

Pray for One Another

James 5:13-18

A teenaged boy excitedly entered the local drug store. As he was browsing the store the pharmacist approached him and asked if he needed any help. The teen said he was looking to buy a one pound box of chocolates, a three pound box of chocolates and a five pound box of chocolates and that he wanted each box gift wrapped.

Curious about the unique purchase the pharmacist asked what the special occasion was. The young man said that he had a date that night with a very special girl.

If she let him hold her hand he would give her the one pound box of chocolates.

If she let him put his arm around her he would give her the three pound box of chocolates.

And if she let him kiss her he would give her the five pound box of chocolates.

The young man showed up right on time for dinner and as they sat down to eat he was asked to pray. He prayed and prayed and prayed. He prayed for everything he could think of and then he prayed for everyone he knew. When he ran out of things to pray for he ended his prayer and they ate.

After dinner as he and his girlfriend were sitting on the porch she commented on the lengthy prayer before dinner stating that she didn't know he was so religious to which he responded that he didn't know her dad was the pharmacist.

Our one another topic today isn't about the do's and don'ts of dating, but about prayer. Specifically it is about the admonition to pray for one another. While we are at it we should pray for this young man.

We'll find our admonition in James 5 and we'll begin by taking a look at verses 13-18 today and then consider some other passages about how we can pray for each other.

An appeal for prayer
An approach to prayer
An appropriate prayer

We read in Acts 2:42 that the early church gathered together and devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Prayer was an essential part of gathering.

In Acts 6 the Apostles are said to have devoted themselves to prayer. Prayer has been and always will be a vital discipline for the Christian.

Prayer played a significant part throughout the ministry of Jesus.

He prayed before choosing the 12 disciples.

He prayed privately.

He prayed publicly.

He prayed before His arrest and crucifixion.

Taking our example from Jesus, prayer should have a prominent part in our lives not only at meals to give thanks, but throughout the day as Paul writes that we should pray without ceasing (I Thes. 5:17).

E.M. Bounds has written a number of books about prayer. He wrote "To pray is the greatest thing we can do, and to do it well, there must be calmness, time, and deliberation!"

Someone else has said that prayer is hard work after all we are bringing our petitions to the ear of the God of the universe. Our prayers should not be in some half-hearted, thoughtless fashion, but with the utmost care and deliberation.

While we could spend a lot of Sundays talking about prayer our intent today is to discover this important one another passage on praying for each other. Scripture gives us some guidance on how we can make this one another admonition practical. So let's first consider an appeal for prayer.

I. AN APPEAL FOR PRAYER – v. 13-16a

Notice that we are to pray if overwrought by worry.

A. Pray If Overwrought By Worry – v. 13

If I were to ask by show of hands how many of you have ever been in trouble at one time or another in your life, I'm guessing you would all raise your hand, some of you might raise both hands or both hands and a leg.

The KJV uses the word "afflicted". It comes from a root word in the Greek that means evil, to treat badly, or to hurt.

Let me remind you that James is writing to Jews scattered throughout the nations and he is specifically speaking about the suffering or affliction they were experiencing because of their faith or because of their nationality or both. They were being treated badly with evil intent.

It may have been suffering through loss of work. It may have been suffering through physical persecution.

It may have been suffering through isolation or excommunication. (Voice of Martyrs)

In some way they were suffering physically or emotionally. They were in trouble, afflicted and discouraged for James to write what he did.

Paul uses the same word in writing to Timothy. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal." (II Timothy 2:8-9)

In his second letter to the Corinthians he wrote about how many times he had been flogged with whips, beaten with rods, near death, stoned, shipwrecked, in danger on land and sea and from his own countrymen and from the Gentiles.

The idea that James conveys is suffering evil treatment at the hands of others.

The Message simply asks "Are you hurting?"

We sang earlier the hymn of Joseph Scriven which aptly sums it up for us in the second stanza of his hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Is that last line our practice? Go in prayer to Christ. Through such difficulties we can be overwrought by worry and we are encouraged to pray in those times.

Our culture is increasingly becoming more hostile toward our faith and ability to openly share the gospel. There are many around the world who are afflicted for their faith. We need to pray for them.

