

## A Christian Description

If you were asked to give a Description of a Christian, what would you say?

Attends church regularly. Church Member. Lives in a “Christian” nation. Serves those less fortunate than themselves. Is a good person. Gives \$\$ to the work of the church. More to it than that?

Personally accepted Jesus as their Savior. Trusts in the death & resurrection of Jesus *alone* for forgiveness of their sins. Holy Spirit lives in you. Evidence of life - change consistent w/faith in Jesus Christ.

Christian: “Belonging to the party of Christ” or “follower of Christ”. First called Christians in Antioch b/c their activity, speech and *behavior* were like those of Jesus Christ. Would people say that about you and me? About The Bridge Church as a whole?

James says it should be evident to those around us. In this passage he gives us some targets to consistently shoot for that will change our lives (and the lives of others) identify us or mark us as followers of Christ. Show that we have a faith in Jesus.

**Faith That Works is about Progress, not Perfection.**

It’s about growth, about taking steps forward. Not perfection but daily progress.

**A Christ - Follower Consistently Pursues Prayer, Purity and Purpose.**

A Christ – Followers most Powerful Resource is Connecting with God in Prayer.

Have you ever had a prayer answered? I mean where you prayed something would happen and it happened? Was there anything special about the way you prayed that prayer? How did it make you feel when it was answered?

As children, many of us learned to bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands – not a bad posture for prayer, but is it required for God to hear us? Some of us pray at certain times of the day, grace before meals, some recite the Lord’s prayer or follow it as an outline. Some seek quiet places & solitude. Others pray while driving.

So, how would you define prayer? Are there certain ways we need to pray? Prayer is essentially to commune w/God. So, prayer is a conversation with a great God who loves us.

James 5:12 (NIV) **Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned.**

Translation. Don’t use elaborate vows to prove the truth of what you say. “I swear to God”. Don’t use religious language to impress others. Just be a person who is honest. Say “yes” or “no” & mean it.

James 5:13 – 14 (NIV) **Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.**

James seems to give us a menu. For different situations here's what you do. In trouble – pray. Happy? Sing songs of praise (prayers). Sick? Call the elders of the church to pray over you.

**Catch the Context:** James is writing to Jewish believers in Jesus who are scattered all over b/c of persecution. Whatever is happening in your life, prayer should be the *first response* of a follower of Christ. Default position. Not an afterthought but a forethought.

Why would a person pray when in trouble/adversity/suffering? God hears. Why sing praises when they are happy? God hears. We are to approach God *both* in our times of trouble and good times.

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? If you're a follower of Christ, does pursuing prayer describe you?

**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."

Prayer should be the **DEFAULT SETTING** for a Christ – follower. It should be our go-to. Ex. Like Me & Chick-Fil-A. A Follower of Christ consistently pursues Prayer, Purity & Purpose. *Does that describe you in your prayer life?* Progress, not Perfection.

James 5:14 – 15 (NIV) **Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.**

Once again, followers of Jesus Christ are reminded to lean on God and his people during the difficult days that will come to us all. An **act of faith** to call the elders. *Why?*

Elders: Local leaders of the church. 1 Peter 5:2 (NLT) Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Examples of godliness, righteous and faith.

2 Chronicles 16:12 (NLT) **In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a serious foot disease. Yet even with the severity of his disease, he did not seek the LORD's help but turned only to his physicians.**

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 (NLT) **So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God.<sup>13</sup> And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.**

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 5:15 (NIV) **<sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.**

But is that a guaranteed promise of healing if the people praying are faithful enough? That's what James says, isn't it? If that's the promise then we have a problem, b/c not all people have been healed. The phrase "make well" can mean physical or spiritual healing. Save the soul or temporarily save from sickness.

God will eventually heal all his children. Here or in heaven. Confess any sin. It *may* be in the way of your healing. Our faith doesn't *earn* God's healing. God is sovereign & God's healing is a gift. We can't ascribe a lack of faith to a lack of healing nor take credit that our strong faith was the cause of healing. Ultimately it is God's power that heals, not our faith. Faith is only the instrument, not the power itself.

What do you say to God when you're sick? Is this a time when you ignore God, or pay more attention to Him? Sickness often brings about a spiritual awakening. We beg God for healing. We promise to live better lives. We may even confess our sins. Often when we're sick we realize we have been praying out of routine and begin to once again pray out of faith that truly seeks after God. Physical sickness often has positive spiritual results, humbling us and causing us to seek God's presence and God's people.

James 5:16 (NIV) **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.**

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. James encourages believers to do something that is foreign to many of us - "confess your sins to each another and pray for each another so 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 isolates, steals intimacy & invites insecurity.** It 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."

**To Find Healing, Stop Concealing and Start Revealing.**

Whatever we won't bring out of the darkness dominates us. We are only as sick as our secrets. When we reveal sin instead of conceal sin it breaks the power of sin over us.

