



Powerful Praying

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Back in the 1980s, Sean Connery uttered a memorable line on screen when he held a shotgun in his hand, and he reminded his opponent and filmgoers that it's foolish for his opponent to bring a knife to a gunfight. And that's always been a good line, I think. It is kind of foolish to bring a knife to a gunfight. Not very effective. But sadly, I fear that is probably how you're living. You are up against more than you think and you're trying to live that Christian life, if you are a Christian, with a knife in your hand. And this is not a knife fight.

Let me give you a couple passages that may tie this together for you. First Peter Chapter 5. Let me just remind you of this text. In verse 8, it says that we have an enemy, "An adversary and he prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." That's not just like there's a coworker out to get you. That's not just like there's a problem that you got with the IRS. This is a supernatural being that is out to put you in his crosshairs. Of course he's got a big team, so he's probably not dealing with you personally. But speaking of his team, it says over there in Ephesians Chapter 6 verse 12, that the wrestling that we have, we may have trials and difficulties and illnesses and problems and, you know, arguments and issues and whatever, disappointments.

But the real wrestle that we have is really not against stuff you can see. It's not against flesh and blood. It's against these principalities and powers. Here's a line, "Against these cosmic forces that are permeating this present darkness," and then this line, "that the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." I mean, that's just mind-altering to think the problems I'm having, these problems are taking place because there's something going on behind the scenes. And of course, if we read the book of Job, we know that the goal is to get you to stop being the Christian you're supposed to be. And all this stuff is trying to get you to doubt, it's trying to get you to be discouraged, it's trying to get you to step off the path, all that God wants for you. There's a battle going on. Right?

Those are some pretty serious guns that are after you and you respond with a knife. I mean, that's our tendency, right? Which is well, let me see who I can talk to and let's see what I can do and how can I negotiate something with these people and what can I do to get a better argument going with this. Or how can I, you know, can I call a doctor or a lawyer? And we think, well, these are the... We get temporal solutions to what is ultimately a spiritual problem, even though the spiritual forces are utilizing human and temporal means to affect my life. We need a shotgun. We need something much bigger.

Speaking of the end of Peter, Peter is ramping into that statement and he says in Chapter 4, he says, "you need to be sober and alert," notice this line, here's the shotgun, "for the purpose of your prayers." It's just a great line to be alert for the purpose of your prayers. And then over there in Ephesians 6, after he says, we're "wrestling against these cosmic forces" and these spiritual, you know, these entities that exist outside the realm that you can see, he ramps up into this and it's a great statement and it's worth me reading it so I don't miss a word of it. It says, "We need to be praying at all times in the Spirit," this is the culmination, the



punch line of this all, "with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making prayers or supplication for all the saints." And you guys need to be praying and praying for each other.

We have access to someone who's more powerful than all the cosmic powers that are out to try and derail your Christian life or your joy or your fruitfulness or your faithfulness. You have something much more powerful. You have the creator of all things, and your connection with him is for you to be alert and sober and persevering in your prayers. You should bring a shotgun to a gunfight. That's what you ought to bring. And we have one available. And as I said, I can pretty well guess that you're probably not praying the way that you ought. I mean, you probably looked at the bulletin hoping for something about a baby in a manger and you got this thing about powerful praying. And I just know it evokes this guilt about the fact, "I need to pray more."

I get it. And I'm not here to invoke more guilt or pile on guilt to say, you know, twist your arm that you need to pray more because you're a bad Christian unless you're praying. I can say you're a weak and ineffectual Christian, I guess that makes you a bad Christian, if you're not praying. That's true. But my goal here this morning as we get into a busy time of the year is to help you. And I'd like to help you by looking at a passage found in James Chapter 5 verses 13 through 18. And in this passage, I think I can give you some hope and some help. But I warn you, in this text there's a lot here and there are trees that look funny. And if you look at those trees too closely, although we should and we could and we have and we will. But if you look at individual trees too closely you'll miss the forest. And the forest is about praying and it's about your prayer life.

So if you could not be distracted with the questions that surface, although we'll address some, there's a lot in this text from beginning in verse 13 to ending in verse 18 that is all about you and I being encouraged and motivated to pray. And if you're a Christian, you know you need that. And you know that even the Spirit that dwells within you, I mean, there's this sense of prompting. I need to pray and I don't pray and I don't pray like I should. And we feel like Peter, James and John, who Jesus says, "You can't even pray with me for an hour." You can't even pray. Well, you haven't spent an hour in prayer recently. So we want to be encouraged and motivated beyond just saying, yeah, we were deficient. We want to be motivated to move forward into a new level of praying. And it may mean that in a busy season you have to say no to some other things and focus on this.

And so many good Christians and great preachers have said it better than I could. But the idea of us as Christians, this is what we do. Right? This is what we do. Spurgeon said the cobbler is about shoes, right? Christians should be about prayer, you know. It's like asking, does a soccer player run around on grass and kick a ball? I mean, yes, of course. Well, do Christians pray? Well, yes, of course. This is what we do. This is our expression of our relationship with the living God.

So turn on your Bibles if you haven't already to James Chapter 5. Let's start in verse 13 and I want to read for you from the English Standard Version this text of Scripture that really is all



about prayer, which I think is obvious from the first word, although we lose it in some of the details of this text. I'll read it for you starting in verse 13. "Is anyone among you suffering?" It reads, James 5:13, "Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Well, let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he's committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. And he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit." Verse 18 is about Elijah praying, verse 13 starts with "Hey, are you struggling? Pray" Okay. I want to stay focused on prayer and I want us to glean what we can from this passage about you and I leaving this auditorium saying we are going to be praying more, we're going to commit ourselves to praying more. We're going to be motivated and encouraged to pray more.

Let's start with verse 13 and see what we can find here. If you're suffering, you ought to pray. That I think is the easiest thing that happens to us when we are suffering. We think, "Oh, man, if God were here, he could fix it. If God knew he could fix it. If God were involved, he could fix it." Because when we suffer, it's reflexive, it's natural to respond by saying, "I need to pray." So that's not so difficult for us in the sense that we know that. What's difficult is what comes next. And what it's doing is setting up for us what you might call an inclusio, a set of bookends, something that shows us that no matter where you are on the spectrum between suffering and cheer the response is the same. And I know you don't think the response is the same, but let's read the second half of verse 13 again. "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."

