



“Confess your faults one to another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Faith Prays Fervently

Central Truth: Your earnest prayer can release great power.

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Topic: Faith: Of Believers; Prayer.

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” To that poet's statement we add a hearty “Amen!”

Does prayer really make a difference? Yes! If we realized the difference prayer makes, we would pray much more than we do. There are two parts to prayer: we ask, and God acts. That is evident in almost every prayer promise in the Scriptures. Examine Jeremiah 33:3 and John 14:12, 13 to see those two elements of prayer.

There is a difference between saying a prayer and having a ministry of prayer. A person with a ministry of prayer pursues it as diligently as a Sunday School teacher prepares and delivers the lesson. A ministry of prayer is vital to the spiritual life of a church. Each congregation needs several people who share such a significant ministry.

Prayer does not remove the necessity of work. We pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on us. Working and praying is the way we fulfill God's commission.

James 5:13-18 is a great passage to use in teaching us to pray.

Occasions of Prayer (James 5:13, 14)

Pray when you are afflicted (verse 13). The term “*afflicted*” refers to those who experience difficulties and suffering which are caused by external

circumstances of life. There are three things for which you may ask God in your afflictions.

First, pray for wisdom. James discusses the trials which put your faith in God to the test. He realizes that you might have a problem understanding the “why” of the trials. So he writes, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5). Pray for wisdom that you may know how to bear your trials as a Christian ought.

Second, pray for deliverance. Paul asked God for deliverance from his *“thorn in the flesh”* (II Corinthians 12:7, 8). It is not wrong to pray for relief. Jesus asked that the *“cup”* might pass from Him (Matthew 26:39). Ask for deliverance, but always ask with the spirit of *“Thy will be done.”*

Third, pray for grace to endure the affliction. God's throne is one of grace. There you will *“obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). Paul found that God did not remove his *“thorn in the flesh”*; instead He promised, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (II Corinthians 12:9).

Pray when you are merry (verse 13). This time your prayers may be expressed in song. Have you prayed in the words of Psalm 100 or Psalm 103? Try it. Ephesians 5:19 says you can speak *“in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* Someone has said, “God gave music so we could pray without words.” But it is wonderful to put your praises of God to music and sing your prayers to Him. Try it.

Pray when you are sick (verse 14). James refers later to the prayers of others on behalf of the sick (verses 14-16). So here he must refer to the sick person praying himself. *“Is any among you suffering?”* he asked. *“He should turn to God in prayer.”* God's people do get sick and need help. The experience of sickness is no sign of spiritual failure in a believer's life. Therefore, a Christian can go to God privately and ask for healing.

Power of prayer (James 5:14, 15)

Here is instruction on praying for the sick which is largely ignored in churches today. But that does not annul or make invalid the promise of healing. Follow the simple procedure and note the profound answer. How is a sick person to get healing from his illness?

The sick person should call for the elders of the church (verse 14). The elders are the spiritual leaders, the pastors. That office is mentioned twenty times in the New Testament, the term elder being used

interchangeably with bishop. Note that the call for prayer is made by the sick person. The pastors are not commanded to go through the church community seeking people to pray for. The call by the patient indicates his faith that the prayer of the elders will be answered in his healing.

The elders are to pray over the patient (verse 14). An unsaved relative, friend, or physician can do much to help the sick; but this is one thing he cannot do. Only the people of God can pray effectively for the sick. But God has promised to give to one who asks (Matthew 7:7-11). The elders respond to the request of the patient, indicating their faith that God will hear prayers for healing. They go where the patient is and pray over him.

The elders are to anoint the patient with oil in the name of the Lord (verse 14). Here interpreters differ. (1) Anointing with oil may refer to appropriate medical treatment. Oil was used as a medication in those days. So it would be saying that the patient was to take the appropriate medicine and the elders were to pray for him. The problem is that the text sounds as if the elders were to administer the medication personally. (2) Anointing with oil may refer to a ceremony where the sick person is anointed without reference to medication. Since oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, this anointing would be a confession of need for divine aid and an appeal for God to do the healing. It may also be intended to strengthen the faith of the patient. Bible-believing Christians are on both sides of the issue of anointing with oil. The Bible says to do it.

Prayer for healing is to accompany the anointing with oil. They simply claim the Lord's promise of John 14:13: *"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* They accept that promise as applying to the request for healing, and they ask in His name.

