

**The World According to Jim**  
**“The Call to Pray”**  
**James 5:13-18**

**Introduction**

- We are in the homestretch of James’s letter. Thinking back to all that James has said so much of it relates to speech doesn’t it? The awesome power of our words. Warnings about oaths and swearing. Religion that God desires is controlling the tongue. And on and on. It is fitting that in a letter so devoted to speech James would end with a call to pray. That’s what James 5:13-18 is all about. [Slide #2]

**Proposition**

- **Put your tongues to use by praying**
- So, this morning we are going to pray. This passage is a call to prayer and here’s how we’re going to do this. I’ll make a few clarifying comments about what James says and then we’ll pause and pray as James suggests. This service and the prayers you pray will be as meaningful as you choose to make it. At certain points I may ask you to stand or to move or to share something corporately. If you feel uncomfortable standing or moving or sharing that’s fine. The most important thing is that you pray.

**Transition**

[Slide #3] In James 5:13-18 James gives...

**Organizational Sentence**

- **Three specific calls to prayer**

**Transition**

Before those three calls to prayer let me share a few introductory words.

- During the Great Awakening of the 1740’s and 50’s **Jonathan Edwards** presided over a massive prayer meeting of eight hundred men. The first Promise Keepers. As they were praying a woman sent a message into that meeting asking the men to pray for her husband. Edwards read the note privately. It described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult. Then, thinking the man described in the note might be present, Edwards made a bold request. He read the note aloud to the eight hundred men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. Three hundred men raised their hands.<sup>1</sup>
- We aren’t going to get anywhere this morning if we aren’t broken before God. Before we pray a single request let’s humble ourselves and confess our sins. James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* Proverbs 3:34 *He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.* Psalm 32:5 *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace*, (Crossway, 2001), p. 80.

- Ephesians 2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*
- *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*<sup>2</sup>
- What we are about to do, pray here together, is made possible by the death of Christ. It is no light thing to pray. As [Oswald Chambers](#) puts it, “Remember, what makes prayer easy is not our wits or our understanding, but the tremendous agony of God in redemption. A thing is worth just what it costs. Prayer is not what it costs us, but what it cost God to enable us to pray.”<sup>3</sup> In the World According to Jim prayer is the most significant thing we can do with our tongues. So let’s **put our tongues to use by praying.**

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### Transition

Three calls to prayer. Look at verse 13 for the [first](#). *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.* [[Slide #4](#)] First call? If you’re suffering, pray. A few words about what this means and then we’ll pray.

### Main Points

- The word translated *trouble* means more than just suffering or sickness. It means most any kind of suffering or difficulty. The New Living Translation reads like this. *Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray.* “It is any ill circumstance which may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an on-looking friend might say, ‘That’s bad.’”<sup>4</sup> Opposition. Bereavement. Marital breakdown. Financial distress. It could mean sickness but let’s not think about illnesses right now. We’ll pray for illnesses later.
- Right now I want you to think back to earlier sections of James when we talked about trials. Those trials of life that may still be ongoing—all through this series. That what James is referring to here. Maybe the weight of those things still hasn’t lifted. Ask God to bring those things to mind right now.
- When God has brought those trials to mind, those hardships to mind, I’m going to ask you to stand and move to pray with one of the people up front. Prayer leaders will be here to pray with you and for you. This group has been instructed that anything shared in prayer here right now be held in strict confidence.
- I want you to keep in mind what you will be asking for in prayer. Do you remember James 1:2-4? Remember, these trials are spiritual opportunities. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* As one commentator says, “The prayer here is not a prayer for the alleviation of suffering or trial but as in earlier in James it’s the prayer ‘for the

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 1:5-6

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Chambers, *If Ye Shall Ask*, 1958, 1985 (Chosen Books).

<sup>4</sup> Motyer, p. 187.

spiritual strength to endure the trial with a godly spirit.’<sup>5</sup> Pray for endurance. Pray for perseverance.

