

Text: James 5:13-18

Title: Your Prayer Life

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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James is considered the most action oriented book in the Bible—faith without works is dead—James (written by Jesus' brother who became the leader of the Jerusalem Church) concludes his epistle with a call to prayer...implying that prayer is not a passive exercise.

As Christians prayer is our greatest work. In all of our situations we are supposed to pray—Philippians 4 says in everything by prayer & supplication make your requests known to God, whether we are struggling or enjoying good times.—pray. 1 Thessalonians 5: 17 states, Pray without ceasing. We should have an ongoing dialogue with God as we go through our everyday...living in dependence upon and seeking God for guidance & developing our friendship with God.

As a church we are to be a fellowship of prayer which means we need to be holding each other up in prayer, and seeking each other out for prayer. Running into church members in gym parking lot... or on the tennis court or meeting a parishioner walking around the lake—we talk about Jesus and enter into prayer.

John Galloway points out that prayer is a risky thing to do. One of the reasons we hold back from fully engaging in prayer is that to dive into prayer means turning everything over to God so that God will have His way in our lives. Prayer actually lets the Lord be Lord & that is scary.

Prayer is access to divine power! James 5 states: if anyone is sick —engage in prayer for healing. Health care is a major issue on the political table and a significant component for the economy. But I fear that we sometimes rush to our prescriptions drugs and HMO calls instead of first kneeling down to ask God to extend His healing touch. 2 Chronicles 16:12...King Asa became severely diseased in his feet, yet even in his sickness he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.

Research shows that patients in hospitals who are prayed over heal quicker & require less treatment...which has economic benefits because prayed over patients are out of the hospital faster saving our insurance companies millions of dollars! We should get a deduction for being churchgoing Christians!

The reality is God is alive and heals people. Katherine Marshall wrote a book about her husband titled a man called Peter. Peter Marshall was the senate Chaplain and pastor of the New York Ave. church in Washington D.C. (An outstanding preacher) A movie was made about his life and Richard Todd played the role of Peter. One woman was cast in the role of a fussy trouble maker in the New York Ave. church someone who drove Peter Marshall nuts. Churches are known to have a person like that around every now and then... We'll leave that concept alone.

This particular woman was self righteous; she always had a different opinion from Peter Marshall. She nagged after him all the time. The actress who played this role was handicapped from an automobile accident years before and had to lean heavily on a cane. They were filming a scene in the sanctuary of the New York Ave church with Richard Todd in the pulpit reading a sermon that Peter Marshall had delivered years before. As Marshall's message of God's love and power came through this actor, the actress who played the role of the fussy parishioner seated in the pews realized something was happening in her body. When the sermon had ended she put down her cane and approached the front the communion table. The cameras stopped the reels, nobody moved. The Hollywood crowd was stunned to silence as the people tried to compute what just happened. Finally they burst into thunderous applause.

God is able to do amazing things and we are called to reach out to God in prayer for our healing. Prayer has great power.

Now having said that, prayer is not a substitute for getting the best medical attention we can. God often works His healing through the medical profession. Christian Science examples of letting their kids die ignoring the medical opportunities. One judge sentenced the father of a child who was denied treatment to three months of following a chaplain around the hospital to see how God works in that institution. God uses His earth & the resources within it for our benefit

God's healing is sometimes physical, but often it is not. The fact of the matter is regardless of how much we pray for healing and apply faith to every situation; the truth is everyone in this room is going to die. Peter and Paul experienced miraculous deliverance from death on numerous occasions, but there came a day when that was no longer God's will.

I remember praying so hard for one of my parishioners whose cancer returned and exasperated I apologized to him, Joe I pestered God so fervently on your behalf. He waved me off I have been healed pastor—I'm reunited with God and the rage is gone—I have peace.

This is not to find an escape clause to get God off the hook when He fails, but when we pray we are turning someone over to the Lord and God works His purpose in a wide variety of ways. Very often the healing is spiritual or emotional or relational—healing of memories or our morals. God moves in unexpectedly, but with profound effect.

I believe when we pray for healing there is potential for healing in every instance. You asked the living God who loves you to bring His gifts to your situation... Matthew 7:7 He promises to hear our prayers...but the healing may be beyond the scope of what our limited minds can grasp.

