

SERIES: "24-LIVING FOR CHRIST"

MESSAGE: WHEN YOU PRAY

TEXT: JAMES 5:13-20

DATE: MARCH 2, 2008

## When You Pray **James 5:13-20**

A. We're concluding a 2-month series on the book of James called, "24: *Living for Christ Around the Clock.*"

1. The Christian life is more than coming to church on Sunday or going to a Home Group one night a week....It's a 24/7, all-day-every-day, way-of-life.
2. So in this series, we've picked up on the idea of the television show "24" about the United States' Central Terrorism Unit....Each season of the show covers one very intense day for Agent Jack Bauer and his team.
3. "24" covers an entire, 24-hour-day -- minute-by-minute -- what would your life look like if it were revealed in that detail.
4. Well we decided to follow a few of you around this week with hidden video cameras and we have put together a montage of the things we saw you doing, last Monday through Friday ...
5. We didn't really do that ... but couldn't you look around and make sure that there is no one passed out on the floor close to you.
6. What would that be like if everyone could see everything we do 24/7 ... the reality is "God can" ... remember "God First".

B. James has talked to us about facing trials, serving God, taming our tongue, including God in our plans, practicing patience when life gets intense...24/7.

1. In these final verses of the book, James builds an interesting case regarding which types of people in the world need to pray....It makes sense really, that this book about spiritual maturity climaxes with a passage about prayer.
2. "*Prayer is a conversation between two people who love each other.*" – Rosalyn Rinker
3. So... who needs prayer?
4. Listen to what James wrote. James 5:13-16

## **God First ... When You're in Trouble (v.13a)**

- A. The Greek word James uses here for trouble suggests trouble that comes through no fault of your own: It's the trouble that comes from outside circumstances....
1. James used the same word back in verse 10 that's translated "suffering"....
  2. The prophets were patient in the face of suffering--trouble--trouble from outsiders....
- B. When we hurt, God wants to know about it.
1. Well, He already knows, but He wants us to talk with Him about it.
  2. Nothing is too big or too small....A lady asked her preacher one time if it was appropriate to pray to God about little things.
    - a. He said, "*Ma'am, to Almighty God, which of your problems do you think is big?*"
    - b. He's seen it all before...He's heard it all before...He knows all about it anyway.
- C. Jesus was undeniably compassionate toward everybody He came into contact with...
1. He healed lepers, raised a widow's son from the dead, cast demons out of one seriously disturbed man.
  2. He also took the time to hug a child and feed a hungry crowd and go to lunch with a crooked, selfish, short tax collector....When you're in trouble, God cares.
  3. When you're up against the wall, Jesus is right there with you.
- D. We put God first, when we allow Him to help us in our troubles.

***Prayer sometimes changes my circumstances; Prayer always changes me.***

## **God First ... When You're Happy (v.13b)**

- A. Have you ever been so happy, you just felt like singing and really didn't care who heard you?
- B. We're often so compartmentalized in our thinking, we don't think about prayer and singing going hand in hand....But when we sing words like,
1. "*Indescribable, uncontainable, you placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name. You are amazing God.*"

2. *“Here I am humbled by your majesty, covered by your grace so free, knowing I’m a sinful man, covered by the blood of the lamb.”*

C. Sure we sing those words, but those are prayers:

1. Who do you think we’re talking to? ...
2. Whether we’re singing the words to God or speaking them with our heads bowed and eyes closed, we need to take time to offer thanks and praise.
3. People who are happy--people who are blessed--should be praising God.

D. We put God first, when we celebrate our joys with him.

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### **God First ... When You’re Sick (v.14-15)**

A. Now this is a tough one that causes confusion and frustration.

1. What is up with the oil?
2. Why don’t all who pray get well?

B. What is the purpose behind the anointing that James refers to?

1. It’s crucial to remember that the main purpose and emphasis of this teaching is PRAYER.
  - a. In the Greek the main verb is Pray
  - b. The secondary participle is anoint.
2. As we study the Greek text it becomes apparent that James was not specifically taking about a ceremonial type of anointing here.
  - a. He used Greek word “Aleipho” – “to smear or rub”  
Rubbing oil on a wound or sore spot was common medicine for the day. It cooled the skin and may have reduced fever.
  - b. Did not use “chrio” – word for ceremonial anointing
3. It seems as if James is prescribing both prayer and medicine.

