

# About Prayer

(Expanded)



Philippians 4:6: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

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Restoration Movement Literature

The story is told of a minister who went to the usual prayer meeting only to find nobody present. He began tolling the church bell. A dozen people came running to ask who was dead. “The church”, replied the minister.

I. Prayer has a lot of mythology surrounding it – which has rendered it ineffective in some cases – and drudgery for many.

A) We hear all of the time that prayer is “just talking with God”, or “a conversation with God”, or “just spilling your heart to God.”

i) There are nuggets of truth there, but the real power in prayer is in so much more than that.

ii) **Prayer has changed the outcomes of battles** (Joshua 10:11-13), **extended lives** (2 Kings 20:1-6), **healed the sick** (James 5:14), **bent the sun’s rays** (2 Kings 20:8-11), **cast out Satan** (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29), and **grown the church** (Matthew 9:37-38). It has lifted up the broken-hearted, unified families, and aided the poor. It has even provided wisdom and educated those who asked (James 1:5). Prayer is talking to God, but let us not steal away God’s promises by limiting its scope, or cheapening its privilege.

B) What prayer is not: a magic wand, a flippant conversation, or time to waste. Prayer can change things the moment it begins, can change us while we pray, **and convince of the Lord’s presence maybe more than anything else does.**

II. Upon your preacher’s study of prayer for several months now, I have been praying much more, much more earnestly, and seen the results of it. **I hope to instill in you a new appreciation – and hopefully practice – of prayer.** God loves you, wants to hear from you, and is ready to act upon our prayers given according to His Word and Will.

A) **We need to be devoted to prayer (Colossians 4:2)**

i) Luke 18:1 says, “Jesus told them a parable so that they would pray and not give up.”

**a) It might interest you to know the Greek word for prayer is “ask”. That’s it. Prayer, primarily, is asking God for what we need from him.**

b) Prayer comes “with instructions”. And with those instructions, come the influence of God on our lives.

c) 1 Peter 5:7 says “Cast your cares upon Him, because He cares for you.”

ii) Doug Hardman, back at our 2014 revival, preached a sermon based on this text, and it touched me the most of all his sermons.

a) I immediately went to studying prayer more, and immediately began seeing the benefits of not only praying more, but doing so according to Scripture’s instructions.

b) Luke 18:1ff tells the semi-odd story of the judge and the widow: the widow wanted justice for a misdeed done unto her, but she had to ask repeatedly until the judge tired before he gave her justice. Jesus compares the Father to the judge! God is not unwilling (Luke 11:11, Matthew 7:9), like the judge was, but rather our repeated requests will be heard and honored by the Father.

iii) Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

**a) This verse indicates there is nothing “too small” or “too big” to pray about.**

A few months back, I prayed the “smallest” prayer I had ever prayed: One of my kids had a rough week, and the others were all gone for the weekend with other friends or family. So I took him to the driving range to

hit golf balls. There were these giant metal tubs that you could aim for and he really wanted one of the balls to go in there. He failed to do so. We had such a good time though, that we came back the next weekend. He was still feeling down, and could simply use some encouragement. So I prayed, “Heavenly Father, I have the smallest request for you; I feel silly for even asking. But if you could help my son hit a golf ball in one of those metal tubs, I would be very grateful. I pray this in your Son’s name with great gratitude, Amen.” The very first ball went into the tub!!

b) “Supplication” means to “ask”. Ask God in faith!

c) **James 4:2 says we do not have because we do not ask.**

If we do not ask God, is it any surprise we do not have what we desire from Him?

iv) 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “pray without ceasing”

Some interpret this verse to say, “This verse means you need to be praying as often as possible – every minute you are not doing something else!” For anyone who is not in such a habit (and who really is?), this sounds impossible, unrealistic, or possibly even brings up feelings of inadequacy. So does “pray without ceasing” mean pray every minute of every day, or does it mean make a habit of regular prayer?

To find out, we can examine the Greek word for “without ceasing” (or, “unceasingly”). It is the Greek word, “**adialeiptōs.**” We can see how it is used elsewhere in the New Testament. There are three other occurrences, two of those in the same book:

Romans 1:9, “God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you.”

