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**James 5:13-18**

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

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 of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

**Praying with Power**

Next week we'll end our study with James. In verses 19 and 20, it talks about retrieving a brother who is lost in sin, retrieving another Christian who is wandering from the truth and bound in sin. James will end his whole letter with this appeal to retrieve that person. He has been giving a lot of instruction, in fact, a lot of commands. If you do a little ratio of the number of words in the book of James and you compare it to the number of commands, we are not surprised that of all the books in the bible and in the New Testament, James has more commands per word than any other book. He doesn't hesitate to tell you what to do. But he will end his letter with an appeal to take that instruction and to help others who are lost in their way.

Now, I mention that because there are some elements in today's passage, verses 13 through 18, which we will kind of postpone and deal with under that umbrella. We will talk about confessing our sins to one another and how that works in relationships and even try to touch on the subject of how does sin relate to the topic of sickness if it does relate and confessing our sin. So it's a commercial for next week. I think it will be intriguing and interesting, not because, Lord willing, I will be bringing the message but because of the nature of the topic.

This week I want to focus on prayer. This is the main idea of the passage. In fact, every verse in these six verses contains some form of the word pray or prayer. It's the main idea of the passage. It makes this astounding promise. This happens in scripture, but the promise of healing for the person who is prayed over and anointed with oil by the elders when the prayer is the prayer of faith.

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A lot of questions can come as a result of that idea and we are going to try to deal with it today. But I want you to connect these thoughts as you kind of frame the main idea in your mind. Prayer, faith and power. Prayer that is prayed in faith results in the power of God. God works powerfully through prayer. He works powerfully through the prayers of ordinary Christians when they pray believing – when they pray in faith.

This is a familiar passage. I think it is one of the great passages in the New Testament on the subject of prayer. In fact, about three years ago I came on a Sunday morning, I was going to preach on a different topic and felt led to preach from this passage. It's kind of unusual that we would not do what we plan to do and not stay in the series. That Sunday I was feeling a particular burden to speak on the topic of prayer, to speak on the topic of faith and was led to this passage, I believe. I say that to tell you this is so important. The subject, its content, so relevant, so timely. I preached from this passage a number of times, some of the ideas, some of the points you may recognize. If you are one of those people who write down the points and you say he is preaching an old message – not true – although I have preached it a number of times and love it.

So all that to lead us into five principles. We are going to talk about five principles from these six verses that will help us to pray with power.

### **1. Prayer is the Way God Works**

At the end of versus 16, the example of Elijah is given and these fantastic miracles that the great prophet of the Old Testament performed are held up for us; in particular, one miracle where he prayed for it not to rain and it didn't rain for three and a half years, and then when God broke the drought, he prayed and it rained. At the end of versus 16, in that context, this statement is made, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." The phrase translates a word for active or effective or energy. The emphasis is that in prayer God works. The energy, the power of God is released, activated. This is God's economy. This is how God moves. This is how God works. This is what transitions from the will of God to the accomplishment of that in our world.

The NIV translates that "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." I think that that is a correct thought, but it's not quite as accurate as the ESV with the emphasis on the working of God's power.

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Just listen to these thoughts from some great saints that call our attention to this simple truth that prayer is the way God works.

Andrew Murray: “Christ meant prayer to be the great power by which his church should do its work.” Listen to that statement. “Christ meant prayer to be the great power by which his church should do its work. The neglect of prayer is the great reason the church lacks power over the masses in Christian and unbelieving countries.”

John Wesley: “God does nothing but an answer to believing prayer.” That is an astounding claim by a great saint.

Jonathan Edwards: “When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayer of his people.”

Prayer is the way God works. You will find this over and over in scripture where there is a promise given or a prophecy that goes forth, but it just doesn't happen. Many times when it's time for that prophecy to be fulfilled, God will touch some person or group of people to pray.

We are going to begin after international study with a study in the book of Acts. We will begin there with the great promise that the Holy Spirit is going to be given. The gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all tell us: The promise is coming. I'm promising you that I will give you the promise. I will pour out my spirit. Now go and wait.

