

Pray in Faith (James 5:13-20)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 October 2025

Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0 : 0 0] Amen. Amen. Thank you so much, Squire, for leading us and teaching us that song, He Will Hold Me Fast.! What a powerful message behind that song. What a powerful reminder that no matter what we're going through in this life, that Christ will hold us fast.

Such an encouragement. Over the last few months, we've been making our way through the book of James. And James is one of those books at first glance and really for many years of my life when I read through the book of James.

I think one of the reasons that I liked it so much and still many of the reasons I do today is because it's so practical. Because James does step on your toes a little bit. James does call you to do things. There is this wisdom literature aspect behind it that James makes very clear as we read through the book of James. But there's no doubt about these things. But I think at the heart of this book, it's a book about faith.

It's a book about faith. That faith in Jesus is going to produce a life that follows Jesus. The way that we've said it many times throughout this is faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ.

[1 : 2 6] Once we place our faith and our trust in Jesus, then it's going to produce a faithfulness in our life that we want to live for Jesus. And so while James is a book that calls us to do many things, while it is a book that is very practical, it is ultimately a book that is strengthening our faith and our trust in Jesus.

James has the heart of a pastor. And even in some of those difficult topics that he addresses, he does so because he loves the church.

He does so not out of a heart of trying to get a rise out of someone, not with a heart of just trying to point fingers, but he does so with a heart that loves the people, that loves the church.

And so as we close out this book, you get to clearly see the heart and the importance of faith being displayed in the last eight verses of James.

And so for the last time, at least for a while, I invite you to open with me to James chapter 5. We're going to start in verse 13, and we're going to close out and finish reading through the book of James.

[2 : 4 2] So James chapter 5, starting in verse 13, this is what the word of the Lord says. It says, And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain.

And for three years and six months, it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Now, before we get into this passage and figuring out what James is trying to communicate to us, I think it's helpful for us, especially with a passage like this that can be difficult to understand, that can have a little bit of controversy there.

[4 : 2 3] I think it's important for us to understand what this passage is not saying as we go into what it is saying for us. First of all, this passage is not an example of a healing rally or a particular healing ministry of someone.

For one, this is taking place in a sick person's home. It's happening in their home where they're laying. It's happening in their life. And they are the one, the sick person is the one who is initiating the prayers to come to him.

And the prayers that are coming are being offered up are by regular elders in the church. They didn't reference the apostles, which at the time of this writing, they could have referenced many of

the apostles and asked for the apostles to come and pray with them.

And we see that the apostles had an incredible ministry of proclaiming the gospel and also healing people as they went about. But this is not the case here. We see this as regular elders in the church.

And so whatever James is describing here, he is certainly not talking about a healing service, so to speak. Next, this is not teaching that prayer always leads to healing, and especially the kind of healing that we may have in mind.

[5 : 46] We see examples in the Bible of godly sick people not being healed. Timothy, for example, he was dealing with an issue with his stomach, and what Paul told him to do was to take a little wine for the issues that he was dealing with with his stomach.

And also we see in Paul's life himself, we see this thorn in his flesh that he prayed for for multiple times for this to be taken away, and it wasn't taken away.

And so this is not some kind of secret formula here that is going to guarantee healing. What we must remember in this is what makes our faith strong is not manufacturing intensity, but understanding who is the object of our faith, and that's Jesus.

It's not going to come about because we're trying to manufacture something, we start making promises, and we're not going to do this, we are going to do this, and then maybe we'll have enough faith.

That's not the point of this. The point for us is to trust Jesus more, understanding that he does have the power and that he has the wisdom as well.

[6 : 58] If we forget this, we end up trusting in our faith and wondering if we have enough rather than trusting in Jesus. To think and to suggest that only certain people whose faith is intense enough can receive miraculous healing is both dangerous and it's not supported in Scripture.

Sam Alberi, he notes it this way, he says, Some never recover from such teaching.

They might reject God altogether for not keeping what they have been led to believe was his side of the bargain. Or they might reject themselves, believing that they are such spiritual failures that there is no point in trying to keep up with the Christian life.