Okay. Unfortunately, you may not see singing praise as a subset of the concept of prayer, but it is. This is the Greek word, not that it matters, I suppose, but it may help us. It's the Greek word that's transliterated the psalms. It's in a verbal form. So it's a "Let him psalm." Right? Let him express the psalms. Let him do the psalms stuff. Well, what is the psalm stuff? Well, it's an Old Testament hymn-book where they're all talking to God, right? They're expressing to God their..., in this case, this gets us to think, because the word itself, is about praise.

Now, the word that translates it in the Old Testament, it's a word you're familiar with in Hebrew. It's the word hallelujah. You're familiar with that word. Hallelujah is a compound. Maybe you've heard this before, but here you need to think through what praise is. To sing praise, it almost sounds like when I was with you last time talking about thanksgiving, it can sound like something that just kind of happens, it's an attitude or a feeling, but it's not. It has an object, right? "Halle" is the Hebrew word "praise," right? "Lu" is the part of the word that is expressing a plural inclusion of what you should do. It's a command to everyone. Everyone should do this. "Halle," everyone should. Right? "Jah." Jah is the abbreviation as many of these compound Hebrew words do, of the proper name of God, Yahweh, Yahweh. Yahweh should be the one you praise. Everyone should praise Yahweh. Halle-lu-jah. It's translated in



our English text as "praise the Lord." It implies the second person plural, but praise "you all" the Lord.

It's always about the Lord. It's always about me saying to God, "You are great for doing this thing that made me cheerful." Right? Prayer specifically is me petitioning God when something is hurting. So I'm hurting. I'm suffering. And I'm saying, "Hey, God, this is hard, this hurts." So on the end of the spectrum, when I think about my pain, it's easy for you to think, "Yeah, I'm a Christian. I should be asking God to help me or to fix it." On the other end of the spectrum, though, it's about prayer as well. But it's saying things were good this week, things were good today and I should be expressing to God, which is what prayer is, expressing to God that I'm grateful. I should be hailing God. I should be giving glory to God. I should put the spotlight on God. I should be saying to God, "God, that's good that you did this." Over here on the suffering side is, "God, I wish that you would do this. But what's common in both of those is that they're both prayer. They're both saying, "God, hey, God." Okay.

I just want us to recognize that the spectrum of life, whether you had a great week last week, you should be praying, whether you had a terrible week last week, you should be praying. The content is different, but it's all about praying. It's all about taking our thoughts and directing them to God. If you've been in our Partners Program, you know that's our discipleship one-on-one program where we help people work through the basics of the Christian life, although it can be adapted to be not all that basic, but we talk about like issues of prayer in the Partners manual. And prayer is defined as taking a thought and directing it to God. That's how we narrow down the concept.

And you say, "Well, isn't it communication with God?" Yes. Communication with God, though, makes people think about words expressed to God and the problem is so often our words, we think when we've uttered words that we've prayed, when in fact, a lot of times I like to, I would like to, I don't do it very often, because it would seem rude, but I'd like to stop people and say, "You just said that in prayer. What do you mean by that?" And I would guess because I've been in this long enough, I would guess a lot of people would say, "I don't know. I mean, it's just those are prayer words, right? Lord bless those people, Lord, you know, bless..." They just say all kinds of things in prayer. And I don't want to mock or make fun of them, but they say all kinds of things in prayer and I think, well, you don't even know what you're saying. But if I said, "What did you just do?" They'd say, "I've just prayed." "What does that mean?" "Well, I said these words, you know, and I directed them to God."

But if you don't know what you're saying, it's about content, it's about logical meaning, it's about you having a cogent thought and saying, "God, I'm directing this to you." Of course, we utilize words usually in our thinking, not that we have to say them to convey those, but if you don't know what they mean, then it's not prayer. Prayer has to be me with intent taking my mind and saying, "Here, God, here's what I would like you to do." That's like in the suffering what I would normally do. "Let your request be made known to God," to quote Philippians 4. I want to tell God what I'm thinking and what I'd like him to do. And at the other end of the spectrum in praise, I should be filling my praise with content, right? I should be saying to God, "Here's what I'm thankful that you did."



All of this is an expression of a Christian knowing that God is involved in everything, whether it's a mediocre week, a terrible week or a great week. God has brought me into the terrible circumstances I'm in and, "God, here's what I'd like you to do now that I'm here. I had a mediocre week." Whatever is going on, it certainly includes the middle of this and the whole spectrum and everything in between, I want to acknowledge God. That's the whole point of the Christian life. I realize that God is ever-present in all things. I'm a person who should know, as Paul's going to say in Acts 17, which we'll get back to soon, I trust Lord willing, we're going to look at Acts 17 where Paul is speaking to the Athenian philosophers and professors, and he says, "In him we live and move and have our being." As Paul writes to the Colossians, "In Christ, all things hold together," they consist.

So God is involved in everything. We're not deist. We don't think God just set it up and just let it go. God is bringing everything into reality. He's actively involved. And I want to talk to the one who's actively involved in everything. And I should have in my mind an awareness of the truth that God is, and that God is involved. And so how do I express that? How do I know that? How do I affirm that? How do I demonstrate that? I do that by talking to God because God is involved in it all. So the first point, let me word it this way. To summarize verse 13, which opens up this whole discussion about prayer, it really is showing us the spectrum of experience in life and how I'm supposed to be talking to God. I'm supposed to be communicating with God, expressing myself to God. Okay?

Let me just put it this way. You're not going to like applaud after this, I'm sure. You're not going to say, "Bring the bag back. I'm going to put more money in the bag because this was amazing. It's very simple. And you say this guy went to seminary to teach us this?" I understand. Simple. But I want to remind you of what we just said. This is what it means. Ready? Number one. "Pray all the time." Pray all the time. "Uhh...?" Why is that profound? Because that's what Christians are doing. They're expressing the fact that they know that the thing that we cannot see with our eyes, we cannot hear with our ears, we cannot touch with our hands is real. It's that God exists. God created us. God sustains all things, and everything will come under the purview and evaluation of God at the end. God is God. He's involved and he's here. So my prayer life is expressing that in specific ways. I am acknowledging God. If I don't do that, I'm forgetting the basics of the Christian life.

