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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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### **James 5: 13-18: The Power of Prayer!**

**General idea:** What are we to do *first* in all situations? Is it to complain? Argue with one another? Be stressed? NO! We are called to pray, as prayer not only sets the tone for our behaviors and insights, but it also brings Christ into the picture with us more powerfully and effectively. It is not about getting what we want, as we may get a yes, or a no, or maybe a call to wait for the right timing. This passage is a series of calls to prayer. We are all indeed called to prayer; it is not a talent, a special ability, or a spiritual gift. It is not for certain occasions or with certain postures. Rather, it is the communication through which we encounter our loving, living Lord! Prayer is a call, and for this call, we need to know the veracity and importance of it.

These are not necessarily formulas, but encouragement that will lead us to pursue God! When we seek Him, we are ready, along with others, to engage in the actions of appeal and request to God for people who are in need and sick. We can pray for forgiveness, for our nation, show our gratitude—even pray for the weather. Thus, in all things, we are to be both in personal prayer and collective prayer with other believers. Prayer is not just a means to get what we request; it is the means to line us up with God, His precepts, and His presence. Prayer can meet all things and needs; prayer can and must be a significant part of anything we will ever face in life, from the trivial to things of utmost importance! We can have confidence that our prayers are heard and answered. No matter what we need or face, we have Christ! Thus, we must preface, surround, and empower all that we do with prayer. It is never to be an afterthought; rather, it must be our first thought, our principle action, and our primary plan.

**Vs. 13-15:** Prayer is not just an exercise we do. Rather, it is the active communication we have with God; it is the most important act for us in any matter or endeavor. Prayer is not about our will; rather, it is a means of seeking His (Matt. 6:33). Prayer does not just prepare us for ministry and service; prayer *is* our ministry and service. Prayer is not just a means of preparing us for the encounters and battles of life; it *is* the battle! Prayer is more about being the greatest work we can do than about the results we receive from it! Remember, our obedience is what is important, not how others respond to us. We are even called to bless those unreasonable people, and we do that, as we mature, by remaining true to His Lordship. You cannot be responsible for how others respond and treat you when you are acting in godly character (Romans 12:14-21).

- *Suffering* here means “in distress,” and includes physical sickness, being stressed out, or having emotional and/or personal problems. To the person in

this situation, hope seems to be missing and relief is absent, but when we come to them, we bring the hope and relief!

- *Sing songs* means praising our Lord, in unity, with a willing, loving heart. This is an aspect of real worship and music, which is never a show; rather, it is a response of our love giving praise. We, as a congregation, are the performers, and Christ is the audience. Real, authentic worship is to be inspired by who Christ is and what He is doing in us. It is not about form or function or type; it is about our hearts showing our love to Him. Prayer and worship share the same heart and attitude (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:12-17).
- *Sick*. The call for us here is to engage them with love and care; it is not about the healing, although, whenever possible, we are to seek the best and continual medical attention. It is more about showing our love coming from His love. Also, the call for the sick person is to make sure others know they are sick so others can respond.
- *Elders* are the people selected to be in charge of the local church, whose call is to train, care for, and administer His love and precepts to the rest of the congregation. They must have the qualities of Christ working in them before they can help others. The connection is that the elders should be the primary ministers to the people of the church (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:2-7; 5:15; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- *Anointed with oil* has two meanings: “the healing power of God,” a call, and also to “seek medical attention.” It is not a ceremonial procedure, although it can also infer actually applying oil to the person and praying over them. We are called both to pray and to seek medical attention (Isa. 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34).
- *Power of faith* refers to trusting in God and then being faithful towards our intercessory duty to others. It does not mean a “special power” as some have proclaimed; rather, it is a call to action to show our Christian community and faith displayed in our care toward one another. Yes, God does heal today, but healing is not guaranteed or even normative. How we respond and learn is what matters to God over all else, even an actual healing. If your body is healed and your mind and heart are not centered on him, what good is it; it is merely temporary and of no eternal use.
- *Committed sins*. James is not saying all sickness is from sin, as some Jewish Rabbis thought; harboring resentment and unforgiveness actually deteriorate the body and mind. Seeking forgiveness is very restorative to the soul and body! Sometimes, though, God can cause us to be sick to get us out of sin, as it is far better to be stooped by sickness than to create a much worse environment for ourselves and others. Sin is the biggest barrier between us

and God, and prevents God's work being received by us. Confession breaks these barriers (1 Cor. 11:30; Phil. 2:25-30).

What is prayer? It is receiving the amazing, redemptive work of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, so His power and purpose flow through us and into others. Prayer is spending time and talking with God, expressing our heart to Him, and interceding on behalf of others. It is meant to be exciting, powerful, and fulfilling. Just like a phone conversation, prayer is not a one way communication. God will speak to us, not as a burning bush, but in quiet ways; so, we must also listen. And, of course, always compare to Scripture what you think He said, as He will never contradict Himself. Then, you will be able to distinguish between your desires and His precepts. There is no need we can ever face that prayer cannot meet; there is never a problem we go through that prayer cannot answer!