Tom Long tells of a minister who was called to the hospital by a woman in his church who had just received terrible news: her cancer had returned with a vengeance, she only had a couple of weeks to live. She said I want you and some of the elders of the church to come and pray over me and anoint my

head with oil as the book of James says. This minister was a Presbyterian and had a hard time with that. Presbyterians tend to be staid. He said it sounds magical to me, I'm not sure we can do that. She gripped his hand and said I am going to die, the doctors have made that clear, I am never going to leave this hospital. So the minister asked, then why do you want me to call the elders to pray and anoint you with oil? She said because it will be a sign that death does not have the last word about me, a sign that I belong to Christ, a sign that the power of God has already healed. She was embracing her eternal relationship with God, looking past the physical—looking deeper than the immediate.

Don't discount the ways the Lord will work. Wilfred Sheard in his autobiography "In Love with Day Light, talks about the polio he had as a child and how it devastated his body. For three years he prayed for a cure until he realized that I was not going to get one and that I did not need one because I was used to polio. My prayers were answered." 2 Cor. Paul's thorn in the flesh

For some of us the answer to our prayer is to be at peace with who we are. This is how God created me, this is who I am and I am content to be that.

Sometimes a deeper acceptance of who we are is the healing. That you are o.k. flaws and all—God accepts you. Some young people pray Lord make me someone else, heal me so that I am not a misfit anymore—make me a cool person. Maybe they just need to be healed of the peer pressure of not having social skills or athletic ability or the certain look that would make them popular. Using the parlance of the young, being a dork is often nothing more than being unable to accept yourself and thus you do dorky things. So the greatest healing that can come is the realization that this is who I am. After all, none of us are all that we wish we were.

One monk said; a life of prayer is a life of beginning all over again. Sometimes the Lord's healing is a change in our mentality and outlook.

Prayer is an individual exercise but it also has a corporate aspect as we are to confess to one another. Confession is difficult. We've cheapened confession in our society with the Jerry Springer theology. If we do outlandish things and want to talk about those things—you can be a celebrity. Look at the sin I have been delivered from! The emphasis is on the sin not the deliverance.

Ken Woodward in Newsweek took another slant on Confession talking about how clergy let our people down, accusing us of having substituted therapy for spiritual discernment. Clergy refer people to a nurturing God who helps people cope with their dysfunction rather than calling sin—sin. Thus we never have to deny ourselves.

We have lots of ways of getting around confession, but genuine confession is incredibly profound, difficult and humiliating. So we short circuit confession. Lewis Smedes says we pass on legal admissions and public gossip as confession. If we are going to be a strong fellowship of prayer we need to be able to confess to another Christian "this is where I struggle and falter" so that they will fight for your progress in the faith journey. Proverbs 27:17 As Iron sharpens iron so does one man sharpen another.

But I must give you a warning be careful when you confess your sins to someone because you are confessing to a sinful human being. You might have heard of the three clergy having lunch. One suggested they confess their sins to each other for support. The Methodist said I confess to having a lust problem. The Presbyterian said I sometimes have trouble drinking too much wine. The Baptist said I have a gossip problem and I can't wait to get out of here!

Find someone you can trust and when someone confesses their sins to you & shares deeply--be trustworthy. When someone has a weak moment, don't go announcing it to others. Rather fight for that person in prayer! In fact, all of us should find an accountability partner someone who will assist you in monitoring your spiritual growth. Don't allow your conversation to only be filled with chit chat—spur one another on to spiritual maturity.

It is my responsibility and privilege as your pastor to pray for you. I lay your needs before God and wrestle with Him on your behalf.

So let me wrap this message up: pray for healing & confess your sins...because very often the unexpected happens!

Prayer entails trusting God with all of our circumstances & concerns

Monica the mother of St. Augustine prayed earnestly that her son would stay in Carthage and not go to Rome. She feared in Rome the evil pagan people would lead Augustine, who was already carnal, astray. Against her wishes and against that for which she prayed, he went to Rome...where he came under the influence of Ambrose the bishop of Milan. Augustine went on to have the most influential ministry outside of anyone in the Bible. Trust God

If we are concerned about a person take them to the Lord in prayer and pray for the person. What you might discover is that the Lord is going to change your life! As C.S. Lewis stated, we pray not to bring God to our point of view, but to bring us to God's point of view.

Prayer is risky business. Because in the exchange --that dialogue with the divine, we might obtain the mind, character and heart of God.

Someone asked Charlie Shed what did you do that caused a great renewal in your church? What program did you use? Charlie Shed said, Let us pray! It turned things around.

Let us pray...