

**James 25 – Wisdom about Ministry**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley**  
**GFC – 11/19/23**

This is the final sermon in our series on James called Wisdom for Everyday Life. I'm preaching today on Wisdom about Ministry. Our text is James 5:13-20.

In these verses James gives us wisdom about how we should respond to various times of need in our lives and how we should minister to others in need. By the way, all of these verses put the responsibility on you to seek out ministry for yourself and to minister to others.

Some people seem to think that pastors should automatically know their needs and then initiate ministry to them. But the Bible puts the responsibility on all of us. There are times when all of us need ministry and there are times when we are all ministers. James says in 5:13

*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.*

We'll see that prayer is a key to all of the issues that James mentions.

**1. Prayer and praise are a huge part of ministry.**

Why? Because our first ministry is to the Lord! And James has the same advice for both the suffering one and the cheerful one: take it all to the Lord. In fact, the two commands could be reversed: sufferers should sing also, and the cheerful should also pray.

It's interesting that the Greek word for prayer here also means worship. And the word translated praise here means public worship with musical accompaniment. So – James is not just saying to praise alone. We should do that, but he's saying there is power in corporate worship. We need to pray and praise alone and we need to pray and praise together! Our first priority is to minister to the Lord.

The word trouble here means hardship – you're going through a tough time. A tough time is prayer time! Actually – anytime is prayer time! Jesus said in Luke 18:1 to *always pray and never give up.*

The problem is the many of us make prayer the last resort. We try everything else to get out of the hard time and then we eventually we say, "I've tried everything I know to do. I guess all I can do is pray." Seriously? All you can do is pray? All you can do is go to the God who created everything, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful God? All you can do is go to Him? Have you considered that the reason everything else you tried did not work is because you didn't pray first?

Prayer should be the first resort, not the last resort. We should go to God in prayer and praise first! Before the doctor, before the banker, before the lawyer, before the counselor, before a friend, yes... even before a pastor! Go to God first! I'm not saying there's never a time to go to a doctor, a banker, a lawyer, a counselor, a friend or a pastor – I'm simply saying go to God first.

It's always amazing to me when people fail to tap into the power of prayer. I've counseled many people over the years and many times I will ask them, "Have you prayed about this problem?" And they will say no. I'll ask if they've gotten into the Word to see what God says about the situation. They'll say, "no." I want to say, "Why are you coming to me if you haven't gone to God?"

We've all said, "We've tried everything else, all we can do is pray." Instead, we should say, "We're not trying anything else until we pray."

We can pray and praise on our own, but at some point we need others. How do I know? Because James goes on to say in verse 16:

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

There is power in prayer and there is even more power in the prayer of agreement. Praying together multiplies our impact. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19-20:

*Whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My name, I am there with them.*

There is power when you pray – but there's more power in agreement! Now James transitions from the ministry of prayer to:

## **2. The ministry of healing.**

And he ties the ministry of healing to the ministry of prayer.

People wonder why they are not healed, and there can be many reasons. It could be because of unbelief, double-mindedness, unforgiveness, or as in this case - unconfessed sin.

Sometimes sin needs to be confessed before healing.

Sometimes we need to forgive someone before we are healed.

Sometimes someone else needs to pray for you.

And sometimes that's the elders. James 5:14-15 says:

*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

It is interesting that there seems to be a correlation here between sickness and sin. Not all sickness is a direct result of a person's sin, but some is. It is a dangerous thing to put yourself in the position of a judge by saying, "Well, they've got it coming to them." And I think that it is cruel to say that all sickness is the result of sin in a person's life. Not all sickness is a direct result of sin.

There are many reasons why people get sick, but there is only one source of healing – Jesus, the Great Physician – and there are many different ways to be healed. The New Testament has three major words for healing. These words show us some of the diverse ways God heals.

