

Today's message, is on "prayer".

Some Christians, see themselves as very practical people – they are the sorts of people, who like to serve God with their hands (is there anyone like that here?)... And usually, a lesson on prayer, is something they might feel, "Well, that's for those other people – that's for the spiritual people – But I'm a practical person – I like to work with my hands"... OK, now if you're one of those "very practical people", you can work with your hands. You can do this: (*adopt a posture of prayer*).

*Martin Luther once said, "I have so much to do, that I must spend the first 3 hours of each day in prayer."*ⁱ

When it comes to being a disciple of Jesus, there is nothing more **practical**, than prayer. It is something that we can **all** do; at **all** times; and in **all** places. It is something we can do privately, or we can do it together with other Christians. Or we can even do it with a non-Christian, when we ask, "Can I pray with you?" And you might be surprised at how many non-Christians are more than willing – they're ready, for us to pray with them.

Prayer, is the most practical thing, that any of us can do. And if Christianity, is about having a relationship, with the One, True, Living God,,,,, prayer is not an optional extra... Imagine if any of the 12 disciples never talked to Jesus, and never listened to Jesus – what kind of a relationship would they of had? They wouldn't have been disciples at all, would they???

And it's the same with us. Prayer should be **key** in our walk with God.

Some people like to pray first thing in the morning. Others like to pray, last thing before they go to bed. Some pray, when things get really tough, and when their life seems to be going down the toilet. Some pray when they're desperate. Some pray when they're full of joy...

The thing is: "It's **always** the right time to pray". In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says: ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

And James says pretty much the same thing:
¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

James is telling us, to pray, in **whatever** situation we find ourselves.

The Greek word for "suffering" Κακοπαθεῖ , means "all sorts of suffering" – it certainly includes being persecuted for one's faith, but it means "all kinds of suffering". Last week, we heard how the Prophets suffered when they spoke the word of God – it's the same word. And Paul used this same word again, when he wrote to Timothy, and told him to be willing to undergo suffering...

And the thing is, if we are suffering, we should pray...

And our natural tendency might be to pray, “God, save me from this suffering. Don’t let me suffer. Take this affliction away”... But sometimes it’s God’s will for us to endure suffering. And a prayer of faith, is a prayer for strength to get through suffering.

So, ¹³ **Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.**

You know, when I first read that, I thought “Yeah, well, this is the 2 opposites.” If you’re suffering – if your world is crashing down around you – pray about it... But if everything is going good, then be cheerful about it, and sing praise... And the natural way to take this is, you’re either one or the other – you’re either sad because you’re suffering, or you’re cheerful because everything’s going so marvellously, that you just want to celebrate...

But you know what? Jesus turns all that on its head. In Jesus Christ, even in the midst of suffering, there’s joy. Not that we dismiss all suffering, but even as we suffer, there is joy... Like when Paul and Silas were in jail – they’d been locked up for preaching the Gospel... And there, in that cold, dark dungeon, unaware of what their fate might be, they were busy praying, **and** singing praises to God...

If God is for us, who can be against us. If God loves us – who cares who hates us.

And this is the good news of the Gospel – it’s something to be joyful about. God loved us so much, He sent His son, to die for us on the cross. He loves you that much... He came, to

save us from our sins. ... We didn't deserve that. We have sinned against God, and so we deserve death – we deserve to go to hell... But God, in His grace and mercy, didn't give us what we deserve. He gave Himself to save us... His life, was a ransom, that saved ours. There's a reason for joy.

Next week is Easter... And we will be celebrating, that even though Jesus died, He lives. And because **Jesus** lives, **we** live... Even though we die, we will be raised to life...

Now, does anybody here get any joy out of that? I hope so... And even in the most desperate times of pain and distress, in Christ, we have reason for joy... **Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise....** even if you're suffering.

So, we pray when we suffer. We pray when we're cheerful...
... And we pray for the sick.

I want to broaden this one out a bit. The Greek word, ἀσθενεῖ, our bibles translate as "sick". And that's correct. But it can also mean *weakness, sickness, disease, timidity*ⁱⁱ.

Alright, so it includes sickness. But you might be feeling weak; or lacking confidence; or you might be depressed; or be filled with anxiety.... It's **primarily** about sickness, but it can mean any of these forms of weakness.

And if you are sick, or weak, or anxious, or timid... A humble act of faith, is to call the elders of the church, to come and pray for you, and anoint you with oil in the name of Jesus. Now, that might sound very religious, but to anoint someone with oil, is just to put some oil on their head (I usually use

olive oil)... In the Old Testament, it was an act of consecration – this person is set aside as holy for God.

And this is something, that we as a church, do. – not if someone's got a cold, but if someone is seriously ill, I need to know about it... There have been times, when our parishioners have been in hospital and I didn't even know about it, until they were discharged, or flown out.

Please, if you, or one of your family are sick, please call the leaders of the church, and they will come and lay hands on them, and pray for them, and anoint them with oil in the Name of Jesus.

And V15 says, that when we do this, **the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.**

But I suppose this brings up a question we need to address. "Why is it, that sometimes people are healed, and sometimes they're not?" And there's several different positions, that people take on this:

- A cessationist would say "No one is miraculously healed any more." They would say, "Miraculous healings ceased, after the Apostles all died"....

Well, I'm afraid I can't go along with that, because that's not what the Bible says. And, I've seen enough miracles in my time, to know that God is still performing miracles. (Maybe not as many, or as often, as some might falsely claim), but God continues to be super-naturally active, in

this world, today.

