

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



Prayer and Ministry

James 5:13-20



Introduction

Prayer is the dominant theme of our passage. The topic of prayer might produce various feelings. It could be stressful because you don't know what to say, or it could be burdensome if you feel like you don't pray enough and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which says "pray without ceasing," fills your heart with trepidation. Let me provide the example of the famous saxophonist Kenny G to help us. He has taught himself a breathing technique called circular breathing that enables him to play notes continually without having to stop for a breath. Circular breathing requires the musician to breathe air in through his nose at the same time that he blows air out into the instrument. His trick is to build up a reserve of air in your cheeks, blowing that air into the instrument while breathing fresh air in through your nose. This technique allowed Kenny G to earn the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest-held musical note, holding an E flat for 45 minutes and 47 seconds.

For us to pray without ceasing, we are to hold the same principle. We must keep inhaling from God so that we can continue exhaling prayers back to him. The trick is that we must have a reserve of Bible study, sermons, and conversations with believers on our minds so that we can draw on them while we exhale prayers of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests. This isn't easy! It took Kenny G ten years to perfect the technique for him to play a single note and another ten years before he could play continuous notes without stopping. As we grow in prayer, let tonight be the start of our "circular" praying.



Study

Context: James spent the beginning of chapter 5 speaking to unbelieving rich people who will experience the full judgment of God at the coming of the Lord (5:8). The impending judgment of God gives purpose to suffering believers, calling them to be patient before "the Judge [who is] standing at the door" (5:9). James uses this context as a transition to invite the believers in the church to pray. The thematic context of suffering from 5:7-11 continues into 5:13-18. The sandwich verse of 5:12 serves as a way to show bad speaking to God. James will show in vv.13-18, the good speaking to God that believers should exhibit.

3.) Read 5:16. James gives two direct imperatives (or requirements for believers): “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” How often do you practice confession of sins to each other? How often do you pray for each other? What are some ways that these two things can become more commonplace in your lives?

APPLY → If we confess sins to each other and pray for each other the result is healing. This healing has different effects. One aspect of the healing is communal. James 5:15 tells us, prayers in faith accomplish much, and God is eager to forgive the sins of his people. By confessing sin and praying for each other the spiritual community of the people will be secure. How does confession of sin to each other result in deeper community? Are there people in your life who you are sinning against but you resist confessing sin to them? What would be positive spiritual aspects of confession? How could prayer create the bond of unity between people who have sinned against each other?

4.) Read James 5:17-18 and then 1 Kings 17:1 and 18:41-46. What do you notice about Elijah’s prayer in 1 Kings? Why do you think James uses Elijah as an example for us to follow?

APPLY → Read 5:16 again. Elijah is the example of this righteous person who can use the gift of prayer in power. Thankfully, we can be sure of our righteousness and our standing before God. It is secure because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our justification. Therefore, although we have a nature like Elijah, we who are in Christ are united to him in his life, death, resurrection and power. (Ephesians 1:15-23). We have access to the incredible power of Christ. How does this power change the manner in which we pray? What would it change about the content of our prayers?

Minister to One Another (5:19-20)

- 5.) When James uses the word “truth,” he uses it to describe the entirety of the gospel. Read James 1:18 and 3:14. How does wandering from the truth begin? What can be done to prevent wandering from the truth?
- 6.) In the Christian community, we are to inspire faith within each other. We are to bring those who are spiritually apathetic and those wandering from the truth back to life in their relationship with Christ. This is a spiritual life and death matter! Do you view Christian community as a spiritual life and death matter? Why or why not?

APPLY → James doesn’t give us a concluding benediction and praise to God. Instead he gives us a call to action. (This type of conclusion is common to more formal New Testament letters that are to read like published sermons.) He calls on his audience to be active in the community to those who might be struggling with the spiritual issues that James has been addressing. As we conclude the final passage in James, can you think of someone who might be struggling with faith? How can you be active in engaging their issues with faith? What does Christian community signify for our relationships with each other?



Connect

Gospel Connections. Throughout his book, James has caused his audience to doubt their own righteousness brought about by works. James teaches us that “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:17). How does this prayer have great power? It has power because it is the Lord who creates the righteous person. As believers in Christ, we possess an “alien” righteousness, in that it is righteousness outside ourselves. It is a righteousness that belongs to Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus imputed his righteousness to us and we imputed our sins to him – it’s the great exchange. We obtain an outside righteousness that belonged to Jesus by faith in him. Through this righteousness we stand before God, robed in the righteousness of Christ, united to Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, with direct access to God Almighty.

This is why our prayer has great power in its working. Not because of how eloquently we pray, but because our righteousness remains in Christ alone by faith alone, so that we can be confident in him.

Whole-Bible Connections. The consistent theme of prayer occurs throughout the Bible. God's people seek him in prayer. There are many examples of characters in the Old Testament who sought the Lord in prayer. James uses the example of Elijah who "with a nature like ours" was able to pray effectively that it would not rain for 42 months. Then he prayed again and the heavens gave rain (1 Kings 17:1, 18:41-46). Prayer is how God's people interact with their Creator and Savior. Prayer can be effective in the life of a believer (Matthew 21:22) as we align our hearts with God. This should encourage us to seek the Lord in prayer daily.

Theological Connections. The attribute of God that is most evident in these verses is faithfulness. God's faithfulness is to his people in the way he answers prayers. God was faithful to Elijah in his effective praying. God will continue to be faithful to us. James 5:15 indicates that "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." The raising up that the Lord will do has a double meaning: it means that God will physically raise him up from sickness, but it also means that God will raise him up just as when he raised Jesus from the dead. God is faithful to do the raising; bringing back physical life and ushering in new spiritual life (see 1 Corinthians 15).

Praise Connections.

By Faith

By faith we see the hand of God
In the light of creation's grand design,
In the lives of those who prove His
faithfulness,
Who walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith our fathers roamed the earth
With the pow'r of His promise in their hearts,
Of a holy city built by God's own hand,
A place where peace and justice reign.

We will stand as children of the promise;
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward.
Till the race is finished and the work is done,
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the pow'r to break the chains of sin and
death
And rise triumphant from the grave.

By faith the church was called to go
In the pow'r of the Spirit to the lost
To deliver captives and to preach good news
In ev'ry corner of the earth.

We will stand as children of the promise;
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward.
Till the race is finished and the work is done,
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith this mountain shall be moved
And the pow'r of the gospel shall prevail,
For we know in Christ all things are possible
For all who call upon His name.

We will stand as children of the promise;
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward.
Till the race is finished and the work is done,
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

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