

The Prayer of Faith

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 6
James 5:15-16 10-25-2015

Summary: The purpose of the statement about the power of prayer is to motivate us to obey the command to pray for one another. Prayer actually changes outcomes, especially when we pray the prayer of faith, which may refer to special times when, after a long period of intense prayer, God makes it known to you what He is going to do.

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James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. 13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you weak? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 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. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

The Motive: Power

Do You Believe Enough to Pray?

Does God answer prayer – yes or no? Okay, now let me ask you that exact same question in another way: pick a random person sitting somewhere in this room – do you believe that that person would be better off if you prayed for them? Would their life actually be better in real-world ways, with better outcomes, if you prayed for them, than if you didn't pray for them? If you said *yes* to the first question but you are waffling on the second question, then your answer to the first question wasn't a real yes. We give lip service to the idea that God answers prayer, but do we really believe that to the point where it actually seems to us like someone will indeed be better off if we pray for them? It may be that the biggest impediment we have to prayer is that we just don't really believe it does anything. Look at that final sentence in verse 16.

16 ...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Motive for Prayer: Power and Effectiveness

What is the purpose of that sentence? The purpose of the first half of the verse isn't hard to figure out, because it is a straightforward command.

16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

The purpose of that is to get us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another. That's obvious. But what is the purpose of the statement about prayer being powerful? Why tell us that? Why not just command us to pray, and let us discover on our own how powerful it is? Whenever God gives a command and then immediately gives a piece of information, it is usually for the purpose of motivation. God doesn't just command us to do things; He helps us obey the command. And one of the greatest helps He gives us is to provide incentives that will get us excited about doing what is commanded. God knows that prayer is hard for us, and that our tendency will be to neglect it. So instead of just commanding us to pray, He lets us know that prayer gives us access to real power.

Now, is that a bad motive or a good motive? Is it a good thing or a bad thing for you to desire a powerful life? Obviously it's a good thing since God offers it as a motivation. It is a good thing to want a powerful, effective life. God does not want you to go through life spinning your wheels. He does not want you to limp along with a powerless, ineffective life. God wants you to want a powerful, effective life, and He is showing us here how to get it. It comes through prayer. Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the mighty muscle of omnipotence. Nothing will make you more powerful than prayer, because prayer moves the hand of Him who moves all things.

It is really a strong statement. The NIV says prayer is **powerful** – your Bible might say **very powerful** or **great power**. It is two words – *polus* (much, very) and *isxuo* (powerful). The prayer of a righteous man is *very powerful*.

The word **effective** is a hard word to translate. There are several possibilities, but I believe the most straightforward reading and the most likely meaning is simply this: *the prayer of a righteous man is powerful because it brings about an effect.*¹ It changes outcomes, so that they are not the same outcomes as what would have happened if you didn't pray. If you had some kind of special telescope where you could look and see the future of your life, so if you pointed it to the right you could see the next 10 years of your life without being devoted to prayer, and if you turned it to the left and you could see what the next 10 years of your life would look like if you *are* devoted to prayer, you are going to see two completely different futures. Your life will be a different life with different outcomes. And the emphasis

¹ *πολὸν ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη*

It could mean energetic prayer, or when it is effective, or when it is exercised.

- Very powerful is the request of a righteous person being effective – adj

- Very powerful is the request of a righteous person exercising itself. – adv mid

- Very powerful is the request of a righteous person being exercised. – adv pass

Heibert - etymologically this word denotes power working inwardly. If it is an adjective describing the prayer, the point is that the prayer accomplishes its task. He also rejects the adverbial passive view because there is no agent in the context. He lands on this – a righteous man's prayer when it keeps at work is very powerful.

McCartney says it's not adverbial passive because that would make the sentence conditional. He rejects taking it as an adjective modifying prayer because that would be essentially a tautology – effective prayer is effective. He rejects the view that says prayer is powerful as long as it is active, because that brings up the possibility of inactive prayer. So he lands on the middle adverbial view modifying "is powerful" explaining not the condition, but in what way the prayer has power – is powerful because it effects change. James' point is that prayer causes things to happen as the example from Elijah demonstrates. I agree with this view.

