

Faith That Works Msg 11
 Why Pray?
 Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
 Eagle Rock Baptist Church
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We've been in a series in the book of James, and this evening we're coming to the end of that book in a section where James talks about prayer.

If you've got your Bible or your Bible app, open up to **James 5:13-20**

If you've been with us since the beginning then you know that James, the writer of this book was the Lord's brother.

And as the Lord's brother he would have had an opportunity to get to see Jesus up close and personal, and no doubt he had seen how important a part of Jesus' life, prayer was.

There's a story in Luke's gospel - - Luke 11 where we're told that

"Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray. . ." Luke 11:1

What's interesting about that detail is that if you read through all four gospels and you'll discover that **this is the only thing that the disciples ever explicitly asked Jesus to teach them to do.**

Think about that for a moment . . .

The disciples were there when Jesus **calmed the winds of a storm**

They watched Jesus **turn water into wine**

They watched Jesus **raise people from the dead**

And yet there's no record of them asking Jesus . . .

"Teach us to calm storms or . . .

"Teach us to turn water into wine or . . .

"Teach us to raise people from the dead. . . .

They did ask Jesus to, **"Teach us to pray"**

Why?

It's because **they could see the power** that resulted from this practice.

And James, the one who wrote this book that we've been studying, wasn't just any disciple – as I said - he was the brother of Jesus and he grew up watching Jesus

He saw when he would pray, and how he would pray

And in these verses he share some of the things that he learned from those observations.

James chapter 5, verse 13 . . .

***"Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord."* James 5:13-14**

***"Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results."* James 5:15-16**

***"Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops."* James 5:17-18**

***"My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins."* James 5:19-20**

This evening - - - four observations from these verses about **The Power Of Prayer.**

And before we look at those, let me just mention that if you read through the Bible, you'll find again and again that **Prayer is Powerful.**

You'll also find **that even though God is all-powerful,** and **he can do all things,** there are **some things that he has chosen to do only through prayer.**

There is an amazing moment in Jesus' ministry

Do you remember the story of the time in Jesus ministry when he had just **healed a boy who was possessed by an evil spirit**,

And the disciples had been trying to do this . . . trying to figure this out and they couldn't . . .

And so a little bit later they asked him **WHY** they couldn't do this

Mark 9:28 . . .

“Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, “Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?” Jesus replied, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”

Mark 9:28-29

Prayer is powerful!

There is a power that becomes available through prayer that is only available through prayer.

To Unleash The Power Of Prayer

1. I need to Pray

Prayer starts where you are . . .

Look again at verses 13-14

Are you **in trouble**?

You should pray about that

Are you **happy**?

You should pray about that

Are you **sick**?

You should pray about that

Wherever you are . . . whatever you're doing . . . whatever is going on in your life . . . pray

Prayer ought to be an authentic interaction with God, about whatever is happening in your life.

In sports, there's a common phrase that goes something like this,

“You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.”

Please don't misunderstand me on this.

I'm not saying praying is just a random act of tossing up prayers hoping some of them stick.

But I do believe that when it comes to prayer, just like with so many other things, there is **a link**

between consistency and power.

Those who pray often are usually the ones who see the greatest results.

I recently read an **article that was examining artistic greatness.**

The writer **wanted to know what it was that made people great artists.**

Whether it was a painter, a sculptor, a musician, a writer, a poet, an athlete, whatever it was, **what was it that led to their success?**

The writer also wanted to know **when and how** that artist produced their greatest work.

Leonardo Da Vinci had his **Mona Lisa**,

Beethoven had his **Fifth Symphony**,

Michelangelo had his **Statue of David**,

Shakespeare had his **Hamlet**,

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr had his **“I Have a Dream”** speech,

Michael Jordan had his **game winning shot** in game 6 of 1998 NBA Finals.

So what did all of these greats have in common?

And when, and how, did they produce their most influential and most memorable achievements in their respected fields?

The **author of the article, actually only found one link** between all these people.

Some were young when they produced their masterpiece and then never really found that great of success again.

Some were unknown until later in life before producing their great work of art.

Some were well educated, some were not.

Some were city dwellers, some lived in the country.

Some were extroverts and some were introverts.

Some had one great achievement and others went on to produce other famous works as well.

The **only thing that all of them had in common** was that **they all produced massive amounts of work.**

All of them tirelessly **kept writing, kept painting, kept sculpting, kept playing** – the greats, whatever field they were in, all produced massive amounts.

Do you think that was the **first time Da Vinci picked up a paintbrush** when he painted Mona Lisa?

Do you think the **Statue of David** was Michelangelo's first time sculpting?

How many shots did Michael Jordan take before his NBA Championship winning shot in 1998?

I'm not saying that you gain power in prayer through repetition,

Jesus warned us in Matthew 6:7-8,

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

I'm not saying you see success in prayer through self-effort.

