

The Christian Life  
Part 5: Living Prayerfully  
James 5: 13-20

Prayer is one of the foundations of Christian living. Prayer is an act of worship, a means of drawing near to God, and a powerful agent of change. Prayer is one way we can put our beliefs into action. The Scriptures are filled with powerful prayers....not just words but people. I wish we had time this morning to learn more about Elijah. His story is found in the OT Book of Kings. He is known as an OT prophet, a man who lived prayerfully, a worker of great miracles and one of only two people known in human history to go to heaven without dying first. Interestingly enough, James describes him in verse 17 as a man with a nature like ours. We might wonder exactly which nature he was referring to, especially since he just wrote four chapters about sin and how it harms the human soul. It is not possible to know with certainty what James had in mind, but verse 16 gives us a clue. He lifts up Elijah as an example of a man with a fallen human nature, like the rest of humanity, but also a person who was found righteous by God.

What does that mean? Jesus once taught a parable that explains it better than I ever could. Luke 18:9-14. Some translations render verse 11 this way: The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself.... Proverbs **30:12** sums it up well. God doesn't answer the prayers of the self-righteous, let alone hear them. The righteousness that James is referring to in 5:16 is not self-righteousness but God's righteousness. If we are to live prayerfully, it is something we must have. **Living prayerfully is living righteously.**

We could easily spend several Sundays on the topic of righteousness. Perhaps someday we will, but today we will need to look at it in a very basic and simple way. The righteousness of God is a distinctly Biblical concept, and we can trace its roots back to a promise God made with Abraham in Genesis 15:6. In the holy sense of the word, righteousness means to believe or have true faith in God. Abraham was found righteous because of his faith. He believed God, specifically the promise that God made with him that his descendants would be as numerous as the number of stars in the skies. Elijah was found righteous because of his faith. He believed God when God told him that a three- year drought was coming. Like all true prophets, they believed God's word and were faithful to it.

In a similar way you and I are also declared righteous. We may not be famous prophets like Abraham or Elijah, but God also sees us as righteous people because we believed His word that says Jesus was crucified, died, and resurrected died for our sins. The apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans **3:21-22**. The righteousness of God comes to us through faith in Jesus.

**Living prayerfully is living faithfully.** When we have it, it puts us on good speaking terms with God. Elijah was a righteous and faithful person who lived prayerfully, and if we want to do the same, it will be good for us to see how he did it. It was during that three- year drought that God sent Elijah to the land of Sidon to live with a widow and her son. Faithful people are also obedient people, so he went and found both literally starving to death because of the lack of food in the land. The widow's pantry was basically empty, the only thing left was a small bit of flour and a few drops of oil. There is much more to the story, but God used Elijah to work a miracle for them. The good news is that the tiny amount of oil and flour that she had was divinely replenished and did not run out until the drought was over. The bad news was that the widow's son would later become sick and die. We will soon find that one of Elijah's greatest prayers had nothing to do with the weather or baking pita breads. 1 Kings 17: 17-24

The first thing we learn from Elijah about **living prayerfully is that we will keep praying when bad things happen**. Even in his anguish, Elijah cried out to or better said prayed to God. It appears he was struggling with a difficult question, one that many of us might wonder about at times but have not courage to ask. God, did you bring this calamity about? Are you the one who killed him? The heartache and pain of tragedy can cause us to question Gods' goodness, and that is true for the righteous as well as the unrighteous. That word kill is a strong word, a painful word, not a word to take lightly unless we are trying to eradicate a deadly virus. It brings to mind violence, murder, and homicide. It is not a word we typically associate with an all loving and all compassionate God, so verse 20 might raise what seems to be a difficult question. Is it Covid19, cancer, heart disease and accidents that kill us or is it God? How we answer the question will say much about our faith and how we choose to live our life.

Elijah knew the answer. He cried out to God for the child to come alive. Not once, not twice, but three times. **Living prayerfully is praying until our prayers are answered**. Elijah's prayer was answered in a powerful and unmistakable way. Verse 22 tells us that the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah, and the child came back to life. As powerful as that narrative is, it does not completely explain how God works through the divine ministry of healing.

Prayer is often involved, but not always. Scripture records one man was raised from the dead by touching the bones of a dead prophet named Elisha. It is a truly a mystery how God hears our prayers. But there are some things we do know. We know the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working...**James 5:16**

That is why we call, pray, and anoint those who are suffering and those who are sick. If healing only was that simple doctors and hospitals would soon go out of business and everyone would be signing up to be an elder in the church. Those that are in the risky business of faith healing often refuse to make a distinction between divine healing and divine curing. Some will even go so far to call it a lack of faith. It is risky because for a variety of reasons there will be times when a divine cure doesn't come at the altar. Those seeking a cure begin to doubt their faith, they may doubt that God heard their prayers, they may doubt that the elders who prayed and anointed them are truly called by God. Even worse, they may doubt that God loves them. When divine healing is confused with divine curing, Satan is the only one that wins. We must not fall into that trap.

Look carefully with me at verse 15. Does it say that the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up? Yes. Does that mean they will be cured if they have faith? The answer is they will be saved, they will spend eternity in glory with Jesus and need not fear death or judgment. They may or may not be cured. Is it the prayer of the elder or the prayer of the one seeking healing? Yes. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working...**James 5:16 Living prayerfully is living powerfully.**

God answers the prayers of fervent and righteous people in the same way, by His grace. Healing comes through His Son Jesus. **Isaiah 53: 4-5**. Healing comes through prayer, humility and by righteous living. The power to live righteously comes from our love for the cross. So just how does God heal? It is a mystery, but we do have a clue. God heals when we remain faithful, when we draw near to Him and receive the anointing of His Holy Spirit, when we pray with other believers and confess our sins to one another. **Living prayerfully brings healing and peace.** The world desperately needs both. Let us bring both. Amen.