

**HOW TO PRAY ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS**  
**Developing A Faith That Works - Part 15 of 15**  
**James 5:13-20**  
**Rick Warren**

JAMES 5:13-20

*"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (vs. 16b)*

**I. WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?**

1. WHEN I AM \_\_\_\_\_ .

*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." (vs. 13a)*

*"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." (vs. 13b)*

2. WHEN I AM \_\_\_\_\_ .

*"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." (vs. 14-15)*

3 Kinds of Sickness

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5 Attitudes Toward Healing

1.

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3. WHEN I AM \_\_\_\_\_ .

*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* (vs. 16a)

## II. WHAT KIND OF PERSON CAN PRAY? \_\_\_\_\_

*"Elijah was a man just like us ..."* (vs.17a)

See 1 Kings 19:1-10; 18:42-45

## III. HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

*"You do not have, because you do not ask God"* James 4:2

2. \_\_\_\_\_

*"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* James 4:3

3. \_\_\_\_\_

*"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* James 5:16b

Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Isa. 59:2

4. \_\_\_\_\_

*"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt..."* James 1:6

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v. 16 *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* The word "prayer" is mentioned seven times in this passage. That's what it's about. Prayer. James had a reputation for being a man of prayer. His nickname was James, the Camel Knees, because he had such big knots on his knees from spending hours and hours in prayer. There is tremendous power in prayer. Prayer is the greatest privilege of the Christian life, being able to talk to God, and it's the greatest power in the Christian life. What prayer can do is what God can do. Anything that God can do can be done through prayer. Jesus said, *"The things that I do, you'll do also even greater works."* How do you do greater works than Jesus? Jesus said in the verse underneath that, "It's by prayer". Anything you ask, you pray for. It's our greatest responsibility. It's probably our greatest failure in the Christian life. We talk a lot about prayer, we study about prayer. A lot of us are not too satisfied with our prayer life. Tonight we're going to look at "When should I pray", "What kind of person can pray", and "How can I pray more effectively".

#### WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

James, in this passage, mentions there are three specific times when I really need to pray.

##### 1. When I am hurting emotionally

v. 13 *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."* The word in Greek literally means "to suffer misfortune, to be in distress" to be under stress, under tension. In Timothy it's translated "hardships." He's talking about internal distress caused by external circumstances. It may be a financial crisis, a relational crisis, something on the outside, your heart is breaking, tension is at an all time high, when life gets hard. David said in Psalm 18:4, *"In my distress I call unto the Lord."* He's talking about this in light of what we just covered. v. 12 *"Above all, my brothers, do not swear"*. When you're under tension, that's when you're tempted to swear. When you have distress in your life you have two alternatives -- swear or prayer. v. 13 or v. 12. You can pray about your problems -- your financial conditions if that's creating stress in your life.

Right underneath this he says, *"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."* Have you noticed that life is a series of alternations between high and low, feast to famine, problem to joy? The Bible says, *"Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice"*. One of the job qualifications of being a pastor is that you have to be willing to shift gears pretty quickly. A lot of people are up and a lot of people are down. Recognize there's situations in life when you're down and when you're down you pray. When you're happy, live it to the hilt. Some people are afraid that if they really enjoy what God is doing then He's going to zap them with a bummer. If I think it's great, then the bottom is bound to fall out. It's too good! They're afraid to pray, they're afraid to rejoice! It is not uncommon for someone to come to our church, a first-time visitor, and they come out saying, "The joy is contagious here. You can really sense it." I think Christians ought to be contagious. I think it ought to be fun to go to church. I think the Bible says, *"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord."* Not sad, mad or bummed out. So when you're happy, you sing. On Sunday

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morning we never sing a song in a minor key. It's a celebration, a day of joy. James says it's valid to be happy.

"Praise" is used 550 times in the Bible. It is to be the lifestyle of the Christian -- to be happy. If you want the secret of a rich, personal, devotional life nothing has done more for my own personal life than singing to the Lord. I sing a lot in my quiet time. I write a lot of songs, choruses.

