

## Effective Prayer ([James 5:13-20](#))

North Hills Baptist Church, June 5, 2019

### James 5:13-20 (KJV)

<sup>13</sup> Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

<sup>14</sup> Is any sick among you? 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:

<sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

<sup>16</sup> Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

<sup>17</sup> Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

<sup>18</sup> And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

<sup>19</sup> Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

<sup>20</sup> Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

James urged his readers to pray in all circumstances, including blessing, trouble, sickness, and sin. Using the illustration of Elijah, James showed that **the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective.**

- I. **Prayer for Times of Trouble ([V. 13a](#)) James 5:13 (NKJV)** <sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

**"Is any of you in trouble/suffering?"** was James's opening question to his readers regarding prayer. **The kind of "trouble" he referred to is when believers suffer evil or hardship.** When believers are tempted to grumble against one another, prayer serves as the antidote to grumbling. James's previous instructions on prayer tell us that this prayer should be:

1. **for wisdom** ([1:5](#)) and **James 1:5 (KJV)** -<sup>5</sup> **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.
  2. **wholehearted** ([1:6](#)). **James 1:6 (KJV)** -<sup>6</sup> **But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering**. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. **Simply put, God says it, that settles it.**
- II. **Prayer for Times of Blessing ([V. 13b](#)) James 5:13 (KJV)** -<sup>13</sup> **Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry/cheerful? let him sing psalms.**

Paul wrote in [Col. 3:16](#): "Let the word of Christ dwell (*en-oy-keh'-o, basically means to take up residence*) **in you richly** as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude (not just rote - *mechanical or habitual repetition- singing*) in your hearts to God."

James posed a second question, "Is any merry/cheerful?" Times of happiness are a blessing from God. **The believer's proper response for these times is praise and gratitude toward God.** James seems to imply this praise is to be shared with the rest of the local Christian community or church. **Our testimonies as to the goodness and faithfulness of our God can and will encourage others in their walk with the Lord.**

- III. **Prayers for restoration.** "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual **should restore him gently**. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ"** ([Gal. 6:1-2](#)). Sadly, most churches today do just the opposite and just gossip about the wrong that person is involved in and tear them down instead of seeking to build up and restore them.
- IV. **Prayer for Times of Sickness ([Vv. 14-15](#))**

In these two verses, James's teaching emphasizes the community of Christian faith. Problems of sin and sickness challenge unity within a church or fellowship of believers. As with happiness, times of sickness are to be shared with other believers. In [verse 14](#), James set forth a threefold pattern for prayer on behalf of the sick:

1. The sick person is to call the elders.
2. The elders are to anoint the sick person with oil.
3. The elders are to pray over the sick person for healing.

James told his readers that "**the prayer of faith,**" not prayer based on the wrong motives (**James 4:3 (NKJV)** -<sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.), will heal the sick person. In describing God's response to their praying, James wrote that the Lord will "**raise up**" the sick person. **It is a word used for resurrection—a restoration of life.**

"While Calvin, Luther and some other expositors think that the practice of anointing, along with the power to heal, was meant to be confined to the apostolic age, it is doubtful that such a restriction can be maintained." *Douglas J. Moo, James, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 179.*

Listen to this excerpt from Tyndale's NT Commentary: "It is best, then, to view James' anointing as a physical action with symbolic significance. Since the symbolism of 'anointing' is usually associated with the setting apart or consecrating of someone or something for God, we are probably to understand this as the symbolism intended in the action. **As the elders pray for the sick person, they also set that person apart for God's special attention.**"

**15.** While anointing with oil, because of its uncertain meaning, not unnaturally attracts a good deal of attention, **we must remember that it is prayer that is James' main concern in these verses. This is reflected in James' ascribing the anticipated healing to the elders' prayer, not to the anointing. Their prayer is denoted with an unusual word, *euchē*, (yoo-khay') which connotes a strong, fervent wish or petition (see the use of the verb *euchomai* in [Acts 26:29; 27:29; Rom. 9:3](#)). **But it is not the fervency or the frequency of the prayer that renders it effective, rather—it is faith. Faith in, (not just the prayer but in the God who answers our prayers) 1:6-8,** where James also discusses the efficacy of prayer, **refers to a wholehearted unwavering commitment to God. Since it is the****

