



## Be Doers, Not Just Hearers of the Word Demonstrating Faith Through Prayer

James 5:13-20

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It's so good to be back with all of you here in Women's Bible Study. In our three months in Arizona we experienced winter (snow 1 ½ inches in January); spring in February; and summer (100 degrees) in mid March. We returned home to begin the cycle all over again with snow a couple of weeks ago and now spring. At this time of year we are all so anxious to get out and work in the yard and begin our spring planting. Each year I teach about this time and try to relate our lesson to gardening in some way. Today as we talk about prayer and faith I would like you to think about your garden and yard and what you are planning to plant. Our lives are much like gardens, as we plant the seeds of faith and nurture them with prayer they will grow and blossom forth with beautiful flowers----spiritually, the fruit of the spirit.

**Galations 5:22 "....the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."**

As this fruit develops in us, we grow and mature to become more like Christ, in our attitudes and actions. Today we are concluding our study of the book of James with a call to prayer just as he challenged us in the beginning chapter, vs 5 about asking God for wisdom in the trials of life. He uses these last 7 verses to describe effective prayer in several forms. Let us read the passage.  
James 5:13-20

**"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

**Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.**

**My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."**

### Explanation of the Passage

First let us take an overview of these verses to see how they continue the theme of faith and practical Christian living, drawing us toward holiness. From the beginning James has encouraged us to put our faith into action--- to be "doers of the Word and not hearers only". In verses 13 & 14,

James exhorts his readers to pray in whatever circumstance they find themselves. Pray in times of trouble. Pray in times of happiness---sing songs of praise. Pray in times of sickness—those times when we feel weak and our outlook seems hopeless. We find this same admonition from Paul in other parts of the NT.

**Eph 6:18** "Pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."  
**1 Thess 5:17** "...pray continually."  
**Phil 4:6** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God."

James goes on in verses 14 & 15 to tell his readers how to pray, describing how prayer should operate in the church--the body of believers.

- ◆ **We should call upon the elders of the church for prayer when we are sick; with the anointing of oil.** (The act of anointing with oil was a personal touch and contact that served to strengthen the faith of the sick person. The oil served as a symbol of God's healing power; the oil had no healing power in itself. It may also have symbolized the setting apart of the sick person for God's special attention.)
- ◆ **Pray in the name of the Lord.** (This phrase acknowledges the power comes from God and that the one praying is acting in union with Christ to call upon the power of God.)
- ◆ **Offer prayer in faith---based on the confidence that God can and wants to heal.** (This does not imply that if a person has a certain degree of faith God will automatically answer the prayer of physical and spiritual healing. A true prayer of faith always includes within it an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty in all matters----that is, God's will must be done, and it is not always God's will to heal those who are ill.)
- ◆ **Effective prayer is to pray united as repentant sinners** (We should confess our sin and pray for each other asking for both spiritual and physical healing of our lives to restore our relationship with God and others. When we pray for each other and speak God's forgiveness to each other, we, the church experience the life Christ gave us.)

In verses 16b through 18 James gives us the example of Elijah and his powerful and effective prayer. We will talk about that in more detail in a couple of minutes. Let's skip over to verses 19-20.

**"My brothers , if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins."**

Here James makes an appeal to his readers to act responsibly when they are aware of another believer wandering from the truth. He points out "someone should bring him back". As we hold on to the truth and trust God in prayer during our trials, we should keep helping others to do the same. Are we willing to try to bring back someone who has wandered, or do we simply wring our hands, feel sorry for him and let that person go off into further confusion and darkness? Ministering and

helping others is what the Christian life is all about and will require us to make some sacrifices of time and energy. We need to be willing to get involved outside our “comfort zone”.

In the beginning of his letter James addressed himself as a “servant of God” and now in these last two verses he adds an implied calling, “servant of sinners”. He has written forth-rightly, insistently and passionately about what is sinful and what is righteous. In fact, someone has called James’s letter “the Ouch! Book”. From these studies, have you been convicted and experienced an “ouch” or two?