**Vs. 16-18:** Ask God, be real, be honest, be yourself, and make sure your motives are right. We are never to seek to manipulate God to get our way, just as we are not to do so with others. In this spirit, we can come to one another and seek accountability and reconciliation. We can confess and be on guard with sin, so it stops and does not fester or escalate. And, as Elijah demonstrated to us, always remember that a righteous person is a praying person; we cannot do anything of meaning or significance for our Lord unless we are a person and a church of prayer!

- *Confess.* We are called to be accountable to one another, to state what we are going through and struggling with to someone in confidence who will listen and help guide us by His Word. It is not about going to a pastor or priest, but to God directly, and with accountability, to another trusted person, small group, or mentor. We cannot do the Christian life by ourselves; it is not a spectator or an individual sport! Christianity is not for *lone rangers*, it is for community!
- *Righteous man* means a person who is rooted in his or her faith to Christ and has a growing prayer life that also shows up in his or her behavior.
- *Elijah*, in 1 Kings 18, was a miracle worker. James uses him as an inspiration and incentive to the power and prominence we have available to us. Elijah represents the "everyman," who, by his prayer life, was powerfully used by God (1 Kings 17:1; 18: 1, 41-46; 1 Sam. 12:17-18)!

Many misguided Christians will say to another Christian who is ill or going through troubles, that he or she does not have enough faith or that he or she has unconfessed sin in his or her life and that is why the sickness has come; then they use this passage to back up their uncaring and insensitive claims. But, this is not what James is saying! It is not about the healing; it is about showing the love and care of our Lord. Making statements such as these does otherwise, and misses the call of the Scriptures! If you are earnestly praying, and perhaps are

frustrated that you have not received an answer or the answer you desire, remember: while you are waiting, God is working (Matt. 21:22; John 14:14)!

Prayer is our primary means of communication with our Lord. It is also the bond that builds community, churches, and marriages, as it synergizes and brings out God's love! It is a marvel and a wonder that we, as created human beings, can obtain direct communication with God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Prayer shows us His love and concern for us just in allowing us to make our presence and requests known, and His even further, unfathomable love in that He earnestly hears us and gives us an answer and intervention! Prayer is precious; it is not to be a half-hearted endeavor, or just an empty routine, an unctuous ceremony, or a meaningless ritual. Prayer is not about the recitation of words, nor is it about posture, place, or expression usage; it is an outpouring of the posture of our heart to His. Prayer is an expression of our connection of love for what Christ has done for us in giving each of us this precious relationship with God. It shows our love and dependence on Him. It is a primary avenue for us to learn and grow in Him, and to be better equipped in life to touch others in His Name. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependency, as any real growth must involve the surrender of our will to His Will. Prayer pulls us up by the roots and plants us further in His presence and will! Beware! We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can live our Christian life without prayer, as one could be married or have a child and never have communication with that spouse or child. It could be done, but the relationship would be absent and soon would be bankrupt; we cannot *do* life on our own. Even if we could (and many Christians seem to), God just might let you; this would really be the time for fear and dropping to our knees!

Prayer is not just about what our own needs are. It is about putting our lives and experiences in Him, sharing our days and lives, both in times of urgency and times of happiness, and bringing others to our thoughts and into our prayers. Continual and effective prayer will build our relationship with God. We will realize that He is in charge of all that happens in our lives, and that we are in His Hands. How we interact with Christ as Lord and respond to others is rooted in how we communicate. Our spiritual growth and how we can connect to God with an effectual relationship is determined by how effective our prayer life is. It can be put this way: all we do in life is based on our ability to communicate—and our principle communication is to our loving Lord!

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?

3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. What do you do when you are facing hardships? How is prayer a part of these experiences?
2. What is prayer to you? How much of your prayers involve listening to God? How can you do this in a better way?
3. What are we to do first in all situations? What causes you to go first to the art of complaining or arguing, or be stressed?
4. How does prayer set a tone for us in our behaviors and insights? How can prayer help your church or relationships?
5. Why do some Christians feel that prayer is all about getting what we want? How do you feel about that? What can be done to show people the primary purpose of prayer?
6. How does prayer become the means to line us up with God? What can you do to make sure your motives are right with prayer?
7. Do you believe that prayer can meet all the things and needs that you will ever face? Do you have the confidence that your prayers are heard and are answered? How can you have more confidence in prayer?
8. How does trusting in God and being faithful help you in being effective towards your intercessory duty to others?
9. How do you feel about people claiming they can heal? Have you seen or experienced it? I definitely believe that God heals today and have seen amazing things! However, did you know that in Scripture, healing is not guaranteed or even normative; it is about how we respond and learn that

matters to God over all else—even an actual healing? How can this fact strengthen your resolve and faith in Christ?

10. How does harboring resentment and unforgiveness deteriorate your body and mind? Can you give an example?
11. How does knowing that God can cause us to be sick to get us out of sin keep you motivated in the right direction?
12. What can you do to make your prayer life more time invested, more exciting, more powerful, and more fulfilling?

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