

James 5:13-18 Series: Faith Works

Message #12: Answered\Unanswered

In his book, *When God Answers Prayer*, author Bob Russell shares the story about a small Kentucky town that had two churches and one whiskey distillery. Members of both churches often complained that the distillery gave the little town a bad image. To make matters worse the owner of the distillery was an outspoken atheist. For years the church members had tried to shut down the distillery but their attempts were always unsuccessful. Some of the members got together and decided that the two churches should come together and hold a prayer meeting to ask God to help shut down the distillery.

The date was set and the church was filled with members of both churches. During the prayer time a terrible electrical storm was taking place. As they continued to pray a lightning bolt struck the distillery-setting it on fire and burning it to the ground. The following Sunday both churches had worship services centered on the power of prayer.

The week following the owner of the distillery was notified by the insurance adjusters that he would not receive compensation for the buildings because the fire was started by an act of God and that was excluded in the insurance policy.

The distillery owner was infuriated and decided to sue both churches and their members claiming that they had conspired with God to destroy his building and his business. In reply the churches denied that they had anything to do with the fire.

The judge who presided over the case opened with these words, "The thing I find most perplexing in this case is that we have a plaintiff, an atheist, who is professing his belief in the power of prayer, and the defendants, all faithful who is professing his belief in the power of prayer, and the church members, are denying the very same power.

Today we wrap up our series on James that we have been in for the past few weeks. It's a series we've entitled Faith Works.

We're going to take a look at the final few words that James has for us that focus on prayer. For many years churches held prayer meetings and while most Christians say they believe in prayer it is not really a powerful force in many of our lives. and because of that we don't pray very much. If we saw more power we would probably pray more often and we would probably do so with a sense of anticipation.

I think a lot of that is due to the fact that we're uncomfortable with and not sure what we are doing or supposed to be doing. Often times we want to echo the words of Jesus' disciples---Lord teach us to pray.

Let me state this right up front---I am no expert when it comes to prayer. I struggle daily to pray and to stay focused during my prayer time but fortunately we have a great expert who we have been learning some great stuff from over the past 4 - 6 weeks.

We can see throughout his entire book that prayer is of great importance to James. In chapter 1:5 he says, if you lack wisdom ask God. In chapter 4:2 he says, many of you don't have because you don't ask God. And in chapter 5 - this final paragraph of his writing he mentions prayer 7 different times as he talks about prayer that is powerful and effective.

The Greek word for effective, that James uses here, is where we get our word for energy. It carries with it the idea of an ingredient being added to something average that then turns it into something effective. Prayer can take the average Christian life and turn it into an effective and powerful life if we put it into practice.

So let's see what we can learn from James about prayer and how it can become an energizing force in our lives, the life of our church and in our world.

Grab your bible, or open up your app to James 5 and let's get after it. We'll begin in verse 13.

James starts out by saying is anyone among you in trouble? He should pray. Some great advice there isn't it? If anyone is in trouble-pray. But how often do we do that? You would think it would be an automatic response-- wouldn't you? But when most of us find ourselves in trouble how do we normally react?

A federal aviation inspector said when they listen to the final words of airline pilots, who are about to be involved in a crash, they often hear profanity being spewed around in the cock-pit. Many times the very last words that are preserved in that black box are not prayers but cursing. Because when faced with difficult situations people often revert to lifelong habits. What habits do you revert to when you are in trouble?

James tells us that we need to get in the habit of reaching out to God when we are in trouble. He's not just talking about life threatening situations although that's a good time to do it. He's also talking about the kinds of situations we find ourselves in on a daily basis.

For those who went back to school this past week or for those of you about to head off to college---you walk in to class and the teacher says pull out a sheet of paper and a pencil---and you forgot to review your notes ---it's time to pray. Lord Jesus---please come now! Been there-done that. I'd have the t-shirt if someone created it.

You find a strange knot or spot on your body---it's time to pray. Lord please don't let it be cancer.

You get a message from your boss that they want to meet with you at 4pm on Friday. It's time to pray. Lord let this meeting be positive regarding my employment.

Trouble can come in different sizes, shapes and forms. James said is anyone of you in trouble he should pray!

His next statement in this message reads: Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

Here's another form of prayer that I think we often don't think about- Singing. Most of the time when we think of prayer we think back to what we were taught as children at home or in a Sunday School classroom. Do you remember it? We bow our heads, we clasp our hands and we close our eyes! How many of you used to try and open one eye to see what everyone else was doing? Been there and don't that as well. But that is not the only way to pray.

