

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JAMES

STUDY NUMBER 12 – JAMES 5:13-20

PURSUE THE POWER OF PRAYER

We are in James 5:13-20. Pursuing the Power of Prayer. This is our 12th and final study of the book of James.

Chapter 5 and verse 16 is our key verse in pursuing the power of prayer.

There's a great little book written by Ruth Myers, she has a trilogy actually of 31 Days of Praise, 31 Days of Power, and then 31 Days of Prayer. In the 31 Days of Prayer it's very instructive on setting up a plan whereby you can trust God's blessing through a disciplined prayer life. And I would urge you to consider that little text. From that text I am reading the following:

THE TELEPHONE RINGS and it's your country's leader. He wants to come by for a visit. While you try not to gasp into the phone, he continues. He hopes to find out if there's some way he can help you. And he wants to talk personally with you about a project on a scale almost beyond imagining—an undertaking he'd like you to be a part of.

How would you feel after such a call?

“Well,” you say, “I'd feel shocked, a bit intimidated—a bit doubtful about his motives.”

Yes, but wouldn't you also feel honored? Wouldn't your life suddenly seem more significant? All your daily strivings a little less humdrum? As you waited nervously for your president or prime minister to visit, wouldn't you see yourself in a completely different light?

The King of all kings, the Ruler of the entire universe, has also made that call. He wants time with you. He wants you to tell Him about your needs and interests. And He's asking for your partnership on an immensely important project!

(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God's Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers) Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers. Copyright - Warren & Ruth Myers, 1997. p. 13.

Rosalind Goforth, missionary from a past generation said:

"There is nothing too great for His power, and nothing too small for His love."

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James has chosen to conclude the epistle of James with the thing that is a part of his legacy. His nickname was "Camel Knees" because he spent so much time on them.

And so prayer is a vital function with regard to making progress in our Christian lives. We've travelled through the test, the temptation, the taking of the Word of God daily into our lives. Being filled with unconditional love which is produced by the Spirit of God. Fruit flowing from our lives is evidences that we're His children. Control of our tongues, only by the power of the Spirit. The wisdom which comes from above, which is a product of the Spirit's work in our lives. Victory in the warfare, developing dependence upon the Designer. Being a good steward of financial resources. Now we're talking about the whole business of prayer without ceasing.

James is actually saving the best for last.

Hudson Taylor said:

*Lord Jesus, make Yourself to me
A living, bright reality,
More present to faith's vision keen
Than any earthly object seen;
More dear, more intimately nigh
Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie.*

HUDSON TAYLOR

(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God's Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers) Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers. Copyright - Warren & Ruth Myers, 1997. p. 110.

One writer that I was reading this week said:

“True prayer is a way of life, not just an emergency detour.”

Charles Spurgeon said:

“We should pray when we are in a praying mood, for it would be sinful to neglect so fair an opportunity. We should pray when we are not in a praying mood because it would be dangerous to remain in so unhealthy a condition.”

(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God’s Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers) Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers. Copyright - Warren & Ruth Myers, 1997. p. 162.

Turn with me if you will now to James 5. We’re picking up in our study this morning at verse 13. James is asking some questions.

Question #1:

v.13 Is anyone among you suffering misfortune? Let him keep on praying. Is anyone cheerful? Let him keep on singing praises (making melody).

In essence with those two questions, he takes life experiences of sorrow and sadness and of joy and he

said “That should not effect our continuous communion with the Father through prayer.”

I thought immediately of the apostle Paul and Silas in the dungeon of the Philippian jail after being beaten that afternoon. About midnight the prisoners heard them as they were singing and praising the Lord at the midnight hour.

What he is saying in essence, is be sure you stay and fellowship and commune with the Lord no matter what happens. Just asking Him to remind you that He is there. And there is some purpose in it. If it’s hard and it’s difficult, that will be revealed at some later date, perhaps not until heaven itself. And then it also helps us when we’re in communion with Him in those dark hours. Always remember the sovereignty of God and that He is there and in total and complete control.

Now as he raises these questions about the whole business of prayer and when we should pray, I was reading Friday in my Daily Walk Bible and I was reading in 2 Kings 18. This is the record of King Hezekiah’s leadership in the land of Judah. His whole life seemed to be centered around getting effective answers to prayer. And in the Daily Walk part of it, Bruce Wilkinson says:

If you’re looking for some help in your prayer life, why not spend some time studying an Old Testament character whose every recorded prayer was answered!

