

The Priority of Prayer

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Grab your Bibles and let's go to James tonight. We'll finish James tonight. I don't know what I'll do without James on Sunday night. It's been enjoyable to me and, ah, enlightening to me to go through this book again and, ah, as I come to these last verses, I'll have to confess to you that I've totally changed my opinion on what they mean. Um, let me preface it by saying this section of James where he talks about if you're sick, at least that's the translation of the word we have in the text, come and the elders will anoint them with oil and pray over them and the prayer of faith will heal, and those kind of things, I've just completely changed my viewpoint on that and understand that this is a text of Scripture that good men who are conservative, God-fearing scholars could have differences of opinion here, okay, and we still love each other and be alright. I don't even know what, what our staff's opinion is. I don't have any idea but anyway, here we go.

James 5. As he closes out, he emphasizes prayer, he emphasizes praying for one another, um, helping one another through difficulties as you might expect a pastor would speak to his people in closing out his letter to them. Verse 13, James 5.

14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. 19 My brethren, if any of you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Now we're talking about prayer. I. Notice, first of all, the supplication mentioned here and how we all ought to bring our supplication before the Lord. That is a humble and earnest entreaty before God.

In verse 15 he talks about, "Is, if any among you is suffering." I think that's a very broad application there. Any and every burden or difficulty or trial or heartache, what is causing your suffering, then cast it upon the Lord. Matter of fact, keep your Bible ribbon or finger in James 5 and look at, at the Psalm with me right quick, Psalm 50, um, 57. Psalm 57 beginning in verse 1, "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge Until destruction passes by. I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me. He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth. My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows And their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the midst of it."

One thing that I learned early in my Christian pilgrimage, that the Psalms is a great thing to pray through. Go to the book of Psalms and, man, when you're suffering and when you're going through difficulty, especially, um, unjust mistreatment or unkind situations or unfair things, praying through the Psalms, to me, is a great protection from the, the sin of bitterness and resentment and anger and retaliation. Take your suffering, take your heartache to the Lord and take it through the Psalms. You might just do like three Psalms a morning or you might find the Psalms of a, of, of, of suffering and, ah, there's scholars that can tell you which ones those are and pray those out before the Lord. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." Jeremiah 16:19, "LORD, my strength and my stronghold, And my refuge in the day of distress."

So take it to the Lord. Pour it out to him. Ah, don't grumble about those who do not have the hardship you have. Don't complain about those who may have a better place than you have, or at least it appears. Be careful, be careful judging something you don't know much about. Sometimes the veil is pulled back and you realize, "Hey, they had issues I had never dreamed they had. They have troubles I never understood that they had." So don't grumble about someone who may have it better, and don't blame God for it. Don't accuse God of unjustly or unfairly treating you. He's accomplishing something in your life for his glory and for your good. He knows what he's doing.

Ah, James 1:5. Early in my, in my Christian pilgrimage I clung to this verse and it is an active part I don't think I'd be exaggerating to say my everyday life. "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously without reproach." You come to a situation and it's troubling and it's discouraging and it's difficult, and just go to God, "God, give me wisdom." And here's what I mean by that, "God, let me see this the way You see it. Give me the capacity to see this as You see it. I don't want to just look at it through my emotions, I want to look at it through the lens of divine wisdom." So bring our supplications, our humble and earnest entreaties before the Lord.

Now as we look at this and we're, he, he begins by talking about suffering, then he's gonna talk about the sick, and I want to talk about what that word means in a moment. But, um, they were going through lots of difficult trials. Ah, ah, singularly persecutions

for their faith and on top of that, they got, ah, biting and devouring one another, they got, ah, hardened hearts one toward the other. They, they were not loving and helping brothers and sisters when they were hungry sometimes or when they needed a place to stay or clothes to wear. Ah, they were beginning to show partiality toward the rich, I guess thinking that would help them with their plight. So they had a lot of difficulties. There's a lot of struggling and suffering and James kinda brings his, these final admonitions in here, I think, to encourage them and put them on a better track.

