



INTRODUCTION

On October 16, 1996, John Dina, missionary to Mozambique, was bitten by a deadly green mamba snake as he walked in the Mozambican bush with coworkers. John drove himself home, a trip which required five hours. His wife and a missionary doctor stayed with him during the night as his pulse slowed and his breathing became more labored. At dawn a medical evacuation airplane arrived to take him to Johannesburg, South Africa. Doctors at a hospital administered huge doses of antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs. They kept a ventilator on standby. Within days John had made a remarkable recovery. His doctor said that he would suffer no permanent damage from the bite. Dina's miraculous recovery from the bite left many villagers, who knew of the incident, amazed at the power of the God of Christians.

For his part, John thanked God for his recovery and acknowledged the prayers of God's people. Thousands of people prayed for him when his name appeared on a missionary prayer calendar on October 12, his thirty-fourth birthday. Thousands of others prayed when an urgent notice was posted on the toll-free prayer lines of the Mission Board and electronic prayer network.

Prayer may be one of the most misunderstood and neglected blessings of the Christian life. Ironically, prayer is one of the simplest concepts to understand and one of the easiest actions to do. The Christian's most powerful resource is communication with God through prayer.

Dr. R. A. Torrey, the great noted Bible preacher said, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that that lies beyond the will of God". Dr. A. C. Dickson said, "When we depend upon organization, we get what organization can do. When we depend upon education, we get what education can be. When we depend upon money, we get what money can do. When we depend upon singing and preaching, we get what singing and preaching can do, but then he said, when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do."

Nearly every verse in these final paragraphs of James contains an explicit reference to prayer. Prayer constitutes the very heart of a vital Christian faith.

Like a car without fuel, life without prayer grinds to a halt. Like a lamp without electricity, the prayer-starved Christian fails to shine in a dark and desperate world. However, effective, fervent prayer moves the heart of the omnipotent God of the universe.

James was a man who practiced what he preached. He was given the nickname "old camel knees" because he spent so much time on his knees in the Temple praying for the people of God. And as he closes his letter, he describes five elements of fervent and effective prayer. We want to discover these elements and apply them to our prayer life that we might be both fervent and effective before God's throne of grace.

1. Adoration (v.13)

A life that is defined by a living faith will turn to God amid the varied experiences encountered. Life is a series of mountaintops and valleys. We go through moments of great euphoria and extreme pain. James exhorts the believer to pray with adoration despite the circumstances of life.

a. Adoration when hurting

The word *afflicted* means "to experience trouble or suffer misfortune". It carries the idea of enduring hardship, or experience calamity. This could include physical, mental, personal, financial, spiritual, or religious difficulty. When a believer encounters such times of "trouble" our immediate response must be prayer. "Let him pray" is an imperative (command). The one suffering is to make it a practice of turning to God whenever he is in distress. Our troubles should drive us to God, not away from Him. In the midst of adversity, the Christian's duty is to pray. Choosing to adore and praise God in times of trial demonstrates more than just faith in God to deliver us from trials, but through trials. When we are afflicted, it's time to pray. And when the affliction is finally lifted, it's time to praise!

b. Adoration when happy

Too many people view prayer as a fire extinguisher. The only time they use it is in emergencies. They act like they are a member of the "volunteer prayer squad". They respond in prayer only when needed. Every kind of situation calls for prayer. To be *merry* expresses the inner attitude of happiness. It is to "be of good cheer", "in good spirits", or "of good courage". Here is one who is experiencing peace and joy in life. It is in these times of peace that we can easily forget to pray. James encourages this "merry Christian" to give voice to the song in his heart. "Let him sing psalms" speaks of the expression of the heart through sacred music, both vocally and instrumentally. Praising God in

song is a form of prayer. James desires that God be remembered and praised in all situations, the good as well as the bad. Songs of praise to God are suitable not only when the heart is glad, but also when trials and distress engulf us.