The Greek commentators on James take the word as passive, in the sense "being made effective." This is thought of as accomplished either by the virtues of the one who prays or by the ensuing good conduct of him for whom the prayer is offered. Modern commentators sometimes interpret: "when actuated by the Spirit," but it is not legitimate here to assume this altogether later use, from which the term energumen, "possessed person," comes. Others take it as meaning "made active," "energised," and so as about equivalent to ἐνεργής, "effectual," or ἐκτενής, "earnest." But the writer would hardly have desired to restrict the power of a righteous man's prayer to exceptional cases where it showed more than ordinary intensity; the sentence owes its whole force to being an unqualified statement. Moreover there is no good evidence that the word was capable of bearing this sense.

The following interesting passages have been brought to the attention of N. T. scholars by the aid of Dr. S. Schechter (see Fulford, St. James, pp. 117 f.): Samachoth Zutarti (ed. Chaim M. Horowitz, Uralte Tosefta's, Mainz, 1890, pp. 2831-), "From the time when a man takes to his bed, they come to him and say, 'Words neither revive one, nor do they kill. '[After exhorting the sick man to set his worldly affairs in order, as Isaiah did Hezekiah, [2Ki 20:1](#), if he sees that the sick man is dangerously ill, the visitor says], 'Confess before thou diest, for there are many who have confessed and died not; others who did not confess have died. Again perhaps on the merit of thy confession thou wilt recover. 'If he can confess with his mouth, he does so. If not, he confesses in his heart. Both the man who confesses with his mouth and the man who confesses in his heart are alike, provided that he directs his mind to God and his understanding is clear. "T. B. Shabbath 13 b, "He who comes to a sick man says, 'May the Lord have mercy on you. " " He who comes to pay a visit to a sick man must not sit on a bed or on a chair; but let him wrap his mantle round him, and pray the mercy of God for the man. There is a divine presence at the head of the sick man. "Closely like the verse in James is Baba bathra 116 a (in the Talmud), "Let him into whose house calamity or sickness has come, go to a wise man (i. e. a rabbi) that he may intercede for him with God."

in this verse is not praying for yourself, but praying for others. That person sitting in front of you or behind you right now – the next 10 years of their future looks very different if you pray for them or if you don't pray for them. And if you don't believe that, you don't believe James 5:16.

If God says that the prayer of a righteous man is very powerful, then the prayer of a righteous man is very powerful. And **very powerful** does not mean impotent or powerless or inconsequential. It means the opposite of that. Things will be different – things will be much better in their life the more you get serious about praying for them. This is the power that God has put in your hands. James doesn't say, "pray for one another so that they will feel good knowing that someone is thinking about them." He says pray for them so that they will be **healed** - physically and spiritually. You pray, they recover. You don't pray, they don't recover. Prayer is not just some vacuous religious exercise, or divine mind game. It is not God saying, "I'm doing this either way, but I want you to pretend to be involved by praying for it." We are told to pray in order to cause something to happen that would not otherwise happen, namely, the recovery and restoration of that person.

"That's hard for me to believe because God doesn't answer my prayers."

If that's the case, there are a couple possibilities. It may be that you haven't had as much success in prayer as you could have, because one of those four conditions for answered prayer that we talked about last week is missing. Relationship, reason, resolve, request. The strength of your relationship with God, your motives, earnestness and persistence, and praying in accordance with God's will. It could be that one or more of those has been missing, and that has hindered your prayers.

Another possibility is that God has been answering your prayers, but you haven't taken notice or remembered all the prayers He did answer, because all your attention is on some particular prayer that He didn't answer. You have lost sight of all the hundreds of times God has said *yes*, because of your disappointment over the times He said *no*. We are so prone to forget the marvelous things that God does. We ignore 100 acts of mercy and grace because we are upset about the one time when God's will or timing didn't match up with ours. And so it becomes impossible for God to give us joy through answered prayer, because no matter how many prayers He answers, we will not be satisfied because he didn't answer that prayer that we prayed for something we think would be best, but God knows isn't best.