C. Why aren’t all people healed?

1. I have seen God do amazing things with tumors.
  - a. I have seen them completely disappear days before surgery.
  - b. I have seen them come back as huge masses of benign fatty tissue.

- c. I have seen them removed as serious life-threatening malignant masses and people survive cancer for years.
    - d. I have seen cancer take people's lives after friends, family and the church pray diligently.
  - 2. So why does God say that the prayer of faith makes sick people well, and yet we have all known of one time or another when God didn't heal.
  - 3. I have spent a lot of time contemplating and studying so that I could give you an answer to that today – and I have discovered the answer.
    - a. I DON'T KNOW
    - b. In Isaiah 55:9, "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*"
    - c. I have no idea why both of my parents survived cancer and my wife's parents both died with cancer.
    - d. Somebody wrote, "*The same faith that enables some to escape enables others to endure. The same faith that delivers some from death enables others to die.*"
  - 4. I do know this ...
    - a. James taught us back in chapter four: "*We ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'*" ...
    - b. The Apostle John said in *1 John 5:14-15*, "*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.*"
    - c. We ask, according to His what? His will.
- D. Jesus Himself prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified, "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ... Yet not my will, but Your will be done.*"
  - 1. C.S. Lewis wrote this, concerning Jesus' prayer:
 

*"In Gethsemane, the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times that a certain cup might pass from him. It did not. After that, the idea that prayer is recommended to us as a sort of gimmick may be dismissed."*

2. What's he saying? -- Not even Jesus got everything He wanted when He prayed.
3. But Jesus had the courage to pray, "*Not my will, but Your will be done!*"

E. We put God first, when trust Him to heal us when we are sick whether he does it miraculously through prayer, or with the combination of elders praying and laying hands on us, or with the combination of known medical techniques.

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### **God First ... When You're Sinning (v.16)**

A. James Dobson from Focus on the Family told one time about a little boy who called down to his dad for a drink of water after being tucked into bed.

His dad was used to stalling tactics like this, so he said: "*No son, it's time to go to sleep.*" ... The boy called down again, "*Please Daddy, bring me a drink of water!*"

*"No, go to sleep."* ... "*But Daddy, I'm really thirsty! Please bring me a drink!*"

Dad said, "*No, and if you ask me again, I'm going to have to come up there and spank you.*" ... It was quiet for a few minutes, and the boy called back down:

*"Daddy, on your way up to spank me, would you bring me a drink of water?"*

1. Sometimes our prayers are like that little boy asking for a drink....
  2. We know we're in trouble--we know we've been disobedient--but we still cry out for help.
- B. James says that we needs to put God first when we realize that we are sinning and that means we prayerfully do what He asks us to do.
1. He tells us to confess our sins to one another. This is not about coming to a priest or standing in front of the church and coming clean with everything you have ever done.
    - a. When Jesus died the vale was torn so that we could go directly to God.

- b. But we need to be authentic and vulnerable and sincere with people who can help us take new steps in the right direction.
  - 2. I do whenever possible we need to confess to the very people who have been hurt by our sin.
    - a. Private sins need to be confessed privately. We don't mind hearing someone else bear their soul, just like we don't mind slowing down and staring at an accident on the highway.
    - b. But nobody wants to be the someone.
- C. We need the same level of authenticity we share with friends we trust when we talk to God as well.
  - 1. Spiritual healing comes when we're honest about our failures and strive to become more like Christ....
  - 2. Confession really is good for the soul.
- D. We put God first, when we realize that we are sinners and there is no answer to our sin debt without him.

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<b>God First ... When You're Concerned (v.19-20)</b>
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- A. James finishes his letter by acknowledging that the people are probably as concerned for some of their friends as he is for them.
  - 1. If you have ever really been burdened about someone that had strayed away from their faith, undoubtedly you prayed for them.
  - 2. When we see people we care about on a collision course with disaster, we need to ...

**Pray for them      Encourage them      Confront them**

- B. Do you see there that James said if you do that you will cover a multitude of sins?
  - 1. He is not talking about your sins, but theirs because relationship with God can be renewed.
  - 2. There may still be consequences of those sinful actions, but the sins can be forgiven and the person restored.
- C. We put God first, when we invite him into our concerns for others.

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## **Bottom Line**

Let's go back to the original question ... who should pray?

Sounds like everyone ... those who are in trouble, or happy, or sick, or sinning, or concerned for someone's eternity. I think all of us fit in all those categories at different times in our life.

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