

## Before the Lesson

**Read the Scriptures and overview below before your LIFE Group meets.**

Scripture passage: James 5:13-20

James is a book that outlines expressions of authentic faith, and a manual of measure for practical Christian living. Not to be considered a to-do list but rather a go-to guide for handling the complexities of life, it is packed full of real-life complications and offers all-encompassing relief from the ups and downs, joys and sorrows, and peaks and valleys this world holds. It has helped us develop some healthy habits for Christian living and aided us in putting feet to our faith. The culture surrounding James' writings was one of turmoil much like today. Life, after all, was and is still complicated. As wonderful as life can be at times, the reality is that it can also be full of disease, disaster, dismay, and disillusionment. Persecution, famine, heartache, injustice, illness, stress, and strain have been and will always be a part of life and a part of a believer's walk of faith.

The final words of James to fellow believers center around three crucial concerns that we must all deal with – suffering, sickness, and sin. They also give the antidote for handling these life complications – prayer!

Therefore, as we near the close of our series, we will handle this final passage in two parts. This week we will consider *five foundational statements about suffering, sickness, and sin*, looking closely at the realities that surround these human experiences. In our final lesson in James next week, we will examine the *ministry of prayer* as it relates to these life complications and its power to turn our hearts toward God in the seasons and sufferings of life.

### Focus question:

**Why is suffering a part of the believer's walk of faith?**

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## Group Discussion

**Discuss the following five foundational statements surrounding suffering:**

1. *The Fall* is our point of reference for suffering, pain, and sickness in the human experience.
  - Genesis 3
  - Romans 5:12
  - Romans 6:23
  - Romans 8:7
  - Romans 8:22
2. The painful and perplexing reality is that because of *the Fall*, suffering touches every life in two ways:
  - Original Sin – Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23, Psalm 51:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 5:12
  - Personal Sin – Job 23:10, Psalm 119:67, Romans 3:23, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, Galatians 6:7-9, Hebrews 5:8

3. Sickness and suffering are **not** always the result of personal sin.
  - John 9:2-3, Romans 8:18-21
4. Jesus came to reverse the curse.
  - Romans 5:17-21, 1 Corinthians 15:2-22, Revelation 21:3-7
5. While God can heal anyone, anywhere, and anytime, it is not always God's will or way to heal physically.
  - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- *Suffering, says Joni Eareckson Tada, teaches me that the greatest good of the Christian life is not the absence of pain, but the growth of Christlikeness. To be like Christ in suffering is to be prayerful, obedient to the Father, self-controlled, hopeful, patient, and long-suffering. Consider these verses on suffering and its relationship to our walk of faith.*
  - Romans 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, Hebrews 12:10-11, 1 Peter 4:12-13
- According to James 5:13-18, there is one comprehensive response to the issue of disease (suffering, sickness, sin): **The Prayer of Faith!**
  - James 5:17-18 references Elijah. His story is a wonderful and positive reminder of prayer in the life of a believer. **Skim 1 Kings 17-19.** Prayer characterized Elijah's life. He consistently talked with God, received instruction, and obeyed.
  - What characterizes you? Are you known as a man or woman of much prayer? To whom do you turn first when you encounter suffering, sickness, and sin?

## Further Study (to be used in your personal Quiet Time)

In preparation for next week's study on prayer and its effects on us as we deal with the complications of life, look at these examples from God's Word.

- Exodus 33:12-13 – a prayer for guidance
- Psalm 51 – a prayer of repentance
- Matthew 6:9-13 – Jesus' model prayer
- Colossians 1:9-14 – a prayer for believers