But whatever you think your experiences might be telling you, the Word of God is more reliable than your assessment of your own experiences. And the Word of God is very clear – the prayer of a righteous man is very powerful and it brings about an effect.

It changed my life when Tracy read that book *The Power of a Praying Wife*. Ladies, if you want a better marriage, and you want a better husband, get that book. I don't know what that book says, but it changed my life. All of you should be grateful to Tracy, because if it weren't for her prayers, I don't think I would be half the pastor that I am now. I still have a lot of weaknesses as a pastor, but if not for Tracy's prayers, it would be a whole lot worse, believe me. And not just her prayers, but hundreds of other people's prayers. There is no doubt in my mind that those prayers have had an impact, because the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective - and they become even more powerful the more closely they are aligned with God's will.

The Prayer of Faith

And that brings us to where we left off last time with this phrase **the prayer of faith**. What is **the prayer of faith**? It is possible that it just simply means faith in the ordinary sense – believing the truth about God, and trusting in His goodness and wisdom. Another possibility is that it is referring to the kind of faith he described back in chapter 1 – which is the opposite of double mindedness. You have to be fully committed to God, not waffling back and forth about whether you are following God or running after the world.

But there is a third possibility. Many interpreters believe that this phrase is talking about something beyond the normal kind of faith in prayer. James uses an unusual word for prayer² which leads one

² It's the word normally translated *vow* – **the vow of faith**. This is the only place in the NT where that word is used for prayer.

scholar to say that this phrase **the prayer of faith**, sounds to him like a technical term – referring to something very specific or special.³ We have seen throughout this book that James tends to get his terminology from Jesus. So if we search Jesus’ teachings, is there ever a time when Jesus gave an unusually strong promise about faith and answered prayer? Yes. It’s in Mark 11.

Mark 11:22 “Have faith in God 23 I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

The Meaning of Faith

That is the only place I know of in the Bible that defines faith that way.⁴ Faith is always a certainty of what God has *promised*. But this is the only place I know of where it is described as a certainty that you will get what you asked for in prayer. Normally what we see is something more like this:

Matthew 9:27 ... two blind men followed Jesus, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” 28 ... He asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

He didn’t ask, “Do you believe that I *will* do this?” He asked, “Do you believe that I am able?”

“Yes, Lord,” they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you” 30 and their sight was restored.

They were healed because of their faith, but their faith was not an assumption that Jesus would heal them; it was simply confidence that He *could*. And that is the normal way that faith is described in Scripture.

Mark 1:40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” 41 “I am willing,” he said, “be clean.”

He did not assume that Jesus was willing – he only assumed that Jesus was able. That’s faith. Contrast that with the guy in Mark 9.

Mark 9:22 “...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” 23 “ ‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

It’s fine to say to Jesus, “if you are willing,” but don’t ever say, “if you can.” There are two occasions where Jesus described someone as having great faith – in both cases it was because they believed He had the ability to heal over a distance.⁵ They didn’t assume that He would; they just believed that He could.

You cannot force God to do something just by convincing yourself that He will do it. That’s why there are occasions where we are surprised by God. We are just sure He is going to do one thing, and He does the opposite. Convincing yourself that something is going to happen does not give you the power to control God. That is the error of the Word of Faith, name and claim it heresy. If something is not true and you say it is true, that’s not faith; it is delusion.

“Prayer” is the correct translation here. This word is used for prayer outside of the Bible, so prayer is within the semantic range, and it is clear in the context that he is talking about prayer, not vows. The word for prayer here is *euxe*. The cognate *euxestha* is used seven times in the New Testament, including in v.16 (Acts 27:39, Acts 26:29 Rom. 9:3, 2 Co. 13:7, 9, Jas. 5:16, 3 Jn. 1:2). It seems to be used in contexts of especially passionate or urgent desire. It definitely focuses more on the desiring aspect of prayer.