Have you ever noticed how many of our songs are prayers-thanking God?

I will praise you in this storm, and I will lift my hands
That you are who you are no matter where I am,
And every tear I've cried you hold in your hand
You never left my side and though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm.

We don't use these songs in worship to kill time until everyone gets in and finds a seat or until we are ready for the sermon ---they are expressions of our heart. A desire to pray to him and express our joy because we are happy!

If you're happy, sing songs of praise. And when you sing those songs of praise be sure your face is showing it.

John Blanchard wrote: "When the world is on top of you, pray. And when you are on top of the world, pray."

In Acts 16 we read of the story of Paul & Silas being arrested for preaching the gospel. They were beaten, thrown into prison, and chained in their cell.

In verse 25 of that chapter we read these words: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them. They are praying because they were in trouble and they were singing songs of praise thanking God that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

What do you think went thru the minds of those other prisoners who were listening to them? These guys weren't moaning, groaning or cursing because of where they found themselves. No they considered it pure joy to have been found in this difficult of a situation so they prayed and sang to God.

Verse 26 says, "There was a violent earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison - the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

Paul & Silas prayed while in trouble and sang songs of praise to God & there was a power that flowed through that prison like never before and they were all released.

Then in verse 14 James writes: "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord."

The word 'sick' that James is referring to means extreme illness. James is talking about someone in this verse who is without strength to the point that they are incapacitated. They have to call for someone to come to them. The ones that James says they should call are the elders, the shepherds, the overseers of the local church. And when they are called they should pray and anoint with oil in the name of the Lord. Calling the elders to come and pray over those who can be healed from the extreme illness that they are battling.

Side note here, and in so doing I may step on a few toes, but did you notice that James puts the responsibility for this prayer taking place on the

shoulders of the one who is sick? I've often heard that people get upset, saying "no one came to see me, none of the elders or staff came to visit me or pray with me." And the question that runs through my mind is, "Did you call? Did you let anyone know?" Our team will come but we can't come if we don't know that something is going on.

A few weeks ago I told you about our Contact an Elder Card that we now have available in the lobby. If you have something going on and you want an elder to pray with you, talk with you or visit with you, help us out by taking a moment or two and completing a card. One of our leaders will follow up with you within a few days. If not the card, then please call the office and we can relay the message.

Back to verse 14. This verse creates some controversy as to whether this anointing with oil is medicinal or symbolic. If our elders are requested to meet with someone to pray with them they willingly go. I've been with them on a number of these requests in my time here. Sometimes the person will request an anointing with oil and sometimes one of the elders will make that suggestion and then one of our elders will take a drop of olive oil and place it on that person's forehead as a symbol of the presence of God's spirit and power during our prayer time.

Now the belief regarding the oil that is mentioned here by James was that it had more of a medicinal function.

Charles Swindoll wrote that the word used here means to apply or to rub something in to the skin. In Bible times, oil was used on one who was sick, for medicinal effects.

We see that happening in Luke 10 when the Samaritan poured oil onto the wounds of the man who was mugged by robbers.

James is not writing about ceremonial anointing here. What he called for was the best medical procedure in that day. Rubbing or massaging oil

into the body and praying were two of the best medical treatments they had in Bible times.

Translated into today's terminology oil represents antibiotics or other medications, surgery, therapy and so on.

James is not saying forget medical practice and rely solely on faith healing. He said when you are sick---you get the best medical treatment you can find by having the elders of your church come and pray and anoint you with oil.

And then in verse 15 we read: "...the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well and the Lord will raise him up." There will be power in that prayer.

Please understand this is not a magic formula that guarantees the physical healing of the person we are praying with every time we follow James instructions. If it did work like that people would never die, would they?

We know that Paul had the ability to heal those who were sick but not everyone that he prayed for received that healing. Paul tells Timothy in his letter to him that he left his friend sick in Miletus. I'm guessing that Paul earnestly prayed for his friends healing-wouldn't you?---but for whatever reason the healing didn't come about.

Those who promote that idea---that if you have enough faith and you are in a right relationship with God---that you will always be healed, deny both experience and scripture. I've been a part of this scenario that James describes for us. The sick person called for the elders. They anointed the individual with oil and yet the person seeking the prayed died within a few months.

And I have been a part of some powerful times of prayer where God did a miraculous thing and people were healed. This church family has been a

part of some powerful times of prayer and you have seen the power of God at work.