When is the last time you confessed sin to another brother or sister in Christ? Is it b/c: Stopped sinning in that area? No one you can trust? Didn't know you should? Pride?

One of the reasons we are in habitual sin is b/c we have no one to ask us the uncomfortable, difficult questions, help us live holy lives and pray for us daily.

3 Steps to Accountable Relationships:

Ask God for same gender friends to pray & share with

Make time weekly or bi – weekly to meet

Develop questions to discuss and be transparent & honest

This results in *spiritual healing* as God hears the prayers of the righteous.

A Follower of Christ consistently pursues Prayer, Purity & Purpose. Does that describe you in the area of **PURITY**? Progress, not Perfection.

In case you wonder if the prayers of others matter in your life or your prayer matters in theirs, James gives us an example of one of the greatest O.T. prophets, Elijah. He doesn't point out the difference between Elijah and his audience – a great prophet vs. you small insignificant folk.

James 5:17 – 18 (NIV) **Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.**

He prayed earnestly or “he prayed with prayer” showing intensity. God heard and answered.

Problem. I'm not Elijah! That's where we misunderstand the point. Scripture says, “*Elijah was a human being, even as we are*”. He had a nature like you and me. He wasn't/isn't different for you/us!

It's not the **PRAYER** that is powerful, nor is the **PRAY-ER** powerful. It's **The God** who *hears* and *answers who is powerful!* And that God is giving us a **PURPOSE**; using us to pray for people, to help them during physical & spiritual sickness.

A Follower of Christ consistently pursues Prayer, Purity & Purpose. Does that describe you? Is your **PURPOSE** to pray for others? Faith That Works is about Progress, not Perfection. A Christ – Follower Consistently Pursues Prayer, Purity and Purpose. Does that describe you? In which area do you need to grow the most?

## Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?
2. Share about a time God answered a specific prayer request. How did it make you feel? How did it help grow your faith?
3. Why do you think prayer is often a difficult habit, even for people who believe in the power of prayer and the presence of a loving Heavenly Father who hears their prayers? What practices have you found effective for developing *focus* & faithfulness in your prayer life?
4. Read James 5:12 – 14 How would you summarize James final instructions about controlling your speech? What message is James trying to convey to us about prayer? What steps does James say a Christ – follower should take who needs God's healing? Why?
5. Read James 5:15. Is this a guaranteed promise that God will heal all who ask? Why or why not? Share some examples in scripture of people that Jesus healed. Are there examples of people He didn't heal? What two meanings can the phrase "the Lord will raise them up" mean? What part does faith play in healing? Does our faith *earn* our healing? Where does healing ultimately come from?
6. Read James 5:16. What does James say is the result of confessing our sin to another brother or sister in Christ? Does that come naturally for you or is it more of a struggle for you? Why? What are some negative results of sin when we try to hide it? (Isolate, steal intimacy, invite insecurity). How can developing a trusting relationship with someone of the same gender help us break the destructive power of sin? Why do you think this is difficult, even for Christ – followers?
7. James says, "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective". When have you seen this to be true in your life? Do you believe part of your purpose as a Christ – follower is to pray for others? Share the why behind your answer.
8. In verse 17, James states that "Elijah was a human being, even as we are". How does this encourage you when it comes to praying for God to do great things in your life or the lives of others? Do you believe your prayers are powerful and effective? Why or why not?
9. A Christ – follower consistently pursues **Prayer** (our Default), **Purity** (confessing sin & accountable relationships) & **Purpose** (praying & believing God to do great things in your life and the lives of others). Which of these is the most consistent for you? Which of these do you most need to trust God to help you grow in? What steps can you take to see that happen? Remember Faith that Works is about **Progress**, not **Perfection**.

Close in prayer.

## Accountability Questions by Rod Handley of *Character That Counts*

\*I have added a few things and they are in *italics*. - Steve

### For Women

1. Have you spent regular time in prayer? *What prayer needs are pressing on you?*
2. Have your thoughts been pure? Have you resisted lustful, envious thoughts or exposed yourself to explicit materials?
3. How do you feel about how you've handled personal, family and/or business finances?
4. What three relationships have you nurtured most?
5. What has made it difficult to do your 100% best in the different roles in your life?
6. Have your words built up or tore down others or self?  
Have you exposed yourself or contributed to gossip?  
Have you been committed to your words?  
Have you put yourself in a better light to those around you?
7. Do you feel you missed any opportunities to talk to people about the Lord?
8. Have you taken care of your body through daily physical exercise and proper eating/sleeping habits?
9. Which fruit of the Spirit have you had the hardest time living? Why?
10. Have you left anything hidden in answering these questions?

### For Men

1. Have you spent daily time in the Scriptures and in prayer? *What scripture challenged you this week?*
2. Have you had any flirtatious or 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 spent quality relationship time with family and friends?
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 and proper eating/sleeping habits?

9. Have you allowed any person or circumstance to rob you of your joy?
10. Have you lied to us on any of your answers today?