patience He wants us to have.
 - c) Also, before I start, since this is my last lesson on James, I have included a short biography at the end of this lesson that lists my sources that I used to prepare them in the first place.

4. James Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.
- a) One of the great dangers in studying one's bible is to read bible verses of out context. If one just reads this verse, or even the first six verses of this chapter, one would think that James basically hates rich people and no one could be saved if they are very rich.
 - i) Stop and consider that there were a handful of rich people in the Old Testament that were saved. Abraham was a very wealthy individual. At the end of the book of Job, God restored Job's riches after a test of life without them. Even in the New Testament, odds are good that the Gospel of John Chapter 3, the teacher who came to Jesus with a question about salvation was rich and became a disciple of Jesus.
 - ii) My point is money itself is neutral. It is the sole dependence upon money in order to appreciate life that is the source of problems. An interesting note is that one can acquire lots of stuff and usually end up being becoming a very selfish person once one has all of that money.
 - iii) There is an old Quaker expression that goes, "Tell me what thing you cannot live without and I'll explain why you don't need that thing in the first place".
 - b) Most of us reading this are Americans and are far richer than most of the world can even relate to. All one has to do is travel to most parts of the world and one realizes how rich any American is in comparison to the most of the world. Does that mean that all us who live here are going to be condemned by this section? Hardly.
 - i) This comes back to my point that money itself is neutral. It may help at this point to recall where we last left off in the book of James. At the end of the last chapter, he was talking about (remember that chapter numbers were not part of the original text) people who made a living as merchants going from city to city. James' point was that one should say "If it is God's will, let us go to that city" as opposed to just doing that act without considering what is God's will for our lives.
 - c) My point here is that James is still using the accumulation of wealth as an illustration, but his point about wealth is different here. The issue is no longer about seeking God's will to make a big financial decision. The underlying issue of the start of Chapter 5 is about what will happen to us if we spend our lives ignoring God in the first place?
 - d) Think of the first part of the chapter this way: The last part of Chapter 4 effectively asked us to think about God before making a big financial decision. Now this chapter starts by saying here are the consequences for ignoring God to only focus on one's own well being.
 - i) This leads me back to my title of "Patience and faith". Let's be honest, when we see or read about someone with a lot of wealth, we can easily get jealous and wish that we had that type of wealth. What we fail to see is the consequences of living with that type of lifestyle of ignoring God in exchange for having all of that luxury.
 - ii) Living with the consequences of failing to trust in His guidance is the type of faith and patience that James wants us to focus upon as we read this text.
 - e) Let me try this one more way: I doubt there are many very wealthy individuals who read James' letter. Let's be honest, such people don't want to hear that how they are living out their lives is wrong. They don't want to hear how selfish they have become by focusing only on their wealth and how they achieve and maintain it. By far, most people who are Christians throughout history and even today do not fall into this category of people as described here in these verses.
 - i) Remember that the condemnation is not of being rich in the first place. James is going to emphasize the danger of ignoring God just because one has achieved say acquiring tremendous riches, or anything else one thinks that can make one happy by achieving such goals. He is warning such people that while they live in luxury now, a judgment day coming. Since they ignore God and only focus on what they acquire in life, they will suffer far more than the good times they have now.

5. Verse 2: Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.
- a) If you thought James was tough on rich people in Verse 1, then you don't realize that he was just getting warmed up. James really lays into such people in Verses 2 through 6.
 - b) James basic point is see all of these things that you have based on your wealth, you don't realize that they will all waste away. None of them matter for eternity. Beautiful clothes will eventually be eaten by moths or they will just wear out over time. The point is such riches don't last forever.
 - i) One has to be careful as one reads this. Again, I don't believe God condemns the idea of owning things. He condemns the idea of trusting in those things for one's happiness and joy and ignoring Him as we focus on those things.
 - ii) Think of it this way: One of the 10 commandments is not to steal. If God is against the idea of stealing, then He must favor the private ownership of things.
 - c) This leads me to Verse 3: If one knows about pure gold and silver, they do not corrupt in that pure form. It is only when it is mixed with "impurities" that those other things wear out. People who work with metals refine them by burning off those impurities. The point here is not that their specific gold and metal is corroded, but that it is a true waste of a life to only spend one's life focusing on acquiring such things.