Illustration: Paul and Silas sang hymns to God while in prison with bleeding backs and feet fastened in stocks (Acts 16:25). It was the sacred concert that brought the house down – literally!

Transition: Element number one of fervent, effective prayer is adoration. We are to pray and praise God despite the circumstances of life. When we are hurting, pray. When we are happy, praise. Element number two...

2. Intercession (v.14-15)

To *intercede* means to “intervene on the behalf of another”. An intercessor is one who intervenes on the behalf of another to God through prayer. Here James speaks of the intercession made for the “sick”. The book of James contains one of the key biblical passages on sickness and healing. It has been studied, misapplied, and abused, but it has also been the source of great hope and encouragement to others who have carefully considered its teaching.

a. Intercession for the weak

Prayer is important not only in our relationship with God, but also in our Christian relationships. The “sick” are those who are “without strength”. The word depicts the debilitating effects of sickness that has incapacitated one for work. It was commonly used of bodily weakness but could also denote any kind of weakness, mental, moral, or spiritual.

James outlines steps to be taken by those who were sick and the elders of the church, in the matter of intercessory prayer. First, the one who is “sick” is to call for the elders of the church. This places the duty on the sick person as a definite act to summon the elders to himself. The sick individual is to personally take the initiative; others do not do it for him. These “elders” are leaders of the local church assembly. Notice it is the church leaders who are called, not persons with special gifts of healing. These are men who would be spiritually mature and experienced in intercessory prayer.

As the “elders” come along side the sick, James details their twofold responsibility. Verse 14 says, “let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord”. This pictures the elders standing by the bed of the sick and extending their hands over him while praying. The significance of next phrase, “anointing him with oil”, has been differently understood. Some

believe the oil (most likely olive oil) was applied for its **medicinal** purposes. We see this used when the Good Samaritan who poured oil and wine on the injured traveller (Lk. 10:34). Others believe that the oil was not essential to his healing, but **symbolic** for the healing power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Herman Hoyt writes, “The oil becomes a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit who lives in and watches over the saint”. By anointing the sick with oil, the elders were setting the sick apart to be ministered to in a special way by the Holy Spirit. Still others see it as a **sacred** practice, like OT prophets, priests, and kings who were anointed. By anointing the sick, the individual was being set apart for the Lord. This was to be done “in the name of the Lord”. The phrase implies that the church leaders were acting in trustful dependence upon Christ, His authority, and His will.

The result of this “prayer of faith” is that the Lord “shall raise him up” (v.15). The term *prayer* here is an unusual one. It denotes a “strong, fervent wish or desire”. Of course this prayer of faith is properly offered with the condition “if the Lord will” (4:15). It is a prayer offered in the belief that God keeps His promises and accomplishes His will. But notice the true source of the healing and restoration – “the Lord shall raise him up”. The anointing oil is no magic potion, nor is the human exercise of prayer responsible for the healing. Ultimately God does the healing – not the oil, not the elders, not the prayer. It is the Lord who will accomplish the restoration. He is the Healer and the Great Physician. “To be raised up” refers to being raised up from the sickbed.

James further adds, “and if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (v.15). This recognizes that the sickness may be due to sin. Venereal diseases, alcoholism, and narcotics addiction are a few obvious ones. Sickness from sin is not always the cause, and it is wrong to assume that whenever a believer is sick it is because of sin in his life. Job experienced a disease of boils, yet we know he was a righteous man who “feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:8). However, the Scripture does teach that sin in the life of a believer can lead to sickness as discipline from God (1 Cor. 11:30). Sickness often awakes the consciousness of sin in the sufferer. The possibility should be considered and opportunity given for confession, but it must not be assumed as true in every case. We are to intercede for those who are weak and sickly, but we must do so praying that God’s will would be done in their life.

b. Intercession in God’s will

A true prayer of faith will acknowledge God’s sovereignty in His answer to that prayer. A prayer for healing must be qualified with a recognition that God’s will is supreme.

