HOW TO PRAY ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS 2
Developing A Faith That Works - Part 17 of 17
James 5:13-20
Roger Miller

Once there was a monastery in the woods that had fallen upon hard times. In the past it had been a thriving community that was well known and respected throughout the region, but over the last generation the monks had died one by one and there were no new vocations to replace them. Besides this, the monks did not seem to be as friendly to each other. Something just wasn't right. The Father Abbot was quite concerned about the future of his monastery, now consisting of himself and three brothers and, thus, he sought counsel from the local rabbi who was known to be a great sage. The abbot went to the rabbi and asked him if he had any advice on what to do to save his monastery. The rabbi felt at a loss and said that he, too, worried about his own congregation; people were too busy and simply were not coming to the synagogue any longer. The two commiserated together and read the Torah. As the abbot was getting ready to return home the rabbi looked at him and said, "One in your home is the Messiah." The abbot walked home puzzled as to what the rabbi's words meant.

When he arrived at the monastery the monks asked the abbot what he had learned. He responded that the rabbi had given him no concrete advice, but he had said in cryptic language, "One in your home is the Messiah." Over the next days and weeks the monks pondered what this might mean. Was it possible that one of them was the Messiah? If that was the case then most certainly it was Father Abbot. He had been the leader for more than a generation. On the other hand it might be Brother Thomas, for he is a holy man and full of light. Certainly it could not be Brother Eldred. He is old, crotchety, and often mean-spirited, but he always seems to be right, no matter what the situation or question. The rabbi could not have meant Brother Phillip. He is very passive - a real nobody, but one has to admit that he is always there when someone needs assistance.

As they continued to contemplate this question, the old monks began to treat each other with

great respect, on the off chance that the one with whom they were dealing really was the Messiah. They again began to live the gospel message. The monastery was a much more prayerful place once again.

Because the monastery was located in a beautiful portion of the forest it was common during the spring, summer, and fall months for families to come and have picnics on the grounds. During this period people who came seemed to sense the new spirit of respect and love that was present at the monastery. The people returned often and one day a young man came to the Father Abbot and asked if he could join the community. Soon others inquired and joined and, thus, after several years the vibrant community at the monastery was again restored because the wisdom of the rabbi had transformed hearts. The monks had once again started to live their lives according to the Golden Rule.

The monks in the monastery learned, "through the back door," of the need to treat their brothers with respect. They were converted to an understanding that prayer must be a way of life. Prayer is vocal, but it must also be action. It must be the way we live our daily lives. Saint James, as he concludes his epistle, a letter based on action, that is being doers of the word, makes this point abundantly clear.

v. 16 *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* The word "prayer" is mentioned seven times in this passage. That's what it's about. Prayer. James had a reputation for being a man of prayer. His nickname was James, the Camel Knees, because he had such big knots on his knees from spending hours and hours in prayer. There is tremendous power in prayer. Prayer is the greatest privilege of the Christian life, being able to talk to God, and it's the greatest power in the Christian life.

What prayer can do is what God can do. Anything that God can do can be done through prayer.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

James, in this passage, mentions there are three specific times when I really need to pray.

1. When I am hurting emotionally

v. 13 *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."* The word trouble in the NIV or afflicted in the KJV in the original language literally means "to suffer misfortune, to be in distress" to be under stress, under tension. In Timothy it's translated "hardships."

He's talking about internal distress caused by external circumstances. It may be a financial crisis, a relational crisis, something on the outside, your heart is breaking, tension is at an all time high, when life gets hard.

He's talking about this in light of what we just covered. v. 12 *"Above all, my brothers, do not swear".* When you're under tension, that's when you're tempted to swear. When you have distress in your life you have two alternatives -- swear or prayer. v. 13 or v. 12. You can pray about your problems -- your financial conditions if that's creating stress in your life.

Right underneath this he says, *"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."* Have you noticed that life is a series of alternations between high and low, feast to famine, problem to joy? The Bible says, *"Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice"*.

A lot of people are up and a lot of people are down. Recognize there's situations in life when you're down and when you're down you pray. When you're happy, live it to the hilt. Some people are afraid that if they Really enjoy what God is doing then He's going to zap them with a bummer. If I think it's great, then the bottom is bound to fall out. It's too good! They're afraid to pray, they're afraid to rejoice! James says it's valid to be happy.

2. When I'm hurting physically, I ought to pray.

v. 14-15 *"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven."*

The word "sick" in Greek, literally means "without strength". You are

totally wasted, fatigued, bedridden, unable to work. Not just acid indigestion or postnasal drip. This guy has a serious illness here that is keeping him from actually working. It's the word most frequently used for illness. It's the same word describing Lazarus. When Lazarus got sick, he died. And the same word to describe Dorcas, and she died. And the same word that describes the man at the pool of Bethesda who sat there for years and years and didn't have enough energy to get up and get into the pool. He's talking about a serious illness here. When you're beyond the help of a doctor, you pray. The elders of the church are to come and pray over him and anoint him with oil.

