



If you were asked to give a description of a Christian, what would you say?
Today we are reminded that followers of Jesus are to be people of prayer, purity, & purpose.

What role does prayer play in your life...for REAL? Do you only call on God when you NEED something? Or do you talk to God throughout the day, in the good times & the bad times?

- ☀️ **Joe Dallas** "Commit to daily prayer as well because holiness without prayer is as unthinkable as swimming without water. Read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and you'll see He set aside time for prayer. He was and is God incarnate, yet He felt the need and desire to commune with His heavenly Father through prayer, publicly and privately."¹
- ☀️ **Leonard Ravenhill** "No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

CATCH THE CONTEXT James/Jacob is writing to Jewish believers, some of which had likely scattered because of the persecution they were facing. Jacob opened his writing telling them to be patient in trials, knowing that this testing of faith produces endurance & maturity (1:2-3).

Praying in Suffering & Celebration

James 5:13 (ESV) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him **pray**. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing **praise**.

Why would a person **pray** when **suffering**? It's simple. God hears. Why should a person **sing praises** when they are in **good spirits**? It's simple. God hears. We are to approach God with both in our suffering and celebration. Jacob (AKA James) was known for his prayer life.

- ☀️ **Eusebius** (ancient Christian historian) wrote about Jacob: "*his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people.*"²

So it is that in all things, in the good times and in the bad times, through the suffering and celebration, one **Description of a Christian is a person who PRAYS**.

Asking for Physical Healing

James 5:14-15a (ESV) Is anyone among you **sick**? Let him call for the **elders** of the church, and let them **pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**.¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

Once again, believers are reminded to lean on God and his people during the difficult days that will come. In our day, how quick are we to run to the doctor BEFORE we run to the Great Physician. This is something **King Asa** had been guilty of.

2 Chronicles 16:12 (ESV) In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease **he did not seek the LORD**, but sought help from physicians.

¹ Dallas, Joe (2013-07-01). *Five Steps to Breaking Free from Porn* (p. 37). Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

² Kirsopp Lake trans., Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 1, 2.23 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 170, 171.

This is not to say we shouldn't seek out physicians who God has given the wisdom & medicines to heal. **Luke**, the Gospel writer & associate of the apostle Paul, was a **physician** by trade (see Col. 4:14). Certainly there was less medical knowledge & less legitimate treatment options than in our day. But in our times of scientific knowledge, it is EASY to lean on pills, treatments, & physicians without ever seeking the God who heals & His people who pray.

And so it was then, and should be more often today, that those who are sick would call on the elders to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

WHY OIL? Olive oil served many uses in Biblical times and places. Look what that disciples of Jesus did when He sent them out to minister.

Mark 6:12-13 (ESV): So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and **anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.**

Although **oil** was used to maintain health, this oil didn't contain a miracle cure. Instead, the **oil represented the presence of God**. (When like David were anointed with oil this represented the presence of God who had made them king.) Just as the prophet anointing the king was simply a servant anointing on behalf of God, so the elders are to anoint **in the name of the Lord**.

James 5:14-15a (ESV) Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, **anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

The oil represents the Presence and authority of Jesus!

But is this a guaranteed promise that God will always heal those who ask? Some would say, "That's what James says, isn't it?"

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:15)

If that's the promise then we have a problem, because not all people have been healed. Either 1) God's promises can't be trusted 2) we don't have enough faith 3) If God chooses to heal it will be in response to the **prayer of faith**.

But here's the reality in all of Scripture. People die. Some of the most godly people we've known, even after being prayed over & anointed, have died. God CAN heal and we should ASK Him to. But God does not always heal immediately nor miraculously.

In all things we pray for the Lord's will to be accomplished, not ours (see James 4:15). We remember that God CAN and HAS healed before. We also remember that we have **biblical examples where God chooses NOT to heal quickly** or at all. Sometimes He even heals though medicines.

- Despite working beside the apostle Paul who was able to heal many people, **Epaphroditus**, became deathly sick and wasn't immediately healed (Phil. 2:25-27).
- Paul had to leave **Trophimus**, another brother who had been traveling with him, because he was "ill". (2 Timothy 4:20)
- Paul told **Timothy**, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." (1 Timothy 5:23 ESV). Why not just anoint him, heal him, & be done with it?

Physical sickness often has positive spiritual results, humbling us and causing us to seek God's presence and God's people.

