

CCC HOW TO PRAY ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS

Developing A Faith That Works - Part 15

Read James 5:13-20

v. 16 *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* The word "prayer" is mentioned seven times in this passage. That's what it's about, prayer. James had a reputation for being a man of prayer. Prayer is the greatest privilege of the Christians life, being able to talk to God, and it's the greatest power in the Christian life. What prayer can do is what God can do. Anything that God can do can be done through prayer. Jesus said, *"The things that I do, you'll do also even greater works."* How do you do greater works than Jesus? Jesus said, "It's by prayer". Prayer, talking with God is our greatest responsibility. It's also probably our greatest failure in the Christian life. We talk a lot about prayer, we study about prayer. But, yet a

lot of us are not too satisfied with our prayer life. Today we're going to look at, When should I pray, What kind of person can pray, and How can I pray more effectively.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY? James mentions there are three specific times when I really need to pray.

1. When I am hurting emotionally – He says in verse 13 *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."* The word in Greek literally means "to suffer misfortune, to be in distress" to be under stress, to be under tension. In Timothy it's translated "hardships." He's talking about internal distress caused by external circumstances. It may be a financial, relational, your heart is breaking, tension is at an all time high, when life gets hard, we should pray.

Then Right after that he says, *"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."* Have you noticed that life is a series of alternations between high's and lows, we go from

feast to famine, problem to joy? What is being said here, "Praise" is used 550 times in the Bible. Let me share a truth with you... if you haven't learned how to come in here and just let loose and praise the Lord you really are missing a lot... It's how we handle the season of praise that gets you through the hard times. Does anyone know what I am talking about... Praise, is to be the lifestyle of the Christian not just standing in here with your hands in your pockets doing nothing but looking forward – do you want to be happy in all situation, do you want the secret of a rich, personal devotional life come in here and praise the Lord in song, singing to the Lord. Not because you have a good voice or a bad voice because God has called you and I to come and make a joyful noise unto the Lord on Sunday's and I do just that and he delights in my praising Him by

singing, by raising my hands to Him, by making a joyful noise unto the Lord. When should I pray

2. When I'm hurting physically, I ought to pray.

v. 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" in Greek, literally means "without strength" not just acid indigestion or postnasal drip, a serious illness. When you're beyond the help of a doctor, you pray. The elders of the church are to come and pray over him and anoint him with oil.

The Scripture teaches that there are three different kinds of sickness. The Bible says that first there is the **sickness for death**. It's covered in 1 John 5:16, John 11:4. That kind of

sickness God allows to take us on home to be with Him.

There are some sicknesses that you will never recover from. There will be an illness someday that you will never recover from because God doesn't want you to live indefinitely. If every sickness could be healed by faith then anybody who had a lot of faith would never die. There is a sickness for the purpose of taking you on home.

Then there's a **sickness for discipline**. The purpose for a sickness for discipline which is covered in 1 Corinthians 11:28- 32 where they were abusing the Lord's Supper. Paul said, The Lord is disciplining you because you're out of the will of God. When we sin it does bring sickness into our lives.

The third kind of sickness is **sickness for the glory of God**. The sickness for the glory of God is a sickness that God has allowed in your life simply because He wants to

heal you of it and let it be a testimony to the world. John 11:4 a man came to Jesus who was ill and blind. The disciples said, "Lord, who's sinned, him or his parents?" Jesus said, "Nobody's sinned, this is a sickness for the glory of God." Then he healed the guy and it brought glory to God.

There are three kinds of sickness: sickness for death, sickness for discipline, sickness for the glory of God. The last is the kind God wants to heal.

Over the years I have seen approximately five different attitudes toward healing. There's a lot of different divisions about healing.

1. **The sensationalist.** These are the guys you see on TV. They come into town and hold giant meetings in large auditoriums, advertise miracles. There's bright lights, TV cameras rolling. Often the healer is flamboyant. He shouts

at the people, slaps them on the head. It is often a highly charged emotional atmosphere. The guy might say, "Do you feel warm?" and he's standing before 20,000 people, rolling TV cameras and spotlights! Some one says yes and the crowd goes crazy... There is psychological motivation in all of this. Be careful of this. Be discerning on this. Why do I warn you to be discerning here, just because something is a miracle doesn't mean it's from God. Remember when Moses laid down his stick and it became a serpent. What did those priests do, the exact same thing. Just because something is done in the name of the Lord doesn't mean it's of God. Jesus said in Matthew 7 "Many will come in that day and say, 'Lord, Lord didn't we do many miracles in your name?' Jesus will say, 'I didn't even know you.'" They themselves were doped by the devil.