So it is not teaching that prayer will always lead to the kind of healing that we think of. That being said, there are some that suggest this passage is not referring to miraculous healing at all.

And well, this doesn't seem to be accurate either. And so as we look at this, we must see the balance of what James is trying to communicate. And it's interesting to note, if you look at verses 13 through 18, that paragraph or that longer paragraph that we read, if you look at each one of those verses, you're going to see prayer coming up in every single verse.

[8 : 41] And so with such an emphasis on prayer and such a repetition, clearly James is trying to communicate to us the importance of prayer in our lives. And I think the first thing that he's trying to communicate, the first thing that he's trying to teach us about prayer is that we should pray in everything.

That we should pray in everything. Listen to verses 13 and 14. James is clearly telling us to go to God in prayer.

No matter what's going on in our lives, he's saying, is anyone of you suffering? Go to God. Is anyone of you cheerful where everything is going well? Go to God.

Is anyone of you sick? Then go to God. What he's clearly telling us over and over again is that we should have such a dependence on God that we go to him in everything that we say and do. Think about your lives. Think about what's going on in your lives. If someone, think about the person that you would go to if something tragic happened in your life. Who's the first person that you're going to?

[10 : 05] Who are you going to call when you're suffering and going through a difficult time? And then also think about the person that you would want to be the first one to know when something really great happens in your life.

When something really exciting takes place. Who's going to be the one you call for that? And then also when you just get a bad diagnosis or someone close to you does.

Who's going to be the person that you call? And I have a feeling that in each one of these circumstances, the people that we're going to call are those that we are closest to.

And that's the point that James is trying to make here. Have a relationship with God that is so close, that is so intimate, that is so dependent on him in our lives that no matter what we're going through

in this life, we are going to him.

Our lives are going to be filled with ups and downs and everything in between. What James is saying for us to do is to go to God in everything. To go to him in everything that we say and do.

[11 : 10] And I think this is something that James modeled very clearly for us. I mean, how else are you going to get the nickname Old Camel Knees without constantly going to prayer in God?

You know, this was what we talked about the very first week. His nickname was Old Camel Knees.

And just a couple of weeks ago, we took our family up to a circus in Clarksville.

Now, I don't know what you have in mind when you think of circus, but just have this in mind. The whole circus could fit on this stage right here. It wasn't a very large circus. But what they did have was they had several camels there that for a small fee, you could let your kids ride around the circle and those things.

And I can remember sitting there thinking, because we're going through the book of James and seeing these camels, because you don't see camels that often. And so seeing these camels, and every single one of those camels had these giant calluses on all of their knees.

From the constant getting up and down and using their knees for that. And it reminded me how incredible is it that this was James' nickname. That he was known so much for being constant in prayer, going to God in everything, that he had calluses on his knees that people began to call them Old Camel Knees.

[12 : 24] What an encouragement for us to go to God in everything. The next thing we should do in regards to prayer is to pray for the sick. He says, And the prayer of the faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

In verse 14, James, before this, was speaking of anointing with oil. And there's a lot of speculation around anointing with oil, and the necessity of it, or the importance of it.

And the thing is, this is the only place where we see this emphasis placed on anointing with oil, which leads to a lot of speculation. But because of its infrequent use, we realize that it's not a necessity, it's not a requirement for praying for someone.

Douglas Moo, he notes, he says, Anointing, whatever it signifies, is clearly subordinate to James' main concern in these verses, and that's to pray.

[13 : 36] Whether or not we use oil or not is clearly not the emphasis. The emphasis in this passage is to pray for those who are sick.

And it's important that we do this. Now, we already dealt with much of what this passage does not mean, but we should never be dismissive with this passage either.

We should never just think, well, since I can't really comprehend it, we're just going to assume that it doesn't mean anything to us anymore. If we go down that road, then what we're saying is that the Bible isn't relevant for us today.