☀ **Kent Hughes** *"The miseries of illness can open avenues of grace as they help clear away the traffic which has stalled its flow."*³

Physical healing is something we can ASK God for and believe He can do. Further, we can approach God for **Spiritual Healing**.

Asking for Spiritual Healing

James 5:15b-16 (ESV) ¹⁵ And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, **confess your sins to one another** and **pray for one another, that you may be healed**. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Have you ever done something you struggled to believe God could forgive? The person who approaches God humbly doesn't try to camouflage sin, but instead wants to be fully forgiven. Jacob encourages believers to do something that is foreign to many of us - **"confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed"**. This is NOT talking about going to a priest to confess sin, but going to **one another**, trustworthy brothers & sisters, who will help you through it and pray for you.

Why confess your sins to one another?

Sin brings isolation & drives Christians apart instead of together.

☀ **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *"Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him."*⁴

But confession of sin brings a "healthy humiliation" that "pulls down the barrier of hypocrisy and allows the free flow of grace in the community."⁵

*"Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins the old man does a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother."*⁶

Confessing sin & praying for one another results in spiritual healing, & a further desire for purity.

The Description of a Christian is a person of PRAYER, PURITY, & PURPOSE.

QUESTION: Does that describe YOU?

QUESTION: When is the last time YOU confessed sin to another brother/sister?

If you haven't, WHY HAVEN'T you? Have you stopped sinning in that area; have no one you can trust?; didn't know you should...OR because you are prideful?

One of the reasons we are in HABIT SIN is because we have no one to ask us the hard questions, help us live holy, & pray for us daily.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 255.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 112.

⁵ Hughes, 265.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, p. 114.

3 Steps to Accountable Relationships

1. Ask the Lord for same-sex friends to pray & share with.
 2. Make time to meet every week. (Find something fun to do together.)
 3. Develop questions to discuss & be the first to answer. * examples on last page
- This results in spiritual healing as God hears the prayers of the **righteous**. (v.16)

James 5:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed fervently** that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then **he prayed** again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Jacob gives us an example of the prayer life of one of the greatest OT prophets, **Elijah**. Yet Jacob doesn't point out the difference between Elijah and his audience - a great prophet vs. you small insignificant folks. Nope. Instead he says **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours**.

Elijah had a sin nature too. He wasn't perfect, yet **he prayed fervently**. (Grk "he prayed with prayer" using a Hebrew idiom to show intensity).⁷

God heard and answered. Right after the Mount Carmel challenge, where God lit up the sacrifice and Elijah had the false prophets killed, he told wicked King Ahab that rain was on the way (1 Kings 18:41). Before there was a cloud in the sky, Elijah went up the mountain again spent time in prayer and sent his servant to look for a raincloud...7 times! Finally, there was a small cloud and a heavy rainstorm came (1 Kings 18:42-45).

That's a great story. There's only one problem. I'M NOT ELIJAH! It's not that the PRAYER is powerful, nor is the PRAY-ER powerful. **It's the GOD who hears and answers prayers WHO IS POWERFUL!!!**

And now, somehow, he is USING US to pray for people, to help them during physical & spiritual sickness, and to give us HIS PURPOSE of impacting others for eternity!!!

FEET2FAITH

1. Would you **make time to PRAY throughout this week**? THANK GOD & ASK GOD throughout the day.
2. **Walk in PURITY**. Run from sin & run to someone who will hold you accountable to celebrate w/ you.
3. **Ask God to use you and point to your PURPOSE!**

Accountability Questions (by Rod Handley from *Character That Counts*⁸):

* discuss specific details as you answer questions

1. Have you spent daily time in God's Word and in prayer?
2. Have you flirted, or had lustful attitudes, tempting thoughts, or exposed yourself to any explicit materials which would not glorify God?
3. Have you been completely above reproach in your financial dealings?
4. Have you pursued the hearts of your wife/husband and kids?
5. Have you done your 100% best in your job, school, etc.?
6. Have you told any half truths or outright lies, putting yourself in a better light to those around you?
7. Have you shared the Gospel with an unbeliever this week?
8. Have you taken care of your body through daily physical exercise & proper eating/sleeping habits?
9. Have you allowed any person or circumstance to rob you of your joy?
10. Have you lied on any of your answers?

⁷ Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

⁸ <https://blog.lifeway.com/leadingmen/2016/03/02/accountability/>