

## ***Prayer of Healing and Forgiveness***

James 5:13-20

Summer Sermon Series on Prayer

Kenwood Baptist Church

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August 17, 2014

**TEXT:** James 5:13-20

Our passage this morning is from the last verses of the Book of James. We are nearing the end of our summer series on prayer. We have heard sermons on a prayer of adoration, for God to



be exalted; a prayer for Christ-likeness; a prayer of outcry against injustice; a prayer to receive Christ; a prayer for the feet of Gospel workers; the unique high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus; a prayer of daily devotion; a prayer for the city in which we live; and, last Sunday, a prayer of blessing on our children, generation to generation.

This morning we turn our attention to the prayer for healing and forgiveness. These two powerful ideas are often linked in Scripture. James was an earthly brother of our Lord Jesus. He did not believe in Him during His ministry, but came to believe later and was a leader of the church in Jerusalem. James' style is full of practical wisdom and concrete instruction to live faithfully to the Lord. His writing echoes teachings of Jesus. His final appeal in James 5, his last words, is focused on the life of prayer and the place of prayer among the community of believers. He stresses that our life is to be a life of continuous prayer, a rhythm of prayer and praise, no matter what the situation is. Then he focuses our attention on the specific prayer for healing and forgiveness. We want to look at these two big movements together in this text: first, that our life is to be a life of a daily rhythm of prayer and praise; and then secondly, to look closely at the specific prayer for healing and forgiveness.

James 5:13a begins with a question:

*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."*

Do you have any trouble of any kind in your life? James asks if you have trouble or hardship or difficulty, and the word he uses means that you are suffering anything difficult. This is a very

broad term for hardship, stress in a relationship, anxiety over a grade, fearful about decisions concerning your future, any kind of trouble, distress, or difficulty. James says simply and profoundly: "Then pray." Whatever you encounter in this life that is difficult, go to the Lord in prayer. Last night at a wedding reception, I had a chance to interact with a Nigerian man who is going to seminary. I asked a little bit about his story. He told me that God had brought them out of Nigeria right before his home was attacked. He shared with me the great burden it is to his heart that Christians in Nigeria face great persecution. There has been a public commitment that Christians should be killed every Sunday. We paused right there in the midst of the celebration of the wedding, wrapped our arms around each other, and prayed for the believing community in the southern part of the world, that they would be saved and spared this morning. Whenever you're in trouble, train your heart to go to God in that trouble. Do not turn away from God at the time of trouble. When life or circumstances bring you low, James says, look up. All kinds of things happen to us in this life, and James wisely tells us whenever something difficult happens, then go to God. One of the worst things you can do for your spiritual life is to put up a barrier between you and God when difficulty comes. When the difficulty comes, just throw your heart open to God and say, "God, would you help me?"

James continues, and he says in James 5:13b:

*"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."*

The word he uses is a very broad term: you're feeling good. James says, when you're feeling good, then take your high and go higher. Take the highs of your life and transpose them into the right key, and that is the key of praise. He sets our life in the framework of a rhythm of prayer to God and praise. The completion of any joy or blessing is praise. When God gives us blessings, we are to return them back to Him with the sound of praise. So, James tells us that our life is to be lived in this rhythm of prayer and praise.

Brother Lawrence, who wrote *The Practice of the Presence of God*, said:

*"There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God."*

In your walk with God, some of you struggle, feeling you must pray for a long time. It really isn't the length of prayer that counts, but the frequency. Charles Spurgeon reportedly said I hardly ever go 20 minutes without praying.

The evangelist John Wesley says about the person of prayer:

*"...his heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in*

leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon him, and everywhere 'seeing Him that is invisible.'"

This is the great adventure of living. I don't know about your heart, but my own heart has been renewed this summer in this way. I'm waking up with an expectation of what is God going to do today in and around me. Where will I be allowed to participate? This is where the action is. It really isn't in the newspaper. The action is with the Lord, in a daily conversation with Him, an open ear to His voice, day by day learning to walk with Him.