What do they do? They go into the upper room and they begin to pray. They pray for the fulfillment of the promise. And there as they pray, the promise is given and the spirit of God is poured out.

We think of Daniel. As he comes across Jeremiah's prophecy, Jeremiah is saying, it's ordained of God that the people of God will be in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. He discovers that. He discovers that they are approaching that anniversary. Does he just say it's over? No. He gives himself to prayer and fasting and seeking the Lord because prayer is the way that God works. I would dare say, if you aren't praying, God isn't working.

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Now, I would immediately want to qualify that. I know God is always working and I would say that's true. I want to be careful there. But I want to pray and preach today in a way that would stir you to say it's not ultimately about logging my time or repeating the same phrases over and over again. It's not a works mentality. It is simply coming to the Father in the name of Jesus and asking for him to fulfill his will. He will respond.

## **2. Faith is Essential in Prayer**

Another way to say this is: Power in Prayer is in proportion to faith. Our power in prayer is in proportion to our faith. Faith is essential. So we are told here in verse 15 that we are to pray for the sick. In fact, there is an example given where someone in the body is sick – we take that to mean seriously ill – maybe so ill that they can't even get to the gathering of the church, so they call for the elders. The elders come and anoint with oil and pray for them and we are told that the prayer of faith will heal them. There is this emphasis on faith in prayer.

Now this is an emphasis that we find over and over in scripture. If God will give me grace to preach this point accurately, it will make us all uncomfortable. We don't want the emphasis to be on us in prayer, we want it to be on God and what God does and who God is. When we come across these bold promises that our faith has something to do with the measure of God's supply, we immediately get uncomfortable and, understandably so, because we don't want the emphasis to be on us, we want it to be on God. Yet we find this tension in scripture that God treats us according to our faith as we walk with him. The Christian life is a life of faith. It's the only way to relate to God. Even though we see this truth abused repeatedly -- mistaught, misapplied -- we still have to come back to it and embrace the tension.

Martin Luther said prayer is a special exercise of faith. Faith makes the prayer acceptable. Faith makes the prayer acceptable because it believes that either the prayer will be answered or that something better will be given instead. That is a great summary of how faith works. God, I don't claim to have perfect knowledge, but it seems to me that the greatest blessing would come if you would heal this person. I am praying for you to heal this person and a confidence that says I believe that God will do that or something better. You just can't work that up. You can't exercise it as a force of your personality. You can sit there and say, I've prayed for a lot of sick people, I've seen a lot of people pass on, I've seen people healed, I've seen people not healed. There is a tension that I feel in it. You can

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take that and apply it to the battles in relationships or the battles with strongholds in your life, and you say, I've prayed this prayer many times and, yet, there is a confidence in faith that God will answer.

I have this book by Charles Bridges. It's called *The Christian Ministry* that Charles Bridges ministered in the 1800s. It has a chapter on faith. A lot of times on Sunday morning – not all the time, but once in a while on Sunday morning – before I preach I'll go to that chapter and I'll read sections that I have underlined that are on the topic of faith because it encourages me and reminds me that as someone who preaches the word, I can do nothing. It's not up to me, it's up to God. I want my faith to be stirred. You need those kind of resources that will help you go forward in faith.

Here is what Charles Bridges states in that chapter. "Faith, therefore, belongs to every part of it. Every part of the work. Every part of life. It is the mainspring and the regulator. It enters into every wheel and pivot of the machine. The power or the lack of it is felt at every single point enlivening or paralyzing the word."

Do you understand what he's saying? He is using the picture of a machine and he is saying faith is what makes it work and it either enlivens the work that you are doing or the lack of it paralyzes the work that you are doing.

I would love to pause here and make application to those of you who are in a trial, to those of you who are moms or wives, to those of you who are husbands or fathers or those who oversee people who have a boss or whatever the applications may be. But Bridges here, speaking to pastors, I think the applications then extends and flows out to all of us: God rewards faith. The lack of it paralyzes our work and our works become dead works, whereas its presence allows us to do works that are enlivening.