If we go down that road, what we're saying, what we're communicating is, is that we believe the Bible was relevant for a certain time, but not today. And if we believe that, then what's the point in studying it?

Then what's the point of diving in and going into it? But we believe that these words are God's word, and we believe that it has a message for us today. And I think it's clear that we are to pray for one another.

[14 : 36] There is a clear call to pray for the sick, but this is not a call to be dismissive about medical advances or to not take medication or to go to doctors, nor is it a call to only see miraculous quick healings.

It's not something for us to see only for the miraculous quick healings. Sometimes we understand that God heals over a long period of time. Sometimes it's a long process.

Also, we shouldn't see the power in the elders that are talked about in this passage. Clearly, the elders are to go and pray, and they are to be the ones who are setting the example and leading in this.

But the power is not in the elders. The power is in God. And it's His power and sovereignty that we rely on in prayer. And so this understanding of where prayer and authority lies takes us right into verses 17 and 18.

And this next thing that we should remember about prayer is honestly incredibly encouraging, and we should remember to pray with power. Pray with power.

[15:46] It says, This honestly, I think, is one of the most incredible verses, incredible sections of this entire book.

James gives an example of who we would consider a hero of the faith, right? Elijah. This is the one who calls down fire from heaven. He's challenging all the bells on Mount Carmel, and he's calling down fire from heaven.

And so, yes, this is a hero of the faith. He's also one who prayed, and for three and a half years, it didn't rain because he prayed. And then he prays again, and heaven sent forth the rain.

This is somebody who has faith. This is somebody who's incredible. This is a hero of the faith if there's ever one. But then James says this. He says, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. In other words, Elijah has nothing on you and me. Elijah doesn't have, the power's not in Elijah. The power's in the God who Elijah serves, who has the infinitely great power, and that same God is the God that we serve today.

[17:11] And so we see that we can pray with power. He has a nature like ours. Yes, he had these incredible things that happened, but it's the same God that we serve today.

Elijah had struggles like you and me. You would think after calling down fire from heaven, you would think after praying and God holding back the rain for three and a half years, and then him praying again and God sending the rain, you would think that that would cause a great amount of faith in him that he wouldn't even struggle with faith.

He wouldn't even struggle with fears of other people anymore because he had such great faith. But what you see happening immediately after this great showdown on Mount Carmel is him going on the run.

You see him running, being fearful, going through bouts of depression and struggling in his walk. You see it over and over again.

And so what we're reminded of is Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, but he had a great faith in God. Let us pray with God's power in mind and not ours.

[18:22] If you let your strength and your power dictate what you pray for, then your prayers are going to be far less than what God desires. If our prayers only look at our strength and what we can do, then they're going to be very ineffective.

Let our prayers be God-sized prayers. Let our prayers do essentially what Elijah was doing. Let our prayers line up with what God has already promised, what God has already commanded.

Finally, in regards to prayer, we must pray for the lost. So pray with power as we pray for the lost. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

You see, James closes the book here by saying that we should be about the ministry of bringing people to faith in Christ, going after those who are struggling.

If we see someone wandering away, we are to go after them. If we see somebody struggling and pulling away, we're to go after them. My girls, they love to play out in the woods at our house.

[19:42] And we live in a neighborhood, so there's not a whole lot of woods for them to play in, but they love to go out and play in the woods. There's a little creek and things they love to go down to and play. And sometimes it makes Catherine a little nervous for them to go play out in the woods.

And I'm thinking, you should have seen what I did growing up. But sometimes it makes her a little nervous. And so she likes to be able to see them. She likes for them to be able to hear her when they call their name. And so one time, not too long ago, she had gone outside and she couldn't see them anywhere.

And so she started calling their name and they didn't respond. They didn't call back. Well, I'll tell you what she didn't do. She didn't go inside and say, well, hopefully they'll come back at some point. No, she started screaming loud enough that if they were in a neighbor's house, they would have been able to hear from inside the house. It was quite embarrassing for me, but it was one of them. But the kids heard and they came back very quickly. They were scared as well. But that's what we're gonna see. Somebody who's wandering away is not an inconvenience.

