

I. Introduction

A. Huffington Post: "At the end, prayer and meditation are like anything else in life. If used with knowledge, awareness, and the right intention, they can benefit you. But at the same time, they may become counterproductive if they give you a sense of false hope and radical optimism, or if they get you into a blind group attachment mode. They are positive if they help you with having more focus, having motivation to find a deep meaning, becoming more moral, patient, tolerant, accountable, responsible, objective and rational."

1. While many of these are benefits of prayer, prayer is fundamentally unlike anything else in life.
2. "Prayer is both conversation and encounter with God.... We must know the awe of praying His glory, the intimacy of finding his grace, and the struggle of asking His help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of His presence." (Tim Keller)

B. Umbrella for today... two things

1. Shepherds are called to model faith that heals.
2. The priesthood of believers are called to pray for each other in the spirit and power of Elijah.

II. Prayer, prayer, and more prayer

A. Praying for ourselves; I pray (v 13)

1. Range of our human experience: bookends are difficult (sad) and care free (happy).
2. Two categories set up by James.
 - a. Suffering
 - 1) Broad application - all kinds of suffering and trials.
 - 2) Context of trouble in James: endure suffering with the right spirit and with a divine perspective on history.
 - 3) Therefore, prayer James encourages is for spiritual strength to endure trials with a godly spirit.
 - b. Cheerful
 - 1) State of emotion rather than outward circumstance.
 - 2) Reminder to turn to God especially when we don't feel the urgency of needing Him.

*Paul affirms this in Ephesians 6:18 (pray in the spirit on all occasions) and in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (pray continually).

"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints," Ephesians 6:18

"pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

3. Focus of this passage.
 - a. No matter the circumstance, the appropriate response is to focus on Jesus and remain in community with Him.
 - b. What can I control? My connection with Jesus.

We are called to pray for ourselves.

B. Prayed for by the elders; they pray (vs 14-15)

*This part of the passage is especially hard, but I think I'm beginning to understand why and it's not what I previously thought.

1. Elders: spiritual leaders recognized for their maturity in the faith.
 - a. Natural to call on those who are mature to pray.
 - b. Should be able to discern the will of God and pray with faith that recognizes and receives God's gift of healing.
 - c. Acts 3 (Peter, John, lame beggar); "M" and healing people.
2. Anointing with oil
 - a. Practical (medicinal/pastoral) or religious (sacramental/symbolic) purpose?
 - 1) Physical action with symbolic significance.
 - 2) As we pray, we set apart this person for God's special attention and care.

*However, anointing is subordinate to the main thing - Prayer!

3. The prayer of faith
 - a. Context: physical healing
 - 1) Save: not salvific, salvation/conversion not result of prayer in the New Testament (belief).
 - 2) Raise up: a person bedridden or immobile.
 - b. Sins and forgiveness
 - 1) Sin and sickness was often related in the ancient world (Job).
 - 2) "if" suggests that sickness may or may not be connected to sin.
 - c. Prosperity gospel?
 - 1) "You just don't have enough faith."
 - 2) The faith in context here is that of the elders, not the sick person. A lack of healing then, would be a lack of faith on the part of the elder.

*What then is the prayer of faith?

-The prayer of faith here seems to be a faith in the God who sovereignly accomplishes His will. That when we pray such, it is an overflow of our consistent dependence and submission to the Holy Spirit understanding what He intends to do.

-Do you really know the Spirit's voice and do you obey?

*Peter & John (Acts 3)

We are to call the mature to pray for us.

C. Praying for each other; we pray (v 16)

1. "Therefore"
 - a. Conclusion of 13-15 = mutual confession and prayer

- b. Those with spiritual oversight charged with prayer but so is the priesthood of believers.
 - c. Particularly sins affecting the health of the community.
- 2. Righteous person
 - a. A person is righteous by virtue of Jesus' forgiveness.
 - b. Prayer is powerful in the hands of the "least" in the community.

We are called to pray for each other.

D. Praying illustration (vs 17-18)

- 1. Elijah
 - a. More popular figures among the Jews (powerful miracles, prophetic denunciation of sin, helper in time of need, paved way for Messiah).
 - b. 1 Kings 17-18 = drought because of Arab and Israel's idolatry.
- 2. Elijah, just like me
 - a. Well known victory over prophets of Baal - retreat, depression, and questioning of God.
 - b. Faith is not the absence of struggle/doubt.
 - 1) Elijah had major questions and issues with God.
 - 2) But, his life kept coming back to God dispute his circumstances or his emotional state.

III. Conclusion

A. Prayer

- 1. Prayer is the posture we take in all things, good and bad, exciting and scary.
- 2. The prayer of faith only comes from the anointing of the Holy Spirit through a life that is consistently listening to and obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit.

B. Challenge

- 1. Is prayer like a stream that runs consistently through your life? If not, what is one thing you can decide to do right now?
- 2. Do you practice the presence of the Holy Spirit? Do your decisions begin with Him?