Just before I came to Capital City, Dave Carpenter suffered liver failure. The church family gathered around he and Pam during this very difficult time as Dave went through a liver transplant. Almost 30 years has passed since the transplant and still today Dave is a walking testimony to the power of prayer.

Twenty-six years ago Mike Rodgers was diagnosed with tumors all over his spine. He and Jackie had one son and she was pregnant with their second son. It was a scary time and Mike went through a ton of medical procedures, enduring some of the most intense radiation one person could endure, but I truly believe the reason he is here today is because of the power of prayer.

There are many more stories like this that I could share and there are just as many stories of people who prayed earnestly and diligently and yet their loved ones weren't healed.

Now James puts in a very important prerequisite concerning prayer that we need to look at. Back in verse 14, how does he tell us to pray? In the name of the Lord. That doesn't mean that we just pray in Jesus name---which is a good thing---but what it does mean is that we pray that the Lord's will be done.

How was it that Jesus taught his disciples to pray? Thy will be done. Your will be done, Father, on earth just as it is in heaven.

That's a tough way to pray isn't it? Your will. Not my will but your will. It's the correct way to pray. It's the best way to pray but it's also a tough way to pray.

We pray for the sick. We desperately want our family, our friend, our co-worker to be well . They want it as well. And we pray that God's power will

flow through them and that they will feel it but we surrender to God's will and we ask that He does what is best for them in Jesus' name.

Jesus struggled with that as well. It wasn't easy for him that night in the garden but then he remembered this wasn't about his will it was about his father's will and that is why when we pray we should pray like Jesus ... Lord not my will be done but yours.

I just mentioned one of the prerequisites that James says must accompany our prayers, but let me point out a few more. For you see I believe there are some conditions that we need to meet for prayer to be an effective tool in our lives.

#1) Faith. James says the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. A prayer offered with skepticism or done half-heartedly isn't going to have much power. James isn't saying when you pray that you have to be absolutely 100% confident that God is going to answer your prayer the way you pray. What he is saying is that when you pray you be confident that there is a God who is listening and that He wants to give what is best to you. His best may not line up with your best but His best is always best.

Check out this tweet on prayer from Max Lucado just a few days ago:
"Call out to God for help. Will he do what you want? I cannot say, but this I can: he will do what is best."

#2 Another important condition is Harmony. A right relationship with other people. In verse 16 James says confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed.

The bible makes it very clear that we can't have a right relationship with God unless we have a right relationship with each other.

There's a vertical relationship-the relationship we have with God--that has to be right by faith and there's a horizontal relationship---a

relationship with others--that has to be right by confession so that our prayers can have power.

Look at the words Jesus shared in Matthew 5: "If you are giving your gift at the altar and there discover that your brother has something against you, you leave your gift there and go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift."

When you're at odds with a fellow Christian you are at odds with God and you're not ready to pray.

I ran across this verse in a men's study I led here on Wednesday nights this past spring. One that really jumped off the pages of the Bible to me. 1 Peter 3:7 - Husbands be considerate of your wives. Treat them with respect so that nothing will hinder your prayers." So that nothing will hinder your prayers. If you are out of step with your wife guys---it creates a problem in our prayer lives and blocks the power that God wants to be evident in our lives. In essence, Peter says get your relationship at home right if you want your relationship with God to be right.

One Christian author said he was praying one day and acknowledging to God that he had not been treating his wife as God would want him to. He said he had been critical of her, disrespected her, abusive, and mean-spirited. He said as he was asking God to forgive him it was like he could hear God speaking to him saying don't tell me about it-I know what you've done. Go tell her.

Biblical confession should be made to the person against whom we have sinned and from whom we need forgiveness. Sometimes there are sins that have wounded the heart of God and we just need to confess it to him. Sometimes we have hurt other people and we need to go to the person we have hurt and confess that sin. Sometimes there is a need for public confession when a family, or small group or possibly even a whole church has been hurt or offended.

Confession should be made to the one who has been knowingly wounded by our sin and needs to forgive us. And when someone comes to us and says hey I'm sorry that I hurt you then we have the responsibility to swallow our pride and be reconciled to this brother or sister in Christ. How can we not extend to those around us the same courtesy that Jesus extended to you and me when we wounded him?

#3) One more prerequisite and that is righteousness. Verse 16 again says the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

We all understand that none of us are righteous. We are all sinners who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. But what James is talking about here, just as we have seen week after week thru this study of his book, is that when we do life with God, when we walk with Him, the more power there will be in our prayers.