1 Thessalonians 1:3, “remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,”

1 Thessalonians 2:13, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

It will be helpful to chart these comparisons:

Comparing uses of “ <i>adialeiptōs</i> ”, or, “unceasingly” in the New Testament			
Romans 1:9	1 Thessalonians 1:3	1 Thessalonians 2:13	1 Thessalonians 5:17
“Unceasingly remember”	“Unceasingly remember”	“Unceasingly thank God”	“Unceasingly pray”

So, to simply cast some reason on this subject, we can see that Paul (who is the only New Testament author that uses this word) would not spend all of his time remembering, thinking, or praying, but rather encouraging each to be done a on a regular basis. Just as “perfect” in the Bible often means “complete”, so “unceasingly” often means “consistently.” We need not worry about praying every minute of every day any more than we need to be remembering or thanking somebody every minute of every day. Rather, it is encouraged in Scripture to be a consistent practitioner or prayer as a faithful believer.

A preacher told a story once that two woodsmen were eating breakfast together. They had a big day of wood chopping ahead of them. After breakfast the one took time to sharpen his ax. The other said he didn’t have time to sharpen his – he had to get going. At the end of the day, guess which had chopped the most wood! **We do not “lose time” in our day by praying; instead, we gain much!**

v) It is clear we should pray often, and repeatedly about our requests. Anything worth praying for is worth praying for again.

## B) We need to pray with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2)

i) We can begin, end, or talk in the middle of our thanks to God, but it should always be included.

ii) Ever tell someone, “thank you”, by wrapping your arms around them and they can tell you really mean it? Imagine being that thankful to God – that is the idea.

iii) Thus, it is our spirit of thanksgiving that gives our requests sincerity of heart.

C) We should pray for ourselves and others (Colossians 4:3). **In fact, a prayer really is not a “prayer” in the technical sense without a request:**

The Greek word for prayer is “proseuche”. It simply means “ask”.

**i) Intercession for others is a constant, powerful Biblical theme:**

ii) Moses prayed for Israel several times – to prevent their annihilation. Examples include Exodus 32 and Numbers 12.

iii) King David prayed in repentance – more than once – most famously in Psalm 51. This was right after he had killed a man and taken his wife in adultery. **So, if you really want to know what pray for forgiveness after a sin,** this is an inspired example.

iv) Hezekiah prayed for both his own life’s extension and the plight of Israel’s pending defeat from Assyria in 2 Kings 19 and 20, only to see his life extended by 15 years and the defeat of Israel postponed, giving the nation more time to repent.

a) **Pray for America.** If we can postpone – or better yet stop – her demise, it will be because God was moved by the prayers of His people.

**2 Chronicles 7:14** – “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

In context, this verse is talking about Israel the nation under the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. However, the principle is the same – if a people (whether a family, a church, or a nation) humbles themselves, prays, and seeks His Will while turning from sin – God will greatly bless that effort. Revival has come before; it can come again!

b) **Pray for the unsaved, especially – specifically** – people you know. God will provide a voice and/or an opportunity. This is one item ALWAYS in His will to fulfill!

If you are looking for a prayer request that will be always answered “yes”, ask for someone to witness to. Most of the time, we approach witnessing with someone already in mind – a friend or a loved one – that we want to come to Christ. Certainly, we should pray and witness to them, but if we pray for God to send someone our way – watch out! God will honor that request!

v) King David famously surrenders to God in Psalm 139, about everything he was, is, and will be, is to God’s credit and grace. God granted him a throne that would never end, and indeed, Jesus sits on the “throne of David” to this day.

a) Are we proud of an accomplishment? Have we really seen what that accomplishment could be if we gave God the glory in prayer and when talking with others?

b) Are we planning a next step in life? Have we consulted God first, given Him the glory for each step made, and sought His guidance every step along the way?

vi) Nehemiah sees the plight of the exiled Israelites in the first two chapters of his book and prays urgently and often for the deliverance of Israel.

a) Although Satan would fight him five different ways, God sees Nehemiah through because Nehemiah prayed to God often, obeyed God in His instructions, and gave God the glory.

b) Interestingly, Israel NEVER returned to idol worship after the prayers of Nehemiah. They were faithful until Jesus' time. God honored his prayers!

vii) **Most famously, Jesus prays for His Apostles, His church (us), and His coming plight in John 17.** His prayers (which were offered up constantly throughout this ministry) were answered with incredible force in the book of Acts and beyond.

viii) Paul both prayed and asked for prayers many times in his letters to the churches. Even with Satan's terrible attacks, the church grew, Paul's ministry prospered, and the Bible came together, just as Paul asked for and wrote about.