 - i) The key point is we can't take that stuff with us to heaven. There is a classic story about a man who wanted to take a few bars of gold into heaven. When he arrived at heaven, the response of the gatekeeper was, why would you want to bring some common paving up here when there is plenty of that already lining the streets?
 - ii) I want to state again that I am not against the idea of earning a living or even the idea of acquiring things. The question is always, what is really important to us? If we lost those things tomorrow, would we still have joy? This reminds me again of that Quaker concept of "Tell me what you can't live without and I'll explain to you why we don't need that thing in the first place". That is what James is trying to get across to us in this text. Meanwhile, I'm still not finished with this text.
 - d) In Verse 4 James condemns these rich people for not paying their workers fairly. The idea is that these people got rich by cheating their employees. I don't believe James is arguing for some sort of socialist system where everybody gets paid the same. He is condemning the idea of promising to pay a certain wage, and then not actually paying that wage when the job is completed. It is condemning the idea of getting rich by cheating others.
 - i) This reminds me of an old movie line stated by someone playing a rich investor: His motto was I don't take money from widows and orphans I make them money. The point is God does not want us to get rich by stealing it from those in need, but by investing our time and resources in ways that benefit others. This comes back to the question of are we seeking God to do His will, or are we only using our time for say, acquiring our own wealth? That idea of not caring very much about our eternal destiny is what James is focusing upon in this section of the text.
 - ii) James is effectively saying to wealthy people that don't care very much about their eternal destiny, "You think you've got it made? Well, you ignore the fact that one's time in heaven or hell is a lot longer than one's time on earth.
 - a) Remember that my lesson is about faith and patience? That's the key point here. We need to remember those concepts about His judgment is coming to all of us based on how we live out our lives here and now.

6. Verse 7: Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.
- a) OK, enough complaining about those that only care about this life here and now and not their eternal destiny. It is time to focus on the positive side of patience and faith: That is, there is a wonderful eternal destiny coming for those who are trusting in Jesus complete payment for our sins and are willing to live out our lives based on that trust in that fact.
 - b) James here compares living life with that type of patience to a farmer. Is he saying that a farmer doesn't have to work hard? That doesn't describe any farmer that I have ever even been aware of. James is saying that to be a farmer requires patience. To make a living in that profession requires one's dependence upon God for rain at certain times of the year. Let me explain that one both historically and taking Israel's climate into focus:
 - i) In Israel, it does not rain that much. What rain does come usually happens in the winter months. However, the farmers there were dependant upon some rainfall in the fall to soften up the ground to plant their crops. They also desired spring rain to help those crops grow. One has to remember that they did not have any fancy irrigation systems to water the ground, so rain was a necessity.
 - c) Even today with all of our modern technology and farming techniques, without water, the food we depend upon would not grow. Farmers today still depend upon rain as they get the idea that rain is necessary for the water sources to be there for crops to grow.
 - d) The point here is not to make us experts on farming. The point is about having patience when one is farming crops. That type of patience is what is also needed for the Christian believer. Let's be honest again, it is tough to be dependant upon a God we can't sense. That is why we need that type of farmer's patience. Just as farmer's put their trust in the idea that rain will come during certain seasons, so we must trust that there is a judgment day coming for all people.
 - i) Let's put it in basic terms. If there is a God, what does He want from us? If this life is all that there is, we should be like those rich people described earlier and try to cheat people so we can live as good as possible now. However, if there is a God, and He is going to judge all people eternally, then we should obey Him. We don't do this to earn His love, but just because that is the best way to live, knowing that there is a judgment day coming for all people.
 - ii) But if we are not judged for our sins, how are we Christians judged? It is based on how obedient we are to what God has called us to do with our lives. It comes back to the question of, "Did we use our lives to make a difference for Him, or just use it to enrich our own lives?" That is what James is asking here and uses examples of good and bad people to make his point.
 - iii) With that said, I believe I am patiently ready for the next verse. ☺
7. Verse 8: You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.
- a) Meanwhile, James is saying while the farmer is being patient in waiting for rain at certain times of the year, we too need to be patient that God's timing for us is coming.
