

Make Prayer a Priority

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Date: 14 September 2025

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, which I trust and hope that you do, I encourage you to get them out. And we are, once again, in the book of James. I think this will be our last week in the book of James. But follow along this morning.

And again, I love the book of James. All God's Word is good and important and valuable. But the book of James is one that really highlights some things in our lives, practical things that we should be doing, that we should be reflecting, that should be evident in our lives.

And this morning is no different. And we are going to start in James 5, verse 13, is where we're going to begin. And this morning, I told you earlier, we were talking about prayer.

And I mentioned we're going to be talking more about prayer this morning. And really, that's what this section of James is all about. It's about prayer, and it's about prayer, and then it's about more prayer.

And that should be really what our lives are like. So if you found it in God's Word, I'd ask you to stand if you're able. As we read this morning. Again, James 5, beginning in verse 13.

[1 : 03] And this is what it shares. Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

[2 : 12] Let's bow our heads as we pray together. Lord God, once again, we thank you for this morning that you've given us for this opportunity we have to be among our family and in your house. And Lord, I pray that you would work on each one of us this morning, that you would take your sandpaper to our lives, smooth us where we need to be smooth, teach us where we need to be taught, shape us and mold us, and just help us to be more and more of a reflection of you to this world around us.

Thank you again for your word and just all the wisdom that it provides, Lord, and the truth that it provides. Truth is something we so desperately need in this world. So, Lord, just speak to our hearts on this day, and it's in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, and all God's people say, Amen. All right, you can be seated this morning. So, as we begin in verse 13, I want you to look at that verse. Verse 13 is not a very long verse, and yet there's a truth in this that I think all of us need to come to an understanding of, and not just understanding, but we also need to apply it in our lives. There is a difference between understanding something and applying something. Do you know the difference? There's a big difference, isn't it? Between knowing something and doing something about it.

You know, we talk about the Bible, and we talk about good and evil. We think about Satan, and Satan is real. You know that, right? Okay. Does Satan know about the Bible?

[3 : 42] Do you think he knows it just a little bit? Do you think he knows it better than we do? I would agree with you.

I think he knows it better than we do. So, what is the problem? It's a good thing to know the Bible, right? So, what is the problem there? Yeah, he knows it, but does he follow it? Does he put its teachings into practice? No, he actively works against it. So, again, knowing it is not enough. And as we look at this verse 13 in James chapter 5, it's talking about prayer. And it is great to know about prayer. It is great to talk about prayer. But what is it that we really need to do with prayer? Do it. Practice it.

Put it into effect in our lives. And look at what it says in verse 13. Is any among you afflicted? All right. Let's think about that for a minute. What is an affliction?

[4 : 45] Can be a sickness? Can be an injury? Can be a weakness? Anything else?

We always, when you hear that word affliction, you immediately think, oh, something's physically wrong with someone. But we can be afflicted, that means impacted, or it can have an effect on our life by many, many things.

It's talking about a difficulty in our lives. That's what an affliction is. It's a difficulty. Think about it, isn't it? How many of you would want to say this morning, I hope I'm afflicted this week?

That's what I really want this week. Do any of you want that? No, I don't either. Because it's a negative thing. It's a difficulty in our lives. That's what it means to be afflicted.

And the Bible says, if you have an affliction, if you have a difficulty, if you have a trial, something that's hard in your life, what's our response to that?

[5 : 44] Pray. Pray. Should be our first and most important response. But when we have a difficulty, what sometimes is our response instead of prayer?

How sometimes do we respond to difficulties? Instead of praying about it, what do we sometimes do? Like take care of it. Complain? None of you ever complain, right? Let me ask, how many of you complained about something this week?

If you notice me raising my hand, I've got poison ivy right now. Guess what I've done about that poison ivy this week? I've complained about it because I don't like it.

But we all have things from day to day, from week to week, that are difficult, and we can complain about them. What else can we do? We can try to fix it.

Try to do it on our own. We can solve the problem. We come up with a solution. What else? What's that? Itch it. Yeah, if it's poison ivy. Yeah, yeah. What else can be our response to difficulty?