James is not revealing a magic formula to heal every believer experiencing sickness. Some falsely teach that, “God doesn’t want you to be sick”. They believe that God wants every believer to experience complete physical healing in this life. They emphasize a select few passages while others are completely ignored. Isaiah 53:5 is often referenced, “with his stripes we are healed”. “Christ death brought us healing!” they boldly proclaim. We believe that too, but what kind of healing? Physical or spiritual? The context of the verse demonstrates Christ’s priceless provision is for the spiritual needs of mankind. He died, not primarily to heal sick people in this life, but to give spiritual life to all who will believe on Him. The Apostle Peter understood this when he wrote, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes were healed” (I Pet. 2:24).

We must learn to intercede for others by praying that God’s will would be done in their life. Paul had come to grips with this in his own life. Three times he asked God to remove his “thorn in the flesh”, and three times God’s answer was “no”, “my grace is sufficient for thee” (II Cor. 12:9). Submitted to this truth, Paul wrote, “Christ shall be magnified, in my body, whether it be by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20). Physical healing is not promised to everybody. In some cases it is God’s will to miraculously heal, in others He uses today’s medicines to administer help and healing. We also have to acknowledge that many times it is the will of God that the believer who experiencing sickness glorify God through the “valley of the shadow of death”.

Obviously, if we could claim healing for a Christian in every illness, then none should ever die. God does answer prayer, and He does restore sick people. Sometimes it is by prayer alone, other times through medicine or surgery, and often by a combination of several or all of these. But it is also His plan to allow suffering to exist in other cases and to allow eventual death in all cases until the Rapture.

Transition: The first two elements of fervent and effective prayer are adoration and intercession. Praying and praising God in all circumstances of life. Interceding on the behalf of fellow believers who are weak and sick. James reveals a third element that is often overlooked in our prayers – confession.

3. Confession (v.16a)

“Confess your faults one to another” (v.16a). Interestingly, this is the only verse in the New Testament that commands believers to confess their sins to one another, and it is in the context of intercessory prayer for others. When we think about the relationship between prayer and confession of sin in James,

clearly the implication is that if a person has sinned against a brother, he should confess the sin to him.

a. Confess private sins privately

The word *confess* literally means, “to say the same thing”. It conveys the thought of an open, frank, and full confession. Confessing sin is to agree to identify it by its true name and admit that it is sin. It is a willingness to acknowledge ones personal guilt. When sinning has occurred, the confession required here is not to a priest or pastor, but to “one another”. We must understand that this passage is not advocating indiscriminately dumping all of your sins and shame in front everybody in the congregation. Confess private sins privately. However, it does suggest that the sinner confess specific wrongs to those who have been wronged, and that public sinfulness that has tainted the whole church should be confessed before the church.

b. Confess public sins publically

Unconfessed sins have an upward, as well as outward, impact on the life of a believer. Such sins block the pathway of prayer to God and hinder interpersonal relations. Confession is a Christian duty and a powerful deterrent to sin. James’s counsel is not to be construed as a call for an indiscriminate public confession of all sins. Rather, the breadth of the sin should be the breadth of the confession. Private sins should be privately confessed to God. Public sins should be publically confessed. We are not to “air our dirty laundry” before all.

The goal of this mutual confession of sin is so that we might better “pray for one another” (v.16). We are part of the family of God, we are each members of the body of Christ. As such, it is our duty and privilege to uphold one another in prayer. By confessing and interceding for one another, James says, “ye may be healed”. The word “healed” speaks of both physical restoration of the body as well as spiritual renewal of the soul. Perhaps this is where the old adage, “confession is good for the soul” originated.

Transition: Adoration, intercession, and confession are essential elements to effective prayer. We discover a fourth aspect of fervent prayer in this text – supplication.

