

“A PRAYING CHURCH” // James 5:13-18//
Practical Faith

Illustration: Chair on the attic door.

There are some things you just don't see coming. But in this passage James shows us something rather obvious. We should have a praying life.

This final section is an instruction in prayer. It's broken neatly into three sections:

- I. INDIVIDUAL PRAYER
- II. ELDER PRAYER
- III. ACCOUNTABILITY PRAYER

I. INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. (Jas 5:13).

Suffering? Persecution- context.

Praise is the word “

Have you realized that singing is part of how we disciple one another? Have you ever considered that your voice could be the very thing that lifts the spirit of a suffering brother or sister.

You might be thinking, “Pastor, have you heard me sing? My voice isn't bringing comfort to anyone.” There's a reason I stand down front...

There are weeks when our members leave and even more than the sermon, God used to courageous singing of the congregation to enliven them

Prayer should be our natural reaction.
Every occasion should warrant prayer.

7 Thoughts on Prayer from D.A. Carson

1. Prayer Should Be Planned

I plan dates with my wife. I plan vacation. My family plans our spending. Why? Because they are important.

2. Adopt Practical Ways to Impede Mental Drift

iPhone, TV, email, etc.

3. In Different Times and Different Seasons, Seek Out People to Pray With

4. Get Around People Who Do Pray

Join a small group Bible study, get to know church members and invite one another over for meals. Meet at lunch and prayer.

5. Develop a System of Prayer Lists

Do you track your prayers?

6. Mingle Praise, Confession, and Intercession

7. Pray Until You Pray

II. ELDER PRAYER

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. (Jas 5:14–15)

Lot of questions about these verses:

- What kind of sickness is he talking about?
- Who are the elders of the church?
- What's this about anointing? Oil?
- What is the “prayer of faith?”
- Does this passage promise physical healing?

Ok, there's a whole sermon there. This isn't an easy passage, and there are a lot of misinterpretations:

Two Famous Misinterpretations:

1. Roman Catholic –Unction

- One of the last rites.
- If you are in danger due to sickness or old age.
- Priest anoints with oil.
- If you are unable to give confession it can forgive sins.

I'll explain more in a moment- but this is a misinterpretation.

2. Faith Healers- “Prayer of Faith will save the one who is sick.” They say, “If you just have enough faith when you pray you'll be healed.

I shouldn't even have to tell you how terrible of a misinterpretation this is.

- We do believe in the supernatural and the miraculous.
- We also believe that God heals through medicine. Thankful for doctors. When I have a headache I take an aspirin.
- The doctrine that if you just had enough faith you could heal yourself is a lie from the put of hell.

- The Bible is filled with examples of those who were faithful and yet were not healed.
- Jesus is the prime example. No one had more faith than him. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

So let's answer the questions:

Question #1. What kind of sickness is he talking about?

Answer: I believe he is referring to his church members who are spiritually weary—they are “soul-sick,,” if you will due to the trials they have faced.

- Acts 8 – Paul breathing out threats & scatters the church.
- Chapter 1- They are enduring trials.
- Chapter 5:7-11 Passage just prior to this one:

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ... 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. (Jas 5:7–11)

- He opens this section in verse 13 with: “Is anyone suffering?” These are church members of James' who have become casualties of battle. They're wounded. Their spirit is broken. There may even be physical wounds.

Now in verse 14 he says, “Is anyone among you sick?”

Greek: “astheneo” – All of the English versions translate it “sick”. It can mean sick, but the majority of Greek lexicons state that its primary meaning is “weary, or feeble.”

Weakness of Faith:

- Romans 4:19, Romans 14:1, Romans 14:21

Spiritual Weakness:

- 1 Corinthians 8:9, Romans 5:9

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 12:9

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Co 12:9–10).

Now I just want you to see this: nearly every time this word appears in the NT it's translated as spiritual weakness. That's what I think James is referring to.

In verse 13 James is saying, "I know some of you are suffering. Pray!" In verse 14 James is saying, "Some of you have suffered for so long that you've been defeated. You're spiritually deficient. Maybe persecution put you there. Perhaps sin put you there. The point is, you're weak.

You see, if you're suffering—you're still in the fight so keep praying. If you're "astheneo"—you're spiritually tapped out, you've hit bottom. And you know what? It's hard to have a vibrant and strong prayer life when you're spiritually impotent.

So you know what you've got to do? You've got to find someone who is spiritually strong to come to you and be a strong prayer for you.

Question #1: Who are the elders?

Explain Elders:

- Presbuteros- we get Presbyterian from it. The word is used in NT to describe several kinds of people.
 - Elders could mean older in age
 - Those who were leaders and authorities in the community
 - The NT authors used this word to describe a formal office of the church. Elders are pastors. Pastors are elders.
- Quick side-note: a little Baptist theology for you.
 - We are congregationally ruled: church votes on calling pastors, budget etc. Congregation has the highest authority in this church under Christ.
 - We are elder, or pastor led. The NT calls pastors to leadership. They are to primarily lead in two aspects: preaching and praying.
 - We are deacon served. The deacons attend to the administrative needs of the church. They're role is to take logistical and administrative responsibilities off of the elders plate so that the elders of the church can give themselves to spiritual oversight through preaching and prayer.

The job of the pastor is to come along side those who are spiritually desolate—weary and to lift prayers up.

Question #3: What's this about anointing with oil?