[6 : 55] Ignore it. Hope it goes away. Feel sorry for ourselves. All these responses we can have to difficulties, and some of those come pretty natural, especially the complaining.

The Bible says if you're afflicted, if you have a difficulty, do you have something too? You can apologize? Yeah, that's another one. But it says here if we're afflicted, if you have a difficulty, what does it say to do?

What is the solution? What is the answer? Pray. That should be our first response when difficulties come. Before we start the complaining, before we start the self-pity and feeling bad for ourselves, before we try to solve it on our own, we should pray.

And that solving it on our own thing, I think that's one we also fall into. We try to solve problems on our own. Sometimes we might solve the problem. Sometimes we make it worse, don't we?

And then we finally get to the point, all right, I need to pray about this because I've really messed it up now. Prayer should be that first response, shouldn't it? That first response we have, take it to the Lord.

[8 : 07] Pray about it. So, if you have a difficulty in your life, what's the response? Pray. Now it goes on and kind of talks about the other end of things. Is any merry?

What does that merry mean? Happy. You have something good happening in your life. How many of you will pray for that this week? Yeah, we like the merry part better than the afflicted part. But here's the thing. The response to these two things really should be the same. Whether we have good things or whether we have difficult things, affliction or something we're happy about, the response should be the same because look at what it says.

Is any among you merry? Let him do what? Sing psalms. Sing psalms. Sing psalms. All right. Well, that's kind of interesting. Sing psalms. What is a psalm?

I know we think of the book of psalms, but what's a psalm? Lifting up prayers. Any other answers?

[9 : 09] What's a psalm? It says we're supposed to sing psalms, right? How can we do that if we don't know what it is? It's a type of praise. Words of encouragement.

What's that? Seeing away the evil. Is any among you afflicted? Let him sing psalms. Okay. So we're supposed to... If you're merry, let him sing psalms.

So we're supposed to sing psalms this week. All right? I want you all singing psalms this week. All right. Yeah, we haven't really figured out what that means, right? One of the things that I read that I think sums it up well is that the highest form of prayer is a psalm because it is praising God.

It's all about God. And I know we think of the book of psalms, so the verses aren't up here, but turn to psalms. Turn to the book of psalms in your Bible. Pages should be turning.

Turn to psalms. The very beginning of it. The first couple chapters in psalms are really kind of the opening to psalms. So I want you to look starting in chapter 3 of psalms.

[10:29] Are you all there yet? If you want to know what a psalm is, it's important that we look at this because this is the book of psalms. Most of them, a little over half, written by King David.

Psalms chapter 3. Look at the first verse. Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Who is that psalm to? What's the first word?

Who's he talking to? Lord. Lord. Lord. Look in chapter 4. Next chapter. Hear me when I call, O God, of my righteousness.

You have enlarged me when I was in distress. Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. Who's he talking to? God. Look in psalms chapter 5. Give ear to my words, O Lord.

Consider my meditation. Look in chapter 6. We're flying right through psalms, aren't we? We only have another hundred and some chapters to go. First verse. O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger.

[11:32] Look in psalms chapter 7. O Lord, my God. Look in psalms chapter 8. O Lord, our Lord. Look in psalms chapter 9. I will praise you, O Lord.

Look in psalms chapter 10. Why stand you afar off, O Lord? Look in psalms chapter 11. In the Lord, I put my trust. Psalms 12.

Help. Lord. Are you getting the idea? I mean, we really could keep going in psalms. It's a long book in the Bible. What is a psalm? That should give you a pretty good indication of what a psalm is.

What is a psalm? A psalm of the Lord. Who is it psalm to? Who is David talking to? God. A psalm is talking to God.

It's giving God praise. It's focusing on God. But at its heart, it is talking to God. What is talking to God? Prayer.

[12:29] Prayer. So if you are afflicted, you're supposed to pray. If you're going through a good time, you're supposed to pray. That kind of covers it all, doesn't it?

In the bad, in the good, in all of it, what should our response be? Prayer. And I will tell you, I think one of those is probably easier than the other.

Because when we have difficulties in our lives, we tend to go to God to ask for help. But what about the other and the good things in our lives?