³ E.M. Sidebottom, cited by Heibert, p.322. Heibert notes the double use of the article, but that is simply an example of Apollonius’ Canon, which notes that in genitive phrases, the genitive will match the main noun so if one has the article, the other will as well, and if one does not, neither will the other one. But whether they have the article or not, Wallace states that it has “little grammatical force” since the phrase is typically definite even without the article.

⁴ One possible exception is Mt.9:20, where the woman assumed she would be healed if she touched Jesus’ cloak.

⁵ Mt.8:9-10, Mt.15:27-28.

So the strong emphasis in Scripture is that faith is believing that God is able, and trusting Him to make a good decision. That is the normal way that faith is presented in relationship to prayer. But Mark 11 is different.

Mark 11:23 “I tell you the truth, if anyone ... believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

That stands out as being so different, I think that may be what James is referring to when he talks about *the prayer of faith*. Evidently, there are times when God will give you a high degree of certainty about His will in a particular matter as a response to intensive prayer. You know it’s going to happen.

“What’s the difference between that and the ‘name it and claim it’ teaching?”

The difference is this – we don’t get to pick what this thing is that we are going to be certain about. We can’t just pick anything we want and talk ourselves into believing that it’s true, and make it come to pass. It has to start with God. He decides He wants to do something, and he burdens your heart with it, so that you pray earnestly and fervently and persistently, and at the end of a major struggle in prayer, you emerge with an awareness that this is indeed what God is going to do. So the reason *the prayer of faith* is always answered with a *yes* is because God will never grant you that level of certainty unless it’s something He has decided He is going to do. It is not something you can just pray whenever you want – it is only possible in those special cases.

I cannot tell you with 100% certainty that this is what James means by *the prayer of faith*. But I do think it is more likely than any other interpretation. And it fits what we see in other passages of Scripture. For example, Elijah. In verse 17 James points us to the time when Elijah’s prayers shut off the rain for 3 ½ years, and then brought it back. And if you read 1 Kings 18, you will see that it wasn’t just a matter of Elijah saying, “Dear God, please make it rain.” He went off to a place by himself and spent time in earnest intensive prayer, seeking God and beseeching God - seven times. The first time nothing happened. He sent his servant to go check the skies. The servant came back and said, “Nothing – not a cloud in the sky.” He got the same result the second time he prayed, and the third and the fourth and fifth and sixth. Then came the seventh. The seventh time was different. This time a tiny cloud appeared on the horizon - a cloud the size of a man’s hand. And when you look up in the sky and it is completely clear except for one little wisp the size of a man’s hand, nobody looks at that and says, “Oh no, it’s going to be a downpour.” You don’t cancel your picnic because of cloud size of a man’s hand. But somehow in the course of that seventh prayer, God had made it clear to Elijah what He wanted to do. So Elijah got up and sent word to the king, “You’d better get moving before the flood comes.”

He didn’t hedge his bets, he didn’t say “*maybe*”, he didn’t say, “Partly cloudy with an 80% chance of precipitation.” He put his whole reputation on the line. Just like he did with the prophets of Baal when he dumped water all over the altar and said God was going to send fire from heaven to burn it up. He *knew* it was going to happen.

And not only do we see things like that in Scripture, but that has been the experience of God’s people in the church across denominations. We don’t gain our theology from observing experiences. We get our theology only from the Bible. But observing how God does the things that the Bible says He does can help us understand what it looks like. And it can help us believe in our heart what we know to be true in our heads.

And as I was studying this passage, it was amazing how many accounts I came across of this happening - across denominations. I am always skeptical about things that God is supposedly doing, but He only seems to do them in certain, select denominations or churches. For example, it seems to be only certain charismatic churches where God miraculously gives people gold fillings in their teeth. I am always a little skeptical about things like that. But this is an experience that people seem to have in every sector of the church.

