

SERMON TITLE: Prayer and Healing (Part 2)

SCRIPTURE: James 5:13-18

DATE: January 29, 2023

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## *SERIES SUMMARY*

In Scripture, we find the life of faith is often a difficult journey. But true faith in Jesus will show itself in tough times and display the reality of Jesus to a watching world. In the same way, we're called to give voice to our words and action to what we believe. This is how our faith can make a transformative difference in our lives and the lives of others. On this side of eternity, a faith not applied is worthless and will make no difference. The book of James regularly asks us to put our faith into action so others can witness the reality of Jesus in our lives. As we turn towards Christ, our faith journey will be purposeful, fruitful, and sustain us through any difficulty we face.

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## *SERMON SUMMARY*

A lot of confusion exists in American Christian culture today when it comes to the matter of prayer, faith, God, and healing. Jesus-loving people don't agree on these things, and they all point to the Bible to prove their positions. However, Scripture does speak to these things in very clear, understandable ways—in ways that might challenge much of what we think about prayer. Today, we will go back through James 5:13-18 one more time to look a little deeper and broader into the text and its application. Then, we will look at a couple of statements that are often said about prayer, faith, God, and healing and compare them to what the Scriptures actually say.

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## *SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS*

Read James 5:13-18 —(main points from last week's message on prayer and healing). First, in vv14-15, James is primarily talking about sickness in the community of faith and how, sometimes, sin and sickness are connected. Not all sickness is the result of sin. Jesus makes that clear in John 9, and the fact that James says—"IF" he has sinned in v15—also underscores the fact that not all sickness is the result of sin. In v16, James points out that a small community of believers can pray every bit as effectively as being prayed for by the Elders. In other words, the prayer support you receive in a small group of people who love you and care for you and pray for you will be more than sufficient for you to experience God's healing grace in all its fullness. In vv17-18, James gives us an example from the life of Elijah that lines up with what He's saying about praying in faith. Unlike how we sometimes think, you don't need a great number of people praying for you to "get" God to answer your prayers. Elijah, one man who walked with God—a man just like us—prayed for God to stop and start the rain in Israel, and that's exactly what happened. So, one average Joe or Jane Christian, or a small group of Joe and Jane Christians, praying with you and for you is all you really need. I love the quote from the online article Beyond Prayer Requests that makes this point: Real prayer is the process of getting involved with someone's need, praying as best we can to understand God's work, and then staying in the situation until we see God act.

Also, last week we talked about the two phrases found in vv14-15—"praying in the name of the Lord" and "the prayer of faith" (of the prayer offered in faith). We said—praying "in the name of the Lord" is a prayer that is in keeping with how Jesus did ministry—how He looked for where the Father was working so He could join Him in His work." Essentially, it's the same thing as praying for "God's will to be done." "Praying in faith"(or the "prayer of faith") means when God shows you where He is working, you pray and ask Him to do what He's said He will do. God told Elijah when the rain would stop and when it would start. Elijah simply prayed what God told him He was going to do. (Not unlike, how Jesus told us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God has promised us that His Kingdom and His will be established on this earth when Jesus returns. So we're simply asking God to do what He said He will do. v17 also says that Elijah prayed "fervently/earnestly" for the stopping and starting of the rain.

Elijah didn't simply pray words that he made up, asking for what he wanted. Literally, it says that he "prayed with prayer," which means, prayer that comes from God telling you what He's going to do—Spirit-prompted prayer—and then sticking with that prayer until you see it through. It means prayer in keeping with what God says He will do. (Listen for the two stories and the small group prayer meetings in the message. Think through how the approach of the two groups fits with what we've learned about prayer from James 5:13-18.)

Now, let's address a few statements that always seem to come up in a discussion about prayer, faith, God, and healing (I'll put these in the form of Jesus' pattern in His Sermon on the Mount).