## **Emphasis On Prayer**

James is closing his letter with an emphasis on prayer. In fact, in these seven verses, prayer is mentioned 7 times and implied in the last two verses. Why is prayer so important? It is our personal way of communicating with God and building a relationship. We read the Scriptures --- God’s Word to us and we pray to respond to what He says. In prayer we can ask for God’s guidance in our lives, forgiveness for our sins, and provision for our needs, along with expressing our praise and thanksgiving for His blessings. Prayer is also the means through which God equips, empowers and enables believers to carry out the great commission to take the gospel into all the world.

David Jeremiah says in his book Prayer The Great Adventure; “When we pray, we align ourselves with the purposes of God and tap into the power of the Almighty. Because we pray, God works through us in ways that He wouldn’t otherwise. God has made certain things dependent upon prayer, things that will never be done unless we pray. Could God do whatever He chooses without our prayer? Of course. But God has determined that He will use the prayers of His people to accomplish His purposes on this earth. When we do not pray, we limit what God might do in our lives.”

Even though we know this about prayer, how many of us often find it hard to pray? All of us are busy. Life isn’t slowing down, it’s seems like it is speeding up----everything around us is going faster and faster. It’s hard to keep up and often our prayer life suffers. We say, “I just don’t have time to pray right now----when things slow down a bit, then I’ll have time to pray.”

Oswald Chambers in his book Prayer-A Holy Occupation; says, “Remember, no one has time to pray, we have to take time from other things that are valuable in order to understand how necessary prayer is. The things that act like thorns and stings in our personal lives will go away instantly in prayer; we won’t feel the smart any more, because we have God’s point of view about them. Prayer means that we get into union with God’s view of other people.”

Jesus is our best example of a busy person who was not too busy to pray. He arose early while it was still dark, to pray in the morning after the busiest day of His life.(Mark 1:35) Why should we think we can do without prayer when busyness crowds into our schedules? He is the model we should follow.

The Bible is packed from start to finish with encouragements, urgings, and commands to pray. The first prayer is found in Genesis 20 where Abraham is instructed by God to pray that the life of Abimelech would be spared. The last recorded prayer is found in Rev. 22:20, when John prays,

“Come Lord Jesus.” The Christian’s most powerful resource is communication with God through prayer. It is the instrument of healing and forgiveness and is a mighty weapon for spiritual warfare.

John Piper in his book Desiring God---“compares prayer to a wartime walkie-talkie designed for accomplishing a divine mission. And then he asks this penetrating question: ‘Could it be that many of our problems with prayer and much of our weakness in prayer come from the fact that we are not all on active duty, and yet we still try to use the transmitter? We have taken a war-time walkie-talkie and tried to turn it into a civilian intercom to call the servants for another cushion in the den.’ Piper says, “Life is war.”

We have considered the importance of prayer. Everything God does in the work of ministry He does through prayer. We have seen this illustrated in the book of James. It is impossible for us to do or be anything that God wants us to do or be, apart from spending time in the prayer closet.

Bill Hybels says in his book Too Busy Not To Pray; “When we work, we work, but when we pray, God works.”

We all need to pray so that God can “work” in our lives and accomplish His purposes.

### **Effective Prayer----Example---Elijah**

James gives us the example of Elijah as a person who is effective and powerful in prayer in verses 16-18.

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

James likes to use OT figures to illustrate his teaching. Last week he used Job’s perseverance to teach on patience. His Jewish readers would have been familiar with the remarkable life of Elijah and his powerful prayers. In 1 Kings 17-19 we have a number of experiences in the life of Elijah. He prayed for the poor widow of Zarephath during the drought in the land, that the Lord would enable “her jar of flour to not run out and her jug of oil would not run dry”. We next see Elijah in a confrontation with King Ahab and the wicked prophets of Baal. Elijah prays that God will make Himself known as God, as “The God”, the God of Israel. God sends down “fire from heaven and burns everything on the altar, the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and even the water in the trench”.(I Kings 18:36-38). Then Elijah tells Ahab that there will soon be rain. He goes to the top of Mount Carmel and bends his knees to the ground with his face between his knees---which indicates a praying position, and waits on the Lord to send the rain, which he does. (I Kings 18:41-46) Elijah’s life also ended in a remarkable way (2 Kings 2:11). As he was walking along with Elisha, “suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”