Hezekiah was a man of faith (18:5) and a man of prayer. His first reaction when confronted with a problem was to bring it before the Lord. Whether the problem was 185,000 uninvited Assyrians (19:35) or a painful illness (20:1, 7), Hezekiah took it to the Lord in prayer. And when he prayed, things happened!

Prayer is not a magic formula, but verbal communication with the sovereign God of creation. Examine your own prayer habits. Are they built on a personal relationship with God? Are you strengthening your prayer life with daily exercise? Are you more comfortable talking to God today than you were a year ago? Try this: Every time you get into or out of your car today, spend a few seconds in prayer. You'll find it habit forming.

(Daily Walk Bible by Tyndale House) p. 435

Of course out of the life of Hezekiah you remember that he was so overwhelmed by the Assyrian forces but the next morning he woke up—an answer to prayer—to 185,000 dead corpses laying strewn around the city as liberation was given by God Himself.

When you move to verse 14, we have some more questions.

v.14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the assembly and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Oil is the symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit. And it is right for us as brothers and sisters to surround those who are ill. And to follow this very prescription of anointing with oil and praying for them in the midst of their difficulties.

Now may I say this? In this particular circumstance that you have before you in the passage, they are going to get a Yes, but you always have to remember that God is sovereign and a “No” is just as important as a “Yes.”

When He is dealing with these things we do not know what He has in mind. We do not know what was planned before eternity with regard to the longevity of the life that we’re praying for. So you don’t come to God with an assumption that when you follow this prescription the person is going to get well and everything is going to be fine. That’s not ours to determine. It’s ours to be faithful, to pray and to lay the matter before the Lord.

God can and does say “No.” And we demonstrate, I think, even more in the “No.” That we trust Him in His sovereign purpose and our unfailing love for Him when it’s difficult and when it’s tough, and when we wish there would be some other answer. But there’s a great purpose and plan.

You need to get comfortable with that. If you do not learn that lesson, the first “No” you get you’re going to get bitter. Then you’re going to start looking inward,

you're going to say "Oh boy, what did I do? Why do I deserve this? Why didn't God come through?" kind of thing. We don't want that. We want a very comfortable relationship with a loving God who's demonstrated that love in the death of His Son on the cross. And His loving concern to make you and more like Christ on a daily basis. So when the "No's" come, we can still trust and we can be a witness to glorify Him.

v.15 And the prayer of faith shall make the sick person well, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Now, this is three things that happen when you get a "Yes." And when you get a "Yes" everybody's excited. They love to hear the results and the joy that's in the heart of a person when God moved in and answered a prayer and did something.

Now if we'd have gotten "No," would we have been upset? Well, we don't need to be. God had some greater things He was doing in the lives of all of us and in the process that you learned to trust Him and stay in that comfort zone of knowing that He's at work.

Now notice these three things:

1. The prayer of faith will make the sick person well.
2. The Lord will raise him up in response to that prayer.

3. If he has committed sins, and of course he has because we all have, they shall be forgiven him.

They will be dealt with in the process of what God is doing in the circumstances.

Then we come to our key verse, verse 16.

v.16 Be confessing therefore your sins to one another, and be praying for one another, that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous person is able to do much.

Oh that last phrase is the key phrase to the whole study. To realize what God can do among us in response to an “effective prayer of a righteous person is able to do much.”

John made it quite clear that the whole thing with regard to fellowship and communion with the Lord centered around:

1 John 1:9

If we are confessing our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You know, I know it's hard for you to even think about that, isn't it? We've got pride. We've got a sense of fear

and anxiety about people knowing too much about us. And then basically, we have some dishonesty among us.

Because of our pride, because of our fear, when people ask us on Sunday morning “How’s it going?” We smile and say “It’s going great!”

We’re protecting. We’re afraid to be vulnerable. We’re afraid to say, “You know, it has been the toughest week in my life and I just wish that you could be praying for me. I’ve got some issues that I’ve got to work through.”

You feel like you’re a sore thumb in the bunch so often because you’re around a group of people who are pretending to be perfect. There will be closeness. There will be a sweetness that will prevail when we honestly, honestly admit that we’re struggling in given areas and we would appreciate the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person to get us back on our feet again. And get us moving in the direction we long to be and that’s pleasing God and being fruitful for His glory and His honor.

