

Some Principles of Prayer

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Bible Text: James 5:13-18

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Let's go to James again. We may have gleaned all out of this book that we're going to this time around. James 5 as we once again learn from this actually Senior Pastor of the Grace Life Church of Jerusalem. He was clearly the leader among leaders, one of the elders there but clearly he was the one look to, probably did most of the teaching and had the leadership gifts. He gives some practical exhortation here on prayer. Perhaps this section of Scripture is one of the most misunderstood and maybe sometimes intentionally misused passages though we have to be honest and say that we can't be dogmatic perhaps in any particular interpretation. I believe I have the understanding of the text but we'll go through it together and see how it goes. James 5:13-18,

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 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 earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Simply some principles of prayer. Not all the principles of prayer but some of the principles of prayer. Once again, very practical. I. I used the word "supplication." Supplication. In verse 13 the first part, he says, "If anyone is suffering then he must pray." That's a prayer of supplication. It has the idea of an earnest and humble entreaty. It's, "Oh God, I need your help. I need a word from heaven. Lord, I need a word from you." When he says when you're hurting here or suffering here, it can be almost any kind of suffering. Go to the Lord. Seek him out.

As a matter of fact, keep your Bible ribbon in James 5 and go over to the Psalms, would you do that? Go to Psalm 57 and notice how the Psalmist here takes his distresses to the Lord. Verse 1 of Psalm 57, "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul

takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge Until destruction passes by." So he must be hard-pressed in a difficult spot. Verse 2, "I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me. He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth. My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows And their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the midst of it." So here the Psalmist is pouring out his supplications to God and I would charge you to do something if you've never done this and that is pray through the Psalms back to the Lord. Every type of issue, event, episode you may find in life, you'll find a corresponding parallel in the Psalms. I don't know, I don't want to be an exaggerater, I'm not here to brag about this but perhaps hundreds of times I've prayed through the Psalms. Not in one setting but pick you out a few every day and you'll be surprised at how many times you'll be on the mountaintop with blessing and that's where the Psalmist is. He says, "Praising God." And sometimes like this Psalm, you're just pressed down and discouraged and that's where the Psalmist will be. You'll find out that if you go to God like that with your supplications, he changes things.

I've said this to you before and it was one of those little moments where I think the Lord speaks to you. It's a very simple thing but I'm going to remind you of it again: I found a little one-page article, it must of been in Christianity Today and the article was entitled "Out of the Blue." And it was an article on depression and it was an article arguing against our ever-present propensity to always look to medications if we feel bad. I'm not here to say categorically that you must stay away from all antidepressants. There may be a time for those but I do think they are very, very much overused. I think sometimes we don't find answers in God because it's too easy just to dull ourselves. But nevertheless, the article was about depression and it talked about Philippians 4, how we're to go with God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make our request to the Lord and the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. That's a powerful promise. But here's what happened, here is what the article pointed out: what most of us do is we spend maybe five minutes in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving making our request and we don't get this great peace so we give up on it and go to the doctor and get an antidepressant. What the guy in the article said was this: have you ever closed yourself in a room, opened your Bible and prayed all day? Have you ever gotten with God and prayed all night and said, "God, I'm depressed. I'm discouraged. I can't eat. I can't sleep. God, I've got to have an answer," and wrestle it out with God until you get a breakthrough. Why not? Why give so much effort and money to so many other things? Why not really try God?

Again, I know some of you have things and heartaches and difficulties and I'm not here to condemn you about those things and if you have to take some medication from time to time but I am saying try God's medication thoroughly first. I'm really convinced, I think that all of us that have lived very long have had seasons of real difficulty in our lives and I'm very glad that in some really tough and low seasons of my life I didn't have anybody

peddling pills to me. I learned that God could get me through it. You see, a lot of times we don't know what God can do. We're like Abraham going up the mountain. Remember when he took Isaac up to the mountain? He went up there and went up there and went up there. Isaac said, "Daddy, we've got the fire, we've got the wood. We're going to go and make a sacrifice but where's the ram for the offering?" They kept going and going and going and they got up to the top, about to sacrifice Isaac and God speaks from heaven and says, "Behold the ram caught in the thicket." You see what happens is you don't see the ram until you get all the way up there. You don't know what God might do until you get all the way up there. You don't know how God may come through. Can you imagine how emotionally upset perhaps both Abraham and Isaac were where they were saying, "Well, we know this is God's will but it's killing us." Keep going, there's a ram up on the top. Don't give up on God.