#### **D) Prayer can (and should) be both public and private:**

On the matter of public prayer:

i) Moses prayed publicly in Exodus 5, 6, 8, 32, 33, and many other times.

ii) Daniel prayed with his windows open, and was seen by others – Daniel 6. It was a witness to his pagan enemies.



iii) Hannah prayed privately, but in public view in 1 Samuel 1, and God answered her prayer favorably.

iv) Elijah prayed publicly in 1 Kings 17:1ff and 18:39ff (James' discusses Elijah's prayers favorably in James 5:16-18).

v) Jesus clears up the misconceptions about public prayer in Matthew 6 when he tells us that *when* we pray publicly (Jesus assumes that we will pray publicly), that it not be *for the purpose* of being seen, but to the glory of God, and we should pray only heart-felt prayers, not empty or vain words. Proper emotion is not only allowed in prayers but encouraged.

vi) Public prayer was part of the early church's public worship in the temple. Acts 2:42, in the Greek says, "And the church committed itself to the breaking of bread, to the contribution, to the Apostle's teaching, and to the prayers."

As well, the Apostles prayed publicly in Acts 1:14 before Pentecost. Stephen prayed publicly in Acts 7:60. The Apostles prayed over the first deacons in Acts 6:6. When Paul was in Jail, many gathered together in public prayer (Acts 12:12). The Antioch church prayed over Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:2+3. Paul and Silas prayed together, and loud enough the others nearby heard them (Acts 16:25). Paul and the Ephesian Elders prayed together before he left (Acts 20:36). The church at Tyre all knelt down and prayed with Paul before he left for Jerusalem (Acts 21:4+5). Paul publicly prayed, thanking God for the food He had provided, even with the non-believing people with him (Acts 27:33-35).

vii) Paul prays publicly in his letters – see Romans 1:8-10, 10:1ff, 15:5ff, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 16:23, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 9:12-15, 13:7-9, Galatians 6:18, Ephesians 1:3-5, 15-23, 3:14-21, Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11, 4:23, Colossians 1:3-14, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 2:13-16, 3:9-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-34, 28, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, II Thessalonians 2:16-17, 3:2-5, 3:16, 1

Timothy 1:12, 2:1-3, 2 Timothy 1:3-7, 2 Timothy 1:16-18, 4:22, Titus 3:15, Philemon 4-7, 25, among others!

viii) Jesus himself prayed publicly in Matthew 14:19, 15:36, 26:26, 27:46, Luke 3:21, 9:18, 28, 10:21, 11:1, 22:31-32, 23:34, 24:30, 50-51, John 6:11, 11:41, 42, Mark 8:6, and 10:16. A couple of these examples:

a) “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” – Luke 23:34

a) When was the last time we prayed for someone’s forgiveness while they were persecuting us? Jesus’ example of public prayer shows us exactly this.

How did Christ forgive?

- i. Without condition – Luke 23:34 – “Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”
- ii. In anticipation – Phil. 1:6 – “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.
- iii. Repeatedly – Matthew 18:21-22 – “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”
- iv. Immediately – Matthew 6:14-16 - “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”
- v. Christ’s example is our own!

b) Stephen followed Jesus' example at his own execution, praying his death would not be held against his executioners – Acts 7:60

Imagine the world if Christians forgave like Christ and Stephen forgave!

b) “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” – Matthew 27:46

1) Jesus asked God a question, in public prayer.

2) Before you ask if Jesus' prayers on the cross were really heard, some were recorded by Luke, and this is what he says in the beginning of the Gospel named after him:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things<sup>[a]</sup> accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning <sup>[b]</sup>were eyewitnesses and <sup>[c]</sup>servants of the <sup>[d]</sup>word,” – Luke 1:1-2

c) “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.” – Luke 23:46

On the matter of private prayer:

i) Jesus tells us that if showmanship is a temptation (like it was for the Pharisees), we should pray in our closets (Matthew 6:5-6).

ii) In the very next verse, Jesus comments that when we do pray publicly, we should not ramble so we are praised for our many words – again – like the Pharisees do. **So we see instructions and examples for both private and public prayer, and no blanket admonition against either.**

iii) Jesus also prayed privately many times: Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28, Matthew 14:23, 26:39, 42, 44, and John 17. From what we have as record in the Gospels, **Jesus actually prayed in public more than private, but it's not the number of times he prayed that matters.** What matters is

that Jesus gives us a model for prayer - to whom, how, when, and where. Here, we have examples of both perfect public and private prayers we can look to for guidance.

