



November 27, 2016

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Lesson 11 — *Real Faith: Real Faith Participates in Prayer (5:13-20)*

INTRODUCTION

- Question — How do we consistently and increasingly cultivate the marks of real faith?
- Answer — “He gives more grace...to the humble” (4:6). So, humbly ask for more grace, every day!
- “Participate” = This passage is about community!

WHEN TO PRAY

Pastor James offers at least four considerations on when to pray.

1. Pray during your/another's suffering (v. 13a).

- When facing affliction in this world (v. 10), we should pray (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). **Illustration:** “What A Friend We Have In Jesus”

2. Pray during your/another's satisfaction (v. 13b).

- Praise is one-way prayer.
- This is the appropriate response when we are cheerful.
- “Sing praise” suggests a public expression of praise, so that others may share in your joy.

3. Pray during your/another's sickness (vv. 14-15).

- James uses two different words for “sick” here. The word used in verse 14 can refer to either physical illness (~18x) or to emotional or spiritual weakness (~14x). The word used in verse 15 is only used in two other New Testament passages (Hebrews 12:3; Revelation 2:3), both referring to spiritual weakness. Indeed, James seems to be interweaving physical ailment with spiritual defeatedness, as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 12:10—we are, after all, a psychosomatic union. These may be physically sick; they are spiritually sick. A loose synonym to what is being described here is depression.
- The church leaders should be quick to respond in both prayer and care (“anointing” is a secondary participle, is never used in the NT to refer to ceremonial anointing, and suggests a medicinal application)—this interpretation makes perfect sense in light of James’ emphasis on words and action.

MacArthur writes, “It may well have been that the elders literally rubbed oil on believers who had suffered physical injuries to their bodies from the persecution (cf. Luke 10:34). Medical science was certainly in a primitive state and there were few trustworthy doctors. It would have been a gracious, kind act on the part of the elders to rub oil on the wounds of those who had been beaten, or into the sore muscles of those made to work long hours under harsh treatment.

Metaphorically, the elders’ anointing of weak, defeated believers with oil conveys the responsibility for elders to stimulate, encourage, strengthen, and refresh (cf. Luke 7:46) these people. Speaking of Israel, Isaiah wrote, ‘From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil’ (Isa. 1:6).”¹

- This should be done in dependence upon the Lord—“in the name of the Lord”—recognizing that He alone can minister healing and encouragement.

- When the spiritually mature in the church practice 1 Thessalonians 5:14, God honors His Word and way and ministers restoration to His people. “The idea here is that the elders’ prayers will deliver weak, defeated believers from their spiritual weakness and restore them to spiritual wholeness. Those prayers, of course, are but a channel for God’s power; it is the Lord who will raise up the weak. *Egeirō* (raise up) can also mean ‘to awaken’ or ‘to arouse.’ Through the righteous prayers of godly men, God will restore His battered sheep’s enthusiasm [Psalm 23:3].”²

4. Pray after your/another’s sin (vv. 15-16).

- In light of the promise of healing and restoration in vv. 14-15, wise believers will regularly confess their sins to each other and pray for each other.
- Notice, again, that James has in mind an ongoing group practice of prayer—praying “for one another.”
- This passage emphasizes, in particular, that we should engage in prayer for those who are sick and suffering—praying both for their physical restoration and their spiritual betterment.

At every corner in life, pray! Along each street in life, pray! No matter what you are facing, pray!

HOW TO PRAY

Several truths may be gleaned from Pastor James concerning how to pray.

1. Pray collectively (vv. 14, 16).

- Pray with the sick (v. 14).
- Pray with the sinner (v. 16).
- Why? Because there are embattled believers (vv. 13-16) or false professors (vv. 19-20) around us that need our co-discipling, one-another, prayer-filled ministry!
- **Illustration:** Wednesday night prayer meeting—people coming in late so they don’t have to pray with others.

