

Prayer Of Faith

James 5:13-18

I. Pray When You're Suffering (13a)

^{13a} Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

II. Pray When You're Cheerful (13b)

^{13b} Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

III. Pray When You're Sick (14-15a; cf. Mt 21:22; 1 Jn 5:14)

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? 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. ^{15a} And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

IV. Pray When You've Sinned (15b-16; cf. Jn 5:14; 1 Cor 11:28-30)

^{15b} And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ^{16a} Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

V. Pray With A Right Heart (16b-18)

^{16b} 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.

Conclusion:

- Pray always – in the good times and bad.
- Pray in faith – according to His will
- Pray with confession – the spirit is important, not just our body
- Pray with fervency – change our nation through prayer

Discussion:

- How do we make sure prayer is our foremost response to the bad times (suffering, sickness) and good times (cheer) in life?
- How do we know if we are praying in faith according to God's will?
- As Elijah's prayer effected his nation, how should we fervently pray for our nation?

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James 5:13-18 ¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? 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. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷Elijah 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. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Introduction:

- In several of the New Testament letters (epistles), the authors spend the bulk of their writing on the most pertinent topics. Towards the end of the letter, they will give quicker strikes on other important issues that they didn't cover as thoroughly.
- This is what we see at the end of James. Shorter references to important issues crammed in as they are probably running out of parchment.
- The 2nd to the last topic James is fitting in is on Prayer. With all the themes in James – suffering, patience, faith and works, the problem of the tongue – everything is to be responded to with prayer.
- James is claiming that through the good and bad, in sickness and in sin – we need to be always be in prayer.
- Paul summed it up in **1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."**
- Martin Luther wrote: "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray."

Here are 5 ways James frames the necessity to always pray.

I. Pray When You're Suffering (13a)

^{13a}Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

- James' questions are like taking a poll to identify who is in which category.
- Who's in the **suffering** category?
- Command: **Pray!**
- **Suffering** = *kakopathe*
 - Hardship, distress (emotionally, mentally and/or physically)
 - to suffer misfortune (Kent, p. 186)
 - endure hardship, experience misfortune or calamity (Hiebert, p. 316)
 - Used to describe Paul's prison sentence in Rome (2 Tim 2:9), hardships in Timothy's ministry (2 Tim 4:5), and the suffering of the prophets (James 5:10)

- **Let Him Pray!**
 - *Proseuchestho* – present imperative
 - Most common word for prayer – 80x
 - Hiebert: “Instead of indulging in introspective self-pity, or complaining loudly to others of his terrible situation, let him turn to God for refuge and strength.” (p. 317)
 - Moo: “... the prayer that he encourages here is for the spiritual strength to endure the trial with a godly spirit.” (p. 235)
- James doesn’t give a lot of instruction on how to pray through suffering here because he did earlier in chapter 1
 - Pray for joy in our various trials (1:2)
 - Pray for wisdom to navigate trials (1:5)
 - Pray for endurance and patience (1:12)
 - Pray to resist temptation (1:13-15)
 - Pray for strength and stability through our unchanging and gracious God (1:17)
- Our battle with **Covid19** is a societal and personal suffering
- **Losing our jobs** because of the economy brings suffering
- Standing up for our faith in the midst of **persecution** brings suffering
- Being a **victim or racism** is suffering
- **The most important thing to do when suffering is to pray.**
- Lord, what do you have in store for me?

II. Pray When You’re Cheerful (13b)

^{13b} Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

- Cheerful – good cheer, good spirits (Hiebert, p. 317)
- Contrasting situations (suffering and cheer) require the same response: communicating to God!
- How do you respond when:
 - She says “Yes”?
 - You get a new job?
 - When we get a cure for Covid?
 - When we reopen church?
- We rejoice in several hurdles being passed where we can begin construction.
- City Planning, Public Works, PG&E, Water, Fire, Arborists, SamTrans, Neighbors
- Then there was financing – we rejoice in our wonderful donors but we also got a loan. We signed the loan documents today with David, Lawrence and John and the title company. 45 minutes worth of signatures.
- **PRAY! SING!**
- Sing Praise = *psalleteo* – sing with music, sing without music, sing with joy
- So whether we’re suffering or in cheer, PRAY!