**elders who offer this prayer, it is clear that it is also their faith that is intended here.**

**James describes two results of *the prayer of faith*: the sick person will be saved and the Lord will raise him up.** *Save* (*sōzō*) usually refers in the New Testament to deliverance from spiritual death, and some scholars think that this may be James' meaning here also. In fact, they suggest that all of [verses 14-16a](#) may be about restoration to spiritual health rather than physical health. But James' language is too definite to allow this interpretation; he is clearly thinking, at least primarily, of physical healing (see the [Additional note on Healing](#), pp. 189-192). The word *sōzō* is certainly appropriate as a description of restoration to health and is used in this way frequently in the Gospels. Similarly, *raise up* (*egeirō*) is used to describe the renewed physical vigour of those who have been healed ([Matt. 9:6](#); [Mark 1:31](#); [Acts 3:7](#)). **Thus the picture is of the elders praying 'over' the 'sick man' in his bed and the Lord intervening to raise him up from that bed.** *Tyndale Commentaries - Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – James.*

In Bible times, oil or ointment was used as a medicine in the treatment of wounds ([Luke 10:34](#)). [James 5:14](#) may refer either to a symbolic use of oil or to its medicinal use. **The anointing with oil is not merely a kind of home remedy. As it is applied, the name of the Lord Jesus is to be invoked.** Olive oil, according to Old Testament and Jewish understanding, was prized for its nurturing of human well being and for its healing properties. In Jesus' and His disciples' ministry, olive oil was used in their healings of the sick when combined with the preaching of repentance. "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" ([Mark 6:12-14](#)). (Taken from the *Holman Bible Dictionary* and Kurt A. Richardson, *James, The New American Commentary*, vol. 36 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997], 233.)

James's next statement ([v. 15b](#)) raised the question about the connection between sin and sickness. **Although sickness can be a consequence of sin, this is not always the case.**

In John's Gospel, Jesus encountered a man who had been blind all his life. His disciples asked whether the man had sinned or his parents. Jesus answered that it was neither the man nor his parents, **"but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life"** ([John 9:3](#)).

Earlier in John's Gospel ([5:1-18](#)), Jesus healed a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. Not long after Jesus healed the man, he saw him in the Temple and said, "Behold, you have become well; **do not sin anymore so that nothing worse may befall you"** (NASB).

## V. **Prayer for Times of Sin ([V. 16](#))**

James continued his instruction on prayer by telling his readers that their entire church or community should be characterized by mutual confession of sin. Paul's instruction for correcting a believer who has fallen into sin surely included mutual confession.

A key point here is that mutual confession leads to prayer for each other. Under the covenant with Israel, specific men were designated as priests. **Under the new covenant, all believers are priests and have the privilege of interceding for their brothers and sisters in Christ—bringing them to Jesus Christ, our great High Priest.** Revelation 1:6 (KJV) -<sup>6</sup> And **hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father**; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:10 (KJV) -<sup>10</sup> And **hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.**)

James described **the prayer of the true believer as "powerful" and "effective."** Although these terms have overlapping meanings, both provide unique insight into the kind of prayer that accomplishes God's purposes.

Four friends brought a paralyzed man to Jesus. Jesus surprised and angered some of the crowd by telling the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. This was surprising because the most obvious need of the man was for physical healing. But Jesus went to the primary need first. Some of the religious leaders were angry, thinking to themselves that only God could forgive sin. Jesus perceived their thoughts and

responded: "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'? But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins— He said to the paralytic—'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.' And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all" ([Mark 2:8-12](#), NASB).

## **Prayers that are Powerful and effective**

J. B. Phillips's paraphrase illuminates these characteristics of a righteous person's prayer: "Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer." *The Amplified Bible* says that **such prayers "make tremendous power available—dynamic in its working."**

## **The Example of Elijah ([V. 17](#))**

James used an Old Testament example to illustrate effective prayer. Elijah prayed, and God withheld rain from the earth for three and one-half years. Then God sent rain again at Elijah's request. [First Kings 17:1](#) records his first prayer: "Now Elijah the Tishbite...said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'" His prayer to restore the rain is found in [1 Kings 18:41-42](#).

**"Elijah was a man just like us" means that he had the same kinds of feelings as we do, endured the same kind of circumstances we face, and had the same life experiences as we do. The NRSV translates this phrase, "Elijah was a human being like us." The idea that he had our same nature "indicates that the power of Elijah's prayer did not lie in his supernatural greatness, but rather in his humanity" (Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], 742*).**

Elijah's example illustrates everything that James wrote about a faith that rejects worldly standards of judgment in favor of divine standards. An important point of this illustration is that Elijah knew the will of God concerning the signs of drought and rain. This knowledge was why he prayed so fervently. **By applying the Word of God, all**

**believers can know God's will and then do His will through their own fervent praying.** James's statement "If it is the Lord's will" ([4:15](#)) comes to mind. **This fervent praying is appropriate for all seasons and circumstances of life.**

So, let us dig a little deeper for a fuller understanding of how to pray according to God's will. There is a reason it is so important to not only read God's Word but to study God's Word and why it is so important that we hide His Word in our hearts.

