

Sermon: The Prayer Offered in Faith (James 5:13-18)

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. Tell of a time when you struggled with what you deemed to be unanswered prayer. What did you learn later?
2. Have you ever prayed over someone who was sick? Have you ever had someone pray over you? What was the outcome?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Most principles that James gives in his letter are clear-cut: (eg; James 1:5; 2:1; 3:13; 4:7; 4:11)
In contrast, why can some of the principles in verses 5:13-18 be controversial, and difficult to understand?
What misunderstandings might result?
2. How do James 1:2-6 and 5:13-16 complement the author's teaching about prayer? Why does he use both words 'elders...and each other' (14, 16)?
Who then is called to pray?
3. Pastor Henry described the word "sick" (5:14,15) as having the Greek meaning of being weak, ill with deep despairing heart and distress; a lack of faith to carry on. Review the three areas of 'sickness' that he described.

In what way does John 9:1-4 guide us in understanding one purpose of 'sickness'? How might 'sickness' and 'confession of sins' be connected?

4. What other purposes might God have for allowing sickness?
5. Read I Kings 17:2, 8, 24; 18:1, 31; 19:9. What phrase is significant in each of these verses? How does this phrase explain 'the prayer offered in faith' (5:15)?

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. What did James mean by saying that Elijah was 'a man just like us'? (5:17)
In what way do you see yourself like Elijah? How can you be more like Elijah?
2. What word or phrase ('logos') from these verses has been significant for you?
How has this been a 'rhema' word for you?
How do you need to respond in obedience and submission this week?
3. What comment from the sermon was a helpful challenge for you?
4. The main thing for me this week is

Resource: 'Prayer Matters'

<http://www.cschurch.ca/sermons/inside-out/prayer-matters/>

THE WORD (NIV)

I Kings 17 – 19

Elijah's story

John 9:1-4

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

James 1:2-6

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

James 5:13-18

¹³Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

¹⁷Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Sermon Study Summary

It is important to have an accurate concept of prayer for healing. Not all Christians agree on what James means in praying for the sick. So this week Pastor Henry answered questions from James 5:13-18 one phrase at a time.

What kind of 'sickness' is James talking about? James uses the Greek word to mean weak, without strength. It refers to a despairing heart that has lost hope. Some people were sick **emotionally**, having seen their loved ones beaten, imprisoned or executed. They were abused physically and financially. They were so fearful, distressed and discouraged that their hope in God was wavering. They questioned God's goodness and lacked faith to carry on. Others were sick **spiritually**, living in sin, disobeying and rebelling against God. It was making them physically sick. Now not all sickness is a result of sin, as when Jesus healed the man born blind. (John 9:1-4). When we get ill, we mustn't conclude that God is punishing us. But sometimes when we stubbornly resist Him, God allows sickness to get our attention and bring correction. Yet other people were sick **physically**, and their illness was draining them of energy and joy. They wondered why God wasn't answering their prayers.

If you get so sick that you doubt the faithfulness of God, if you get angry at God, or if you are so discouraged and in despair that you can't carry on and even pray, do as James says. Don't go it alone. Share with God and reach out to the spiritually mature to pray for you.

Who are the elders? (v.14) In James' day, the elders were ordained pastors and leaders. But God's power isn't relegated to pastors only. God uses the community of believers (v. 16), those who are spiritually strong and mature. God will restore and heal through the love, encouragement and prayers of others.

Why does James say to pray over them and anoint with oil? Oil itself doesn't have special power. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit's power to heal and restore *in the name of Jesus*.

What does it mean to anoint "in the name of the Lord"? We pray 1) in line with the character and nature of Jesus, what Jesus taught and how He would pray, and 2) in alignment with His will (1 John 5:14).

How can we know God's will for healing? God reveals his will through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) in two ways: through the Scriptures—"logos" (1 Timothy 2:3-4) and through the Spirit's prompting or whispers—"rhema" to our spirits.

Why does James include Elijah as an example of effective praying? James illustrates God's super working power. Elijah prayed and God raised a dead boy. He prayed and there was no rain for 3 ½ years—then he prayed again and it rained. He prayed and fire came down and consumed the offering. Although James says that Elijah was a man like us (v. 17), we feel he is beyond us. He was so powerful because *three times* "the word of the Lord" came to him before he prayed. (1 Kings 17:2, 8 and 18:1). God gave Elijah a *rhema* of what He wanted to do and what He wanted Elijah to pray for. This *rhema* gave Elijah the faith to pray in total confidence. God wants *us* to pray His will, through obedience and listening to Him.

What is the prayer of faith? It isn't a positive attitude or a formula. It isn't relying on our faith. If we pray this way, we are trusting in ourselves, not God. Instead, the prayer of faith is *knowing* the will of God and that He will answer our prayers (1 John 5:14).

What are root causes of sickness? (See notes above)

1. **Emotional sickness** is due to loss such as loss of a loved one or a job. We question God and Christ's love for us. We even question if there is a God. Or we may feel God is punishing us. We may lose the desire to live. The prayer of faith includes Bible verses to expose Satan's lies that we believe. It affirms the truth about who God is and who we are in Christ. Then God will restore us with new life, hope and energy.
2. **Spiritual sickness** is due to sin, rebellion, or bitterness. We can't sleep and get physically ill. The prayer of faith includes confession (1 John 1:9) and then our sin will be forgiven (v. 15). God's discipline will be lifted and we will be restored. We will experience freedom from hiding sin.
3. **Physical sickness** is due to such things as cancer or heart disease. The clue is to ask God what His will is. It may involve an extended time of prayer and seeking the Scriptures. Will God give us a *rhema* word? (**Note:** If you have a rhema from God, don't publicize it. Tell only a few trusted confidants.) If we have a *rhema*, we will *know* what God's will is and won't pray, "If it is Your will..."

What happens if we're not clear about God's will? It's not a cop-out or lack of faith. Instead, we can pray "If Your will is different from my prayer, I know Your answer is better, and I want You to do what's best." This prayer breathes hope. It's a prayer of submission that God is in control. Tim Keller wrote, "God will either give us what we ask—or He will give us what we would have asked if *we knew* everything He knew."

What happens if God doesn't heal? Prayer and healing are mysteries. Jesus didn't heal everyone. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" that God didn't heal. Instead, God assured Paul that His own strength was made perfect in weakness. Joni Erickson said, "Having been in this wheelchair for some 50 years, I'd much rather be here with God than out of the wheel chair without God."

God may remove sickness, but then again, He may not. But be assured that He'll remove everything that keeps us from Him. He could have kept Paul from prison. He could have kept Jesus from the cross. Don't let the mystery of unanswered prayer make you waver. But do surrender everything to God and keep praying at every opportunity. You'll see God answer in wonderful ways.