- Suffering is one extreme. Cheer is the other extreme. From one extreme to the other and every where in between – PRAY!!

III. Pray When You're Sick (14-15a)

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? 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. ^{15a}And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? 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.

- **Sick** = *asthenei* – without strength
 - “to be without strength, debilitating effect of sickness, incapacitating one for work, bodily weakness” (Hiebert, p. 318)
- When we prayed for God to heal my dad’s cancer, God said “no”
- When we prayed to heal my wife and brother of their cancer, God said “yes”
- C. S. Lewis: “Every war, every famine or plague, almost every death-bed, is the monument to a petition that was not granted.”
- **Elders** = *presbuteros*
 - “Let him call” – responsibility of the sick person to contact the pastors and elders to come pray over him/her
 - The elders represent the community of the church
 - This passage also is misused by Pentecostals and Charismatics who apply this to the gift of healing.
 - This passage is to call the elders, not the faith healers.
 - The person sick also bears the responsibility to let the elders know
 - We’re not to suffer and be sick in isolation
 - We’re to pray for one another
- “Anointing” = *aleiphsantes*
- “in the name of the Lord” = in dependence on the authority of Christ
- **Oil**
 - “Anointing” = *aleiphsantes*
 - **Oil** = *elaio*
 - oil was used for anointing (Ex 40:9-16; Lev 8; Isa 61:1-2)
 - oil provided light (Ex 27:20-21)
 - oil cleansed and sanctified priests and lepers (Lev 8:30; 14:17)
 - Common word for olive oil
 - There is no mystical power in the oil

- There is no mystical power in an elder
- There is no magical formula that guarantees healing

3 views on the meaning of oil:

1. Oil Is Medicinal

- Though olive oil was considered therapeutic
 - The Good Samaritan put olive oil on the victim's wounds (Lk 10:34)
 - King Herod the Great was said to have been bathed in warm olive oil on his death bed as a hopeful cure according to Josephus
- There may medicinal benefits of olive oil, but the passage is not suggesting that olive oil is any kind of panacea, or "cure-all"
- Warren Wiersbe: "The Greek word translated 'anointing' is a medicinal term; it could be translated 'massaging.' This may be an indication that James suggests using available means for healing along with asking the Lord for His divine touch." (*Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 383*)
- In other words, take your medicine and pray. Prayer is not an excuse to ignore your doctor.
- V. 15 – the Lord raises up – not the oil

2. Oil Is Sacramental

- The Roman Catholic interpretation has distorted the meaning of James' intent
- It says a priest is to be called to administer the sacrament called **extreme unction**
- This would be one means of having sins forgiven, along with confession to a priest plus some time in purgatory
- The Roman Catholic view is that Christ opens the door to heaven and the believer must walk their way to heaven by following 7 sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Mass, Marriage, Priesthood and Extreme Unction. You earn your justification and forgiveness of sin.
- The Biblical view is that Christ gives you righteousness and forgiveness. It can't be earned.

3. Oil Is Symbolic Of The Holy Spirit

- Oil is a biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit
- We commit the sick body of a believer to the Holy Spirit

1 Samuel 16:13 "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward

- Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit - Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21; 1 Jn 2:20

^{15a} **And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.**

- **"Prayer of Faith"** – prayer that is motivated and dependent on faith
 - ^{15a} *And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*
 - We pray in faith
 - God can heal and raise the person up out of the sick bed

- But what happens when God doesn't
- Everyone dies, so at some point this promise doesn't seem to work
- There are so many people I've met and read about who lost faith in God because they prayed for a loved one to get better and didn't

Matthew 21: 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

- In praying in faith, we are trusting in God's sovereign plan to work out
- 1 John 5:14 – prayer must be in accordance to God's will

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we **ask anything according to his will he hears us.**

