

Peace: A Fellowship that Heals

James – God's Work in Us and through Us

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Prayer. James concludes his "how to" letter abruptly and with a lesson on prayer. "Prayer" is mentioned 7 times in **James 5:13-20**. Prayer is a great privilege for Christians and it is the greatest power in the Christian life. What prayer can do is what God can do. In **John 14:12**, Jesus said, **"anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these"** How? By prayer. Prayer is a great responsibility and probably our greatest failure.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY? * When I am hurting emotionally. **James 5:13** **"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."**

The word "trouble" here means "to suffer misfortune, to be in distress." In Timothy, it is translated "hardships." James is talking about internal distress caused by external circumstances. It may be a financial crisis, a relational crisis, work/school pressure, tension due to difficulties. James writes this right after **v.12** **"Above all, my brothers, do not swear"**. When you are under tension or in distress, you have 2 alternatives - swear or prayer (**5:12** or **5:13**). You can let loose or you can let God. Then in the very next verse James says, **"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."** Have you noticed that life is a series of alternations between high and low, feast to famine, problem to joy? **Romans 12:15** says, **"Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice"**. Recognize there are situations in life when you are down and you pray...and when you are happy and you praise. Both are valid. In fact, the word "praise" is used 550 times in the Bible! And even when we are hurting, we praise God for who God is and for what God has done, and for what God is going to do in the future for those who are in Christ.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY? * When I am hurting physically. **James 5:14-15** **"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. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven."**

The word "sick" means "without strength, totally fatigued, bedridden". Who does the calling? The sick person. One good reason why everyone needs a church is that when you get sick, you know who to call. The elders pray and anoint him with oil. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Oil was used for medicinal purposes, but the emphasis here is the anointing. It was simply an aide to faith for the sick person and for the elders. Note: God is the healer, not any person... and not the oil. **"In the name of the Lord"** represents the character of the Lord. All healing is based on God's character... who God is and what God has promised. The result is wellness and forgiveness. We do this at HPC. When asked, we pray with faith and anoint – then we wait on the Lord and accept God's will.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY? * When I am hurting spiritually. **James 5:16** **"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."**

In Jesus' day, it was taught that all sickness was a result of sin. Jesus blew that idea out of the water in **John 9** when he said to the man who had been born blind that nobody sinned to cause the blindness. Rather that his blindness happened as part of living in a fallen world and that God was going to use his blindness to show others his glory. Brokenness is part of life in this fallen world. On the other hand, much sickness we bring upon ourselves. If I don't take care of my body - eat right, sleep right, exercise - then all kinds of ailments will come upon me. If I don't listen to God's word where it says "Don't be anxious" and I get an ulcer, then I'm to blame for it. If I allow resentment to build up...it will take its toll. **Psalm 32:3** says **"When I confessed not my sin, my body wasted away"**. I need to fess up to somebody. Why? For openness, integrity, accountability and support

Why isn't everybody healed? Because we are not in heaven yet. Because God has a different purpose in every situation according to His greater plan. It is always in God's power to heal but it is not always in God's plan. A clear example of this is Paul, in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**, it says Paul prayed 3 times for God to heal him, but 3 times God said "No, I have a better plan for you."

WHO CAN PRAY? * All of God's people can pray. **James 5:17-18** **"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain on the land for three and a half years. He prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops."**

The lesson of Elijah's life is you don't have to be perfect to pray. You don't have to be perfect to see answers to your prayers. Prayer is for ordinary people. In **1 Kings 18**, Elijah got alone with God and humbled himself. He prayed 7 times for rain. He was persistent. Finally, the rains came and flooded the place. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things through prayer.

HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY? * By righteousness. **James 5:16.** **"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."**

Not self-righteousness, but the righteousness we have through Christ. Righteousness is our standing before God when we became a believer. It has nothing to do with our perfection. There are no perfect people. But God does want us to have a clean heart. **Psalm 66:18-19** **"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer."** And God wants us to have a clean life. If you say, "God, I'm going to continue doing this wrong thing but I still want you to help me out." God says "no". We need to do our part before we go and ask from God. **Isaiah 59:1-2** **"Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear to dull to hear. But your sins have separated you from your God..."** If your prayers are not effective, then look no further than your heart and your life. Are you in God's will? Are you doing God's will? Are you asking God's will? That we ask and how we ask is crucial to effective prayer. **James 4:2** **"You do not have because you do not ask."** We may say "Thank you for..." and "Bless..." and that's it. Instead, be specific. Keep a prayer log. Write down the date and the request and the promise of God you base it on – then date and log God's answer. Your faith will grow as you see God answer in little things and in big things. **James 4:3** **"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives..."** We ask not for selfishness but for the glory of God. **James 1:6** **"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt..."** That means we trust the Lord ...really trust. As those who are in Christ, who come before God in the name of Christ, who are doing God's will - we pray for God's will to be done – and we trust God for the answer...

The closing verses of James urges believers to reach out to back sliders (**5:19-20**)...it will bless them and it will bless you. But it requires prayer, faith, and action. **Like the rest of James, it requires God to be at work in us so that we can do the works of God.**