It's not hard, by the way, to think about suffering. For most of us that's when our prayer life ramps up when we're suffering. I can turn you into a prayer warrior. Right? I could tell you right now that someone you love the most is in the hospital and on a ventilator and who knows if they're going to make it. You're going to start praying. You're going to become a prayer warrior. Right? But let's just talk about the other side, which expresses whether or not we really are practical atheists or we're genuine theists.

Go to James Chapter 1. This is part of what starts the book. This description in Chapter 1 verse 17. Scroll up to James 1:17. And that's the truth. But I guess we should start with verse 16, because that's the problem. We are deceived, we don't get it. We don't make the connection. Verse 16. James 1:16, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers." I love you,



you're Christians. I love you, you're Christians, you're brothers. But you are missing something. I don't want you to miss this. What are they missing? Verse 17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down," not just from the sky, "from the Father of," all that's good, including the light, the sun, everything. He's the provider of good. This is symbolic here of the good. God is a good God, "Father of light, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." He's not changing. He's invariable. He's immutable.

"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth." He not only brought us forth in time, it's not like the deist would think, well, he set up procreation and we all got here because we just it happens and that's just the rules of the game. Is that he's actively involved. He's creating every individual person. And then redemption. That's clearly, with some of you here. He brings us to regeneration. He's actively involved and you need to know every good thing. If I said, how was your weekend? It was a great week. Really? Why? Well, here are the 18 things that happened that made it a good week for me, a great week. All of those things the Bible says that God is actively involved in it. And so proving my theism, proving that I'm a Christian is expressed through me demonstrating that belief by saying I'm talking to God about all those things. "God, you did that. Thank you for that."

The real concern of Moses when he brought the people into the Promised Land or he was about to, he had to hand it off to Joshua to bring them in, was that you don't get there and the crops are bountiful and your cows are calving and you've got all these great things happening. You sit on your porch and you forget God. Do not forget God because God is the one providing all these things actively for you. Not only getting you out of slavery, easy for you when you're suffering to call on God, but it's harder when you're prosperous or comfortable or the mediocre week to even think about God. Don't forget God.

Look at Chapter 4 of James. James Chapter 4. He says something and it's very difficult. It's hard for us to really process what he's saying, but we'll slowly read it and make sure we understand it. Starting in verse 13. Let's go from 13 to the bottom of the chapter. "Come now, you who say." Are you with me on this? James 4:13. "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit." Now, "come now, you who say..." You know that we're going toward a rebuke. And if you've read the Bible you know this is not a positive statement. And you're thinking, for what? Today or tomorrow, we're going to go into such and such a town spend a year there and try to make a profit? You're telling me God is mad at Christians making business plans? This is crazy. You're about to rebuke someone saying here's my plan for the next quarter? That just doesn't make any sense.

Well, it doesn't make sense if you're thinking about the book of Proverbs and thinking about all the wisdom regarding planning. But guess what? All wisdom in the Bible about planning, about being diligent, about preparing, about Joseph storing up in silos, you know, seven years of crops in good years. What's understood in all of those narratives or all those didactic sections and understanding what the Bible says about the wisdom of planning, it cannot be devoid of your understanding of the fact that God is involved in all of it and you don't get any of it unless God is involved in it. And so there's where he's going to lay into them. It's not what



you said that he's about to rebuke them for. It's about what you weren't even thinking about when you made those plans.

Verse 14. "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills.'" Let's just stop right there. If the Lord, if the Lord wants this, we'll do this. And that means I'm making a plan, and this is showing kind of what prayer is about as well, I'm recognizing that I can't make a plan and have it happen unless God is going to undergird this and make it happen. God is going to have to bring the profit that I'm planning. God is going to have to make these things happen. You can't plan to plan a church and have it happen. I can't plan to go and do this thing or start this school or have a service. I can't do anything at all unless God is going to carry this out. I'm making a plan because I'm supposed to make a plan because it's wise and diligent to make a plan. But I have to in my mind say, but there's God and God is involved in all of this.

That's the concept that is expressed and proved and demonstrated in the fact that I'm talking to God all the time. And he's saying the problem is the absence of you even understanding that you won't even be alive tomorrow. Look after the comma here, middle of verse 15. "If the Lord wills, we will live," I don't even know if I'm going to be alive unless the Lord wills it, "and do this or that." And when it says, "you should say," again, I go back to my definition of prayer. I didn't just tack on at the end of every sentence, "Hey, I'll meet you for lunch at the Olive Garden... if the Lord wills." I'm not saying you have to say the words, but you better know, right? You're not going to make it down there. You can't get two miles unless the Lord wills you to do that, unless he protects you, unless he enables you and sustains you.

So you should be thinking, how would I even think about God in this? I should be talking to God all the time. It ought to be like breathing. I'm going to talk to God all the time. Do you want to say the words? Great. Say the words, but know what you're saying. I'm saying all this is dependent on God. But I'm not saying that and I'm not thinking that, so verse 16, how harsh does this sound? "As it is," you're saying all these plans, but you're not even thinking about God involved in them, "As it is, you boast in your arrogance." Ouch! "All such boasting is evil." I was just called an arrogant, boasting, evil person. Why? Because I forgot God. I didn't factor him into the equation.

How do you factor God into the equation of everything you do? You talk to him. Now, I know you should have those undistracted times where you close your eyes. You bow your head. You should do that. And you should extend those conversations. Like Jesus got up long before dawn. He went up while it was still dark and onto a mountain to pray. He went into a solitary place to pray. He says, "You ought to go into your closet and pray. You ought to find a place without distraction." Great. But then we get up, we get about our day and we ought to be constantly praying. First Thessalonians 5:17, right? "Pray without ceasing," and praying all the time. I'm saying I need to talk to God because God is involved in it all. He's involved in my planning. He's involved in the carrying out of the plans. And then when things don't go that way, God was involved in that. And now I'm going to talk to him about getting out of this or



getting it corrected or amended or fixed or redirected. I got to talk to God all the time. Pray all the time.