 - b) This comes back to a point made in the last lesson. It is that life is short. James compared our lives to a "midst" in Chapter 4. The point is just as one can see one's breath on a cold day and it quickly disappears, so are time in this world is very short in comparison to the eternal time frame of either heaven or hell. As I write this, I am very aware of a relative of mine who is currently dying. She is receiving hospice care at the moment. That is a nurse who assists those who are dying. My point is our time on earth is precious no matter how long or short that time is. If this life were all that there is, life would be very unfair.
 - i) One of my favorite illustrations on this is, "What does one say to a child dying of cancer: Too bad for you or better luck next time?" If there is no heaven, life can be very unfair for lots of people. However if there is a judgment day, one should live out their lives in fear of that day and not just on "stuff" now.

8. Verse 9: Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!
- a) James takes a side-step here and focuses on the issue of grumbling. I taught a lesson on the sin of grumbling back when I taught the book of Numbers. Most of us don't consider grumbling to be much of a sin, especially in comparison to say murder or theft. Yet, God considers grumbling against Him or against other Christians to be a sin. Let me explain:
 - i) In context, grumbling is about not accepting God's will for our lives. Grumbling about other people is about not accepting the idea of putting the needs of others as a priority over our own needs. I'm not saying life does not get difficult at times for all of us. The point is there are healthy ways to deal with problems and also very an unhealthy way. An unhealthy way is to just grumble about our situation and not take it to God in prayer. Another unhealthy way is to get mad at other people because they are getting better things in this life than we have.
 - ii) What God wants instead of grumbling is to take what issues are bothering us to Him in prayer. Pray something like, "I don't like this situation. It is very unfair to me, or unfair to those I care about". Grumbling is when we say or think, "I don't want God to be in charge of this situation. I want it done my way on my timing."
 - b) Now that I've beaten grumbling over all of our heads for a bit, let us think about this verse in context of the previous verses. James point earlier was about the importance of having patience and faith as there is a God and He will judge all people one day.
 - i) The point here is God will not only judge unbelievers but believers as well. I don't hold the view that He will condemn believers for every sin we commit or even the idea of condemning us for grumbling. My view is that we will fail to earn rewards in heaven (however that works) by our failure to being faithful to letting God be in charge of our lives at that moment in time.
 - ii) When James says, "The judge is at the door", it is a colorful way of saying that our lives are short. We never know when our time is up. That is why we have to use the most valuable thing God gives us, our time and give it back to Him by saying in effect, "You are in charge of my life. Make it obvious to me how You want me to use my time and my resources to make a difference for You today." Then we go forward, make the best decisions possible and trust in the fact that God is guiding us through good and bad times. That is where our patience comes into play.
 - iii) James uses grumbling instead of say, theft or murder as if he is saying even when we are just thinking or "murmuring to ourselves" the wrong thing to do, that too will affect our eternal destiny just as much as actually acting out a sin.
9. Verse 10: Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
- a) Here James uses an Old Testament example of someone who has done well by trusting God despite bad circumstances. Remember that James wrote this letter to Christians from Jewish backgrounds. Such people would be familiar with major characters named from the Old Testament.
 - b) The specific example that James picks here is Job. The short version of Job is that he was very rich both in terms of what he owned and having a big family. God allowed Satan not only to take away all Job owned but also to put Job in a lot of physical pain. The purpose of this test was to see whether or not Job would still trust God during that time. Most of the book of Job is a debate between Job and his friends about why he was suffering. None of them understood that God allowed this to happen to test Job. His friends argued falsely that Job had sinned to allow his misfortunes. At the end of the book, God restored Job's health and his riches based on the fact Job trusted God during all of that time.

- c) OK we sort of know that story. Why tell it here? The issue is not that we are all destined to suffer like Job. As I side note, I've yet to teach Job and have been nervous about taking on that study, as I feared that God may take away all I own to help me relate to that book. That is one fear I have to let go and trust that He will help me understand it His way and on His timing. With that said, enough of my fears. Back to why James brought up Job.
- i) James point is that no one person listed in the Old Testament suffered in life more than Job did as recorded in this book. Yet despite that suffering, he never stopped trusting in God's existence and Job's belief that God will resurrect him one day.
 - ii) To put it another way, no matter how much we suffer, the point is eternity is going to be a whole lot longer than our time on earth. The point is no matter what we may be going through at the moment, the longest one's problems can possibly last is one lifetime. As James said in the last chapter, that time frame is like the breath one can see coming out of one's mouth on a cold day in comparison to eternity.