iv) The mature Christian will develop a consistent, specific, and private prayer life, as well as **enjoy prayer with his or her fellow believers.**

E) Jesus teaches us how to pray, as does His Apostles:

i) **Our prayers are to be addressed to the Father, in Jesus' name.**

a) When Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, He tells them to pray to the Father. (Matthew 6:9ff, Luke 11:1ff) John's disciples also prayed to the Father, as indicated in Luke 11:1ff.

b) In Hebrews 4:14-16, we are told we can approach the throne of grace (where God the Father sits) because Jesus is our advocate. Jesus sits on David's throne, at the right hand of God (2 Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 9:7, 16:5, Zechariah 6:12-13, Psalm 89:3-4, all fulfilled in Acts 2:29-36!)

c) In John 16:26+27, Jesus Himself addresses this question with the disciples. We do not need to beg the Son to address the Father; instead, it is in acknowledgment of what Jesus did and with Him as our High Priest we can approach the Father directly.

d) In Luke 11:13, Matthew 7:11, Romans 8:32, and James 1:17 says "the Father" is the giver of all good gifts. In James 1:5, we are told that if we need wisdom, to ask the Father.

e) So is it wrong to pray to Jesus? Some would argue that 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 indicates that Paul prayed to Jesus, but Paul specifically states, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ", which we already understand. The Apostle John says, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come" at the end of the book of Revelation. However, Jesus had been speaking to John directly through the

book – his request is not a prayer, but a hope expressed directly to Jesus in that solely unique experience with Jesus that John had.

Simply put: Jesus tells who to pray to, and to do so in His name. We should not question this, nor assume that we will gain anything by circumventing His plan. **Jesus died so we can have access to the Father which we never enjoyed before His death.** Remember the curtain torn in the temple? (Mark 15:38, Matthew 27:51) People had longed for 4000 years to have a direct relationship to the Father. Jesus is pleased to give us this access. May we not detract from His effort, His command, and His joy by praying any other way.

f) Why does this matter? James 5:16 says, “The prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective.” Jesus says in John 16:24, “whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you.” Proverbs 15:8 says, “The prayer of the upright is his delight.” 1 John 5:14 says that if we ask the Father according to His will, it will be given us.

**All the same, we should realize our prayers’ effectiveness has a dependence on our faithfulness (obedience) to God.** James 5:16 emphasizes this. Jesus says we must do the works of God He has set out before us (John 9:4). Balaam, the bad prophet, prayed that he would die the death of a righteous man (Numbers 23:10), but he was greedy and wicked (2 Peter 2:15, Jude 1:11, Revelation 2:14); his prayer mattered nothing as a result.

ii) **If we do not know what to pray, we can ask the Father that the Spirit would intervene for us (Romans 8:26).** We can also “pray Scripture”, if a Psalm or another Scripture like in Nehemiah 9:6-38 where Scripture is quoted in a prayer.

iii) Ephesians 6:18 says, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions...”

a) **“Praying in the Spirit” is not a mystical or transcendental experience.** It simply means that one has the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit from their baptism forward (Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5), and in prayer each of us believes that Spirit is active in fulfilling the works of God in our lives.

b) A very few say that we should pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit, audibly in each of our prayers. There is no example of mentioning the “power of the Spirit”, or “in the Spirit” in a prayer given in the New Testament, and anyway, the Spirit “bears testimony for the Son” (1 John 5:7). The Holy Spirit never seeks recognition Himself, and though we recognize Him as God and value His seal within us greatly, it seems most expedient to prayer to the Father, through the Son, because the Spirit desires this of us. We should honor that.

#### F) Kneeling and Fasting

i) Both kneeling and fasting were practiced in both the Old and New Testaments.

ii) **Neither kneeling nor fasting is commanded.** They are in fact “aids” to the Christian life that serve specific purposes, if one chooses to utilize them:

As for kneeling:

1) All of Israel (2 Chronicles 7:3, and others), David (Psalms 95:6), other Kings (2 Chronicles 29:29), demoniacs (Mark 5:6), people who were healed (Matthew 9:18), Peter (Luke 5:8, Acts 9:40), armies (2 Kings 1:13), slaves (Matthew 18:26), Daniel (Daniel 6:10), Paul (Ephesians 3:14, Acts 20:36, 21:5, ), Solomon (1 Kings 8:54, 2 Chronicles 6:13), Ezra (Ezra 9:5), lepers (Matthew 8:2), a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:25), the mother of James and John (Matthew 20:20), Stephen (Acts 7:60), and even Jesus kneeled (John 17, Luke 22:41).