James says here, "If you're distressed, if you're down, go to God with it. Pour your heart out. Tell him you don't understand but tell him you know he knows what he's doing but you just can't see what he's doing." And see what he might do with all of that. Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." Jeremiah 16:19, "O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, And my refuge in the day of distress." Go to God with it.

Now that leads us to the second point. If you really go to God with it, look, I mean going to God with the faith that, "God, you're going to give me help here. You're going to give me a breakthrough here and I'm not laying hold of the horns of the altar until you give me peace." If you will go to God with earnest supplication, then you'll get the next thing on the list here: celebration. You not only go to God with supplication if your heart is distressed and if you are discouraged, he says also go to God in celebration. Look at verse 13, the last part. He said, "Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." He is to sing praises so our God is good. Our God is very balanced in our lives. He may allow hours of suffering but he is faithful to bring days of praise. Sometimes we focus far too much on the hours of suffering and forget all the times we need to cast ourselves and throw ourselves in praise to God. Now, I use the word "celebration" here because the very Greek word that James uses is a word that includes resounding musical instruments to praise God. There is a lot of energy in the word. I mean, it's kind of like getting with it. Have you ever seen somebody get with it praising God? I know there's always some phonies around but listen, those who love God ought to work at genuinely praising God. There is a sense of celebration in it for the good times.

I was admonished about this reading the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and realizing that here's this genius, this absolute German intellectual among intellectuals of a family of geniuses there in Berlin, the centerpiece of intelligence and scientific inquiry for the day and he's gloriously converted. By the way, I don't have time to tell you his whole testimony but he was likely converted by coming to America and visiting a black church in Alabama. Here is this brilliant German intellectual. But he said he found something real there. This eminent theologian and he goes back and he makes a lot of statements about Christianity being real and not trying to make it false and phony and put all of these subjective definitions on it. He would talk about, "Live your life where you are but live it

for God. Live it in God. Leave it for the glory of God and quit trying to make up all these superficial subjective caricatures of what you've got to be like if your holy." Because he was in an environment where the national church had become cold and ritualistic and there was probably a lot of monastic influences there being separate and lowly and hide in a cave somewhere to get away from sin. But Bonhoeffer would talk about being real about God and when you're out in the world and when you're walking along the way and you enjoy a ballgame, praise God that he gives us some joy in all of these common graces.

Then of course, there's those rich and deep spiritual joys. When I was preaching this morning and we talked about the fact that we're not waiting for signs and wonders or miracles for an indication, we're looking for Christ. Something to praise the Lord for. We really have a lot to praise the Lord for but if you go with earnest supplications in your distress, you'll end up in celebration. Now, Psalm 57 again. It's where we were a while ago. The Psalmist is pouring out his distress to the Lord, the anguish of his soul. Notice what happens in verse 7 of Psalm 57, "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast," I think that means, "I'm going to you and I'm hanging on to you no matter what," "I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn." In other words, when the sun comes up in the morning, I've got my instruments out and I'm praising God. Verse 9, "I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens And Your truth to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth." The Psalmist is expressing out what James is talking about. Job said in Job 3 that as he went to God with his suffering, that it was God who gave him a breakthrough and gave him deliverance. He said, "God gives me songs in the night." I love that phrase. What a rich expression, "God gives songs in the night." It didn't just mean the literal nighttime though it includes that. It means those night times of the heart, those night times of the soul and God if you'll go to him will give you songs in the night. Dr. Vance Havner used to talk about being in difficult spots. He'd say, "I'm ship wrecked on God and I'm stranded on omnipotence." Have you ever been there? That's what the writer is talking about here.

