

Prayer: A Way of Loving Others*James 5:16-18*

Introduction: Today we continue our study on the topic of prayer. James describes how powerful and effective our prayers for one another can be. In James 5:13-15, he explains how elders are supposed to pray for healing of the sick. He says that such prayer can restore the one who is sick (v. 15). This ministry of praying for one another, however, is not something that is solely entrusted to elders; it is for all of us. “Intercession is”, as Richard Foster says, “a way of loving others.” May this study encourage you to grow in your expression of love for others through this ministry of prayer.

Opening Discussion: Do you find it easy or hard to consistently pray for others? Why?

Read James 5:16-18 (to get the full context read 5:13-18)

1. How would you summarize what James teaches about prayer in vv. 16-18?
2. What does it mean to confess our sins to one another?
3. If we confess our sins to God, why do we need to let anyone else know about it?

Steve said:

In addition to confessing our sin to one another we are to “pray for one another so that you may be healed.” The implication is that our prayers for one another are a strategic element in our healing. I would understand James to be talking about healing in a rather comprehensive sense here (not only physical healing – which is its usual meaning). The term healing is also used of being delivered from demonic influence (Acts 10:38); it is used of the restoration God brings when people turn back to God in faith and repentance (Acts 28:27, 1 Peter 2:24).

4. If you think of healing in this comprehensive sense, are there any areas in which you need healing?
5. What does James mean when he says that “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (v. 16b)?
6. Referring to 16b (“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”), Steve made the point that our prayer life is dependent on our whole life. What do you think he meant by that?

7. What is the point of the example given in vv. 17-18?

Steve said:

In light of what we've been discussing, I'd like for us to consider praying for others as a primary way of loving them. Remember Foster's comment that, "If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer." Think of someone you love – someone for whom you want the very best (e.g., a family member or a friend). I really believe that ***the more we love people the more we'll pray***. The more we love the more we'll pray. And we won't pray vague, timid prayers that don't really cost us anything in terms of time or spiritual effort. We'll invest time and energy in praying for God's very best for people.

8. Do you agree that the more we love people the more we will pray? Why or why not?

9. Who is someone that you believe God wants you to love by praying for them?

10. What kinds of needs do you sense they might have that are "far more than it is within [your] power to give them"?

Steve said:

It is possible that you are facing some sin or some circumstance that you cannot handle independent of other people. It's not that you need a human mediator between you and God; there is one mediator between God and man – the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). It is a matter of interdependence in the body of Christ. God has designed the body of Christ so that you need the gifts, insights, encouragement, love, and prayers of others. These things aren't icing on the cake (i.e., optional); God designed the body of Christ this way. Asking for prayer (perhaps in conjunction with confessing your sin) could be a very strategic thing for you to do.

11. Do you find it hard to ask people to pray for you? Why or why not?

12. What personal needs do you have that you can ask others to pray for in the coming weeks?