Think about it, friends. Think about passage after passage in the word of God where we see individuals with nothing but faith doing the will of God. Think of dear Moses. He comes to the Red Sea. He's at the Red Sea – massive, impassable – sea in front of him, the armies of Egypt bearing down upon him, a million-plus grumbling, unhappy, discontent, want-to-go-back people, and what does he have? He has the rod of God – a stick. And God says hold it out over the Red Sea. What does this man have to do the will of God? He's got a stick.

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He's got more than a stick. He's got the promise of God. In faith he performs the will of God and the sea parts, the people of God pass through, the enemies of God are judged -- by faith. Jesus said in Mark 9:23: "All things are possible for the one who believes."

Again, Charles Bridges, "All our failures may be ultimately traced to a defect of faith. We ask but for little. We expect but little. We are satisfied with little and, therefore, we gain and do but little." Again, Bridges, the dispensations of grace are established upon this rule, "According to your faith be it unto you." Matthew 9:29.

So we see in this verse, James 5:15, this whole idea of anointing with oil. It may surprise you there is only one other clear reference. It's in the book of Mark where anointing with oil, by the apostles in that case, takes place. We don't entirely always know what to make of it. The idea is found in other places, especially in the Old Testament. We kind of understand it to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It represents when someone would be anointed -- anointed as king, anointed as priest -- there would be an anointing that takes place. That person is concentrated unto the Lord. They are set apart. There is this picture where we are asking the Holy Spirit to come upon this person, to touch this person, to heal this person, to empower this person, to help this person. This person is set apart in the sense that they are the focus of the ministry of God, the power of the Spirit. In some ways we may see it as an aid to our faith. It was frequent in the ministry of Jesus that there would be some physical act that he would do in terms of touching someone's eyes or ears or making mud and using it. We never want to put our confidence in those things, but there is a physical act that takes place here.

Now, the question we want to ask is is that required anytime we pray for someone to be healed and how does that work. How does that relate to Paul talking about the gift of healing in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul identifies that there are members in the body who have a greater effectiveness in praying for people to be healed.

Here we see the elders -- or we would say the pastors as a proper application of that word -- being called to pray for people, to anoint with oil, to pray in faith. Paul talks about those with a gift, the Spirit of God to pray for people. I think we need to understand that neither Paul nor James would want us to see their instruction as the only way or as exclusive. Neither one would want us to come to a point where someone is ill and say, does anyone here have the gift of healing? No hands. Any elders, any pastors

here? No, okay. Well, we can't pray for this person. I don't think at all that is the application that God wants. He wants us to pray for one another. He wants us to pray for one another in faith.

But we see these various dynamics and specific applications throughout scripture not to be taken exclusively or as the only way but as instructive into the way that God sometimes works. What do we do with Paul's gift of faith that he speaks also in 1 Corinthians 12. Is the gift of faith something similar to the prayer of faith that James talks about? It is difficult for us to know. A lot of how we would try to interpret this phrase in the book of James, the one who prays the prayer of faith, we have to be careful. It's a unique phrase found in one place. The gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12 appears to be an individual who has been given an absolute confidence in the Spirit of God that something is going to take place.

The illustration that I'll frequently use is the widow who is 80 years old and she believes God calls her to go to a foreign land to do a specific work. Everyone else in your life is saying what are you doing, you can't do that. It's going to be dangerous, it's going to be this...but she has faith and she goes and she succeeds. You wouldn't take her example as a model for all missions, but you'd say, that's specific faith.

Now we have all seen people who have done some crazy things in their lives and after it was over we say, wow, that was crazy. It wasn't like, wow, that was faith. Sometimes there is that element of unknown. But yet, there is a dynamic that is being described here. I think it means the Spirit of God enlivening the word of God in our heart where faith is present and the power of God is the result. There is a dynamic that involves the word of God and the Spirit of God.

