



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 (James 5:16).

Devotional

Prayer is basic to Christian piety and a means for progressing in our sanctification (growth in holiness)...

Today we will look at certain aspects of prayer that we will not cover in our upcoming studies. First, let us note how important prayer should be in our lives. The Apostle Paul, for instance, says that one of the main blessings of being counted righteous in Christ is that we have “obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:2). In other words, our justification means that we may enter the most holy place in heaven and enjoy intimate fellowship with our Creator (Hebrews 6:19–20). Prayer is the way in which we regularly enjoy this privilege.

Regrettably, prayer does not always come easily to us. We start out with good intentions, but when we take time to pray, our minds often wander. Moreover, we begin to sense that our prayers are too self-centered. It is not that God does not care about our needs, of course, for they are among the things we should pray for (Matthew 6:30). Nevertheless, we understand something is amiss if all we ever do in prayer is tell the Lord our personal needs and desires.

Understanding how to pray is the best way to address these difficulties. God has not left us without guidance. Jesus Himself gave us the Lord’s Prayer, which we will consider as our model for God-honoring prayer in the days ahead (Luke 11:1–13). This prayer includes the expression of our daily needs, but it is kingdom-focused, instructing us to ask for the name of the Lord to be hallowed in order that His kingdom may come and His will be done in gladness.

Church history also gives us guidance in prayer. Martin Luther said we should pray through the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles’ Creed in a way that uses each line as a springboard for worshiping God, thanking Him, confessing our sin, asking Him to supply our needs, and so on. Such tools make it much easier for us to focus on those things that our Father prizes most highly.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

Martin Luther's advice on prayer is found in the handy booklet titled *A Simple Way to Pray*. Many people, including Dr. Sproul, have found this work to be very helpful for their prayer lives, but even if you do not use it, you would be wise to consider resources from the best Christian thinkers in history to help you learn how to pray. Leaning on the wisdom of our fathers and mothers in the faith assists us greatly in knowing how to honor the Lord.

Open it

1. Describe the sickest you have ever felt. What caused it and how long did it take you to recover? What, if anything, made you feel better?

Read it

JAMES 5:13-18

Explore it

2. What should we do when we suffer? When we are cheerful? When we are sick?
3. What are we called to do as believers who sin? Why?
4. How does James describe the prayer of a righteous person?
5. For what two things did Elijah fervently pray?

9. We are quick to go to God in prayer in the emergencies of life. What keeps us from thanking and praising Him when life is going well?

10. We encounter all types of suffering in a fallen world—spiritual, physical, emotional, financial, relational. Which types of suffering seem to impact you the most? Why?

Prayer is not just an exercise we do. Rather, it is the active communication we have with God; it is the most important act for us in any matter or endeavor. Prayer is not about our will; rather, it is a means of seeking His (Matthew 6:33).³

11. How can just spending time praying reset our behaviors and insights? What can you do to make sure your motives are right with prayer?

In verse 14 James says to pray with the elders: *“Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord.”* The indication is that someone is weak and bedridden in such a way that they could not get out easily to gather together with the church. Therefore, the elders, or pastors, who shepherd the body would come, at the invitation of a brother or sister, to pray over him.⁴

12. James puts the responsibility on the sick person to seek help and care in their time of need. Why is this the case when our culture would say the elders should initiate care?

³ Study on James by R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. found @ <http://70030.netministry.com/apps/articles/?articleid=33646&columnid=3803> © 2005 R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Into Thy Word Ministries*

⁴ Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus In James (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Location 1952). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

13. What good is accomplished by inviting others into our time of suffering?

These verses make a connection between physical illness and sin. James does not assume that the person is sick because of their sin, but he does seem to indicate that it may be a cause.

14. Can we determine if our illness is caused by sin? What extremes must we steer clear of when discerning such things?

But now we must deal with the questions, “What is the prayer of faith?” and, “Is James guaranteeing healing in every case?” Some resolve this by saying that the gift of miraculous healing was limited to the apostolic age, and so this doesn’t apply anymore. While the gift of healing may have been only for that period, that gift is not in view here. Obviously, God can and does heal miraculously in every age when it is His will to do so.