See what I’m saying? We miss so much that can be ours when we have a pervading sense of communion on the part of each of us. That all of us have definite discipline prayer habits where before God we’re transparent and honest about things, seeing God work.

E. M. Bounds has probably written the classic in a several little volume work on prayer. This comes from Purpose in Prayer:

These men knew how to pray and how to prevail on prayer. Their faith in prayer was no passing attitude that changed with the wind or with their own feelings and circumstances. It was a fact that God heard and answered, that His ear was ever open to the cry of his children and that the power to do what was asked of Him was commensurate with His willingness.

(The Purpose in Prayer by E. M. Bounds) New Kinsington, PA: Whitaker House. Copyright – Whitaker House, 1997.

Then the other classic book, it is anonymous. It is called The Kneeling Christian:

Why are so many Christians so often defeated, because they pray so little. Why are so many church-workers so often discouraged and disheartened, because they pray so little. Why do most men see so few brought out of darkness to light, by their ministry, because they pray so little. Why are not our churches simply on fire for God, because there is so little real prayer. The Lord Jesus is as powerful today as ever before. The Lord Jesus is as anxious as ever before for men to be saved. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save but He cannot stretch forth His arm unless we pray more and

more really. We may be assured of this, the secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer.

(The Kneeling Christian by an Unknown Christian)
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Copyright – unknown, 1970. p. 10.

You find the apostle Paul almost wearing out the saints in every letter. You wonder how he had the time to devote to praying for each of those churches that he was involved with and the letters he wrote. Speaking of praying night and day. And then to see Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail praying at midnight. You begin to understand a little bit about the fact that prayer was not a crisis oriented thing in his life but it was that tool for the deepening of relationship with the Lord and he prayed daily.

Philippians 4:6 (he told the Philippian saints when he wrote back to them:

In no respect be anxious but in everything by prayer and petitioning with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

When you look at the life of the Lord Jesus it's steeped with prayer. Even the disciples came and asked "Please, teach us how to pray."

It's altogether fitting that when His ministry on this earth is ended and He's hanging on the cross, three out of the seven things that He states from the cross are

prayers to the Father. Number one, number four, and number seven:

“Father forgive them for they don’t know what they’re doing.”

“Eli, Eli Lama Sabachthani. My God, My God, why have you forsake Me?”

“Father into Your hands I commend My Spirit.”

Yes James is noted and famous for the fact that he was indeed a man of prayer.

Steve Farrar wrote a book called Point Man, a number of years ago and that book touched men’s lives all across the country. He’s since written several other books. And one of the more recent books is Anchor Man: How a Father Can Anchor His Family in Christ. And he’s talking on the importance of dads and fathers being men of prayer and of fasting. This is a statement that he makes:

- When Moses needed to take some ground, he prayed and fasted.**
- When Jehoshaphat needed to take some ground, he prayed and fasted.**
- When Josiah needed to take some ground, he prayed and fasted.**

(Anchor Man: How a Father Can Anchor His Family in Christ for the Next 100 Years by Steve Farrar)
Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers. Copyright - Steve Farrar, 1998. p. 235.

. . . Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, Esther, Joel, Paul and Barnabas. When they needed to take some ground, they prayed and fasted, laying their hearts before the Lord.

1 Peter 5:7

Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you, or you are his personal concern.

Now I know some of you, maybe you're struggling with the whole business of never really getting an answer to prayer and you're blaming yourself this morning.

And so you've gotten a cold heart. Or perhaps you feel like God never comes through in this kind of thing. Like you want Him to come through. And so you've kind of let a distance be created and you've used prayer as a panic button. When all else fails, pray, kind of thing. And you feel guilty this morning. You feel somebody up here talking about how vital this is to the personal relationship with God and you're feeling a little queasy inside because you know if we took your prayer minutes from this last week it would be

embarrassing to see it flashed on the screen. And it would make you feel bad inside.

Alright, let's just deal with that. One of the things most of the people who have learned to pray and really pray is that they've also learned to persevere. They have not just come to fill God's ear on one occasion with a particular request and all of a sudden have a gigantic bomb fall out of heaven and there's more to it than could ever have been asked. Now God can do that. But rather than that, I would listen to some of these great old prayer warriors who give you the advice when you pray, never give up.