How often do we celebrate and leave God out as a part of that? How often when the good times are coming, do we kind of forget to talk to God? Because when things are good, what should our talk with God be all about?

Praising Him. Thanking Him. Anything good in your life, where does it come from? God. I share it all the time.

[13:36] The verse, every good and every perfect gift comes down from? From above. From God. God. So our response to anything good in our lives should be to talk to God, to pray, and to thank Him.

To give Him the praise. To give Him the glory. That should be our response. Bad or good, we should be talking to God. What do we do instead when things are good?

Instead of talking to God. We realize when things are bad, we grumble, we complain, we do all kinds of other things. What about when things are good? What are some other things we sometimes do instead of talking to God? What's that?

We share it with others, which is a good thing. What's that? We brag. We might do that. But how often do we first go to God and say, God, thank You for this good thing in my life.

Thank You for this good time in my life. Thank You for the little good things, just the health that we have for each day. When you woke up this morning, did you wake up without poison ivy? Thank God for it.

[14:45] You don't want it. But all the good things that we have, thank God for them. And for the difficulties, pray and take them to God. What it's telling us here in James is our lives should be all

about prayer.

In the good and in the bad, our conversation with God. That's what prayer is. It is talking to God. And that should be a core part of our lives as believers.

Talking to our Father. The One who has given us everything. The One who has done everything for us. The One who has given us every good thing. And in the difficult times, the One who is there for us.

He is the One that we should be talking to. And I want you to think in your life, who do you talk to the most? In your life, who do you talk to the most? We can come up with a lot of answers for that, can't we?

Anybody that'll listen. Guess what? God will listen. I mean, we talk to a lot of people in our lives. We talk to our spouse, or I hope you talk to your spouse.

[15:52] We talk to our children. We talk to our parents. We talk to our neighbors. We talk to our friends. We talk to other church members. All that's great. How much of that time do you spend dedicated talking to your God?

In that relationship. Fostering that relationship. The communication between you and God. I have several weddings coming up in October. So I've done a lot of counseling with couples that are getting ready to get married.

Right, Adelaide? Sydney? A couple of them are here. And we talk a lot about communication. And the importance of setting aside time to communicate with your spouse.

That is important, right? I think of some of you couples that have been married like 50 years. If you've been married 50 years or more, raise your hand right now. Raise it up. You should be proud of that.

Keep it up there. All right, give them a hand for a minute. That is an accomplishment. Now, for those of you that have been married 50 years or more, how important has communication been in that 50 years?

[16:55] Very. How has that communication... No, I won't ask. Is it always where it should be? Ain't enough time. What was that? Ain't enough time in the day to hear it.

You don't have enough time in the day. No, that's a truthful answer. And I wonder sometimes how often we have that kind of attitude with our relationship with God.

That we become so busy in things that we don't have time to talk to God. And I really warn couples about this. That life gets busy. You have children.

You have a job. You have responsibilities. And they can pull you in all different kinds of directions. And they can pull couples apart. And they have to be very diligent about spending that time together and communicating in that time.

But folks, the same is true with our relationship with God. We need to be diligent about setting time aside to talk with God.

[17:52] Because if we don't set time aside and make it a priority, you know what? It won't happen. Our time will get filled up with a lot of other things that we think of as important.

And we won't have the time to talk with God. And folks, what James is telling us, we should be talking with God all the time. In the good, in the bad, and everything in between, we should be conversing with our God.

But it doesn't end in verse 13 in James 5. Look on down in verse 14. Is any sick among you? Okay, so we've been afflicted.

We've been glad. Now is any sick among you? What is the answer for if you're sick? What does it say to do? Call for the elders.

And do what? Pray. So we're back to prayer again, aren't we? Pray, pray, and then pray. That is the answer that James gives. And he says if you're sick, call for the elders of the church.

[18:51] Why do you think it says to call for the elders of the church? Are they like more special? God listens to them more? What is the reason for calling for the elders of the church?

They may have already experienced what you're going through. Okay. Any other thoughts? I think that's true. To be humbled. Anything else?

What's that? Strength in numbers? Absolutely. And as I was thinking about this earlier this week, because I think there's power in prayer, whether it's the elders or any group of people, there's power in prayer.