I don't think just praying for someone and saying, this is the prayer of faith and we do our little formula and think is going to end in the result that we want. I want to linger here for a minute because I think it gets to the heart of the passage. Let's think for a minute. You're saying prayer is the way that God works and that prayer works according to the measure of our faith. Think about those two ideas. This is the way God works and he works in proportion to our faith. How, Brian, do I get more faith? I want to give you two or three ideas as we walk through this.

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**A. Use the Word of God**

Meditate on the word of God. Romans 10:17: “Faith comes by hearing...” When you hear good preaching, hopefully faith increases. When you read the word of God and meditate on it – and I understand that’s a battle. Sometimes I’ll sit down in the morning to have my devotional time and I’ll open the word and my mind is wandering. I’ll open a Spurgeon devotional or some other devotional and I’ll read and I’ll say, “Lord, God, help me,” and there is this combination of the word of God and the spirit of God saying, Lord, breathe on your word once again. Enliven my heart. Bring faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Lord, let me lay hold of these specific promises for this specific situation.

**B. Seek the Witness of the Holy Spirit**

I remember when my oldest son who is now 20 -- we sent him off to a good private school for kindergarten and it was a 45-minute drive away from where we lived. We had never sent any one of our children to school. The night beforehand I was overcome with fear. I am taking my five-year-old and I’m taking him down to this place that I don’t know and some teacher I don’t know in a roomful of five-year-olds is going to teach this precious treasure of ours. I was overcome with every fear. I won’t even speak to you the specific fears that I was dealing with. I just began to prayer. I was reading the Psalms. It’s 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, calling out to God...friends, I don’t know if you know this, but the decision on how you educate your children, the decision on where they go to college, these decisions put the fear of God in me. I seek the Lord on these. I don’t believe, friends, that it’s one size fits all. I believe that’s a superficial measure of a complicated topic.

This is a rabbit, but I’m going to chase it. I just sent my daughter off to the University of Florida – 50,000 students – honestly many ungodly things -- I’m sorry to all of you Gator fans – many ungodly things. One of her classes – she was put in a small group – met a girl who lives two blocks from our home – come to find out, out of 50,000 students she lives two doors down from my daughter in her dorm.

My daughter invited her to Campus Crusade. She said, you know what, I need to sort out this whole religion thing, I want to go with you. Went to Campus Crusade – the girl couldn’t go that

night – 1,500 kids at Campus Crusade – 93 kids got saved that first night – walked the aisle. I don't know if they all got saved, but they responded to an invitation. Today she went to church, took two of her roommates who are not typically in church.

There is something in me – I say it in fear and trembling, praying – I believe that God is using her on that campus. I'm fighting. I'm telling her you're going to hear professors that not only don't believe in God, but they are going to attack your faith. But I believe you're at a point where you're ready to start sorting that out. Another child I would say has to go to a Christian school. They're in a different place. Another one I would say needs this. The point is we pray and we seek the Lord. Are you hearing me?

On that night – now we go back 15 years ago – God met me in the sweetest way through promises in scripture. I can't explain it, but – boom, there was a peace in my heart. Your son is going to be fine. Put him in school. Kept him there a year, year and a half until we felt led strongly that we were to home school.

I look at you and I don't make this superficial judgment -- well, your kids are in public school or they are in private school or you home school, you're doing the right thing. It's not like that. We do these things in fear and trembling, but we do them with the word of God and the Spirit of God and God meets us.

So you could be hearing, oh, okay, it doesn't matter. No, that's the opposite of everything I'm saying. It matters critically. Prayer. Faith. The Spirit of God meeting us. Faith is rising in our hearts. You may be saying, boy, this sounds really subjective. Friends, it's relational. It's based on truth. Maybe this will be less subjective. There are three little application points I'm giving you here: Use the word of God, seek the witness of the Holy Spirit and reason with God.

