



## “Faith’s Response to Weakness”

### REVIEW

We live in a world where many seek to produce what we call “knockoffs”, cheap imitations of a quality product. Some of you are familiar with Pinterest fails. All attempts to imitate the real thing but fall miserably short. Genuine Christianity begins with a change in the core of our being through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to bring about change toward the Father’s goal for every one of His children; to be like His Son Jesus. Sometimes the “knockoffs” look authentic until held up next to the real thing. James compares the way we respond to life with the way true faith responds to life. He provides instruction according to God’s ways along with insight to help us understand God’s ways and live accordingly.

So far, we have explored several life categories requiring a faith response.

**I. Faith’s response to trials 1:2-27**

*Joyfully endure – continued endurance produces maturity and stability.*

**II. Faith’s response to partiality and prejudice 2:1-13**

*Love others as ourselves*

**III. Faith’s True Nature 2:14-26**

*Believe God and behave godly or demonstrate your belief by your behavior*

**IV. Faith’s response to conversation 3:1-12**

*Control your speech it can be destructive or constructive*

**V. Faith’s way of life 3:13-4:12**

*Live wisely according to God’s way*

**VI. Faith’s Response to God’s will 4:13-17**

*Include God in all your plans*

**VII. Faith’s response to suffering and persecution 5:1-13**

*Patiently endure and pray*

**VIII. Faith’s response to joy 5:13**

*Sing praises*

*Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. James 5:13*

**IX. Faith’s response to weakness 5:14-18**

*Ask for help and confess sins*

Here James instructs those in a state of weakness to ask for help and confess sins. He then he prescribes a process. He includes instructions for the elders of the church. He anticipates a glorious outcome.

**A. The Instructions 5:14-17**

**1. The circumstance – weakness**

*Is anyone among you without strength (weak)? James 5:14a*

Most of your translations opt for the word “sick”. Here is my reason for opting for a broader translation. Every word in most languages have a range of meaning. The same is true for the Greek language. The context in which a word appears determines any specific meaning.

Our English word “love” has a broad range of meaning. English dictionaries record up to nine different aspects to the word “love”. Context determines specific meaning. “I love pizza” is much different than “I love my wife.”

When studying a Bible term, you can discover its range of meaning by the origin of the word and then the range of meaning revealed in contexts in which it is used. The term translated “sick” in most versions is the Greek root word meaning “strength” preceded by a negative resulting in a word meaning not strong or weak. We do the same in English i.e. “im-patient”, “un-productive”, “un-faithful”. I prefer to translate this passage “Is anyone **without strength** rather than sick?”.

Give attention to the following brief survey how the New Testament used the term.

**a. Physical weakness**

*But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their **sicknesses**.* Luke 5:15

*A man was there who had been **ill** for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The **sick** man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." John 5:1-8*

*The sisters (of Lazarus) sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is **sick**." But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This **sickness** is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." John 11:1-4*

*No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent **ailments**.* 1 Tim. 5:23

**b. Weakness of the fallen flesh**

*I am speaking in human terms because of the **weakness** of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.* Romans 6:19

*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 26:41

**c. Emotional weakness**

*I was with you in **weakness** and in fear and in much trembling,* 1 Cor. 2:3

*I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is **weak** without my being **weak**? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my **weakness**.* 2 Cor. 11:27-30

James also used a synonym in verse 15 for “weak”.

*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow **weary** or fainthearted.* Hebrews 12:3

*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the **weak**, be patient with them all.* 1 Thessalonians 5:14

**d. Weakness of faith or spiritual weakness**

*But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 1 Cor. 8:9-11*

*Without becoming weak in faith Abraham contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; Romans 4:19*

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6*

*Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Rom 14:1*

**e. Demonically distressed**

*When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demonized; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES." Matthew 8:16-17*

*And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a weakness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are released from your sickness." And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God... Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" Luke 13:10-13, 16*

*And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Acts 19:11-12*

**f. Inability**

*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7*

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15*

*For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness Heb7:18*

*This term has a wide range of meaning spanning every aspect of our life; weakness of body, soul, spirit, mind, will, emotions, abilities.*

*The book of James has been all about weakness in the church family.*

- Crumbling under trial
- Falling to temptation
- Failing to obey the word
- Prejudice in the church
- Complaining about life

- Destructive tongues
- Fruitlessness
- Jealousy and selfish ambition
- Pride
- Worldliness
- Presumption of the future and failure to include God in planning
- Struggling under persecution

James concluded his letter by providing a prescription for weakness in the church. Churches have sought to apply this prescription for centuries. I believe in it, but I also feel it has been too narrowly and inadequately applied. Due to the narrow translation, it is usually only practiced for physical sickness. Due to the comprehensive elements involved, its practice is generally incomplete.