1. Pray they will sense God's presence.
2. Pray they will feel connected to the body of Christ.
3. Pray they will experience God's comfort, especially if loved ones are killed, injured, or imprisoned for their faith.
4. Pray they will have opportunities and boldness to share the gospel.
5. Pray they will forgive their persecutors.
6. Pray they will rejoice in suffering.
7. Pray they will be refreshed through God's Word and grow in their faith.
8. Pray they will be strengthened through the prayers of fellow believers.
9. Pray their ministry activities will remain undetected.

Roy Zuck writes "Suffering should elicit prayer." This is written in the present middle imperative voice meaning to keep on praying. When in trouble – pray. When others are in trouble – pray for them.

We need to pray for one another when overwrought by worry because of trouble.

We need to pray for one another when overwhelmed by weariness.

B. Pray If Overwhelmed By Weariness – vs. 14-15

If I was to guess the most often prayed need among believers, it would be for the sick. We want people to be well so we pray for healing.

We pray for people to get better from the flu, a cold, pneumonia, cancer, back surgery, knee surgery, you name it, whatever the physical malady we want others to be made well. And there's nothing wrong with that. We are invited to bring all our petitions and requests to the Lord in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7). We can pray about anything and everything.

But the word that James uses has an intentional meaning beyond being sick. (You just knew that was coming didn't you?) It is a word that means more than just being sick. It means to be without strength, weakness, weariness.

This word is used 14 times in the New Testament and speaks of emotional or spiritual weakness. I Corinthians 11:27-32

Some of the folks were taking communion in an irreverent manner the result being that this sin caused sickness among some and others even died. That's why Paul calls for self-examination before taking communion.

Here's how that relates to our passage. Let me just say right here that not saying every sickness is because of sin. We live in a broken world where disease is part of the curse, but some sickness can be the result of sin. I believe that the individuals who are sick to whom James is writing has to do with some sin for which they have become overwhelmed and weary. They recognize that their sickness happened because of sin and the reason I

say that is because of the advice given by James and because of the steps they are to take.

Notice first they are to call the elders. These are the spiritual leaders of the church who have been called to pray over the person and then anoint with oil.

This is not some ritual anointing. The word refers to a common practice of rubbing some oil on the person. We see it when the woman anointed the head of Jesus.

James is writing to those who are tired and weary, those who were weak both morally and spiritually in the middle of their suffering, those who would be refreshed by a little prayer and oil. The oil was merely symbolic, not medicinal. Such actions would restore them emotionally, spiritually and perhaps physically. This is not a guarantee of physical healing, but certainly spiritual healing. Notice that the result of this is that they will be forgiven.

John MacArthur writes "They are fallen spiritual warriors, the exhausted, weary, depressed, defeated Christians. They have tried to draw on God's power through prayer, but have lost motivation, even fallen into sinful attitudes. Having hit bottom, they are not able to pray effectively on their own. In that condition, the spiritually weak need the help of the spiritually strong."

That's where the church leaders come in. I want to encourage you that if you are wrestling with some sin that is affecting you spiritually where you feel defeated, discouraged, weary, call one of our deacons or me to come pray with you. Be refreshed and renewed and if you want us to use a little oil we'll do that.

The third stanza of *What A Friend We Have In Jesus* is apropos.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge;

take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.

Pray if you are overwhelmed by weariness.
Pray if you are overcome by wrongdoing.

C. Pray If Overcome By Wrongdoing – v. 16a

This touches on what we just talked about, so I want to only make a few comments. Some folks believe this means that any time you sin you should go public. I believe James is saying that where sin has affected someone else, when we have sinned against someone else, cheated them, lied to them, injured them, gossiped about them, slandered them, and on and on, whatever the sin is we have done we need to confess it to that person and that person alone.

This doesn't mean that every Sunday we should have a public time of confession where we air our dirty laundry.

Confess to the person you have sinned against and then pray for one another. Why? So that you may be healed. But healed from what? I think it's to be forgiven. It is assumed that confession has first taken place with God. When we "confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) I think that's the healing James is talking about. It could be physical healing. That can be the meaning here, but if that were the case we should see a lot of empty hospital beds. Such prayer for one another is not limited solely to spiritual leaders of the church but is something we are all to do for one another. And by the way, once again it is to be continuous prayer.

The Phillips translation of verse 16 reads:
"Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer."

The Message reads: "The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with."

Maybe the reason our prayers seem ineffective is because we aren't in a right relationship with God. When we pray, this passage calls for faith and fervency. Don't just pray once or twice, keep at it. We see an appeal for prayer. We also see an approach to prayer.

