

Invitation to Prayer

James 5:13-20



Preparation: *Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 179-189. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.*

Beginning the group study: Thank God for giving you these ten weeks together!

Read aloud from James 5:13-20

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 174-175), printed here:

“I have heard Christians facing difficult trials say, ‘I need to know how great God is.’ A recent occurrence came while my wife’s parents were visiting us for Christmas. Dad became ill, and I had to take him to the emergency room. We all spent a couple of anxious days while he was in the hospital. It is bad enough to be ill; it is worse when one is a thousand miles from home and the doctors are unable to diagnose the cause of the severe pain. On one of those anxious days, Mother was telling me about her quiet time that morning. She said she had thought about interrupting her current reading, which was in a section of Scripture about God’s supremacy and authority, to look for some comforting passages about God’s faithfulness and healing. She decided instead to stay in the section she’d been reading. She said, ‘This is what I need now. It doesn’t answer all my questions, but I need to know how great God is.’

I have experienced it myself. In the midst of still-unresolved trials, I need to submit my life consciously and deliberately to the greatness of God. That does not give me all the answers to the questions of why things are happening or what I should do, but it is what I need in order to deal with the fear and pain.

The original readers of James’ letter are themselves in difficult circumstances. They are suffering under economic, legal and even violent persecution. Their trials are very much unresolved and current. In love for them, James has driven home the point of the greatness of God – that God is great in righteousness, unchangeableness and most of all faithfulness to give good gifts in compassion and mercy. Now, in the final section of the letter, James concludes his message with three particular things to do in light of the greatness of God: do not swear (v. 12); instead, pray; and finally, keep bringing each other back to the truth. These are his three encompassing instructions.”¹

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

Getting started:

- Talk about your experience with prayer – the good and the bad.
- Have you experienced powerful prayer? If so, please share; if not, is that something you desire?

James' first emphasis in this section is about the different times and situations for prayer. In times of trouble, happiness, sickness, or any other time, James tells us that prayer is appropriate and necessary. It's tempting to let times of trouble suggest that God is uncaring or unable to help, and we pray less. Or, when we are filled with happiness sometimes it's tempting to get complacent, which may result in praying less as well.

- When is it most difficult for you to pray?
- It may not be your first instinct to go to God in prayer – either in times of trouble or times of happiness. That's where the beauty of the Christian community can be found – we hold each other up in prayer, and go to God on their behalf when they can't. Talk about how you can be this community for each other past today.

James is hoping to help a group of Christians who are struggling – they are playing favorites (2:1), verbally attacking each other (3:9), fighting with each other (4:1), and judging each other (4:12). Their relationships *need* healing, and James is directing them back to God in faith with a reliance on Him in prayer.

- James sees an opportunity for big change in the lives of his readers. What kind of hopes do you have for your relationships (with others and with God)? Consider taking some time to bring these hopes to God in prayer.

James isn't denying salvation by grace through faith; he's convinced that genuine faith will express itself in righteousness, and the prayer of genuine faith is effective prayer.

- When we see the word "effective," we may be tempted to see the results of our prayers as something we accomplish or failed to accomplish. God asks us to be faithful in prayer and let God be effective. Discuss faithful prayer and how this might be a "righteous" activity of genuine faith.
- Are you ever tempted to see the results of your prayers as something you accomplish?

End your time by praying together. Pray with gratitude for what God has taught you, name what you have learned from each other, and ask the Holy Spirit to take what you have learned in this study and plant it deep in your hearts.