So first of all, supplication, a humble and earnest entreaty to God. Now number 2, celebration. A, a, a celebratory, a praise in our worship. Now notice how he says it here in verse 13b, he gives the other side of the coin. First he said, "Is anyone suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." The scholars tells us this word for singing praises includes musical instruments along with singing, and so we notice that God is good to us. He balances our lives, as someone says, he gives us hours of suffering but he gives us days of singing. I really do believe if you'll think it through prayerfully, you have far far more to praise the Lord about than you have to complain about. There's stuff to complain about if we let ourselves complain, there are difficult seasons, but he gives us hours of suffering but he gives us days of singing.

I, I wonder if, if, do you really praise him for the good stuff? I mean, actually as far as history is concerned, Christians haven't had it as well as Christians in America the last few generations in, in any other time period. We've just done better. We've had more. We've had less persecution, less difficulties, less attacks against us on our faith, so that's for American Christians, not for Christians in places like, ah, certainly the, the Middle East or China, those kind of places. We have a lot to praise the Lord for even during our difficult seasons. We can go to the Lord with supplication – listen to me – go to the Lord with a supplication because we're hurting, and before you know it we'll end up in celebration. Supplication first, then celebration.

Back to the Psalm again, Psalm 57 and let's look at the last part of that Psalm as the Psalmist continues on. He says, verse 7 of Psalm 57, "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!" Now he's gone from his, his soul is among lions, there are those who are breathing for a fire against him, their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues a sharp sword. He said, "They've got a net hidden for me," and then immediately he's taken those burdens to God and things turn for his heart flips over into joy and he says, "O God, I'll sing praises to You. Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre!" This is verse 8, "I will awaken the dawn. I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens And Your truth to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth."

Um, I've mentioned this to you several times. It's just one of those things that I've mentioned this to you several times, that there are those moments we have, they're sort of reference points, they're markers, and we never, we just never get over them. They've affected us for good. Just something somebody said or an experience you had, and I remember reading an article on depression and it was a Christian author and, ah, he was

talking about depression. Well, I've tasted some of that so I was interested in what he had to say and he said, you know, most Christians read their Bibles and pray for about 3-4, maybe 5 minutes and they don't feel any better and then they quit and they say, "Well, I tried that so now I need to go to the doctor and get some pills." I'm not saying pills are always evil but I would encourage you as a child of God, don't, don't make it a lifestyle if you can. Look for ways for the Lord to, to grow you out of it and I, I, I don't know your plight and I'm not judging you, trust me, but I believe, ah, we're way way way too quick for a sedative effect instead of finding real victory over some things. And ah, anyway, the, in the article he said we'll spend 3 to maybe 5 minutes dealing with our depression, then we give up and we go try something else. He said have you ever tried going into your room, closing the door, opening your Bible, getting on your knees and staying there all day? Have you ever tried 24 hours and just say, "God, it's me and You and the word of God and I'm staying here until I get hope again. I'm staying here until I find joy again." He said have you ever tried a whole day with God? I don't know. I just never got over that. You know why? Because in all of my counseling I've never had anybody tell me they locked themselves away for a day with the word of God and an open Bible and, and, and in prayer and were still as discouraged as when they went in. I'm telling you, genuine supplication is gonna lead, is gonna end in glorious celebration when you take it to the Lord.

Well, the Bible says in Job 3:10, he gives songs in the night. In the midst of our suffering sometimes. Sometimes he doesn't remove it, he just gives you joy in the midst of it. And then Paul and Silas in Acts 16:25, they sang praises while they were in prison in the middle of the night. Praying and praising and singing were very important in the early church.

So here, here James says Christians when they suffer they ought to run to God with it and when God has blessed them and when the suffering and the supplication turns into celebration, they ought to celebrate God together. It's a part of our praying. Brother Tom, I think our song service is part of our prayer service, based on this verse it's a part of our prayer service. It's our prayers to God of joy and thanksgiving and joy over the rich doctrines we sing about here.

