

# EXTREME FAITH

WISDOM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

## Lesson Eight:

### *We Need Each Other's Faith (5:13-20)*

Can you believe this is the last lesson in this study? What a great and intense book. Sometimes in history people avoided this book because they were worried that there was too little grace and too much work! Martin Luther threw a copy into the river one day, though he later included it in the Bible he translated into German. Because he was fighting against a corrupt church that focused on religious merit, he worried that people would misread James. But we have discovered that this work is full of grace, hope, and love – sometimes a bit of “tough love.”

Once again, many of James' favorite topics converge in these final verses: prayer, faith, humility, perseverance, and caring for others. The overarching theme is that we are doing all this growing and learning in community – as part of the local church. Notice that all of James' commands and encouragements reflect the importance of good relationships, especially among believers.

God is powerful and sovereign. He has chosen to use us to be agents of blessing to one another. Our prayers matter. Our listening to one another matters. And restoring sisters and brothers to fellowship with God and the church brings divine blessing. It is good to remember that these believers were having communion each week and wanted to be right with God and each other so that this moment of worship would honor the Lord.

#### Opening conversation:

These verses reveal openness and vulnerability in community. Why is it hard sometimes for us to be open with one another?

## Reading #1: James 5:13-16

#### Key idea:

The power of our words is again evident: in our praises to God, our prayers for the sick, our confession of our sins with each other, and in praying for healing and restoration.

- Parallel scripture: I Thessalonians 5:12-24
- Question: What positive benefits do we receive when we confess our sins and needs to a trusted believer?
- Question: Why is it hard to forgive ourselves and others?

### Insight:

Focusing on one sentence in this passage: "If they have sinned, they will be forgiven." It is important that we see the BIG differences between forgiveness and excusing. Excusing is a term reserved for accidental human behavior, like when we bump into someone in a crowd and say, "excuse me." There is no moral or relational issue – just our human limitations. Forgiveness is when there has been a real transgression. God forgives us through the cross of Christ, where love and justice met, and our ransom was paid in full – Amen! (Colossians 2:11-16; Romans 3:21-31). God is not excusing our sin but applying all his love and power toward forgiveness and restoration (Romans 5:1-11). When we forgive one another, we are committing ourselves to treating one another as if the sin had not happened, desiring the best for one another. This does NOT mean being subject to abuse but desiring the best and not keeping an emotional "rap sheet" against the other person.

## Reading #2: James 5:17-20

### Key idea:

"Ordinary" people who believe in a powerful God will see extraordinary things happen, including answers to prayers and restoration of people we thought were lost. This is not faith in our level of faith, but wholehearted trust in God's ability.

- Parallel scriptures: I Kings 17:1; Matthew 8:5-13
- Question: When have you seen the Lord answer a prayer? Share testimonies of God's goodness.
- Reflection: If we are honest, sometimes we struggle with how our prayers are answered. One moment we see dramatic improvement as we pray for healing; other times we are attending a funeral. We pray for the salvation of family and friends and seems to take so long. Other times, we ask for help and it arrives almost the same moment we are praying.

### Prayer exercise:

Let's offer short prayers of dedication to God, expressing our trust that God is good and hears our prayers.

Read Psalm 73 and Psalm 37 in one sitting. Psalm 73 offers words for our complaints, while giving eternal perspective. Psalm 37 gives insights on daily living as we await God's answers.