

SIX GUIDELINES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU NEED GOD'S HELP

James 5:13-20

Why study prayer in the letter of James?

Because James was related to Jesus and heard Jesus talk about prayer.

Who was James? James is first introduced in Matthew 13:55 as one of our Lord's brethren. Though he was not a believer in the early days, 1 Corinthians 15:7 tells us that in the midst of the resurrection appearances of Christ, - "*Jesus revealed himself to James and talked with him.*"

We read in Galatians 1:18-19 of Paul describing the first three years of his life, following his conversion. At this time he spent two weeks with Peter in Jerusalem and also met another important church leader by the name of James, whom he says, "*was the Lord's brother.*"

In Acts 15:13 James is the one presiding at the first great council of the church at Jerusalem where his leadership role is evident. In Gal. 2:9 Paul refers to him as a "pillar" of the church—equal to Peter and John. It is evident that James was a strong believer in Jesus! He was "nicknamed" "*James the Just*" because of his recognised piety, and was said to have "*knees like those of camels*" because of his much time spent in prayer. Josephus records that James was martyred during an uprising against Christians when Ananus was high priest in 62 A.D. James knew about Prayer. Many find the words of James quite perplexing. He says some things that are difficult to understand. He also covers a

number of diverse subjects.

We could focus on what it says about healing, accountability, confessing our sins or prayer. But in this study, we'll zero in on just one topic: Prayer, and what we need to keep in mind when we need God's help.

1. Pray about everything

If there's one thing that the Lord says through his brother James it is what he himself once said, "*We should always pray and not give up*" - (Luke 18:1). James says, "If you are in need - PRAY" (James 5:13-14). Other Bible passages teach the same wonderful truth that we can always speak to God about anything and everything. Of course prayer needs to go beyond the crisis mode. It is always a heartfelt communication between the believer and his God. (1 Thess. 5:17, Colossians 4:1, Luke 5:16). So take time to honestly talk to God about whatever is on your heart. He's a good listener and promises to answer prayer.

2. The greater the need, the larger the circle of prayer

James further points out that as a Christian family, we can and should "*call upon others*" in the church fellowship to pray with us (James 5:14). In the early church life anointing helped heal wounds, or the sick, (Luke 10:34) but prayer was the important factor.

We must learn to deal with the small stuff ourselves, but share the big stuff with others. We can't help if we don't know!

There's extra power in numbers and persistence. (cp. Galatians 6:2, 5, Acts 12:5-17, Matthew 18:19-20, Luke 18:1-8).

3. Before you pray, clean up your life!

This is essential. The Bible says, "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2). We are to confess our sins and humbly approach God.

The Lord said through James, "*Confess your sins to each other*" (James 5:15-16). This does not mean sharing sinful behavior, immoral thoughts and fantasies, but rather taking steps to correct and making amends to those we have hurt, before we can honestly come to God. Jesus taught this, "*Forgive or you will not be forgiven*" (cf. Luke 17:3-4, Matthew 6:14-15).

Unconfessed, hidden sin makes prayer a waste of time. We must confess to others our sorrow for hurting them and then acknowledge our sins to God, so that our prayers will be heard (Proverbs 28:13, Psalm 66:18).

4. Everyone needs a circle of prayer support

The whole concept of the Christian family and fellowship is that of sharing and supporting each other. The Lord encourages us through James by reminding us that... "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*" (James 5:16).

Corporate prayer is even more powerful (Acts 1:14, 12:5-17). We are to share our prayer requests with others of the Christian family, because if they know what's going on in our life, they will pray. Even the Lord and the apostles requested prayer from the church family (Matthew 26:40-41, Acts 12:5, Ephesians 6:18-20).

5. We ask, but the Lord decides

One of the mysteries of prayer, is that of trying to figure out when and how the Lord answers prayer. If there is one thing that the Lord makes clear in James 5:15a it is this, *"It is the Lord who decides."*

God cannot be manipulated by any person or means and He answers prayer according to His divine will. As it says in 1 John 5:14, *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*

Unfortunately, there are Christian and non-Christians, who claim God is blessing and answering their prayers, but He may not be. Human healings can be attributed to a whole host of things. The so called Christian "faith healers," who claim miracles, put God in a dilemma. If God is the healer, as they claim, then God is seen to be unjust, unfair and uncaring about the thousands of good Christian people who do not receive healing -not to speak of the millions the world over, who suffer and die, while the faith preachers live it up, until they get sick and die.

We have no right to presume upon God and claim special privileges, blessings and

favor. God answers prayer according to His perfect will. He will make all things clear when we get to heaven; but until then we must humbly seek His face and trust in Him alone.

6. It's much more important to be forgiven, than healed

The Lord wants us to realize that it's much more important to be forgiven and know we are going to heaven, than it is to get healing and live well on earth (James 5:19-20). As Jesus said, *"It is better to have eternal life than physical healing and go to hell"* (cf. Matthew 5:19-20).

The first and foremost priority of all, is to personally believe on Jesus Christ and be saved (Romans 10:9-13). The first thing to pray about is your salvation (cf. Acts 16:31).

Are you saved and going to heaven? You can be sure, by praying and asking Jesus to save you He **WILL** answer that prayer! (John 1:12-13, John 3:16, Romans 10:9-13)

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