James then focuses our attention on the specific issue that arises in our lives when we're ill. Again, the term for sick is literally *weakness*, when you are in a state of weakness. I want to interpret that broadly: a place where you are were not in health. You may be physically ill; you may be suffering from an addiction; you may be bound up and chained by a certain pattern of behavior. You are sick in some way and bound, and when we are in this situation, the Bible never tells us to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Never! In James 5:14, he says:

*"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."*

When you're in the situation of weakness, you should ask to be prayed for. Isn't that wonderful? Sometimes you're so weak that you can't even pray, and so James says to humble yourself and allow yourself to be prayed for. Put the call out, and that call out goes specifically to people in the church who can pray for you. James uses the word *elders*, which literally means *old people*. This doesn't mean that only old people are leaders in the church, but it means the people who have responsibility or leadership. It's not really age-specific, but an office or role, a godly person in your community that you can go to. Sometimes when we get a diagnosis or situation, we feel embarrassed, and we think, "I'll keep that to myself. I'll just settle this together with God alone." Whenever I encounter that, I always urge people, "Let people know to pray for you," and oftentimes people who start off resistant, when the situation gets a little more serious, say, "I need prayer from anyone and everyone!" We humble ourselves; we call for prayer.

When you get asked to pray for someone, then you are to respond and take that seriously. James writes to us in James 5:15:

*"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."*

We are to take these requests. He assumes that if you call for prayer, people will pray for you. Don't say, "I'll pray for you," and fail to do so. Pray right then and there. Make it a point to keep

that promise to that person and to God.

E. M. Bounds says:

“What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but people whom the Holy Spirit can use— people of prayer, people mighty in prayer.”

I love to watch this church move around the city and our communities and families in ministry to one another throughout the week. James says that the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well and the Lord will raise him up. James imagines God as a prayer-hearing God. He will hear the prayer of faith; the sick will be made well. It may not happen instantaneously, but it may. Dr. Greg Wallace always reminds me that everyone gets healed in the end. God answers all of our prayers, and notice that God gets the credit. It is the Lord who raises people up; it is not our prayers, as though they are instruments of magic or powerful tools with their own independent authority. We pray to God, the God who hears, the God who raises people up. Andrew Murray says that when we come to God, when we stand in the gap for someone:

“Each time, before you intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!”

When someone asks you to pray for them, just pause and worship God. Consider that you have audience with the Creator of the universe, the One who said, “Let there be light,” and there was light; the One who said, “I will remove your sins as far as the east is from the west,” and they are removed; the One who said, “I will pour out the wrath that hangs over the sins of the world, and I will pour it out on My Son, and it will be satisfied in three hours of theological darkness in wrath and it is finished.” That’s the One you are talking to. Come to Him and say, “Father, would You act in this situation and bring healing to this person? I bring my friend; I bring my spouse; I bring my family member, my colleague, to You. We come and we pray to You.”

R. A. Tory says:

“Before a word of petition is offered, we should have the definite consciousness that we are talking to God, and should believe that He is listening and is going to grant the thing that we ask of Him.”

Notice that James includes forgiveness within this prayer for healing. The Greek text of James 5:15, in the last clause, actually says: *“Even if the person has sinned, he will be forgiven.”* It is one thing to pray for healing, but James also imagines here that situation where someone is locked up or chained with unforgiveness, and he says that you can even pray for that.

Remember when Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed? He asked the crowd, "Which is easier to say, 'Take up your mat and walk, or your sins are forgiven'?" Jesus Christ can do both of these things. Sometimes it is the case that sickness and lack of forgiveness actually get merged together in people's lives. Lack of forgiveness can crush the soul. It's like a toxic venom. We come in the Name of Jesus Christ, and we offer the forgiveness that He Himself has purchased. James 5:16 says:

*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

It's a beautiful privilege to confess our sins to one another. If you don't confess your sins, the Bible says that is going to rot you out on the inside.

David says in Psalm 32:1-6 says:

*"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'-- and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to You while You may be found."*

Confess your sins to one another; pray for one another, James urges us.

James motivates us with prayer in the last phrase of James 5:16. The NIV says:

*"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

I first heard this verse and learned it in the King James version which says:

*"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

In the Greek of James 5:16, it is actually a little bit difficult to know which words modify which. What he clearly is saying is that the prayer of the righteous is extremely powerful. Different translations try to capture this in different ways. The real question is where does the word *effectual* go? Does it modify the prayer? Is it *effectual fervent prayer*, or is it just that the prayer of a righteous person is really effective? It doesn't matter a lot in the end. Either way you look at it, it just means praying to God is powerful, really powerful. It's not powerful because of the words. There are not sets of formulae that you need to learn. It's powerful because of the One you're talking to. God answers the prayer of a child; God answers the prayer of a parent; and James urges us that prayer is powerful because it speaks to God.

E. M. Bounds says:

“Prayer is the greatest of all forces, because it honors God and brings Him into active aid.”