Healing comes to the patient (verse 15). Yes, the prayer offered in faith will save the person who is sick. There can be no mistaking the clear statement of Holy Scripture. Jesus had power to heal every type of illness while He was here on earth. The Bible promises that He will continue that same ministry today in response to the prayer of faith.

Forgiveness accompanies healing (verse 15). Physical healing and spiritual cleansing are two different matters. But the Lord promises both in response to prayer. Sickness is often the consequence of sin. If so, forgiveness and healing will go hand in hand in response to the prayer of faith. Do you need to pray, *"LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee"* (Psalm 41:4)? He will hear and answer.

Do you have faith to pray for personal healing? Would you call for the spiritual leaders of your church to pray over you in a specific request for

healing? Does James 4:2 apply here?

Elements of Prayer (James 5:16)

Do you ask, “How can I pray effectively and get that kind of answer”? Here are the elements of the prayer of faith as set out in James 5:16.

Repentance — “*Confess your faults one to another.*” God forgives believers when they confess their sins to Him. And they rejoice in His forgiveness when they confess their faults one to another. If you engage in corporate prayer, be sure there is peace among those who pray. Be right with God and with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Intercession — “*Pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*” Prayer for healing is not reserved for elders of the church only. Christians can pray “*one for another*” and God will hear. Notice, however, that intercession is the point here. Prayer for personal needs is mentioned in verse 13. Prayer for the needs of others is under consideration in verse 15. Prayer for one another should be made throughout the whole church.

Earnestness — “*Effectual fervent prayer*” pleases God. James does not deal with half-hearted, half-believing prayer in this passage. Fervent prayer is made in earnest. It moves the heart of the one who prays. Tremendous power is unleashed by it. No wonder such a prayer is “*effectual*” (effective) and avails much in its work. It is a prayer which searches for God with all the heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Purity — God is listening for *the “prayer of a righteous man.”* The person who is upright in spirit can pray effectively. The promise is not that prayer will be effective. The earnest, stirring prayer from the heart of a righteous person avails much before God. Read Psalm 15 and use it as a mirror to examine yourself before you pray.

Power — A godly person's prayer “*availeth much.*” Such prayers have a powerful effect. They are strong in their work. They are so dynamic that tremendous power is available to fulfill the petition. Such a prayer keeps at work until the answer comes. John Knox said, “When a just man prays fervently, there is great virtue in his prayer.” And it is true.

Use those principles as a guideline for your prayer life. And pray!

An Example of Prayer (James 5:17, 18)

Do you remember God's prophet Elijah? James points to him as an example of a man who prayed and saw powerful things happen. Here is an encouragement to you to pray.

A common person can pray. Elijah was “*a man subject to like passions as we are*” (verse 17). God does not reserve the privilege of prayer for a few elite persons. He delights in the prayers of common people like you and me.

A common person can pray uncommon prayers. As for Elijah, “*he prayed earnestly that it might not rain*” (verse 17). He was asking for something he had never seen before. But he remembered God's promise to stop the rain, so he claimed that promise and prayed. Any Christian can pray that way.

A common person can receive uncommon answers to his uncommon prayers. “*It rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months*” (verse 17). You have Jesus' promise that if you ask He will give (Mark 11:24). You can never ask for too much. Neither can you ask too often. “*Ask, and it shall be given you*” (Matthew 7:7). Believe it and pray!

A common person can have a ministry of prayer. Elijah did not stop praying with that one victory. He prayed again for God to send rain, and He did (verse 18). He had a sacred goal to turn his sinful nation back to God. And he prayed until it happened. The same can happen today. Pray, Christian, pray.

God is the key to answered prayer. Keep your thoughts on Him when you pray. And give Him the credit when He answers. Your earnest prayer can release great power.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the difference between praying and having a ministry of prayer?
2. How does private prayer help the afflicted?
3. Why should a person pray when he is merry?
4. Why should the elders of the church pray for the sick?
5. What do you understand the phrase, “*anointing with oil*” to mean?
6. What does God promise to do for the prayer of faith?
7. How are healing and forgiveness related?
8. Why is confession related to effective prayer?
9. How can you pray an “*effectual fervent*” prayer?
10. How can you follow Elijah's example in prayer?