

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

Whatever Your Need, Pray!

TEXT: James 5:13-18

INTRODUCTION: Years ago I heard James Dobson tell the story of a little boy who had tested his father's patience once too often during the Sunday worship service. Finally, after several warnings for the little guy to be still and quiet, his dad lifted his son in his arms and began carrying him down the aisle toward the back door. The child, recognizing his dire predicament called out to the congregation as his father carried him, "Pray for me, Pray for me!"

There are many things that should move us to prayer:

- Thanksgiving
- Praise
- Confession of our sin
- Desire to fellowship with God
- Seeking God's direction
- Intercession for others
- Praying for our church
- Praying for missions

And many more could be added, and the Scripture offers examples and sometimes instruction concerning each of these reasons to pray.

But in our passage today, James has a single focus. He is thinking of people like the little boy being carried along to what he is confident is certain doom, and so his mind turns to the one thing it has not thought about for quite a while: Prayer.

Rather than condemn the practice of praying when needs arise, James actually encourages it. Now he in no way is saying that we should only pray when trouble arrives on our doorstep, but he is clearly saying that when the unwelcome guest of difficulty comes knocking, or he moves inside your living room, prayer is a good and proper response.

Let's listen to what he says.

James 5:13–18 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

I. LET´S BE CLEAR ON WHAT PRAYER IS.

- **Prayer is simply talking with God.**
- **Prayer requires no specialized vocabulary.** We do not have to sound like the King James Bible: Almighty God, I thankest Thee that Thou hast blessed me with Thy most abundant bounty.
- **We may talk with God as a friend.**
- **We ought not forget that we are talking to God.**
 - God is not just any friend.
 - God is holy, and we ought not forget that when we pray. Jesus taught His disciples to begin their prayer

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, **Hallowed** be Your name.

- **Holy is Your name.**
 - **Reverenced is Your name.**
 - **I honor Your name.**
- We can talk with God informally, conversationally, about any subject or matter. We can be honest. We may as well be honest, for He knows the truth, and He knows our hearts.
 - We can say to God, “Lord I am confused. I just don’t understand what You are doing in this matter.”
 - I would tell you, if you are angry with God, be honest and say so. “Lord, I confess I have feelings of anger over what You did. Help me to understand. Change my heart.”
 - But I will tell you that I do not agree with some who will tell you if you are angry at God, just go ahead and yell at Him. He can handle it. I don’t buy that.
 - God is both a friend and a father to those of us whom He has adopted into His family through faith in Jesus Christ, but He is still God. He is majestic and awesome in power and righteousness. And He is holy, holy, holy.
 - And while He invites us to come before the throne of grace and talk with Him in our common language of our common needs, let us remember that Jesus taught us to come giving honor to His name.

Now, James, talking about this kind of prayer that is available to us 24/7/365, he says

II. WHATEVER YOUR NEED, PRAY!

And specifically he names,

- **When you are suffering**
- **When you are sick**
- **When you need fellowship**
- **When you are in conflict with others**

All of these are examples. The Holy Spirit is saying through James, whatever is troubling you, take it to God in prayer.

He is also encouraging us to let others pray for us and with us.

- **Elders – leaders – in the church.** Sometimes people ask, “Pastor, do you do this? Absolutely we do this. You just call upon us, and we do this. I have a little bottle of olive oil on my desk for this purpose. We do not do it as a part of worship, because that is not the setting described here in the Book of James. But we will do it here at church, or if need be, at home.
- **Others – like your Lifechange Group – Be transparent with a small group and pray for each other.**

WHATEVER YOUR NEED, PRAY!

I guess because I am a pastor, I have often been asked, how can I know the will of God for a specific direction in my life?

The key is prayer.

Now, let me be clear that I am talking about deciding between two or more alternatives that are God honoring choices.

- If you are asking, how can I know if God wants me to forgive that woman who sinned so terribly against me?
- You don't need to pray about that, and neither do I.
- God says in His word, “Forgive and you will be forgiven.”
- You don't have to pray about whether God wants you to witness or share the gospel. He does. His Word says so. You may need to pray about who the next object of your witness will be, but never whether you are to witness.
- I do not ever pray about whether I should go on mission. The Lord and I settled that years ago. I will go. I do go. I pray about where, when, the particular work He wants me to do. But He has told me to go, and that settles it.

I am talking about decisions such as, Lord should I seek this type of job or that one? I can and will honor you in either type of work, but which one would You choose for me?

Lord, where do You want me to live? I will serve you in any of these three places that are options for me and my family, but I really want to go to the place that would be Your first choice for me.

Again, the key is prayer.

Let me share with you how Karen and I have engaged in prayer to find God's answers to these kinds of questions across the years.

- First we have prayed in general about the decision, asking for the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us.
- Then we have pointedly surrendered our desires to Him, declaring that we knew His way was best and that we wanted what He wanted.
- We asked Him to cause our thoughts and feelings to yield to His will for us.
- Then we waited. We continued to think through the options and continued to pray as I have described.
- As our thoughts and feelings coalesced around one of the choices, we would then offer a final prayer in the matter.
- We would say, "Lord, we really do want what You want. We want to do Your will. We think and feel that what You want us to do is – then we named the option we felt drawn to –" but then we said, "Lord, if we have correctly discerned Your desire for us then continue to give us confirmation in our thoughts and feelings about the matter. But Lord, if we are mistaken. If our thinking is astray or if our feelings are misleading us, we do not want to err in this. So, please, Lord, redirect our thoughts and change our feelings so that we will not make the wrong choice."
- Folks, every time we have gone through this process with the Lord, we have seen Him clearly direct our decision.
 - Sometimes He changed our minds and hearts, literally overnight on two occasions.
 - Sometimes He gave us continued confirmation, as He did when we prayed eleven years ago about leaving Slidell and coming here.
 - But He has always given us direction.

Folks, God wants us to do His will more than we want to do His will, even on our best days. I am convinced from both Scripture and experience, that God will guide us when we surrender our thoughts and feelings on a matter to Him.

That is why the Holy Spirit says through James

III. PRAY BECAUSE GOD ANSWERS PRAYER.

James does tell us that **there are things about the way we pray that make a difference in how and when the prayer is answered.**

- **Pray in faith**
 - Remember, **faith is not - believing God will do what you want.**
 - **Faith is - believing God will do what He says.**

- **The prayer of faith (praying within the will of God and believing it will happen)**
 - **Will save the sick**
 - **Bring forgiveness**
 - **And will bring healing when it is the will of God!**
- **Pray with energy (fervently, frequently, repeatedly)**
- **Pray from a life that practices the righteousness of Christ**

James offers Elijah as an example. I think he chose Elijah for two reasons.

1. Elijah prayed fervently, in faith, and out of a life that lived his faith as much as talked his faith.
2. Elijah was just as human as every one of us.
 - He fought with depression.
 - He got scared.
 - He sometimes gave in to the “poor me” syndrome.
 - He sometimes focused far too much on himself.

But, he prayed fervently, in faith, and out of a life that lived out his faith.

God granted Elijah’s improbable request, ... twice!

- **Elijah prayed that it would not rain in order to bring Ahab and Israel to repentance. God sent a 3 ½ year drought.**
- **Elijah prayed for the drought to end; and God sent the rain, although not a drop had fallen in 3 ½ years.**

CONCLUSION: Folks, **the fervent prayer of a righteous person is very effective.**