All people, at Jesus' return, will kneel and acknowledge Him as Lord (Isaiah 45:23, Psalms 22:29, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10)

2) Kneeling can be for the purpose of worship (Psalms 95:6), submission (Matthew 18:26), in request (Mark 10:17), respect (Mark 5:6), or gratitude (Ephesians 3:14). These are just some examples.

3) There will likely come a time in your life – if it has not already happened – where you feel compelled to kneel in prayer. Do not resist the urge; many great people of prayer (including Jesus) kneeled while praying from time to time. At the same time, it is both outside of example and reason to think one must kneel all of the time. **Also, one cannot expect it of others.**

4) Wisely, God knew in advance that some people *cannot* kneel – the disabled, many of the elderly, those who simply do not have knees due to amputation, injury, or birth defect. Therefore, the lack of a command to kneel is wisdom shown by God, but a tool available to those who can kneel and wish to do so.

As for fasting:

1) Some question if Christians should fast at all. After all, Jesus said in Matthew 9:14-17 that the guests should not fast when the bridegroom is with them, and in Matthew 28:20, Jesus says, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

2) Yet, in Acts 14:23, elders were appointed in every church, and they were both fasted and prayed over, committing them to the Lord's service.

3) 1 Corinthians 7:5 (in some translations) says that from time to time we might commit ourselves to a season of fasting and prayer unto a specific purpose, but that it should end, it is temporary, and it is by nature “occasional”.

4) Saul, Barnabas, and others were fasting before and after being commissioned by God to the next step of their missionary journeys in Acts 13:1-3.

5) There are teachings about fasting from Jesus in Matthew 6.

6) **Therefore, we can see that fasting is not required, but for a temporary season and specific reason people may privately choose to do so.** An “all-church fast” is not outside the realm of reason, but it must be understood by all up-front that **it is completely voluntary**, and no one should ever feel “compelled” by another to fast.

7) Wisely, God knew in advance that some people *cannot* fast – diabetics, those who suffer with hypoglycemia, etc. Therefore, the lack of a command to fast is wisdom shown by God, but a tool privately available to those who can fast and wish to do so for a temporary season and a specific purpose.

G) “Amen”

a) “Amen” is a Greek word that means “truly” or “yes”.

b) It is placed at the end of most of the New Testament Bible books.

c) **Jesus taught us to end our prayers with “Amen”** (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4) and His Apostles’ did the same.

c) 1 Corinthians 14:16 tells us that saying Amen at the end of another’s prayer is also appropriate, assuming we “heard” and “understood” what they were praying for. Otherwise, in public prayer, **“Amen” by the group is an affirmation that the prayer was of the group, spoken by one.**

H) Why does God sometimes say “no”?



a) It is important to understand that the prayers of the faithless, cowardly, flippant, or disobedient are ardently useless to receive God's direct, divine blessings.

Balaam, a prophet chosen of God, tried to curse Israel for monetary gain multiple times (Numbers chapters 22-24), deceived them into worshipping false gods, all while praying that he would "die the death of a righteous man" (Numbers 23:10). Instead, his greed and great sin of causing the Israelites to fall into adultery, fornication, idol worship, and revelry resulted in his own death, condemnation, and use as an example of evil throughout the Bible (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14). Balaam's prayer even as a prophet of God did him no good in the face of his own sinful decisions.

b) Second, it is important to understand God's purpose in answering prayer is not to win the lost by impressing them.

God is not putting on a show for unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:23). In Scripture, faith simply does **not** come by miracle – faith comes by hearing the Word of God through preaching (Romans 10:10-17).

c) Other times, a tough truth is that sometimes God does not answer a prayer because He already knows that even if we think so, there is no eternal, spiritual purpose in answering the prayer positively.

If we have God's perspective as expressed by the Apostle Paul and King David, we really would not pray to tarry in this life any longer than our appointed time (Philippians 1:21-26, Psalms 139:16, Hebrews 9:27). A prayer to live just because we do not want to die does not serve God's purpose and it is hard to imagine such a prayer would be honored.

d) Although faith certainly plays a role in answered prayer, it is not a matter of having "enough of it."