Now just some thoughts on praise right quick. First of all, our praise should be intelligent. I'm not really one on encouraging people to have some sort of experience where they mumble things to God that they don't understand. I don't judge brothers who do that in private but my point is when there's a whole Bible full of truths about God, when you exhaust all that the Bible says about him, then you can talk in something you don't understand. I mean, he, he took the trouble to give you all of this. He, you know what? God loves to hear his book spoken back to him and his book is full of him. So pray with understanding of who he is and there the Psalms come in, one of the Psalms over and over and over again will enlighten you as to the attributes and the character of God and you can praise him for them things, those things rather as you come across them.

Secondly, our praise should be based on the word of God. In Colossians 3:16 first Paul writes, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you," then praise him, "psalms, hymns

and spiritual songs." It should be biblical. We've really touched on that in the first one. That's a little amplification of it.

Then thirdly, our praise should be motivated by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that stirs us because he takes resident within us that stirs us with joy and a treasuring of the truths of God.

So bring those praises back to God according to the word of God, inspired by the Spirit of God, and not with mindless gibberish but with mind, minds full of understanding of the greatness and the glory and the wonders of our God.

Well, that's supplication, a humble and earnest entreaty. Then celebration in prayer. And now thirdly, let's talk about investigation. Sometimes we go to God to investigate a matter and I think that's what he's talking about and here's where you'll get into my viewpoint on this text which I, don't come argue with me about it, okay? I think I've, I've, I've got a lot of hours in this and there's no doubt there's probably some things that could be corrected and if you want to correct me, I, I'll receive that. But, um, he, he, he's talking about these people who are going through troubles and then he mentions something somewhat broad and I, I really wrestled with why the New Testament writers translated this way.

Look at verse 14. He says, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." So prayer is, is used, I'm convinced, of, as an instrument to investigate the condition of the heart. "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any hurtful way in me." Prayer is a tool to investigate the condition of the heart.

Now here we see this word that's translated "sick" in verse 14, "If anyone among or is anyone among you sick?" The word "sick" there is most often, not every time but most often translated as "weary or weak," spiritual weak or weak in conscience. One scholar points out that this word as you get, um, out of the Gospels and into the epistles and into the book of Acts, it's most often referred to as weakness. I'm convinced it means a spiritual weakness. I'm spiritually weary. I'm, I'm spiritually down. I'm spiritually discouraged. I think that's what he's getting at. Can't dogmatically say it doesn't mean a physical sickness but I think you'll see as we go through why I believe this so strongly.

So we need to interpret this verse in the flow of the context to try to understand it. So let's look at it one phrase at a time. So that original Greek word for "sick" if it does mean "weakness or weariness or downtrodden spiritually speaking," so it says, "Is there any among you who is discouraged or who is weak or is downtrodden?" Well, you don't call for the elder of the church, first of all, but it means that this is a real problem in your life and you're having to struggle and you feel like you're weak in your faith, then call for the elders of the church. Call, that's what it says in verse 14, call for the elders of the church.

Now let me give you a little side note on elders here. We hadn't touched on this in a long time. Ah, some of you will well remember when we established elders here a long long

time ago, that there was much much criticism about it among the Baptists not only of our area but of other areas. Got me blackballed from a school. It got a lot of things. But, ah, a few thoughts here. First of all, the singular word "elder" is used four times in the New Testament. The plural word "elders" is used 59 times. Now it's interesting, isn't it? So unless the New Testament is constantly referring to a conference or a big meeting of just pastors, that probably has some significance that the word "elder" is used one time and the plural form is used 59 times.