Greek: aleipho "to rub or to oil" The text literally says, "after having oiled him."

Some of you just got really uncomfortable. "Wait a minute! You mean that the pastor comes to see you and he oils you?" I promise you we aren't going to start up the LWBC Massage Ministry.

But what does this mean, "To oil someone." Some believe it's just ceremonial. A dab of oil on the head, and it represents the Holy Spirit—like the anointing of the kings in the OT. And to be

honest—that’s what I had always thought until I really dug into this passage this week.

But here’s the problem with that interpretation: the word “aleipho”, it just means to massage someone. You might wash a guests feet and oil them in the first century. It’s never used in a ceremonial sense. All ceremonial uses of anointing use a different word, “chrio.” It’s a completely different word.

We see the word aleipho in **Luke 10:34** when the good Samaritan found the man who had been robbed on the side of the road to Jericho. Remember what he did? He put wine and oil on the man. The alcohol in the wine disinfected wounds, and the oil softened and eased the injuries.

Same thing in **Luke 7**. Jesus is at the house of Simon and Mary anoints his feet with ointment.

We see the same idea in Psalm 23. We’re told that God is our Shepherd and he, “anoints my head with oil.” You know what that means? When the shepherd brought all the sheep into the fold on the hillside after they’ve walked and grazed all day, he put his staff down at the entry of the pen and the sheep went in one at a time. When the sheep went in he would hold it down and check over its entire body. Wherever there was a wound, he poured oil and soothed it.

Question #4: What is the prayer of faith and does this passage promise physical healing?

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.

I know I’ve given you a miniature Greek class today. But let me give you one more word. When James says that the prayer of faith will heal the sick, the root word for sick is “kamno” It means to be weary, and it’s only used one other time in the New

Testament: Hebrews 12:3

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Heb 12:3).

I love how Dr. John MacArthur explains this,

When you come to the point in your life where you're spiritually weak, where you've exhausted all your resources and you feel like you've hit bottom, you've been through the suffering stage and you tried to pray and now you're into the stage where you're just weak and your prayers seem to go nowhere and you're losing the battle and everything seems to be falling apart and you can't get a hold of it all, go to the spiritually strong, the elders and leaders of the church and let us come alongside of you and let the righteous life and the strong godly men intercede on your behalf and as it were, oil you with comfort and strength and restore you. And the Lord Himself in answer to the prayer of faith on your behalf will restore you...restore you, raise you up, life your spirits.

And, if your own sin has contributed to the weariness, this process of calling the elders, confession, and faithful prayer—you’ll find full restoration and forgiveness.

One more thought on this section. Notice what brings the healing. The elders are not the one’s healing. I cannot heal anyone. I don’t have the power to do that. The oil doesn’t do the healing. Anointing in the passage is just a participle. The main verb in the passage is prayer—but not just any prayer—it’s prayer that is prayed with strong faith and in the name of the Lord!

This is a call for church members who have lost all of their will to pray, maybe by physical suffering, maybe through their own sin. They have no strength, no power, and if they continue to fight the battle alone their defeat is imminent. They are to come

and kneel down with a godly pastor and as he cries out on your behalf and comforts you, the Lord will raise you up. That's the promise.

III. ACCOUNTABILITY PRAYER

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. (Jas 5:16–18).

I don't think this passage requires a load of explanation. James is saying, before you get to the point of needing an elder to come and intercede, you should already be interceding for one another.

Guide for Accountability Prayer:

Confession Should Focus on Habitual Cycles of Sin You Can't Break.

You don't need to confess every time you think that Becky's dress didn't flatter her figure. Most sin can be confessed privately, and directly towards God.

When Someone Comes to You and Confesses Sin, Direct them to Biblical Wisdom

One of the reasons we constantly teach the Bible here is because of commands like this one: if a brother or sister comes to you to confess sin we want you to be able to use the scriptures appropriately to counsel them. I hope you take notes in church. I hope you listen, not just for your own benefit, but because you are called to a community. When you covenant in membership here you are saying, "I take on the responsibility to hold you accountable and disciple you."

So, ask yourself some questions: when someone comes to me can I competently apply God's Word to their situation? You are called to this!

Be Careful that Confession Doesn't Become a Channel for Further Sin:

Pastor Kent Hughes puts it this way:

"Are there dangers in mutual confession? Yes, and they are substantial. Psychologically needy persons sometimes use confession to get attention for themselves. Through the apparently spiritual medium of 'confession' they can handcuff a captive audience with a deluded for feigned contrition. Confession can also foster a spiritual exhibitionism, a perverted moral pleasure in airing one's dirty laundry. The overly morbid can ben confession to become an excuse for unhealthy hyper-introspection. Ostensibly humble confession can also be used as a vehicle for spiritual aggression: 'I want to ask your forgiveness for being bitter toward you over the years' — but what follows is not a confession, but an egregious assault."

That's what "effectual fervent" means—"stretched out." The idea—get a picture of a horse who is jumping over a barricade, and that horse is just stretched out there as it leaps over. Or, get the idea of an athlete who's running for the gold, and he bursts for the tape and he just stretches himself out for the goal. James says that's the way we are to prayer—we are to be striving for the goal we're to be eager, earnest, fervent, impassioned in our prayers.

"Give him no rest, give yourself no rest. Keep on. Bombard God. Bombard heaven until the answers come." - Lloyd Jones

This sermon relied heavily upon the work of Dr. John MacArthur