

Series: Tools of Faith
Title: The Blueprint of a Praying Christian
Text: James 5:13-20
Key Word: Characteristics
Proposition: Everyone can model Christian prayer by modeling these biblical characteristics.

Good Morning everyone. We're delighted that you have chosen to worship God with us today. I invite you to take out your sermon-handout. This tool can be helpful to write down any thoughts or insights that you may want to remember. I firmly believe that the moment you wake up, God is speaking to you, in particular He is speaking to you while you are in this room. The question is: "Are you ready to listen?" If you truly desire to hear what God wants to say to you, you must prepare your heart and mind by setting aside any pressing demands, turning off any electronic devices, and removing any distracting thoughts. God may not shout, he may very well whisper. As the Holy Spirit highlights a word or phrase spoken, prayed, sung, or read, carefully consider it. Write it down. For in the week or month to come we will be tested by the world, by the enemy, or by our self-centered ego. This Word from the Lord will become the offensive weapon to parry or to assault the enemy.

Next week we're beginning a new series entitled, "Seven Simple Truths about Life." Jesus has said that he came that all people may have life and have it abundantly. Many are searching for a more fulfilling, more meaningful life. Jesus the Christ entered into human history to offer this life to any and all who would receive it. During this next series, we will discover this overflowing life offered by Jesus.

As you can see, we're in the midst of a series entitled, "Tools of Faith." We're exploring a short letter penned by James, a half-brother of Jesus. He also led the church in Jerusalem. James teaches us some tools of vital faith.

Last week, we took out our fourth tool to help us build a vital, healthy faith. We learned that a vise can remind us to draw near to God by submitting to Him, scorning the devil and securing a forgiven life.

My dad introduced me to baseball, woodworking, fishing, the adventures of camping and to the joy of building things. When I was in sixth grade, Mom and Dad began making plans to build a house. They bought an acre of land outside Brookville and hired an architect who drew a set of blueprints. Upon completion Mom and Dad had a family meeting and introduced my two sisters and me to a drawing of the house that we would be living in. This blueprint was a detailed plan of action describing the floorplan of our home with all its dimensions, listing of materials, and placement of all the mechanical systems. It revealed our vision of the place where memories would be made, tears would be shed, laughter would fill rooms, and love would be shared. This blueprint contained goals to be achieved and the characteristics of our future home. It was a picture of our preferred future. During the next several months Dad would teach us the meaning of its symbols, and coach us in fulfilling this plan of action. We installed all the plumbing and heating systems. A contractor installed the electrical systems and the carpetry. The blueprint sketched the plan of action. Hard, disciplined work made the vision a reality.

Our friend James has provided us a blueprint of a praying Christian. He provides four primary characteristics of passionate prayer. Passionate prayer contains raw honesty; praises God with singing; pleads for healing and purges sin with confession.

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray because prayer is the most important aspect of our lives. Our relationship with God is more important than any other relationship we have, and that relationship is primarily maintained through prayer. The rest of our relationships, and every other area of our life, revolves around our spiritual health. Prayer teaches us to trust God in the midst of the mundane; trust Him in spite of troublesome circumstances and unnerving relationships. When we fail to pray, we fail—period! James reveals a blueprint for prayer.

It's amazing how many bad things can happen to people. Job loss, huge unexpected expenses, a betrayal, a traffic ticket, life-threatening diseases can turn a good day into a bad day. In our passage for today, James starts out by asking a question: *“Is any one of you in trouble?”* Most of us have had more than one bad day in our life. In fact, some of you are right in the middle of some tough stuff right now. James says, *“Is any one of you in trouble...Is anyone happy...Is any one of you sick.”* **He urges us to first pray with raw honesty.**

Many go to God in prayer when they face various life challenges. We often pray, “Why?” Job, his wife, and friends fell into this trap. A much deeper prayer would be “Lord, what are you saying to me through these difficulties?” “Father, what do you want me to learn about you or what do you wish for me to do?”

The Heavenly Man is the autobiography of one of the leaders of the Chinese house-church movement. It's the story of his life from 1970 to the present. Some of you know the wonderful story of the miracle of Christianity in China. In the 1940s, when Communism swept in and either martyred or kicked out all the missionaries, there were about a million Christians in China, with no missionaries and with a few Bibles up until the 1980s. Today, over twenty-five years later, conservatively speaking, there are at least 110 million Christians in China. There is a fresh wave of persecution sweeping through the Chinese church. They've been imprisoned, killed and fired from their jobs, marginalized in their communities, and kicked out of their families. No church has suffered on such a massive scale as the church in China. As I read through that book, I noticed one constant theme. It's not a worship style or a system, it's not high-tech media or stained-glass windows. The church in China is marked by prayer. They continually tap into the muchness of God.

Perhaps some may be thinking: *Well, of course. If I were a persecuted Christian, my need would drive me to the Almighty God. But I'm an American Christian. I earn a good salary. I can pay all my bills. I have good health. I've got a good husband or wife. I'm enjoying singleness. I've got a job. I take vacations. I have nice clothes. I'm not in need.*

Friends, do you really believe that? The saddest moment in a person's life is when one looks in the face of God and says, "I have no needs." Jesus speaks to this denial, this self-deceit. In Revelation 3, Jesus says to the church at Laodicea: "*I know*

everything you have done, and you are not cold or hot. I wish you were either one or the other. But since you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. You claim to be rich and successful and to have everything you need. But you don't know how bad off you are. You are pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.” The person who is in trouble the most is the person who believes he is not in trouble.

The Laodicea’s were guilty of the sin of self-sufficiency. The letter concludes with the graphic picture of Jesus standing outside the door of self-sufficient heart, knocking, wanting to come in. The muchness of God is activated by the prayers of people who know how much they really need him. Pray with raw honesty acknowledging your need for the muchness of God.

Next, James urges us to praise God with singing. James wrote, *“Let him sing songs of praise.”* Early Christians were always ready to burst into song. Paul wrote, *“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,”* (Ephesians 5:19) Paul and Silas sang hymns and praise songs in the Philippians’ jail. (Acts 16:23-34)

I personally believe that singing builds up the audience. If the message is dry, and yet we have passionate and worshipful singing that reaches the heart, God will draw a crowd to His throne. Music and song not only accompany scriptural revivals, they are essential in deepening a relationship with God. Singing does at least as much as preaching to impress the word of God upon people’s minds. He who sings prays twice.

Next plead for healing. James wrote, “*He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.*” In Richard Foster’s book, Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home, he outlines different ways to pray, including healing prayer. In this chapter he emphasizes the power of group prayer. Foster tells a story of a young girl—a student of his—who was in a serious accident. As she lay in the hospital in critical condition, he commissioned her fellow students to pray for her healing, to pray for a specific physical result: that the injured capillaries in her brain begin to heal and the swelling in her brain to go down. This group of faith-filled students prayed together all night, and the young lady's condition improved. Within a week she was released from the hospital. This happened, Foster believes, because a group of believers prayed.

Most of us have witnessed occasions when a community of people united in prayer for a specific cause, and the miraculous occurred. During the course of my ministry I have witnessed the miraculous more often when the whole church is praying about a situation. That's certainly what the Bible teaches. James said, “*pray for each other so that you may be healed.*”

It's cliché to say there is strength in numbers—but it's true! To the extent that we are able to make ourselves transparent with others, we will experience God's power in our lives. That's why being involved in a life group, or a Sunday school class, is so

important. We need accountability and support from a group of caring believers. We need a place where we can go to the Living God and plead for healing.

Finally, purge sin with confession. James wrote, *“Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”* The Bible also says that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive all of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) Thank God he never reneges on this promise. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, God can now in his justice forgive us for our sins. We can’t put a price tag on being clean to the core.

James acknowledges that the ancient Hebrews, some of whom converted to Christianity, believed that sin and sickness were connected, that all sickness was related to sin. Therefore before healing could occur, the forgiveness of sin was critical. When four men brought a paralyzed man to Jesus on a stretcher, He said to the paralytic, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* (Mark 2:1-5) In some ways this is true today as it was yesterday. However, not all suffering is due to personal sin. It is true; however, that no one can know God’s complete healing until one is right with Him.

Also, in order that forgiveness to be completely effective there must be confession of sin between human beings, especially to the person wronged as well as to God. Yes, it is easier to confess our sins just to God, than to another human being. But there are two barriers to be overcome when dealing with sin, one is the barrier between us and God, and the other is the barrier between us and another. If both barriers are to be removed, then there must be confession in both areas. John Wesley required his

“small groups” to meet two to three times a week, *“to confess their faults to one another, and to pray for one another that they may be healed.”* Yes, sometimes confession to another may bring more harm than good, so discretion must be exercised. For God’s healing to be complete, sin must be purged by confession.

When Hudson Taylor first went to China, he made the voyage on a sailing ship. As it neared the channel between a southern Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door. He opened it, and there stood the captain of the ship. “Mr. Taylor,” he said, “We have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals.” “What can I do?” asked Taylor. “I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind.” Taylor responded, “All right, Captain, I will, but you must set the sail.” The captain was agitated and said, “Why, that’s ridiculous! There’s not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I’m crazy.” Nevertheless, the captain finally agreed. Forty-five minutes later he returned and found the missionary still on his knees. “You can stop praying now,” said the captain. “We’ve got more wind than we know what to do with!”

Friends, God is willing to answer when we pray with faith. He will heal and He will lead through times of suffering, during times of success, in times of sickness, and even when we’re trapped in sin. Brothers and sisters, let’s pray and set the sails! ²²⁸²

