



# DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

## Sunday, September 25 - October 1(B) – James 5:13-20

**Focus:** *Pray for One Another*

### **word of life**

**“Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.”** (James 5:13 NRSV)

Read James 5:13-20

The Letter of James concludes with a call to prayer. If someone is suffering, then pray; if someone is doing well, then pray through praising God. No matter one’s circumstance, continue to draw near God through prayer and supplication.

1. *What prevents people from praying in all circumstances?*
2. *Is it easier to pray in times of suffering or when all is going well? Explain your answer.*

What follows is advice for responding to the physically ill. Those who are sick are to contact the elders of the church for prayer and anointing of oil in the name of the Lord. There is not only support of others, but hope for healing. The anointing of oil seems to be a common practice in the first century, but it is not the oil which heals. Everything points to God, healer of our every wound.

The word *elder* is mentioned over 50 times in the New Testament. In the early church, elders were asked to shepherd and provide oversight of a flock (1 Peter 5:1-3); preach and teach (1 Timothy 5:17); and serve as leaders and judges (Acts 15:4-6; 22-23). They were to be mature Christians who could be a model for others. Based on the writings of the New Testament, it appears the early churches were served by multiple elders, not a single person.

3. *Have you ever been part of a church that had a formalized group called “elders”?*
4. *If so, what role did the elders hold in the church?*

“The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for another, so that you may be healed.” (James 5:15-16 NRSV) Although sickness and confession of sin is connected, it does not imply sin caused the sickness. There is healing of body, mind, and spirit.

There is much emphasis on the community supporting each other in prayer. Prayer does work as seen by Elijah, one who prayed for no rain and there was no rain. Then, he prayed for rain and it rained. (See 1 Kings 18:41-46 for the story of Elijah.)

5. *What does it feel like to know others are praying for you?*
6. *How does the support of the prayers of the church help during illness?*
7. *What changes might occur in the person who is asked to pray for the sick?*

Confession is included in the formula for healing. We are to go to one another and confess our sins, so that we might be healed from our guilt of past wrongdoing.

8. *How does guilt affect our overall well-being?*

There is a final appeal to be not only aware of those who wander from Christ, but to actively invite them back into the Christian community where they can be supported through prayer, fellowship, and the promise of eternal salvation.

## **word among us**

Imagine what it would have been like to live in that first century church. Imagine the passion of those who were willing to risk their lives to meet and pray together. Imagine the questions and conversations of those who anticipated the return of Christ within their lifetime.

1. *What might the early church have been like?*
2. *Would you have enjoyed living during that time period? Explain your answer.*
3. *How does today's church resemble (if at all) the early church?*

The early church was creating a new way of following God, reflecting the teachings of Jesus Christ. They did not start from scratch, but instead built on the rich traditions of the Jewish faith. An example of this is prayer. Time and time again in the Old Testament, people turned to God in prayer. The example of Elijah is just one of many examples of prayer found in the Bible.

4. *Give an example of God responding to your prayers.*

“The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” (James 5:15 NRSV) This verse is quite definitive, but also can be problematic. What happens if the sick become more ill? Or what happens if the person dies? Was the prayer of the faithful not enough?

5. *How do you respond when it appears prayers are not answered?*
6. *What can be said with the sick get worse, even after prayers?*
7. *What is the connection between sin and illness?*

And what about the second part of that verse which includes an all-inclusive forgiveness? Could God possibly forgive all who have committed sins?

8. *How do you respond to this all-inclusive forgiveness?*
9. *Is there anyone outside of God's realm of forgiveness? If so, describe the circumstance.*

## **faith practice in daily life**

### **Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed**

The writer of James is all about action, allowing faith to be the fruit of good deeds. Thus, it should be no surprise for the letter to conclude with actions. Those suffering are to pray. The cheerful are to pray with songs of praise. The elders are to pray and anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord.

But more importantly, God is a God of action, as seen in the life of Jesus Christ. Not only did Jesus teach, preach, heal, suffer on the cross, die, and rise again, he is still at work today. Today, Jesus Christ continues to hear our prayers, heal the sick, forgives sins, draws us back to the church, and gives us eternal life.

10. *How might you make more room in your life for prayer?*

### **Prayer**

Healer of our every wound, forgive our sins and heal our wounds. Draw us near to you. Amen

### *last word*

Pray each day for those who are ill, burdened by sin, and distant from God.