But it says specifically call for the elders. And I think one of the reasons for that is, you know, as you call elders in a church, or whether they're called deacons, or whatever the name you choose to use, I don't think the name is necessarily important.

But these are to be men of faith, right? Faith should be an important part of their life. So what it's really saying is, you're calling together a group that you know are faithful people to pray for you.

[20 : 04] Because the other thing we have to understand about prayer is, prayer has to be mixed with faith for it to really work. Do we understand that? Faith has to be a part of that mixture.

And when it says call for the elders, you're calling for those that you know are men or women of faith. Calling them together to pray. You know, we can look at other scriptures where we find this pretty clearly.

I want you to look in Matthew chapter 17. Turn there real quick. Matthew 17, verse 18. Matthew 17, beginning in verse 18.

Yeah, I don't know what I wrote down. That isn't the verse I wanted. Let's try Matthew 13. Let's go there. Oh, wait. I was in John.

No wonder it didn't make any sense. We all get confused once in a while. Go back to Matthew 17. Let's try Matthew instead of John. Maybe I need your glasses, Dave.

[21 : 21] Yeah, it's the poison ivy. It's all the poison ivy. Yeah, Matthew 17, verse 18. This looks much better than the one in John. It didn't make any sense at all. Matthew 17, verse 18.

And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him, and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said, why could we not cast him out?

And Jesus said to them, because of your unbelief or lack of faith. For verily I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove here to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you.

Unbelief. Unbelief, their lack of faith, had an impact on that, didn't it? That's what Jesus said.

Because of your lack of faith. When we pray, faith has to be a part of that mixture.

That's why it says, call for elders. You are calling for men of faith to come together and pray with you. When you pray as a group, when you pray as an individual, you have to have faith that God is going to work.

[22 : 31] Now, does that mean when you pray and you have enough faith, God is going to do whatever you want Him to do? Is that what it means? Be clear, that is not the case.

God is going to do what God knows is best. But we need to have faith that God can work. That God can do all things. That God cares about us.

That God has a plan for us. That is the faith that we need to have. Do you believe God has a plan for you? Do you believe God has a plan for you?

I'm seriously asking you, do you believe that? If you are a believer, God has a plan for your life.

Have faith in that. Do you believe God knows what is best?

When you pray, understand that. That God has a plan. And that God does know what is best. Ask whatever request you want of God. But make sure then you say, but God let your will be done.

[23 : 31] That's real faith. Trusting in God's plan and God's purpose for your life. Whether it is a time of difficulty or when you're married. When it's a good time. Go back to James chapter 5.

We're down to verse 16. And we're going to talk about something for a minute we stink at. You like talking about things you're not very good at? Okay.

James 16. Confess your faults one to another. How good are we at that? How good are we at that?

Are we good at it or bad at it?

Bad at it. Why? Fear? Fear of what? Don't like to talk about our faults. Why? Fear of what people are going to think about us.

How many of you would agree with that? So what do we do with our faults? It says we should confess them to each other. What does that mean? It means share them with each other.

[24 : 41] We don't, as a general rule, like to share our faults with each other. Because of fear. So what do we do instead? With our faults. We have faults, right?

I've asked you to raise your hand for several things this morning. Raise your hand if you have faults.

Do we have them? Why don't we like to share them? Why are we afraid of sharing them?

Embarrassment? Fear of what others might think of us? Pride and ego. And we let those things stop us from doing something God tells us to do.

Isn't that what He says right here? Is there any other way to understand this? Confess your faults to each other. Is there any other way to understand that than that to mean that we should be talking with each other and sharing our weaknesses and our mistakes with each other?

But we are afraid of that. But we are afraid of that and there's a reason we're afraid of that because we can often be very judgmental, can't we? Somebody shares a fault. Oh, I can't believe that. I can't believe that about that person.

[25 : 48] Well, you should because you've got your own faults, don't you? Here's the reality, folks. We are people that are just riddled with faults. We have all kinds of faults, don't we? Don't we?

Don't we? Whether it is how we treat people, how we think about people, how we handle anger, how we handle frustration. Maybe it's the language we use.