- *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.* I invite you now to adopt a posture that will best help you pray. If you’d like to stand, then stand. If you’d like to kneel then kneel. If you’d like to move to the front to pray with someone, then please begin to do so.

### Transition

Prayer leaders thank you for your help this morning. You can be seated. Now the **second** call to prayer. Look at the last half of verse 13. [Slide #5] *Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.* This is a call to sing prayers of praise back to God.

- Maybe things are going well for you right now? Maybe God has brought you through the wilderness so to speak—through some incredible trials. Maybe he’s sustained you and nobody here knows what God has done. Later we’ll actually sing praises. Right now I want you to zero in on and consider sharing some ways God has shown his hand of blessing.
- In other words, have there been god sightings in your life—evidence of God’s powerful and purposeful working? Then now’s the time to share. Are you amazed at God’s grace? Share how his grace has sustained you. Are you in awe of His goodness? Share of his goodness. Are you amazed by his forgiveness? Then share what his forgiveness means to you. If God has proved himself sufficient then now’s the time to share.
- *Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.* If you have something to share, a few instructions. Please collect your thoughts before you come up front. Organize in your mind what you’re going to say. When you share, keep it short. Don’t monopolize the mic. There may be others who want to share and we want to allow for that. And most importantly, don’t come up here to tell us about you. Tell us about God, who he is and what he’s done. Talk about Him. Praise him and draw attention to him with your words. If you have something to share, you’re invited to come to the front now.

### Transition

The **third** call starts in verse 14. [Slide #6] Follow along. *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. 15 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. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* If you are facing illness, James issues a call to earnest prayers of faith with the overseers of the church.

- These three verses are some of the most misunderstood verses in James. On the one extreme, Catholics uses these verses to support the sacrament of Extreme Unction, or anointing of the sick. In Catholic teaching this sacrament has the purpose of removing any remnant of sin and of strengthening the soul of the dying.<sup>6</sup> There are two problems with the Catholic view. First, I’m sorry, but no earthly priest is that powerful. The only priest who can remove sin is the High Priest Jesus Christ. Grace comes to us by faith alone in Christ alone not through a priestly middleman. Second, actual Catholic practice has little to do with what James says here. James recommends anointing with oil for any illness so that there might be healing—

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<sup>5</sup> Moo, p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Moo, p. 239.

life; the anointing in James is not a preparation for death—it's for the purpose of getting well. That's one extreme.

- The other extreme is the charlatan TV evangelist variety; hocking healing as a means of financial gain. These verses become the basis for extensive healing ministries—as if the only ministry of the church was physical healing. I think we can avoid both of those extremes.
- Some observations. Look at what the text says. [Verse 14](#) says the sick person should call the elders of the church to pray; not those with the gift of healing, but the elders—the overseers of the church. If you think of The Twelve in Acts 6:4, they devoted themselves to two things: prayer and the ministry of the word. That, in a nutshell, is what elders do. They oversee God's church by praying and by teaching the word.
- Next observation. James says the elders are to anoint the sick person with oil. Why? Is there something magical about the oil? Absolutely not. The elders don't bring about healing nor does the oil. James says in [verse 15](#) *the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well*. It's prayer that brings about the healing. The emphasis is on prayer.
- So what is the oil for? There is a long and complicated debate as to why prayer for the sick includes anointing with oil. Some say the oil is medicinal. Others say the oil is for the purpose of stimulating the faith of the sick person. As I've studied this, here's my take. The anointing with oil is connected to the idea of consecration. If something is consecrated it is set apart for service to God.
- I want you to turn in your bible to two passages in Exodus 40. The first is Exodus 40:9. God says to Moses, *"Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it; consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy.* The instruments of the Tabernacle, the moveable tent of worship, and the tabernacle itself are anointed as a symbol of their being set apart for service. They're consecrated for service. Skip ahead a few verses to [verse 13](#). *Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest.* God commands Moses to anoint Aaron for the purpose of serving as priest. Again, there's this connection between anointing and consecration—being set apart for service.
- With that in mind turn back to James 5. When the sick person calls upon the elders of the church to pray what they are really asking for is for God to heal them so they can serve more effectively. It's not just "pray for me pastor so I can get better." That, in essence, is pure selfishness. Instead, it should be "pray for me pastor because my illness is keeping me from doing the ministry God has called me to do." All too frequently the prayer for healing is divorced from service. We are created in Christ for good works. Ephesians 2:10 *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* As the elders pray they are to anoint the sick as a symbol of the person's desire for healing so they can serve God more faithfully. The anointing is a physical act symbolizing consecration.<sup>7</sup> Got it?
- Two more quick observations and then we'll pray. James confidently asserts in [verse 15](#) *the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well*. Which begs the question, if the person isn't healed is it a failure of faith? My college roommate, his mother passed away our freshman year. He prayed for healing. Many prayed and prayed for her healing and she died. Did she die because of someone's lack of faith? Absolutely not. Ultimately the prayer