### **C. Reason With God**

Argue with God. Talk with God on why God should answer this prayer, why this will result in the glory of God. That is the key truth to reasoning with God: The Glory of God. I think John Piper is absolutely right. I find my greatest joy in the glory of God. I want to live with the glory of God due north on the compass of my life. It is the vision of this church. God be glorified at Riverside

Christian Fellowship. Why do we help those without a home? Why do we give food to those who have no food? Because the mercy of God is displayed, God is glorified and we all experience joy. That is the driving force of our vision. And in our lives, we reason with God in prayer. God, this is what will glorify your name. This is your word. This is how it is to be worked out here. Save this marriage. Help me overcome this sin. Provide this need. God, there will be no glory if I go bankrupt. We argue. We reason with God. We present our case before him and what happens? Do we convince an unwilling God? No. Why do we reason with God? Because as we come with the word of God asking for the help of the Spirit of God, bringing biblical reasons with God, you know what, we start to talk ourselves into it. We start to say, this really is right. This really will glorify God. Yes, this is the will of God. Yes, I believe! Faith rises and God moves as result.

I have five principles and I've only given two, so the last three will be very quick.

### **3. Self-Inclusion**

You must include yourself in these principles. Faith is not faith until you believe for yourself. You and I must get past disqualifying ourselves. How does James make this point? Come on, James, you're going to compare me to Elijah? You're going to say he's the example on how I should pray? I mean, this guy took his mantle and he slaps the water and the water divides him. This guy was not an average man. He calls down fire from heaven.

James' point is he was a man just like any other man. The prayer of a righteous person – the prayer is made right by the blood of Jesus – the man or woman who can come before God by the blood of Jesus without sin because of what God has done – forgiven, acquitted of their sin – has a standing with God. God answers the prayers of ordinary people. We must come to a place of including ourselves in the principles of faith and the principles of prayer.

### **4. Prayer is More Than Causal Asking**

In verses 17 and 18, we are told that Elijah's prayer was fervent asking. Now, anytime we talk about prayer, we are talking about asking. Asking is at the heart of every one of the biblical words that is used for prayer. We bring a list. We bring a petition. We bring our intercessions. We bring our supplications. We come before God asking, "God, would you provide...would you bless."

When we come in our Tuesday night of prayer we are asking for God to bless this church, to bless the ministries of this church, to bless the people of this church. It may sound in some ways to be self-centered, but, no, we want to do it with the will of God, the glory of God, due north, the will of God right in the center. We are praying, God, for you to glorify yourself, for you to do your will. We are asking for your blessing, but it's not a casual asking. It's not just, oh, God, would you help us here, would you do this. It is repeatedly, persistently, perseveringly praying to the Lord. Even Elijah when he prayed for it to rain, he asked seven times. Remember the whole scene where he prayed for it to rain and he sent his messenger – go see if it's raining. Six times the messenger returns. No answer. No answer.

How many things could you look at your life and say in any period of time I've asked God more than six times for an answer to this prayer and he said no those six times and I'm still asking. There is by the very nature of prayer a persistence which is needed. When that happens, our focus is narrowed, our desires are refined and we come to a place of learning to ask, learning to narrow in on the target, to pray the will of God and the power of God, the Spirit of God as faith arises, persevering in prayer.

## **5. Prayer is a Lifestyle of Communion with God**

Verses 13-14. What does he say there? "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." Literally, is any one of you in trouble, then pray. Is anyone cheerful, let him pray through the singing of praise is the idea. He is describing for us a life of not just, okay, I'm in a crisis, let me pray -- yes, of course. But our lives are to be lives of prayer, lives of communion with God in prayer, praying always.

1 Thes 5:17: "Pray without ceasing."

Ephesians 6:18: "...praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints..." at all times, all prayer, all supplication for everyone.

Jesus himself in Luke 21:36, speaking to his disciples in the midst of temptation says, "But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place."

## Faith That Works – Praying with Power

James 5:13-18 | Sunday, August 26, 2012 | By Brian Brookins



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Philippians 4:6-7, "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Why? Because prayer is the way God works.

We want to live a life that is not just in the moment of crisis we come before God but all the time. Many of the great saints have observed that we do a better job of praying when we are in trouble than when things are going great.