#### 2. When I'm hurting physically, I ought to pray.

*v. 14-15 "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven."*

The word "sick" in Greek, literally means "without strength". You are totally wasted, fatigued, bedridden, unable to work. Not just acid indigestion or postnasal drip. This guy has a serious illness here that is keeping him from actually working. It's the word most frequently used for illness. It's the same word describing Lazarus. When Lazarus got sick, he died. And the same word to describe Dorcas, and she died. And the same word that describes the man at the pool of Bethesda who sat there for years and years and didn't have enough energy to get up and get into the pool. He's talking about a serious illness here. When you're beyond the help of a doctor, you pray. The elders of the church are to come and pray over him and anoint him with oil.

The Scripture teaches that there are three different kinds of sickness. There's a lot of teaching going on today about healing.

The Bible says that first there is the sickness for death. It's covered in 1 John 5:16, John 11:4. That kind of sickness God allows to take us on home to be with Him. There are some sicknesses that you never recover from. There will be an illness someday that you will never recover from because God doesn't want you to live indefinitely. If every sickness could be healed by faith then anybody who had a lot of faith would never die. There is a sickness for the purpose of taking you on home.

Then there's a sickness for discipline. The purpose for a sickness for discipline which is covered in 1 Corinthians 11:28- 32 where they were abusing the Lord's Supper. Paul said, because they were abusing the Lord's Supper was the reason some of them were sick. The Lord is disciplining you because you're out of the will of God. When we sin it does bring sickness into our lives.

The third kind of sickness is sickness for the glory of God. The sickness for the glory of God is a sickness that God has allowed in your life simply because He wants to heal you of it and let it be a testimony to the world. John 11:4 a man came to Jesus who was ill and blind. The disciples said, "Lord, who's sinned, him or his parents?" Jesus said, "Nobody's sinned, this is a sickness for the glory of God." Then he healed the guy and it brought glory to God.

There are three kinds of sickness: sickness for death, sickness for discipline, sickness for the glory of God. The last is the kind God wants to heal.

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There are approximately five different attitudes toward healing. There are a lot of different divisions about healing.

1. The sensationalist. These are the guys you see on TV. They come into town and hold giant meetings in large auditoriums, advertise miracles. There's bright lights, TV cameras rolling. Often the healer is flamboyant. He shouts at the people, slaps them on the head. It is often a highly charged emotional atmosphere. The guy might say, "Do you feel warm?" and he's standing before 20,000 people, rolling TV cameras and spotlights! Of course he would! There is psychological motivation in all of this. Be careful of this. Be discerning. I don't see Jesus doing this. He did the exact opposite in His healing. In all of Jesus' healing He took them aside from the crowd, where they are out of the glare of the public, talked with them on a one on one basis, healed them there and then it was reported to the crowd. Jesus never manipulated people and never used them for show. He always cared about their needs more than He did about making an impression on the crowds. He healed people quietly.

By the way, just because something is a miracle doesn't mean it's from God. Remember when Moses laid down his stick and it became a serpent. What did those priests do? The exact same thing. Just because something is done in the name of the Lord doesn't mean it's of God. Jesus said in Matthew 7 "Many will come in that day and say, 'Lord, Lord didn't we do many miracles in your name?' Jesus will say, 'I didn't even know you.'"

2. The confessionalsists. The confessionalsists say that it is always God's will for everybody to be healed. This is the Name It and Claim It group. Sickness is a result of sin and all you need to do is claim your healing and God will heal. If you're not healed you lack faith. The result of that is if there's no healing there's an awful lot of guilt. "Maybe I just didn't believe enough." False doctrine always creates false guilt. Always. That's one of the problems with legalism. When you make up all of these rules and regulations, it takes the joy of knowing Jesus out of your life. The Bible says, "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*" These confessionalsists say it's just the way you talk, you'll get it. I claim I have a Cadillac and I get a Cadillac. The problem with this is, it makes God a genie. All of a sudden God is serving me, my needs, my whims rather than me serving Him.

What about the verse in I Peter 5:19 "*Those who suffer according to the will of God.*" Sometimes suffering is the will of God.

3. Dispensationalsists. The dispensationalsists are those who say the gifts of healing were only for New Testament times and they're no longer around anymore. Don't bother looking for those gifts. It was great back in those days but they're not here. I have a problem with that view because Hebrews 13:8 says "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" I believe that He is.

