

Power of Prayer

PANEL

September 26, 2021

Psalm 124:1-8

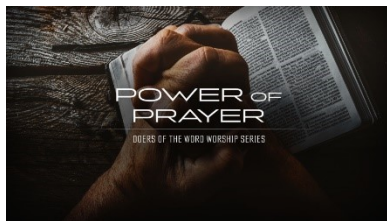
¹ If it had not been the LORD who was on our side — let Israel now say — ² if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, ³ then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; ⁴ then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; ⁵ then over us would have gone the raging waters. ⁶ Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. ⁷ We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. ⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

James 5:13-20

¹³ Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are 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. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰ you should know that whoever brings back a sinner

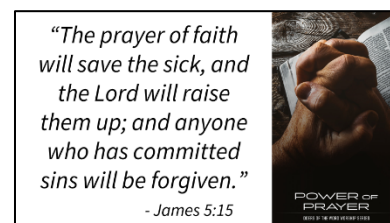
from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.



Today as we draw to the conclusion of our worship series, "Doers of the Word", we lean into the power of prayer. For many, prayer and action may feel like opposites, but they are really complements to one another. Prayer can and should function as both our launching pad into action and as our time of reflection on the actions that we have taken. In these ways, prayer surrounds all we say and do as people of faith. In these ways prayer is a continual reminder of the Spirit's presence with us at all times. As we begin this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Prayer is central to our belief and to the practice of our faith. It is fitting that James ends his letter that focuses on doing with the encouragement to pray. As we turn to James 5, we are called to pray when we are suffering and when we are sick. This seems natural. James also calls us to pray when we are cheerful. James names our songs of praise as one means to pray when we are cheerful. I have sung songs of praise as expressions of my faith. We sing and we pray when we are joyful and when we are well. I have also sung hymns and songs as a way to express the grief or struggle that I was going through. There is certainly a connectedness to our prayers and to our praise. We pray both with the sighs of our hearts and with the songs of our souls. We lift all things to God.

In verse fourteen James encourages the believers to go to the elders of the church to be prayed over, to be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord. To be able to pray with you all – whether before surgery or during a hospital stay, when illness has set in, when blessing a birth or wedding – to be able to pray with you all is such a holy privilege. In verse fifteen we read, *"The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven."* James connects illness and sin together in this verse. He is doing so because the effect of sin and illness are often the same. In James' time, those who were sick were shunned, quarantined, set aside. The sinners in James' day were also set aside, excommunicated. The same can happen today. Or at least the sick and the sinner can feel that way. Even though that may not be our intention, sometimes it can feel like we do not want those people around. If you want some examples of said things, look at the papers on the back wall of the sanctuary. James is trying to tear down that wall – whether it is real or whether it is felt.



So, James encourages us to be honest with one another, to trust one another enough to be vulnerable with each other. He encourages us to confess our sins to one another – not to be judged or to be set aside, but to be prayed for and to be prayed with. The passage from James concludes with the big picture of "why" we are to be open and honest with one another in regard to our sins and struggles. In verse twenty we read that through prayer we can bring another back into faith thus saving another from death. Although we did not name our struggles aloud last week, we did write them down and brought them forward as an act of surrender. And we prayed over one another.

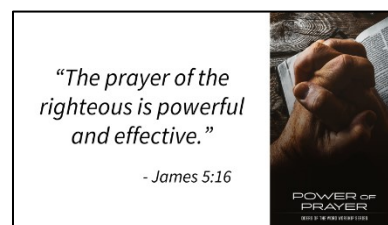
We did so because there is power in community. As a church and as people of faith, we should invite those in need of prayer to come, to be touched, to be anointed, to be prayed over. We should seek to include the sick and the sinner, inviting them to come close, to accept the grace that the community of faith and that God wants to pour out upon them.



James has great confidence in the power of prayer.

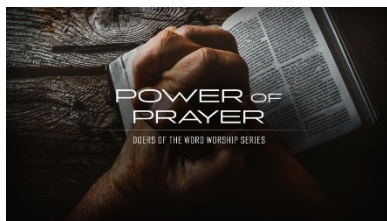
Echoing the faith and the trust that we heard in the words of Psalm 124 earlier, James believes in the power

of prayer. In verse sixteen he writes, *"The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."* James says to pray for and hope for and expect. James calls us to pray for the hand of God to be active in our world and in our lives. He is calling us to a prayer life that mirrors that of the psalmist. That faith acknowledges that *"if it had not been the LORD who was on our side"* then they would have been swallowed up and swept away. The prayer of the righteous expects the same. Our prayers are powerful and effective not because we expect God to make everything alright but because we expect God to save us, because we invite God to be with us.



When we pray these prayers, we are inviting God to draw near to us. When we pray these prayers with others, we are inviting them to draw near to God. When we are willing to pray with the sick and the sinners, we are expressing our belief in the God who saves, and we are inviting them into the kingdom of God and into the community of faith.

When we pray with the least and the lost and the broken, we are sharing the hope and belief expressed by the psalmist: *"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."*



When we pray with one another and with those in need, we are tearing down walls by telling them with our prayers that they belong, that they are worthy, that they are loved and cared for both by God and by us. Prayer tears down walls and builds community by including those have been on the outside – the sick and the sinners, the least and the lost. Again, if you want to what the walls are that inhibit or keep people from coming to church or to youth group, spend a few minutes looking at the papers that the youth made this past Wednesday night. The sick and the sinners, the least and the lost, they are on those papers. Prayer builds up the body of Christ by connecting us to one another and to God. The power of prayer can change lives and save souls. As we go forth into our week, may we be a people of prayer. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How have your prayer practices and your prayer life grown as you have matured in faith? How can you help others to grow in this area?
- 2) *Pray*. When have your prayers been “powerful and effective?” Where can you apply such prayers for another in the week ahead?
- 3) *Study*. Read James 5:7-11. How can these words be applied to your prayer life? How would your prayers change if they reflected such endurance?