 - iii) In summary, James is saying eternity does exist, God will judge us based on how we have lived out our lives here and now, and no matter how much we may have to suffer in this lifetime, it is nothing in comparison to the length of eternity.
- d) That leads to the logical question of, how do we know for sure that God exists and that we will be resurrected into heaven? If you study the bible carefully, you will find that there is very little, if any discussion about God's existence. The bible is mostly about the point that God exists, we have to deal with it, and here is what He expects of us since He does exist.
- i) The question becomes in effect, "How do we know the bible is the word of God as opposed to some other religion or no religion at all?" In that sense, the bible goes to great lengths to prove that God does exist and the bible is accurate. Let me give you a good way to remember how this is. In the back of most bibles is a bunch of maps to show the geography at different stages in history. Therefore, I would like you to remember the word "MAPS" as an acronym:
 - a) M is for manuscript. There is far more manuscript evidence to support the accuracy of the bible than any other book in ancient history. For example, what we know about the existence and history of Alexander the Great is based on a single ancient document. We have literally a mile high pile of manuscripts that were gathered from three continents with parts of, or the entire bible. Yes there are copyist errors, but by putting all of those copies together one can see the complete story pretty much as it was originally intended to be.
 - b) A is for accuracy. Historical evidence from where the events of the bible have taken place does support the accuracy of the book. The study of all of those thousands of ancient manuscripts supports when put together gives support to its accuracy as well.
 - c) P is for prophecy. About one third of the bible is future predictions. Many of those have already come true with 100% accuracy. Many more of them are about the events of Jesus Second Coming. The point is if we can trust the accuracy of what has been predicted correctly, we can also trust in the accuracy of what will happen in the future.
 - d) S is of statistics. Think of the great number of predictions about the birth and life of Jesus that have come true. Even if one does not believe the Old Testament predicts about Him, one has to see the evidence of the billions of people who have become Christians as statistical support. There are lots of very detailed studies one can do about bible statistics and how it supports the accuracy of the book in the first place.
- e) In summary James is saying here is saying God is real, He has a wonderful destiny for us and if we trust in Him, whatever we have to deal with now is worth the trouble.

- f) It may even help to remember that James wrote this letter to Jewish-Christians who were scattered around the world due to persecution for their faith. James is saying here, that all of this is worth it. The bible still is the Word of God. Jesus did die for our sins. Whatever we have to go through in our life now, is worth it for the eternal destiny in heaven based on our trust that Jesus is God, He is in charge of our lives and He did die for our sins.
- i) That is why James brought up Job here. To state that even if we have to suffer as much as Job did, it is worth it. Even if our suffering is not that bad, God still calls us to live a life based on trusting Him to guide us as to how to live. That is why we need to have patience through whatever we are going through that God is real and whatever we have to deal with is worth the cost in comparison to all of eternity. Now that I've beaten that point to death, I can move on to the next verse.
10. Verse 12: Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.
- a) This verse seems confusing when reading it in context of the previous verses. James was lecturing us on the importance of being patience and waiting on God's timing in order to live out the type of life that He wants us to live. Now, he is saying to us in effect "above all of that...do not swear". You would think he might say, "above all of all of that waiting on God's timing, keep your focus on Him, don't murder or steal" or something like that.
- i) Instead we get "over and above all of that" don't swear. So what is that all about?
- ii) I think James is saying here is in effect, "While we are waiting on God's timing, we still have to be a good witness for Him to the world." If you think about it, to keep our focus on God and avoiding sin is all about being a good witness for Him.
- b) OK then, if that is true, why this emphasis on not swearing? The issue is about being men and women of our words. Let me give a little background on this:
- i) In Jewish culture, some oaths were more binding than others. In our culture, one can cross one's fingers behind one's back and that secretly means that what we are saying is not binding. Jewish people at that time had a roughly similar sort of idea that one can make an oath that was not binding if it was said the right way.
- ii) My point is that concept was silly then and it is silly now to think that way. God expects us to be men and women of our word, period. We can't cross our fingers behind our back and think we can get away with something.