4. Rationalists. These are the people who say it's just all in your mind. If you're ill it's because you think you're ill. Just deny it and you'll be OK. This is the Christian Science cult among others. Just deny it's happening and it will go away.

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5. I think James would be a Realist. This recognizes two facts. One, the fact that God still does heal. He does heal but not everybody gets healed. That is also a fact of life. God does heal people today, but two, He doesn't heal everybody. I think life is an example of that.

So what does James say to do when you are sick? You should call the elders of the church. I Peter 5, Acts 20, Titus 2 tells of the structure of the church. James says you call the spiritual leaders of your church to pray for you. These guys aren't professional healers who go around holding healing meetings. An example of that in Scripture is Jesus. If anybody had the right to hold mass meetings, He could have. In the New Testament, healing was a private matter.

I find it strange that people who claim to have the gift of healing always insist that the sick people come to them, rather than them going to the sick.

And it says "*He should call the elders*". Who's doing the calling? The sick person. James is talking about a house call. If you're so sick you can't get out of bed, you call the spiritual leaders to come to your house and you ask them to pray for you.

This implies support for belonging to a local church. Every Christian needs to identify himself with a particular body of believers. Why? One good reason is that when you get sick, you know who to call on. In the New Testament there was no such thing as a free-floating Christian who would just float around, listen to Christian radio and TV, bounce around from this church to that church. There was no such thing in the New Testament. Every person was a member of a specific local church. Because it says you are the body and each of you are members of it. The value of it is when you're in need there is somebody there to care for you.

The sick person takes the initiative. If you don't call the elders of the church, how will they know about it? The word "sick" is talking about a life-threatening illness.

*"Call for the elders of the church to pray over him..."* The guy is probably in bed, so they are praying over him. He is seriously ill. *"...and anoint him with oil"*. Oil is a symbol of the Holy spirit, like many symbols in Scripture. When we baptize with water, water is a symbol of the burial. When we take communion, the juice is a symbol of blood. All through Scripture, oil is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Some interpreters believe that this oil means the best modern medicines of the time were to be used. In New Testament times they did use oil to rub on to people, to massage, use as a salve. There was a medicinal value in that. Remember the Good Samaritan when he found the man at the side of the road. He took the man and applied oil and wine to his wounds (sounds more like a salad dressing!) and then bandaged him up. Oil was used for medicinal purposes. But I think the emphasis here is the anointing. It was of symbolic value of the Holy Spirit -- an aide to faith. Remember when Jesus went to the blind man. He spit into the dirt and made mud cakes and put them on the man's eyes. Nobody believes that the mud had curative power. But it was simply an aide to faith for the guy who was going to believe. It was his faith that healed him. It wasn't the mudpacks on his eyes. The emphasis is on the power of prayer not the power of the oil. It was just a symbol to be used.

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"...in the name of the Lord..." God is the healer, not any person. The name represents the character of the Lord. All healing is based on God's character.

The results: "... And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." We do this in our church, but it is a low key ministry. We don't practice having healing wines with big emotional campaigns. We try to do what the Bible says. Many times some of our people have called for the pastors, the elders, and we have gone to the person's home in a time of long-term illness. We've prayed for them and anointed them with oil. In the years we've been a church we've seen some real miracles. On the other hand, sometimes we've prayed for people and the Lord's taken them on home. We humbly accept the will of the Lord in that matter. But it is scriptural.

The Bible says when I'm hurting emotionally I ought to pray, when I'm hurting physically, when I've got a major illness, I call for the spiritual leaders of the church to pray in a private ceremony. Why private? In private people can feel loved not used. They don't feel put on display. If you put someone on display in front of a bunch of other people, they think, "If I'm not healed it will make the pastors look bad". But it's not us anyway, it's the Lord. We're just praying.

### 3. When I'm hurting spiritually.

*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* In Jesus' day and in many places today it is taught that all sickness is a result of sin. If you are ill, then supposedly you had some hidden sin in your life. If you confessed and still were sick then you still had some other hidden sin. Jesus blew that idea out of the water in John 9 where he said to the man who had been born blind that nobody sinned. I think this is a very unfair concept. You think of babies being born with birth defects -- obviously that baby hasn't sinned. We live in a fallen world and part of that problem is there are hurts and problems.