That would violate the whole truth of grace alone, which is found over and over throughout the Bible.

What I am saying is that you don't become a prayer-warrior overnight.

You don't develop the discernment to pray the right thing at the right time with the right motive in one try.

Some people pray in a soft tone,

Some pray with a booming voice,

Some pray in the morning, and some pray in the evening,

Some pray on their knees or flat on their face.

But the common link in those who have power in prayer is that they pray!

They pray often.

They pray when times are bad, and they pray when times are good.

And this is the point James is making in James 5:13,

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing praise.”

James touches both ends of the spectrum.

He speaks to the suffering and the cheerful, those in the valley and those on the mountain tops.

He says wherever you are at in life, enter into God's presence through prayer.

He says if you are suffering, pray.

And if you are cheerful, praise God.

Both are acts of prayer because prayer is ultimately about coming into the presence of God.

And so if you want to unleash the power of prayer, you've got pray.

A second thing you can do to unleash the power of prayer is to . . .

2. I need to Pray With Others

Again look at James 5:14-16

“Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord.” James 5:14

“Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” James 5:15-16

There's a lot we could draw from those verses, but **the thing I don't want you to miss is that from James 5:13 to James 5:14** there is a shift from the singular to the plural.

What I mean is that James 5:13 is about you personally entering into the presence of God in both good and bad times.

And **we should do that as we go to God individually.**

But then when you move on to James 5:14-16 we have a new category of prayer.

We are now told that not only should you pray by yourself, but you should also pray with other people, with other Christians.

Again, we could say a lot about these Bible verses, but at minimum what we must acknowledge is that we are told to pray with others.

((One of the reasons for our value of Community & Life Groups)

And if you want to pray with more power, it makes complete sense to pray with more people.

If God listens to the prayers of one person, what will he do when more than one person begins to pray about the same thing?

Again, I'm not here to say that we can manipulate the will of God by how many people we get to pray about the same thing.

According to **1 John 5:14**, **God only answers those prayers which are in accordance with his will.**

But we cannot over theologize that principle.

We cannot let the sovereignty of God hinder our prayers.

When we join in prayer with other people, our prayers often become more powerful.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:19-20:

***"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."* Matthew 18:19-20**

There is power when you pray with others.

We can sit around and explain this for days or we can go out and obey this simple truth by asking each other for prayer, by offering pray when we see a need, and by making it our habit to pray with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

SOME PRAYERS MUST BE PRAYED FOR YOU

Sometimes prayer is not something we can do for ourselves. . .

- Sometimes the pain is too great
- Or the grief is too close
- Or the guilt feels too heavy
- And we just want to give up
- Sometimes in those moments you don't need to pray, as much as you need someone to pray for you

To Unleash the Power of Prayer . . .

1. I need to pray

2. I need to pray with others

3. I need to Pray With A Clean Heart

It's pretty hard to read through this section of James letter and miss the connection between sin and sickness - - - between faith and healing.

First off - - sin and sickness

Is there always a connection?

Answering that question in the most general sense you would have to say "Yes" there is always a connection.

What I mean is that if there was no sin in the world, there would be no sickness.

Look back to Genesis chapter three and the first sin and you'll see that one of the consequences was that the world that had been designed to be perfect was now broken and as a result, sin and suffering, sickness and death were now going to be something that we would live with for as long as we live here.

That's the general answer.

But what about specific situations.

Are there specific situations in which sickness comes upon someone as a result of sin?

Yes there are.

The first followers of Jesus - - his twelve disciples understood this.

And that's why they asked Jesus - - -

"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" John 9:1-2

Those first disciples understood that there are situations in which sickness can come upon a person because of their sin – however this was not one of those situations

That's why Jesus answered them and told them . . .

"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him." John 9:3

The disciples assumed that this man's disability was directly tied to the sin of someone specific, either himself or his parents.

And they were wrong.

And we need to realize that, and not repeat their mistake.

When we see someone who is suffering, it's a mistake to automatically assume that that suffering is the consequence for someone's sin.

But on the flip-side it's equally wrong to assume that the sickness it could not be the result of someone's sin.

There's another incident recorded by John in his gospel in John 5 where Jesus heals a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.

Jesus healed this man instantly,

Jesus healed this man completely

The man got up and began to walk.

The words that Jesus shared with this man following that miracle apply directly to what we're talking about.

“But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” John 5:14

It's wrong to assume that there is automatically a connection between someone's sickness and their sin.

We see that in John 9 and the disciples' response when they encountered a man who had been blind from birth.

It's no less wrong, to assume that there will never be a connection.

We see that by Jesus words of warning to the man he healed.

Is sickness always a result of **a specific individual's sin?**

Unless the specific individual you're talking about is the first Adam, then the answer is “No”

Is sickness ever the result of an individual's sin?

