

## WHEN TO PRAY

A pastor had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard and then was afraid to come down. The pastor tried everything to get the kitten down but it would not move and the tree was too narrow to climb. Finally, he decided to get a rope. He threw the rope up to one of the branches and tied the rope to his car bumper. He backed up until the tree bent down, but just before he could reach up and get the kitten the rope broke and the tree snapped back into place and the kitten was gone. He looked all around the yard but there was no sign of it anywhere. The pastor felt terrible so he prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten to your keeping."

The next day he was at the grocery store, and met one of his neighbours. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food. This woman was a cat hater and everyone knew it, so he asked her, "Why are you buying cat food when you hate cats so much?" She replied, "You won't believe this, for weeks my little girl has been begging for a cat, but I kept refusing. Well, yesterday she was begging for a cat again, so I finally told her that she could have a cat when God gives her a cat. So I watched her go out into the back yard, get down on her knees to pray, and, really, Pastor, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, a kitten suddenly came flying out of the clear blue sky and landed right in her arms!"

Today we are concluding our series on prayer. I recognize that there is so much more on this topic that could have been addressed. Prayer is a huge topic and you can come at it from many different directions. Last week I spoke about what to pray for, looking at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. Today I want to talk about WHEN we should pray.

James 5:13-16 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 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. 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. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Life is full of many different moments. There are good days and there are bad days. We never know what to expect. Life is totally unpredictable. Anyone who has had an accident or has had a family member suddenly get sick, can attest that life can change radically in just a matter of seconds. In addition, we all know firsthand how sin can devastate and destroy lives and some of us are living today with the consequences of wrong choices.

In this passage, James talks about 4 times that we should pray;

### 1. When we are suffering (13a)

He begins here in verse 13 asking "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." The word used here refers to suffering of any kind. It can include trouble, disappointment, and persecution. When we're in trouble, we are told to look to God in prayer;

Psalms 34:4-6 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. 5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. 6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

When we're in a mess we should pray for wisdom, strength, and for the removal of the suffering. We have the privilege of prayer where we can go to God at any time, in any situation with whatever is on our hearts. Frankly, I don't know how people can go through hard times without the Lord in their lives.

It's amazing how many bad things can happen to people. A few years ago a columnist named Bill Flick compiled some true stories from a single week. In Connecticut, a man driving a stolen car inadvertently stopped a police officer to ask for directions out of the city. A man in England, who sneezed several hundred times each day for 35 years, was told by health officials that he was allergic to himself. He was cured after another doctor discovered that he simply had a reaction to the oatmeal he'd been eating for breakfast since childhood. In Thailand, an elephant ate 110 pounds of dried rice and then drank 65 gallons of water and, within a half hour, exploded.

In this passage, James asks a simple question: "Is any one of you in trouble?" While probably none of us this week have been sneezing for 35 years or exploded because we ate that much rice or, most of us have had more than one bad day in our life. In fact, some of you are right in the middle of some pretty tough stuff right now. In tough times, go to God first in prayer.

The Bible is clear that suffering is a normal expectation for every believer. Peter puts it rather bluntly;

1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

Even though we know life is never easy, we can give way to self-pity or get resentful and discouraged. When we sense that the pressures of life are greater than we can bear, James tells us to turn to God first and pray.

There was a woman at work when she received a phone call that her daughter was very sick with a fever. She left work and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication for her daughter. When she came out of the store she realized that she had locked her keys inside the car. She didn't know what to do and started to panic. Then she remembered seeing in a movie that someone had used a coat hanger to get into a locked car. She looked around the parking lot and sure enough she found an old bent coat hanger in a nearby bush. She looked at the hanger and said, "God, I don't know how to use this." So she bowed her head and asked God to send her some help.

Right after she had prayed a rough looking man roared up on a motorcycle and pulled into the parking space next to her car. He asked if he could help her. The woman thought, "This is what you sent to help me, God?" She handed him the coat hanger and in less than a minute the car door was unlocked and opened. She hugged the man and through her tears she said, "Thank you so much! You are such a nice man." He said "No, I'm not, Lady. I just got out of prison for car theft." Still hugging him she cried out through her tears "Thank you God for sending me a professional!" When you are in trouble, PRAY!

