

Keys to Answered Prayer

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 5

James 5:14-15 10-18-2015

Summary: All the conditions elsewhere in Scripture that are placed on getting prayer answered are still in force even though James does not mention them. Those conditions can be summed up in four categories: relationship (trusting God, reverence for God, righteousness, and repentance), the reason for prayer (don't pray with James 4:3 type adulterous motives), resolve (earnestness and persistence) and the request itself (praying for the right thing). The Spirit intercedes for us by moving our hearts to pray in accordance with God's will. What James calls for with the elders here sets up a situation where all four of those are most likely to be fulfilled.

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James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. 13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you weak? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Introduction

How would your life be different if God answered more of your prayers? If God said *yes* to your prayers, say, three or four times more often than He does now, how would your life be different? The answer to that question is this: your life would be better. I say that because there are many, many times in Scripture when God teaches us how to get our prayers answered more. That is something God wants, and so it is something we should strive for. If more of your prayers were answered, that would mean that you are on the same page with God more often, and that would definitely be a good thing. (The one exception is if you pray for something that you know is sinful, and God punishes you by saying *yes* - like when Israel prayed for a king like all the other nations, and so God punished them by giving them Saul.) But aside from that, generally speaking, Scripture teaches that we ought to have the goal of getting more and more of our prayers answered. And so we are always excited when we come across a passage like the closing section of the book of James that teaches us principles about how to pray more effectively so that God says, “yes” more often.

Conditional or Unconditional?

I mentioned last time that this is a difficult and controversial passage. There are several reasons – probably the biggest is the fact that James seems to make such an absolute promise for healing.

14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up.

That sounds pretty absolute, doesn't it? Just anoint with oil and pray and he will be healed – just like that. So why are there sick people in every church, and there have been for 2000 years? Even in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, who performed miraculous healings, not everyone got healed.

2 Timothy 4:20 ...I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

Why did he leave him sick? Why not just have the elders come pray for him? When all those people were sick and dying in 1 Corinthians 11, why didn't Paul tell them, “You need to get the elders praying”? When Timothy had **frequent illnesses**, why did Paul tell him to use wine as medicine, rather than just anointing him with oil and praying for healing (1 Tim.5:23)? The classic answer of the faith healers when they can't heal someone is that it is the sick person's fault – they don't have enough faith. But when Epaphroditus was with Paul and got so sick that he almost died, instead of accusing him of lacking faith, Paul commanded us to honor men like him (Php.2:27-30). Disease, sickness, injury, weakness – all these things are part of this life, and every human being will finally succumb to the ultimate human weakness, which is death. So what are we to make of James' absolute-sounding promise?

Some have suggested that James is referring here only to spiritual weakness, not physical sickness. We saw last week that the wording James uses won't allow for that. But even if it did, that still wouldn't solve the problem. Many times the elders have prayed for people who are spiritually struggling, and they haven't recovered. So that's not really a guarantee either.

Conditions Remain Even When Unmentioned

Here is the first thing we need to remember: if the Bible places a condition on a promise, then that condition always applies even if it is not mentioned in the passage you are looking at. For example, if one verse says that the condition for having your sins forgiven is you must place your faith in Jesus Christ, and then there is another passage that promises forgiveness of sins but doesn't mention faith, that doesn't mean faith is no longer required. Very often the writer will simply assume that you already know the conditions, and so he doesn't mention them. But the condition is still in place. So in Matthew 21 Jesus said:

Matthew 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

So what's the condition? Faith. You will receive what you ask for in prayer if you believe.

John 14:14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

No mention of faith or believing. Does that mean faith is no longer required, and the new condition is praying in His name? No, faith is still required; Jesus just didn't mention it in that particular instance.

Matthew 7:7 Ask and it will be given to you

There He doesn't mention faith or praying in His name. He doesn't mention any condition. Does that mean it's unconditional, and every prayer will be answered yes automatically? No, the conditions still remain even though they aren't mentioned.