Paul and Silas sang praises at midnight to the Lord when they were in jail and God gave them a breakthrough. Praying and praising and singing were important parts in the early church. I'm not just talking about when we get together but as we live our lives. Have a God-ward spirit of praise. Look, listen to me: now you men, surely, surely, you don't just praise your wife when you feel like it. You are smarter than that. You know she deserves praise, you know she is worthy of praise. Whether you "feel like it or not." Amen? And wives, amen, the same way in your direction. How much more does God deserve our hearts lifted in thanksgiving and praise whether we feel it or not? When you are purposing to honor his word and it's tough and there's difficulty and there's opposition and there are naysayers, there always will be. In the past in trying to reform to a healthy church, I could just go down at catalog, an encyclopedia it seems like, of people that disappointed me and I think, "Oh God, why? Why wouldn't they support this? Or why wouldn't they stand with us on this? Why wouldn't they stay with us?" And you've just got to keep praising God that he knows what he's doing. You've got to throw yourself into

praise. Look, have you understood that some of your subtractions are some of your biggest blessings? Sometimes God takes something out of your life and it's painful and I'm not saying there are no emotional difficulties but give it a little time and you keep throwing your heart toward God and he gives you a little insight and you say, "O yes, I see what God is doing now. That was a blessing."

Three little sub-principles right quick. Three little sub-principles of celebration. 1. Our praise should be intelligent. 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is admonishing this immature church that was getting all out of order on spiritual gifts and they were coming together and speaking in gibberish and doing outlandish things that no one could understand and Paul didn't say, "Stop celebrating and praising God." He said, "But praise the Lord and pray to the Lord in the Spirit and with the mind." Did you get that? In other words, listen to me, saint of God, trust me we don't have this problem so don't feel like you've got to hold back because we don't have the problem with people getting out of control praising God here. I wish somebody would every now and then. I wish I'd have to call you down to preach the word. I wish somebody would a little bit. But if you were in that kind of environment and you're over here 3, 4, 5 of you over here just going kind of crazy, talking in tongues, out of order, just doing your own thing, your mind if you would listen to it says, "Hold on. You're a distraction to the body of Christ. You're not helping anybody right now." If you get your mind thinking biblically which is what Paul said, "Do what's good for edification, not just what makes you feel good." Are you praising the Lord? But are you edifying the brothers and sisters around you? In the same context, Paul says, "I'd rather speak one plain word than so many words in an unknown tongue." Why? "Because people can understand that and they can join me in my praise."

So use your mind and the Spirit in praising the Lord. One way to do this is just be biblical. Be biblical in the God you're praising. That's where preaching comes in. You need to hear enough good preaching so that you know who God is and what he's like so that you praise him right. If I go to Pam and say, "I love your blonde hair." Well, that would say that I don't know her very well because she has brown hair, beautiful brown hair. That's the way we should praise God, according to how he has revealed himself, according to who he is, not according to what we would like to think about him. Can I get an amen right there? God is not subjective. He is objective. He is to be learned and as we learn him, praise him for what we have learned of him. You see, we have a whole lot going on in churches today where leaders and preaches are saying a lot of things that the flesh likes because we want God to be like us. I'm telling you something: he's not like us. He's radically opposite of us in most ways because he's transcendent in glory. He transcends us in every way so we learn of him and it humbles us; it startles us at times and then we throw ourselves into praise for who he is. So you praise him with the Spirit but also with the mind according to who he has revealed himself to be.

Our praise should also be motivated by the Holy Spirit of God. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, "Do not be drunk with wine," that's dissipation, "but be ye filled with the Holy Spirit." Do you know what happens after he says "be filled with the Holy Spirit"? "Singing to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." He says, "Your praise comes after the Spirit filling," so we need to be confessed up-to-date. We need to be humble before

God. We need to be yielded to him with an attitude of his Lordship and then praise the Lord led by the Spirit of God.

Then the third thing which I've really already mentioned: it should be based on the word of God according to who God has revealed himself to be in the Scriptures.