Just a couple weeks ago I read this from Job Bloom: One Sunday afternoon my wife was in bed with a high fever, groaning and unable to sleep ... I was lying next to her praying. ... I was in a season of significant spiritual wrestling, which was absorbing most of my prayers. But I remember being filled with hope over some precious promises of God and expressing thanks to Him. Suddenly, my joy in God grew

unusually intense. ... God seemed almost tangibly near. ... I couldn't help overflowing in awe-filled worship. Almost immediately I knew, without doubt, that if I prayed for Pam, she would be healed. I laid my hand on her back, prayed very simply in Jesus's name and immediately my hand sensed her body temperature drop and she was instantly asleep. She got up later completely healed." I was reading the Reformed Expository Commentary on James, which is a very reformed, decidedly non-charismatic commentary. And the author tells the story: "A friend suffered a viral infection of the heart and was extremely ill. [After two weeks, he called the elders of the church to come pray for him and anoint him.] No one in our church had done this before, so we did something very Presbyterian: we studied the matter for another six weeks and hoped he didn't die in the meantime. At last we appointed a night for prayer and the elders gathered. ... Before we prayed, the pastor told us not to expect a dramatic physical healing, since God heals in many ways. I appreciated his motive, but there was no need to restrain my enthusiasm; my doubting heart was already skeptical enough. ... My friend knelt down in the middle of the circle of elders. We anointed him with oil, laid hands on him, and began to pray. ... I was appointed to offer the closing prayer. As soon as we began to pray I had an overwhelming sense that God was, at that moment, healing my friend. ... I knew God was healing him. ..." Four days later the man was completely recovered. He goes on to say that that experience never happened again. He only experienced that one time in his life.

One more example. A couple weeks ago Tom Moller was just telling us at the last elder meeting about a time when it happened to him, back when he was an elder at another church. A friend of his was in a coma after a bad car accident back in 1977. Here's what Tom said: "One night ... about a month and a half after the accident, I couldn't sleep and the words, 'Rita, it's time to wake up now' kept going through my head. ... I was very fearful that I might be hearing God wrong and giving a new believer a false hope. So I tossed and turned, praying all night, but the words wouldn't leave my head." The next morning he went straight to the hospital, and by the time he entered the hospital room, Tom said "there was no doubt whatsoever." And here's what happened: "In the hospital room, she seemed to give me signals that she could hear and understand what I was saying as I spoke to her about Jesus, and she signaled her agreement to receive Him for the forgiveness of her sins. And I delivered the words, 'Rita, it's time to wake up now.' She started a real deep crying, ... producing tears which flowed down her face (previously she had been basically motionless and unresponsive for over a month, so the tears were definitely something new.) For the next two and a half months she made regular progress up and out of the coma, coming fully out in January expressing the fact that she knew Jesus. I got to wondering not too long ago, actually, if 'It's time to wake up now' meant the coma, or salvation. Through this her husband also came to the Lord, and both are serving the Lord to this day."

And for Tom, that was also a one-time event, so it seems to be fairly rare. Nothing like that has ever happened in my life that I can remember. But that may be because I wasn't looking for it. I never used to believe that God worked this way, so I haven't really been open to it. But now I am.

And I will say this – there have been times when it was clear to me that it was time to stop praying for something, because it wasn't God's will. I remember when we were all praying for my dad. There came a point when we all just kind of stopped asking for healing and started talking about heaven. God just seemed to make it clear to us that this was not an illness he was going to recover from.

If You Don't Have the Certainty, Pray Anyway

One other observation - in each one of those stories we see something that matches what happened with Elijah, namely, the strong feeling of assurance does not come until after a season of significant prayer. Elijah prays six times, but isn't confident about the rain until the seventh time. And that seems to be a fairly common experience – that this high level of confidence doesn't come until after a long, arduous season of earnest, intensive prayer. You pray, and pray, and pray, and wrestle with God, and finally He puts in your heart the thing He wants to do.