So what are the conditions for answered prayer in Scripture? What is it that James is assuming we already know? Well, he is assuming we read chapter 1 of his book, where faith is required. And he is assuming we read chapter 4, where if you pray with the wrong motives God won't listen. And James is going to mention some more conditions here in chapter 5. I found about a dozen different conditions for answered prayer in Scripture, but for the sake of remembering, I think we can group them under four main headings. And all four are mentioned in James.

Relationship

The first one has to do with your relationship with God.

A Relationship of Trust

James 1:6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea ... 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man

Doubt and double mindedness make it less likely that God will answer your prayer.

Matthew 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

Matthew 17:19 Then the disciples ... asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith."

The most fundamental ingredient to having a close relationship with God is to trust Him.

Righteousness

Another aspect of relationship is right there in verse 16 of our passage.

16 ... the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

We must have a relationship with God marked by obedience. When we rebel against Him or disobey Him, that hinders the closeness of our relationship with Him, which makes Him less likely to answer our prayers.

Proverbs 28:9 If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.

God will not listen to our prayers while we are rebelling against Him – especially if that disobedience is in the area of failing to love people. 1 Peter 3:7 says that if you are not living with your wife in an understanding way, that will hinder your prayers.

Proverbs 21:13 If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.

So disobedience hinders prayer, but when we obey God and please Him, He is more likely to say *yes* to our prayers.

1 John 3:21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

So the more disobedient we are, the more we take the power out of our prayer life. But the more righteous we are, the more powerful our prayers become.

And that is not to say that we somehow earn answers to prayer by being righteous. God doesn't owe us anything when we are righteous, because even our righteousness comes as a gift from Him. So it is not that we are earning anything, it's just that it is like any other relationship – the closer the relationship, the more influence you have with the person. And the more you improve your relationship with God, and the more closely you walk with Him, the more responsive He is to your prayers.

John 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Reverence

Another aspect of having a right relationship with God is reverence and fear. The reason Jesus' prayers were heard was because of His reverent attitude toward the Father (Heb 5:7).

Repentance

So what if those things aren't in place? What if your faith is weak, or you have fallen into some terrible sin, or your attitude is bad? Should you shrink back from prayer and shy away from God until you get your act together? No, because one prayer God always hears, always listens to, always accepts, always answers, and always responds to in a positive way is the prayer of genuine confession and repentance. Look at the connection between verses 15 and 16. In verse 15 it says that when the elders come and pray for this sick person, ***if he has sinned, he will be forgiven***. James says *if* because not all sickness is a result of sin in your life. Maybe it's a result of sin; maybe it isn't, but if it is, that sin will now be forgiven.

“Wait a minute – in order for him to be forgiven, doesn't the sick person have to confess his sin and repent?”

Yes – again, James is assuming we already know that. And that is clear from the conclusion he draws in verse 16.

15 ...If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Confess so that you may be healed. So if there is sin in your life, don't shy away from God. Just confess the sin and repent, then God will forgive, and now your relationship with Him is restored and you can pray.

Psalm 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

It doesn't say, “If I had committed a sin the Lord would not have listened.” If that were the case we could never pray. What makes God stop listening is when my heart is still clinging to that sin. I'm not really repenting of it. I want to leave a crack in the door in case I decide I want to return to it once in a while. That is when God stops listening.

Search Your Heart for Sin

So when you get sick, search your heart for sin. Sickness isn't always because of sin, but sometimes it is. In Corinth, many of them were sick and even died because they took communion without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:29-30). During the time when David was refusing to confess his sin, it took a toll on his body.

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

In John 5 there was a guy who had been disabled for 38 years, and Jesus healed him, and then He told the guy, **Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you**" (John 5:14). So if your relationship with God isn't what it should be, or if you have fallen into sin, don't shy away from prayer. That's when you need to pray the most. God wants you to go to Him when you're in trouble, and you are never in more trouble than when you are wandering away from Him. No sheep needs the shepherd more than a lost sheep.

