

## POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE PRAYER

James 5:12-20  
Key Verse 5:16

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Thank God that he has given us the words of life through the book of James for the last seven weeks. Today we will study the last portion of this book. Do you remember what we have studied? They are “trials and temptations”, “listening and doing”, “favoritism forbidden”, “faith and deeds”, “taming the tongue”, “two kinds of wisdom”, “submission to God”, “boasting about tomorrow”, “warning to rich oppressors”, and “patience in suffering” with the theme of the book, faith that is alive and works. The book of James has 108 verses which include over 50 imperatives. In these last nine verses, James closes his letter with the final exhortation on the prayer in faith. James already talked about prayers twice in this book, “Prayer for Heavenly Wisdom” in chapter one (Jas 1:5-8, 17) and Prayer with wrong motivation in chapter 4 (Jas 4:2-3). In this passage, he talks about powerful and effective prayer.

First, do not swear (12). How does the topic of swearing in verse 12 relate to the topic of prayer in the following verses? Right before the crucifixion, Jesus prayed at Gethsemane to overcome the power of the devil. In contrast, Peter swore by his life and death, saying, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” (Mt 26:35) He did not have any evil intentions in his big words. However, he disowned Jesus three times. It was time for him to pray earnestly as Jesus told him to pray, again and again, three times instead of relying on his self-confidence.

Look at verse 12. “Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise, you will be condemned.” These words are almost identical to the oath in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5:33-37. Before commanding them not to swear, James uses a phrase, “Above all”. It means that he is emphasizing this verse as the most important thing. This verse is related to the third and ninth commandments not to misuse God's name and not to make false testimony.

Here, the word, 'do not swear' refers to an oath which embellishes one's words to magnify self-righteous assurance. At that time, the Jews swore by heaven, by earth, or by anything else. They thought they should keep their promises if they swore by heaven, but they thought they were not bound if they swore by the earth. (Mt 23:16) James warned them from making excessive oaths not living honestly and sincerely before God as they are.

We live in a free country with freedom of speech and expression. But the core of Christianity is the promise between God and us. All of the Old Testament and New Testament are words of promises, promised by God. God never breaks his promises. As Christians, we should grow in Christ's character. Therefore, we must not make any promises carelessly, and we

must keep whatever oaths we made. We must acknowledge our weaknesses and only make promises that we can keep.

What will happen if we make excessive oaths and break them intentionally or unintentionally? The trust among brothers and sisters in the community will be broken. God wants us to build a community that trusts each other. How can we build and maintain such a community with trust? We must not make vain oaths to make people believe us, but honestly share what is right or not right. Instead of swearing, we must pray in all circumstances. We should simply say “Yes” or “No” in our daily life.

Second, a time to pray and a time to sing praises (13). Look at verse 13. “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.” I think all of us are very familiar with these verses, right? I have a question for you. Were you in trouble or happy this week? How many times did you suffer or sing songs of praise this week?

In reality, some Christians seem reluctant to pray about the specific problems or needs they encounter every day. We tend to complain or blame others or situations and chew the misery of life when we face problems in life like most non-believers. However, we must remember the word, “Let them pray” and pray in trouble and help others to do the same thing: pray.

This short verse teaches us at least four things about prayer. Who has to pray? Anyone should pray. What should we pray about? We should pray for anything. When should we pray? We should pray at any time. Why should we pray? God answers our prayers and he wants us to pray to him.

As we know very well, prayer is a personal conversation with God by talking to him about what is on our hearts. Prayer is the breath of the soul to sustain our spiritual life. God who hears our prayer is our shield, refuge, and reward. He hears and answers all our prayers beyond our knowledge and description.

At that time, Christians were scattered because of extreme persecution after Stephen’s martyrdom. They were confronted with severe problems of life. How should we react to the trials we encounter? Paul testified in 2 Cor 1:8-9. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” It was Paul’s testimony that through suffering, despair, and a near-death experience, he met God who raises the dead and learned from trials that he must rely on God, not on himself.

God allows suffering to help us to come close to him and see the presence of God in our suffering. We will find him and see him vividly amid trials and experience the power of prayer. Usually, a great man of God appears at the time of severe hardships. Through hardships, we Christians grow as a mature man or woman of faith and a useful instrument of God.

Let us think about the second question and answer? “Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.” In general, we often pray when we are in trouble or need help. However, it is not easy to praise God when we are happy. When things go well, we are prone to be proud. But, it is God’s will for us in Christ to be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thes 5:16-18). No matter how much we express our thankfulness to God at the time of success, it is insufficient for human words to describe the grace of God. Praising God is an act of worship that exalts what God has done to us and renders all the glory to him. I believe singing a hymn is another form of prayer with a melody that brings all the glory to God.

During their second missionary journey, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns at midnight in the prison after being stripped and beaten in Philippi. God performed a miracle and saved them as well as the jailer who asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied; “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Ac 16:31).

Praying and singing hymns are two pillars of our life in Christ and the most essential thing that we should do in our daily life. Having a sweet time of fellowship with God in prayer is the secret to refresh ourselves in Christ. When we pray and sing hymns always, we will have the peace of God and see miracles of God like the conversion of the jailer.

