

JAMES 5:16B-18

PASTOR SCOTT ESTELL

Introductory Overview (the “forest”)

- The overall context of the book of James is: spiritual maturity
- According to James 5:13-18, one of the characteristics of a mature Christian is: praying
- The one who writes these words is James, half-brother of our Lord, called “camel knees” due to his own propensity for praying (his knees becoming calloused due to his frequent kneeling in prayer), and the first pastor in church history, pastor of the church in Jerusalem, a church that also had a propensity for prayer, as a study of the book of Acts shows, one whom R. Kent Hughes says “walked his talk—on his knees”
- Introductory comments on verses 13-16a (the “trees”)
 - if suffering, pray (v. 13a); if soaring, praise (v. 13b)
 - back to the first, a specific subset of suffering (vs. 14-16a)
 - the praying is primary, the anointing with oil secondary (pray the main verb in v. 14, anointing a participle; no mention of anointing in v. 15)
 - the sickness seems to be the direct result of sin (end of v. 15 and start of v. 16)
 - IMHO, this procedure is not prescriptive for the present (no more direct revelation to definitively know that the sickness is the direct result of sin; “the prayer of faith” in v. 15, and faith is taking God at His Word [so, this is more objective than subjective], and no more word from Heaven)
 - The commands of verse 16a are contextually conditioned (the first, therefore, is not authorization to air one’s dirty laundry in public; the circle of confession is to correspond to the circle of commitment—so, private sin, private confession; public sin, public confession—and the circle of confession is to correspond to the circle of cognition; so, confession should only be to those who have a right to know, i.e., those who are part of the problem or part of the solution—parents, pastors, principals, police, etc.)
- In 5:16b-18, James gives an excellent example of praying, the example of: Elijah

The Proposition (v. 16b): prayer is powerful

- Literally: “very powerful is a prayer of a righteous man, being made effective”
 - “Very powerful” first in sentence, for emphasis

- “Being made effective [Greek *energeo*/English “energy”]” is a passive participle (the prayer is not doing the acting, but is being acted upon)
 - So, energized by Whom? God
 - And how? I.e., what kind of praying does God empower, energize? The rest of this text tells us.

Proof (vs. 17-18): the example of Elijah

- The person praying (vs. 16b-17a)
 - A righteous man (v. 16b)
 - Positionally righteous—what’s the only prayer of a sinner God will hear? The sinner’s prayer; the only way to have access to the Father is through the Son (John 14:6b), so you must first have the Son
 - Practically righteous
 - Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 1:28-30; Isaiah 1:15, 59:2-3
 - In the context, the sin that was producing the sickness was also preventing answer to prayer
 - A regular righteous man (v. 17a)
 - Cf. 1 Kings 19, as Elijah runs for his life from Jezebel and wants to end his life
 - Rightly has it been said that Elijah “put his tunic on one sleeve at a time”
 - And also rightly has it been said that “The best of men are but men at their best”
- The praying (vs. 17b-18)
 - He prayed (“and he prayed,” v. 17b)

Poem: “Prayers Must Be Prayed”

“Life without purpose is barren indeed;
 There can’t be a harvest unless you plant seed.
 If we send no ships out, no ships will come in.
 Unless there’s a contest, nobody can win,
 For games can’t be won unless they are played,
 And prayers can’t be answered unless they are prayed.”

- He prayed passionately (“and he prayed fervently,” v. 17b)

- As did Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44—“And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”; now that’s passionate praying!)
- As did Epaphras in Colossians 4:12—“always struggling [Greek *agonizomai*/English “agony”] on your behalf in his prayers”
- And as Paul asked the Romans to do in Romans 15:30—“I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with [Greek *sunagonizomai*] me in your prayers to God on my behalf”
- Why is prayer so agonizing? Why is it, as Samuel Zwemer, missionary to the Muslims, once said, “the gymnasium of the soul”? Because of the enemies of our soul:
 - Satan *discourages* (don’t let him use your failure to pray in the past to cause you to fail to pray in the present; don’t let him get you to think that prayer is pointless)
 - The world *distracts* (prayer is not nearly as exciting as virtually any other thing)
 - And our flesh is *undisciplined* (as 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us, we need to “train “ ourselves for godliness”; prayer takes physical and mental discipline)
- He prayed purposefully (vs. 17b-18)

To perceive this point, consider the historical context behind what James writes

- Apparently God reveals to Elijah that the rain would cease, as judgment upon Israel for her idolatry (1 Kings 18:18), and Elijah tells Ahab so (1 Kings 17:1)
- Elijah prays accordingly (“prayed fervently that it might not rain,” James 5:17; note how God’s sovereignty did not diminish the intensity of his human responsibility; rather than diminish it, it drove it)
- God answers Elijah’s prayer (“and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth,” James 5:17)
- God reveals to Elijah that the drought would cease (1 Kings 18:1), and Elijah lets Ahab know (1 Kings 18:41)

- Elijah prays accordingly (1 Kings 18:42 and James 5:18’s “then he prayed again”)
- God answers Elijah’s prayer (1 Kings 18:43-45 and James 5:18’s “and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit”)

The purpose for Elijah’s praying was: to see God’s purposes performed.

In other words, what made Elijah’s praying so powerful was the fact that he prayed according to the revealed will of God.

And this is what will make our praying powerful, not seeking to have our will done in Heaven (James 4:3), but seeking to have God’s will done on Earth (Matthew 6:10b). See especially 1 John 5:14-15, as well as John 15:7, in this regard.

And since the only place in which God reveals His will is in the pages of His Word, let us make the Bible integral to our praying by:

- Studying the prayers found in Scripture, such as those of:
 - Christ (Matthew 6:9-13 and John 17)
 - Paul (see *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* by D.A. Carson)
 - Others (including the prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:36-37; the prayer of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14-19//Isaiah 37:14-20; the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10; the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19; the prayer of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:4-11; the many prayers of David in the Psalms; the prayer of Daniel in Daniel 9:1-19; and the prayer of Epaphras in Colossians 4:12-13)
- Praying for the things the Bible specifically tells us to pray for or things that the Bible specifically tells us are God’s will, such as:
 - the salvation of the lost (Romans 10:1, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9)
 - the sanctification of the saved (John 17:17, 1 Thessalonians 4:13)
 - laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38)
 - the ministry of God’s Word (Ephesians 6:18-20, Colossians 4:2-4, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1)
 - political leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-8)
 - enemies (Matthew 5:44)
 - the return of Christ (Matthew 6:10a, Revelation 22:20)

- And reading, studying, meditating upon, and memorizing our Bibles more in order to discern the desires of God and pray accordingly (see excerpt on George Mueller from p. 108 of D. Edmond Hiebert's *Working with God Through Intercessory Prayer*)

D. A. Carson: "One of the most important elements of intercession is to think through, in light of Scripture, what it is God wants us to ask for"

See excerpt from W. Bingham Hunter's *The God Who Hears*, p. 104

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- Verses 13-16a

- In verses 16b-18, James gives an excellent example of praying, the example of:

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 - Positionally righteous (John 14:6b)

- Practically righteous (Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 1:28-30; Isaiah 1:15, 59:2-3)
- A _____ righteous man (v. 17a)
- The praying (vs. 17b-18)
 - He _____ (“and he prayed,” v. 17b)
 - He prayed _____ (“and he prayed fervently,” v. 17b)
 - As did Jesus (Luke 24:44)
 - As did Epaphras (Colossians 4:12)
 - As Paul asked the Romans to do (Romans 15:30)
 - Why is prayer so agonizing? Because of:
 - Satan *discourages*
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