Reason

So that is the first factor that determines the power of your prayers – relationship - the strength of your relationship with God. The second category has to do with the reason for your prayers – your motive. Why are you asking for this thing you are asking for? If your motive is to find joy in life through something besides God, God will not answer that prayer.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 Adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

If you are so in love with the world that you look to earthly things for your joy instead of looking to God alone for joy, and you pray and ask God to supply you with those earthly things that you think you have to have in order to be happy, then your prayer is really just a request asking God to help you commit adultery against Him, and He won't answer that prayer. For a prayer to be answered, it has to be for the purpose of seeking greater closeness with God, or achieving God's purposes for His glory. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come." There is no reason for us to ever pray for anything that isn't for the purposes of His kingdom.

Resolve (Earnestness)

The next category is resolve, or earnestness. How much passion and fervency is there behind the prayer? Look at verse 18. Elijah's prayers were powerful because **he prayed earnestly**. Jesus told a couple of different parables about persistence in prayer – Luke 11 and Luke 18 (the persistent widow, and the neighbor who kept banging on the door). God responds to earnestness and urgency and persistence. He loves the sound of banging on the door. God wants to see, and He wants you to see how serious you really are about this request.

Isaiah 62:6 You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, 7 and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem

Give yourself no rest, and God no rest.

Request

So your relationship with God is a factor. Your reason for the prayer is a factor. The level of resolve and fervency and persistence is a factor. And then the final category is the request itself – are you praying for the right thing? For God to answer prayer, it must be according to His will.

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.

In the Lord's prayer Jesus taught us that before we request anything from God in prayer we begin with this request: **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Multiple Possibilities within God's Will

"But if God is only going to say *yes* if it's His will, what's the point of praying? Won't He just do His will anyway?"

One thing we learn from Jesus' prayer in the garden is that from the perspective of time, there are multiple different scenarios that could possibly fit into God's will. He said, "Father, *if it is possible*, grant this request." That says to me that some things are possible to fit into God's perfect plan, and others are not. Obviously, if you pray and ask God to cancel the Second Coming, there is no way He will say *yes* to that prayer. It wouldn't matter how much faith you had, how righteous you were, how good your motives were, how passionate your prayers were – the answer would be *no* because it would be impossible to fit that request into God's perfect plan. But in the case of Hezekiah's sickness, evidently there were two possible outcomes that could possibly fit into God's plan.

2 Kings 20:1 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD...4 Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: 5 "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. ... 6 I will add fifteen years to your life.

Evidently either scenario was possible to fit into God's will - him dying right away or him living 15 more years. That is an example of how prayer can have a real actual impact on the outcome, but God's will remains the same. It seems that it was God's will for Hezekiah to die if he didn't pray, and for him to live 15 more years if he did pray. Either one was possible, and so which one happened depended on whether or not Hezekiah prayed.

So when we pray, we need to pray according to God's will. And the reason for that is very simple – whatever God wills is what's best. And why would God answer a prayer if what we are asking for isn't what's best? Why would God answer your prayer if what you are asking for isn't good enough and He wants to give you something better? In John 11 Martha wanted Jesus to heal her brother. But He didn't, because He wanted to do something better, namely, let Lazarus die and then raise him from the dead. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul asked God to remove his thorn in the flesh, and God said *no* because He wanted to give Paul something better, namely, extra grace and strength made perfect through Paul's weakness (2 Cor 12:7-9).

I read about a guy who was volunteering to package up some things that his church was sending off to some missionaries, and as he was driving away, he realized he misplaced his glasses. He prayed and asked God to help them find the glasses. He went back to the church and looked all over and couldn't find them. Months later they got a communication from the missionaries thinking them profusely for the gifts – especially for the glasses that were in the box. The missionary's glasses had been destroyed and he couldn't function without them, and he had no way of replacing them. And this prescription happened to be just right for him. I am sure the guy read that letter and praised God for saying *no* to his prayer. God had something much better in mind than just giving him his glasses back. You've heard stories of people who pray, "God, don't let me miss my flight," and they miss it, and then the plane crashes. Aren't you glad you don't have to worry about God saying *yes* when we pray for something that wouldn't be best? Elijah prayed for God to kill him, but God wanted Elijah to do some more great things and then go to heaven in a whirlwind – that beats dying.