I'll give you an example – one more story. John Piper once asked his father about this. He said, "Have you ever prayed so long and so hard that before you got up off your knees you knew it was going

to happen?” His dad said, “Yes, about five times in my life.” He told John about one of them. He was in the middle of an evangelistic crusade and no one was responding to the message. And so he wrestled in anguished prayer until about 2 o’clock in the morning. And he said, “At 2 AM God assured me that five people would respond the next night.” And John said, “Keep in mind - my dad is *anti*-charismatic. He could write a book titled ‘Power without Tongues’.” He wasn’t charismatic at all, but in this case he was convinced that God had assured him – five people would respond. The next night he preached, gave an invitation, and four people came forward. And he closed the service. Everyone left, but he just waited. And eventually, this person came back. He got halfway home, turned around and came back. And so John asked his dad, “Why don’t you pray like that all the time?” And his dad said, “If I did, I would be dead.” That’s how hard he wrestled that night. This is not the sort of thing you do day in and day out. It comes after significant prayer, which means you start praying before you have that confidence.

So don’t sit around waiting for God to show you how to pray before you start praying. Remember, in most cases, faith is simply believing that God is able to do what you ask, and trusting Him to make the best decision about whether He wants to. That is the normal mode for prayer. Does God still answer prayers when the one praying isn’t really expecting a *yes* answer? Sure. Remember when the church was praying for Peter to be released from prison? God miraculously answered their prayer, sent an earthquake, Peter walks out of the prison and goes to the prayer meeting, and here’s what happened:

Acts 12:13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!” 15 “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

What a distraction this girl is to the prayer meeting. Stop talking to us about Peter being outside – can’t you see we’re busy praying? Meanwhile...

16 But Peter kept on knocking

“For crying out loud! How are we supposed to pray with all these interruptions? Would someone besides Rhoda please go get the door?”

16 ... and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

God doesn’t always grant a ton of confidence even when He is planning on answering the prayer – but He still answered. So don’t stop praying. Even if I am ignorant and clueless and have no idea what God’s will is, God still reserves the right to do immeasurably more than all I could ask or imagine (Eph.3:20). But I also want to remain ready when God wants to do it through working inside me to know exactly what He wants to do and pray this kind of **prayer of faith**.

Calls for Maturity

One reason why I have not been open to this interpretation in the past is because there are so many examples of this being abused. We have all seen those situations where someone claims to have heard from God, and they haven’t. “God told me that you are going to be healed!” and the guy gets his hopes all up, but then it doesn’t happen. It is easy for this kind of thing to be abused, which may be the reason why James says to call the elders of the church. If you get the men who are most likely to be spiritually mature, and they come as a group,- that can help guard against the folly of those people who think they hear from God when they don’t.

In verse 16 James specifies that it is the prayer of the **righteous** person that is powerful and has an effect. God hears the prayers of the righteous and not the prayers of the wicked. That would include all believers because we have the righteousness of Christ credited to our account through faith. So God listens to the prayers of all believers. But I think the righteousness that James is referring to here is not just positional righteousness, but practical righteousness. In other words, the more you disobey God as a Christian, the more you hinder your prayer life. And the more you obey God, the more powerful your

prayer life. And one reason for that is that the righteous man or woman who is walking in obedience to God will tend to have enough spiritual maturity so that they will not frequently confuse their own thoughts and impulses with promptings from God.

The Command: Intercession

Okay, so all that to say that prayer is exceedingly powerful, it has an effect on outcomes, and it is even more powerful when you pray **the prayer of faith**. That is the motivation God gives us to pray for one another - power. Now let's talk about the command itself: **Pray for one another**. (He also commands us to confess our sins to one another, but we'll have to wait until next week to talk about that part.) For now, let's just focus on the command to pray. When God looks down on His church, He wants to see us praying for one another. So many of the most important things in the universe happen when we do that. Praying for one another blesses the person, glorifies God, fulfills the great commandment⁶, and accomplishes the will of God.

