

James 5:13-18

Prayer Works

I. Introduction

- A. The pick up notes of verse 12 — We don't make oaths and we do not curse...we pray!
- B. **Prayer is to the believer's soul what oxygen is to the body. It is our connection to God, a life-line. It is a joining of our heart and mind to Christ.** Without it we would be cold, blind and lost. We would have no capacity by which to do life with God.
- C. **We speak to God and call it prayer...God speaks to our heart and we call it prayer. It is the communication of the believer in Christ with God.**
- D. **But we often imagine it to be just that...a conversation. Words. We often say, talk is cheap and sometimes we view prayer that way whether we ever utter the words or not.** How can I say such a thing??? Well, if it were not so we would pray much more than we do!
- E. **New research has shed light on the difficulties evangelicals have in making time for their spiritual life. In particular, the Evangelical Alliance's study found that evangelicals struggle to find the time for both reading the Bible and praying each day. Of the over 1,500 surveyed, nearly all (90 per cent) said**

they read the Bible regularly, but only 31 per cent said they set aside a substantial period of time each day to pray.

- F. An Ellis Research survey for Facts & Trends finds just 16% of pastors are very satisfied with their personal prayer lives, 47% are somewhat satisfied, 30% somewhat dissatisfied and 7% very dissatisfied. Their median amount of prayer time per day is 30 minutes. During that time, a typical pastor spends 12 minutes with prayer requests, 8 in quiet time, 7 giving thanks, 7 more in praise, and 5 confessing sin. The top 5 things they pray for are individual congregation member's needs, congregation's spiritual health, wisdom in leading church, spiritual growth for church, and personal spiritual growth.
- G. Leonard Ravenhill — Ministers who do not spend two hours a day in prayer are not worth a dime a dozen – degrees or no degrees.
- H. Ravenhill — Prayer is the most unexplored area of the Christian life.
- I. Ravenhill — At the judgement seat the most embarrassing thing the believer will face will be the smallness of his praying.
- J. I suspect Ravenhill is right. The smallness of our praying very well may be the greatest of all regrets we face on judgement

day. When the whole of our life is on display and we are held to account for opportunities enjoyed or squandered prayer-less-ness and weak, faithless praying will be the great sorrow of most believers.

K. James wants us to understand that prayer is more than the mouthing of words. It is a spiritual business of great power and affect. It changes things.

L. **He has already told his readers in James 4:2, “You do not have because you do not ask!”** There are things you and I will never have in this life, things which will never happen, for the simple reason we did not ask for them.

M. There is never a time in life when prayers cease to be the large part of our life. Whatever the circumstance we find ourselves in we should pray.

I. Suffering

A. Are you presently experiencing a time of suffering in your life? **That word “suffering” means, “to be afflicted with any kind of trouble, whether bodily, mental, personal or domestic, arising from ordinary trials, spiritual conflict or religious persecution. The Greek word means “to suffer misfortune” or to have “hard experiences.”**

- B. If you are in a time of life when the going has gotten rough **James says to pray...but not just pray...pray and keep on praying.** Pray even though you likely do not feel like doing so. Pray, pray and pray some more.
- C. **Satan, demons, spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly places do not want you to pray. They will provide every excuse and distraction to keep you from doing so.**
- D. **Our heart becomes discouraged in the midst of pain and suffering and so we lose our hope in prayer. So we pray short, little, sporadic prayers and get back to our pain and problems.**
- E. **James says, deal with your problems through long, extended, strong and consistent prayer. I wonder how many of us have stopped our prayers short and missed out on answers.**
- F. **Prayer changes our heart. Prayer prepares us moment God to enter our situation;** prayer invites the power of God into our suffering. It humbles us and prepares us to receive from God what we would otherwise attempt to accomplish in ourselves.
- G. **Somerset Maugham, the English writer, once wrote a story about a janitor at St Peter's Church in London. One day a young vicar discovered that the janitor was illiterate and fired him. Jobless, the man invested his meager savings in a tiny shop, where he prospered, bought another, expanded, and**

ended up with a chain of stores worth several hundred thousand dollars. One day the man's banker said, "You've done well for an illiterate, but where would you be if you could read and write?" "Well," replied the man, "I'd be janitor of St. Peter's Church in Neville Square."

H. Prayer is an emptying of ourselves of self so that we might be prepared to receive the power, life and provision of God and His plans for us. It puts our life in a position to give glory to God for what He can do.

- I. Our suffering has purpose if we pray and depend upon God in the middle of it...
- J. **Prayer is confessed dependence upon God and a recognition of His goodness of character and love...**We confess, "God I can't but you can...and I know whatever answer you give is best because you love me."
- K. So in our moments of pain and suffering we pray and pray and pray. We pray in faith knowing God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

I. Cheerful

A. When we are cheerful and all is well with the world...we pray.

We pray prayers of praise.

B. Some folks get hung up on the idea that prayer is simply a lifting up of a great wish list or shopping list of needs to God. But prayer is so much more than this. Prayer is relationship with God by which we know Him and He shapes us.

C. When life is good pray prayers of praise to Him. Tell Him of all the good things in your life and praise Him for them.

Recognize that all good things come from His hands. That He is the one who did this. He is the one who gave you life and has blessed you with good things. Give praise and thanks!

D. The words here mean to “sing” to God in prayer with or without music. Let your heart shout, sing and praise God’s character, goodness, love and strength poured out upon your life.