Third, powerful and effective prayer. Now James talks about prayer for a specific thing, the most serious problem of life; pain and illness. Look at verse 14. “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” Who are elders? At that time, the apostles raised elders to take care of the flock of God in each region after establishing new churches. So, “elders” can refer to mature and spirited leaders who take care of the church and offer prayer in faith. At that time, it was the custom of the Jews to anoint the sick. It is known that they applied olive oil to the sick with their intercessory prayers. Anointing them with oil was their act of faith and making a space for God to cure the sick person. So, the sick person must call the leaders of the church to ask for their prayers.

Verse 15 says. “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.” The Lord listens to the prayer in faith and saves the sick and raises them. Even if they have sinned, their sins will be forgiven. Not all diseases are caused by our sins, but God promises that the Lord will listen to the prayer offered in faith and heal the sick and forgive our sins.

How can we offer our prayers in faith? Verse 16 says. “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Here, the phrase “each other” is repeated. Adam did not have a single life forever in the garden of Eden. God created a family, Adam and Eve, to serve God as a unity. Also, God builds a church where more than one person gathers together to confess their sins and pray together in Jesus’ name. God established a family and a church to work together to display the glory of God to the world. But, we commit sins and hurt others while working together because of our self-righteousness and miscommunication even if we do not have an evil intention to do so. Usually, we commit sins against one who is very close to us. There are coworking problems even in the Christian community for various known and unknown reasons.

Matthew 5:23-24 says, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” To confess our sins to each other, we must go to our brother or sister first who has something against us to make reconciliation. We may need to overcome victim mentality or hatred in our hearts to go first and ask for reconciliation. Nothing may happen if we wait for someone to repent first. It is the requirement for my salvation and mutual healing to come to God in prayer as we pray all the time with our tongues, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”. Anyone who forgave and is forgiven can offer prayers in faith. It is the way to offer powerful and effective prayers. To build unity, two things are required, confessing our sins to each other and praying for each other. When we pray for others, our hearts toward those people will be changed and the bond among those who pray will be created. There will be a revival of the ministry where there is the movement of repentance and prayer. When we repent of our sins and forgive the sins of our brothers and sisters and pray, we will be healed and our community will be healthy where the work of the Spirit can work all the time.

What does it mean, “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”? There are so many people with prayers in the Bible. But James emphasized the prayer that affects powerfully. James gives us an example of the prayer of a righteous person in verses 17-18. “Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

What do you know about, Elijah? Why was Elijah called “righteous”? Elijah lived during the reign of the evil King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. 1 Kings 16:30 says, “Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.” Besides their evil deeds, they served and worshiped their idol, Baal. Especially Queen Jezebel killed all the prophets of God, so no one identified himself as a prophet of God. But Elijah went to King Ahab as a messenger from God and delivered the word of God’s judgment to him. 1 Kings 17:1 says, “Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

Elijah is called righteous, not because he was sinless, but because he feared God and shared the word of God in any situation, even in a risky situation. God protected Elijah and blessed him to be fed by several ravens during his hiding. Also, he was fed by a poor widow in Zarephath and took care of her food supply and her son’s life with his prayers. He was not a man of special superpowers but a man of prayer who experienced miracles of God through his powerful and effective prayers.

The word, “righteousness” is expressed in Romans 1:17. “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” The righteous is one who truly repented of his sins and has been forgiven by God even though he has committed many sins. When we acknowledge our sins and confess our sins sincerely, God forgives our sins and credits us as righteous. He will

answer our prayers in his way and in his time when we pray by faith in his name. The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective.

In 1995 we had a deadly heat wave of 106 degrees in Chicago and 739 people died from heat-related causes. We prayed together as a church for cool weather for the international conference. God heard our prayers and changed the weather miraculously as we had prayed.

Once due to my poor eating pattern and exhaustion of life, the food I ate and medicine I took did not go down to my stomach, but they came back up as I vomited for three days. I thought I was going to die at a young age. At that time, I had a chance to pray with the founder of our church, the late Pastor, Dr Lee in his prayer room. I felt the Spirit of God scanned through my body from the top of my head to my stomach during his prayer. Miraculously, I was able to eat food and take medicine without much problems right after his prayer.

Before I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior in college, I had no meaning in life and did not have a motivation for living. To me, it is the greatest miracle that I was healed from my sin sickness and deep wound of fatalism and defeatism by the grace of God and the prayers of praying people around me. Also, God has been using me to offer intercessory prayers and helped me to experience the power of prayers many times.

I believe the power of prayer is given to all Christians, especially to a righteous person who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. I believe God works with praying people and reveals his glory to the world.

Fourth, save sinners from death (19-20). Look at verses 19-20. "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." At that time, some people returned to the error of their old life even after receiving Christ. Those who are deceived by the devil and have left God are dead in spirit, but they can be saved from spiritual death by coming back to God. James concludes his letter by talking about the restoration of lost people instead of the word of final greetings.

Many people come to the church and leave including some people we love. Also, many people are suffering under the power of sin and death not knowing the way to their salvation. How should we bring wandering brothers and sisters back to Christ? We must offer prayers in faith as Elijah prayed for the wicked and adulterous generation. When we purify ourselves with sincere repentance and offer intercessory prayers in faith, God will surely forgive their sins and raise sick people and dead people. Nothing is impossible with God and he will bless our prayers in faith to be powerful and effective.

In conclusion, [slide] we should not swear, but we must pray in times of trouble, and sing songs of praise in times of happiness. [slide]We must offer prayers in faith with sincere repentance and look forward to powerful and effective answers from God. [slide]We must pray for the lost souls to come back to Christ.