Pray when you're hurting. Pray when you're happy. Be prompted by pain. Be prompted by blessing. Be prompted by mediocre life. Be prompted by boredom. Be prompted by everything to pray. I don't want to be accused of forgetting God because God, if you forget him, you are now living in a non-reality because reality is God is here, he's present. One day our faith is going to be sight. Everybody, every atheist is going to see the realities of God beyond this life. But right now, though we don't see him, we love him, we believe in him. We have this joy that should be there because our constant awareness of what is not tangibly seen. God has stepped into space and time. He has been seen by the incarnate God. We just sang about it. But the reality is we got to engage our minds in directing thoughts to God all the time.

Verse 14. Back to our passage now. Chapter 5. James 5:14. Do you want to talk about suffering? Let's drill down a little bit. We suffer usually when we're sick because it's pain and we don't like pain. And pain gets our attention and we start saying, I don't want this pain in my life. I'd like it to go away. "Is anyone among you sick?" Well, we already know in verse 13, you ought to be praying. You ought to pray when you're suffering. But now it says, listen, maybe it's a chronic thing, maybe it continues on, maybe it's severe, maybe it's big. "Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him," comma. We'll get to the rest of that sentence in a minute. But now I'm saying you should get more people to pray. Paul said that in Second Corinthians 1. I didn't want you to be unaware of what I was going through because I needed to be helped by your prayers. I need you to pray.

So broaden the circle of prayer. Don't be a hermit. Don't be a monk. Don't sit in the corner and not tell anybody. Get people involved and pray. And if you think I've got a real bad problem, well, then "you should tell the elders of the church, and they should be praying over you." Well, and that happens. You go to our Web site and go to a place that's got a tag. And maybe at the bottom now because we got a little weird stuff on the tech. But click on that prayer request if you need a prayer. It goes to all of our pastors, it goes to our prayer team, and we pray for you. Every week we go through the prayer list and pray for you. I pray for the people who say, "I am sick, I need prayer." And as an elder, as a pastor, I do that. And you ought to let us know.

Do you have a chronic problem, a big problem? It's not for every migraine or hangnail, but you ought to be asking for prayer. Why? Because that's what this passage is about. It's about prayer. It's about prayer going from an individual life to more and more people. You ought to be praying. You ought to be praying with people. You better be praying for people.

And then it says, "Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord," anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. If I say anointing someone with oil, what are you thinking of? If you think biblically, you think about like Samuel pulling out a flask of oil and pouring it over the head of David, a young shepherd boy. You think about a flask of oil being poured over the head, in the book of Leviticus, of the priest who's been



consecrated for service. It was a symbolic gesture of pouring oil, and the word "pour" is simply the word "anoint" with oil. And oil, there's a particular kind of oil that was used in the ceremonies of the Old Testament to inaugurate the office of a prophet, priest or king. That's probably what you think.

But you probably don't think that when you read the story of the Good Samaritan, where the Jew gets mugged on the road to Jericho and the Good Samaritan comes alongside the Israelite and says, "Listen, those guys are going to pass by you. I'm going to care for you." And what does he do? He takes his wounds and he anoints those wounds with oil. He pours oil on the wounds, and then he bandages up the wounds, takes him on the beast that he has, on his animal, takes him to the inn and pays for his entry fee in to convalesce. You're not thinking of that when you talk about him having the oil poured on him, administering the oil.

Oil, as I like to say, is like Bactine when I was a kid. Right? And my parents will object to this. But Bactine was like the solve-all for everything. If you get a cut? Bactine. Hangnail? Bactine. Right? A wart? Bactine. Toothache? Bactine. But Bactine was like you just put Bactine on it and that's what you do. That's how I remember it. It's hard when your parents go to the church and hear your illustrations. But that simplified view of my, you know, my wonder years memory of my childhood, it is akin to what happened in the ancient world when oil was the number one medicinal use to fix people's wounds. Right? It was the salve, it was the basis for everything they used medicinally. Not everything, but a lot of things. Right?

Wine was another one. When Timothy had stomach problems, he didn't say go find some Pepto or find some Tums. Paul says, "Take a little wine for your stomach." Because the pastor, like the pastors here, we say no to alcoholic beverages because the danger there and the stigma and all the rest. And Timothy was a pastor who did the same thing, but Paul said, "Listen, you got stomach problems, you ought to take a little bit for your stomach." So the reality of it all, if you think about that, is that you're going to use the basic things on the medicinal shelf that you have on the shelf to deal with people. But you're supposed to do it "in the name of the Lord."

Now you're thinking, "Well, the elders are called to do this to people." Well, remember this, much like on the mission field today and I've been on the mission field. I was there. I remember one scene where a guy was using an ax. He had the ax hit his leg and big gashing wound. And where does he go? He goes to the pastor in the village because the pastor in the village was the guy who was not just the Bible guy, but was also, you know, kind of like the spiritual chief of the place. And he was the one who had the medicines and he had the salve and he had the antibiotic cream and he had some gauze. And he helped this guy patch up his leg after hitting it with the ax.

That was what happened with these scattered Christians in this diaspora. They went out and he was writing to them. They were probably living in these communities where the pastor was the guy who they thought was the most competent to administer medicinal use. Now, that's one view on this and some people have it, I have it. You can think about a ceremonial use, but then you have to create a whole paradigm for that that we don't have in Scripture. And



you got to hearken back to ideas. And I'm just thinking this is what we do see in Scripture as one of the ways when we talk about oil being administered to someone and I'm saying this: that in my understanding of this text, yes, you should seek medical attention.