E. **Too often our good times become occasions in which we forget about God. As one commentator said, “The light-hearted are apt to be light-headed.”** We should be careful this never happens to us!

F. C S Lewis — I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on

telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.

- G. When we praise God we are actually increasing our enjoyment of the good thing He has given as we brag on Him and think about the good He has done for us. Never miss the joy of praise!**

I. Sick

- A. We pray when we are sick don't we? This is one of the times we pray most! So why is James reminding us to pray when we are sick? He wants us to see something of the power and effectiveness of prayer.**
- B. A group of physicians used in double-blind "drug" studies of the efficacy of Christian prayer on healing. Patients from the San Francisco General Medical Center were randomly divided into placebo and test groups. Patients in the test group were prayed for by Christians; the placebo group received no prayer. There were no statistical differences between the placebo and the prayer groups *before* prayer was initiated. The results demonstrated that patients who were prayed for suffered "less congestive heart failure, required less diuretic and antibiotic therapy, had fewer episodes of**

pneumonia, had fewer cardiac arrests, and were less frequently intubated and ventilated.”

- C. When you are sick pray...and if your seriously ill call upon the elders of the church (pastors and leaders) to pray over you. And these prayers of faith will lead to the will of God being done...and often times that means complete and total healing on this side of heaven.**
- D. Sometimes this healing occurs in heaven but one thing we know is that the prayers of healing for the believer in Christ are always answered.**
- E. An Aside — Sometimes, and this is certainly not all times, sicknesses are the result of sin. When this is the case the sick person should confess those sins to God and to other believers so that the prayers of faith lifted on behalf of the brother or sister might be prayed intelligently.** It is in the dealing with the sin and the subsequent prayers that healing occurs.
- F. If you are under the discipline of God because of some sin in your life do not think you can simply pray for an ending of the discipline without first dealing with the occasion for it. In those moments it is when the sins are confessed and repented of that you are in a position to be prayed over and healed.**
- G. Mark 2:5-11 —** Jesus did say that there are times when sin has led to sickness

- H. **John 9:1-3** — Jesus Himself said that it is not always sin that has led to illness.
- I. **We should be slow to jump to a conclusion about the cause of illness and allow the person being prayed for to be convicted of such...we should be slow to assume such even about ourselves unless prompted by the Holy Spirit of such.**
- J. But where sin has led to illness or any other type of discipline and we are asking others to pray for us...we should be quick to give them the full story so they might pray well...pray for our repentance, freedom from sin and full healing...that the hand of God's discipline might be lifted from us.

I. **YOUR Prayers CAN Move The Heart of God**

- A. **Who is the righteous man or woman? Simply put it is the Christian.** We are made righteous by our faith in Christ. You and I can never be good enough for this verse to be indicative of us in a general, positional sense. Only “in Christ” are we righteous in the eyes of God at all, ever.
- B. **Practically speaking for our time here on earth James is referring not only to our standing before God but our heart toward Him as well. Prayers can be hindered by the presence**

of un-repentant sin in our life. If we are living in open rebellion against God and His way of doing things our prayers can be hindered.

C. 1 Peter 3:7, “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

D. Our sinfulness can hinder our prayers but a moment’s confession with repentance can put us back in the place for effectual, powerful, life altering praying.

E. Elijah was a man like we are...He wasn’t anything special as far as his humanity goes. He sinned, got depressed and even angry with God. Yet he was God’s kind of man...repentant... he was righteous and prayed prayers of fervent faith. And God answered

F. Fervent — He did hard work in his praying. This kind of praying is work and it is in the hard praying that answers of great magnitude are given.

G. Ravenhill — Prayer in its highest form is agonizing soul sweat.

H. Ravenhill — Prayer is not a preparation for the battle; it is the battle!

- I. Prevailing prayer is the type which grabs hold of God and won't let Him go until the blessing is received. Until God answers even if that answer is no.**
- J. Among those in the court of Alexander the Great was a philosopher of outstanding ability but little money. He asked Alexander for financial help and was told to draw whatever he needed from the imperial treasury. But when the man requested an amount equal to \$50,000, he was refused--the treasurer needing to verify that such a large sum was authorized. When he asked Alexander, the ruler replied, "Pay the money at once. The philosopher has done me a singular honor. By the largeness of his request he shows that he has understood both my wealth and generosity."**
- K. Prevailing prayer is believing prayer...dependent...faith filled and expectant**
- L. God loves that kind of prayer. It touches His heart with its faith, passion, love and trust. He is moved by it. Have you seen such prayer in your own life?** It is a prayer of passion that accompanies you wherever you go...a travail of soul and a passion of the heart.
- M. God does big things in response to the persistent, faith filled prayers of righteous men and women of faith.**

I. Conclusion

- A. How is your prayer life? Do you pray when suffering? When Cheerful? When sick? At all times without ceasing? Or is your life of prayer limited simply to those moments of desperation when there is no hope in self...moments you can fit into your busy schedule?
- B. I am always amazed at folks who talk of interjecting God into their life at moments of convenience as though they are doing their duty and God a favor...I pray when driving to work...or as I walk to class...that's not the kind of prayer we are talking about here this morning.
- C. If you want a life of relationship with God...a life in which you see God's power and life...be a part of things bigger than yourself...a life with Him...pray