George Mueller is probably one of those great men who in his legacy left tremendous answers to prayer. And he said this:

The great point is never to give up until the answer comes. I have been praying for fifty-two years, every day, for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but they will be! . . . The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it.

(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God's Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers) Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers. Copyright - Warren & Ruth Myers, 1997. p. 73.

And of course the rest of the story is that they both did. In response to this faithful man's prayer.

Kay Arthur has always impressed me with her incredible ability to do inductive studies of the Word. Precept Ministries is formed out of that which is a worldwide Bible teaching ministry.

We use a lot of Kay Arthur's materials when we teach and train teachers in inductive studies along with my hero Howard Hendricks. I want you to listen to Kay pray and maybe it'll help you understand that God is blessing and using her in such a significant way.

Gracious Father—high King of heaven, yet my Father!—You are seated in the throne room of the universe on a throne of grace, a throne of favor for the undeserving. What a privilege it is to come to Your throne unafraid, with utter freedom and confidence, assured of Your glad welcome—“to run right into Your throne room and find Your arms open wide!” (Kay Arthur).

(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God's Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers) Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers. Copyright - Warren & Ruth Myers, 1997. p. 81.

That last phrase of the verse, just let it haunt you. “The effective prayer of a righteous person is able to do much.”

Ok, it’s time to stop and get practical. What are you going to do in view of the fact that God brought us to this Sunday morning with the emphasis upon our hearts to learn to pray? And if we do not have any discipline pattern and plan for prayer, what are you going to do about it?

You’re going to be a doer of the word and not hearers only. Ok? First of all, get you a little book. I have one and in the first part of it, list all the things that you want to praise the Lord for. Use that as part of your morning discipline. Start that way, positive.

Secondly, a list of petitions. Those petitions need to include first of all everybody in your family. Pray for your grandkids every morning. And a special sense of spiritual warfare that God will protect them in these and these and these areas.

You’ve got that list. Then expand it to your ministry. The things you’re doing. To the kids in your Sunday school class. To the kids in your youth group. To the other people that you’re associating with where you are in your ministry. Then following that, move to the world. Start thinking of specific missionaries that you’re praying for.

The main thing you want to do is to have a time in your prayer when you really ask God to search your heart and to reveal to you the things that are an offense to Him. Be teachable. That's when you're still. You don't have to say anything. You just sit there and you just let the Lord show you the areas that offend Him. Now listen, we're never going to get there. Ok? There's going to be a litany of agendas when you are teachable and you're quiet and you're open to things that offend Him. And you didn't even think about it. But now you will.

It's just a simple thing. Satan makes it so complicated and so boring and so ugly and you're getting to meet with the King of kings and the Lord of lords who loves you and rejoices and waits for the minute you run into His presence. And yes Kay Arthur's right, He's got His arms open wide and He wants you to sit on His lap and just pour out your heart.

We carry so many burdens and concerns and we're so anxious. And we're so worried. That's His business. Let's come to Him with honesty and transparency and each of us, please, let's make it a commitment this morning that if you don't have it you're going out of here and you're going to do it. You're going to get a prayer journal and you're going to incorporate that into whatever you do in Bible study and the rest of it. But you are going to be able to say the next time I see you, "Yes, I am spending time in prayer on a daily basis."

Verse 17.

Now, as you have known James often uses Old Testament illustrations to prove his point. When we were back talking about faith and works in chapter 2, we had Abraham and Rahab come before us. And then last week we had the prophets and Job when it came to the coming of the Lord. Today we've got one of my heroes, Elijah. Talk about a man of prayer. And what an illustrations for us in this sermon where he's dealing with us. Notice what he says in verse 17.

v.17 Elijah was a man with the same nature as us, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months.

Remember the story? Ahab and Jezebel leading the northern kingdom deeper and deeper into wickedness and into sin and the worship of Baal. Elijah has the courage to go in and face Ahab by saying "God's judgment has come. It isn't going to rain for three and a half years."