Now you run to go get your Ibuprofen when you have a headache, you go to your medicine cabinet. Right? All I'm saying is if you're administering this yourself to try and say I'm going to put some kind of something on this thing to fix me, whatever it is. Right? First I'm saying it's about prayer, right? And it's about doing whatever you're doing to medicinally fix this "in the name of the Lord." What does that mean? That means that I know that just like Chapter 1 verse 17 says, nothing good is going to happen to me in my health unless the Lord is involved in it. So it's not like Hezekiah, who in his illness sought the physicians, the Old Testament King of Judah, he sought the physician, but he did not seek the Lord and the Lord was not happy with that. Why? Because he's against physicians? No. Is he's against medicine? No, it's that you better be trusting in God to utilize these means.

Just like David said, I'm not trusting in the armies. "I'm not trusting in the horses. I'm not trusting in the chariots." I'm not trusting in the swords. But I have all of those and they're sharpened and prepared. "But I trust in the Lord" because the battle belongs to the Lord. And that's true, whether it's a military engagement or whether it's you and your oncologist, all of this depends on the Lord. So we do it with a deference to God. Why? Because that's the whole point of praying all the time that I always recognize God's involvement. But here, if it's done with an understanding, then you don't have to be a Christian to get healed from, you know, your situation, whatever it is, to recover from illness. But the point is that you should, as a Christian, acknowledge the realities that are there, which is that God is involved in this. If anything good is going to happen, God is going to do it.

It says in verse 15, here's how this works in the economy of God. "The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." Okay, when you read the word "the Lord will raise him up" or you just read the word "raise him up" come springtime at least I know you're going to be thinking about resurrection. Matter of fact, many passages in Scripture, same phraseology about the raising up of the Lord, the raising up of the dead. If I think about raising up, I'm thinking about a body that's really got problems, a body that is completely dead. And even if I think about prayer, there are very few resurrections in the Bible. And only one to immortality. That's Christ. But I have a few others. Jairus daughter. I've got Lazarus. In the Old Testament I got an Assyrian widow who's got a son that Elijah goes and prays for and he asks for God to restore the life of this kid. And God does it.

Now, that kid's got a lot of medical problems. He's dead. That's big, right? But Elijah prays and God raises him up. I just think that if nothing else reminds us of, like, the fact you're going to bring up Elijah here in a minute, that God has power over every cell in my body. God is a God who is sovereign over all things and a God who has power over all things. And it talks about prayer now and it seems like in this statement of an illness, look how powerful God can be in response to prayer. He can raise that person up when someone comes sincerely, trusts God, prays to God. And if God responds positively, that body is going to be raised up. It's going to recover from that illness.

Then he shifts to something else that you may see as an overlap, and surely there is an overlap in Scripture, we see it in Scripture, that sometimes illnesses are related to sin, and that happens according to Hebrews Chapter 12. In First Corinthians, they were talking about the problem of sin in the church regarding the Lord's Supper. And he said, "Because of this, some of you are weak, some are sick, and some have even died." So I know that sickness is sometimes associated with sin and so that may be part of the overlap. But it is a different category. I can have a spiritual problem relationally with God and I can have a physical problem with my own body. Nevertheless, he says, and he connects these, they go back-to-back at least, but it's a different category, a different subject. Bottom of verse 15, "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." Well, how does that work?

Verse 16. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another." If there's one thing James' audiences knew, it was that if you're going to be forgiven, you have to confess your sins. Right? First John 1:8 and 9. "If you confess your sins, he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Again, you see that word "confess" and you think about that. And then it's saying, listen, if you think about a situation maybe where you've called the elders of the church to pray for you and you're sick, and they ask about your life, and maybe there's a connection of discipline and you now confess your sins and say, "Yes, I was sinning and this, you know, maybe it's God's discipline." The whole point here is confessing sins to one another, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another that you may be healed.

Now, that could be independent, right? I could have a sin problem and if it's going to be fixed and God is going to forgive me, well, then I need to pray. Pray what kind of prayer? A prayer of confession. God, I am sorry. God, I did wrong. God, this was not right. God, I will do right. That's the prayer of a penitent person confessing sin and moving on. How does that happen? It's called prayer. Psalm 32. David is praying and he says, "I confessed my sin to the Lord and he forgave the guilt of my iniquity." How did that happen? Prayer. Prayer. How powerful is prayer? Prayer can take a problem, which, by the way, is much harder than seeing you healed physically and he can take a problem of the stain of your sin and immediately with a prayer, remove it.

I mean, think about that. If you came in with this really nice white silk scarf and I pulled out a big, you know, blunt-ended black Sharpie, a permanent marker, and I just started writing my name and drawing pictures on it, you probably wouldn't be impressed. You'd be angry. And you'd probably say you've ruined this. Right? You might, among other things you might say to me. You would say that, right? Because I've stained the garment. It's irreparably stained. That's the picture there in Isaiah Chapter 1 verse 18, that our sins have made our lives like a garment that was stained, "as though it was crimson, it was red," and it was like blood was spilled on it. But "Hey, come. Let's reason together." Right? Though your sins be like that, they'll be white as snow, they'll be white like wool."

The idea here is that you need to recognize that you may say, "Well, I'd like to pray a prayer and have some dead person rise. I'd like to pray a prayer and have some paralyzed person



walk." Right? I just want to think about the category of praying and how powerful prayer is. When you pray to an all powerful God and a holy God and you say, "God, I would like this to be fixed." One thing you're doing, I hope every day is confessing your sins to God and "God is faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." The picture of the forgiveness of your sins, that picture is such a good one to remind us that prayer it has a huge effect when we're praying to a God that has something big to do. Right? And that is, in our case, to forgive our sins or even if he chooses to, to relieve us from our illness.

Number two, let's put it this way. It's the power of me talking to the right person. I put it this way, "Pray to the All Powerful God." Pray to the all powerful God. If I said there's power in prayer and I know books have been written, the Power of Prayer. The title of this sermon, right? What is that? What did I call it? Powerful Praying. If you think about prayer and you say prayer is powerful. Right? And if you define prayer as communication to God, right? If you think it's about the communication itself, as some prosperity gospel people think, you're going to miss the whole point. Because the point isn't that there's something powerful in what you're doing. It's about who you're doing it with. You're speaking to God.

