

TURNING THE CASUAL INTO THE ACTUAL

Part X: In Dialogue with God **James 5:13-20 (NLT)**

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:17)

I can still clearly remember how Reiko accepted Christ. Reiko was once an international student in this ministry who is now married to Nobu. I just moved down to San Diego from Los Angeles, getting settled into the ministry. I recalled having a conversation with Megumi, who just became a believer in Christ. She also happened to be Reiko's roommate at that time. Megumi shared with me that she wanted Reiko to accept Jesus; so we prayed for Reiko that her heart will be softened. I then got involved in teaching in the care group that met at Tim and Martin's place. I remembered we were sharing our personal prayer requests and Lukas closed in prayer. Besides praying for all of the members' needs, Lukas also said a short prayer for Reiko, that she will encounter God in her life one day. At another care group time everybody shared that they would like to see Reiko accept the Lord; so, we prayed for her. There was even a time when Reiko attended care group, and everybody prayed for her salvation while she sat there listening to us! I thought surely she would never accept Jesus now that she knows we kept praying for her.

Then one Sunday morning after service I saw Reiko sitting at the back of the church, and you can tell something was on her mind. Then I saw a couple of women approach her and they started talking. I said a silent prayer for her. Miriam passed by and whispered to me that we need to pray for Reiko. An hour later, we heard the news that Reiko received Jesus into her life. What wonderful news!

Why wonderful news? Because righteous people who earnestly prayed had their prayers answered by God! These were prayers that involved the whole community of God. We desired for a spiritual relationship between Reiko and the Lord; we knew she needed him. And together in intercession God heard each of our cries and drew Reiko to his truth.

This is the message that James speaks about prayer in chapter 5, from verses 13-20. Our dialogue with God should never remain personal and intimate only; it must also incorporate the community of faith in directing lives to God. Let us look together at this passage:

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

¹⁶Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. ¹⁷Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! ¹⁸Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.

¹⁹My dear brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back again, ²⁰you can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

What can we learn about prayer in James 5:13-20?

1. Prayer impacts **a variety of circumstances.**

- Suffering (verse 13)
- Times of joy (verse 13)
- Sickness (verse 14)

We normally pray in times of suffering, whether it be personal or within a communal/global scale. Many innocent lives have been lost in the war in Iraq; that calls for prayer. Many people go hungry everyday; that calls for prayer. Even when we are battling the flu, prayer is enacted.

But, we do not usually associate prayer in times of joy. Yet, James says that prayer should be lifted to God in the form of praise. You see, prayer is an act of worship to God. Prayer lets us know that God is in control over all circumstances that we face in life each day. This includes both good and bad times. There is always room for God to work through, whether in times of celebration or in sorrow. God impacts people's lives through prayer.

2. Prayer directly involves **the community of believers.** (verses 14-16)

- Demonstrates faith when a sick person calls upon the church to pray for him or her
- Demonstrates unity when the church prays for the sick person
- Demonstrates repentance when we confess our sins and pray for one another

The calling of the elders signify the church's active involvement in every person's life. There is no excuse for the community of faith not to impact people's existences; prayer plays a significant role in this impact. And the person's desire to have the church be involved in his or her life exhibits genuine faith that the church can make a difference. Prayer should never remain personal between God and the individual. It

must extend and embrace other believers into the intercession. Praying in community allows for spiritual accountability between believers as we strive for righteousness in life. Repentance and confession become a focal point in the church as she strives to become more like Jesus Christ. In prayer we build up a church determined to serve one another in unity through unconditional love.

There are many ways all of us can be involved in community prayer. Every Sunday morning we have prayer meeting next to Pastor Andre's office. Prayer is also emphasized in our care groups. For example, at Motion care group we break off into gender small groups to pray for our needs. Discipleship is a wonderful time to pray for one another. You can even pray together with your roommates. As a body of believers we must emphasize unity in faith through our prayers. Such a determined effort allows the church to experience God's transforming work as one community.

3. Prayer is **an active pursuit for healing in relationships**. (verses 16-18)

- Be earnest in seeking God for healing
- Be intentional in encouraging healing in your relationships with other people

Prayer is used to engage healing in relationships. When we confess our sins with one another and pray for each other we experience conversion and spiritual wholeness. That is why James encourages us to be earnest in our prayers. Intentionally seek God for healing and God will heal. And be deliberate in sharing healing to others in both words and deeds. Pursue relationships in righteousness and kindness using prayer to produce wonderful results.

Lucy and I make an effort to pray together everyday. This lets us pursue healing for our marriage and for those we pray for. We want to see people experience God's dynamic presence in their lives, and praying together is one way we are accomplishing this. We use this time to share our weaknesses and how we can pray for healing for one another. I noticed that when we seek God earnestly, believing that he will restore us according to his will, God always comes through! Use prayer intentionally to shape people's lives and good results will naturally flow from that.

And pray for a diversity of healing – stress at work, marital issues, co-dependency, financial problems, and so on. Remember, *“the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.”*

4. In prayer **we bring people back to the truth of God**. (verses 19-20)

When we purposefully pray for one another we are drawing people back to God. Prayer is very concerned about people's spiritual conditions. God's desire is for us to pray consistently and earnestly for those who have wandered away from the truth. When prayer is used to reach out to broken lives, God brings healing as an answer to that prayer. Relationships is the backbone in which prayer intertwines with. As the church let us intentionally pray people into the kingdom of God.

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