

COOKIE CUTTER

Scripture Reading: Read James 5

As I write this devotional, Thanksgiving and Christmas are right around the corner. For many folks that means family gatherings, rich foods, Christmas lights, trees, carols, and presents. People will be running around shopping, decorating and cooking. For many families, it means baking Christmas cookies lathered with confectionary sugar frosting, followed by weight gain, followed by New Year's resolutions to lose weight!

In our home, my wife loves making cookies with the kids. She breaks out the cookie cutters, spreads out the dough, and the kids have at it. One thing about cookie cutters, though, you always get the same basic design no matter how many times you press the shape in the dough. If you have a star shape cutter, you get a star-shaped cookie every time. There is no variety to it. No exception to the mould.

Sometimes, in the church, we fall into a rut and provide ministry in a similar fashion. We expect everyone to need it the same way, with that way being our way. God, however, is an infinitely diverse God and he meets believers where they are at, not where we want them to be. If we don't get in the way, the Lord is fully capable of connecting to folks where they need his touch. James seemed to have understood this when he wrote today's chapter reading. Look at what he says in verses 13-14: *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."*

Notice, James mentions multiple situations and provides a diversity of answers. When a person is going through a troubling time, James commands them to pray. He doesn't tell them to just "praise the Lord, brother," for such a response would be nothing more than an unsympathetic pat answer. On the other hand, for those who were not going through a trial but were happy and filled with joy, they were commanded to let loose with songs of praise. They weren't told to stuff it and devote themselves to deep or intense prayer. Finally, for those who were sick, James encourages a third response. He doesn't tell them to buck up and pray or to sing a song of praise or to deal with it on their own. No, he encourages them to call for the elders of the church and have them anoint them with oil and to pray the prayer of faith. In response, the Lord would heal the sick, forgive any sins and raise them up.

Did you notice the diversity? No cookie cutter ministry here. No one size fits all. God meets believers right where they're at and so should we. Cookie cutters may be great for Christmas but not for the church!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Are you going through a trial today? James urges you to pray. In James chapter 1, he tells you, in part, to pray for wisdom when you're going through a trial. Such wisdom will help you learn from the hardship and to respond properly. Are you happy today? Start the songs of praise coming! Are you sick? Call for the elders of the church and have them come over and pray for your healing. Finally, give thanks that a diverse God meets you right where you are.

Take-a-way: *A cookie cutter ministry just doesn't cut it in the church.*