2. Pray believingly (v. 15).

- It is the prayer of faith that is promised success (cf. 1:5-8). Cf. Matthew 17:19-21

3. Pray righteously (v. 16b).

- Likewise, the prayer of the righteous (i.e., the one who has his sin confessed and forgiven, not hidden) is promised success (cf. 4:3). Cf. Psalm 66:18

4. Pray fervently (vv. 17-18).

- Elijah is submitted to us as an example of effective prayer. The effectiveness of it seems to be in some way related to his fervency/earnestness in prayer (cf. Luke 18:1-8—the persistent widow).
- Fervency has nothing to do with us (“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours”); it has everything to do with who God is (“faith” in what God can do).
- Consider what happened as a result of both of Elijah’s prayers. The teaching, then, is that faith-filed, righteousness-produced, fervent prayer can accomplish the same “exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think” results (cf. Ephesians 3:20)!

5. Pray actively (vv. 19-20).

Sometimes, you should do more than just pray! You should finish praying and then act. Sometimes, we are the answer to prayer we have been offering for someone.

a. Evidence (vv. 19-20)

“Wander” = Matthew 22:29; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:25; cf. 1 John 2:19

- **Someone is wandering from truth (v. 19; cf. 1:18; Titus 1:1): doctrinal.**
- **Someone is wandering into sin (v. 20): behavioral.**

b. Intervention (vv. 19-20): “Bring him back” (2x)!

- If “anyone” is wandering, then *any* “someone” should bring him back (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25). We all have this responsibility!
- **Application:**
 - #1: “We cannot but be struck by the fact that James speaks of the concerned believer as ‘bringing back’, ‘saving’ and ‘covering the sins’ of the one in error. Surely these are things which only God can do? Only God can forgive sins, save us from them and give us the gift of repentance by which we return from our personal far country (e.g. Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). How can we do these things? The answer is that we cannot, but we must act as if we could. The words express the measure of the concern and effort we are called to expend in our spiritual concern for those in spiritual need. Though we cannot convert them, we must labour to do so. Though we cannot save them from death, we must strive for their spiritual welfare as if their eternal destiny rested with us. Though we cannot cover their sins, we must follow the example of the Son of God who can do so, and hold nothing dear to ourselves and no sacrifice too great if only they are saved. For the local church of which James speaks is a fellowship of concern. [John 20:23]”³
 - #2: “But the question must be asked whether it is in fact possible for us, with our limited wisdom and blinkered perceptions, to discern the difference between the backsliding of a believer who, for all his present slipping away in truth and life, is none the less secure in Christ and will

unfailingly be brought back, and, on the other hand, the pretty identical evidence which declares that one within the visible fellowship does not truly belong to Christ at all. The fact is that the only evidence we have of each other is what we profess with our lips and live in our lives. We are not privy to the secrets of another’s heart, nor to the secret counsels of God. We dare not sit back from any declension in truth or life that becomes evident within the bounds of our local church.”⁴

c. Result (v. 20)

- You “will save his soul from death.”
 - **Eternal death for the unbeliever (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Jude 23)**
 - **Physical death for the believer (1 John 5:16-18)**
- You “will cover a multitude of sins.”
 - **Theological Meaning (Psalm 32:1)** — “Covering’ sin is a basic Old Testament idea. ... it is more than sweeping sin under the carpet; it is atonement; it is a putting of sin out of sight by the provision of a sufficient sacrifice. ... Perhaps we are planning something for the future and we set aside a sum of money saying, ‘That will cover it’, so that when the bill comes in it can be paid in full and the thing forgotten. In this way the verb ‘to cover’ comes to mean a totally sufficient payment, through the blood of sacrifice, by which God has dealt with our sin.”⁵
 - **Practical Implication (Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8)** — “The idea of covering sins is found in 1 Peter 4:8 (cf. Pr. 10:12) in

relation to the love we bear for each other, whereby what we happen to know about each other's sinfulness is quietly kept under wraps. When the loving duty falls to any one of us to pursue, care for and rescue some wanderer, we do so because we have become aware of a lapse from the truth or an error in the life. But that knowledge is for ourselves alone: no publicity, no sounding of trumpets before, during or after the rescue bid but, throughout, simply the love which hides a multitude of sins."⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *James*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 278.

² Ibid.

³ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 213–214.

⁴ Motyer, 212–213.

⁵ Ibid., 211.

⁶ Ibid., 213.