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<sup>7</sup> Moo, p. 241.

of faith is a prayer for the Lord's will. *Your will be done, Lord.* It takes great faith to pray that way—especially in light of severe and chronic illness. *Your will be done.* And in some cases God chooses to heal—that's his will. In other cases the healing comes later in the form of a glorified resurrected body. There is a dual sense to *the Lord will raise him up* of verse 15. Sometimes it's here and now. Other times it may be at the resurrection. Regardless of when, the prayer of faith is for the Lord's will to be done.

- Last observation. Sometimes there is a connection between physical illness and sin. I said sometimes. In John 9 Jesus clearly denies a one to one correlation between illness and sin. *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus.* Sometimes people are just sick—not because of any sin.
- However, sometimes illness and sin are connected. 1 Corinthians 11 seems to make that connection. Matthew 18 seems to indicate that unforgiveness and bitterness may be related to physical torment. Even so, it's hard to discern when the underlying cause of an illness is sin, or if it's just an illness; which is probably why James urges confession of sin by all who request prayers for healing. **Verse 16.** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.* As one commentator says, “recognizing this possible connection, between illness and sin, James encourages the sick person to deal with any potential spiritual causes of the illness that he or she is experiencing.”<sup>8</sup>
- With that being said, here's what we're going to do. Bruce will you join me please. If you are sick or ill such that you aren't able to serve God the way you desire to serve him I want you to consider coming up front for anointing and prayer. I will first ask you if you think your illness might be connected to sin. If you believe so, I'll ask you to confess that sin to the rest of the body. If you have a sense that your illness is unrelated to sin, we'll anoint you with oil, I will lead you in a prayer of confession and then we'll pray for your healing. Remember, the prayer for healing is accompanied by a desire to serve God more effectively. So, take a moment to search your heart before God and then if you desire prayer, come forward when you're ready.

## Conclusion

- James concludes these three calls to prayer with this statement. **Verse 16.** *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* The most significant thing we can do with our tongues is pray. The temptation, however, is to not pray because we don't feel righteous. We feel disqualified and so we don't pray. To encourage us in our weakness James adds these words. *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. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.* Notice it doesn't say we're like Elijah. It says he was just like us. Did you ever think about that? Elijah was just like you. Inadequate. Fearful. Weak. And yet he prayed. The text says he *prayed earnestly*. Literally it just says he prayed prayers. He prayed the heavens stopped raining. As a follower of Christ, standing on the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ alone, our prayers are powerful and effective simply because we pray them. Every believer has access to the kind of effectiveness in prayer like Elijah if we would just pray. In the World According to Jim, the most significant thing you and I can do as followers of Christ is pray. 1 John 5:14 says *This*

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<sup>8</sup> Moo, p. 243.

*is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. In John 14:14 Jesus said, You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. What things would look like if we just took our Savior at his word?*