So many preach (especially “prosperity” false-gospel preachers) that if a person has “enough faith”, they can be rich, healthy, famous, or anything else they want. This falsehood has driven poor people poorer (making already-wealthy TV preachers even wealthier at the poor’s expense), because they have come to believe that faith is like flour, poured into a bowl until there is enough to make “the miracle-recipe.”

<b>What is Faith?</b>
<u>Faith is faithfulness.</u>
Faith is <b>not</b> a unit of measure designed to force an answered prayer.

The damage this view has caused is immense but this booklet will only discuss the most damning of evidence against viewing faith as a measured substance:

1) As discussed before, God’s will alone ultimately determines a miracle’s occurrence. Even if faith was measured like flour, no amount of it gives us authority over the will of God to exercise divine power at our own whim. No one on earth has this authority, only Jesus (Matthew 28:18).

2) Faith is ultimately a choice, not a feeling, just like true love is chosen, not always felt (John 3:16 – God loved the world – but He certainly did not “feel good” about condemning His Son to death on a cross!). Commitments held fast have many periods of doubt, anger, and even mistakes. However, commitments held fast endure to the end (Revelation 2:10). Faith is much like this: faith is a commitment to God, and that faith says that *whatever* happens, the person who committed trusts God’s plan for his or her life. That kind of faith *sometimes* brings about answered prayer. Faith is faithfulness. Let it be known that no miracle ever relied on mere feelings.

3) Faith, as defined by the eighteen specific, obedient heroes of Hebrews 11, is *always an obedient faith*. Some of these specific heroes mentioned were more faithful than others, and some not until their last miracle (and event) in their lives, like Samson, but nonetheless an obedient faith is the only faith God honors for the purpose of divine intervention (James 2:17-24).

Faith also takes the form of “believing God.” James 1:6-8 must be studied in context to understand what is being taught about faith. James here says, “...you must believe and not doubt...” This preacher struggled with this verse for years, because if there is anything I struggle with *emotionally*, it is doubt. However, there is a difference between “feeling doubtful” and “choosing doubt above God’s power.” A person is not condemned for their feelings or temptations that are stirred up from them (Hebrews 4:15), even “feelings of doubt.” Rather, when I pray (i.e. “ask”) God for divine healing (or any kind of divine blessing), do I believe God can do it if He so chooses, or do I believe God is actually unable to fulfill my request? Yes.

The former is “believing God”, in the context of a prayer request. The latter is the doubt James speaks of. The condemning kind of doubt is the kind that believes anything on a whim (vs. 6, gullibility), is unstable in all his ways (vs. 8), and says one thing and then does another habitually (vs. 8). Otherwise, the kind of doubt that prevents a prayer request from having potential divine intervention is **not** the feeling of doubt, but rather the habit of doubtful living – gullibility (readily influenced by the world), instability in *everything* a person does (literally, “not keeping commitments”), and finally double-mindedness (habitually lying by saying one thing and doing another). The reader may notice that how one lives matters a great deal more than how one feels; in fact, it is infinitely more important:

Job felt lower than dirt when he had an attitude of “repentance” before God after the righteous lecture he endured, *even though he had not sinned* (Job

42:7-8). Job had God-approved courage throughout his great trials despite his feelings of doubt and anger because in the end He still trusted God's plan was right, although he himself could not possibly understand it (Job 42:2-3).

### **About Doubt:**

“The kind of doubt that prevents a prayer request from having potential divine intervention... is the habit of doubtful living...”

Courage, like Job's, is also mentioned through Scripture as a prerequisite for God's intervention (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:9; Matthew 14:27; Acts 4:13; 1 Corinthians 16:13). **Again, courage is a choice, not a feeling.** One may very well feel doubt, fear, anger, etc. but not sin nor disbelieve God (Hebrews 4:15). Courage is choosing to obey God's path despite the potential physical, emotional, vocational or other hazards for doing so.

Job is a good example of one who had questions for God, expressed doubt, fear, despair, and anger but did not sin. Job had courage to endure even when every physical symptom, familial tie, and emotion tempted him otherwise. Likewise, a person's courage in their prayer life is not about how they feel in the moment, but rather what they are resolved to do.