God Does His Will through Prayers

So when you hear all that, you might think, *since I don't know what's best, why should I pray for things?* Why not just say, "God, do Your thing"? He knows what is best, I don't, so why should I talk to Him about what I think He should do? Here's why: Because there are a lot of things that God wants to do, but He only wants to do them through the prayers of His people.

And I think there are several reasons for that. For one thing, it shows everyone that what happened was not a random fluke. When it is a response to prayer, it makes it more obvious that it is from God. And it reminds us that He is our source of everything we need. If God just did everything He wants to do apart from prayer, we would start to look at that as just the natural order of things and would not have nearly as much awareness of our dependence on Him.

And so very often God decides to do something, but He holds off on doing it until we pray, so that we can be reminded that He is the source. He did that with Hezekiah. God wanted to heal Hezekiah, but He held off on doing it until Hezekiah prayed. And the implication is that if Hezekiah had not prayed, it wouldn't have happened. We are going to see the same thing with Elijah. God was going to end the drought, but He held off on doing so until Elijah prayed seven times.

Another reason why God holds off on doing His will until we pray for it is this: it helps us love Him more. When we ask God for things, and He grants them, that fuels our love for Him because it makes it easier for us to feel His favor. Responding to prayer is one of the primary ways God reveals His favor for a person. When God wanted to show everyone how much He favored Moses, He did it by saying, "now only heal Miriam if Moses prays for her" (Nm 12). When God wanted to show everyone how much He favored Job, He did it by only forgiving the three friends if Job prayed for them.

Job 42:8 My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.

If God wants to forgive them, why not just forgive them? Why would God only forgive them if Job prayed for them? Because that was God's way of showing His favor on Job. The reason God wants you to pray for things is because God wants to do those things, but He wants to do them in a way that will show His favor on you.

I believe that is the whole reason why Jesus intercedes for us. Have you ever wondered about that? If the will of God the Father is the same as the will of God the Son, and they are in exactly the same page, why would one of them have to speak to the other one on our behalf? Is it that God the Father is reluctant to forgive, and Jesus has to talk Him into it? No. The Father is eager to forgive us, but he holds off on doing it until Jesus asks for it so that every blessing God ever gives us can be given to us in response to the request of His Son, in order to show how much He favors His Son.

How Do You Know What to Pray for?

So all of this is still under the heading of "Request." If you want your prayers to be answered, what you request matters. You need to make sure you are asking for the right thing. So how do you know what that is? In cases where it's not something that is revealed in the Bible, like, "Should I pray that I will find my glasses, or should I pray that some needy person who needs them will find them?" If I hit a traffic jam, I don't want to spend my energy praying for it to break up if God has some marvelous purpose for it. How am I supposed to know what will work out best?

Pray for What You Desire

With regard to those kinds of things, we should just simply ask for the thing that we desire the most. As long as our motives are pure, and we are seeking to glorify God and to increase our love for Him, and to enjoy Him through His gifts, that is fine to ask for whatever gifts we want at that moment - as long as we also say, with Jesus, "**Nevertheless your will be done, not mine.**" And not just say that as a formula,

but really mean it. To really have a heart attitude that treasures God's will above our own preferences because we actually trust Him more than we trust ourselves.

Pray for God to Reveal His Will

So when you don't know for sure what would be best, go ahead and pray for what you desire. But I would like to take it a step further than that. Twice in Scripture we are commanded to pray in the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:18, Jude 1:20). What does that mean? It's hard to say with absolute certainty, but I do think that we have a clue in Romans 8:26.

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Let's take a minute to think that verse through. What does it mean that the Spirit intercedes for us? Does that mean that the Holy Spirit is up in heaven translating our prayers to conform to God's will? So if the guy says, "God, please help me find my glasses," the Spirit chimes in and says, "Strike that, Father. Instead, let the missionary get the glasses"? I don't think so. I don't think it is saying that the Holy Spirit translates our prayer into something different than what we prayed. And one reason I say that is because of the next verse – look at verse 27.