On the other hand, Jesus did teach that a lot of the sickness we bring on our lives we do bring upon ourselves. If I don't follow God's principles, my body is going to find out about it. If I don't take care of my body, eat right, sleep right, exercise right, then all kinds of ailments will come upon me. If I don't listen to God's word where it says *"Don't be anxious about anything, but pray about everything"* and I worry, fret, get anxious and I get an ulcer, then I'm to blame for it. If I allow resentment to build up in my life... doctors say it's not so much what you eat but what's eating you that makes the difference ... resentment can take its toll in your life and it makes a big difference. If I don't trust God and I allow these things to come into my life there will be sin. *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

Many years ago I was invited to see a man who was paralyzed from the waist down and had not been in church for about nine months. I began to talk with him and he was a very bitter man, just filled with resentment. A cow had kicked him in the back and paralyzed him. He was bitter against members who hadn't visited him, bitter against the insurance company for not paying off, bitter against the doctor for not figuring out how to make him walk, bitter against the cow, bitter against God. He was very resentful. I said, "God may want to heal you and restore you to full health, but He will not heal you until

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first you get rid of that resentment in your life." I remember him bowing his head and begin to weep, almost uncontrollably, deep sobs, "God, I have been so bitter. Just flush all the anger and hate from me." He wept for about 10 minutes. I prayed with him and I left. The next day the man came to church, in a wheelchair, the first time he'd been in church in nine months. At the end of the service I gave a "come forward" invitation to people who wanted to come and pray. The man got up out of his wheelchair and walked down to the front and recommitted his life to the Lord.

What happened? There was a block in his life that was keeping God from doing what He wanted to do in his life. When he got his spiritual act together, the other fell into place. We are a whole -- physical, emotional, spiritual. When the spiritual is out of kilter it affects your emotions. When your emotions are out of kilter it affects your body. We talk about psychosomatic illnesses. They are real but they come from within ourselves.

Why isn't everybody healed? I don't know. God has the power but it isn't His purpose in different situations. It is always in God's power to heal but it is not always in God's purpose to heal. A clear example of this is Paul, in 1 Corinthians. It said Paul prayed three times for God to heal a problem in his life but three times God said "No, I've got a better plan for you."

What's the condition for healing? Confess. We'd rather conceal and camouflage our sins, than confess them. It is a liberating experience to confess your sins and get them out and share them, not just with the Lord but with each other. Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. Many people come to me in counseling and begin by saying, "I've never told this to anyone else in the world." Once they say that, I know that something great is going to happen. I know what a relief it is to not carry a burden anymore, to get it out and share it with somebody else so you can be loved and accepted for who you are without having to pretend you're perfect and wear a mask.

*"confess to each other"* -- Does that mean I get up and confess to the whole church? There is a principle of the circle of confession. Only confess as widely as it involves other people. If I've got a private sin, just between me and the Lord, then I ought to just confess it to the Lord. If it's a personal sin, between me and you, then I need to come to you. If it's a public sin, then I need to apologize to the whole church. He says confess your sins, not broadcast them. If it involves somebody else you ought to go to somebody else. There ought to be at least one person -- husband, wife, pastor, friend -- you have that you can share everything with and know you'll be loved and accepted unconditionally. A verse in Job says, *"A man needs his friend most when he's doubting God."* He needs somebody to stand and walk him through that time of doubt to that time of faith.

Years ago I was speaking in a tiny church -- only a hundred or so people. It was Sunday night. I was preaching and all of a sudden I stopped and said, "Maybe there's some people here that need to get some things right with each other. I sense some coldness here. I may be wrong but I'll bow my head and ask the pianist to play. If you've got a grudge against some other person and you need to get it right, why don't you just get up and go to that person and tell them you're sorry?" I bowed my head and I heard this tremendous noise! The whole church was going to each other! It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen in my life. It went on for about 45 minutes. A guy was walking along

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outside. He wasn't even a Christian and said, "What's happening in here?" Somebody led him to the Lord right there.