- c) So why is this so important? The important idea is that God cares about us being a good witness for Him. If we are the type of people who can't be trusted to keep our promises, how can we be trusted when we tell others about God? If we swear up and down what we say is the truth and it then turns out not to be true, how can anyone trust what we say when it comes to really important issues like one's eternal salvation?
- i) That is why James is saying don't swear. Just say yes when one needs to say yes and say no when one needs to say no. When one is wrong about a situation, one just needs to apologize and say one was wrong and not make excuses.
- ii) One of my favorite sayings on this topic is, "The blood of Christ has never covered one excuse". People are more than willing to accept honest apologies. Excuses for doing the wrong things are essentially our ego's trying to cover our tracks.
- iii) Remember the big picture idea: Being a good witness for Jesus. Despite whatever one is going through at any given moment, despite the difficulty of having to wait on God's timing, we still need to be a good witness for Him. That is why James is saying "above everything else" to be honest in our dealing with people so that we can be considered trustworthy people.
- d) Before I move on, once again, note that James is saying things "parallel" to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount speech from Matthew Chapters 5 to 7. Jesus said in Matthew 5:37 to "Let our yes be yes and our no be no". One can't help to notice the similarity between what Jesus said and what his half brother James is preaching to us here in Verse 12.

11. Verse 13, Part 1: Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.
- a) I heard a comment recently about someone with a really bad migraine headache. He had the elders of his church pray over him. After the prayer, one of the elders who also dealt with migraines give the sick person some pills to take to relieve the migraine symptoms. My question is, "Is that a lack of faith to take that medicine?" Was the prayer even helpful if one is going to take such medicine? The answer is yes, the prayer made a difference.
 - b) Remember the purpose of prayer: To get our will in line with God's will. Prayer is there to help us understand God's perspective in such situations. It is acceptable for us to want a migraine to go away and to pray about it. A good second line to that prayer would be to help us learn what God wants us to learn from that headache and see pain among other things from His eternal perspective. Honest Christian doctors will tell you that the main purpose of most medicine is to help us deal with pain until the body heals itself. It is the honest fact that God cures most of our ills through time.
 - i) Grant it, things like open-heart surgery and setting crooked bones in place require good surgical skills. The point is what doctors do is help our bodies get better by correcting what needs to be correcting.
 - c) This leads me back to prayer. The issue is not just medical needs, but whatever other type of trouble we can get in. Remember that James is writing this letter to people who are on the run for their lives just for being Christians. James is saying we should pray regularly for God's help and guidance, but still make whatever effort we have to, to run and hide in such a situation.
 - d) My whole point is simply that we need to seek His guidance but at the same time do what is practically necessary to deal with whatever trouble we are in at that moment.
12. Verse 13, Part 2: Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.
- a) Here we get the opposite of being in trouble: That is being happy. Remember what is the difference between happiness and joy: Happiness is based on our circumstances and joy is our attitude no matter what are the circumstances. If we just received some big prize or say a lot of money, we may be happy for the moment, but joy is about our attitude.
 - b) James' point here is that if we are happy for some reason, be grateful to God for whatever reason caused that happiness. As I said in my last lesson, remember the expression, "Are you going shopping? Great, take God with you." The idea is about making Him part of every aspect of our lives including the things we enjoy doing. God should not just be an entity we pray to when things go wrong, but someone we can share our happiness with, during times when things are going well.
 - c) Also think of it this way: Would you rather be around a person who is happy all the time or a person who is complaining all the time? Of course there are difficult times in life. I'm just saying that being a good witness for God is more than just praying for Him when life is not going well. It is about being grateful for the good things we have in life. Not only does it keep us focused on Him, but it also makes us a better witness to others around us.
 - d) Now the bad news. That is all the happiness we get for awhile. ☺ In the next few verses, James is going to focus on the issue of being sick and having others pray for those who are sick in the church. So with the issue of being sick in mind, let me start:
13. Verse 14: Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.
- a) The first thing to discuss here is why should elders pray over someone who is sick? Does that mean that person will automatically get better? Not that I have seen. If the elders of any given church have the power to heal anyone who is sick, why aren't they standing in hospitals all day healing people? Before I get into a discussion of these verses, remember the fact that only God alone can forgive our sins, not the elders of our church. Therefore, the purpose of this ritual is something far more than just asking for sin forgiveness.