2. **The confessionalists.** The confessionalists say that it is always God's will for everybody to be healed. This is the Name It and Claim It group. Sickness is a result of sin and all you need to do is claim your healing and God will heal. If you're not healed you lack faith. The result of that is if there's no healing there's an awful lot of guilt that goes around and confusion, Amen. "Maybe I just didn't believe enough." False doctrine always creates false guilt. Always. That's one of the problems with legalism. When you make up all of these rules and regulations, it takes the joy of knowing Jesus out of your life. The Bible says, *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* These confessionalists say it's just the way you talk, you'll get it. I claim I have a Cadillac and I get a Cadillac. The problem with this is, it makes God a genie. All of a sudden God is serving me, my needs, my whims rather than me serving

Him, and what about the verse in I Peter 5:19 *"Those who suffer according to the will of God."* Sometimes suffering is the will of God for me.

3. **Dispensationalists.** The dispensationalists are those who say the gifts of healing were only for New Testament times and they're no longer around anymore. People will say, "Don't bother looking for those gifts. It was great back in those days but they're not here." I have a problem with that view because Hebrews 13:8 says *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."* I believe that He is.

4. **Rationalists.** These are the people who say it's just all in your mind. If you're ill it's because you think you're ill. Just deny it and you'll be OK. This is the Christian Science movement. Just deny it's happening and it will go away. I truly believe that these types of people should go to

children's hospital and visit all the little kids there dying and tell them it's all in your head. Just think differently

5. I think James would be a **Realist**. This recognizes two facts. One, the fact that God still does heal. He does heal but not everybody gets healed. That is also a fact of life. God does heal people today, but two, He doesn't heal everybody. I think life is an example of that.

So what does James say to do when you are sick? You should call the elders of the church. I Peter 5, Acts 20, Titus 2 tells of the structure of the church. James says you call the spiritual leaders of your church to pray for you, not because these guys are the professionals, no they have nothing to offer they are just part of God's order and structure. When we change Elders in the years to come the new elders will come to you and pray for you and guess what they have themselves nothing to offer you but to be

obedient to what God has called them to do, pray for the sick and God does the healing Amen.

"...and anoint him with oil". Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, like many symbols in Scripture. When we baptize with water, water is a symbol of the burial. When we take communion, the juice is a symbol of blood. All through Scripture, oil is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

"...in the name of the Lord..." God is the healer, not any person. The name represents the character of the Lord. All healing is based on God's character.

The results: *"... 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."*

3. When I'm hurting spiritually. - *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* In Jesus' day and in many places today it

is taught that all sickness is a result of sin. If you are ill, then supposedly you had some hidden sin in your life. If you confessed and still were sick then you still had some other hidden sin. Jesus blew that idea out of the water in John 9 where he said to the man who had been born blind that nobody sinned. I think this is a very unfair concept. You think of babies being born with birth defects -- obviously that baby hasn't sinned. We live in a fallen world and part of that problem is there are hurts and problems.

On the other hand, Jesus did teach that a lot of the sickness we bring on our lives we do bring upon ourselves. If I don't follow God's principles, my body is going to find out about it. If I don't take care of my body, eat right, sleep right, exercise right, 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 about anything, but pray about everything" and I worry, fret, get anxious and I get an ulcer, then I'm to blame for it. If I allow resentment to build up in my life... doctors say it's not so much what you eat but what's eating you that makes the difference ... resentment can take its toll in your life and it makes a big difference. If I don't trust God and I allow these things to come into my life there will be sin. *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

Listen carefully to this next part. If you desire to be healed there is a condition for healing? Confess. We'd rather conceal and camouflage our sins, than confess them. It is a liberating experience that leads to healing when you confess your sins and get them out and share them, not just with the Lord but with each other. Revealing your feeling

is the beginning of healing. Many people come to me in counseling and begin by saying, "I've never told this to anyone else in the world." Once they say that, I know that something great is going to happen. I know what a relief it is to not carry a burden anymore, to get it out and share it with somebody else so you can be loved and accepted for who you are without having to pretend you're perfect and wear a mask.

