

How should we face affliction or persecution? There are four ways in which we should **not** react. We should not react with surprise or with panic or with bitterness or with despair. How then should we react? James says we should turn to prayer.

'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.'

- Every trouble is an invitation to prayer
- Various kinds of trouble
- One remedy

'Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing songs of praise'

- When we are not suffering singing songs helps us to pray
- Gratitude – music and worship

Sickness

- Sometimes arises from bitterness of spirit

(i) The sick person takes the initiative

(ii) Reference is to Christians

(iii) The elders of the church – plural

'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.' This is the only thing that James mentions at this point. He says: let suffering have a shaping effect on our lives in leading us to prayer. God does not allow any trouble to come that is not within His control. Every trouble is an invitation to prayer. It could be a threat to your security, something to do with money or safety. It could be something emotional or psychological. Failure. Or depression. Or stress. It may be something to do with health (as James goes on to say). Then there are trials which we bring upon ourselves. These are specially bad because not only do we experience suffering, but we also tend to feel guilty. Perhaps your children are rebellious but it is partly your own fault! The worst suffering is spiritual suffering, when God 'turns his face' and seems to hide from us. But whatever the trial, one remedy is there: the trouble must drive us to prayer.

*'Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing songs of praise'*¹. We are not suffering all the time! James knows that we can at times be greatly rejoicing. God can give us a break from suffering. God is there for us in every circumstance. We pray when we are suffering. We pray when we are rejoicing. We pray when we are sick. It is important to keep praying when we are not suffering! We might be tempted to leave aside prayer when we are doing well in life. But James says we should still be people of prayer. However the praying will be different when we are rejoicing. This is a time in our lives when we specially ought to sing songs of praise. Suffering helps us to pray. When we are not suffering singing songs helps us to pray as well. There should be some music in our prayer-times. God wants our gratitude. He wants our worship.

One special trouble that may come to us is sickness. There was perhaps some sickness among James' friends. In James 3:2 James said, 'If anyone makes no mistakes in talking, that person is perfect and is able to keep the whole body under control'. I wonder whether this includes the idea that if we are not able to control the tongue we shall find ourselves having physical problems? Certainly sickness sometimes seems to arise from bitterness of spirit. James has a word for the sick.

*'Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the congregation; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord'*¹, *and the prayer of faith will make the sick person well, and the Lord will raise him up*². It is important to note the precise details of what James said. (i) The sick person is the one who takes the initiative. The elders do not call for him. He or she calls for the elders. (ii) James is referring only to Christians. He says: 'If anyone of you ...'. He is referring to his Christian friends. (iii) The praying people are a plurality. This is not just 'the pastor' or a super-preacher with a reputation for being a healer. The sick person calls all the officers of the church. We have to do here with the elders of the church. (iv) James envisages an actual visit to the sick person. They

¹ 5:13

¹ 5:14
² 5:15a

(iv) A visit to pray

(v) Anoint with oil

(vi) Prayer in the name of the Lord

• The prayer of faith brings healing

• All blessings 'in the atonement'

• Leave room for God's sovereignty

• Sickness caused by sin – sometimes

• Confession only as wide as the sin – no wider

• Public sin – public confession

pray 'over' the sick person. (v) They anoint the person with oil. Some think this is medicine, but I think it is more likely a symbol of our faith in the Holy Spirit. They are praying for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the body of this person. (vi) They pray in the name of 'the Lord' Jesus Christ. 'The name' of Jesus is His power. We are asking for the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to be at work.

James says 'the prayer of faith will make the sick person well.' The most important question here is: what is 'the prayer of faith'? It is not 'taking' healing. It is not persuading yourself or trying to force yourself to believe. It is not 'claiming' your healing as a right. There is indeed (as is often said) 'healing in the atonement'. Actually there is every spiritual blessing in the atonement, including the resurrection body. Jesus died for the redemption of the entire universe¹. But this does not mean that this sovereignty of God is cancelled out and we can 'switch on' healing at will. Matthew 8:17 only means that **when** God gives sovereign healing it comes from the cross. It does not mean we can switch anything on at will. Forgiveness is available now; but the redemption of our bodies is something we are mainly 'waiting' for. Any healing before the resurrection is a foretaste of what is to come.

It may be that the sickness was caused by sin (although not all sickness is caused by sin). James has a word for this kind of person also. 'And if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven¹. So confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may all be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power in its working²'. There was apparently a lot of sickness in the churches to which James was writing. James asks them to admit their sins of discrimination and quarrelsomeness. It is not a question of confessing something that no one knows about. (For confession should be as wide as the sin, and no wider. If it is entirely secret it may be confessed only to God. If the sin was public sometimes the confession must be public as well. But the unnecessary public confession of secret sins helps no one, except the devil.) When we admit to each other our needs we pray for each other. The result is great spiritual blessing for such praying has great power.

1
Colossians
1:20

1 5:15

2 5:16



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