Let's hurry on. III. We've talked about supplication, James says, "If your heart's broken, go to God with it. Pour it out to God. If your heart is happy, praise the Lord for it. Celebrate him with praise and thanksgiving for all of the good that he's done." Now thirdly, investigation. Prayer is a way of investigating something to find out what the root issues are, if you will. We see this in verses 14 through 16. If you will, look at that again. Verse 14, "Is anyone among you sick?" Here's an interesting thing, he's talking about praying and he says, "Okay, let's talk about sick people." He's also going to introduce something else interesting as we go along in the text, he's going to talk about sin in the lives of sick people. So you can't really interpret this passage accurately unless you think about all that Paul is saying. He's not just saying sick people do that, he's saying sick people who have sin issues will do this. So there's an investigation as such, going on as this prayer is going on. You know, you have to interpret a passage of Scripture in its context and that would include also systematically, in other words, what does the balance of Scripture systematically teach on that topic. Then of course, we don't ever violate the common grammar or the historical setting of the passage.

So taking all of that into consideration, let's look at this aspect if anyone among you is sick, verse 14, "then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins they will be forgiven him." It's very interesting. Now, first of all, he says, "If you are sick, call for the elders of the church." Just as a side note here, notice he didn't say call for the elder, he said call for the elders plural. Once again, it's very clear in the New Testament that the New Testament teaching was a plurality of elders in a singular church. As one of the most esteemed Baptist theologians of early America, Dr. Pendleton used to say, "Far from there being only one elder in a church, we see a plurality of elders in single churches." I think perhaps in the early days as Western expansion came across from the East Coast and settlements were popping up in Kentucky and Tennessee and Mississippi and other places, they had circuit riding preachers and the best they could do was maybe get a preacher to come around every month or six weeks to preach one time so they were just glad to get one guy every six weeks or so, sometimes months perhaps. Perhaps that led to the conclusion that, "If we just get one elder, we'll be thrilled," but nevertheless, that's not the healthiest approach to church government.

Well, that's a side note. That's not really what our text is about. But let me say first of all what this verse does not mean: when he says if you are sick call for the elders, he's not saying visiting the sick is the primary job of being an elder though elders certainly do that and they are blessed when they do that. He's not saying visiting the sick is a priority of the office of elder though all of us should have the mentality and the heart and through your small groups you do such a really exceptional job of caring for one another in those

difficult times but it shouldn't be the case that in those unique situations, and this is one of those, where there's a special need and primarily if there is a special need that has a sin issue involved, that's when the elders would probably want to go and minister to that person. That's the context here because he talks about sin being involved in the whole issue. So, in some special cases, maybe not all the elder body but some elders would go and visit a sick person.

Let me just say as a side note here: we have something of a practice that occasionally a person will come to our Sunday morning elders' prayer time and request special prayer. We think that's wonderful and any time you have a burden or a sickness, we want to do that. That's a blessing to us but you don't necessarily fall under the case of a person that is likely struggling with a sin issue in coming for prayer. You just want your brothers to pray for you and that's something we are blessed to do and humbled to do and glad to do.

Then he says the phrase here "let them pray over him, anointing him with oil." "Pray" here is the verb and "anoint" is the participle. Now that's important. That's what Greek grammar or any grammar is all about. The weight of the emphasis is not on the anointing, the weight of the emphasis is on the prayer. That's what the text is saying. As a matter of fact, anointing with oil, the word "anointing" here is not the word you would use for anointing in a special or spiritual service. It's the word you would use if you were rubbing oil on your mule. It's the word you would use if you were rubbing oil on a person that is getting a massage. It was a common street language word which leads me...it's the same idea that happened when the Good Samaritan came along and found the man wounded on the side of the road. What did he do? He applied oil. In this day, olive oil was applied to for any disease or medical need or any pain or ache a person may have. They just kind of believed it sort of helped cure everything. So that's likely what they're talking about here. The best translation would probably be that the person come, pray for them in the aorist tense here, it shouldn't be translated "having anointed them with oil," which means that the most likely understanding is that you've already sought the medical authorities on how to fix this thing and there's still some other issue so you want to go and seek the oversight and the guidance of your church elders in this situation in your life and to pray for you. Now the word *karis* is another word for anoint in that is the word that you would use if you were involved in a spiritual ceremony like when the Bible speaks of Jesus being the anointed one, it's *karis*. It's not this common word for medicinal purposes that we see used here.