In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders, plural, in every church, singular. Plurality of elders in a single church. In Acts 20:17, Paul called the elders, plural, of the church, singular, church at Ephesus to him for counsel or to, to give them admonition. In Titus 1:5, Titus was instructed to appoint elders, plural, in every city, singular. Ah, matter of fact, I, I, I don't think there's much of a concept in the New Testament of multiple churches in one city, one geographic region considered to have one church and one meeting place for that church. Obviously it was within walking distance. Then all through Acts, elders are managing the affairs of the singular church in Jerusalem and there are more and more and more examples. So I'll get off of that and come back to my main outline now.

So if someone is downtrodden and discouraged and weak in faith, they're to call for the elders of the church. Now calling for the elders does not mean that this is primarily the ministry of the elders; that that's what they do 80% of the time. That's not what it's saying. It's not saying that this is a ministry that is a priority even of the elders. We know that preaching the word and teaching the word is clearly the priority but the elders should be available and should be ready to counsel and deal with someone if they're burdened and struggling with their spiritual walk, and certainly we are and all of us keep office hours and somebody's always 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is on call in case there's a need or a burden.

So what does it mean? I mean, I think it means in special cases, the elders should go and minister directly. Now again, this word most of the time, not every time, most of the time it's translated as a weakness or a weariness, and they are to go and pray for them, and it says in verse 14, anointing with oil, and I think it's A. T. Robertson, the Greek, Baptist Greek scholar, says having anointed them with oil, pray for them. In other words, this is your customary way of blessing them and I believe that's what this word "anointing" means here when it talks about anointing them with oil. I believe it means a general honor or a blessing. It's the reason why the woman poured the oil and perfume on Jesus' feet, she was blessing him and honoring him.

Ah, for example, um, ah, if you are a guest in someone's household, they would commonly place a little oil on your head. It was just a blessing and a welcome to say, "We honor you and we bless you and you're welcome here." Um, those who fasted, Jesus said, should not just make themselves look like they've been fasting, they should clean themselves up and anoint themselves with oil. I believe that's what it's saying. Um, now there's arguments that have some legitimacy that says, no, this is the anointing to heal the sick that we see primarily in the Gospels. You don't see a normative practice in the

epistles as chronology goes on of doing this. It's just not there. Ah, I don't think it's speaking of that.

Others say that the word "anointing" here and this is true, the word "anointing" here is not the Greek word for a spiritual anointing. It's not what you like when it says Jesus is the anointed one, this is not the word. The word for "anointing" here is a common Greek word you would use if you were rubbing oil on your horse. It's just a common word. It just means rubbing or applying oil and likely, ah, the idea usually, I should say, was when there was an ailment or a sickness. Oil was very commonly applied.

I don't believe it's a medical application here. It could be. I don't believe it is. I don't believe it means a special spiritual anointing. I believe it just means they blessed them with this customary anointing oil when they came. It was, it was, it's a token of the way the elders could say, "We're one with you and we, we identify with you and we're here to love you and help you. You're welcome." Alright? Now again, there's a cultural aspect but I believe that's where it's coming from.

Now the investigative part of this begins to come out as we look at verse 15, "and the prayer," not really of faith, "the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." Now the word "sick" is used again here in verse 15. Interestingly, the word for "sick" here in verse 15 is a very different word from the word used for "sick" in verse 14. That's interesting because while the word in verse 14 can be used for physical sickness but most often is used for just weariness or weakness, the weak, the word translated as "sick" in verse 15 is only used for weakness or weariness. It's only used one other time and that's in Hebrews 12:3 where it's clearly translated "growing weary." It's the only one other time this word is used in the New Testament. It literally can only mean to grow weary.