- b) I would like you to notice in Verse 14 that the word "elders" is in plural form. That way, if God does choose to do some sort of miracle and heal a sick person, no one single person is getting the credit for that prayer being offered to God at that moment.
- c) Coming back to my relative who is dying at this moment, I know her family all are strong Christians. I'm guessing that there are many people praying for that person as I write this message. We all know that no matter how much we pray, sooner or later all of us will die. My point is this ritual of calling church elders to pray over a situation is not a guarantee that sick person will get better. If that is true, why does James say this in the first place?
Good question.
 - i) For starters, when God does choose to do a miracle, which I have seen many times in my life, there are now multiple witnesses to God doing that healing.
 - ii) What about pouring oil on the sick? Do we take that literally? I have personally been involved in watching such rituals. In the Middle East, oil is associated with giving someone comfort. Pouring oil on someone is soothing in hot weather.
 - iii) I don't think there is any special magic in whatever oil is used for that ritual. It is just a ritual that is associated with God. If He chooses to use that specific ritual to heal a person, that is His business and not ours. I see this whole ritual as, "It can't hurt to try". If the sick person gets well after this specific ritual is performed, then we can give God the credit.
 - iv) So if that is true why not just try any sort of ritual? The issue is whether or not that ritual is associated with the true God of the Universe or not. God does not share His glory with anyone. The reason God wants us to give Him the credit is not for His ego, but simply to get and keep our focus upon Him in our lives.
- d) Let me step back and focus on the big picture of the book of James. The main point in this whole letter is in effect, "If you are saved, what are you doing about it?" Most of the text in this chapter focuses on the issue of patience in waiting on God's timing. James then said that no matter what we are dealing with, we need to be a good witness for Him.
 - i) That means praying for help in bad times and singing songs of praise when we are happy. Now James gives this ritual about having our church elders pray for us or say for others we love when they or us are sick at the moment.
 - ii) The common thread of the whole section is about keeping our focus on Him and waiting on His timing to deal with whatever it is we have to deal with.
 - iii) Again, having elders pray over a situation is a way of having group involvement so no one person gets the credit for the way that they prayed if God so chooses to work at that moment to heal that person.
 - iv) Before I move onto the next related topic, I also want to say that I have seen some incredible miracles in my own lifetime when this ritual is performed. The point is not the exact way we perform the ritual. The issue is our sincerity in trusting God to work and again, waiting on His timing. I can't explain why God chooses to do incredible miracles for some and others have to go through horrible suffering and death. I just know sometimes, He does choose to work that way. This is just one of those situations where we just have to trust that when we get to heaven He will explain why He allows some things and not others to occur.
 - v) I am reminded of something I once heard Chuck Swindoll (a prominent Christian pastor and speaker if you have never heard of him) say, "When we get to heaven, the only word we will get out of our mouths in God's presence is the word "oh"."
 - a) That is, we are wondering why God allowed this or that to happen and after God explains it, all we can say is "oh" as in that is why You allowed this event to happen the way it did. The point is you and I cannot explain all of the great and horrible things that happen in our world. I simply trust that God exists and He allows things to occur His way for His reasons.

- e) All of that now leads us to Verse 15. The final part of that verse says, "If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." This comes back to what I said earlier that only God alone can forgive sins. My point is that it is not about the elders of our church forgiving us, but God is the one who does the forgiving.
- i) I am convinced that the first moment we realize that what we did that was sinful is wrong God forgives us. Remember that to repent of a sin is simply to think or say that "God's view (or the bible's view) on this issue is right and I was wrong on that same issue and therefore, it is my desire to do things God's way and not my way."
 - ii) One of the most famous things Jesus taught is that if someone sins, we should be willing to forgive them "seventy times seven" times. (See Matthew 18:22). Some translations say "seventy seven times" as opposed to seventy times seven.
 - a) The point is we should never be counting how many times one has sinned and then say, "you will never change I can't forgive you anymore".
 - b) But what about the habitual liar? What about say, a drug addict who then keeps going back to their bad habit? Do we give money to someone who we know can't be trusted to keep their word?
 - c) The answer is one has to separate forgiveness from trust. We may not trust someone until they can prove over time they can be trusted. However, if God is willing to forgive anyone who is sincere, we should as well.