Others go to the other extreme and say that it is always God’s will to heal. If you aren’t healed, you must not have prayed in faith. This view is not only false, but cruel! If this were true, no faithful believer should ever get sick or die. But that doesn’t square with either reality or the New Testament. Paul was not healed of his thorn in the flesh and he did not heal Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30) or Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20). He urged Timothy to drink a little wine for his frequent stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23), not to claim his healing by faith. And, we all eventually get sick and die.

So my understanding of this verse is, if you are seriously sick or have an injury that is debilitating, call the elders for prayer. We will come and talk to you about your situation. We may ask if you are aware of any sins that you need to confess. We will anoint you with oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is mighty to heal. We will pray with you, believing that God can and does heal. But, we must submit to His sovereign will, which we seldom can know in advance. If He chooses to heal you, give Him the glory, because it wasn’t the oil, it wasn’t our prayers or faith that healed you. It was God! ⁵

⁵ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-23-god-dependent-community-james-513-16a>

15. How do you feel about people claiming they can heal? Have you seen or experienced it yourself? How can the healing that James describes strengthen your walk and faith in Christ?

Confession, like prayer for healing, has also been taken to unwarranted extremes. Some never do it at all, but others may indiscreetly share things in public that should never be shared. I once had a man in a Sunday School class share in front of the entire class (with his wife present) that he had lusted over another woman in the class! James is not encouraging such a thing!

Generally, the confession should be as public as the sin. If it is a private sin, confess it privately, or find a godly, trustworthy saint who will keep your confidence and confess it to him or her (men with men, women with women). If your sin hurt specific individuals, confess it to those people and ask their forgiveness. If it affected the entire church, then ask the elders for an appropriate time and place to confess it to the church.⁶

16. James clearly commands that God's people be active in confessing their sins to one another, yet it is rarely seen in churches today. Why is this the case? What can a church do to make this practice more prevalent and edifying for all?

17. If you weren't embarrassed and could call together all of God's people to pray for you in a specific way, what would it be? What about for a specific sin?

Elijah had taken on almost legendary status among the Jews in James' day. By all accounts, he was an impressive man! He marched in before the wicked, powerful King Ahab and announced that it would only rain by his word, and his word came true! He was miraculously fed by the ravens during the drought. He miraculously enabled the widow of Zarephath's flour to be replenished throughout the drought. He raised her son from the dead. He called down fire from heaven to consume his waterlogged sacrifice in front of the 400 prophets of Baal. Then he ordered the execution of them all. Later, he called down fire to consume two groups of soldiers sent to arrest him. He parted the Jordan river to walk across. His final act was to be taken to heaven without dying in a chariot of fire. That's the stuff legends are made of!

⁶ ibid

As you read the story of Elijah, you find that in spite of seeing God work in miraculous ways, he became fearful and depressed. James' point is that while Elijah was a great man, he was after all just a man. He did not have some privileged status before God that we lack. He had his ups and downs, but he prayed and God answered. So even though you have your ups and downs, pray! The power of prayer is not with the man, but with our God.⁷

18. What truths regarding prayer can we learn from Elijah's example? What excuses could Elijah have given for giving up on prayer?

19. How long should we continue praying if God doesn't seem to be answering? Is there a point at which we should give up?

Prayer acknowledges that our need is not for just a little boost from God, and then we can handle it on our own. Prayer admits my need is total! In seminary, Dr. Howard Hendricks used to challenge us with the question, "What is there in your life that you cannot explain apart from God?" Our problem is not that we are inadequate to live the Christian life, but rather that we think we are at least partially adequate in ourselves. So God sends some overwhelming circumstances into our lives to teach us what Paul learned (2 Corinthians 1:9), "*Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.*"⁸

20. It's hard to imagine bolder, more confident prayer and faith than that of Elijah. What things are you praying for that clearly demonstrate bold, expectant faith?

⁷ Sermon by Pastor Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-24-power-prayer-james-516b-18>

⁸ *ibid*