1. Sozo – this is the most common New Testament word for healing. Sometimes it's translated "to save," sometimes "to heal." The idea is that of saving from sin and its effects, including sickness.
2. Iaomai – (ee-ah'-o-my) means "to be made whole." God wants us to be whole - spirit, soul and body.
3. Therapeuo - (Eng. therapy,) to care for the sick, to heal with medicine. Doctors are not our ultimate healers – God is. But He uses doctors and medicine.

The point is that God heals in many different ways. Even Jesus healed many different ways. Sometimes He just said, "Be healed." This shows us we can be healed through the Word.

Other times Jesus laid His hands on the sick and healed them. Sometimes He cast out spirits of infirmity that were causing sickness. Acts 10:38 says:

*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.*

This shows us that the Devil can make people sick.

Sometimes – Jesus required something of the people He healed.

In Matt. 12, He told the man with a withered hand to stretch it out to be healed. In Luke 17, He told the 10 lepers to go show themselves to the priests and as they went, they were healed. This shows us that sometimes obedience is required before healing.

In Matt. 14:36, everyone who touched the hem of His garment was healed.

In John 9, Jesus spit on the ground, made clay and put it in on the eyes of a blind man and said go wash it off in the pool of Siloam.

In Mark 8, He spit on a blind man's eyes.

He had to pray for him twice, which speaks of progressive healing. Sometimes God heals instantly; sometimes it's a process.

I believe that healing is usually progressive, where a miracle is instantaneous. For instance, we've prayed for people with cancer many times and we've seen some people healed progressively and some miraculously.

I remember in the early days of this church when Pastor Deb was diagnosed with a brain tumor. The doctor saw it on an MRI and gave us the bad report. He said she needed another more definitive MRI and she needed to see a neurosurgeon.

We had the whole church pray for Deb. We prayed before, during and after the next MRI. When we went to the specialist, he looked at the MRI for a long time. We were anxious for an answer, so Pastor Deb finally asked him, "Am I going to need surgery?" He said, "Not from me." We said, "What do you mean?" He said, "See on this MRI where the stem of the pituitary gland is pushed to the side. I can see where something WAS – but there is nothing there now. You don't need surgery." That's a miracle!

Sometimes God involves other people in healing. He gave all believers the ability to lay hands of the sick for healing. In Mark 16:17-18 Jesus said

*And these signs will follow those who believe... they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*

I encourage you to have the faith and boldness to pray for people in your family and at your work who are sick! All of us can do that. James 5:16-18 says:

*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

Think of the prayers God answered in the Bible:

- Moses prayed and God reversed His judgment against Israel.
- Isaiah prayed and the sun stood still.
- Hannah prayed and she had a son who was a mighty prophet of God.
- Jehoshaphat prayed and God gave him victory over his enemy.
- Solomon prayed and the glory of God filled the temple.
- The early Christians prayed and angels got Peter out of prison.
- Elijah prayed and it didn't rain for 3 and a half years. He prayed again and it rained.

Don't think God answered these people's prayers because they were super saints! People just like us can pray prayers that are powerful and effective!  
People just like us can pray prayers that move the hand of God!  
People just like us can pray prayers that overcome the enemy!

Satan wants you to think you must be more holy to pray, but he's a liar!  
Satan wants you to think you must be more mature to pray, but he's a liar!

Satan wants you to think you must be stronger to pray, but he's a liar!

You don't need anything to pray but faith in God! I believe God can take ordinary men and women who will pray and literally change the world. Our vision as a church is to touch heaven and change earth. We do that in worship but we also do that in prayer. There is supernatural power in prayer. How do we tap into that power? By praying. Stop talking about it and start talking to God! The NKJV of James 5:16 says:

*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

Much of our prayer is not effective simply because it is not fervent. It is offered with a lukewarm attitude. Effective prayer must be fervent, not because we must emotionally persuade a reluctant God, but because we be fervent for the things He is fervent for.

Additionally, effective prayer is offered by a righteous believer. This is someone who recognizes the grounds of his righteousness reside in Jesus, and whose personal walk is consistent with the righteousness that he has in Jesus.

Fervent prayer is passionate, zealous, burning, intense. In fact, the Holman Version says:

*The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful.*

It's interesting to see this verse in the original Greek. When it says Elijah prayed earnestly – it basically uses the same word twice. That's why Young's Literal Translation says:

*Elijah was a man like affected as we, and with prayer he did pray —*

I like the way Pastor Olen used to say it: this means Elijah prayed in his prayer! He didn't just say some religious sounding words. He actually prayed in his prayers!

### **3. James teaches on the ministry of reconciliation in James 5:19-20**

*My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

James reminds us of the need to confront those who have wandered from the truth. There are many people wandering from the truth these days. Many are deconstructing their faith, which is actually rejecting faith. It's sad and we must care enough to lovingly reach out to them.

This shows us that God uses people in turning sinners back from the errors of

their ways. God does not need to use people, and sometimes He does not. But most of the time He does.

To turn someone from the error of their ways is not done by telling them that they are okay in their sin and backsliding. "Oh go ahead. God is merciful. God is gracious. It doesn't really matter." That just validates their sin.

But we must speak the truth in love. They must know we love them and because of that, we want to save them from the consequences they are headed for. We don't condemn them; we just lovingly speak truth to them. We don't argue with them. We don't fight WITH them – we fight FOR them.

Again – that involves the ministry of prayer. We must wage spiritual warfare on their behalf. Prayer is spiritual warfare and here's some ways to pray for them:

- That God would give you an open door to witness to them
- That God would draw them to Himself
- Bind the spirits that blind them to the knowledge of the truth
- Pray that God will open their eyes to truth
- Pray that God will give them godly sorrow for sin that leads to repentance and faith.

How long do you pray? As long as it takes! Colossians 4:2 says:

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*

We must persistently engage in aggressive prayer — wholeheartedly seeking a specific answer from God as you keep vigilant with your eyes watching for the soon-to-be-manifested answer. And as you take that stance of faith, lift your voice to thank God in advance for the answer you are seeking!

It's one thing to thank God for something after it happens. Anyone can do that! But what he's talking about here is the voice of faith that thanks God for the answer before it comes! It is hard to be discouraged or defeated when you are continually thankful, so be sure to maintain a thankful, faith-filled heart as you watch and wait for your answer to arrive!

So, what should you do if you are praying in faith and the answer still hasn't come? It's time for you to dig in and press in the Spirit toward the answer.

Are you going through one of those trying times right now? Have you been tempted to give up on something you've been praying for because the answer isn't coming as quickly as you wish?

If so, don't throw up your hands in exasperation and walk away! Instead – throw up your hands in praise and press in to God.

Stay in faith and stay alert, because you may be on the very brink of receiving your long-awaited answer!

Keep in mind - When we work, we work, but when we pray - God works.  
When we fight, we fight, but when we pray - God fights!  
Think of people in the Bible who continued in prayer and thanksgiving despite difficult circumstances.

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison. It looked like it was over for them – but they continued in prayer, faith, and thanksgiving, and God sent an earthquake to set them free. That led to revival in Philippi.

And when you are in your darkest hour – if you continue in prayer and thanksgiving – God can send an earthquake to shake things up and set you free.

The children of Israel were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. It looked like this would be the end - but they continued in prayer until God said get up and part the water. The Sea parted and Israel walked over on dry ground.

When you feel like you are trapped in life – continue in prayer and thanksgiving and God will part your sea and defeat your enemy.

Lazarus had been dead and buried for days. Everyone said it was over, but Jesus stood outside the tomb of a dead man, prayed and gave thanks to God. God heard that prayer and raised Lazarus from the dead.

There may be situations in your life that look too dead to resuscitate.  
Maybe you feel your marriage is dead and gone.  
Or a relationship with a family member had been dead so long it stinks.  
Or there's an area in your life where you are bound up.

What if God is waiting for you to continue in prayer and thanksgiving before He releases His resurrection power into your life?

To have wisdom about ministry you must know that our first and foremost ministry is to God through prayer and praise!

So, does anyone here have enough faith to thank God for the answer before it comes!

Can somebody give God some radical praise and worship today!