So someone comes, they're downtrodden, they're weary, they're hurting, they're spiritually lackluster, to say the, the, the least. They want some help. They go to the elders of the church and they are to pray a prayer offered in faith. Now stop there for just a moment. What does that mean, a prayer offered in faith? Brothers and sisters, New Testament faith is not you believing something hard enough that you make God act on your behalf. Can I say that again? New Testament faith and New Testament belief is not you believing something hard enough, putting enough vigor in it. Matter of fact, and I know there's some dear people of God that I love and I believe love Jesus who believe this and it's not a personal attack on them, okay, but I strongly disagree with that notion. Matter of fact, if you go to the bush of Africa where we went for like 11 years in a row to help plant churches, or you, you, you go to any Third World culture, you know what you'll find? You'll find in all their superstitions... Y'all have to forgive me, I am brain dead. This is my fifth time to preach in 10 days and I've done two conferences so I'm just brain dead. But anyway, some of my words don't come out just right sometime. But if any of those cultures I've, in India, any of those cultures, you will find the unrelenting chanting, ah, verbal incantations to their spirits, to their gods, to whatever because they believe if we're strong enough and if we're firm enough, we'll get what we're asking for. That is a mark of pagan superstition. It is not a mark of Christian faith.

So what is faith? Faith in the New Testament idea is understanding and accepting God's truth – now listen to me – and joying in it. Understanding and accepting God's will and embracing it with a genuine heart of, "Hallelujah, this is best." Husbands, love your wives, takes faith but God gives me the faith to say that's the best way to live as a husband. I joy in that. Wives, submit to your husbands in all things. That's difficult. Man, in today's world women are tacked on that every other breath they take, but a woman of God says, no, that's God's wisdom, that's God's will. I embrace that. God's given me the faith to say yes to that. And on and on and on we could go. Jesus Christ, having faith in Jesus Christ is, what? It means I believe the same things about Jesus that the Father believes about Jesus, that he is the only Savior, the only atoning sacrifice for my sins. You're agreeing with God. That's what faith is.

So the investigative part comes out here as the elders come together and open the word of God and discern what's the basis, what's the reason for your difficulty, this weakness, this, this weariness, this lackluster of your spirituality, and then you get the wisdom from the word of God and you say, "A-ha, we believe what the Bible says about this situation and we're gonna base our prayer on God's word for you."

Well, what is praying? Well, Jesus said when he gave us the model prayer sometimes called the Lord's prayer, "Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What's the point here? We want to be lined up with God. We want, we want, want earth to be like heaven. We want to be, agree with God. So the point is you find out God's will in this thing. You find out God's wisdom as best you can.

1 John 5:14 and 15 says and "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything He heareth us." No. "If we ask anything according to His will." Not according to my fervency and the depth of my belief but according to his will, he hears us, because you might be like the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh, some debate about exactly what that was but Paul entreated the Lord. I don't know if there's anybody on earth that's got more faith than Paul. "Lord, remove it! Lord, remove it! Lord, remove it!" And then the Lord showed Paul, "No, this is My will, Paul. This keeps you from exalting yourself. I have a purpose in this." And so Paul turned around and learned to embrace that that he asked to be removed once he saw God's will in it.

Now look, folks, if you don't know God's will and you don't know God's purposes, ask God to remove it. Plead with God to remove it. I'll plead with you. But when God's word tells us he's got a reason for it and a purpose, then our heart enabled by the Spirit of God is able to turn all the way around and embrace that which we might have asked to be removed.

Well, in this case, obviously there's a sin issue and it's, it, does it not flow perfectly in the flow of this context if you're weary, if you're weak, if you're struggling in your faith, there's probably a sin issue. There's probably unconfessed, unrepented of sin and that's where your elders can come in. It doesn't have to be elders, it could be brothers and

sisters all throughout the church. We're all to be doing this but this is probably a case that a guy's just having trouble getting through and so he wants to go to his church elders and so together they discern is there a sin issue.

Well, what does the text say, ah, in verse 15, the last part? "And if he has committed sins," through this investigative process, they find these sins, he confesses them, "they will be forgiven," and he's on his way to mending, becoming whole instead of staying in this spiritually sick, weakened, weary condition.