So here is the investigation part of it. Look at verse 15, "and the prayer offered in faith." Literally that means the prayer marked or characterized by faith. Well, what does it mean? What is faith? Faith is understanding, accepting and acting on God's truth, the truth of God's word. Sometimes I call it the truth of the unseen world. There is a spiritual world that is just as real as the world you're sitting in though it's unseen. As I heard a man say one time, "Right now in this room there is a man fishing and catching fish. Right now in this room there's a man shooting and chasing Indians." You say, "Wait a minute, I don't see any of that." Yes, but if you had an antenna, you could pick up the waves of the television antenna waves or whatever you call that stuff. If you are old, you understand what I'm talking about. Then you could bring it through and see that it was indeed in the

room. You just didn't have the receptors to get it. Well, that's what the Scripture teaches. God has spiritual truths and spiritual truths are revealed through the word of God.

So faith is, "I put my trust in what the word says," now listen to me, "over what my emotions feel." Have you men realized...now look, men are to lead their wives with gentleness and patience and loving kindness but men, your wives are not designed emotionally to take the lead in spiritual things. They need a man to lovingly lead in those things. Wives are very emotional. They are nurturers. They are carers. They get attached. They are sentimental. By the way, praise God for that, amen? We need ladies like that in our lives but we don't respond to things on our emotions, we respond on the word of God. Listen: and require our emotions to get in line with God. Have you found that when you do what God says no matter how you feel about it you start feeling better about it later? Have you found out that your emotions will catch up with God and God's truth? Your emotions are not Lord, Jesus is Lord. You go, "Pastor, I just feel," and I don't mean this ugly. Look, I'll be sweet and kind personally but I'm not so sweet and kind when I'm preaching. But if you come up to me and say, "Pastor..." I just feel like I want to say, "Well, yippe yi you ki yay. What does it matter what you feel? We've got a whole book of truth here." If I leave you in your feelings if that's what's ruining you and wrecking you and causing you turmoil, I'm not helping you.

He says the prayer in faith, the prayer that says what the word of God says. Prayer is getting our hearts and minds in line with the will of God. Prayer is getting our hearts God-ward. God-ward. So I think the point is: seeking God in prayer with the church elders, this particular person has a sickness that he's gone to the elders having been anointed with oil, he's very likely had some spiritual or sin issues and that's why he wants to talk to the elders. It's possible, I might even go as far as to say probable, that his sickness has confined him. Through his prayer and seeking God and then with the elders coming over and discussing it and praying with him, they all come into agreement, "You had sin in your life and we need to get the sin right and see what God may do about the sickness." So it's likely the elders are there primarily because they represent this man and they represent the things of God before the church so they can come back to the church and give a report of this man's confession and repentance and the church can forgive him and restore his fellowship and then if the sickness was to the end of getting his attention and getting him right in those areas, you can trust God will now heal the sickness. That's what I think is the very likely scenario of what's happening in this particular text.

Now, I think it's a good way to view sickness to view it as one of three things. It may be a combination of three but one of three things. If a sickness comes into your life, it's either a sickness unto death, God's calling you home and that's just what it is. Pam and I visited Brenda and Brenda is in the final stages of Lou Gehrig's disease and she has very, very slight movement of her left hand and she can speak still clearly but I'm telling you, she's strong in the Lord. Her spiritual strength is there. She is desiring to go home. She's not asking for healing. It's as though the grace of God has given her peace. This is a sickness unto death. Unless a radical miracle happens, she's going home to be with the Lord soon and she's at peace with that. Isn't that good news? Have you heard that unless Jesus

comes first, every one of us is going to die? Wouldn't it be good to die with a peace that we know the Lord is in charge and we're good with that?

So there's a sickness unto death. Secondly, there's a sickness unto the glory of God. Sometimes God brings sickness into a variety of ways. He's going to use this to manifest his glory. Maybe he's going to miraculously remove it. Maybe he's going to humble you and draw you near to him through that event. I don't know what all that may be but in some way, God is going to be honored through it. In John 9, there was this diseased man and somebody said, "Lord, was it this man's sin or his father's sin that he was born blind?" Jesus said, "It wasn't either one of them that sinned. It was a sickness that God might be glorified," and then the Lord healed him.