4. Supplication (v.16b-18)

Supplication is the “act of asking or begging for something earnestly and humbly”. In this case, it is specifically restricted to petitionary prayer to God alone. James will make the point that God answers prayer when righteous men

fervently pray. God has chosen to accomplish His will through the prayers and lives of His faithful and obedient children.

a. Intensity in Supplication

The word *effectual* denotes a power working inwardly. We get our English word “energy” from it. So it describes the prayer as actively accomplishing its task, as being energetic and effective. Add to that the word *fervent* and it carries the idea of “stretched out”. Like a horse that is jumping over a barricade, it stretches out as it leaps over the hurdle. Or like an athlete who is running for the gold. He will strain and stretch himself to be the first to break the tape at the goal line. In regard to prayer, James is not so much referring to the position of your body, but the intensity of your desire. Just like a lazy horse cannot clear the hurdle, half hearted, lukewarm, indifferent prayers don't get through.

What he is talking about is prayer that is intense, fervent, like an athlete, with every nerve, every ounce, every inch, every fiber, stretched out, intense prayer. God does business with those that mean business. James says “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”. To *avail much* shows it is powerful, literally “strong, is able to do much”. Fervent prayer is prevailing and effective prayer. It could be translated “much availeth the supplication of a righteous man”.

b. Integrity in Supplication

James highlights not only the intensity of the prayer, but also the integrity of the one praying. It is the prayer of a “righteous man” that availeth much. To be *righteous* denotes a man who has confessed his sins and by faith stands acquitted before God. We are made positionally righteous by faith in Christ alone. But since James in this epistle is stressing that a living faith must manifest itself in daily life, the term more probably calls attention to his ethical character (integrity). This is practical righteousness. It is the person who has his or her attitude, priorities, and disposition oriented toward God's will. From this we can glean guidelines for effective prayer. First, we must know God's Word and pray in accordance to it. Second, we must deal directly with a particular issue and ask for specific results. Third, we must embrace in absolute faith that God is able, wise, His timing is perfect, and His way is best.

c. Illustration of Supplication

James cites his fourth reference to an OT character as an illustration of supplication. The prophet Elijah has his name mentioned some 30 times in the NT. He held a prominent place in Judaism. Numerous traditions grew up

around him and exaggerated opinions developed, often ascribing superhuman traits to him. But James says that he “was a man subject to like passions as we are” (v.17). He disarms those who would believe they could never achieve the prayer results of a grand person like Elijah. Prayer is not for the perfect but for the imperfect. You don't need to be a prophet or an apostle to pray effectively. You don't need to wait to be perfect before God will hear your prayers. You simply need to pray with intensity and integrity.

While Elijah was a powerful prophet of God, he was also a sinner saved by grace as we are. In faith, he would call down fire from heaven and destroy 450 prophets of Baal, but in fear, he would flee to the wilderness and in a state of depression wish to die. Yet, despite his sinful struggles, God used him mightily because he was one who prayed with intensity and integrity.

James says, “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (v.17). The word *earnestly* could literally be translated “with prayer he prayed”. It points to the fervency and intensity of his prayer life. According to God's Word and will Elijah's prayer was answered with a drought of three and a half years. Verse 18 states, “and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain”. While First Kings 18 makes no mention of his exact prayer, we can see the prayer posture and attitude of Elijah. He “cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees” (I Kings 18:42). His prayer was answered because it was grounded in God's promise to send rain (I Kings 18:1). This example of the tremendous power of prayer does not mean that Elijah could suspend the laws of nature at will. Rather, Elijah was in such intimate communion with God that he was in tune with God's will and Word in prayer. The beauty is that God used Elijah's prayers as the means through which His Word was accomplished.

Transition: We are discovering elements of effective prayer. There is adoration, intercession, confession, and supplication. James now concludes his letter with an abrupt stop. The final two verses seem to summarize his goal for the letter as a whole – that those who are wayward would be restored. But these final words are very much related and connected with the theme of prayer that precedes them. For often our prayers are for those who have strayed from the Lord, and we plead with God that they might be restored.