"confess to each other" -- Does that mean I get up and confess to the whole church? There is a principle of the circle of confession. Only confess as widely as it involves other people. If I've got a private sin, just between me and the Lord, then I ought to just confess it to the Lord. If it's a personal sin, between me and you, then I need to come to you. If it's a public sin, then I need to apologize to the whole church. He says confess your sins, not broadcast

them. If it involves somebody else you ought to go to somebody else. There ought to be at least one person -- husband, wife, pastor, friend -- you have that you can share everything with and know you'll be loved and accepted unconditionally.

Years ago I was speaking and I was preaching all of a sudden I stopped and said, "Maybe there's some people here that need to get some things right with each other. I sense some coldness here. I may be wrong but I'll bow my head and pray and if you've got a grudge against some other person and you need to get it right, why don't you just get up and go to that person and tell them you're sorry?" I bowed my head and to my surprise I heard this tremendous noise! The whole church was going to each other! It was one of the most amazing things I'd ever seen in my life. It went on for about 20 minutes. Not just that but after that

the church began to draw non-church people into it again.

When Christians really love each other you have to lock the doors to keep people out. The Bible says, "*By this shall all men know that you're my disciples, that you love each other.*" That's what counts.

When should I pray? James says you can pray whenever you've got a need -- a physical need, an emotional need, a material need. No matter what it is you ought to pray.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON CAN PRAY? ordinary people... Some people think you have to be a spiritual giant to pray to get answers. They think, I could never pray and see somebody healed or I could never pray and see a financial miracle happen. I could never pray and see a relational miracle. Many Christians feel inferior. So James uses Elijah as an illustration. "*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." I Kings 19. In the chapters before this Elijah demonstrated fear, resentment, guilt, anger, loneliness and worry. Now you know why it says, "Elijah was a man just like us." We have fear, resentment, guilt, anger, loneliness and worry also, he was no different then you and I.

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. It's for ordinary people. I Kings 18, Elijah got alone with God and humbled himself praying for rain. It says he prayed seven times. He was persistent. He would not give up. One day a little cloud formed in the sky and he said, "It's going to be a gusher!" The rains came and flooded the place. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things through prayer.

HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY?

I want to review four conditions for praying effectively that James mentions in his book.

1. I must ask. That sounds simple but in a lot of our prayers we never ask for anything. We say "Thank you for..." and "Bless..." and that's it. We never pray specifically. The more specific your prayers are the greater you're going to be blessed in the answer. I have and still do many times in my walk keep a prayer journal and I would encourage you to. Take a piece of paper and make four columns: Date, Prayer Request, Promise to base my prayers on, Answer/Date. This is a real faith building time in my life. (We are going to have one here for a while, your prayer request) I saw God answer in little things and I saw him answer in big things. I trust Him for great things. James 4:2 *"You do not have because you do not ask."* Be

specific. Throw away all your clichés away. I love to hear new Christians pray because they don't know all the language, and they're so honest. It's refreshing. They say the most honest and genuine things that are really meaningful.

2. Have the right motive. *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* If you're going to ask in prayer, make sure your motives are right. Not for selfishness but for a genuine reason -- the glory of God.

3. Clean life. *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* James 5:16 . Circle "righteous". If you're a Christian you are righteous. We're not talking about perfection. We're talking about righteousness. Righteousness is your standing before God when you

became a believer through Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with your perfection. If God only answered the prayers of perfect people, how many prayers would get answered? None. But God does want us to have a clean life. Psalm 66:18, David said, *"If I hide [regard, conceal] iniquity [sin] in my heart then the Lord will not hear."* If I am willfully and knowingly doing something I know is displeasing to God and say, "God, I'm going to continue doing this but, by the way, help me out." It's like saying "Dad, will you loan me the keys to the car, but I'm never going to do a single thing you ask." We need to have the desire to try and live a clean life before Him. Proverbs 28:9 *"He that turneth his back from the hearing of the law, even his prayers are an abomination."* Isaiah 59:2 *"Your sins have separated you between you. Your God has hid His face so He cannot hear."*

4. Ask in faith. Expect an answer. James 1:6 "*But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt...*" When you come to God, believe that He wants to answer your prayer. Trust Him. Don't doubt. Really believe.

How important is your prayer life to you? I struggle with this more than any other area in my life -- this area of being consistent in prayer. I talk to the Lord all the time, but I don't really have the prayer life I want to have. I'm never satisfied with it. I want to know Him in a deeper way. I want our church to be a miracle. I want it only to be explained by the fact that God did it. I want our church to be an embarrassment to the devil. I want people to look at our church and say, "Only God could have done that."