Romans 8:27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

It doesn't sound to me like this intercession is taking place up in heaven. It sounds like it is something taking place inside our heart, because the thing that the Holy Spirit is doing, God sees it as He **searches our hearts**. So the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in such a way that God's will is found in our hearts. So I think what it is saying is that when I don't know what to pray, I can ask the Holy Spirit for help, and He will work inside my heart to help me discover God's will. The Holy Spirit will show me what I should pray and put it in my heart to pray for that thing.

That's a great promise, isn't it? And let me assure you, that promise is for every believer. Some people want to restrict this verse to only apply to people with the gift of tongues. But there is nothing in the context whatsoever that would point toward the gift of tongues, and everything in this context and all the surrounding verses, apply to all believers. Scripture is clear that not all believers have the gift of tongues (1 Cor 12:30). God doesn't want every Christian speaking in tongues, but this verse is for every Christian. So it's not tongues.

I think the point of the groaning is that it is more of a feeling than a reasoned line of argument. The Holy Spirit just gives you a sense that you should pray for a certain thing, and you might not necessarily be able to put into words exactly why that's the best thing to pray for.

Now, we need to be careful with that, because people get all kinds of feelings and impulses that aren't from God. Just because you have a strong impulse in a certain direction doesn't mean it's from God. If you have an impulse that would violate a biblical principle or contradict biblical wisdom, that is for sure not from God. But if I am just walking down the street minding my own business and all of a sudden I have a strong urge to pray for a particular individual, there is a good chance that's from the Holy Spirit. Praying for that individual at that moment does not violate any biblical principle, it doesn't violate biblical wisdom, there's nothing foolish about it, but I can't put into words any particular argument why it's better to pray for that person at that moment than to pray for someone else. That may very well be that groaning from the Holy Spirit, working in me to will a certain way so that I will pray for something that God wants to do.

I'll give you an example. When my father was a teenager, he was a fake Christian. He had everyone at church fooled, but he knew in his heart that he was not saved. So one night my grandfather woke up in the middle of the night with the strong sense that he should pray and ask God to spare his son. He had no idea why, he didn't know what was going on, he just had a sense that he should pray for his son. So he got out of bed, got on his knees, and begged God to show mercy to his son. It turned out what was

happening at that moment was that my dad was getting hit by a semi going 50 miles an hour on Ogden Avenue in the Chicago area and knocked 150 feet up the highway. Then the truck jackknifed and tipped over and fell right on top of him. They said it was a miracle that he wasn't killed on impact. And when the trailer tipped over on top of him, it happened that he was right in between the cab and the trailer. A few feet in either direction and he would have been crushed. I am convinced that if my grandpa had not gotten out of bed and prayed, my dad would have died that night, and I would not be in existence. But it was in God's heart to grant Dad not 15 extra years but more like 60 extra years, but like with Hezekiah, God wanted to do it only as an answer to prayer, and so God saw to it that my grandpa did pray.

When the Holy Spirit moves your heart to request the right thing, that is when you will get your prayers answered.

We got a letter a couple weeks ago from a radio listener who had been the victim of identity theft. Someone stole her purse and ran up charges on her credit card. They spent hours on the phone with the bank trying to get the charges reversed. The bank wouldn't budge, and finally in exasperation they gave up. A couple weeks later, the husband was moved to pray about it again, but this time in a different way. Here's what he said: "This time I said to the Lord, 'I will call the bank one more time and if it be Your will that the money be refunded we will gladly send it straight to [a ministry that they support].' My wife was in full agreement, and you can guess the rest. I have never talked to a more agreeable bank representative on the phone, especially when making the unusual request for them to send ME money. God is good and the \$358.19 was refunded, and now is being used for the Lord's work."