Courage to do what is right falls right in line with obeying God, or being faithful. You might say courage is the genuine intent to obey God that immediately precedes actual obedience to God. Feelings of any kind are not required to have courage or obey; in fact, many righteous, brave people will testify they were “scared to death” many times in their various trials.

I) What about praying for healing by anointing with oil?

To be certain we are studying the passage in context, I will quote James 5:13-18 immediately below:

“<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

James says emphatically in verse 15, “And the prayer offered in faith **will** make the sick person well...” It is this verse’s “guarantee” that engages many into pursuing this particular kind of divine healing through prayer by the anointing with oil by the elders of a church.

However, it can be easily stated that many have attempted this and simply not received the healing they were seeking. Many, especially in charismatic groups will say, “The person did not have enough faith” (quoting vs. 15 where James says, “in faith”). Or, in skeptical circles, people might say, “This was a waste of time.” Others simply do not know what to do with this verse, and quietly ignore it, hoping no one asks about it!

This author would like to propose an understanding that may help:

James was a half-brother to Jesus, and thus a contemporary of both him and the Apostles. James is considered to be many to one of the first books of the New Testament written, possibly as early as 45AD. To put this into perspective, Jesus likely died and rose again in 30AD. This would put James at the very early part of the New Testament’s church’s growth and development. In terms of the book of Acts, the book of James was probably written before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

This was a period in the early church where the Apostles were all alive, Paul's ministry had begun, and thus miracle-working was going on regularly as a testimony to the Word being preached (Acts 14:3, 2 Corinthians 12:11+12, Hebrews 2:3-4, and of course during Jesus' ministry while He was on earth). When the Apostles would lay hands on another, they would receive miraculous gifts (Acts 5:12, 6:5-8, 8:6-7, 17, 19:6, among many others), although those people could not pass on those gifts (that is why when all of the Apostles had died, and the generation following them, miracles ceased, as predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Philip is an example of a preacher who was not an Apostle, had miraculous gifts (Acts 8:4ff), but never passed them on. Simon the Sorcerer, certainly not a righteous man, testified through Luke's writing that this was how miraculous power was passed (Acts 8:8-19). Paul himself admitted that in order for the church to receive miraculous power, he would have to make a trip there for them to receive it (Romans 1:11). Paul gave Timothy his gifts in the same manner (2 Timothy 1:6). Therefore, with no Apostles or first-generations Christians around, men no longer have miraculous power. Miracles by the hand of man have ceased because their purpose has been fulfilled in the completion of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

### **Key Bible Fact:**

**There is no example of anyone in Scripture** who had received miraculous gifts by the laying on of hands by an Apostle was able to pass miraculous gifts onto another.

This limited miracles by the hands of men to the Apostles and the first-generation of Christians who had received them by the laying on of an Apostle's hands.

This is how Paul explains it to the church at Rome (Romans 1:11).

What does this have to do with James? In James' time (early in the growth of the first church), it is perfectly reasonable to assume that there were many elders in many churches who had received miraculous powers by the laying on of hands by an Apostle. Therefore, many elders would have possessed miraculous gifts of healing to confirm the message they were commissioned to teach amongst their flocks (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). James was saying do not neglect these gifts; they were temporary, precious, and to be used to confirm the Word preached by those elders. The churches at the time lacked all of the New Testament (parts of it had not been written or widely circulated yet) so the elders' words were backed by miraculous power, just like the words of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others were.

1 Corinthians 11-13 discusses people of all kinds who had received powers by the hands of an Apostle but were using them improperly. The proper use was the miracles to be used to confirm the Word. Healing, just like in Jesus', Peter's, and Paul's ministries, was a useful tool for confirming the preached Word of God.

<b>Key Quote:</b>
James was saying to the elders, "Do not neglect these gifts"; they were temporary, precious, and to be used to confirm the Word preached by those elders before the New Testament was completed and widely distributed.

So, without miraculous gifts by the hands of God today, should elders anoint with oil those who are sick, praying for their healing? Absolutely, they should. Although the ability to heal is no longer in the hands of man, it is certainly in God's, and although the "guarantee" of healing is no longer provided (as the Word of God is complete and its testimony confirmed, so divine healing no longer serves the purpose of confirming the Word), it is a Biblical act of prayer offered up in obedience (faith), which is certainly

Scriptural. If God honors the request “yes”, it is not because of the oil but because He sees a purpose for His Kingdom in the prayer offered (Romans 8:28). If He does not heal, the Scriptures say we will be able to discern His will in it if we have the Word of God educated in our minds (Romans 12:2).