Based on Jesus' words here, and the words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11) about what was happening to some of those who were dishonoring the Lord's Table - - - you can read that on your own and see how some were sick and others had died - - you would have to answer “Yes.”

Sickness can come upon us for a variety of reasons.

It can be simply because we live in a fallen world.

It can be because God wants to do something through that sickness that could only happen in that way.

It can be because God is disciplining someone.

And because we don't know which it is, the right response in every situation is to pray.

That's why James says “Are any of you sick?” - - - Pray!

But he adds a qualifier and you see it in our

MEMORY VERSE . . .

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:16

That word “Righteous” can be scary.

What you need to remember is that if you're a Christian you are righteous.

Think of it this way

We need righteousness to be acceptable to God.

But we don't have it.

What we have is sin.

So, God has what we need and don't deserve — righteousness;

And we have what God hates and rejects — sin.

What is God's answer to this situation?

His answer is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died in our place and bore our condemnation.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

Don't miss those last words. . .

“so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

This is what theologians call **“The Great Exchange”**

You place your faith in Jesus Christ and his completed work on the cross, and **God exchanges** your sin for Christ's righteousness.

And that's how he can call you “righteous”

It's how James can write. . .

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:16

If you’ve placed your trust in Jesus Christ, then in God’s eyes you are righteous. When he looks at you he no longer sees your sin, but His son’s righteousness. Again James, in this verse is not talking about perfection. He’s talking about righteousness. Righteousness is your standing before God when you became a believer. It has nothing to do with your perfection. If God only answered the prayers of perfect people, how many prayers would get answered? None. James continues talking about prayer and he points to the example of. . .

“Elijah...”

We’ll look more at Elijah’s story in our Life Groups this week, but for now the thing I don’t want you to miss is where James writes . . .

“Elijah was as human as we are...”

Don’t miss that!

James, in pointing to Elijah as an example of the power of prayer wants to make sure that we understand that ***“Elijah was just as human as you and me.”***

And James’ point is that . . . prayer is not just for the “Spiritual Elite”

It’s for everyone

Elijah was an ordinary man who saw extraordinary results because he prayed:

Now, having said that, I don’t want you to miss the fact that God does want us to have a clean heart.

We receive that righteous standing before God when we put our trust in Jesus Christ and what he did for us on the cross.

But as we walk through life, we can get dirty

And that why the Bible also tells us . . .

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

How important is that ongoing confession and cleansing?

Critically important if we want to see our prayers be effective.

King David, a man after God’s own heart wrote these words about prayer. . .

“If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Psalm 66:18

If I am willfully and knowingly doing something I know is displeasing to God and I’m saying, ***“God, I’m going to continue doing this thing, but in the meantime I’m praying to you and I’d really appreciate it if you’d answer my prayer.”***

That’s not a prayer that God will answer.

He wants us to have a clean heart before him.

Proverbs 28:9 says . . .

“God cannot stand the prayers of anyone who disobeys his Law.” Proverbs 28:9 (CEV)

Before we get to the next point, one word about prayer to the husbands among us . . .

Peter writes these words in his first letter . . .

“In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should. . .

And don’t miss this last part . . .

“... so your prayers will not be hindered.”

1 Peter 3:7

To unleash the power of prayer. . .

I need to pray

I need to pray with others

I need to pray with a **clean** heart

And then finally . . .

4. I need to Pray Expecting An Answer

In verse 15 of the fifth chapter, James talks about ***“the prayer offered in faith.”***

This is not the first time that he’s talked about the relationship between faith and prayer.

At the very beginning of this letter

James wrote about praying for wisdom . . .

“If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone.” James 1:5-6

Don't miss the link there between your faith, and prayer.

But what I think is important, is that James isn't pointing to the size of your faith, but rather the object of your faith.

Even a little bit of faith in a big God can yield big results.

Jesus talked about faith as small as a mustard seed, producing big results.

It's not the size of your faith – it's the size of your God.

But having said that I don't want to ignore the fact, that a lack of faith could be a limiting factor in our prayers.

There's an interesting kind of side note in Matthew's gospel.

In Matthew 13, Matthew writes about Jesus returning to his hometown, and he tells us about the skepticism of the people there.

They had known Jesus since he was a little boy, and it was hard for them to believe that this one who had grown up among them, could be the Messiah they had been waiting for.

That's why Jesus told them, ***“A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.”***

And that chapter ends by telling us that Jesus . . .

“And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.” Matthew 13:58

CLOSE: How important is prayer in your life?

When we pray for each other and are open with each other, and confess and admit our sins and shortcomings—God blesses that

Do you have anyone you can confess to?

You find that as you enter into community

My prayer for our church is that we would be an imperfect church – for imperfect people who are willing to admit their weaknesses...

When you have a church where confession is more common than criticism – you've got a church that God can bless in incredible ways...

Nobody has it all together! That's why we need each other.

That's why we need to become a people of prayer.

Let's pray together. . .