So, that's one view. Another view, comes from the "Word of Faith" movement:

- A "Word of faith" preacher might say, "If God didn't heal you, it's because you didn't have enough faith. Or those around you didn't have enough faith." And it's their fault, because they didn't believe enough. You see, some Christians believe, "If you ask for it, and you believe it, God **will** do it for you."

But the problem with this view, is it puts us, in the position of being God's master... We ask for it. God does it. But that's not the way our relationship with God is supposed to be. The Lord is **our** master – He's not our servant.

So, if God continues to heal today, what **are** the barriers to healing?

Well, one barrier to healing, is that we don't ask for it. Back in Chapter 4, James says "**You do not have, because you do not ask.**" Sometimes, God is ready and willing to heal, and all we have to do is humble ourselves, and admit "I need You, Lord". And ask Him for that healing.

A second barrier to healing, is unrepented sin. In Verse 16, James says, ¹⁶ **Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be**

healed. So, unrepented sin is sometimes, a barrier to healing. We can read about it in the church at Corinth, where people were getting sick and dying, because they were sinning in they way they took communionⁱⁱⁱ.

A third barrier to healing, is “a lack of faith”, or “a misunderstanding of faith.” And to ‘get’ this, we need to understand, “what **is** faith?”, and “what is a **prayer** of faith?”, because James says “**the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick**”

Well, “Word of Faith” preachers (that I mentioned before) work on the premise that faith is believing that a particular event is going to happen. I pray for healing. I believe it, and if I believe hard enough, and don’t doubt, it will happen... It’s sort of like a Christianised form of “mind-over-matter”... And it’s a very common teaching coming out of the United States, and often held by our Pentecostal brothers and sisters... But that is not a biblical understanding of faith.

I’m going to make 2 statements about faith: Biblical faith is faith in a person. It’s faith in Jesus. It’s faith in God The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It’s grounded in who the person is. It’s trusting implicitly, and completely, in God. And so no matter what happens – whether I’m healed, or whether I’m not, I will continue to completely trust in God...

And the 2nd statement is tied to it: Faith, is believing that what **God** has said, is true. If **God** has made a promise, then we can believe (with 100% certainty), that He will keep that promise. And so our faith, is in God – not in a healing.

Let me give you an example: God told the people of Israel to go into the promised land, and not to be afraid, because He would give them victory over their enemies. But they didn't believe Him. (they're giants – they're enormous. We don't stand a chance). They didn't have faith. And so they disobeyed, and had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

But when they realised what they'd done, they decided for themselves "Well, we'd better go in then." But Moses said "But God won't be with you." But they went in anyway, and they were defeated. The 1st time around, God made a promise, but they didn't have faith, and so they disobeyed. ... The second time around, they decided for themselves what they wanted, and acted (on an old promise of God), believing it was going to happen, but it didn't.

Faith, is faith in God. And faith is believing what God has said, is true. But what is a "prayer of faith"?

Well, a prayer of faith, begins with faith in a person. Our faith is in God. God is Sovereign. God is King. God is God, and I am not. And sometimes the things that I want, might happen to be in conflict with God's purposes. Who knows best? God or me? God. And yes, even when it comes to healing. If I am sick – even if I am dying, yeah, I might want to be healed – of course I want to be healed... But the Lord may have another purpose.

And a prayer of faith, is a prayer that knows that God knows best. It's a prayer that asks God for healing, but it's also a prayer that says, "And even if you don't heal me, I know it's

because you know what's best. And I'm not going to stop believing in You. I'm not going to stop trusting in You, because my faith is in You – not in a healing.” That's a prayer of faith.

An immature faith says, “If God heals me, I'll believe in Him.” A mature faith – an established faith says, “Lord, I believe in You. Whether you heal me, or whether you don't, I will continue to believe in you, and to trust in You.”

You know, when I think back, and try to remember some examples of people who are angry at God, in every case, their anger, is because God hasn't done their will. But you know what? God isn't in the business of doing our will. Jesus taught us to pray, “**Your** will be done”... And a prayer of faith will pray, “Lord, Your will be done, and help me to stand strong in faith, right in the centre of Your will, no matter how tough it is.”

When Teresa Beare got lung cancer, we went to her, and anointed her with oil, and we prayed for her healing... And John said (and Teresa agreed) “We believe that God has healed Teresa, and if it's not an earthly, physical healing, it's a spiritual healing at the resurrection...” And it brought tears to my eyes, because I rarely hear such a mature, deep faith.

A fourth barrier to healing, is when we don't know the healer. Verse 16 talks about confessing our sins, and getting right

with God. And it says “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

You may be surprised at how many people, who haven't committed their lives to God, continue to expect that He's going to come and answer all their prayers. *It's like not joining RACQ, and then expecting them to come and give you a complimentary jump-start whenever your battery goes flat...*

We've got to decide, “Am I committed to God”, Or do I just want Him to do this one thing for me, and then I'll look after myself again?

The prayer of a righteous person, has great power... And the righteous are those who fall on their knees, because they know they're not righteous, and say “God, have mercy on me, a sinner”... God makes us righteous, as we repent of our old ways, receive forgiveness in the Name of Jesus, and follow Him as His disciple.

Praying in faith – a praying heart, yielded to God's will – not mine.

We could talk about prayer all day, but I think we might leave it at that, and I'm willing to have a go at answering some questions.

ⁱ Green, Michael. 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Books: Grand Rapids. 1989

ⁱⁱ H.-Link, G., 1986. Weakness, Sickness, Disease, Paralysis L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 11:²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.