James 5:6-20 - A Note on the Handout

The handout for the passage this week takes a little different approach. The goal is still to explore the passage inductively (Observation, Interpretation, Application), but with just a slight peek into the process of translation.

For any translation process (from Greek, Spanish, or Mandarin) a translator faces the question of how to take words from one language with their own shades of meaning and communicate that into words of a different language with different shades of meaning. In 99% of the Bible the process is pretty straightforward. But occasionally translators have to make a choice between two (or more) reasonable options.

The passage for this week has a few words that offer those reasonable options. While many commentators recognized and discussed legitimate alternate translations, most (actually ALL) the English translations (50+) that I have found make the same translation choices. I thought it would be interesting to try to look at that process for ourselves and see what (if any) conclusions we might reach.

On the back of the handout you will find four particular words that have a range of meanings. What I have tried to do is to offer English words that have a range of meaning similar to the Greek from Scripture. Then on the front page you will see I have inserted those alternate words into the text of James 5.

As you read the text you will see (I think) how the choice of how the words are translated can affect our understanding of James's message. The question then becomes (for us just like any translator), which nuance of the words best fits into the context that James is writing about. And read the passage in your favorite translation(s) to see how the translators viewed the range of meanings of those particular words.

And if that wasn't enough, there is another page showing examples from Scripture for those four words and illustrating the range of meanings.

https://www.goodnotsafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/James-5_6-20-Range-of-Meanings.pdf

I hope this will be interesting and stimulate our discussion of God's Word and how we can understand it better and apply it more fully.

James 5:6-20

*English Standard Version (ESV)**

*See the back page for **alternate translations** of words with a range of meaning (sickness / weakness.)

[6] You [rich ones] have condemned and murdered the
righteous person. He does not resist you. [7] Be patient,
therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See
how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient about it, until it receives the early and the
late rains. [8] You also, be patient. Establish your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is at hand. [9] Do not grumble
against one another, brothers, so that you may not be
judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. [10] As
an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the
prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11] Behold,
we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You
have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have
seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is
compassionate and merciful. [12] But above all, my
brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by
any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no"
be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. [13] Is
anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone
cheerful? Let him sing praise. [14] Is anyone among you
{a} **not strong**? Let him call for the elders of the church,
and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the
name of the Lord. [15] And the prayer of faith will
{b} **rescue** the one who is {c} **afflicted**, and the Lord
will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will
be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one
another and pray for one another, that you may be
{d} **restored**. The prayer of a righteous person has great
power as it is working. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature
like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain,
and for three years and six months it did not rain on the
earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain,
and the earth bore its fruit. [19] My brothers, if anyone
among you wanders from the truth and someone brings
him back, [20] let him know that whoever brings back a
sinner from his wandering will {b} **rescue** his soul from
death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Verses 6-12 are included to see James's thought process leading into this passage.

- What theme or themes do you see that James has emphasized throughout?

- How does this passage relate to what has gone before in James's letter?

- How does this passage draw James's letter to a close?

- What effect does this passage (and all of James's letter) have on you?

This passage uses several words that have a range of meaning including both sickness and weakness.

{a} ἀσθενέω (*astheneō*) is used to mean either physical illness (Matthew 10:8) or spiritual weakness (Romans 14:1); similar to English "**not strong**" (the literal meaning of Greek: ἀ – σθενόω; Kohlenberger, et al., 93).

{b} σῴζω (*sōzō*) often indicates spiritual salvation (Matthew 1:21), but is also used for physical healing (Matthew 9:22); similar to English "**rescue**."

{c} κάμνω (*kamnō*) is only used two times in the New Testament. It may mean sick in this passage, or it could mean weary (Hebrews 12:3); similar to English "**afflicted**."

{d} ἰάομαι (*iaomai*) means physical healing (Matthew 8:8) but is also used metaphorically of spiritual healing (Matthew 13:15); similar to English "**restore**."

For more suggested methods of study: http://www.goodnotsafe.com/methodical-bible-study/
For examples of inductive studies: *http://www.goodnotsafe.com/inductive-bible-study-examples-2/*

Inductive Bible Study

(A few general ideas)

Observation (What does it say?)

*What facts do you **observe** about the passage that help bring out the writer's thought process?*

- Who are the people involved?
- What action takes place?
- What type of literature is it (poetry, history, didactic, etc.)?
- What details are included or left out?
- Are any unusual words used?
- Is there symbolic language?
- What is the grammar of the passage (pronouns, prepositions, verb tenses)?
- Are words or ideas repeated?
- Any comparisons or contrasts?
- Any cause and effect?
- Are there indications of purpose ("in order that…")?
- Are there conclusions ("Therefore…")?
- Are there explanations?
- Does the passage logically break into sections?
- How would you summarize the passage?
- What would be a good "headline" for the passage?

Interpretation (What does it mean?)

*What questions come to mind about the facts that would help you **interpret** the meaning?*

- How would the original readers have understood the passage?
- What is the main emphasis?
- Why does the writer use repetition, or contrast, or unusual words?
- What does the grammar or structure of the passage reveal about the writer's thought pattern?
- Is there a logical sequence in the passage?
- How are different ideas in the passage connected?
- Are there any new ideas or concepts presented?
- Are there difficulties in the passage?

Application (What does it mean for me?)

*What is the impact on your life? What **application** does the Holy Spirit want to show you?*

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a promise to be thankful for?
- Is there an attribute of God to worship?
- Is there an example to follow?

Read nothing into the Scriptures, but draw everything from them, and suffer nothing to remain hidden that is really in them.
J.A. Bengel (1687-1752)

For a much more detailed description of the methodology, see
Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*. Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1952.

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