When Christians really love each other you have to lock the doors to keep people out. The Bible says, *"By this shall all men know that you're my disciples, that you love each other."* That's what counts.

In the New Testament the Christians confessed to each other. During the Dark Ages, they confessed to the priests, Freud said confess to the counselor, Protestants said, we're not going to confess to anybody. As a result we've got a lot of problems and hang-ups.

When should I pray? James says you can pray whenever you've got a need -- a physical need, an emotional need, a material need. No matter what it is you ought to pray.

### WHO CAN PRAY?

Some people think you have to be a spiritual giant to pray and get those kinds of answers. "I could never pray and see somebody healed" or "I could never pray and see a financial miracle". Many Christians feel inferior. James uses Elijah as an illustration. *"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain on the land for three and a half years. He prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops."* I Kings 19. This is after the big god contest on Mt. Carmel. He runs to the other side of the desert and goes through a fit of depression and prays, "God, kill me. I'm so depressed." He wasn't afraid of 400 prophets of Baal but he runs from a woman named Jezebel. In that passage -- the first 10 verses -- Elijah demonstrated fear, resentment, guilt, anger, loneliness and worry. Now you know why it says, "Elijah was a man just like us." We have anger, fear, resentment, worry, loneliness.

The lesson of Elijah's life is you don't have to be perfect to pray. You don't have to be perfect to see answers to your prayers. It's for ordinary people. I Kings 18, Elijah got alone with God and humbled himself praying for rain. It says he prayed seven times. He was persistent. He would not give up. One day a little cloud formed in the sky and he said, "It's going to be a gusher!" The rains came and flooded the place.

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things through prayer.

### HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY?

I want to review four conditions for praying effectively that James mentions in his book.

**1. I must ask.** That sounds simple but in a lot of our prayers we never ask for anything. We say "Thank you for..." and "Bless..." and that's it. We never pray specifically. The more specific your

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prayers are the greater you're going to be blessed in the answer. When I was in college I taped a huge sheet of butcher paper up on the wall. It had four columns: Date, Prayer Request, Promise to base my prayers on, Answer and Date. That was a real faith building time in my life. I saw God answer in little things and I saw him answer in big things. I trust Him for great things. James 4:2 *"You do not have because you do not ask."* Be specific. Throw away all your cliches. I love to hear new Christians pray because they don't know all the language, and they're so honest. It's refreshing. Kay and I often write down the prayers our kids pray. They say the most honest and genuine things that are really meaningful.

**2. Have the right motive.** *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* If you're going to ask in prayer, make sure your motives are right. Not for selfishness but for a genuine reason -- the glory of God.

**3. Clean life.** *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* James 5:16 . Circle "righteous". If you're a Christian you are righteous. We're not talking about perfection. We're talking about righteousness. Righteousness is your standing before God when you became a believer. It has nothing to do with your perfection. If God only answered the prayers of perfect people, how many prayers would get answered? None. But God does want us to have a clean life. Psalm 66:18, David said, *"If I hide [regard, conceal] iniquity [sin] in my heart then the Lord will not hear."* If I am willfully and knowingly doing something I know is displeasing to God and say, "God, I'm going to continue doing this but, by the way, help me out." It's like saying "Dad, will you loan me the keys to the car, but I'm never going to do a single thing you ask." We need to have a clean life before Him. Proverbs 28:9 *"He that turneth his back from the hearing of the law, even his prayers are an abomination."* Isaiah 59:2 *"Your sins have separated you between you. Your God has hid His face so He cannot hear."*

**4. Ask in faith.** Expect an answer. James 1:6 *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt..."* When you come to God, believe that He wants to answer your prayer. Trust Him. Don't doubt. Really believe.

How important is your prayer life to you? I struggle with this more than any other area in my life -- this area of being consistent in prayer. I talk to the Lord all the time, but I don't really have the prayer life I want to have. I'm never satisfied with it. I want to know Him in a deeper way. I want our church to be a miracle. I want it only to be explained by the fact that God did it. I want our church to be an embarrassment to the devil. I want people to look at our church and say, "Only God could have done that."