

59-05-01.wpd --Try Using Prayer

prayer, elders, means of grace, faith, sin, confession, healing

James 5:13-18

Prayer places trouble into the path of God's intervention.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture Reading)

--Scheduled prayer is a needed discipline in the lives of Christians. The

Lord's Prayer is meant to be a daily prayer, because it asks, "Give us this day our daily bread." (Mat 6:11, NKJV). Church attendance a reminder for

weekly prayer. Holy Communion offers us the opportunity each month for a special monthly prayer in approaching the Lord's Table. The National Day of Prayer (1st Thurs. in May) is on our yearly schedule.

--But life brings unscheduled troubles. **V.13** of our text says, "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." The same verse says, "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." This is a worshipful praying, when happy circumstances come along. Both are unscheduled prayers.

--Like all troubles, sickness ["not being well" or "dis-ease"] fits into no one's schedule, and it calls for unscheduled prayer. In illness, we often turn to medicine or doctors. But first, as with all trouble, we should turn to the Designer of our body. **HOM.idea**. The text brings out some factors to be aware of when we "try using prayer." (**title**).

I. Enlist Others in Praying for Your Illnesses

A. Sickness for a Christian should never be a lonesome journey (Christian faith doesn't shield us from life's troubles, but it should bring us into a community of faith where we don't suffer alone.)

B. Sickness [Gk., infirmity, weakness] is a trouble that needs special prayer, with leadership involvement-- **v.14a**, Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church... (Let others know when you are ill; when people can't call for themselves, we must call for them.)

C. Elders are church leaders [BUT lit. "older ones in the church" (who have more wisdom and experience in Christ)] [**appl**- Call on pastors, when sick, but also ask for the prayers of those mature in faith among your church family.]

II. Employ Means of Grace with Praying for Others

A. Means of grace (physical actions with spiritual significance) not magical but memorable; not to perform healing but to accompany faith-- **v.14b**, pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

- B. "pray over" [Gk., upon, positioned over, against] It means "laying on of hands," prayer using physical touch [**appl**- Today people recognize the therapeutic power of touch. It's real, because we are humanly connected as a race. But Christians are even more connected as one Body in Christ.]
- C. "anoint...with oil" [the ancients used oil in medicine and massage, but it was also a ceremonial sign of preparation for service, both in **leadership** and in **ministry**-- 1 Sam 16:13, So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. // Isa 61:1, The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,] A ritual use of oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit's anointing for continued service. It encourages faith in the requested healing (we are not healed for a longer duration of life on earth, but for longer earthly service).
- D. "in the name of the Lord" [as a child, I believed that "in the name of Jesus, AMEN" was a magic formula to get my prayer heard. It is far beyond that!]
1. Praying "in the name of Jesus" puts our circumstances, our trials & troubles, our sicknesses **into the path of God's intervention**.
 2. All power for all divine action in relationship to all creation, in heaven and on earth is **now** in the hand of one Authority, God's Son, whose name is the Lord Jesus Christ-- Acts 4:30 (the early church prayed), "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders **through the name** of your holy servant Jesus.")

III. Energize Your Faith for Getting Prayer Answered

- A. Fear raises a question, "What if God doesn't want me well?" Faith offers a prayer-- **v.15a**, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" Fear challenges weak faith, but is no challenge to strong faith ["Fear knocked at the door. Faith opened it. No one was there."]
- B. Faith drives out by standing on God's Word ["How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!"]
- C. Faith is the positive energy behind prayer-- 2 Cor 1:20, For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. (When believers pray together, everyone should join in by saying "AMEN! YES!")
- D. Faith gets God's attention when we really seek Him-- Heb 11:6, And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards **those who earnestly seek him**. (We mix up earnestly seeking him with earnestly seeking what we ask)

for in prayer. Faith in God must focus not on "my plans" and "my will" but on "Thy kingdom come," and "Thy will be done."

IV. Align Your Prayer with God's Purposes

- A. God wants more for us than to be healed from sickness-- v.15b, "the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."
1. God desires to raise us up from illness, but also from falling, from depression, ultimately from our worst enemy, death itself)
 2. Before He can raise us up, He must release us from what keeps humans down: our sins. [Gk., forgive means to "let go" or "send away"]
 - a. God's process for helping us get released from sin is mutual confession-- v.16a, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."
 - b. Mutual, because we are all sinners, each needing release [In my massage therapy course we practiced on each other by taking turns on the massage table. When students massaging felt *tight spots* in those receiving, they were to rest pressure there for a "release" (a *letting go* or *relaxation* of the knot in the muscle). The pressure was not always comfortable, but the release was worth it.] All of us have knots of sin in our souls. We can help each other get released as we each take turns on the confession table and receive focused prayer on areas of need.
- B. Prayers that connect with God are prayed in commitment to God-- v.16b, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (Prayers of the uncommitted might as well be prayed to themselves, like those of the Pharisee who prayed on the street to be noticed by people. Those who "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" align their prayers with God's purpose by first aligning themselves.

CONCLUSION:

--This passage started out by saying "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." It ends by saying in **v.17-18**, *Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.* It's not about weather and agriculture, but about trouble. And we do not need to be spiritual super-saints before we try using prayer. Try prayer for any trouble, but especially for illnesses, for weaknesses, for being raised up when down and released when bound. These things come, unannounced, unscheduled. **Prayer places them and all trouble into the path of God's intervention.**

James 5:13-18 (NIV) Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. {14} Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. {15} And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. {16} Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. {17} Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. {18} Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.