**Press On: With Prayer (Feb. 1, 2017)**

**James 5:13-20 (NIV)**

13Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14Is 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. 15And 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. 16Therefore 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.

**Helpful Background**

1. The best response to trials, troubles, or tough times is to pray! James calls the Church to pray, in formal and informal ways. We are to call the leaders of the Church together to pray, we are to pray for each other, and we are to pray for those who need the healing touch of the Lord.

2. The elders of the Church were simply the leaders of the local body of believers. James instructs the believers to rely on the elders to pray for them, and to anoint them for healing. This anointing was simply a tangible sign of God’s care and grace, and in no way was viewed as a “magical cure” for the sick person. Anointing with oil was a sign of blessing, of “setting someone apart for God’s service,” or for a symbol of God’s presence and grace.

3. James makes a strong link between “believing prayer of the elders” and the answered prayer that the sick person “will be healed” and the “Lord will make them well.” The responsibility for the “believing” is the Church leaders, not on the faith of the sick person. The difficulty comes in the differing definitions of “healed” and “well.” From God’s perspective, a person that is truly healed and made well is brought home to Heaven and out of this fallen world. The person is forever “healed” of any disease, illness, or struggle, because all trials are gone. The person has received the “ultimate healing,” and is “made well” in an eternal sense. From the human perspective, we want the person to be physically healed and restored, and want them to still be part of our lives. We do not call it healing if a loved one dies, and we do not think of their death as them being “made well” either. But at some point in our life-long journey to know and love Christ, we learn to share God’s perspective on this topic, and this maturity helps us greatly.

4. Some physical illnesses MAY have a link to an individual’s sin. For example, sinful addiction often has physical consequences that are a direct result of the sinful choices made by an individual. Also, sin can produce bitterness, depression, discouragement, or guilt that may spark physical symptoms. James carefully uses the word “if” in this context, as he does not want to make the link that physical illness is ALWAYS caused by sin, as that is clearly NOT the case. (5:15) Sin can cause sickness, (Mark 2:1-12; 1 Cor. 5:5, 11:27-30) but it is clearly not always the case. (John 9:2-3)

**Review Questions**

***5.*** 5:13) What challenge does James issue? When we are going through hardship, what should we do? What about when we are going through good times?

6. (5:14-15) What can a believer do when they are sick? Who are the elders? What is the significance of anointing with oil? What is the potential difficulty wit 5:15? How can we reconcile this?

7. (5:16) How does the last part of 5:15 fit with this verse? What is confession? To whom should we confess our sins? Why? How can this help? Who is righteous? Of what use are the prayers of a “righteous” person?

**SO WHAT? (Apply)**

8. (Review 5:13-16) Your thoughts? How have you experienced prayer? Have you responded to trials with prayer?

9. Have you ever prayed for another or been prayed for in a more formal/spiritual ritual way (anointing with oil, or similar)? How can prayer create tensions if we don’t properly understand this passage? How do we “Biblically define” words like “heal” and “well?”

10. How does this passage help us to press on? What part does prayer play in persevering through difficult times or not getting distracted during good times?