**Isaiah 55:11 (AMP) -<sup>11</sup> So shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void [without producing any effect, useless], but it shall accomplish that which I please *and* purpose, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.**

There are many other verses concerning the power of God's Word and the faithfulness of God to his Word, but these should suffice to show us the importance of us knowing God's Word, and not only knowing His Word but praying His Word because His Word is His Will and His Word always works.

**Psalm 107:17-21 (AMP) -<sup>17</sup> Some are fools [made ill] because of the way of their transgressions and are afflicted because of their iniquities.**

<sup>18</sup> They loathe every kind of food, and they draw near to the gates of death.

<sup>19</sup> Then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivers them out of their distresses.

<sup>20</sup> **He sends forth His word and heals them and rescues them from the pit *and* destruction.**

<sup>21</sup> Oh, that men would praise [and confess to] the Lord for His goodness *and* loving-kindness and His wonderful works to the children of men!

**Isaiah 61:11 (AMP) -<sup>11</sup> For as [surely as] the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring forth, so [surely] the Lord God will cause rightness *and* justice and praise to spring forth before all the nations [**through the self-fulfilling power of His word**].**

James urged his readers to pray in all circumstances, including times of blessing, trouble, sickness, and sin. Using the illustration of Elijah, James showed that the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective.

**Understanding the Power of Prayer which has been entrusted to us is a necessary part of the ministry God has given to every believer, and that is the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18 (AMP) - <sup>18</sup> But all things are from God, Who through *Jesus* Christ reconciled us to Himself [received us into favor, brought us into harmony with Himself] and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation [that by word and deed we might aim to bring others into harmony with Him].**

## VI. **The Ministry of Reconciliation or Restoration ([5:19-20](#))**

The disciplined Christian life involves not only patience and purity of speech and prayer but **also persistence in rescuing the perishing.** At the very heart of the life and work of the church is restoration of the fallen, the finding of the lost, and the saving of sinners. Again, in this passage James used the only word for sin that he employed in his writing, and that is the word that means "to miss the mark." It is the nature of human beings to stray from God's way, to miss the moral targets that He has established, and to turn from the ideals that God has ordained.

Restoration takes place in view of:

1. **God's mercy, which** James tells us **triumphs over judgment** ([2:13](#)).
2. **God's requirement that believers humble themselves** ([4:6-10](#)).

To anyone willing, the way "back" to God and to life is to turn "from the error of his way" to save one's soul from "death and cover over a multitude of sins" ([v. 20](#)). **James 5:20 (NKJV) -<sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.** Morally stumbling men and women who are missing God's mark of their lives, who are sick unto death, can find grace and the good life when they trust and obey Him.



Let us take a quick look at the word Turns.

This word is a compound word made up of the prefixed preposition "towards" and the verb "to turn." It literally means "to turn about" or "to turn toward" something. It is often translated "convert" because it describes a person's turning around or about. Associated with this turning around is repentance and faith.

At the very heart of the life and work of the church is restoration of the fallen, the finding of the lost, and the saving of sinners. To anyone willing, the way "back" to God and to life is the way of turning "from the error of his way" to save one's soul from "death and cover over a multitude of sins" ([v. 20](#)).

**Conclusion --** The call of James to do the gospel has been debated, criticized, and even ignored. His call needs to be heard. There may be several keys to the lost radiance of the modern church, but one of those keys is in plain view in the gospel according to James. **It is the key that unlocks the door between faith and works and once again joins that which God never meant to be separated. The joys, victories, and triumphs of pure religion are for those who live under the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and who are doers of the Word.**

**To be TRUE doers of the Word, requires that we be good students of the Word. Paul admonished Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:15 (AMP) -<sup>15</sup> Study *and* be eager *and* do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing *and* accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth. Jesus himself defined Truth for us: **John 17:17 (AMP) -<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by the Truth; Your Word is Truth.****

Let me close by encouraging each of us to be good students of the Word of God and begin to learn how to rightly divide (apply and share) the Word of Truth.