Martin Luther said:

“Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”

I've experienced many answers to prayer this summer and in recent years, and when God answers your prayers, you are motivated to pray even more and more regularly. I've grown this summer. I hope you have. I have grown in praying more consistently to God daily, and I have been delighted to see how many prayers He answers within the scope of 24 hours. One prayer He answered for me last year was a 20-year prayer, and those are sweet of a different order. When I think of Kenwood, my mind goes to the first time I met Dan Doyle. He had about 60 tubes coming out of his body, and he was totally unconscious. We prayed for Dan for weeks. Dan had visited Kenwood just a handful of times, but we prayed for him and God raised him up and healed him and spared his life. Now Dan and his family are to such a blessing in this community of faith. God heard our prayers. My mind goes to the time that a group of us went to Rob and Angie's home to pray for Miles when he was in a difficult spot. We just laid our hands on him and anointed him with oil and prayed for this young man and just watched God have His hand on his life. God answers our prayers. There are people I've prayed for that God did not heal, but God has promised that He would raise us up. That is the word that God uses for resurrection, and all of those prayers are answered in the end.

Salome and I had the great privilege last week to go to very special place, JH Ranch, for a father-daughter experience of growing stronger in our own relationship and to the Lord. It was a very powerful time, one I can't recommend highly enough. There were 120 pairs of parents with a child. The students were 14, 15, and 16 years old. As soon as we stepped on the property of the ranch, we got the sense that this place was seriously prayed for. There was a heavy sense of God's presence there working. There are many stories I could share from this week.

The ending of the week was a time where the students, or their fathers or mothers, were given a chance to give a testimony in one minute or so. We were there gathered for worship, and there was a man sitting in the front row, and his high school age son was next to him. I had noticed this high school son all week. He was very tall and quiet, and I noticed that he was always looking down. I tried a couple of times to engage him in conversation, but he gave only one-word answers. The time opened for testimony, and to my great surprise, this quiet, tall, high school student was the first one to leap up to the stage area. He said, “I came here in a dark place. Though I'd grown up in church, my faith faltered and then became nonexistent. I

had such a heaviness and darkness in my life that I could not get away from it.” Then this handsome high school student said, “I finally reached the place where I tried to take my own life.” Then he went on to describe what happened to him at the ranch. Part of our time included a ‘cross walk’ up to the top of a mountain ridge where there is a cross. The walk was led by a 29-year-old young man who told all these parents and sons or daughters to pick up something from the forest that represented a burden they were carrying and carry it with them. At some point in the walk, they were to throw it aside. I’ll never forget watching these people as they came up this mountain. One young man was dragging two logs; another adult man in his late 50s was carrying one. As we walked in silence, it was wonderful to hear the crashing sound of a stone or a log being tossed over the ridge. During the walk, one father gave testimony that he had tossed 20 years of hatred and unforgiveness over the ridge on that climb. This troubled high school student shared: “When I heard these testimonies, I heard God. I saw Him working. I came into my bunk late that night after the walk and I woke up at 2 o’clock in the morning.” Then he said, “The love of God filled my heart and the stone just left me.” This tall, high school man was smiling for the first time I’d seen him smile all week. He stepped down from the platform and threw his arms around his father. A few minutes later, his father came up, and his father said, “I come from Alabama. I’ve had 28 years in the military, and I’m supposed to be a really tough guy.” He looked at everyone and he said, “I underestimated God.” He told how God had worked in allowing them to be there, and in front of all these people, he spoke of how much he loved his son. He came down off the platform and they embraced each other, and everyone in that space knew God is real.

God hears prayer and responds. If you’re in a time of trouble, go to Him. If you’re in a time of happiness or answered prayer, then praise Him. If you are sick or weak or chained up with unforgiveness, ask to be prayed for. If you get asked to pray for someone, then by all means pray. Can we be a community of faith that trusts God, that praises to Him regularly and gives glory to Him for His response? Can we be that? That’s what James is asking us to be. Let’s pray.

Father God, we come to You this morning. We thank You for Your Word. Your Word is teaching us this morning to pray, to pray to You, to call for prayer, to pray for one another. Lord, I want to ask this morning that You would hear our prayers. If you need prayer this morning, I want to ask you to come up and we would love to pray for you. It doesn't matter what you need prayer for, but if you need prayer for healing and forgiveness, just come up by the organ. We'd love to pray for you. As you live this week, listen for the invitation to offer prayers that God is seeking to come forth from you. Lord, we honor You together, that You are a prayer-hearing God and a prayer-answering God, and that somehow, in the mystery of Your kingdom, the prayers of Your people are extremely powerful and effective. And so we give glory to You, Lord Jesus, that You receive us when we come. In Jesus Name, Amen.