I can say some things to you. I can say here's a powerful prayer. "Hey, Jim. Make it rain on Thursday." And that's a powerful prayer, man. But it means nothing because Jim can't do anything about the weather. Right? If I said, "Wendy, lift this car. Make it fly." Okay, well, that's powerful, man. What faith you have. You have faith now. That's powerful praying. Yeah, but Wendy can't make my car fly. So it really doesn't matter how powerful and faith-filled your words are. What matters is who you're talking to. And here is a God who can raise the dead. Here is a God who can forgive sins. Here's a God who can look at you as though you never did the things that you did. That is, like, remarkable. How can I change reality? God can do that. It's impossible with man, but it's possible with God.

So my point is this: you're praying to someone who is powerful, and that's what you need to remember every time you bow your head, every time you utter a word. Like when Nehemiah was asked by the king, what do you want? And he prays to God and he answers the king. In that moment he makes a statement to God and he doesn't tell us what it is, but it's some kind of statement where he's somehow acknowledging that God is great and big and can do anything. And sure enough, the response from the king was very unexpected. It was wanted, but unexpected. And he ends up funding and allowing the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. That prayer. What is it? It's an acknowledgment that I have a connection with the all powerful God.

See, some people think prayer in these prosperity preachers is like a remote control on a drone. Right? We got this thing and it's a drone. It's got missiles on it or whatever. And I'm going to pick it up and I just do this and push that forward and move it this way. Do you want to move God? Prayer controls God. Right? Now, I would hope your theology is that you say, I don't think that's a good definition of prayer, a good description of prayer. "Prayer controls God." Right? You're not controlling God. You understand that. This is a person, you're talking



to a person who just happens to be the CEO of the universe, who made the universe and every molecule in it reports to him. But you're talking to a person.

Just like your kids can come to you and ask you something. They can ask you something and they're deferring to you and they think you have resources they don't have. And that's true with us. And it's great to know that we're talking to someone who does have all authority, but you're asking a person.

Now, I know the problem with this whole sermon is that some of you will get so demotivated to pray, because I'm actually talking about something as dramatic as someone who's sick and they're being healed and you're thinking, "I prayed that and it doesn't happen. I prayed many times and it doesn't happen." I hope you can look at times you have prayed and God has brought someone through it. Like Psalm 103 says, "He's delivered you from your diseases" and that's great. But some of us are going to sit here and say, "Well, I know I prayed and it didn't happen."

And I know that's true universally and will be true universally of everyone unless you have no friends. It will be true because we have no 300-year-old people in the church. And because we don't have any 300-year-old Christians in the church I know that people who have gone before us who have died and I'm assuming if they were loved and had friends, they had people praying for their recovery and they didn't recover. I need to give you three quick reminders and three quick possibilities as to why you've prayed and that didn't happen, particularly when it comes to something regarding your health or your loved one's health.

Three reminders. Let's go to Romans for this. Romans Chapter 8. I'll give you three from the passage. Now, the first one I've already basically talked about, but I want at least point it out, because it's all in the context of Romans Chapter 8. Are you still with me? Is anybody still with me on this sermon so far? Okay. I hope some of this is helpful. Is any of this helpful for you? Okay. Romans Chapter 8 verse 11 then. We'll continue. If you need to go, I understand. But let's at least try to finish out the hour here. Verse 11, Romans 8. "If the Spirit," capital 'S', "of him who raised Jesus from the dead," now that's pretty amazing, "dwells in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

Okay. That's meant to jar you a little bit. You have a relationship with someone who has power to raise the dead. I mean, that's just amazing. Talk about an underutilized shotgun. There's a relationship. Now, I'm not pulling the trigger and I don't get to control God, but I can certainly ask him to pull the trigger. And so that's a big, big deal. So that's observation number one. Reminder number one is he has the power to fix it. Whatever your thing is that you're praying for, my kid has cancer, you know, whatever. This guy was in an accident and is on a ventilator. I can say I know this: God could fix anything. He could have 500-year-old people in this church who every time they pray, they get near death, no, God says no. It could happen. So that's number one.

Number two, drop down to verse 26. I know that when I say if you're suffering then pray, I know how you're going to pray when you're suffering. And that is, "I want it to stop." When you're sick, pray. Get people to pray. I know what they're going to pray. They're going to pray just immediately and reflexively and naturally, they're going to pray, "I hope that you stop being sick." If my wife comes to me and says, "Hey, I have a headache, would you pray for me?" She's not asking me for anything deep. She just wants me to say, "I'll pray that your headache goes away." That's what I'm going to pray, right? Because that's how we all pray. The problem is, I want us to make observation number two, reminder number two, our prayers aren't always that great.

Verse 26. "Likewise, the Spirit helps our weakness." Not only could he do anything, but he's going to help us out. "We don't know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself." Guess what? He knows how to pray. "He intercedes to the Father with groanings too deep for words." And the point of the passage is we sometimes want things so bad we're like, "Ohhh, want it." The Spirit wants things really badly too. But he wants things that are much more informed than us. So all I'm saying is, observation number two, our prayers are shortsighted. By nature they're shortsighted. They're shortsighted, particularly in pain, because all we want is the pain to go away.

Observation number three, verse 28. Romans 8:28. Oh, there's that passage. I don't want this to turn you off, but here it is. "We know that for those who love God," I hope that qualifies you, you're qualified there, you love God, you're a Christian, "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." So God's got a purpose. The Spirit knows what it is. You encounter something that's called suffering or sickness and you pray. The Spirit knows how to intercede to the Father about that situation. You're praying, the Spirit's praying. You might be praying two different things. But here's the truth. The purpose that God is working out, if you love him, and "are called according to his purpose," he's going to work the purpose out for good. He's going to say, that was good, it worked the way I want it to work.

So I have to, observation number three, know that God is working out a plan. God is working his plan. That includes, by the way, as we're about to see, some illness, includes suffering, includes dying. So those three reminders, if you're following with me. God has power to fix it. Our default is shortsighted prayers. God's working a plan. And it's a good plan.