Considering these powerful answers to prayer by Elijah we might be intimidated and wonder how James can say “Elijah was a man just like us”. How much do we have in common with such a man? How could our prayers possibly emulate his? Reading further in Scripture we see that Elijah

was human and sometimes got depressed and had doubts. Right after his victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah is terrified by Jezebel's threat to kill him and ran for his life and was depressed.(19:1-18)

Life Application Commentary---"James uses Elijah as an example of someone who did not allow his own weaknesses to undermine his trust in God. Elijah's weak belief in himself forced him to believe even more firmly in God. James is inviting us to identify with Elijah's weaknesses so that we might develop the same honesty and power in prayer that Elijah exercised. The same God who listened to and acted on Elijah's prayers will give attention to ours."

James wants his readers to recognize that this power of prayer is available to all who are sincerely following the Lord ----not just a special few.

Let's take a few moments and consider what makes prayer effective. Is it the words we say---the way we say them-- or the position of our body in bowing, kneeling, or being prostrate before God? James says the first pre-requisite is that the person is "righteous". In other words, he is right with God, has a clear conscience and lives his life pleasing to God. We need to be close in our walk with God so that we love what God loves and reject what he rejects.

In the King James version this verse is worded differently ---"The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man (or woman) avails much." The additional word "fervent" expresses earnestness and passion in prayer----caring deeply about the circumstance or person.

Effective prayer using Elijah's example would include the following:

- ◆ He prayed---one cannot be effective in prayer unless you pray.
- ◆ He prayed fervently, he was aware of what he was praying, and kept praying with diligence and perseverance.
- ◆ He prayed in faith expecting results. Prayer must come from the heart, sincere, with trust in and obedience to God, and with no doubting, as in James 1:5-8.
- ◆ He was a righteous man (vs 16); he did not allow sin to hinder his conversation with God.
- ◆ He prayed specifically for situations----not vague requests.

As we consider our own prayer lives and measure them against the above list I think there are two areas in which we often fall short and keep our prayers from being powerful and effective---persistence and lack of faith (expecting results).

George Muller of Bristol, England, well known man of prayer and faith who started several children's orphanages (1805-1898) solely depending on God for provisions said, "The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer: they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory; they should pray until they get it. Oh how good, and kind, and gracious, and condescending is the One with Whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I had asked or thought."

Are you fervent and persevering in prayer? Fervent prayer means we do not quit easily. Fervent prayer means we purposefully spend sufficient time in intercession--praying for the needs of others. Fervent prayer means we cry out to God, sometimes in tears with all our heart and soul. Fervent prayer comes as the Holy Spirit assists us in praying with groanings too deep for words.

**Romans 8:26 "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."**

Fervent prayer is focused and persevering even when we cannot see results. What do you do when you don't see answers? In the last couple of weeks I have observed an illustration of "focused perseverance" in our backyard. I filled our two birdfeeders with sunflower seeds to feed the finches and the cardinals. The squirrels have determined that this food is for them too. Every obstacle I put in their path they figure out how to get around it and get to the feeder to eat. It's a battle of the "wits"!!! They are determined, focused, and persevering. If we could take a lesson from the squirrels---to be so hungry for God and His spiritual food that we will focus on Him and be fervent and persevering in our prayer lives to be fed.

Do you have prayers that took a long time to be answered? Or do you have some prayer requests that have not yet been answered? We live in an instant society--always trying to do everything faster. Freeways and supermarkets have express lanes. We can get our digital camera reprints in an hour at some stores. We think our computers need upgrading if they make us wait 5 seconds. Sometimes we pray and feel frustrated if God hasn't answered in a few days. We want everything now!!!!

