

[1]
Faith that Prays
James 5:13-18
January 17, 2016, Jeff Germo

We live in an era where we can find the answer to almost anything — in a few seconds. I do this all the time. It's a bad habit that I'm working on breaking. If I am in a conversation with a group of people and someone states something as fact and I think perhaps it's not true, I will grab my smartphone and Google it. I know that's pretty rude and I try not to do it.

We can find out information about almost anything. If you want to find the perfect bread recipe, just Google it. If you want to find out statistics about almost anything, just Google it. You just start typing, and Google will guess what you want as you type, just like we do sometimes when we are having conversations with people. We interrupt them half way through a sentence and tell them what we think they were going to say. Google does that. Last week I started typing, "How much faith do I need..." and I was given options. One of them was, "...to found [start] a religion." Sorry, Google, you got it wrong. That's not what I was looking for.

But, we have become so used to finding quick answers to our questions that we could be in danger of approaching the Bible like that too. We are uncomfortable with mystery. Why does God sometimes heal and sometimes not? I wish I could answer that one. I can't. We want a formula. What words do I say? What should my posture be? How much faith do I need? These are all good questions, but to find a definitive answer is pretty tough. There is a lot of mystery in the question of why God seems to answer sometimes and other times he seems silent.

I would imagine if I asked for a show of hands for all who are satisfied with their prayer life there would be very few hands raised. Each of us has room to grow in this area. We all fall short. And if you're like me there are times when you feel guilty about your lack of prayer.

"I should pray more, and longer, and for more people, or more eloquently, or more intensely."

And so we're left with these ongoing feelings of guilt because we don't pray right or long enough, kind of like the guy in this cartoon.

[2]

"Oh great! Here comes Bob. I told him I'd pray for him! 'Dear God, help Bob. Amen.' Hey Bob, been prayin' for you!"

Well, we are going to dig into this passage in James and see if we can make sense of what he says about prayer. Seven times in six verses prayer is mentioned.

Usually when we read this passage the thing that stands out to us is the part about praying for healing because it sounds sensational. But that is just a small part of the passage. This whole section is marinated in the theme of prayer. Prayer was very important to James.

According to tradition he was nicknamed "Camel-knees" because, apparently, he spent so much time on his knees praying that they built up rough calluses like the texture of a camel's knees.

So, let's read the passage and see what Jesus' brother has to say about prayer.

[3]

James 5:13–18 (ESV)

***¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.
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.***

[4]

15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, 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.

[5]

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

There are several kinds of prayer James addresses here. The list is not exhaustive, but these are the kinds of prayer that he includes:

[6]

1. Prayer of comfort when suffering (v. 13)

[7]

2. Prayer of praise (v. 13)

[8]

3. Prayer of healing when sick (v. 14, 15)

[9]

4. Prayer of confession in community (v. 16)

[10]

5. Prayer of the righteous (v. 17, 18)

I am going to try not to get bogged down in a bunch of details. Let me just say right off the bat is that James main point seems to be simply to **talk to God about everything**. No matter what your situation go to God. Don't think you can do your life without him. You can't. At our very core we need Jesus.

[11]

James 5:13-18 (ESV)

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

Are you experiencing some kind of suffering? Talk to God. 'Suffering' here refers to any kind of trial. It might be relational. You might be having difficulty in your marriage, or with your kids, or your parents, or a friend, or colleague, or an employee, or an employer. The natural thing to do when we have relational difficulties is to react. Someone snaps at us and we snap back. That's the most natural thing in the world for us to do. Or we pray that God would change *them* instead of us.

But, James says, don't do what comes naturally. The Holy Spirit is living in you and he can empower you to love that person and deal with them in a way that you and the other person can maintain your dignity. Sometimes change in the other person won't happen until change happens in you.

The suffering might be financial. Maybe you're having difficulty making it to the end of each month before pay day. The most natural thing to do then is to charge it to your credit card and rescue yourself. James says, No, talk to God first. He has promised to meet all our needs

according to his riches in Christ Jesus. Do the next right thing and then trust God. Trust God and do the next right thing.

[12]

Don't do what comes naturally. We've talked about this many times. If we do what comes naturally, often times we will do the wrong thing.

There might be a major decision you have to make about your future and you don't know which fork in the road to take. Talk to God. Whatever your hardship is, and we've all got them, the first thing we need to do is talk to God about it. Don't do what comes naturally!

[13]

"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."

What James is saying is no matter where you are at on the emotional spectrum go to God. Spend time with him. Get to know him.

In John 15 Jesus said if we spend time with him and allow him to spend time with us we will get to know him so well that we can ask him for whatever we want and he will give it to us. That sounds pretty good doesn't it? The caveat is that by spending time with him we will get to know him and his will, so whatever we ask for will be for our good and his glory. We won't ask him for things we know are not good for us.

Good parents don't give their kids whatever they ask for, because sometimes kids ask for things that are not good for them. But, as the kids get to know their parents and that they actually want what is best for them, hopefully they will learn that the reason they say "No" at times is because they really *do* know what is best.