Possibilities. "Why have I prayed and it didn't work out?" Number one, Second Corinthians 12. Second Corinthians 12:1 through 10 if you need the whole passage. Second Corinthians Chapter 12. Sometimes the healing is not the best thing. Some react, "Not the best thing?" That is a purpose that God is going to show you that it was a good thing that this happened to you. And this was something in his good purpose where he used something painful to do something good. And in that passage, if you know your Bible, that's where Paul talks about his thorn in the flesh. Guess what that means? A sickness. What if he opened up James Chapter 5 and said, "All I got to do here is pray and the prayer in faith offered in praise. Maybe I just got to get more of the elders of Ephesus to pray for me, and then it'll go away because this says God will raise him up."

Why didn't it happen? Paul figured it out. He prayed. He prayed. He prayed. Three times he prayed earnestly, fervently. "Hey, God, take this away." God said no. And then God said, "Now here's why. I want you to know in this very privileged position you've had as an apostle, you have a tendency to get a big head and all this. Your pre-Christian life was like that. I don't want you to have that. So I'm going to make you suffer and hurt with this thing, this ailment. And so you will be humble. You will defer to God, you will depend on God. And so this is a good thing." And so Paul says, "Great. I get it. I understand it, and I see your good purpose in it." So possibility number one, it's not best and you'll see why it's not best in time. You'll see it. That's possibility number one. You prayed, didn't work.

Possibility number two. Your kid's got cancer and you're praying for health. Your wife's got some tumor and it's a problem and it's threatening her life. An accident, person on a ventilator. I'm praying. Great, God could do anything. We know that, our default is to fix it, and that's just God may know better. God's working a plan. I get all that. But what about this if it ends poorly? Well, I would say this. Maybe it's not best, and you'll see it's not best. Or maybe that's it. God is fulfilling his Genesis 3:19 promise. And Genesis 3:19 is you won't have anybody who is 2,000 years old in your church, right? "It is appointed for man once die," or as Genesis 3:19 says, "you are going to return to the dust." This is what I'm promising of you.

Write this passage down next to it. Second Kings Chapter 13. The successor of Elijah was Elisha. Remember that? And Elisha in this passage, verse 1, I just want to read it for you, Second Kings 13:14. It says, "Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die..." Okay. And then we read about his illness. And if you got the English Standard Version, at the top of that paragraph, it says "The death of Elisha." Now you expect Elisha to die. Why? Because God is going to keep a promise from Genesis 3. All of you are going to get sick and die. There's a happy quote with Christmas trees around me. "Hey, Merry Christmas. You're going to die." You're going to die because God promised you're going to die. And guess what? Much like this, many of you will die because of an illness. And I hope if you have friends and loved ones they'll probably pray that you recover from the illness and their prayers will not be answered because like Elisha, you're going to fall sick with the illness with which you are to die, because that's the point.

So I know that. God is never going to keep answering your prayers in the affirmative for you to have all your loved ones get over their illnesses. So I know that. That's a possibility. Maybe it's my time. I hope if I get sick, you'd say, "I hope you get better." And if it doesn't get better I hope you can see God's purpose in that. Or you say, well, I guess it's this illness with which God's got your number, your number's up Pastor Mike. Great. Okay. I know that's on the schedule.

One more, very unfulfilling. Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 20. Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 20. This is the very last section, the very last paragraph of Paul's extant writings. We have nothing else from Paul. This is the end of his life. He's about to be executed in Rome and he wants Timothy to come. And here's why. "Erastus," he says, "has remained in Corinth, and I left Trophimus ill in Miletus." Now he wanted Trophimus there. I mean, the reason he's

going to say in verse 21, "Do your best to come to me before winter." He wants Timothy there. Why? Well, because he needs a substitute because Trophimus is sick. Why is Trophimus sick? And again, this is an argument from silence in this passage and very unfulfilling. But why? I don't know why. Does Paul know why? I think he'd tell us if he knew why. There's no big spiritual thing that he knows. He doesn't know the purpose. I wrote it down this way when I thought through possibilities, God's undiscernible purpose. I don't know what the purpose is.

I can pray and I have prayed for a lot of things in my own life and sometimes I think, what is the purpose for this? Why do I have this pain or why do I have this illness? I don't know. I don't know. I can't see a spiritual lesson that will really... I don't want to make one up and have a super spiritual answer for my illness or just... I don't know. And that's not a bad possibility for a lot of things because I don't know. I'm just going to pray and I'm going to hope that the Spirit who knows better is going to pray. And then I'm just at a place where I'm like, I'm resigned to the fact of God's will.

I know that God is not saying, "Hey, you didn't pray the prayer of faith the way you're supposed to." And I know that's how people sometimes preach this passage. And all I'm saying this is an encouragement to pray. Why? Because the focus in this passage is on a powerful God. And I know you know this. You can pray to a God who does something that defies reality. He looks at you no longer as a sinner. How does that work? How can you be the thief on the cross and he looks at you and say, "Hey, you're ready for paradise"? It's impossible. Prayer did that, right? Oh, it's not the prayer is powerful, you prayed to the right person. And the right person in his power provided redemptive in Christ and counts you as clean. It's as though you had never sinned.

How does that work? How powerful is that? That's better than resurrection. That's better than not having cancer. That's gigantic. Although, if you get cancer I'm going to pray that you don't get it. That it goes away. I'm going to pray that it gets reversed. I'm going to pray that you recover. We should pray reflexively. We should pray habitually for good. I get that. But at some point, maybe we're going to see the purpose and we're going to say, I'm going to just pray and morph in my praying to the place where I see that purpose and I'm going to affirm that purpose and I'm going to pray that purpose works its full purpose out in my life.

By the way, I have no time for this, but that's never stopped me, as I often say. Let me just quote this passage for you and you might want to write down the reference. Jesus told a parable about prayer. Luke Chapter 18. In verse 1, he said this. "He told them this parable to this effect that you should always pray and never lose heart." Some translations translate "and never give up." Jesus told them a parable to this effect that you should always pray and never lose heart. And then he tells the story about the unrighteous judge who really is a jerk. That's the Mike Fabarez version, right? The guy's a jerk. He doesn't care about people. The widow comes and she wants justice and he will not get out of bed. He doesn't want to be bothered by her. And finally, he's worn down. You know the story. He's worn down by her constant nagging that he gets up and he gives her what she needs, some adjudication of some problem.