[20:44] A brother or sister wandering is not an inconvenience. It's an emergency. If we hear a brother and sister wandering away, struggling with some sin, our job is not to gossip about them.

That's what James has already warned us about. Our job is not to gossip about them. It's not to ignore them. It's to go after them. If we hear of people that have never heard the gospel, it's our job to take the gospel to them.

This is where those God-sized prayer happen in a powerful way. You see, God does the saving, but he uses us in this process.

God does the saving. It's all him, but he's chosen to use us to be a part of it. Paul, he tells us, he says, if you've been reconciled, then you've been given to the ministry of reconciliation.

In other words, if you've been saved, God wants to use you in the process of saving others. This is an important thing for us to remember here. James wrote one letter, and what is on his mind at the end of the letter is straying people, people who are walking away, who are leaving.

[22 : 00] He has the heart of a pastor, and James, in doing this, reminds us of the heart of his older brother. In going after those who are wandering, James reminds us of the heart of his older brother, Jesus.

Because you see, Jesus is the ultimate good shepherd that came for us. When we were lost, when we were wandering, when we were not, when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, that's when Jesus came for us.

He didn't ignore us and hope, well, hopefully they'll come back at some point. No, he left the glory of heaven, lived the life that we couldn't live so that we could have a relationship with him.

This is the heart of our Savior. This is the heart of James. This is the heart that he wants us to have, those who are wandering to go after them.

When we were lost, Jesus came for us. May our prayers reflect this heart. I'm sure that you've probably heard this question a hundred times from a hundred different pastors, but it's still very powerful and telling.

[23 : 09] If God were to answer every single prayer you prayed over the last week, if he just blanket answered every single prayer you prayed over the last week, how many people would come to faith in him?

How many people would be saved because of our prayers? We should pray for those who are lost. We should pray with power for those.

For James, prayer is never in isolation for him. Now, I don't mean that James never prayed alone. I don't think you get a nickname like old camel knees if you're not constantly in prayer with others and alone by yourself.

But what I mean when I say, for James, prayer is never in isolation, is that James understood that we are the hands and feet of Jesus. That yes, we pray, but we also put that prayer into action.

James has made it abundantly clear as we've made our way through this text. And this is why context is so important because it helps us to understand these difficult passages.

[24 : 11] He's made it very clear that prayer should be something that is very, very important in our lives. from chapter one and then now here in chapter five, he has put an emphasis on prayer in our lives.

But what he's also done all throughout this is show the need for putting our faith into action. Don't just be hearers of the word, but be doers of the word. Don't just hear about a need of somebody and just say, hey, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body.

He says, don't do that. He says, yes, pray, yes, put it into action. And so for James, there's always this connection of prayer and being the hands and feet of Jesus.

But then he also says in 127, religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James clearly calls us to pray in this book. And James clearly calls us to act in this book. Prayer and action almost always go hand in hand. Throughout this book, James returns repeatedly to how faith not only impacts the details of our lives, but also the lives of those around us, both locally and globally.

[25 : 34] Platt notes, he says, faith moves Christians to lead Bible studies in workplaces and neighborhoods. It leads us to help addicts in rehabilitation centers, to serve food in homeless shelters, teach orphans in training and learning centers, care for widows in retirement homes, provide hospice care for the elderly, train men and women in job skills, tutor men and women in reading, rock sick babies in hospitals, help patients in AIDS clinics, teach English to internationals, and the list goes on and on.

Faith moves Christians to take steps of radical obedience to make the gospel known all around the world. Faith leads us to action.

And it's our hope and prayer as a church that not only do we teach this, not only do we teach that faith leads to action, but we also give opportunities to actually put this into practice.

About three weeks into our study of the book of James, we were talking about this verse and this pure and undefiled religion and what it is of caring for orphans, caring for widows, doing these types of ministry.

And what we did was we highlighted a ministry that was being reestablished then, shepherd staff, of those who are going out to visit people within our church who are no longer able to attend as much as they would like to because of health concerns.