II. AN APPROACH TO PRAYER – vs. 16b-18

A. A Prayer That Is Reciprocal – v. 16b

That simply means pray for one another. Now we just talked about praying specifically because of worry, and weariness, and wrongdoing, but I want to expand on that and say we need to be praying for one another – all the time.

If someone comes to your mind, maybe someone from years ago, take a moment and pray for that person. I have at times had someone come to mind and I'll send a quick email to them and say, "I'm not sure what's going on right now, but the Lord brought you to mind so I'm praying for you." Take our church directory and pray for people. Every week we put a church family, teen or college student in the bulletin to pray for.

We updated our prayer sheet. There are different things to pray for each day rather than having one sheet with lots of things. Folks were saying it was both difficult to pray because there were so many things and the print was getting smaller and smaller. The next step was to put it on micro-fiche for those of you who remember that form of data retention. It was too much so we broke it out and gave you something each day to pray for one another.

Social media is a great place to find things to pray about for others.
Birthdays and anniversaries

They tell us about good days and bad days.
 They tell us when work is going well or it's the pits.
 They tell us about school, sports, and vacation.
 Stuff that people are going through are all there.
 Use it to know how to pray for them.
 Instead of praying that they would have a good day
 or be blessed, when they say work is rough pray
 that they'll be encouraged in some way, to find
 strength in God's Word or to stand against the
 attacks of our spiritual enemy.
 Our prayer should be reciprocal – for one another.

Let me just say this before I go on. You ought to be
 praying for and with your family. I think a lot of
 family issues can be resolved if we started that
 practice. Robyn and I try to pray together before
 we go to bed. We pray with David at night before
 bed and when dropped off at school. Last year one
 of the mothers mentioned to Robyn that she noticed
 when we dropped him off at school that we prayed
 in the car and said she needed to start doing that.

Some of our kids and all our college students are
 out in what I call the devil's playground – the public
 school. We need to pray that they will be able to
 stand on the truth of God's Word and discern false
 teaching. We could spend a long time talking about
 how we should be praying for our schools, the staff,
 and teachers, especially Christian teachers in the
 public setting.

Incidentally, even though we don't have any kids in
 High school right now pray for the Christian kids
 who will stand around the flag poles next week to
 pray for their schools. Prayer is to be reciprocal.

B. A Prayer That Is Righteous – v. 16c

How is your heart with the Lord?
 Psalm 66:18-20 “If I had cherished sin in my heart,
 the Lord would not have listened; but God has
 surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise
 be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or
 withheld His love from me!”

Husbands what kind of relationship do you have
 with your wife?

I Peter 3:7 “Husbands, in the same way be
 considerate as you live with your wives, and treat
 them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs
 with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing
 will hinder your prayers.”

Husbands, could it be that our prayers are being
 hindered because we are not treating our wives with
 the respect and love we are commanded to show
 them?

If we want our prayers for one another to be
 answered we need to be doing all we can to live a
 godly life, to be right with God.

C. A Prayer That Is Resolute – vs. 17-18

James then gives us an example of someone who
 was righteous and the effectiveness of his prayers.
 The story he refers to from the life of Elijah is taken
 from I Kings 17-18.

Israel was steeped in sin. Elijah prayed that God
 would withhold rain hoping to bring the people to
 acknowledge their sin, repent, and return to obeying
 the Lord. For 3 ½ years it didn't rain. (And we
 thought this past summer was dry.) One day he
 showed up in Israel and challenged King Ahab and
 his hundreds of false priests to a battle of the gods.
 It was the epoch battle of the ages – The God of
 heaven vs. Baal. The first god to bring down fire
 when called on and consume a sacrifice would be
 declared the greatest god. Try as they might Baal
 never answered. At the time of the evening
 sacrifice Elijah made a simple prayer and instantly
 fire fell and consumed the sacrifice. Elijah then told
 King Ahab to prepare for rain and when he prayed it
 began to rain hard.

We can look at Elijah and conclude that his prayer
 was answered because he was some spiritual giant.
 But did you notice how James described him?

“Elijah was a man just like us.” We read that he was hungry and thirsty. At times he suffered from discouragement and depression. He thought he was the only follower of God and he even wanted God to end his life. He was just like us. But he was also described as a righteous man. We see it from the end of verse 16. It gives us an important clue into the life and prayers of Elijah. “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” He prayed and prayed and prayed. He didn’t stop.