If we want our prayers to have power then it is important that we do what God asks us to do and in so doing we do what is right.

In the book *This Present Darkness* author Frank Peretti pictures the angels of heaven poised and ready to come and do spiritual warfare on behalf of the Christian, but the angels can come only in response to the prayers of believers who are doing what God asks them to do.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

In verse 17 James references an old testament prophet named Elijah. James must have liked the stories of these old guys. Last week Todd shared of James' mentioning of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord and he also shared the story of Job.

Now James brings up Elijah as a positive example of prayer. The story of Elijah is found in I Kings 17. I'll let you check out his full story later. In verse 17, James says Elijah was as human as we are. Just like you and me. And

if he's anything like me then he's not perfect, and he wasn't. Elijah battled depression, self-pity, cowardice, and yet he was still used by God as a prophet.

God sent Elijah to the Israelites to encourage them to turn back to a life with God. They had been doing it a long time without him and it was ugly. That's usually what happens. Unfortunately they chose not to listen to Elijah and when this happened he prayed that God would discipline them with a drought.

And James tells us that it did not rain for three and a half years because of Elijah's prayer. Elijah had such a right relationship with God at this time that God heard his prayer and brought about the drought that Elijah asked for. 3 Y years of no rain. The Israelites were some slow learners. Finally they repented and again Elijah prayed and the skies opened up bringing life back to the earth and it began to yield crops for the Israelite community. Do you wish that your prayers could have that kind of power in them?

Again verse 17, James said that Elijah prayed earnestly. In the Greek it literally reads he prayed in prayer.

Unfortunately I think many of us don't pray in our prayers. We recite things we were taught as kids. We use words that we know but maybe don't believe in. We feel this is something that we have to do but our hearts aren't really in it. But God isn't impressed with ritual or recitation.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:7, Don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. Don't be like the hypocrites who think they are going to be heard because they merely repeat word after word after word.

God wants our prayers to come from our hearts. Even though it may sound awkward. Even though we may lose our train of thought. Even though we stumble to find the words to say what we want to say God wants it to come from our heart.

Let me give you a few suggestions as to how prayer can become more powerful in your life.

- 1) Schedule time every day for when you are going to pray. We schedule in all kinds of other things to our day so why not schedule some time to spend with God. Not sure how much-start with 5 minutes a day. If you are already past that allotment awesome. Push yourself to spend 5 more minutes then. Will you try it for a week? 5 minutes.
- 2) Find a place where you can be alone. Jesus said (Matt 6:6) find a place where you can go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your father in private. Find a place where you can get quiet and not be bothered by anyone.
- 3) Suggest that you kneel when you pray. We see this often in scripture. It's not a mandate that we have to pray kneeling but when we do so we are assuming a position of submission.
- 4) Pray out loud. This helps me to stay focused. For whatever reason when I pray silently my mind has a greater tendency to wander. I seem to lose track of my thoughts and I struggle to stay in the moment of prayer.
- 5) Talk to God in normal language. So many times we feel like we have to talk like they did in the bible. I grew up in a church that loved the KJV of the bible. There were a lot of thees and thous and words that ended in th. It was hard to read much less talk and or pray. You just talk to God in your everyday language and you let the HS worry about doing the translating for you.

Rosalind Rinker said that prayer is just a conversation between two people who love each other.

Rarely does prayer result in a lightning storm that is going to burn down a distillery or a bar. Only on occasion does God miraculously heal someone dying of cancer or who has suffered a major health issue or traumatic event. The majority of the time requests to stop rain or cause it start raining are not answered immediately but God promises us his inner strength, that peace that passes understanding, to everyone who learns to pray effectively and that is powerful.

As we close, I want to take us back to James 5:13 & 14. James says: Are any of you in trouble? You should pray. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing with oil in the name of the Lord.

In just a moment our worship team is going to lead us in a song of praise. During that time I'm going to invite you to come and pray with one of our staff or one of our elders. We'll have our elders stationed at the worship centers in the corners of our room to pray with you. Doc, Jordan, Larry and I will be down front here to pray with you.

Are you in trouble? Home, Work, School, Personally struggling. Relationally struggling. Come we want to pray with you.

Are you sick? Emotionally, Mentally, Physically, Spiritually. Come we will anoint you with oil and pray with you.

Maybe you need to make that decision to make Jesus Lord of your life. We would love to talk to you about that as well. Come. Don't wait. Don't put it off!