*You have heard it said that—"If you have enough faith, God will heal you," and "If you have enough faith, God will answer your prayers." But I say to you, "No, the amount of faith you have is not a condition for answered prayer." Your heavenly Father is not calling you to trust in your ability to trust, but to trust in God and His trustworthiness.*

*You have heard it said that—"Prayer changes God's mind." But I say to you—No, the mind of God does not change b/c God does not change (cf Numbers 23:19). Prayer doesn't change God's mind, but prayer does change things.*

*You have heard it said that—"You need to be persistent in praying in order for God to answer your prayer." But I say to you—"No, that is not what the Scriptures teach." I hear you, "But isn't that what Luke 11:5-13 teaches?" —No—the parable is teaching us about God, not the widow. This is a "how much more" story. In other words, if a grumpy neighbor will finally get up and give his shameless neighbor what she needs, "how much more" will your heavenly Father give you what you need? The point is: God is nothing like the grumpy neighbor. He does not need to be pestered and cajoled into answering your prayers. You don't have to beat the door of heaven down to rouse God's concern for you. You ask and seek and knock, always knowing that Your heavenly Father knows how to give good gifts to His children. He doesn't give us serpents or scorpions. He gives us good gifts—what He knows is ultimately best for us. His best gift is the Holy Spirit, who lives inside us to teach us and guide us, to give us wisdom and the strength we need to endure hard times, and to help us with many, many other things. This is not a parable about how we should pray; it's a parable about how God will hear and answer you when you pray. It's a parable about how you can always come before God with all your requests. You never have to worry about Him saying, "Don't bother me. Don't you see I have a big world to run here? I'm tired of your piddly requests for your trivial pursuits." God's not like that at all. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for God's preeminence in your life and in the world (Luke 11:2), for God's provision for your daily needs (11:3), and to experience God's ongoing forgiveness (11:4a) and for God's protection from the Evil One (11:4b).*

Genuine prayer is not about how much faith you have; genuine prayer is not about trying to get God to change His mind; genuine prayer is not about persistence in prayer. Genuine prayer is our expression of heartfelt dependence on God to do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves. And, it's trusting in the goodness of God to answer your prayers as He knows best.

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## COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Begin with—"Has anyone had any further thoughts about what we talked about last week regarding prayer and healing?

Have someone read James 5:13-18...

- What new insights ("aha's")—did you have from going through this passage a second time?
- Talk about the two stories—Eric and Linda—and the two prayer groups. How do these two stories illustrate what we've learned from James 5?
- Have you ever been prompted by the Spirit to pray a certain way for someone's healing?
- Talk about the three "You have heard it said"/"But I say to you statements. What "aha's" did you have as these three things were explained? What outstanding questions do you still have?"

(BTW—If someone asks about the parable in Luke 18, it IS about persistence in prayer. But its focus is praying for one thing—praying for God's justice to come on earth. The best translation of v7 is not that God's justice is coming *quickly*, but that it will come *swiftly/speedily*—meaning—When Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom on earth, judgment will be

swift/speedy. The parable encourages us to pray and not give up praying for the fulfillment of what God has promised. And, He has promised to one day set right all that's wrong in the world. On this, compare to Rev6:9-11).

It also underscores the fact that God is nothing like the unjust judge who has to be cajoled into granting justice. God hears our prayers for justice, and He will absolutely, for sure, establish His justice on earth. He may delay in bringing it, but again, when Jesus returns, His judgment will be swift.

- Spend an extended time in prayer in this week's meeting. Ask that prayer requests be personal to the people.

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The following resources have been a great help to us in preparing messages for this sermon series: *The Letter of James (NICNT)*, by Scot McKnight; *James (ZECNT)*, by Craig Blomberg; Mariam J. Kovalishyn; *The Epistle of James*, by Peter Lange & J.J. Van Oosterzee; *The Letter of James*, by Douglas Moo. Also, I (Charlie) have benefited from the teachings of Tim Keller, Andy Stanley, Tim Mackie and the Bible Project, and others whom I will credit during my messages. I have adapted and borrowed insights and illustrations from these men and incorporated them into the messages in this series.