Therefore

And it is a command for everyone in the church. Notice the transition from verse 15 to verse 16. The first word in verse 16 is **therefore**. Verse 16 is the conclusion James draws based on what he has said about the elders praying the prayer of faith for the sick person. That's interesting, because the conclusion he draws has nothing to do with the elders. The leadership of the church is never mentioned again or alluded to in the rest of this passage. When James draws his conclusion, everything he says is for the congregation.

16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

What about the restoration of a wandering sheep? Does James attach that to the elders? No.

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death...

One another ... one another ... someone ... whoever - this is all about the congregation generally, not just the leadership. The influence of Roman Catholicism has created a mentality for a lot of people that thinks of clergy and laity as two totally different categories. They see someone who is just an average Joe in the congregation baptize someone or administer communion and it raises eyebrows.

"Are they allowed to do that?"

People think there is still a kind of quasi-Old Testament priesthood, or Roman Catholic priesthood where there are certain things that are off-limits for regular people – only the priestly class can do them. But that is not the picture of leadership that we have in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:5 refers to the church as a holy priesthood. We are all priests.

Revelation 1:6 He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

In the church, the leaders are not pictured as a separated class with special privileges. Rather, elders and deacons simply set the pattern of example for the things that God has called the whole body of Christ to do.

At Agape we believe this is so absolutely central to what the church is, that we have set aside a special time for it right in the middle of everything we are doing on Sunday mornings. From 9:45 to 10:45 we all gather in our prayer groups and pray for one another. We want that to happen all through the week as much as possible, but we believe it is important for us to do it on Sunday morning when we are all gathered together, because that is such a fundamental part of what church is.

⁶ Praying for someone is an essential part of loving them. **Matthew 5:44 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**

Intercession

Scripture teaches us several key ingredients for our prayers: adoration, where you talk to God about God; petition, where you talk to God about you and your needs; confession, where you talk to God about your sin; affirmation, where you talk to your own soul about what God has said; thanksgiving and praise, where you talk to God about your delight in what He has done; and one more – intercession, where you talk to God about others. You intercede by stepping in and praying for the needs of other people. And that is what James is commanding in this verse. It is not enough for people to ask God to supply their own needs. *You* must also ask God to supply their needs.

1 Samuel 12:23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.

In Ephesians 6 where Paul teaches us how to put on the armor of God, he concludes by saying this:

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and at all times keep on praying for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me

Did you notice how many “all’s” there are in that passage? This is all-out prayer for one another.

Be Careful Who You Pray For

So let’s commit to pray for one another. If something is keeping you from being a part of a prayer group – read what the New Testament has to say about the “one-another” commands when we gather together as a church – especially this one: pray for one another.

And let me close with this – be careful who you pray for. And be careful what you ask God for when you pray for them. If prayer were just an empty, meaningless religious exercise, then it wouldn’t really matter what we asked for. But if it is really this powerful, then it deserves some careful thought.

A few months ago I had a period of time where, for whatever reason, God was answering my prayers far more often than normal. It was such a pronounced difference, that it was actually startling to me. The kinds of things that I would ask God for and typically get a *no* answer, God was granting those things – one after another. It almost felt like I was walking around with a superpower – I could just ask for pretty much anything and God would give it. And during that time, I found that it really changed my prayers. I would start mumbling some distracted prayer for some inane, trivial thing, and then it would hit me, “Wait a minute, God is probably going to grant whatever I’m asking for – do I really want to waste that on this request? If I can ask for anything right now, do I really want to spend my time and energy and earnestness asking for this dumb little thing?” I drop my car at the mechanic and start to pray, “God, please let it be that cheap fix and not the expensive problem,” and then it would strike me – is that the best thing you can pray for right now? If God is likely to say *yes* to what you ask for right now, aren’t there some other things in your life that you care about a whole lot more than this? And I started thinking more carefully about how I wanted to spend my influence with God. I only have so much influence with Him, and I only have so much time to pray, and so I started to develop a reluctance to squander my prayers.