[27 : 01] And in doing so, we had over 60 people sign up to be a part of shepherd staff. Over 60 people sign up to want to be a part of this ministry.

Well, today we want to bring another need before us as well. Today we're going to provide another opportunity for ministry and caring for the least of these. Compassion International is a well-respected organization in the sponsorship community and is known for their accountability and transparency in finances.

In addition to this, I love their three-cord approach to ministry, which states we are Christ-centered, church-driven, and child-focused.

Everything they do is centered around Christ and what He's done for us. And they do this by partnering with churches all around the world and their focus is on children and providing physical needs but ultimately spiritual needs for them.

My family has had the joy of sponsoring two children for many years now, Hector and Desire, and it's an encouragement for us and our family to be able to get these letters from these children.

[28 : 12] Just about a month and a half ago, I saw, I didn't even realize they were doing it, but I saw a letter going out that was on our kitchen table that was getting ready to be put in the mail and where the kids had written letters to the sponsored children.

It's an incredible opportunity. I remember many years ago, Tim Hale standing right here, getting up and sharing about how he had sponsored some kids and actually had the opportunity to go visit them in the countries where they lived.

And it had an impact on me and it caused me to step out and say, you know what? I think we can do that. And it's made an impact not only in our life, but it's making an impact all over the world in Hector and Desire's lives where they're getting a gospel message presented to them.

Compassion also provides the opportunity for this correspondence where you get to have that interaction with them. When we were talking with compassion about this day, they asked us where we wanted the sponsored kids from.

They said, is there a specific region that you would like for us to send you cards from? Or would you just like us to send you the ones who are in most desperate need right now, who've been waiting on a sponsor for a long time?

[29 : 28] And I hope you know what we said. We said, we want you to send us the ones who've been waiting. We want you to send us the ones who've been longing for a sponsor for quite some time. And so they sent us 50 of the most urgent needs.

And they also sent us 50 that are specifically from Kenya because they heard of an ongoing efforts to try to send teams to Kenya as well. And so today you have an opportunity to be a part of partnering with other churches, partnering with other churches around the world to be a part of the Great Commission, to getting the gospel to the nations, to getting the gospel to places that it would be very difficult for us to go to on a regular basis.

And so I want to encourage you to pray about the opportunity to be a sponsor today. Now, this doesn't, I don't think that God is necessarily calling every single person in here to do that.

If that were the case, we'd have got a lot more than 100 cards. But I do believe that God is calling some of us to be a part of this. And it's an incredible opportunity where we get to be the hands and feet of Jesus, where we get to share the gospel with those all around the world.

And so I want to encourage you with that today. But I also want to encourage you, if you're here today, you've never placed your faith and your trust in Jesus, understand that we have a good shepherd.

[30 : 53] That while we may be wandering, while we may be trying to figure out what that next step is from our lives, we have a Savior who left the glory of heaven for us.

And it's my hope and prayer that today, if you have never placed your faith and your trust in Him, that today would be the day. Today would be the day you go from death to life.

Today would be the day that you begin placing your faith in Jesus and living a life that is faithful to Jesus. Heavenly Father, we thank you so very much for all that you do for us each and every day. Lord, we thank you for the book of James. We thank you for how James challenges us. We thank you for how James encourages us. And we thank you ultimately how James points us to you as the source of our hope.

And so Lord, I pray that as we read through James, that we would be reminded over and over again that faith in Christ, faith in you always produces faithfulness to you.

[31 : 57] And so Lord, we thank you for that. And Lord, I pray that you be with us today, be with us, help us to be encouraged that there are needs all around the world and that you have called us to be the hands and feet to help meet those needs.

So thank you so much for organizations like Compassion International that give us those opportunities. But Lord, I also pray that if it's not sponsoring through compassion, that you would make our minds and hearts aware of those needs and to give us wisdom and guidance as we think about how we can be your hands and feet and meet those needs.

We love you. We thank you for Jesus. And it's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen.