

# James: Faith Works

## Can You Hear Me Now?



Bro. Ricky Cunningham  
James 5:13-18

### Scripture

***"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? 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 has 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."***

Do you remember the day when cell phones first came out? You would receive a call and be talking to someone, but you were not sure if they

could hear you and so you would say that famous line, "Can you hear me now?" But you never uttered that line standing still; you knew that you had to move around. You would move to a place where you really thought you had a good reception and say again, "Can you hear me now?" Do you remember saying something like, "Just hang on if you can hear me. I can't hear you. When I get to the top of this hill, I think I will be able to hear you and you will be able to hear me." Do you remember doing that? We don't do that much anymore, but this week I made a phone call to a friend to ask a question and the friend said back to me, "Ricky, I am in a bad spot." Now, immediately I knew what he was saying. I was trying to tell him I know you are in a bad spot but I can hear you, this won't take but a minute, and then I asked him the question and I heard him say, "Ricky, I am in a bad spot. As soon as I get out of this bad spot I will call you back." About six minutes later my friend, Kerry, called me back and he said, "I was down in a little valley. I had to come up on top of a hill, but as soon as I got on top of the hill I knew I would be able to talk." The title to this message is, Can You Hear Me Now? Have you ever had that thought in prayer? God, can you hear me? A little bit later, you are saying, God, can you hear me now?

Before we speak about what James says about prayer, I want you to remember that he is writing to a church, a group of people who have Jewish origins, raised under the Law of Moses, came to faith in Jesus Christ, and because of the persecution that came on the church in Jerusalem, they have now been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. As he calls for them to pray, there are some things that he already knows they know. So that none of us takes this out of context, I want to make sure that you remember how you can know God hears you when you pray.

I can't tell you how many times I am on my phone, I know I have bad reception, I look in the corner, and I see those bars. Many times, I will just have one bar and I know I can't really talk. I can text, but I can't talk. I know if I can just get to the top of the hill, I will have two bars. If I can get three more miles down the road, I will have three bars. Then, there are places in the county (not where I live) where I can actually have four bars

of reception and it feels like we are not talking on a phone; it feels like we are literally in person with each other.

When you begin to pray, Scripture teaches us to pray in the name of Jesus. That's just basic. Please don't think praying in the name of Jesus means you give your wish list to God and then at the end you tack on "in the name of Jesus." No, no, no. In the name of Jesus means you are coming to God, not in your authority, but in the authority of Jesus. You are literally praying on His behalf to God. He has authorized you. He has given you that authority. He has given you His name. When I was a kid on the farm, I could go into town, buy a part, pay for the part, and write a check, but the check had already been signed by my dad. I have had some businesses take some really big checks, not because it had *my* name on the check, because it had my dad's name on the check. When we pray, we are praying in the authority of Jesus.

The second bar of reception — Jesus would teach us that when we pray we pray believing, we pray in faith! James has already told us in the first chapter that when we are going through trials and tribulation we are supposed to have a certain kind of joy. In that trial, if we are lacking wisdom we can pray and God will grant the prayer, but not if you doubt. You have to believe, you have to trust, you have to believe that what you are asking for God is going to answer.

But we don't want to stay at two bar reception. To have three bar reception we have to remember that Jesus said (talking about a vine, talking about our relationship) that if we abide in Him and His Word abides in us, whatever we ask of the Father He will grant it to us. Are you abiding in Christ? That word, abide, means to make yourself at home. Have you made yourself at home in Christ? Is your relationship with Him to that point that you feel like you and Him are together? Is His Word abiding in you? When you are in Christ, fellowshiping with Him and His Word is in you, and you are praying based on His Word, there is just a receptivity level that you have, a confidence that you have when you come before God in prayer. Then, don't forget what John teaches us. John wrote a letter so

that the church might know they have eternal life because they believe in Jesus. He said I want you to know that because you are a believer in Christ, whatever you ask God according to His will, He hears you. And here is the confidence we have...if He hears us then He will answer us. So we are praying in the name of Jesus, we are praying in faith, we are praying because our prayer is coming out of an abiding relationship with Him based on His Word being in us. When we come before God, what we are asking ultimately for is not our will done, but for His will to be done. Amen?

Now, can I give a therefore? It took me a long time to understand this, but I really believe prayer is not about me getting from God what I want, but it is ultimately God getting from me what He wants. With that in mind, James tells each one of us that we are to be looking for, longing for, and hoping for the return of Christ. There is not ever going to be justice in this life. Justice will only be in the next life. Therefore, because of all of the injustices that take place in the life of a Christian, when things happen, James has just told us that we are to be patient. We are to suffer long.

Now, this is following up the same thought...he now asks a question, "Is any among you suffering?" I promise you, if I asked you to raise your hand, there would be some of you in here right now who would say, I am suffering. This word, suffering, is a general word that can speak of physical suffering, mental suffering, psychological suffering, and spiritual suffering, but this is literally talking about being afflicted. You are in a position where there is some pain, whether there is a little pain or a lot of pain. You are uncomfortable. Life is not going the way you thought it was going to go. But he is not asking you are *you* suffering, he says is *anyone* among you suffering. I know that many of you would not raise your hands if I asked you if you are suffering, but if I were to ask if you know someone who attends this church who is suffering, would you raise your hand? You would raise your hand for someone else because you know of folks who are suffering.

James says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray." Wow...let him pray. Now, we are going to define prayer simply this way: prayer is talking

to God. If you get in a position this week where suffering starts to come to you because you are a believer in Christ, life is putting the squeeze on you, (now, we know from James chapter 1 that we are supposed to count it all joy because God ultimately has a purpose), what I do at that moment I am suffering is be patient, but I pray and talk to God. I think what James is saying here is just tell Him how it feels. Talk to Him about what you are thinking. Share with Him how this looks from your perspective. When you do that, I want you to keep in mind that the reason you are talking to Him is not because you want Him to give you what you want, but in this situation you want for Him to ultimately get from you what He wants, because you realize the day you got saved, repented of your sin, and put your faith in Jesus, you made Him your Lord. You took your hands off of yourself and said I am not mine anymore. I don't belong to me; I now belong to you. I no longer want my life to be lived for my glory. I don't want my life to be about my name. I want my life to be about your glory and your name. So some of us are going to quit doing what we are doing when we start suffering and we are going to talk to God.

Then he asks a second question, "Is anyone cheerful?" Are you ready for this? Sing. Sing! He does not say if you are cheerful turn your radio on to a country music radio station or soft rock station. He said sing praise! If I am a believer living for Christ and I get in a place where I am suffering, I am experiencing hardship, there is pain, I am supposed to talk to God in prayer — but when I have joy and I am cheerful, He wants me to be singing, singing praise. He wants me to be worshipping. In other words, two of the characteristics that ought to define Hardin Baptist Church is we ought to be praying in the day or we are to be singing praise in the day. If we are praying, it is sharing that we are suffering or that we know someone who is suffering. If we are not suffering, we are praising God; we are worshipping Him, as we are being patient. Got it? So we are going to be patient and we are going to pray, or we are going to sing while we are being patient.

Now, James follows this up with a third question, "Is anyone among you sick?" Now, when he asks this question he doesn't respond by saying let

him pray, he says let him call. Get this picture. If you are suffering a hardship physically, spiritually, or psychologically, you just talk to God about it. But if you get to that place in your life where you are sick — now the sickness this is talking about is not a migraine headache, a tummy ache, or a sprained ankle or wrist. The picture here is if you find yourself down and out and you can't get up — then you need to call the elders of the church.

Now, in the New Testament the words, "elder," "bishop," and "pastor" all refer to the same person. The word, elder, describes the person, and it refers to his maturity, literally. The word, bishop, describes the office the person holds, and it means an overseer. The word, pastor, describes the work that the elder does who is a bishop in the church. So the person who oversees the church is shepherding the church. He is shepherding God's sheep. Does that make sense? When you find yourself down and out, so to speak, you call for the pastors. Now, because you are down and out you probably can't come to them so they may have to come to you. When they come to you, the picture is that they are going to pray over you. Now, most of the time in the New Testament, when we are praying for someone, we are praying for one another. But particularly here, James says to "pray *over* him." He paints the picture of someone who is lying down and someone is standing *over* them and praying over. That is where I get the image of the person being down and out. It could be physical or spiritual, we don't know, but they are sick. They are not able to do the normal things they do because they are down and out and they call for the pastors.

The pastors are not only going to pray over them, they are going to anoint them with oil in the name of Jesus. We know that oil was used in the biblical word as a medicine. We see that in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There is a guy on the road who meets somebody who has been robbed and beaten. He goes to him and takes care of him. He pulls oil and wine out of his backpack and puts it on his wounds. He takes the man with him, drops him off, and says I will pay whatever it costs to take care of this man when I come back. We also know that oil was used in the Old

Testament as a symbol of being set apart. So there is great debate whether the oil here is referring to something medicinal or as a symbol, possibly, of us believing that when we are praying we are setting this apart and trusting God's Holy Spirit to do what only God's Holy Spirit can do in leading us to pray for and heal this person. Remember in Mark chapter 6, Jesus sent the disciples out and they cast out demons. It says they anointed people with oil and healed them. Now the Bible is going to tell us next that the prayer of faith can save a person and God will raise that person up. And if he has committed sin, his sins will be forgiven. So in my opinion here, James is teaching that the emphasis is not on the oil as a medicine, but the emphasis is on faith and praying in faith. So I would go with believing the reason we anoint someone with oil (and you have seen us do this at Hardin many times) is because when we anoint with that oil we are symbolizing that we are setting this person apart. They are in a situation where they are calling on us to pray for them, and we are taking no credit for what is going on. If this prayer gets answered, it is going to be because God chooses to answer the prayer. Amen?

Then, the Bible tells us the prayer of a righteous man just keeps working its great power. I will never forget the first time I got the call as a pastor for a funeral I did when I was at Owens Chapel. It was for a man who was lost. I was 21 years of age. Another man did the actual message and I assisted that man. I did the Scripture and prayer, but it was my first funeral. From that funeral, I got acquainted with his family who lived just right down the hill from the church, and the two daughters who had never been married began to attend Owens Chapel. I will never forget, (now this was before cellphones), word got around to me that I needed to come to their house. When I got to their house, Mahaley came running out. She said, "Bro. Ricky! Bro. Ricky, I am so glad you are here. I need you to pray for me and I know that when you pray for me, God will heal my arm." Then, she showed me her arm and it was BAD. She had broken her arm in several places. She had been to the doctor but because there was so much swelling they couldn't do anything, so they sent her home and told her to come back next week. Basically, next week they were going to do a surgery on her arm. And here is this lady telling her 21-year-old pastor,

you are going to pray for me and God is going to heal my arm. Can I just remind you that I was raised Baptist? I had no oil with me. But if I can be honest, I had no choice but to pray for her. I don't know if she knew this verse, but I knew this verse about the prayer of faith. I knew what it said about a righteous man praying and that prayer availing much. I am now on the spot — I have to talk to God about God doing what she thinks He can do through me, and I don't even know myself if He is going to do this — but I have to talk to God in front of her and her sister. Again, just being honest, I just said something really simple like this, "Dear Lord, I am really coming to you in the name of Jesus." Then I reminded God that Miss Mahaley believed that when I talked to Him He would answer her prayer and make her well so she does not have to go back to the doctor. I said, "God, I am asking this in the name of your Son." Now, I will be honest. I had my head bowed and eyes closed and I didn't want to say amen and open my eyes, but I knew I had to when the prayer was over. About the time I said amen and opened my eyes, Miss Mahaley grabbed me with both arms, wrapped them around me, and gave me the biggest bear hug anybody could ever give a person. She said, "BRO. RICKY, HE DID IT!!! HE DID IT!!! LOOK!!!" I saw an arm that was mangled become completely healed when I opened my eyes. I never told a person — but she did.

The next thing you know, it went through our church and our little community and I got another call. It wasn't from the daughter of a man who died not knowing Christ. I got a call from a family, and the lady was the daughter of my deacon, Fred Patton. If you are from Calloway County and have ever met Fred Patton...wow, I mean no disrespect to anybody in this church, but he was probably as godly a man as I have ever met. His daughter played the piano in our church. His son-in-law led the singing. Fred sat in the front pew every Sunday and what an encouragement he was to me. Now I am driving to Memphis, Tennessee because Fred's daughter, Faye, is going to have a surgery. She has cancer in her eye and I knew what was coming. I walked into that room and everybody was cordial and polite. We talked and then it finally came to the time when Faye looked at me and said, "Bro. Ricky, would you pray for me? Would you pray that God would heal me?" And I prayed! I prayed believing! I went



home and told them to call me when she got into surgery. She got into surgery and they called me when the surgery was over and I got the news. They took her eye out. God did not heal her.

Several years ago, (many of you were here) we had just opened this building when a friend of mine who I went to school with, did not go to church here, but heard about this church had a grandbaby born that could not see. They were being referred to a specialist in Nashville. They came to church one Sunday and said, "Brother Ricky, we have heard about this church. Would you all pray tonight?" Those grandparents stood in front of us with their little grandchild, and we all gathered around them and we laid hands on that little feller. I told them when they left to make sure to call us and let us know. I think it was the next Tuesday when I got a call and they said, "The doctors didn't know why we brought our baby. They asked us why we brought him so we said we were told our baby was blind. The doctor said I don't know why they told you that and I don't know why they thought that. There is nothing wrong today with your baby."

Do you all remember Gerald Whetsell? God healed him as we laid hands on him in our downtown facility. God did not heal my mom. I was not only her son, but I was her pastor. That day in the field that I helped my dad, I asked God believing that He would not let him die, but He did.

Please hear me...some of us were raised on the extreme that God doesn't do things like this today, and some of us were raised on the extreme that says God does do these things today, and if he doesn't do this it is because we don't have faith. So some of us don't ask God, we just bear it because we don't really believe that He will or that He even can. Some of us have let Satan blame us for the reason that our loved one didn't get healed because we didn't have faith or they didn't have faith. No. Listen, there are times God chooses to heal and there are times He chooses not to heal, but what He does is ultimately for His honor and His glory. That is what we agreed to when we took our hands off of our lives and put our faith and trust in His Son and His finished work on a cross.

This passage tells us to call for the pastors. It tells for the pastors to pray over. It doesn't mean that only a pastor can pray over. It doesn't mean that only a pastor can anoint with oil. It doesn't mean that only a pastor can pray in the name of Jesus. But God wants you to know that your shepherds care so much about you that they will bring your need before God when you don't even feel like you can get out of the bed or off your feet. Then, listen to what this says...and if you have committed sin that will be forgiven too. I want us to be careful here. This does not teach every time you get sick or are down and out it is because you have sinned, but there are times where there is a correlation between sin in your life and physical or spiritual sickness in your life. Sin will make you sick spiritually, and that can lead to physical sickness. James wants you to know that sometimes there is a correlation. So, IF you know you are sick because of something you have done or because you are rebelling against God and God heals you, please know the thing that caused it got dealt with too and you are forgiven of that. Does that make sense? Now, it does not mean that every time you are sick that you have sinned, but you don't mess with sin, it is devastating.