Warren Wiersbe states “Too many times we fail to get what God promises because we stop praying.” John 15:7 “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

Jesus is saying here that if you are right with God because you obey His Word, ask. But remember that God is not the cosmic genie who lives in the golden lamp of heaven that when we rub it with prayer He’s obligated to give us our wish. Our prayers should always be bathed with the desire and understanding that we want His will to be done and not ours. How hard do you pray?

A man who had been married a long time was asked how often he told his wife he loved her. He responded by saying that he told her on the day they were married and if it changed he would tell her. Prayer should not be just a one time thing as we pray for others. “I prayed for them once. If that prayer changes, I’ll let God know.” Be resolute, keep praying for them.

It is a prayer that is reciprocal.

It is a prayer that is righteous.

It is a prayer that is resolute.

We have seen an appeal for prayer and an approach to prayer. Let’s conclude with an appropriate prayer.

III. AN APPROPRIATE PRAYER

Praying for one another in general all the time is a good thing. Many of the things we pray for we aren’t clear about in regard to God’s will.

Is it the will of God for this person to get well?

Is it the will of God for this person to take this job?

Is it the will of God for this person to move?

We can pray for those things and ask for God’s will to be done or hope that as we pray to that end.

I want to close with six ways to pray for someone that are always appropriate. I can state emphatically that as I read God’s Word they are His will for each person. You could pray these six things and insert someone’s name and it would be God’s will for them.

Now before I mention them I do want to say that in Adult Impact I have given you several passages that reflect how Paul prayed for others and how Jesus prayed for us. Let me give them to you know so if you can’t stay you can look them up later.

Ephesians 1:15-23

Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11

Colossians 1:9-14

John 17:20-23

Look them up and pray them for each other. I have also included a place for you to put down the names of five people to pray for and three specific things to pray about for those people.

I want you to be intentional about prayer for them, not just praying generalities.

A. Pray That They Might Know God Personally

It begins by praying for their salvation if they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Have they trusted Christ as their personal Savior?

If not, that’s the best place to begin because it is God’s will that they be saved “God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

The other five points won’t mean a thing if they don’t first know Christ as Savior.

If they are a born again Christian pray about three things related to knowing God personally.

1. Pray that they might know His Word
2. Pray that they might know His Will
3. Pray that they might know His Ways

If we are going to understand God' will we need to be reading His Word.

If we are going to understand God's ways, His character, we need to be reading His Word.

Pray that the eyes of their understanding will be opened as they read the Bible.

Pray that the Word of God might richly live in them. (Colossians 3:16)

Eugene Peterson writes in *the Message* we read in Colossians 3:16 "Let the Word of Christ--the Message--have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense."

B. Pray That They Might Love God Passionately

Deuteronomy 6:5 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Just think what our marriages and homes, our churches, our neighborhoods and places of work, our towns and cities, and our nation would be like if we truly took this to heart – to love God with everything we have. What a tremendous difference it would make.

Pray that others might love God passionately.

C. Pray That They Might Obey God Purposefully

Obedience is intentional. It's a matter of the will. It's not a feeling. A child may say they don't feel like obeying today, but really it's a matter of the will. It's a choice. Every day, every temptation we face is a matter of choice – to obey God or not.

Pray that choices to obey will be purposeful.

I Samuel 15:22 "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the

voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

D. Pray That They Might Serve God Practically

One of the things I pray with and for David about is looking for ways to be a help and encouragement to others at school. The other day he was telling me about a little scuffle a couple classmates got into, and yes, even in a Christian school. We talked about ways to come alongside and encourage.

John 13:14-15 "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

E. Pray That They Might Proclaim God Powerfully

Pray not only for opportunities to share Christ but for courage as well. It is our commission and we can pray Romans 1:16 for each other not to be "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe."

F. Pray That They Might Live For God Protectively

In Ephesians 6:10-18 we read about putting on the armor of God. All of this armor is necessary in order to stand against the daily and difficult attack of the spiritual enemy we face. What a great prayer for others to be protected by that armor putting it on as verse 18 says, by "praying in the Spirit with all kinds of prayers."

Those are just some of the ways we can pray for one another. We can pray for a lot of things, but pray especially for each other's spiritual well-being.