I think we could add a lot of power to our prayers if we would spend more time at the beginning just saying, "God, what do You want me to pray for in the situation?" So when you are suffering, instead of always having the exact same generic prayer – "God, please bring relief from the suffering. Nevertheless Your will not mine be done" - maybe you seek God first and ask Him to show you what He wants you to pray for. Maybe for one trial you will have the sense that you should really pray for relief. And in another trial, you'll really have the sense that you should pray hard for it to teach you humility, or strengthen your faith, or whatever. Again, if you don't have a strong sense that God is directing in one way or the other, it's perfectly fine to pray for whatever you desire. But it certainly wouldn't hurt to ask God to guide you in your praying, and to move your heart to desire the same kinds of things that He is desiring in that situation.

God's Provision for Answered Prayer

So when James says that when the elders anoint the sick person and pray for him, he will be healed, even though that sounds unconditional by itself, the conditions for answered prayer in the rest of the book still stand. How effective will the elders' prayers be? It depends on relationship, reason, resolve, and request. It depends on the strength of their relationship with God – intimacy, reverence, and trust. It depends on their reason for praying – do they have good motives? It depends on the intensity of the resolve – how passionate are they, and how persistent? And it depends on what they request – are they praying for the right thing, in line with the will of God?

Now for some of you, you might hear all that and think, "You've just ripped the heart out of this passage. You've taken what sounds like a really strong promise, and made it dependent on so many different conditions that the chances of the person he is being healed are one in one million. So what sounded like an amazing promise at first now doesn't sound like much of a promise at all."

I believe it is a special promise – different from average, ordinary prayer for healing. Those four criteria for answered prayer are still in place, but I believe this is a situation where God is providing for those criteria to be met.

The one praying must have a close relationship with God, so he calls the elders of the church. Ideally, they should be the ones setting the example for a close relationship with God.

Next, reason - the ones praying should have a good motive. Again, if the elders are models of spiritual maturity as they should be, their motives are most likely going to be good motives.

Third, resolve. Since the elders are the ones who devote their full time to the ministry of the word in prayer, he would expect them to be the most likely to be earnest and persistent in their prayer.

And finally, the request – praying for the right thing. And I think that is where this phrase **the prayer of faith** in verse 15 comes in. Normally when the Bible talks about praying in faith, it just means that when you pray, you believe that He is powerful and good and you trust Him to do what's best. Most of the time in Scripture, that is what it means to pray in faith. But as I have studied this passage, I think there are some significant indications that this is something a little different. We don't have time right now to get into those reasons but I think there is good reason to believe that **the prayer of faith** that James mentions here is a special situation where the Holy Spirit has interceded and has given the elders an especially high degree of certainty that God has decided to heal this person.

I'll plan on explaining that in much more detail next time, but for now, if that is accurate, then you can see how God is making provision in this situation for the prayer to be answered. He is making a provision where each of the four criteria for answered prayer is most likely to be in place. And so the chances of the sick person being healed are actually much higher than in a normal, everyday prayer for healing.

Conclusion

God is eager to answer your prayers. He doesn't want to answer them in a way that would bring harm, so He set the criteria in place to teach us how to pray in such a way that He can say *yes* to our prayer and still do what is best for us. And so all four of these conditions are exceedingly precious to us, because they show God's love for us. Strive for the closest relationship with God that you can possibly attain. Trust Him, fear Him, love Him, reverence Him, obey Him, and when you sin, repent and seek forgiveness from Him. Secondly, pray with the right reason. If you ask for healing or anything else, make sure it is for the purpose of a closer relationship with God, and for the sake of His glory. Third, pray with resolve. Pray your heart out, and don't give up. And finally, seek God's will, so that your desires are the same as His desires, and your prayers become a tool in His hands to bring about His magnificent works.

Benediction: Psalm 37:3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Roll your way onto the Lord; trust in him and he will act.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Of the aspects of relationship with God that were mentioned (trust, reverence, and righteousness/obedience) which is strongest in your life right now? Why do you think that area is so strong? Which is weakest?
- 2) Of all the things going on in your life right now, if God were to make His will crystal clear in one area so you knew exactly how He wants you to pray, which area or situation would you want it to be?
- 3) If you were to call the elders to come pray for some physical or spiritual problem in your life, which problem would you pick?