We have to trust God---His timing is always perfect. Sometimes God delays to test our faith. Sometimes His delays are to develop character qualities in us such as endurance, trust, patience and submission that take time.

**Isaiah 55:8-9 "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways..... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."**

When we wait a long time, maybe even years, for an answer we may have wondered if God was saying, "No" only to find out later that he was saying, "Not yet", so that he could orchestrate a better answer than we could have imagined.

ILLUSTRATION---My husband relates how God answered the prayers of his uncle who was a pastor. He had prayed year after year for his son to receive Christ as His Savior. After 47 years his prayers were answered and his son's whole family came to Christ.

When you are going through a difficult time and it seems God is not answering, it's important to stand on the faithfulness of God and His Word.

Psalm 145:13b "The Lord is faithful to all his promises, and loving toward all he has made."

Hebrews 13:5b "Never will I leave you or forsake you."

We need to be faithful in continuing to pray, some answers to our prayers we may not see until we get to heaven.

## **Pattern for Prayer and Biblical Examples**

James was passionate about prayer. One of my commentaries said he was called “Old Camel Knees” because he spent so much time in prayer. Did you notice in these 7 verses that he presents a pattern for prayer to cover all the areas of our lives?

- ◆ Praise and thanksgiving---vs 13
- ◆ Confession and forgiveness---vs 15-16
- ◆ Petition---guidance in trouble ---healing in illness vs 13-14
- ◆ Intercession for others---vs 19-20.

Often when we consider a format for prayer we think of the acronym, ACTS----Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; and Supplication (petition and intercession). James has incorporated all this in this passage. The Scriptures offer a wide variety of prayers. I included several examples in your study questions. Some were short and some quite long. I hope you enjoyed finding the similarities and differences.

Elijah - 1 Kings 18:36-37: God’s Sovereignty and power

Hezekiah - 2 Kings 19:14-19: God’s Sovereignty and power

Daniel - Daniel 9:4-19: Pleading for nation of Israel and God to show His mercy and compassion

Peter - Matt 14:22-36: Short prayer---“Lord, save me”

Jesus---Matt 6:9-13: Lord’s Prayer---short only 66 words but encompasses all our daily needs.

From looking at all these prayers we see that God doesn’t care if our prayers are short or long---- simple or complex and full of lofty words. What He is interested in is our heartfelt longings, expressing our dependence on Him and His provision. Scripture tells us He knows our heart and He always hears us when we call to Him.

Isaiah 65:24 “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.

## **Exercising Prayer in Our Lives**

Let’s look at how we exercise prayer in our own lives. The needs in our lives often drive us to our knees and we learn to pray fervently and diligently out of necessity.

Illustration---Many years ago when I started to really get serious in my commitment to God, He used the difficult circumstances I was experiencing to teach me to rely totally on Him through prayer. It was probably the most intense year and a half of my life. At the time we were living in Mpls. and our children were small.

**Jan** ---My father had open heart surgery here at Mayo—only given a 50/50 chance of survival. My mother got the Asian flu during that time, staying across the street from St.Mary's.

**Feb** ---Dad was recovering and came to our home in Mpls for a few days before returning to Nebr. At our celebration dinner we discovered our 2-yr old had crawled up on the table and eaten Dad's heart pill -----trip to the ER.

**April**---Bob's mother had a blood clot in her lung and could have died..

**June**--I was the Director of VBS and on the morning we started I got a bladder infection. I prayed for God's "supernatural" power to make some old pills I had in a drawer from a previous infection several years before, to work effectively.

**July**---Asked to accept chairmanship of So. Mpls Christian Women's Club. In praying about this decision, God gave me a life-long call to ministry. (Acts 20:24 and Luke 9:62)

**Sept**--Bob was offered a job in Phoenix, AZ. We didn't want to go and began praying about the possibility of opening our own women's apparel store in Wilmar, MN.

