

# THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER OF FAITH

(James 5:13–20)

## WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS DO?

Respond to suffering, sickness, and sin with prayerful intercession before God; actively intervene in the lives of fellow believers. Sin may become a cause of sickness or suffering, but not always. When sin is involved, confession is expected. A *prayer of faith* proves powerful in all cases.

### 1) Christians should... pray in every circumstance, and when needed, confess their sins when facing suffering and sickness (v. 13–18)<sup>1</sup>

- Christians should respond to all situations of life with **prayer** (v. 13).
- Christians should respond to **severe sickness** with both prayer and ritual anointing with oil (v. 14–15a).
- If the sickness results from sin (often it is not), then Christians should **confess** their sin to receive physical and spiritual healing (v. 15b–16a).
- The prayers of righteous people are **powerful**, like Elijah's (v. 16b–18).

### 2) Intervene in the lives of fellow believers who are sinning (v.19–20)<sup>1</sup>

- God can use you as His **means** of intervention to turn back someone who has strayed from God's Word; such godly sorrow and repentance save that person from the consequences of possible apostasy (vv. 19–20a). Do not look the other way. Christians are expected to intervene.
- Successful intervention can bring **forgiveness** even when that person has committed many sins (v. 20b).

## APPLICATION:

- Christians should be concerned for the sick (spiritually and physically); prayers for healing are part of the normal work of the church; healing occurs within the context of the Christian community; spiritual health *always* comes before physical well-being.<sup>2</sup> Pray for His will to be done.
- We gain God's wisdom by praying (1:5) and we pray believing God can and will answer our prayers (1:6–8).
- When we lack necessities of life, we ask God for them. We check our motives and persist in prayer (4:2–3). Sometimes, we ask for things that are simply *not* God's will (4:15).
- God often bestows gifts when we haven't prayed (1:16-18). But He has chosen to reserve some good gifts contingent upon us asking (4:2).

Thus, we should persevere in prayer, without ceasing! It is appropriate in every circumstance of life, especially when we suffer (5:13–15).

- Prayers of confession when we sin lead to forgiveness and restoration (5:15–16). So, strive to develop a lifestyle of confession relative to the offense (private sin private confession; public sin public confession).
- Prayers of the righteous for other people prove effective and powerful (5:16-18), including prayers for restoring those who have wandered away spiritually or sinned (5:19–20). Offer prayers of faith fervently.
- Christians should also prayerfully seek to bring the wayward and lost back into the flock; they should also forgive others knowing that love covers a multitude of sins (Jas. 5:20; Pr. 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8).

## Several things to take note of:<sup>3</sup>

- Although Christ makes it possible to go directly to God for forgiveness, confessing our sins to others still has a place in the life of the church.
- This means that if we have sinned against an individual, we must ask that person to forgive us or we are sinfully in the wrong.
- If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly.
- If we need loving support as we struggle with sin, we should confess the sin to those who are able to provide that support.
- If after confessing a private sin to God we still don't feel his forgiveness, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer and hear him or her assure us of God's pardon or provide further godly counsel.

## James 5:13-20 (*Commands in italics*)

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| <p>Is anyone suffering among you?<br/><i>Let them pray.</i></p> <p>Is anyone happy?<br/><i>Let them sing praise.</i></p> <p>Is someone sick among you?<br/><i>They should call together the elders of the church</i> and <i>they should pray for that one</i>, anointing the person with oil in the name of the Lord.</p> <p>And <i>the prayer of faith will save the sick</i>, and <i>the Lord will raise them up</i>; and if they have committed sins, <i>they will be forgiven them.</i></p> <p>Therefore <i>confess [your] sins to one another</i> and <i>pray on behalf of one another</i> so that you may be healed.</p> <p>In many ways, <b>a prayer of a righteous person is strong</b> when it is exercised.</p> | <p>Elijah was a man with the same nature as us, and <b>he prayed fervently</b> that it would not rain, and <b>it did not rain</b> upon the earth for three years and six months.</p> <p>And <b>again, he prayed</b>, and <b>the heavens gave rain</b> and <b>the earth produced its fruit.</b></p> <p>My brothers and sisters, if someone among you should stray from the truth [God's Word] and someone should restore them, <b>let that person know</b> that the one returning a sinner from the error of their ways saves their soul from death and covers a multitude of sins.</p> |
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<sup>1</sup> Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, vol. 16, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson, "Healing in the Epistle of James," 344–45. For an expanded and updated treatment, cf. idem, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 236–60.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *James*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1992).