2. When we have success (13b)

James continues here saying "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." James is saying here that not everyone goes through troubles at the same time. God balances our lives. We will all have good days and bad days. The key is to make sure you remember God, even on the good days.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world -- C.S. Lewis

God shouts to us in our pains, so it is easy to pray when we go through trials. The word “happy” means to be of good cheer, and suggests a state of mind that is free from trouble. When we are happy we need to also stay fervent in prayer. Often our faith is tested more by our successes than our suffering.

In the Old Testament we read about the life of King Hezekiah. He was tested by God in 3 different ways. The first was the test of SECURITY. The king of Assyria came and laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. He had sent a letter to Hezekiah saying that God was unable to save him and that the city would fall. Instead of panicking and giving up, Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed and God sent an angel to kill 185,000 enemy soldiers. The king returned to Assyria in disgrace and his sons killed him while he was in the temple there. Hezekiah passed the test.

The second was the test of SICKNESS. After seeing God defeat the Assyrians Hezekiah became ill and was told by Isaiah that his sickness would lead to death. He wept bitterly about this and God saw his tears and had mercy on him and added 15 years to his life. Again, Hezekiah passed the test.

The third test was the test of SUCCESS. Hezekiah had seen the miracle of the Assyrians defeat. He had gone through sickness and had been given more years to live. He had been a very successful king and he had many riches. Envoys then came from Babylon to meet Hezekiah and see the great things that God had done for Israel:

2 Chr 32:30 It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook. 31 But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

Instead of giving God the glory, Hezekiah took credit for his success and showed the envoys everything in his kingdom, boasting about his accomplishments. God’s judgement on Hezekiah is immediate:

Is 39:5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: 6 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.

Because he did not give God the glory, he lost everything. His own success destroyed him.

In 1928 meeting of the world’s most successful financiers. They met at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. The following were present: The president of the largest steel company, the greatest wheat speculator, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of the President’s Cabinet, the greatest “bear” in Wall Street, the president of the Bank of International Settlements and the head of the world’s greatest monopoly. Collectively, these tycoons controlled more wealth than there was in the U.S. Treasury, and for years newspapers and magazines had been printing their success stories.

Twenty-five years later, a reporter followed up on that meeting. What happened to each of these powerful and successful men? The president of the largest independent steel company, Charles Schwab, lived on borrowed money the last five years of his life and died broke. The greatest wheat speculator, Arthur Cutten, died overseas, insolvent. The president of the New York Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, served a term in Sing Sing Prison. The member of the President’s Cabinet, Albert Fall, was pardoned from prison so he could die at home. The greatest “bear” in Wall Street, Jesse Livermore, committed suicide.

The president of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, committed suicide. The head of the world's greatest monopoly, Ivar Drueger, committed suicide as well.

When things are going bad in your life, PRAY! When things are going good in your life, PRAY!

3. When we have sickness (14-15a)

James continues saying in verse 14-15: "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. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up..."

In verses 14 and 15 we see that forgiveness and healing go together. That is because through our salvation we have been brought into the kingdom of God which is breaking out into the world. Divine healing is happening today as a testimony to the power and grace of God.

Is 53: 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The word for infirmities is translated GRIEFS in the KJV. The context of the passage is that Jesus took on our sins when he was on the cross. It talks about our griefs, sorrows, transgressions and iniquities and then says we are healed. The New Testament says:

1 Pet 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Healing here is again linked to Jesus dealing with sin on the cross. Ultimately all sickness is a result of sin. Because of original sin we live in a fallen world and our bodies are subject to decay. The moment we are born we begin to die. These bodies were not made to last and there is something self-destructive in all of them. Through the cross Jesus brings healing. That healing comes in one of 3 ways:

a. Healed FROM the sickness – faith is built

Sometimes God will choose to miraculously heal us from a sickness. I believe in miraculous healing, I have seen it first hand. I believe it is important to pray for healing. If asked to pray for someone I do not say, "if it is your will Lord, heal this person" because that is basically just saying God will do what God is going to do. I ask specifically for divine healing.

b. Healed THROUGH the sickness – faith is refined

Sometimes God will not heal in an instant but allow doctors, medicine and the bodies own natural healing mechanisms to bring the healing. Our bodies are amazing things.

c. Healed BY the sickness into glory – faith is perfected

God ultimately brings healing by calling us home to be with Him. We all die. Even people who are miraculously healed of an illness will one day die. Death is God's ultimate healing.

One day we who have received Christ will be called home to heaven and we will be fully healed when we get our new bodies there. Until then the grace of God is sufficient to help us bear our thorns and at times the mercy of God spills out in miraculous healing. Yes, we should pray and expect God to do the miraculous, but trust in God to ultimately do what is best in our lives.