3. When I'm hurting spiritually.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

In Jesus' day and in many places today it is taught that all sickness is a result of sin. If you are ill, then supposedly you had some hidden sin in your life. If you confessed and still were sick then you still had some other hidden sin. Jesus blew that idea out of the water in John 9 where he said to the man who had been born blind that nobody sinned. I think this is a very unfair concept. You think of babies being born with birth defects -- obviously that baby hasn't sinned. We live in a fallen world and part of that

problem is there are hurts and problems.
On the other hand, Jesus did teach that a lot of the sickness we bring on our lives we do bring upon
ourselves. If I don't follow God's principles, my body is going to find out about it. If I don't take care
of my body, eat right, sleep right, exercise right, then all kinds of ailments will come upon me. If I don't
listen to God's word where it says *"Don't be anxious about anything, but pray about everything"*
and I worry, fret, get anxious and I get an ulcer, then I'm to blame for it. If I allow resentment to build
up in my life... doctors say it's not so much what you eat but what's eating you that makes the difference
... resentment can take its toll in your life and it makes a big difference. If I don't trust God and I allow
these things to come into my life there will be sin.

WHO CAN PRAY?
Some people think you have to be a spiritual giant to pray and get those kinds of answers. "I could
never pray and see somebody healed" or "I could never pray and see a financial miracle". Many
Christians feel inferior. James uses Elijah as an illustration. *"Elijah was a man just like us. He*
prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain on the land for three and a half years. He
prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops." I Kings 19. This is
after the big god contest on Mt. Carmel. He runs to the other side of the desert and goes through a fit
of depression and prays, "God, kill me. I'm so depressed." He wasn't afraid of 400 prophets of Baal
but he runs from a woman named Jezebel. In that passage -- the first 10 verses -- Elijah demonstrated

fear, resentment, guilt, anger, loneliness and worry. Now you know why it says, “Elijah was a man just
like us.” We have anger, fear, resentment, worry, loneliness.
The lesson of Elijah's life is you don't have to be perfect to pray. You don't have to be perfect to see
answers to your prayers. It's for ordinary people. I Kings 18, Elijah got alone with God and humbled
himself praying for rain. It says he prayed seven times. He was persistent. He would not give up. One
day a little cloud formed in the sky and he said, “It's going to be a gusher!” The rains came and flooded
the place.
God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things through prayer.

HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY?

I want to review four conditions for praying effectively that James mentions in his book.

1. I must ask. That sounds simple but in a lot of our prayers we never ask for anything. We say
"Thank you for..." and "Bless..." and that's it. We never pray specifically. The more specific your
prayers are the greater you're going to be blessed in the answer. When I was in college I taped a huge
sheet of butcher paper up on the wall. It had four columns: Date, Prayer Request, Promise to base my
prayers on, Answer and Date. That was a real faith building time in my life. I saw God answer in little
things and I saw him answer in big things. I trust Him for great things. James 4;2 *”You do not have
because you do not ask.”* Be specific. Throw away all your cliches. I love to hear new Christians
pray because they don't know all the language, and they're so honest. It's refreshing. Kay and I often
write down the prayers our kids pray. They say the most honest and genuine things that are really

meaningful.
2. Have the right motive. *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* If you're going to ask in prayer, make sure your motives are right. Not for selfishness but for a genuine reason -- the glory of God.
3. Clean life. *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* James 5:16 . Circle "righteous". If you're a Christian you are righteous. We're not talking about perfection. We're talking about righteousness. Righteousness is your standing before God when you became a believer. It has nothing to do with your perfection. If God only answered the prayers of perfect people, how many prayers would get answered? None. But God does want us to have a clean life. Psalm 66:18, David said, *"If I hide [regard, conceal] iniquity [sin] in my heart then the Lord will not hear."* If I am willfully and knowingly doing something I know is displeasing to God and say, "God, I'm going to continue doing this but, by the way, help me out." It's like saying "Dad, will you loan me the keys to the car, but I'm never going to do a single thing you ask." We need to have a clean life before Him.
Proverbs 28:9 *"He that turneth his back from the hearing of the law, even his prayers are an abomination."* Isaiah 59:2 *"Your sins have separated you between you. Your God has hid His face so He cannot hear."*
4. Ask in faith. Expect an answer. James 1:6 *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt..."* When you come to God, believe that He wants to answer your prayer. Trust Him. Don't

doubt. Really believe.

How important is your prayer life to you? I struggle with this more than any other area in my life -- this area of being consistent in prayer. I talk to the Lord all the time, but I don't really have the prayer life I want to have. I'm never satisfied with it. I want to know Him in a deeper way. I want our church to be a miracle. I want it only to be explained by the fact that God did it. I want our church to be an embarrassment to the devil. I want people to look at our church and say, "Only God could have done that."