He goes to the brook and he goes over to the widows of Zarephath and then finally God said: "It's time to confront the king." And you remember they had the Super Bowl on Mount Carmel where the prophets of Baal tried to call fire out of heaven and dear old Elijah about three in the afternoon just put the rocks down

and got the sacrifice on the rocks and he said “I want you to see that I’m not using any secret matches. Get me twelve barrels of water and dump it on it.” So they doused that thing. And then he just said “God we can use a little fire down here.” And Boom! wiped up everything. And all the people are saying “He’s God! He’s God! He’s God!” They slew 250 prophets of Baal. Then he turned to Ahab and he said “You better get back to Jezreel because I think there’s a rain coming.”

Now it’s a perfectly cloudless day, OK. So he sends his servant up the hill. He comes back and he says “There isn’t anything.” So this goes through six cycles where Elijah is praying for rain. And there’s nothing up there! Six times! And finally on the seventh time the servant comes back and he’s just ecstatic. He says “There’s a cloud the size of a man’s hand!” And on the evidence of what Elijah knows about God, he says “Ahab, you better get to the barn because you’re going to face flash flood warnings all the way to Jezreel.” And God poured out the raining.

I’m just saying that God delights in His heart when we take time to pray big and to pray excited prayers of faith, trusting Him to move mightily for the glory of God to the saving of souls.

v.18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

v.19 My brethren, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth, and someone brings him back;

This is a man who's out of fellowship. And because of prayer and because of intercession, maybe you're sitting here today because of the effective, fervent prayers of the righteous brought you back. And you're sitting in this pew this morning because somebody loved you so much they prayed for you while you were going astray and while you wandered off. And James said, "This is another thing we can do for brothers and sisters in Christ."

v.20 let him be knowing that he who turned a sinner from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall remove from sight a host of sins.

I don't want to get into it, but this is the sin unto death. As believers in 1 Corinthians 13 there was much unjudged sin and many of them slept physically.

1 John 5 speaks of this and here it is again.

When you and I don't respond, when you and I choose deliberately to live by our agenda and our plan, there comes a time when God just blows the whistle and pulls the chain and you're going to the barn.

You need to recognize that there are consequences of living in disobedience. And here he's saying "Let him know that as a result of his prayers he saved that man's soul from death and he removed from sight a host of sin."

You've got a powerful tool in your hand. You've got the God of the universe on hold. I hope you'll answer the phone today. And I hope you'll take time to be instructed at His feet and that you'll put away those things which distract and you'll learn what it is to walk in the joy of the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Prayer can come by faith or by flesh.

LESSON #2: Your prayer life is a reflection of your spiritual maturity.

LESSON #3: Your prayer life tells us how in fellowship you are with the Lord.

LESSON #4: Your prayer life tells us how willing you are to trust Him to handle the circumstances in your life.

LESSON #5: Prayer is communion with the Father.

LESSON #6: Out of this communion and communication with the Father, there comes a oneness whereby we are able to express the deepest desires of our heart.

STUDY NUMBER TWELVE - PURSUE THE POWER OF PRAYER
— JAMES 5:13-20

KEY VERSE 5:16

NOTES

v.13 Is anyone among you suffering misfortune? Let him keep on praying. Is anyone cheerful? Let him keep on singing praises (making melody).

v.14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the assembly and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord.

v.15 And the prayer of faith shall make the sick person well, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

v.16 Be confessing therefore your sins to one another, and be praying for one another, that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous person is able to do much.

v.17 Elijah was a man with the same nature as us, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months.

v.18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

v.19 My brethren, if anyone among you

wanders away from the truth, and someone brings him back;
v.20 let him be knowing that he who turned a sinner from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall remove from sight a host of sins.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read James 5:13-20 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What are we asked to do if we are “suffering” in verse 13?

3. What will be the results of the “prayer of faith” in verse 15?

4. What will the “prayer of a righteous person” do in verse 16?

5. What illustration does James use in verses 17 & 18?

**6. Has the Lord ever answered any of your prayers?
Give examples.**

**7. Do you pray very often? When? Do you feel like you
are getting through?**

**8. What does James say will be the three-fold result of
coming back to the truth, according to verse 20?**

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Prayer can come by faith or by flesh.

LESSON #2: Your prayer life is a reflection of your spiritual maturity.

LESSON #3: Your prayer life tells us how in fellowship you are with the Lord.

LESSON #4: Your prayer life tells us how willing you are to trust Him to handle the circumstances in your life.

LESSON #5: Prayer is communion with the Father.

LESSON #6: Out of this communion and communication with the Father, there comes a oneness whereby we are able to express the deepest desires of our heart.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:
