

5 “P’s” of Prayer

Series: How Do I Pray

James 5:13-18

August 12, 2018

There are many aspects of the Christian life that most of us wish we were better at.

- I’m sure there are some in this room who wish they read their Bible more.
- I’m sure there are some in this room who wish they gave more.
- I’m sure there are some in this room who wish they served more.
- I’m sure there are some in this room who wish they witnessed more.
- And I’m sure there are some in this room who wish they prayed more.

And I think it is probably prayer that we should focus the most on. Prayer is THE essential spiritual discipline. I tell elderly persons who feel they can do nothing more for the kingdom due to infirmity and wonder why they are still here, that they can now devote themselves to prayer to help the Kingdom of God advance: to pray without ceasing for the church, the pastor, the congregation, the ministry. For when we can do nothing else for God, we can still pray. And most of us wish we had a better prayer life.

My dad retired from the phone company. I’m sure he would have appreciated this story:

A priest, a minister and a guru sat discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repairman worked nearby. The priest said, “Kneeling is definitely the best way to pray.”

“No,” said the minister. “I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven.”

“You’re both wrong,” the guru said. “The most effective prayer position is lying down on the floor.”

After listening to all of this, the repairman could contain himself no longer. “Hey, fellas,” he interrupted, “The best prayin’ I ever did was when I was hangin’ upside down from a telephone pole.”

For the next several weeks, we will be focusing on “How Do I Pray?” Think of this series as a time that will help your spiritual life and Christian witness grow tremendously. This will be like a golfer who spends some time with the teaching pro who finds something that helps you hit your driver straighter and 50 yards longer.

I invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin as we look at James 5:13-18. As you do that, let me tell you a bit about this book. It was written by James (thus the name), who was one of Jesus’ half-brothers. As Christianity spread and the disciples went out on missions, James became the leader of the believers in Jerusalem. So, he was quite knowledgeable in the practical matters dealing with faith.

I want to look at James 5:13-18:

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has

great power and produces wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.¹

In this short 6 verse passage, the word “pray” or “prayer” is used 7 times. In fact, James gives us keys to pray, but I’m calling them 5 P’s of Prayer.

First, The Place of Prayer.

James 5:13 reads:

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.²

The place of prayer is compared here to the place of praise.

We see prayer as the answer to troubles; if you are suffering, pray. When trouble comes, don’t go to pieces, go to prayer. If we would pray in times of trouble rather than grumble or complain or worry or bemoan, we would see an end to our troubles more quickly. The fact that prayer is a help in trouble tells us that prayer is a powerful friend. The value of something is proven by what it will do for you in difficult times. Many things fail us in difficult times, but not prayer.

We also should praise for pleasure. “Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.” Too many when they are merry forget to praise God; they just tell everyone else their good news or go celebrate with alcohol or a party. The word translated “sing praises” is literally “to make melody.” Sing praise to God when things are good and pray to God when troubles come.

The first “p” of prayer is the place, the importance, or prayer.

The second “P” is the Plea of Prayer.

Look at James 5:14-15:

Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.³

This plea is for others to pray for you when you have a major health problem. James wrote the one who made the plea was sick. The word translated “sick” means to be weak, debilitated. The sick person was so weak he or she could not attend the meetings with the other believers, and so had to send for the elders.

The elders were the leaders, the shepherds of the people, helpers in the ministry. The use of oil for anointing was an ancient part of prayer, whether it be for consecration or for healing. We made sure and bought some anointing oil while we were in the Holy Land. But it is not the oil that does the healing, but it is a symbol of the power of healing.

And James tells us the prayer of faith gets results. He mentions recovery from sickness, making one well, all through the Lord. He also mentions forgiveness of sin. Sickness is not always a result of some sin in the sick person’s life, but sometimes, it is.

