

The Life of Faith, Part 11, A Study in James: The Power of Prayer

We are exploring our life of faith. James just instructed us to live humbly and with patience. Now he is telling us to pray with faith.

What is prayer?

James 5:13 NKJV Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

The word for prayer means to speak to or make requests to God. Prayer is communication with Almighty God the creator of the universe. In Luke 19 46, Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 where it is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." The temple was a place, like this place, that has been dedicated to come before God in worship, praise, and prayer.

James is encouraging all believers to keep praying and fellowshiping with God. He said we should pray when we are suffering and sing songs of praise when we are cheerful. When the Epistles were written, many believers were suffering and facing severe persecution. They often came before God with earnest and fervent prayer. The focus of our life of faith is on the God Who makes a way where there seems to be no way.

Have you ever prayed and received the answer that you were needing? It is wonderful to know that God answers our prayers for big and small things. Each of us must put into practice the discipline of going to God with everything.

James 5:14-16 NKJV 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. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

There is special power when the community of believers join together in prayer.

If you are sick, you should call elders of the church to pray. The word "elders" has several meanings. First, it refers to persons of responsibility and authority. Second, it refers to people of mature faith. Third, it refers to leaders in the church. These individuals are in this position because they have a solid faith and trust in God. Obviously, everyone does not have faith that God can do miracles. These elders should be righteous people in the church who believe that God can answer prayers. When you are sick or have trespasses, you need to make sure that the people you call are righteous people of faith.

Why should we call others to pray with us?

Matthew 18:20 NKJV For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NKJV Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.

You need to know that you can come to God on your own. Jesus said believers have this privilege to pray and ask God for anything. You do not have to wait for the big things to come to God in prayer. Whatever you ask, believe that you will receive it, and Jesus said you shall have it, (Matthew 11:24). There is also great benefit in having the community of faith gather together in prayer. Something powerful happens when God's people gather together in faith-believing prayer and praise. Each of us should become familiar with the privilege and possibilities of faith-filled prayer.

James 5:16 tells us to confess our trespasses to one another.

James 5:16 NKJV Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

He is setting up an accountability structure because we want to be pure before God when we pray. Our trespasses are our faults, slips, offenses or sins. Confession to one another is part of our demonstration of true love and fellowship with one another. James is showing us deep concern and love for one another.

Psalms 66:18 NKJV If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

Proverbs 15:29 The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Whether you are praying alone or having other believers pray with you, it is necessary to address our trespasses.

Why is it important for us to evaluate our lives when we come to God with our needs? When we pray, we are coming before the holy God. We should confess our trespasses because sometimes sin and trespass is the cause for our sickness or situation.

When the paralytic was let down through the roof to Jesus, the Lord saw their faith and said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." When the people around questioned this, Jesus asked, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk"?"

Often when Jesus healed the sick, He forgave their sins. That is not a hard rule in our lives.

Sometimes the righteous are attacked and sometimes we are sick for many other reasons, and we should seek to know the difference. If there is sin, we should confess it and ask for forgiveness. If we are being attacked, we should resist the devil and he will flee from us. We cannot enter into spiritual warfare in any area without making sure we have a right standing with God.

You need to know that your heavenly Father wants to bless you with these things. Physical ailments often have spiritual, emotional, or psychological cause. Guilt, stress and broken relationships can make us susceptible to disease.

However, not all sickness comes from personal sin, stress or spiritual failure.

Job was afflicted and had boils all over his body but he was innocent and God called him righteous. In Job's case, the only reason for his affliction was Satan's bold attack. When Hezekiah became ill and would have died, no sin was mentioned, but rather his righteous stand before God. Epaphroditus who was a faithful coworker with the Apostle Paul was sick almost to death, but he recovered when believers prayed, (Philippians 2:25-30). When someone is sick, we should not think they must have sinned or there must be a spiritual cause or some weakness.

James says, "If they have sinned they will be forgiven." These words incite us to turn to God for help when we are going through any kind of suffering, trial or sickness. Our immediate reaction to any kind of situation in life should be to turn to God for praise, help, forgiveness and healing.

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (vs. 16) First take a look at that word 'righteous.' The New Living Bible dictionary says this word means "completely righteous." The Greek word means "innocent, faultless, guiltless, those who fully observe divine laws."

Can we be righteous enough to make God answer our prayers? The Pharisee stood at

the altar with pride and said he was more righteous than the sinner who was kneeling at the altar. Who is righteous? How can we become righteous? What is the difference between righteous and unrighteous? God will not look upon our self-righteousness.

Romans 3:23 tells us “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We only become righteous before God by His work in our lives through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (Romans 3:21-26)

If you want to be made righteous, you must confess your sins and transgressions and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. All self-righteousness is as filthy rags in God’s sight. If you want answered prayers and healing, you must make sure your sins are forgiven. When you are made “right” before God, Christ’s righteousness is credited to you.

James 5:17-18 NKJV Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Elijah had a nature just like yours. What does that mean? He had the same passions, feelings, and circumstances. He was faced with the same vacillations of the flesh.

Everyone in the Bible shares these same passions, feelings and circumstances. The people in Lystra thought Barnabas and Paul were Greek gods, (Acts 14:15). They told the people they were men of like nature.

What is James saying? Everyone comes before God from a similar condition and position. These “super heroes of faith” are just people just like you. They had weakness and failures, highs and lows, but they prayed earnestly and God answered their prayers. Our faith is not about our perfect behavior but humility before God. As you experience tests and temptations, suffering and sickness, weakness and sins, put your faith and trust in God. You can trust His compassion and wisdom. He is able and willing to minister to your need and bring healing or supply.

Elijah prayed earnestly and it did not rain for three years and six months.

“Then the text says he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain.” Do you remember what happened when he prayed that second time? The famine had become severe, and Elijah had been through a difficult time himself. The famine was a difficult time for everyone, but God sustained Elijah by the brook Cherith until the water failed. Then God sent him to a widow’s house who only had enough meal and oil to make one small cake. She was about to bake her and her son’s last meal. God supplied daily food and water at the widow’s house until the famine ended. I want to emphasize “daily.” They had to keep trusting God every day for the supply. Then he was sent to Ahab to announce that God was going to bring an end to the famine and send rain on the earth. After all of that, he challenged the prophets of Baal and God sent down fire from heaven. Finally, Elijah told Ahab, “There is a sound of abundance of rain.”

1 Kings 18:41 NKJV Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.”

Elijah was hearing something that Ahab did not hear. He was seeing something no one else could see. God was showing Elijah something in his spirit that He was about to do.

1 Kings 18:42-44 NKJV So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked, and said, “There is nothing.” And seven times he said, “Go again.” Then it came to pass the seventh

time, that he said, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’ ”

James said, Elijah was just like you and he prayed earnestly. After his earnest and persistent prayer, he saw a little cloud as small as a man’s hand rising from the sea. When they saw the cloud, Elijah knew there was going to be a terrific rainstorm. God hears our earnest prayers.

There is another lesson in Elijah’s prayer. The text says he prayed seven times before he saw anything. There is more to this than that. He already had God’s promise that it was going to rain, but he still had to pray seven times. We need to know what God thinks and says about our situation. You can have bold, persistent prayer when you know that God is on your side and He is ready to bring the answer. You may only see a small little cloud in the distance, but God is bringing the end to your famine.