Now, does that mean you should never pray about small things? No, you can pray about whatever you want. But if something is a small priority with a small amount of importance, then I want the thing to take up a small space in my prayer life. And again, this verse isn’t about praying for yourself, but praying for others. Let’s start praying some big, big things for each other! We have the ear of the Almighty. He will do things that we ask Him to do. Through prayer we can move the hand of the Prime Mover. Your influence with God is the greatest asset you have – spend it wisely, and generously.

You can’t pray for everyone, and you have most responsibility to pray for those who are closest to you. You are not responsible to give special attention to everyone in the congregation, but you do have to pray for enough people in this congregation so that you don’t have to be ashamed on judgment day when the Lord asks you, “When I commanded you to pray for one another in the church, did you obey Me?”

2 Kings 20:5 ... ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.

Benediction: (concept taken from Psalm 66:17) You will cry out to him with your mouth; his praise will be on your tongue. 18 If you had cherished sin in your heart, the Lord would not have listened; 19 but God will surely listen and hear your voice in prayer. 20 Praise be to God, who will not reject your prayer or withhold his love from you!

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Pick one person in the group. If you knew there was a 95% chance God would answer your next prayer for that person, what would you ask for?
- 2) Tell the group about some recent (or especially precious) answers to prayer you have received.
- 3) What is the #1 impediment that threatens to keep you away from prayer group on Sunday mornings?

Application Questions (Expanded Version)

James 5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Summary: The purpose of the statement about the power of prayer is to motivate us to obey the command to pray for one another. Prayer actually changes outcomes, especially when we pray the prayer of faith, which may refer to special times when, after a long period of intense prayer, God makes it known to you what He is going to do.

Intercession, praying for one another, individually or for the body was one of the main points in the sermon, tonight we want to discuss this powerful weapon of intercession God has given to the church. It appears from this section of scripture that James concludes with the command that we as saints and priests of God should confess our sins to one another and as we confess our sin we are to pray for one another as mediators who stand in the gap as priests and offer prayer for the confessing brother, to plead on their behalf that God would heal them from their sin, to bring about deliverance from its power. When we pray as intercessors for the one who is caught up in sin and confesses we activate through the prayer prayed in faith this effective weapon that has great effect in bringing healing.

From the Sermon: Scripture teaches us several key ingredients for our prayers: adoration, where you talk to God about God; petition, where you talk to God about you and your needs; confession, where you talk to God about your sin; affirmation, where you talk to your own soul about what God has said; thanksgiving and praise, where you talk to God about your delight in what He has done; and one more – intercession, where you talk to God about others. You intercede by stepping in and praying for the needs of other people. And that is what James is commanding in this verse. It is not enough for people to ask God to supply their own needs. *You* must also ask God to supply their needs.

1 Samuel 12:23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.

We have been studying the processes involved in rebuilding a broken church. One of the key components of this is prayer. Prayer by the elders, and prayer for one another...in last week's sermon, it ended with intercession, where James exhorts us to pray for one another...the first question for our 1:25 meeting deals specifically with intercession...so, what I thought would be a good idea is, write down the names of everyone in our group...look at the first question below, in prayer ask the Holy Spirit to show you and help you to know the will of God for each person, as He leads, pray...and write down your answer for question 1.

- 1) Pick one person in the group. If you knew there was a 95% chance God would answer your next prayer for that person, what would you ask for?
 - a. How difficult is it for you to stand in intercession for someone in prayer?
 - b. When you pray, how much of your prayer time *is* actually spent praying for another saint or for the church (local, universal)?

- 2) What is the #1 impediment that threatens to keep you away from prayer group on Sunday mornings?
 - a. What do you see as necessary to get you to prayer group if there is an obstacle in the way?

 - b. What is it about prayer group that you could encourage someone else who might not attend to start attending?

 - c. What is one the most encouraging aspects of prayer group?

 - d. What is one the most discouraging aspects of prayer group?

- 3) Tell the group about some recent (or especially precious) answers to prayer you have received.