So sometimes there is a sickness unto the glory of God, there is a sickness unto death but thirdly, there is a sickness unto discipline where God is using the sickness as a chastisement to get your attention about something far more important than your physical health. I believe that's the major context here.

So the text goes on and says if he has sinned, verse 16, here's the elders. They are praying over him in faith, seeking the will of God and the word of God in this situation. In their prayer of faith it simply says, "if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven." Now this has to imply that he has gotten honest about his sin and he's repented of it and then you can trust that God would always forgive his children when they confess their sins to the Lord. Then he says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed." I think that is just a generalized statement. None of this is a law. In other words, there is no law that every time you're sick you've got to be anointed with oil. It's just a suggestion out of the culture of the day.

So here we have this most likely a man seeking the elders to confirm and discuss with him about sin that God has shown him. By the way, we all have blind spots and it is uncanny how accurately God can shine the light on our blind spots when suffering comes our way. I have my own testimonies about that going through a difficult season years ago. I remember driving my car and going home and it was like I was saying, "God, what is the deal?" And it was like, it's the only way I know how to describe it, it's like God shined the light into my heart and it was like God screamed at me and said, "Your real problem is pride and selfishness." Pride and selfishness. I thought, "Wait a minute man, I give 20-30% of my income back to the church," and the you start talking about all the good things you do. That doesn't matter. You can give everything away and live in a cardboard box and still be totally selfish. By the way, if works salvation is your mentality and you give everything away, you're the most caring, giving, loving, most devoted, likable person on earth but it's not for God, it's for people to think that you're special, that's selfish. Amen? Have you learned that some of the sweetest, kindest, most giving, most impressive people are not spiritual? They've just disciplined the flesh to be spiritual, kind and sweet. Now, if I'm going to be around fleshly people, that's the kind I want to be around. They make good neighbors but it doesn't mean they know God. Spirituality doesn't necessarily always look that way and I believe God sends deceivers into the church that way. They are just humans that are compassionate and kind and caring and

sweet but they may not be spiritual. They are just that kind of people. They just have a propensity to be that way.

Well, we're talking about the prayer of faith. This guy calls for the elders, I guess just to help him see, "Do I have blind spots here?" God exposes the blind spots. He gets things right. It's reported to the church if it's necessary, certainly most things aren't supposed to be reported to the church. And then you can expect God to bring a healing in those cases if that sickness was to the end of getting your attention about that sin because God says you don't have any need for it anymore.

I remember reading about Charles Simeon. Charles Simeon was a pastor I've told you about before that his church hated him. He was an Anglican minister who was a Bible believing evangelical and in this day, this was like 200 years ago, an Anglican church despised Bible believing evangelistic preachers. If you remember the story, Charles Simeon would come to his pulpit and that was in the day when every family owned their own pew and they had locks on them. You'd have a lock on your pew and Gene would have a lock on his pew. Everybody had locks on their pews and they locked all the pews and they wouldn't let anybody sit down. So the people had to stand in the aisles. That went on for ten years. Ten years. He said, "I just prayed God would bless them double for coming and standing up." Then finally he got that fixed but Charles Simeon talked about that he was under such distress in his pastorate that he kept looking toward his retirement age. He came down with an illness and he didn't really say what it was but he felt terrible and he didn't know what was wrong with him and he said, "I came to a point where I said, Lord, I can't put my hope in a retirement age. You may not want me to quit at that age. I've got to put my hope in you." He said the whole sickness lifted and came off of him once he got that right. That's just an illustration I think of this very truth.