Our Father God is omniscient. He knows everything. He is completely good. And he is omnipotent, meaning he holds all power in his hands. So, if he is all-knowing, all-powerful and completely good, it stands to reason that we should spend the time necessary to get to know him so we will ask for the things that will ultimately be best for us.

Remember what James wrote in chapter 1:16-17.

[14]

James 1:16-17

"¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..."

God is good and wants to give us good things. Trust him and do the next right thing.

[15]

Don't do what comes naturally.

In good times and in bad times we need to train ourselves, by the grace of God, to look up to him. And, as James said in the first chapter, even in the middle of our hardships, we can learn to see God's hand in them and thus be joyful in our suffering. Again, this does not come naturally for us. It will take training by the grace of God to actually get ourselves to believe it and then act on it.

[16]

Last week after the service someone came up to me and thanked me for the sermon and she said that there was one sermon I preached a few weeks ago that prompted her to work on her thought life. I asked her if I could use her story this week and she sent me this, but asked that I not use her name.

“I was moved by your sermon on not complaining several weeks ago. I wrote up Philippians 2:14 but was not having a lot of victory in this area. I got the idea somewhere of wearing a bracelet as a reminder. And every time I complained out loud I moved the bracelet to my other wrist. If I complained in my head I did not move it. At first, as you can imagine, that bracelet went back and forth. After several days I would stop myself from complaining out loud (just so I didn't have to move the bracelet) and just think the negative thoughts in my head, and by the way this includes gossiping/slandering AND complaining. Your sermon on not slandering anyone also spoke to me. Anyway things went along a bit better, less verbal complaining, but after a bit I noticed I was no longer complaining in my head. Slowly my whole thought life was changing. My whole outlook on life is changing. Philippians 2:15 goes on to tell us why we should not complain. It says we will shine like stars in the universe; and what better witness is that!”

Isn't that great! By doing that she was cooperating with Jesus allowing him to train her to take her thoughts captive. I thought that was a great example of training in righteousness.

We will not coast into maturity. It's going to take hard work, training, and cooperating with Jesus as he hones our character through life experiences.

The next kind of prayer that James addresses is **Prayer for healing**.

[17]

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 one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

In Matthew 8 where Jesus calmed the storm when the disciples were in the boat with him, they cried out to him to **save** them.

[18]

That word **save** is *sōzō*, the same word that James uses here when he says, “***the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick.***” It basically means to “**rescue**” in this case. So, in the case of praying for physical healing we should first go to God, our rescuer.

Of course we should use all the means at our disposal, such as going to the doctor, and using appropriate medicines, because God has given us those things as well. But we should not forget God. The natural thing for us to do is to go directly to the doctor without even thinking of talking to God about it.

[19]

So, when we are sick, James says, call the elders of the church and get them to pray for you.

Now, again, this is not the most natural thing for us to do. We have to humble ourselves in order to ask for help. We don't like to do that. It makes us look weak and needy. But, James says this is one of the requisites of healing prayer. We need to take the initiative, humble ourselves and ask for help from our faith community.

[20]

Don't do what comes naturally!

The next thing James says is that the elders are to anoint the sick person with oil in the name of Jesus.

[21]

There is nothing special about the oil. There is no magic healing potion. Just as when we baptize someone, the water is not magic. There is nothing special about it. It is symbolic. It's the same with the oil we would use for healing prayer. For some reason God's Word says to use it and so we do in obedience.

Let's move on.

[22]

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

When James says that the prayer of faith will save them he is not meaning spiritually, in the sense that they will be made right with God. I also don't think James meant that they will necessarily be physically healed, although we can't rule that out because God is certainly well able to and still does heal today.

We have to remember the context of James. They were suffering in many ways under the oppressive thumb of the Roman government. Remember in chapter one James urged them to face their suffering with joy because the suffering will lead to maturity in Christ if they persevere. If we face our trials with the right kind of humble attitude God will transform us from the inside out so we will bear more of the fruit of the Spirit.

In chapter one James did not say God would take the trials away. Nor, do I think he is saying that if you follow his prescription the sick person will necessarily be physically healed.

Remember when Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17. He said to the Father, ***"I'm not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one."***

Just before Jesus prayed this great prayer for his disciples he said,

[23]

John 16:33 (ESV)

³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Trouble is a part of living in a fallen world, and as Christ-followers we are not exempt from it. I do not believe that God always wants us to be healed. Our comfort is not the most important thing to God. That may surprise some of you. What is important to him is that we grow in our relationship with him and with others, and that we have his peace and learn to trust him in the middle of the storm. And that will not happen if God always rescues us from our problems. I once visited a lady at the cancer clinic in Vancouver. She had a very serious form of cancer. I asked her how I could pray for her. And aside from praying for her healing, she said, "I'd like you to pray for my kids that they would be free from pain and suffering and have an easy life." I paused for quite a while before I answered. "I'm sorry," I said. "I can't pray that in good conscience. I can pray that they would grow and learn and become stronger through the difficult

things they will face in life, but to pray for an easy life is not something that will be good for them in the long run. We need pain and suffering in order to grow.” She was good with that once I explained it.

And so when we pray about these kinds of things, either for ourselves or someone else, we should pray that God would help us to endure and learn what it is he wants us to learn through it instead of just helping us follow the path of least resistance.