Remember the story of Jesus from Luke 5:

One day while Jesus was teaching... Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to take him inside to Jesus, but they couldn’t reach him

¹ James 5:13-18 (NLT2)

² James 5:13 (NLT2)

³ James 5:14-15 (NLT2)

because of the crowd. So they went up to the roof and took off some tiles. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat down into the crowd, right in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven." But the Pharisees and teachers of religious law said to themselves, "Who does he think he is? That's blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!" Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God. Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, "We have seen amazing things today!"⁴

That man, for whatever reason, needed not only physical healing, but spiritual healing.

The second "P" of prayer is the plea for prayer. It begs the question, "How earnestly are you praying?"

The third "P" is the Prerequisite of Prayer.

The first half of James 5:16 says:

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*⁵

Christ has made it possible for us to go directly to God for forgiveness. But confessing our sins to each other still has an important place in the life of the church.

1. If we have sinned against an individual, we must ask him or her to forgive us.
2. If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly.
3. If we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess that sin to those who are able to provide that support.
4. If we doubt God's forgiveness, after confessing a sin to Him, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer for assurance of God's pardon. In Christ's Kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers.⁶

James is telling us that after dealing with the sin problem, then prayer can be made for healing. God does not listen to the prayer of self-righteous sinners, but the humble and repentant person.

The third "P" of prayer is the prerequisite, and that is confession and forgiveness.

The fourth "P" is the Productive Prayer.

James writes in the second half of verse 16:

*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*⁷

There are 3 important requirements are stated here if one wants a productive prayer:

First, the character of the praying. It must be earnest. The Greek word here says to pray with energy and enthusiasm. If you don't have earnestness in praying your prayers, do not expect God to be earnest in answering your prayers.

⁴ Luke 5:17-26 (NLT2)

⁵ James 5:16 (NLT2)

⁶ Life Application Study Bible, James 5:16

⁷ James 5:16 (NLT2)

Second, the character of the prayer. The word translated “prayer” means to ask someone a specific request. If you want specific blessings, you will have to pray specifically. We must be specific if we want success in our prayer life.

Finally, the character of the praying person. They must be righteous. Sin will stop the success of your requests. If you want to pray well, keep yourself clean. Purity is a basic qualification for prayer to be effective and productive.

The fourth “P” of prayer is productive, and that happens when we are earnest, when we are specific, and when we are righteous.

The final “P” is the Power of Prayer.

Look at James’ illustration in verses 17-18:

Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.⁸

He is referring to the great Old Testament prophet Elijah. Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. He provided food for a widow and her only son during the 3-year drought, then brought the son back to live later on. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, 2 others were transfigured with Jesus: Moses and Elijah.

But look what James says about Elijah; this is critical. Verse 17:

Elijah was what? As human as we are.

Sometimes I will say to Myra, “You need to pray about that.” And she says, “You pray about it; you’ve got the Bat-phone to God.”

If I have a Bat-phone to God, it’s not because I am special, and you don’t have to be either. Elijah was just like us, except he was prayed up before he went to Mt. Carmel, prayed up before he fed that family and prayed up before he raised the son. He was prayed up before any of it, and he knew where the power was coming from: God.

A Baptist minister friend of mine tells his congregation – and you’ve heard me say this before – “Much prayer, much power. Little prayer, little power. No prayer, no power.” The power is from God and it is tapped through prayer.

My friends, the Christian’s most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought were possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort to be tried when all else fails. This approach is backward. Prayer should come first. Because God’s power is infinitely greater than ours, it only makes sense to rely on it – especially because God encourages us to do so.⁹

The five P’s of prayer: the Place (or Importance) of Prayer, the Plea (or earnestness) of Prayer, the Prerequisite of Prayer (confession and forgiveness), the Productive Prayer (earnest, specific, and righteous), and the Power of Prayer (when we are prayed up with God..

Would you like your prayers answered? Right there it is.

Much prayer, much power. Little prayer, little power. No prayer, no power.

⁸ James 5:17-18 (NLT2)

⁹ Life Application Study Bible, James 5:16-18