Now notice the flow here, verse 16, "Therefore" on the basis of this, flowing in context, "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed." So now we can understand in the perfect flow of the context that this prayer of faith in verse 15 means that through the word and through prayer the weak or weary person discerns God's will for them is to repent of sin and most likely they've come to the elders because it has a public connotation to it and God as they would confess their sin and repent of their sin, lifts their spirits and brings them out of that doldrums of discouragement and weariness. You can never be right with God, you can never have joy with unrepented of sins. Are some of you dry? Are some of you barren spiritually? Is your spiritual walk dusty right now and lackluster? Have you got sins you're not dealing with?

Brothers and sisters, listen to me, your, your whole Christian pilgrimage, you're either actively repenting or you're actively backsliding every moment of every day. Did you hear me? You're either actively repenting or you're actively backsliding every moment of every day. There, there, there is no just kind of neutral zone out there. "Well, I'm not repenting today but, praise God, I'm not sinning either." No, there's no such thing.

So this fits, I think, my interpretation very very well, ah, instead of viewing this only as a physical sickness because, by the way, if you view this as a physical sickness, two thoughts here. You come up with an approach to that physical sickness that has no real balanced or systematic weight biblically. It's kind of out here by itself. You've gotta be careful forming a, a, a normative practice for your life or for the church based on one area of Scripture. And secondly, um, I've been a part of a lot of these services where we anointed someone with oil and I'm not against doing it again, by the way. I, I would not in any way discourage you if you feel like you want to do that, but can I be real honest? They weren't healed. Many of them are in heaven right now. So either the text doesn't work or we're missing it somewhat. Now of course, our, our brothers and sisters who are out and out charismatics may tell us, "Well, you didn't have enough faith." But I believe if I could record all of the times they did this and the person didn't get healed, they'd have to say, "Well, we've seen it happen a lot too." Because I don't think that's what it's saying but if I asked you to raise your hands if you've experienced this, if you've been a Christian any time at all, you'd, you'd, you'd raise your hands and that is after you got something right with God that you hadn't gotten right with God, when you really repented of it and confessed it to God, was not your spirit lifted? Was not the spiritual weariness pushed away? Was not the spiritual doldrums kinda rolled out of the way? I think that's what the text is saying. He's saying, "Care for one another that way in the church, and if you have a special situation that's really gotten you down, then you can go to the elders of

the church and let them try to help you through it." And we would love to do that and help you through it.

Well, a summary, some summary thoughts now on investigative praying. Seek God's face as for the purpose of your difficulty. Is God pointing something out to you? And by the way, this certainly would include sickness. The Bible teaches that many are sick because of undealt with sin in their lives. So it can very well include sickness. It doesn't have to but it very well may include it. If God reveals that your sins based on the word of God and prayer, if God reveals that your sins are the reason for your weakness and weariness, then it requires repentance and maybe even public repentance, and certainly that would require calling the elders of the church. You can't come before the church without the blessing of church elders. We're not running a zoo around here.

So if the elders confer with your discernment, then they will pray the prayer of faith with you. That is, "Ah, we see. So we have faith that what God is telling you that this is because you have an area of your life that's not right with God and that's why you're having these difficulties and these struggles." And by the way, if you are a brother or sister with you, finds out there's a pattern, I'm not talking about something you're repenting of but a pattern of something in your life that's sinful and you're not humbled about it and you're not repentant about it, then you need to get it right whether you feel better or not, whether it lifts the weariness off of you or not.

You need to get right about it. But 9 times out of 10 it lifts us back up and God will heal us, and that word "heal," ah, verse 16, "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed," that word has the idea of making whole. It doesn't necessarily have to mean a physical healing. None of these terms are, are, are strong really at all in that direction of interpretation.