### What Can We Expect When We Pray in Faith? (Faithfulness)

- 1) God may answer yes and act accordingly.
- 2) If God does not render the healing requested, He will provide discernment (Romans 12:2) and peace (Philippians 4:7).

James 5:16 also helps us understand the distinction between the prayer the endowed elders offered up and the prayers we may offer up when we confess our sins. Verse 16 uses the word “may” where as verse 15 uses the word “will”. Again, this indicates that the prayers offered up by a faithful believer “may” result in healing by God whereas the prayers offered up by an elder who had received miraculous power as the result of an Apostle laying their hands upon them certainly “would” result in their healing. This does not mean that God was showing favoritism to the elders or those they prayed for; the limited-time purpose of miraculous healing by the hands of man was to confirm the preached Word not yet compiled and widely distributed as the New Testament. Once the Word was complete, the miracles and the generations that had them had passed away (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

### A Key Difference in James 5:15+16

**Vs. 15**

**Vs. 16**

“will”

“may”

**Meaning:** One or more elders had been given miraculous gifts by the laying on of hands of the Apostle “would” make the ill individual better by their prayer offered “in faith” (vs. 15) (faith meaning obedience to



God and also by obeying the command to pray and anoint). The faithful believer who had not been given these gifts could pray and “may” receive healing. Every Christian today falls into the latter category as none of us have received miraculous gifts by the laying on hands by an Apostle.

Finally, in vs. 17+18 James uses Elijah as an example. Elijah was a chosen prophet of God, who once again had powers for the purpose of confirming the prophecies (preaching, not always foretelling) He preached. His powers could be used at will, just like the elders and others in the early church who had received miraculous power by the laying on hands by an Apostle. We are not to be compared to Elijah or the elders James is referring to; James instead is saying that just as Elijah was to use his power for this purpose, so could the early-church elders who had that power. James’ chief concern was that some elders may be neglecting to use the power when it was available to them for the purpose of confirming the Word preached. This was the opposite problem the Corinthian church had where people were overusing, or abusing their power (1 Corinthians chapters 11-13).

This power was precious, temporary, and useful, so as long it was “a prayer offered in faith” (vs. 15) (faith here meaning obedience), the gifts were to be used. We can also understand this verse in the context of when James speaks earlier in James 4:17, “If anyone then knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, then to him it is sin.” These elders had a job – preaching the Word – and a gift to confirm it by (healing and other miraculous signs). They were to use both “in faith” (in obedience) and not neglect the short opportunity by which these gifts would be available to the fledgling church.

**There can be great meaning** in gathering together the elders of a local church, anointing the ill individual who requests the prayer, and having the elders pray over them. This strengthens the leadership, the church, and ill

individual spiritually and in unity. Regardless if divine healing happens, it is a prayer offered in faith, by faithful people, for the purpose of fulfilling a Kingdom purpose (Romans 8:28). God will hear our prayer (1 John 5:14), and will either honor our request with healing or give us discernment (Romans 12:2) and peace (Philippians 4:7).

Undeniably, this study on prayer falls short. Volumes could be written, but hopefully this study is sufficient to help the reader begin a fruitful, regular, and powerful prayer life based on their condition as a redeemed individual by following Christ's terms of pardon (Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:38, etc.), being faithful to Him (John 9:4, Revelation 2:10, etc.), and sharing Him with others until the end comes (Revelation 22:17).

### In Review:

- I. We should pray to the Father, through the Son.
- II. We should pray regularly, specifically, with thanksgiving.
- III. We should pray for ourselves and others.
- IV. Our consistent obedience and faithfulness to God is necessary for an effective prayer life.
- V. We should pray privately and participate in public prayer.
- VI. Kneeling and fasting are private, optional tools to aid our prayer and spiritual lives. We should not expect or command it of others.
- VII. We should end our private and public prayers with "Amen", affirming what was requested in thanksgiving to God.
- VIII. We should realize that when God answers our prayers "no", He will provide peace and discernment if we have been faithful.
- IX. Anointing with oil for healing is Biblical but not guaranteed.

May God bless you as you develop a prayer life and see the works of Him who has called you to His purposes! (Romans 8:28)