**Nov**---Bob's routine thyroid surgery turned out to be cancerous. Thankfully, it was a non-invasive kind.

**Dec**---God closes the door on a women's store in MN. and opens the door for us to go to Phoenix.

Now after this intense year, the "learning curve" was not over.

**Jan**---On our way to AZ at night on I-40 our family car broke down. We were all singing praise songs and smoke began coming out of the hood. God had conveniently stopped us very near a dilapidated old filling station with a tiny little light on and an old pick-up in front. (This was before cell-phones) Bob hopped the fence and called for help. When he got back in the car, the light went out and the pick-up drove away.

**Feb**—Bob's mother came to visit and celebrate her birthday with us. On a trip to the zoo she fell and broke her hip and recovered with us for three months. The day she came home from the hospital we began 6 weeks of chicken pox with the children. Every 2 weeks and 2 days, we had a new case.

**Mar**----During all of this our poodle got out and met a neighbor poodle and we had 4 puppies!!!

**Feb---April** ---We had 13 groups of company----at least one meal and some staying overnight.

**Summer vacation back to MN**----Our family (4 out of 5) got food poisoning from a fast food restaurant traveling back.

Maybe some of you can identify with situations you have gone through in your own lives. Many of you may be experiencing some very difficult issues right now. Hang on---God is faithful! He will see you through and you will find that these problems and heartaches will draw you close to Him in a special way. His presence will be very real to you.

Meditate on the faithfulness of God.

Many of the Psalms speak of His faithfulness and Lamentations 3:23 "...his compassions never fail. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness." Another thing I like to do is to review the words of the old hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" ".....all I have needed, your hand has provided, Great is your faithfulness, Lord unto me."

## **Establishing Habit of Daily Prayer**

As we are concluding the book of James, he is giving us his last instructions and they are all about prayer. He wants this to be an active daily part of our lives in order to grow and mature in Christ. Let's look at some things we can do to make prayer a daily habit.

**Set Aside Time**---Are you still in the process of trying to establish a consistent, daily time to read and pray? I remember when our children were young how difficult that was to do. The key is to find what will work for you and your family. Set aside 15 –20 minutes or longer where you can commune with God privately.

**Special Place**--Do you have a special place for your "quiet time"? I have a chair in our living room that is my "prayer chair". It helps me get into an attitude of prayer. Lately, I have also been using the treadmill downstairs. I can accomplish two things at the same time ----exercise, both physical and spiritual !!!

**Vary your "quiet time"**----Sometimes I have found it helpful to use some Scripture to pray back to God, especially verses that focus on God and His greatness. The Psalms are very good. Also vary your intercession for others to keep your prayers fresh and stimulating. You could use different days of the week to pray for the church, missionaries, the needs of friends, national and local leaders, teachers and the schools, etc.

**Prayer Journal**---I would really encourage you to start a "Prayer Journal. I never wanted to do this---didn't want to take the time to write anything down. A few years ago I decided to try it, so bought a very small spiral notebook. I don't write every day, but several times a week. I write the most important prayer concerns----a few words with the date, and spaces to write in the answer. I have found it to be such a blessing and encouragement. I don't remember all the things I have prayed for and when I review the pages a few months later, it is such a "faith builder" to see when and how God has answered my prayers. Often God answers differently than I prayed and sometimes He answers almost as I wrote the prayer request down.

Someone has said, "Prayer needs to be part of the rhythm of our daily lives". It sounds like something James would say. Prayer should be as necessary to us as breathing.

**Conclusion** We have finished the book of James. It is a letter about practically living the Christian faith. We have been instructed in what it means to follow Jesus day by day. James has told us we need to put our faith into action and be "doers of the Word and not hearers only". Right living is the evidence and result of faith. He has given us instructions for the church to serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God's commands, and love one another. If we truly believe God's Word, we will live it day by day. God's Word in James calls us to action.

As you go to your discussion groups now, I hope you will share how this study of James has impacted your life. May all of us take the things we have learned from these lessons and practice them in our daily lives.