Now James gives us a therefore, "Therefore, confess your sins one to another and pray for one another." Do you hear this? Every one of us in here who are believers needs to have one or two people in our lives who we can confess to. This is not talking about confessing your sin at work or confessing your sin publicly, but it is talking about realizing the consequence that sin can play in our lives. If you hide your sin, it will take you places that you could never imagine it could take you. It can literally ruin your life. James wants us to be in such a community that we have some folks who we trust and confess to. Once we confess that, that person is going to hold us accountable and pray for us. Now, let me say this to you. If you have a brother or sister who comes to you and confesses to you, you keep it to yourself. You better not share that with someone else. You better not piously, religiously, or spiritually go to someone else and try to say...*You are not going to believe what so and so told me. We need to pray for them because...*NO, NO, NO! That is gossip, even if it is true! That person needed a brother, a sister, or someone to talk to, and they shared

with you so you pray for them. If they want another person to be brought into it, they will tell that person themselves or they will tell you to tell a certain person. But if they don't, they are saying they believe in you and they need you. You listen to that confession. You pray with them and you pray for them.

Here is what James says — because you are in a right relationship with God, you have been justified by the blood of Christ, you are being sanctified through the Holy Spirit and through the Word — just know that when you start to pray... WOW... that prayer keeps on working. You may not see it immediately, but know it is at work because there is energy when we talk to God on behalf of someone else. Then he is going to give us an illustration. It is Elijah. James says Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours. Most of us don't believe that. We think Elijah was way up there and I am way down here. No. James says Elijah was just like you and me. One day he started praying it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain for three and a half years. Then, when he started praying for it to rain, it started raining. He is telling you that is the way you and I can pray. Wow! Are you with me?

Now, I personally believe this illustration about Elijah is describing what the prayer of faith is. In our ESV version, it says "the prayer of faith." The prayer of faith will save him and God will raise him up. But in the Greek, it says 'and the prayer of the faith will save him.' Then it says Elijah, as an example, prayed with prayer. The ESV says prayed fervently, but it is two words for prayer that are stacked back-to-back, so it literally says he prayed with prayer. How do you pray with prayer? Well, let's think about this. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah goes to Ahab and says as the LORD lives, I am telling you it is not going to rain! Then the rest of the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter talks about him meeting this lady who doesn't have any food and so they pray and the barrel never runs empty. Then he meets another lady who has a son who has died and he raises that son to life. Then we get to the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter and we have a battle between the prophets of Baal and God and Elijah. Now we have Elijah standing before Ahab once again at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter and the Bible says God told him to tell Ahab it is going to

rain. So Elijah tells Ahab it's going to rain and now the next verse says "and Elijah sat down and put his head between his knees." Now, most Jewish people, when they prayed, stood up and raised their hands to God or they laid flat on the floor. Elijah is praying with his face down and he has his face as close to the ground as he can with his knees up beside his ears. He prays for it to rain! He doesn't pray for Ahab to see and repent, he prays for it to rain, but God has already told him it was going to rain! Why would you pray for what God has already told you He is going to do? Because you are the one who told Ahab what was going to happen — so now you are interceding with God for it to rain like you said it is going to rain. Elijah bows his head and prays and Scripture says he raised his head up, but he didn't look, he just said to the guys with him, look out at the sea and see if you see the clouds (in that day, rain showers came in off of the ocean and the Mediterranean Sea) and they say, nope, no clouds. Scripture says he bowed again and he prayed again for it to rain. Then he said Hey guys, look. Do you see clouds over the sea? They say nope. He prays again! Hey guys, do you see clouds.... NOPE...He prays again! Hey guys, do you see clouds...NOPE...The seventh time he said, Hey guys, do you see clouds? They say, ELIJAH, WE SEE CLOUDS!

What is James trying to tell us? There are going to be times that the pastors of the church and we in the church know what to pray for because we are praying as if God has already told us what we ought to pray for because he has given us a glimpse of what He wants to do. In that moment, that knowing from God, that urging from God to pray causes us to pray. When we pray, we pray that prayer of faith and God saves and God raises up and God forgives and God heals! WOW! You and I get to get in on what He is doing, because until Jesus comes back He is either causing or allowing things to happen in our life and they are ultimately being used of Him to mold us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Until Christ comes, we are going to be patient and while we are being patient we are going to pray...*not my will be done, but thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*. I pray that is what you desire — the true will of God for your life.