



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

June 19, 2005
James 5:13-18

OVERVIEW

Well, this week is bound to stir up some conversation because we are going to touch on some "hot topics": prayer, sin, sickness, and healing. Clearly, we will not be able to address all of these issues in depth, but we do want to be attentive to what James has to tell us about prayer and suffering. In the midst of this letter to his fellow followers of Jesus, James has a word about the place of prayer in the midst of suffering. Bottom line? He thinks prayer should be a "first step" rather than a "last resort."

DISCUSSION

The opening questions should help get your group thinking in the direction of "first steps." Most of us have certain routines that have become a regular part of our lives. We follow a fairly predictable pattern when we get up in the morning, when we get to the office, when we get into a car. After talking about these less provocative scenarios, turn the question to James' favorite topic: suffering. What are the "first steps" you take when you face suffering? Most of us probably have a routine there as well.

As you read James 5:13-18, it quickly becomes clear that to James' way of thinking, prayer is a "first step" in many situations. And, specifically, when facing suffering or sickness, prayer is not supposed to be a last resort kind of action.

Notice that after laying out the suggestion that those who are ill should approach the elders of the church for prayer, James does open the door for everyone to pray for one another (5:16). It isn't only the elders who can pray this way; but it is one option. What seems to be "not optional" is to adopt prayer as a first step in dealing with suffering and, in particular, physical ailments.

James very clearly seems to be connecting sin with sickness. But does this mean that all sickness is related to sin? No, it doesn't. (See, for example, John 9:1-3.) Are we to assume that there is no connection at all between sin and sickness? Clearly not. (Besides this passage, note I Corinthians 11:39-40.)

Be careful about turning your small group discussion into a "theology of suffering" debate or a heated argument about healing. If you feel that the conversation is getting beyond what you want to discuss in the group, don't be afraid to refer those interested to an elder or pastor for further discussions.

What do we want to take away from James' comments here? Focus on three things:

1. James tells us that prayer should be a first step whatever we are facing.
2. James tells us that physical healing *can* come through prayer (although that is not a guarantee).
3. And by using the example of Elijah (from I Kings 17-19), he calls our attention to someone who prays powerfully *but who prays as the Lord has led him*.

BIG IDEA

Prayer, it's not just for last resort any more!



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

June 19, 2005
James 5:13-18

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Let's take a little poll. We want to talk about "first steps." So, what is the first thing you do . . .

When you get up in the morning?

When you get in the car?

When you plan for a vacation?

Everybody has "first step" tendencies. There are things we just naturally do "first" when we are facing a particular issue. Let's do one more. What is the first thing you do . . .

When you are facing suffering?

James' letter is all about how Christians are empowered and enabled to grow through hard times with joy. Let's read James 5:13-18 and look at James' view of "first steps."

What are we encouraged to do if we are suffering?

If we are happy?

If we are physically infirm?

What is the common element in all of these?

Why do you think it is that so many Christians see prayer as a "last resort" kind of thing rather than a "first step"?

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