- If God healed every sickness, there would be no death
- One day, there will be no more death, but that isn't His timing now
- So we must pray, but we must accept His will
- Sometimes it is God's will for a person to die
- Ie/ We all had been praying for Betty – there were several challenges she faced with her cancer that made progress and we rejoiced. There came for a time that the Lord wanted her to be with Him. We accept God's good will and rejoice in the victories He brought in her life.
- **Keep praying that God will take us victoriously through this Covid Crisis**
 - It is not the **government** that will bring the healing we need, it's the Lord
 - It is not even the **medical** and **pharmaceutical** companies that will bring the healing we need – though I'm praying they'll find a cure. But death can't be cured outside of the cross and resurrection of Christ.
 - It is not the **church** that will take us through the Covid Crisis either, it's Christ!
- Ie/ God always answers prayer! God gives one of four answers: Direct Answer, Delayed Answer, Different Answer, or Denial (Lehman Strauss, *Sense and Nonsense About Prayer*)
- ie/ Thomas Aquinas (13th century theologian) said "Our prayer is not designed to change God's plan; the purpose of prayer is to obtain what God has already planned."

IV. Pray When You've Sinned (15b-16)

^{15b} And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ^{16a} Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

- There are times our sickness and suffering is caused by our sins.
- Venereal diseases can come from immoral sex
- Cirrhosis of the liver can come from abusing alcohol
- Lung issues can come from abusing cigarettes
- I've seen sharp minds ruined by methamphetamines
- Not always – babies can contract diseases from their parents, lung cancer affects non-smokers, etc.

- Confession goes a long way to resolve the sickness and suffering caused by sin. There may be some irreparable physical damage, but Christ fixes all spiritual damage.
- But if it is accompanied with sin – **confess to one another** and God will heal not just the body, but the spirit
 - **Confess** = *exomologeisthe* – from *homologeō* – literally: “same word”, “agree with” (Moo, p. 246) – you aren’t telling God anything He doesn’t know when you confess your sins to Him

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

- 1 Cor 11:28-30 also warns us that taking communion without examining ourselves before Christ is the reason why many are weak and ill and dead
- Note, it’s not confessing to a priest or pastor, but to one another
- Ie/ In a culture where many of us are concerned about how we are seen and are adverse to shame, it’s difficult to confess sins to one another
- But it’s biblically healthy
- We shouldn’t try to be perfect before others, but to be vulnerable.
- Ie/ It’s difficult in a shame culture to help a marriage until it’s too late. Counselors and Pastors aren’t sought until divorce until papers are ready to be filed. Mostly because couples are too ashamed to admit they struggle and need help.
- It’s a means of keeping each other accountable and holy.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.”
- Bonhoeffer continues: “Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins the old man does a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother.” (cited by R. Kent Hughes, *James*, p. 265)

V. Pray With A Right Heart (16b-18)

^{16b}The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷Elijah 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. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

^{16b}**The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.**

- Why is the prayer of a righteous person more powerful?
- Righteous means being right
- In this case, right with God
- When we are aligned with God’s will, our prayers can be accomplished in God’s will

- If we are misaligned with God's will because of selfish pride or sinful motives, our prayers will be ineffective

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.

- Example of Elijah
- "with a nature like ours" = *homoioopathes* – "subject to like passions" (Kent, p. 193)
 - We can relate to him – he has gone through what we've gone through
 - He's been weak, fearful and has suffered
- Prayer fervently
 - Fervently = with force
- Elijah prayed fervently for rain to be withheld and a 3.5 year drought occurred to show the might of God in judgment
 - We don't see 3.5 years mentioned in the O.T., but Jesus confirms it

Luke 4:25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land,

- The prayer of a common man, Elijah, with a nature like ours affected a whole nation!
- **Why should we not pray for our country?**
- **How should we pray for our country?**
 - Covid healing, yes.
 - Racial harmony, yes.
 - Repentance from sin, ABSOLUTELY!
 - Maybe that even a wake up call from the nation's events will awake us to the Lord.
- Wiersbe quotes Robert Law: "Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven. It's getting God's will done on earth."

¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

- His prayer was powerful because it conformed to what God wanted to accomplish
- This time it was for rain, drought over, crops flourished

Conclusion:

- George Muller - great missionary who ran an orphanage on the power of prayer = left a lifelong record of his prayers and their answers - more than 25,000 answered prayer requests
 - a friend asked him what the secret was for answered prayer
 - Muller replied "Have faith in God"

- Pray always – in the good times and bad.
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Discussion:

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- How do we know if we are praying in faith according to God's will?
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