## 2. The conduct of the weak 5:14a, 16

### a. Call for the elders of the church 5:14a

*Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church...James 5:14*

We have seen the word **para** kaleo meaning to call alongside, encourage, comfort.

This is the word **pros** kaleo which means to call toward or to one's self.

Every other occurrence of this word is found in the Gospels and Acts.

*And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. Matthew 10:1*

*And Jesus called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: Matthew 15:10*

*And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them Matthew 18:2*

You get the idea. It means to invite someone into your life to help. Who do we call? The two options are to call for the official elders of the church or the term could also refer to those older and mature in the church. The plural use of the term indicates we are to invite more than one.

### b. Confess sins to one another 5:16

A second action occurs in verse 16 as James summarizes the process.

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another... James 5:16*

James moved from providing instruction to any individual member of the family struggling at a specific time with weakness to instruction for the whole church family to develop a practice of confessing sins to one another and praying for one another.

The term translated "confess" comes from two terms "same" and "say". It had to do with an acknowledgement of something or a declaration of agreement. To say the same thing. Be willing to call sin as God sees it.

*And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Mark 1:5*

*Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. Acts 19:18*

*It is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." Romans 14:11*

and every tongue **confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:11

because, if you **confess** with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one **confesses** and is saved. Romans 10:9-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10

We honestly acknowledge our struggle. We willingly humble ourselves and evaluate our life according to God's standard. Sometimes our weakness directly relates to something in our life; anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, moral failure, guilt, rebellion, disobedience, doubt

Neglect of our spiritual health can weaken any area of our life from the physical to the spiritual.

Willful sin may open doors to demonic strongholds.

*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give a place (beachhead) to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27*

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the danger of bitterness and unforgiveness.

*so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:11*

Some Corinthian members symbolically declared their commitment to Christ and His body through participation in the Lord's supper while failing to demonstrate it by their life. Here is what Paul said of them.

*Anyone who eats and drinks (The Lord's Supper) without discerning the body (church family) eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are **weak** and ill, and some have died. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30*

James lays the responsibility to ask for help on the one experiencing weakness in their life. James instructed them to invite mature believers to help them manage their weakness. James called for an openness about their life at any of these categories. If we accept the broader usage of this term beyond physical sickness, this should be a regular church family practice. Why isn't it? Fear, bad experience, pride, lack of trust in other people, embarrassment?

### **3. The conduct of the elders 5:14b**

So, what are the "elders to do? James included specific instructions for them.

*Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church, and let them pray on him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14*

#### **a. Anoint with oil in the name of the Lord**

Even though the instruction to pray comes first, the action indicated by the use of a participle indicates that the anointing comes before the praying. "Let them pray **having anointed** with oil (previous to prayer)."

Only one other place connects anointing with oil to healing.

*And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. Mark 6:13*

Some think the oil was medicinal. If that were the case there would really be no need to call the elders, or confession of sin. Just take your medicine! How does one take medicine in the name of the Lord? Anointing with oil in Jewish tradition was a symbol of God's favor and blessing. Perhaps the gesture affirmed God's love

and care for the person being prayed for. Note: I cannot find any direct correlation between oil and the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

***b. Pray in faith***

This is the regular word for petition, supplication, request and sometimes even worship. Here they were to pray “on” or “upon”. Laying hands? The pray would be offered with the assurance of God’s willingness and ability to answer.

**4. The anticipated outcome 5:15-16**

James provided a notable variety of life-change words. What does the Lord promise to do in response to the prayer of faith offered by the elders. Notice it is neither the elders nor the oil nor the specific prayer that actually does the work. It is the LORD who produces results in accord with His sovereign will. I found a surpassing correlation between the range of meaning of the four life-change words or results with the range of meaning we discovered with the word “weakness.” It is such a fascinating study I didn’t want to rush it. We will detail it next week as well as tackle the whole issue of why there has seemed to be so few positive examples of this process in the church.

James indicated that these prayers of faith will result in:

- Salvation of the one who is weak.
- Restoration of the one who is weak.
- Forgiveness of the one who is weak.
- Healing of the one who is weak.

Where do you feel weak today?

- Physical weakness?
- Weakness of your flesh?
- Emotional weakness?
- Demonic oppression?
- Weakness of faith? (Spiritual weakness).
- Sense of inability to function?

God wants to address your struggle.

He can meet you where you are.

He encourages interaction with your spiritual family.