5. Restoration (v.19-20)

Lifeguards who have rescued swimmers from drowning know better than most that victims tend to fight their rescuers in the hysteria of that terrifying moment. In an uncontrollable panic, they will even pull their rescuers under the water. Reason would tell them that if the lifeguard goes under, so does their only hope of surviving. But a drowning person isn't thinking reasonably. The same is often true when a believer attempts to rescue those who are

floundering spiritually because their faith has suffered shipwreck. There may be an initial struggle and resistance, but in the end, gratitude is expressed for the one who came to their rescue in time of need.

a. The Action of Restoration

James wants us to again understand that real faith calls for action. It is good to have concern for the needy brother and express that in prayer, but is not a substitute for personal effort to restore the wanderer. Christians frequently stand back and watch as a brother or sister sinks deeper into sin. James commands that we pray for the straying brother, but also that we work toward restoration. Those who had strayed from the truth of the gospel and its attendant responsibilities needed to be brought back to proper conduct. When it comes to how we should handle straying saints, real faith is prompted not only to pray but also intervene.

When a believer is aware of another believer's wandering, that knowledge carries with it responsibility for action. That is the problem being addressed here. A member of the local group had gone astray. They have "err[ed] from the truth" (v.19), meaning they are like a sheep that had wandered from the fold or a planet that had drifted out of its proper place. The verb denotes an occasional rather than habitual occurrence. "The truth" denotes the whole body of truth as contained in the gospel. This individual is headed down the path of destruction and is in need of rescue.

James says we are to *convert* the wayward. The word means to "turn around, to turn back". Our task is to turn around the straying Christian from his wrong direction. This means the wanderer has effectively been turned back onto the way of truth. They have done a 180 degree reversal in the direction and course of their life. Fervent prayer and compassionate confrontation are elements in this restoration process (Gal. 6:1). There is something fatally wrong with us if we have no strong desire to bring back sinners to God.

When the goal of the rescue operation is met, a soul is "from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (v.20). This depicts the result of the restored sinner. Being saved "from death" stresses the seriousness of the condition from which he was rescued. Sin is destructive, and unless its work in man's life is broken, it will surely result in separation from God. When James says that it will "cover multitude of sins" that is not to be taken in the sense of hiding sins or keeping them secret. It carries the sense of securing forgiveness. Our sins are covered and remembered no more by being placed under Christ's atoning blood. The erring individual may be guilty of a "multitude of sins", but he is assured that they will be forgiven when confession is made.

b. The Attitude of Restoration

Not everyone is equipped with the right attitude for turning wayward saints back toward the right path. Galatians 6:1 states that those who are "spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted". The person who intervenes in the life of a wayward believer must be spiritual, gentle, wise, and humble. Praying and working toward the restoration of another cannot be prompted by pride, but rather by humility bathed in gentleness. Our motive must be genuine, and our goal must be compassionate correction leading to complete restoration.

One of the least pleasant aspects of ministry is confronting those who stray. Sometimes our desire to restore the wayward is not well received. But this is biblical, necessary, and when done in love it can bring great blessing.

Conclusion: It is with these beautiful words the book of James comes to abrupt close. This keeps with the nature and purpose of James work. He has found it necessary to rebuke on many levels, but his motive has been not to condemn but to restore. The letter of James is Christianity with its sleeves rolled up. Theories are for theologians, but James is interested in real life. James has demonstrated that Christian faith is a serious matter. It is not just a creed, but a life-transforming experience that shows itself in action. God's Word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do.

Real Faith demonstrates itself in godly living. One with Real Faith endures trials and escapes temptation (ch.1). They welcome the Word into their life (ch.1). They remove partiality and validate their faith with good works (ch.2). They tame their tongue and demonstrate godly wisdom (ch.3). They humbly seek to be the friend of God and depend upon Him (ch.4). They invest in eternity, endure suffering, and fervently pray (ch.5). This is Real Faith! May God help our beliefs to determine our behavior that our lives to mirror our message.