Then, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." And then the motivation, the last thing here, the rest of the chapter, the motivation he throws in here was Elijah, "Elijah was a man with like nature of ours, as ours and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain." Now, now the word, the, the, the original for "prayed earnestly" means he prayed in his praying. He prayed. You ever heard somebody say, "Well, they prayed when they prayed"? Well, I, I, I would like to amplify that out further. I think what it means is Elijah discerned the will of God so he prayed a prayer of faith. In other words, he prayed according to the will of God and, listen, he prayed with worshipful joy in his praying. As he asked God, "Don't let it rain! Don't let it rain for Your glory, Jehovah! Don't let it rain! Judge these people for their idolatry because I discern that's Your will. So I agree with You, God. With joyous worship I say, God, don't let it rain." Prayer of faith. The faith means in harmony with God's revealed will to Elijah.

Then they had the showdown at, um, at, um, wherever they had it. Mount Carmel. And, ah, the prophets of Baal put up their altar and God did not lick up their altar but God answered from heaven and devoured, ah, Elijah's altar and said, "Now who do you think serves the true God? Who's the true God, Jehovah or Baal?" And then he prayed again

that it would rain. With joyous worship he prays believing because God revealed to him that was God's will for it to rain and the rains came again.

Now when, when, when the Bible says here he prayed earnestly and then verse 18, he prayed again, I in no way want to suggest that you can pray too much but I believe there's some types of praying we pray too much and if, if you're drifting over into the carnal natural man's view of prayer, if I just say this enough, if I just repeat it enough maybe I can get God over on my side, brothers and sisters, is that not the dumbest thing in the world? He's a God of infinite wisdom. You can't improve on his ideas and he loves you more than you can love you. So if you're trying to twist God over to your opinion, you're asking God to do what's not best for me. God, function by my wisdom, not yours. No, the prayer of faith is, "Thank You, God, for showing me Your wisdom. I embrace it with worshipful joy," and I'm passionate praying about it. When I pray for our church to be a biblical model God might use for his glory to the nations of the world for the churches all over the world, I pray that passionately because I know that's God's will. I know the church is the centerpiece of God's purposes and of God's glory. I know he wants churches to be true to him, to help other churches to be true. You don't have to wonder about that so it just with joyous worship I embrace that and ask God for it and then you can be real confident you're gonna get it because it's God's idea anyway. Prayer is getting you, prayer of faith is getting your heart aligned with God's predetermined, pre-established, all-wise will and purpose for your life and that's what Elijah did.

Well, then he continues on, verse 19, my prayer, "if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back," turning back would imply they're not right with God which implies they're in a weary, weakened spiritual condition. It goes with the context well, does it not? Verse 20. "let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." It doesn't necessarily mean physical death but save him from ruining his life, ruining his, ruining his influence for God, and all sins metastasize if left undealt with and will end up multiplying into more sins.

So prayer is to be taken to God in earnest supplication when we're hurting. We ought to pray to God in celebration for the blessings and the good things he brings and even our suffering. If we go to God with it, he'll bring celebration out of it. And then there's investigative praying, "God, give me wisdom. Lord, show me what You're trying to teach me. What's behind this? Am I missing Your will somewhere and this is to get me to go somewhere else or see something else?" Well, how many times of all ridiculous illustrations, is it, is it, and if I give you this, you'll go home and sing it all night long, so I, I hate to give it to you. Is it Garth Brooks that has a song about unanswered prayer? Oh, some of you, just lighten up. Like, ah. That God's, God's greatest blessings sometimes is unanswered prayer? I, Pam and I just heard it on the radio. We turned on the radio and it was playing and we listened to it, and I said, "Well, I didn't know Garth Brooks sang Gospel music." But there's good truth in that song and aren't you, now think back, aren't you glad God didn't say yes to a lot of your requests but he showed you in wisdom and pretty soon in faith you could embrace his will instead of what you first wanted. Some of you, if you'd married her, boy, you'd been after you'd married him, it, it... God knew what

was best. Investigative praying helps us find the will of heaven and get in line with it and rejoice in it and if getting in line with God's will means we have to confess and repent of sin, it's all for his glory and for our good.