Maybe it's things we look at on the computer or our phones. Maybe it's pornography. Maybe it's alcohol. I don't know what it is, but we all have our faults, don't we? Maybe we gossip. Maybe we eat too much.

Gluttony's a fault, isn't it? Maybe we don't pray as often as we should. Maybe we don't really read our Bible. We just talk like we do.

All those are faults, aren't they? Maybe we don't share love the way that we're supposed to. I don't know what your fault is, but guess what? You have one. You have more than one.

[26 : 46] And so do I. Folks, and it doesn't mean for me to call one of you up and say, Armando, I want you to come up here and I want you to share your faults with everybody right now.

How would any of you feel if I asked you to do that right now? Any volunteers for that? Scott would do it. Most of the time, we would be very, very uncomfortable with that.

Airing out our lives and our faults in front of each other. And I don't know that that's what it's asking us to do. But it's asking us to have enough relationships with each other in this family that we are.

To have enough relationships where there are those times we can be talking with somebody and say, I'm struggling with this. Or I really blew it in this situation. I was talking with somebody and I really lost my cool and I said some things I really shouldn't have said.

Or I was alone this week and I looked at some stuff that I really shouldn't have looked at. Or you know what? Somebody asked me something and I didn't want to really get caught in that so I lied about it.

[27 : 52] That we can share those things with each other. Because we all have faults. We all sin at times, don't we?

Don't we? That's truth, folks. That's reality. We try to hide it and gloss over it like, Oh no, we're perfect people. We're so righteous, we never sinned.

That is not anyone in this room. Jesus is the only one that walked on this earth and can say that He never sinned. The rest of us are not in that category and will not be.

We will continue to have our faults. We will continue to have those rough edges that God needs to continue to work on and sand down through the Holy Spirit. We will continue to have that. But we are supposed to get better at that by sharing those things with each other.

But again, after we share it, it's not just to share it to get it off our chest. It's not just to share it just because the Bible says it. But what does it say after that? Confess your faults to one another.

[28 : 51] And then it says something we're supposed to do after that. Oh, we're back to prayer again, aren't we? It always comes back to that, doesn't it? Confess your faults and pray for each other.

We are supposed to pray for each other's weaknesses. That's what it's saying. How can we do that if we don't even know each other's weaknesses? It requires an honesty that is uncomfortable.

But I have not yet found a verse in God's Word where He says His first priority is to make you comfortable. Have you found that verse? It's because it's not there.

God's priority is not to make you comfortable. It's to make you more and more a reflection of Him to the world around you. And the only way that's going to happen, if there is honesty and we pray for each other and we work at those weaknesses and we become more and more the people God wants us to be.

We might be in James another week because I'm not done. And our time is. But folks, this morning, it's about prayer.

[29 : 58] I want you to honestly think for a moment in your life. In your priorities of life, where does prayer fall?

And don't answer that out loud, but I want you to consider that. Is it where it should be? When you have a difficulty, is prayer your first place you go? When you have something good happen, is prayer the first place you go?

Do you share with others your weaknesses so they can pray about those things? It's what God is asking us to do. This week, I simply encourage you to think about prayer in your life.

Is it what God would want it to be? That's it. It's as simple as that. Is it what God would want it to be? If it's not, work on it.

Work on it. Make it a priority. Ask God to help you. Make it a priority. Don't try to do it on your own. Talk to someone else in the church and say, you know, I don't pray as often as I should.

[30 : 57] Just check with me once in a while. My prayer life is where it should be. Be accountable to each other. It's God's desire for our lives. Let's pray.

Lord God, thank You again for Your Word. And Lord, Your Word is meant to challenge us. It's not meant to just for us to come into Your house and Your Word to just make us feel good and then we leave.

That is not the purpose of Your Word. It will make us feel good. It will bring us joy. It will bring us peace. But Lord, Your Word is also meant to challenge us. And Lord, I pray this morning that each one of us would consider the place of prayer in our hearts and in our lives.

Are we the people of prayer that You ask us to be? Do we pray in the bad, in the good? Is prayer our first response or our last thing we look to?

Help us to make prayer our first response in our lives. Help us to make it a priority, our communication with You. In the name of Jesus, I pray.

[32 : 05] Amen.