 - iii) Besides the issue of being patient with imperfect people (all of us), let us go back to the verse itself. The issue was praying over sick people. As an example suppose someone is sick, due to a venereal disease caused by committing to a sin. Praying over such a person might convict them of that sin. If God is willing to forgive such a person, so should the elders who are praying over that person.
 - iv) My point is that it is not our job to confess every one of our sins to the elders of our church. We don't sin against our elders, but sin against God. The point of having elders praying in such situations is not to beat a confession out of us. It is that if we are that sick person, and people are there praying for us, it should get our focus on God and makes us realize and confess our sins to Him, and not the elders.
- f) Now let me focus on the first part of Verse 15. It says "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up."
- i) I have to admit, that seems like a contradiction. First it says that if that prayer said for this person is made in faith, they will get well. Then it says the Lord will "raise them up" as if they died right after prayer. This does require an explanation.
 - ii) To explain, notice the phrase "prayer making a sick person well". As I've beaten to death, the point is that God chooses to heal sometimes and other times He lets us learn things from those difficult times. There is no specific prayer that elders can say that will automatically make us well again. Again, the purpose of prayer is to help us get our will aligned with God's will. He does give some believers a special gift of healing, but it is not a switch that one can turn on and off. Healing is still up to God and we have to let Him work His way and on His timing. (Look, there's that "patience" issue coming back again. ☺)
 - iii) With that speech out of my system, I think the whole point here is that if the one who is sick is trusting in God to help them through that sickness, no matter how long it takes or what is the outcome, one will be saved. Again, it comes back to the basic idea that salvation requires our trust that Jesus is God and the fact that God the Father did raise Him from the dead and Jesus is in charge of our lives. If we accept that concept we will be saved. If people are praying over us and we agree to the "terms" of that prayer, that is how we are made well.
 - iv) The point is the word "well" does not necessarily refer to the relief from sickness. It refers to our trust in Jesus as both God and the one who is in charge of our lives.

14. Verse 16: Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
- a) All of that discussion about praying over sick people leads us here to Verse 16. Reading it out of context, it would appear that the way to be forgiven of sin, is just to confess our sins to other people and then we will be forgiven. Assuming we have not sinned against the person we are talking to, it is God who forgives our sins, not the elders of our church or whoever else we are praying with at that moment.
 - b) The issue of confession is not so that person next to us will forgive us. It is to relieve our conscious of that sin we carry around with us. There is a wonderful healing aspect to let others know about whatever guilt we are carrying around inside of us due to a sin issue. Obviously we have to trust that person. That is why Roman Catholic churches have the concept of a "confession booths" and Protestant Christians are encouraged to confess our sins to each other in most denominations.
 - i) The point is only God alone can forgive us. Telling others is about letting go of the guilt we carry around inside of us due to whatever sin we are worried about.
 - ii) It also gives others a chance to help us by praying with us over that issue. As I've stated a lot in this study of James, the only way to overcome any sin is by relying on His power and not our own willpower to make us better people.
 - iii) Having God fearing people praying with us and for us is not a magic pill to make us better. It is the fact that people are asking for God's help in order for us to live the type of life that He wants us to live. Having other Christians sincerely pray for us to draw closer to Him, helps us to realize others care about us, and those others want to see us draw closer to Him and rely upon His power to live the type of life that God desires that we live. That is why we confess sins to each other and pray for one another so that all of us can rely on His power to live, as He desires.
15. Verse 17: Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.
- a) Every now and then, James likes to mention the name of someone famous from the Old Testament as an example to be used for whatever issue James is talking about. Here he brings up a bible prophet named Elijah. For those of you not familiar with him, there is no book of Elijah. However, he is a significant figure in "1st Kings". He was a prophet of God during the time period when Israel was ruled by kings.
 - b) The history behind this was that there was a wicked Israelite king named Ahab. Elijah wanted to show this king that the true God is in charge of the world and not the false gods that this king worshipped. To prove his point, Elijah said in 1st Kings, 17:1 that there would be no rain in Israel (The Northern Kingdom) until Elijah said otherwise.
 - i) What is fascinating to bible scholars is the three and one half year time frame that is specified here in James is not specified in the Old Testament. Some just say that James was speculating, but I disagree. If James was speculating, why give such a specific time period? I think that this is one of those little proofs that this letter by James is God inspired simply because he gave information that was not revealed until this moment in time.