Well, the Bible doesn't say that you're to send for a faith healer. The Bible says you are to seek the Lord, be investigative, "God, what are you doing? What are you showing me? Biblically does this mean anything?" And you may very well go through a whole season and not really know what all God was doing but I can promise you if you're going through a season of distress, it's probably very wise, you may or may not want to call for the elders to consult with them, that's your choice. That's your call. Here the guy called for the elders and you do what you want to do but you'd be very wise to say, "O God, let me investigate what's in my heart and what's in my life that I need to deal with." I have not had a season of distress in my life even though from the human eye I've been through seasons of distress where "I was innocent." It was the persecutors that were causing it but yet even those, there are things in my heart I needed to deal with. Others wouldn't have seen them or known them but God showed them to me and I figure we're all about the same.

Well, summarizing this investigative praying: if you are sick, get medical attention trusting God the whole time you're seeing the doctor. Did you hear that? Trust in God while you're seeing the doctor. Praise God for the doctor. Do everything medically the medical professionals ask you to do but you're trusting God while you're doing that. Then you seek God's face as to the purpose of the sickness. If God reveals conclusively to you

that your sins are there for a reason and this requires a confession or even a public repentance, then you ought to call for the elders and say, "Look, I need to deal with some things," and get it done. Get it over with. Get that great joyous freedom. By the way, can I say something to you? And I mean this with all of my heart: there is not a more forgiving, loving church on planet earth than Grace Life Church of the Shoals. I'm telling you, listen to me, the moment you show a half ounce of genuine humility, these people will wrap their arms around you and they'll go to the ends of the earth to help you. They will. Do you know why? Because you're Christians. That's what Christians do.

If you sense from praying in the word of God that this is a sickness unto discipline and that God will remove it if you get some things right, then go to God in prayer with it, confess it to God, make it right with whomever and you can believe and trust that God will remove that sickness from you. He's achieved his purpose. Not all sicknesses are like that but if it's a sickness unto discipline, that's what will happen.

Real quick, the last word. Not only supplication and then that's if your heart is downcast. Then celebration for all the good God brings. Then investigation. That's what this fellow was experiencing, calling on the elders to investigate the situation. Lastly, motivation. He throws out an example of Elijah as our motivation. 16b, the last part, he says, "The affective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 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 earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured forth rain and the earth produced its fruit." I think it's interesting, he said Elijah was just a man with like nature as ours but he was in the will of God and he was what God called him to be and what God called him to do. You remember Elijah is opposed by wicked King Ahab and twice wicked Queen Jezebel. They are warring together. Elijah was the one who challenged the prophets of Baal and they built their altars and Elijah said, "Whichever God answers by fire is the true God." And to get their attention for their wickedness and their idolatry of Baal worship, Elijah prayed and asked God not to let it rain and then he prayed again and asked God to let it rain and God did both of those things.

You know, there is no doubt that I, Jeff Noblit, am a man of like nature as you. There is nothing, absolutely nothing special about me. But you know, I began praying I think a biblical prayer many, many years ago about our ministry and about our impact for the glory of God around the world. Do you know that if in the next ten years God keeps accelerating our impact around the world the way he has been, it's going to be quite overwhelming. It's going to be quite overwhelming. It's pretty overwhelming now and we didn't have to do it by chasing the world, fads and gimmicks and pampering the flesh, we did it by trying to do it the biblical way, to be God-centered and glory of God focused and Christ honoring. I believe God is just answering those prayers we prayed together 30 years ago. And there's nothing special about any of us.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man can avail much. Someone said that: prayer is not getting our way in heaven but getting God's will done on earth. Did you hear that? Prayer is not getting our way in heaven, it's getting God's will done on earth. Elijah was persistent. He prayed and the Bible said that he prayed again. You know, we're not

heard for our much words but there's a difference between vain repetition and believing persistency. You need to believe God for the things that Scriptures are clear about and hold onto God and be persistent about it. If you are praying for your children, ask God to make them a godly seed in this earth for the glory of God and you're not going to let God go about it. Or your grandkids or whatever it is. If you know it to be God's will, pray with persistence. If it's really for God and his glory, he'll answer that prayer. The Bible talks about praying earnestly here in verse 17 that Elijah was a man with a like nature as ours and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain. Really what he did was he prayed in his prayers. A lot of times we don't pray in our prayers, we just have prayers.

Some principles of prayer from the pastor James.

Let's stand together, alright?