That said, we should pray for healing. God does still heal today. He answers our prayers. I believe that with all my heart. We have a friend who is originally from El Salvador. She has a niece who is still there and had surgery to remove a cancerous tumour from her mouth. The resulting exposed nerves were excruciatingly painful for her, as you can probably imagine.

There were people all over the world praying for her healing. And I believe God heard those prayers and answered. At exactly 12:00 pm one day the pain instantly disappeared. I believe that was the hand of God. We prayed that the pain would cease. But, we did not **only** ask God to take away her pain. We asked more than anything that she would experience God’s presence in her pain, and that his will would be done through her pain. We prayed in the name of Jesus, or according to his will.

[24]

I want to just touch on what James meant by “**the prayer of faith**” in verse 15.

James says that the prayer of faith will save the sick person. What does that mean? Whose faith does the prayer of faith refer to? Is it the faith of the pray-er, or the faith of the one being prayed for? We don’t have time to deal extensively with this. Suffice it to say that it’s the faith of the elders who are doing the praying that perform this prayer of faith, not the sick person.

The elders are praying with the prayer of faith. Their faith is in a loving God who is all-powerful and able, and always does the right thing. They trust God because they have experienced his goodness throughout their lives.

I have counselled many people who have struggled with illness of one kind or another who have been told by well-meaning Christians that the reason they are not getting healed is that they don’t have enough faith. And then they walk around with a guilt complex feeling like a substandard Christian because they don’t have the right amount faith to receive healing from their heavenly Father who is supposed to love them.

There is an element of truth to the fact that we need faith, but Jesus said it can be as small as a mustard seed. Many times Jesus actually healed people without them personally having any faith. **The centurion** who asked for healing for his servant is a case in point. The servant wasn’t even present when Jesus healed him. **Lazarus** who Jesus raised from the dead is another example. Jesus didn’t ask his permission. He was dead. It was God’s will to do it, so he did it. There are many other examples like this. Jesus prayed with the prayer of faith in the One to whom he was praying, that he held all power in his hands and that he was good.

And, as Jesus said many times, he always acted according to his Father’s will. And we need to do the same.

James continues at the end of v. 15:

[25]

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

This person who has asked for prayer, James says will also be forgiven.

He has already humbled himself before God. He has recognized that he is powerless to do anything about his situation barring the miraculous intervention of God. If we posture ourselves in humility before God when we go to him in prayer we will make sure that our hearts are right before him, and thus we will be forgiven.

And so, James continues in verse 16:

[26]

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Confession of sin is another requisite of healing prayer. And this is not just confession in front of God, but in front of your community of faith.

We need to be careful, though, not to assume that the person is sick is because they have sin in their lives. I've heard many stories of people who live in shame because someone told them the reason they aren't healed is because of their sin. Jesus reprimanded his disciples for doing that in John 9. Sometimes that might be the case, but we are not the judge.

[27]

¹⁶ ...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Elijah was just like us, James said. In others words, we can potentially have just as an effective prayer life as he had. He was so set on living his life according to God's ways that he knew without a shadow of a doubt that his prayers would be answered.

Friends, God still answers prayer today. He still heals. But, we have to train ourselves, by the grace of God, to stop doing what comes naturally and instead take it to the Lord in prayer and trust him with the outcome. Our faith is not that we will get exactly what we ask God for. Our faith is in the One to whom we pray. We know he is all-knowing, all-powerful and completely good and trustworthy, so we can trust that he will always do the right thing.

What James is saying in this passage is that we should practice the presence of Jesus. Be aware at all times that he is with us. Whether you are happy, or sad, or anywhere in between, be aware of his presence. Talk to him. He listens. And above all, the God of the Bible is a rescuing God. That is the over-arching message of the Bible from beginning to end.

[28]

Our prayer life should not be mostly about getting what we want from God, but in getting to know the God who saved us through Jesus. Spend time with him. Get to know him through his Word so you will know how to pray and what to pray for.



Faith that Prays
James 5:13-18
Week of January 17th, 2016

Objective of this study: To understand God's heart to communicate with us in everything.

January 31st after the service we will be having a potluck and looking back to how God spoke to us through the James series.

Please be ready to share your journey with your faith community. It's going to be exciting!

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 116:1-9** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

When do you most naturally pray?

Word/Work (60 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read James 5:13-18 slowly and allow God to reveal his heart to you.
3. James' main point is that in every situation, pray. God, your Father cares, hears and answers.

Sermon Quote: "In good times and in bad times we need to train ourselves, by the grace of God, to look up to [God]."

4. James reveals at least five kinds of prayer in this passage. What are they?
5. Of the five kinds of prayer which is more natural for you?
6. Which are least natural?
7. Which do you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you to work on?
8. Read Psalm 116:1-2 again. Share some experiences where you cried out to God and he heard you.
9. Spend the rest of the time praying together.

Sermon Quote: "Our prayer life should not be mostly about getting what we want from God, but in getting to know the God who saved us through Jesus. Spend time with him. Get to know him through his Word so you will know how to pray and what to pray for."