It says we are to call the elders and to anoint with oil. Oil in the Bible was often used as a symbol of health and vitality and it was used as a visible symbol of God's presence. The same is true here. There's nothing magical or supernatural about it. By anointing with oil, we are giving a humble reminder that all healing must come from God. It builds faith and says to the sick person, "God is here and He is able to heal you." It says that we should pray "in the name of the Lord" which again is a reminder that God is the ultimate source of all blessing and healing. The power is not in the elders, in the oil, or even in the amount of faith we possess -- but in the name of the Lord. Ultimately God will heal in the way He sees fit to heal.

Dwight Moody was traveling by boat on one of the Great Lakes when a really bad storm developed. The other passengers on the boat cowered in fear. They even started an impromptu prayer meeting asking God to deliver them from the storm. Moody didn't join in this prayer meeting. When asked why not, he answered with these words, "I have a sister in Chicago and one in heaven and I don't care which one I see tonight." Through suffering, success and sickness we need to PRAY!

#### 4. When we have sinned (15b-16)

Notice the last part of verse 15 and verse 16: "If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

Again, there is a close relationship between the physical and the spiritual. David, after committing some pretty bad sins, started to feel the effects in his body. Listen to how he describes the link between his walk with God and his physical health.

Psalms 32:3-4 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

It is extremely important that we confess your sins to God and to others. Sin can work its way into our bodies, causing us to feel like we're wasting away. We need to own our sins. If you can think of something right now that you've done, or are still doing, confess it to someone. The word "confess" means to find a fellow believer and agree with what God says about your sin.

All sickness is the result of sin, meaning original sin. It is important to understand that sickness is not always the result of particular sin. Most sickness is just the natural result of living in a fallen and sinful world. We need to pray for forgiveness when we blow it, but understand that God does not punish your sin by striking you with some disease in your life. When you have sinned PRAY!

Pray aggressively because God can do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

Pray fervently because the fervent prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective.

However, pray submissively because God's understanding of the total situation is much greater than ours. Pray specifically and boldly, but remember that prayer is a request, not an order.

F.B. Meyer writes, "The greatest tragedy is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer." Remember Jesus said that sometimes we have not because we ask not. So let's ask expecting to receive.

You do not need to be an expert in prayer to pray. No matter who you are, you can make a difference.

Barbara was a high school student. Her father took her to the high school parking lot for driving lessons. For this particular lesson, Barbara's three-year-old sister rode along in the backseat. While trying to negotiate a turn, Barbara hit the curb. From the backseat she heard a small voice say, "God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food..." Barbara slammed on the brakes, turned around to the backseat and yelled, "What are you talking about?" Her little sister replied, "Your driving is scaring me, and that's the only prayer I know."

I want to end the service today by asking you to pray as a church for a new local outreach initiative we have as a church. We as a church want to be a blessing to this community around us. While we have lots of nice expensive houses around the church, we also know that we have one of the poorest areas of Brampton just down the street from us, an area called Knightsbridge.

A few years ago Ted and Jen Brown sold their home and intentionally moved into Knightsbridge. Along with living there they had been renting an apartment where they provide assistance and children's programs for the area. Ted and Jen are moving to a different ministry and we as a church have taken this apartment to continue blessing the community. We are looking for people from the church to be involved in three different ways.

The first is a weekly children's program. Each week and evening program for younger and then older children is held. We need volunteers who are interested in working with children to help run these programs to reach out to these kids. Many of them are from different faith backgrounds, and this is an amazing opportunity to share Christ.

The second way to get involved is through a youth art class. Each week youth come and learn about art from volunteers. This program was initially started by Jason Persaud and Youth Unlimited but is in need of people to come and help. Again, this is an amazing opportunity to share Christ with our community.

The third way to get involved is through the free store. A few times a year the apartment at Knightsbridge is opened to those in need. Food, furniture and other assistance is given as a way of showing the love of Jesus.

These are just some examples of ways that you can be involved in blessing this community. We as a church continue to support regeneration and organizations like the Wilkinson shelter. The youth are involved in a weekly basketball outreach to many non Christians who come from the Knightsbridge area. Please pray with me that we as a church would continue to be a blessing.

To find out more about how to be involved there is a special information night happening this Wednesday at 7:00 pm here at the church downstairs in room 1. As you pray if you feel that God is directing you or your small group to get involved please come out and find out some of the ways you can help.