 - c) With that said, the important thing is not the three and one half year period, it is that we are learning of another issue about faith in God, patience and waiting on His timing. My personal view is not that Elijah said, "Ok 3.5 years that's long enough. Let it rain". I think it was all about waiting on God's timing and after that time specific time frame, God said, "that's enough, I've made my point." A lot of innocent people had to suffer due to that drought. However the king and all the people who lived under that king realized for that moment that the God of the Israelites is the true God and don't mess with Him. The point is Elijah was just a man, who was used by God in great way to show His power to us.

- d) So does that mean if I pray hard enough it will start or stop raining? Again, prayer is not about getting our will done, but His. If it is His will to make it stop, we can pray for that to happen as easily as we can pray for someone to be healed of sickness. The underlying point is not only that God wants us to pray for His will to get done (so that our will, will be in alignment with His will), but also that we can demonstrate both patience and faith by trusting in His will to be done. In that sense, Elijah is no greater than you or I. God can and does choose to work through anyone willing to trust Him to do His will.
- i) As one reads through the entire bible, one gets the impression that God likes to go through incredible lengths to get us to focus upon Him and have a relationship with Him. To put it simply, God loves us too much to leave us alone.
 - ii) Therefore, the point is God is willing to do allow bad things to happen in order to draw us back to Him as well as allow good things to happen to us if we are just willing to give Him the praise for those good things that happen in our lives.
 - iii) The point of all of this is that faith in God does require patience that He is working out our lives for His glory, through the good and bad times of our lives.
16. Verse 19: My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.
- a) James ends this letter by stating the fact that God desires team work if for no other reason, then the fact that Christians can help each other to stay focused on Him.
 - b) To put it another way, having patience on God's timing is a hard way to live and we need to encourage each other to keep on trusting in Him no matter what we are dealing with.
 - c) That leads me to Verse 20. The verse implies that if we help someone turn from sin, then we will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins.
 - i) Let's be honest. The statistics on death are pretty steady. 1 of out of 1 people die.
 - ii) Therefore, James is not talking about literal death but spiritual death. If James is talking about nonbelievers, then showing someone the way they have sinned is a way of helping people draw closer to God, which is what He desires all of us use our lives in order to accomplish.
 - iii) What if we are in a situation where we are encouraging someone who is already saved? By helping other Christians turn from sin, we are helping them to do His will for their lives at that moment. Does that mean we should force our will on others? As I once heard Dr. James Dobson say, "I can't even force my own dog to do what I want him to do, let alone force anyone else to do my will".
 - iv) The point is we should if we get the opportunity offer to help others, but we can never force our will upon anyone else. It never works. However, helping others to turn from sin usually prevents them from committing more sins, which is James final point in that verse. It saves him (or her) from death not only in the sense of salvation, but also in the sense of Christians encouraging each other in order to do His will for all of our lives.
 - d) OK, why end this letter this way. It seems like a tough way to end it. The issue at hand is about Christians working as a team in order to encourage each other to live the type of life that God wants us to live. It is about having the patience and trust that He is guiding us as He desires and we should encourage each other to trust in Him. In that sense, this ending is the perfect ending of the letter, as we help each other to trust in Him through our lives.
17. I want to end with a prayer I personally use a lot. In Colossians 1:11-12, Paul prays that we all be strengthened with His power so we may have great endurance and patience and joy. That is the desire for my own life as well as those of you who read these lessons. Yes I want all of us to have patience in waiting on His timing, but we do it through His power and not our own. That is my closing prayer for all of us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
18. Since this is my last lesson on James, on the next page is my sources I use for these lessons.

Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #9 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on the book of James are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on James by Alistair Begg. This is from an audio series available for download from his website. The link is <http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/?scripture=James>
2. Commentary on James by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
3. Commentary on James by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/james/>.
4. The Letter of James, by Douglas Moo. Copyright 2000 by Wm. B. Publishing Company 255 Jefferson Ave S.E. Grand Rapids Michigan 49503. ISBN 0-8028-3730-1.
5. Commentary on James by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
6. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
7. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source. The actual text that is copied and pasted is taken from this source.
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm.
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
10. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at www.jpmoreland.com and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at www.str.org. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them here.