And Jesus says, an argument from lesser to greater, "You think that God will not give his elect justice, those who cry out to him day and night?" Who do you think you're talking to? Not the unrighteous judge. God wants us to never give up in our praying. That doesn't mean that our prayer requests stay the same. Oftentimes what prayer does is aligns our passions, our desires, and our wisdom to the purposes of God. But don't stop praying. The point is your praying to the most powerful person in the universe who's powerful not only over your health and over every molecule of the universe, and not only over your forgiveness of sins, but even over the plan that he's got for you. Keep praying. You're praying to the most powerful person in the universe.

Poor Elijah, has so little time to talk about. Verse 17, Chapter 5 of James. Now let's read the last line of verse 16. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." If you're going to lead off with that and you're going to bring up Elijah, here's how I would expect it to go. Right? "The prayer of the righteous persons has great power as it is working." Elijah, for instance, was a really righteous person and he had really powerful prayers. That's how I would expect it to be. That is not how it goes. It starts with something that's a bit surprising. "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours."

Well, wait a minute. I look at Elijah praying for someone to be... I think man, that dude is righteous. He is righteous because that's the whole paradigm here. The righteous person prays. But it's not like he's righteous like on some kind of varsity professional team. And I'm sitting here listening to James write this letter to me, going like, you know, "God's not going to listen to my prayer. I pray for small things." He has "a nature like ours." You know, not one hero that we know of that gets any airtime at all to speak of in the Scripture, do we not learn about their clay feet. Have you ever noticed that? All of them. It doesn't happen in other ancient near-Eastern histories, but it happens in the Bible. You learn about David, he's a great king, "A man after God's own heart," a paradigm for the coming Messiah and you learn about his sins.

Elijah. Right? Wow. Amazing. He prays and things happen, right? He prays in judgment against Ahab and Jezebel about the drought and it happens. And he prays about it going away and rain coming. And it happens. You think, wow, that's huge. But you got to remember, Elijah was one who sat there in the shadow of his confrontation with Jezebel and Ahab and said he wanted to die. He was suicidal. He was like, "I can't take this anymore. I'm the only one." He had a terrible complex about the fact that nobody else is righteous but me. We see their clay feet.

So you know that the thing that I say about you praying and powerful praying and all that, you think I could not be that person who has prayers where God does something great, like George Mueller where he prays and just amazing things happen in his ministry. You can. Why? Because "he has a nature like ours." The whole point is we're all on level ground here when it comes to this. We all have the possibility as Christians to pray as a righteous person. You pray as a righteous person by confessing your sins before God and then going to your Father and saying, "God, I'm asking you for this and I'm thanking you for that. And I'm praying



for these plans, and I want this to take place." You give your request to God. Let them be known to him.

And you should not have any excuse for praying. And you should do this as he said in Chapter 1 about the prayer of wisdom, you ought to pray without any doubting. You shouldn't be going back and forth, equivocating between this and that. You ought to be absolutely sure that God wants you to pray and you're going to pray.

Number three, I put it this way. You got to "Pray without Doubting." Pray without doubting. And it's not that I'm going to get the yacht in the harbor. I'm just going to keep praying for that. I'm going to pray for that Rolls-Royce, I'm going to keep praying for that. I'm going to pray that my kid doesn't have, you know, paralysis, and you can pray for that and God's going to take it away. I'm talking about you praying without doubting about the paradigm that we have before us. God is inviting us to pray, to ask, to knock, to seek. And he's saying, you're talking to the most powerful person in the universe who knows a lot about a lot of things, knows everything about everything. And you need to keep on coming and never give up, never lose heart.

And you should not doubt that God has this, not only is his will for your life, but the means by which he's going to get things done in your world. Pray, pray big. "Well, I'm not a really big Christian." Pray, big, pray, pray, pray, pray, full faith.

Pray without doubting, because he says, who should expect they're going to receive anything from God? This was Chapter 1 when he talked about wisdom. If you're just going back and forth in your own head. Trust that God invites you to pray and pray. He says ask and receive. He says seek and you'll find. Knock and the door will be open. Do what he said. "Well, I tried. It doesn't work." Keep praying. Are your prayers going to stay the same? They'll often shift, they're often aligned to God's will, God's purposes. But keep praying. Stop doubting that your prayers are ineffectual. They have great power in their working. You just got to keep praying because you're praying to the right person. I'm overtime. But I want you please to see this as the whole point. As Jesus says, you need to know I am a responsive God, a good God, a caring God. He's not a God whose ears are stopped up. My arms are not short to save. I want you to pray. We need prayer.

Let's pray. God, we'll pray for prayer. As Spurgeon once said, we've got to pray for more prayer. If we feel like we don't want to pray then we want to pray to pray. And we're praying right now at the end of this service that we might be men and women of prayer. We pray more. Sometimes, as he had already told us, sometimes we pray with wrong motives so that we can just spend it on our pleasure. We need to purify our motives. We need to have righteous prayers that care about things that you care about. We need to align ourselves with your will. And God, I just pray it would start by us talking to you. We got to talk to you more often. We got to connect not just to suffering, to a deprivation of need that we need you to fix, but we need to see you in that suffering. We need to see you in the mediocrity. We need to see you in the good times, in the cheer, in the fun. God, we need to see the connection in everything and talk to you about everything all the time knowing who we're talking to.



Let us never doubt that this is the means by which you do things in this world. So we pray. We pray for the success of this Christmas musical, we pray for the evangelization of the lost. We pray for the fruitfulness of our church planning. We pray for the success of Compass Bible Institute to train people for ministry. We pray for things that God we should be praying for all the time with a trust that you have a good plan for these things. And when there are left turns, when there's illness, when there are struggles, when there's sin, God, we just want to keep praying through all of these things that you're a gracious and merciful God who has a plan and cares, and we want to be given to prayer like we've never been before, please.

In Jesus name, amen.