

FAITH IN ACTION PRAYS ALWAYS

Greetings: James, it seems, learns effective prayer from his brother and Lord Jesus Christ and, like Jesus, speaks of prayer in the sense of community as Jesus taught His disciples on the Sermon on the Mount found in **Matthew 6:9-13**. Jesus teaches: “*Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil...*’ Jesus concludes the model prayer with tenets of restoration/forgiveness. James, once again, echoes Jesus’s sentiment and pens his closing remarks on the subject of prayer, ending with restoring the one who strays.

Historically, James not only wrote about the potency of prayer but demonstrated it in his own life, so much so that later writers gave him the name “Old Camel Knees” because of the time he spent on his knees understanding that *Faith in Action Prays Always*.

JAMES 5:13-20 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. ¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

As James comes to the final section providing wisdom for living an active faith in Christian community, he focuses on the church and prayer. The church is a *community of prayer*. Faith in action is a path that motivates us to continually gather within the community for the purpose of prayer. James gives practical instruction on how to pray in community. We will consider the following themes: Suffering, Joy, Sickness, Confession, Elijah and the Life of Prayer, and Restoration. All these themes require our attention to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the community of faith.

PRAYING THROUGH SUFFERING...AND THROUGH JOY... 5:13

- Is anyone among you suffering?
 - James gives us a second answer on how to be patient in suffering. His first response is to eagerly anticipate *the coming of the Lord*. **7-9** But this too is done by the imperative...*Let him pray*. **13-18**
 - In time of distress, call on the LORD! **Psalms 18:6, 118:5, 120:1**
 - The church stands in a long history of the people of God who cry out when they are in troubles of various kinds.
 - ✓ When we come together, we lift our lives to God in prayer.

- ✓ Where there is suffering, we lift our sufferings up before God. We do so in faith, knowing that God hears us.
 - ✓ Our first response to the times of hardship in our lives is praying to the God who is powerful enough to provide a way for us to endure. God is faithful and powerful. God is the one who saves us in our times of trouble. When we pray for one another, we are entrusting our lives to God.
- Is anyone among you cheerful?
 - Along with speaking truth **12**, prayer, and confession **16**, giving praise to the Lord is one of the edifying usages of being mindful of the tongue in contrast to the seven defiling sins of the tongue mentioned in James.
 - The prayers of the people of God often become praise and songs of thanksgiving. **Psalm 100:2, 81:1, 95:1ff** God is the God who gives joy and cheer to creation! God's ways are good. In praise, we remember that the life of faith is rich, diverse, and deep. There are times of great trial, but there are also times of incomparable joy.
 - Sing because of the joys that God brings into our lives and even greater joy that is still to come!
 - ✓ When we come together, we lift our voices, and our prayer becomes praise as we bring our hearts together before the living God. All creation sings in wonder to our God!
 - ✓ We not only pray to God for help in trial, but we sing to God with shouts of joy. Jesus is alive! The grave is defeated. God is powerful and wonderful!
 - ✓ John sees the prayers of God's people ultimately coming before God, resulting in glorious song and praise for God's salvation through our crucified and risen Lord. **Revelation 5:8-10**

PRAYING THROUGH SICKNESS... 5:14-15a

- Is anyone among you sick?
 - Physically sick, spiritually sick, or both? James uses sick/weak {*astheneo*} **14** and sick/wearied {*kamno*} **15**. Paul states, *For this reason many among you are weak {asthenes} and sick {ill-arrhostos}, and a number sleep.* **1 Corinthians 11:30**
 - Praying for our sick is part of how we provide God's love and comfort.
 - We do not abandon our brothers and sisters when struggling. We trust that God is able to restore.
- Special Instructions—read the prescription for best results.
 - Elders are designated to pray over and anoint the sick in Jesus's name.
 - This unique communal act highlights the fact that there are times when we may need special prayer and attention and reminds us of how essential it is to belong to a church community.



- Prayer is a primary task of the church and its leaders. **Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1-4, 8; 1 Peter 4:7**
- A word of caution.
 - Prayer is both wonderful and mysterious. We pray knowing that we are not in control of the outcome. May the Lord's will be done. **4:15, Matthew 6:10**
 - We pray in faith, trusting in the God who hears and loves us. **1:6, 1 John 5:14-15**
 - There will be times when the church prays, yet healing may not come in the form we long for. Ultimately, we are praying for God to be God. In sickness we need God over us, in us, through us, and to come near to us.

PRAYING THROUGH CONFESSION... 5:15b-16

- Has anyone among you committed sins?
 - The church is a community of prayer and a community of *confession*. Of all the words James gives about prayer, none is more significant than this call for the practice of confession.
 - Confession to one another must be done with compassion and grace. Because of shame and fear, many Christians hold back and do not confide in trusted brothers and sisters.
 - The church, as a whole, can also make confession; this is the most honest thing we can bring to God. To confess Christ as our Savior and Lord is to confess our powerlessness over sin.
- For the sick (physical/spiritual), James encourages the elders to pray and anoint the wearied.
 - One of the best ways to practice this is by developing deeper relationships between one another in the church.
 - Facing sin alone, we will find failure and can be overcome.
 - When we face sin as a community through confession— sin can be named, confronted, and overcome as we together call on Jesus. Healing comes as we together confess and speak to one another the word of God, "In Christ, you are forgiven." **Matthew 18:18-20**

"The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ." (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*)

ELIJAH IN A LIFE OF PRAYER... 5:17-18

- The people of God, like Elijah, can accomplish much through prayer.



- Pray as Elijah. *And he prayed earnestly {proseuche—in prayer}*. While praying, he PRAYED! *I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also.* **1 Corinthians 14:15**
 - Elijah was specific in what he prayed for. To not rain and to rain. God answered both prayers. **1 Kings 17:1ff, 18:1ff** And again in a later prayer, God answers his very public entreat letting the people *know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou has turned their heart back again.* **18:37**
 - The power was not in Elijah, but in the living God to whom he prayed.
- Elijah's life of prayer.
 - Elijah prays alone, feeling isolated and depressed. God answers this prayer as well letting him know he is not alone. **1 Kings 19:9-18**
 - We, too, are called to a life of prayer. Many times, in community, many times, alone. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** We, too, are called to live in faithfulness and obedience.
 - A community of God's people exists. God gives Elijah a trusted friend and successor in Elisha.
 - **The church (*brethren*) in a life of prayer. 5:19-20**
 - Just as Elijah prayed for the hearts of the Israelites who strayed from the truth **1 Kings 18:37-39**, the church in earnest prayer prays for our brothers and sisters who have wandered away.
 - We are not alone. Prayers bind us together with God and we are saved.
 - We pray for one another. We confess our sins to one another. And by God's grace, we keep one another walking by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- ❖ Which of James's themes on prayer (suffering, praise, sickness, confession, prayer life, restoration) have you had most experience with? The least? Why?
- ❖ What might it look like for our church to give more time to praying for and confessing to one another? (How might it be practiced in Bible classes, small groups, etc.?)
- ❖ Discuss opportunities to meet with other Christians. Make sure members know how to contact and meet with the elders for prayer. Are members aware of ways to get involved with life groups? Are members aware of ways to meet with ministers.
- ❖ Take time to pray in class. You could end class by letting members pair and pray with someone nearby. A simple instruction such as having groups of two each share one request for prayer. Then, let each one pray over the other.

Prayer