JAMES: LIVING THE KINGDOM

JAMES 5:13-18

OCTOBER 17, 2021 | PASTOR MATT WHITEFORD



FOLLOW UP FROM LAST WEEK'S LIVE IT OUT QUESTIONS

If your group met last week, was there anything you committed to doing after reflecting on Scripture during your group? Did you follow through with that commitment? What steps did you take (or not take), and is there any way we can help?

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

- 1 What things do you most often pray about? Why are these common points of prayer for you?
- 2 Why is prayer so important in our relationship with God?

QUICK REVIEW (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week's message, was there anything you heard that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

DIG DEEPER (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

- 1 Someone read **James 5:13-14** for the group.

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.

What circumstances or seasons of life do these verses mention? How does this teaching relate to the ongoing process of faith and works in the Christian life?

How does prayer help us remain in community and grow our connection with Jesus?

What changes in your heart and mind when you view the repeated instruction to pray or praise, regardless of the circumstance, as a relational invitation rather than a religious obligation?

James constantly pointed us to the fact that the Christian life is about glad-hearted obedience. After all the practical application of spiritual truth that James addressed for five chapters, he started to close his letter with a call to prayer. Prayer is infinitely more than a transition in our lives from our everyday routines to a spiritual moment and then back again. Prayer is ongoing communion with God. If God is the source of our life, salvation, hope, and righteousness - and He is - then prayer is the way we approach Him in utter dependence and satisfaction. James repeatedly pointed out that knowing the right things about God isn't the same as a faithful life in relationship with God.

1 Someone read **James 5:15-18** for the group.

¹⁵ And 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. ¹⁶ Therefore, 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. 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.

What examples did James give to demonstrate the power of prayer in the life of a faithful believer?

Looking at this passage, how would the confession of sin to each other lead to healing as we pray for each other?

James' use of Elijah can connect to our lives right now. Elijah had huge victories. He experienced deep struggle and depression, which he also complained to God about. God didn't condemn Elijah in that moment in the desert when he fled from Jezebel & Ahab. Instead, God had compassion on Elijah and generously provided for his needs. We should be able to relate with Elijah in all of this. We must honestly assess if we truly believe God is listening and cares and if we are approaching God with a surrendered heart and mind.

Thinking about all Elijah went through and how he went to God in desperation and frustration, are you similarly going to God in all circumstances? If you are, do you just want this difficulty you are experiencing to end or are you asking God what He wants you to learn in the difficulty or how He wants you to respond?

LIVE IT OUT (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

- 1** How can you encourage others by praying for them often and communicating that you are doing so? How might God use this to grow their faith? How has He done so for you through others?
- 2** What does it look like for you to listen to and obey the Holy Spirit in your life? What is the connection between listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit, and James' command that we pray for one another?
- 3** If what we looked at tonight in God's Word is true, what needs to change in intimacy with God through prayer?

CLOSING PRAYER

If you have not already done so, take some time to share needs and praises to your group so that you can pray for one another, both during your group and throughout the week.

NEXT WEEK: JAMES 5:19-20

Take some time before Sunday to pray that God would use this message and the truth in His Word to transform the minds and lives of those who hear it. Remember to take good notes so you are ready to add to the discussion your home group will have!

PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to write the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

TIPS ON GROUP PRAYER

Prayer is an important part of being in a Home Group. Here are some tips to help make group prayer be a life-giving aspect of your group.

PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME: Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request or praise during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next request or praise.

PRAY MORE THAN ONCE: If your group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one should be required to pray.

KEEP PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE: Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group. No one should be required to pray out loud.

How to Use this Discussion Guide

This guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and becoming like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel the need to ask every question during your group discussion. This guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your group grow in Gospel community. In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit cpmodesto.org/groupleaders to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit cpmodesto.org/homegroups and use the Home Group Finder!

COMMENTARY

JAMES 5:13-18

5:13-14 James used a series of questions followed by commands as an effective way of exhorting the congregation to prayer and worship. Suffering in verse 13 is not a reference to physical illness; it is instead a spiritual burden caused by misfortune or poor choices. Elders, who functioned in various capacities in the early church, should anoint any sick person with olive oil and pray over him. Olive oil was considered a cure-all ointment in the ancient world, but for James the real healing power is in prayer.

5:15 The prayer of faith echoes 1:5-8. Save refers to physical healing (as in Mk 5:23,28,34; 10:52; Jn 11:12). The Lord will restore him to health does not indicate that death is at hand (v. 14), but that once healed by the power of God the sick person could get up and walk (Mt 9:5-7; Mk 1:31; 2:9-12; 9:27; Ac 3:7). He will be forgiven indicates that perhaps the illness was connected with sin, and the prayers of the elders could bring spiritual healing as well.

5:16 Pray for one another echoes the prayers of the elders, and these should lead to both physical and spiritual healing (i.e., forgiveness). Prayer is not a magical incantation or a guarantee of healing, but when offered fervently by a righteous person, God will respond in a way that best fits His good purposes.

5:17-18 James cited a biblical personality, Elijah, who prayed effectively. The illustration is intended to encourage his audience that their prayers could lead to similar results.