

Prayerful Till Christ Comes

James 5:12-18

Pastor John Miller

I want to read, as I normally do, the entire text, even though it's lengthy.

Starting in verse 12 to verse 18, James says, "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes,' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment...."—or "you sin with your speech." "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses..."—or ("faults"—"...to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 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 land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."

If ever a man was qualified to speak on the subject of prayer, that man is James, the author of this book. You ask, "Well, why is that?" Because James and church tradition in history said that his nickname was "Old Camel knees." He had camel knees not just because he was old. You say, "Well, I have camel knees. I'm old." But he had camel knees or calloused knees because he prayed so much. So James was famous for his old, worn-out knees because he spent so much time on them praying.

It's not the first time in this book that James has talked about prayer. In James 1:5, he said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." So he introduced us to prayer. If you need wisdom for life, ask God, and God will give you that wisdom. Then in James 4:2-3, he said, "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss." You ask for the wrong reasons, therefore God has not given you what you've asked for. So we talked about prayer, asking for the right motives for the glory of God and in the will of God.

But now at the conclusion of his letter, beginning in James 5:12—specifically in verse 13—James introduces again the subject of prayer. I want you to notice that seven times in six verses, the word "pray," "prayed" or "prayer" appears. In verse 13, he mentions "pray"; in verse 14, he says "pray"; in verse 15, he has the word "prayer"; in verse 16, we have both the words "pray" and "prayer"; in verse 17, we have, "He prayed earnestly"; and then in verse 18 we have, "He prayed again." Seven times in six verses we find the words "pray," "prayed" or "prayer."

A little note of encouragement: When you read in your Bible, look for repetition. Look for key words that are repeated over and over. It will give you the idea of what the topic is in that text.

You say, "Well, I can't really identify with 'Old Camel Knees.' I have difficulty praying." I think

that most saints will admit that the one area of spiritual discipline—and I would admit it in my own life—that poses the area of greatest challenge is prayer. When people ask me, “How can we pray for you?” I say, “Pray that I will pray. Pray for my prayer life.” I find it easy to be busy and easy to study and easy to preach and teach the Bible, but I find it so difficult to simply get on my knees and to pray and intercede and talk to God.

You may say, “I identify with Peter more.” Peter was told, with the other James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” Jesus went into the garden deeper, and when He came back to them, what were they doing? Sleeping. They had the gift of sleep. It seemed that they were always sleeping. Jesus had to wake them up and say, “Could you not watch with Me for even one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

An entire chapter in Luke 18 is devoted to the subject of prayer. Jesus taught in parables on prayer. Luke 18:1 opens with Jesus saying, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” We should always pray and not lose heart or faint. We faint because we don’t pray. I believe that if we actually prayed, we would not faint.

Now remember that James has just exhorted us in verses 7-11. I want to put in context our text. In verses 7-11, he exhorted us to be patient until Jesus Christ comes again. Jesus Christ is coming again. Do you believe that? He promised to return. He will always keep His promises. I believe that the stage is set for the rapture of the church, for the tribulation and for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I’m looking with expectation for His coming. I need to be patient, but I also need to be prayerful. You might say that verses 7-11 are “Be patient until He comes,” and then verses 12-18 are “Be prayerful until He comes.” Patience comes, and then prayerful follows. We need to be prayerful as we wait on God. Someone said, “Like a car without fuel, life without prayer grinds to a halt.” I like that. It’s like you’ve run out of gas if you don’t have prayer in your spiritual life.

In our text, James calls us to pray. But the question is: When should we pray? That’s the answer that James gives us. He gives us four areas of our lives or four circumstances or times in which we should be prayerful. The first is in suffering, when you’re sad. The second is in joy, when you’re glad. The third is in sickness, when you’ve been afflicted physically. The fourth is when you’re in spiritual darkness, when the nation has apostatized and turned away from God.

It reminds me of Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.” The only thing in the Bible that we are told to not cease is prayer. He didn’t say to preach without ceasing. He said, “Pray without ceasing,” so it’s a continual work in the life of the believer. We are to live in the atmosphere of prayer.

Now let’s go back and look over this text. The first area of our life in which we are to pray is when we are suffering or when we are going through a time of sorrow or affliction. Look at verses 12-13. “But above all...”—that means “most importantly” or “it’s the primary thing”—“... brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.” James is talking

about swearing by God or swearing on earth or taking a foolish, frivolous oath. "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment." He means be a man or woman of your word.

What does James mean in verse 12, "Do not swear"? The word "swear" there would include, but does not primarily mean, profanity. The Bible is very clear that profanity should not be part of the Christian's life. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." What happens is that when we suffer, we sometimes start to swear, or we curse, or we blame God or we get angry at God.

But in the context, the word actually means "a frivolous oath." So it's primarily the forbidding of taking an oath. But this doesn't apply when you go into a courtroom and you're to witness or testify and you put your hand on a Bible and that you swear to "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God," and you say, "I do."

By the way, what hypocrisy: We don't believe in God, we've rejected the Bible as God's Word, but we are swearing on the Bible. Because we're such liars, we've got to swear. You know, some people say, "I swear to God!" Is it because when they aren't swearing to God, they're not telling the truth? People say, "No. I really mean it this time. Let me tell you the truth." Does that mean they didn't tell the truth before? Why do we have to preface it with "Look, I'm going to be truthful with you." Does that mean they were lying up to this point? Just say "Yes"; just say "No." Be truthful in your speech. Don't use your speech for swearing.

So James is not forbidding a courtroom oath taking. He's talking about frivolous oaths in which we swear by heaven or by earth. Someone said that he's actually saying, "Let your speech be with reverence and truthfulness." In other words, when you suffer, don't swear, but turn to God in prayer. Remember that: When you suffer, don't swear, but turn to God in prayer.

Notice verse 13: "Is anyone among your suffering? Let him pray." The word "suffering" or "afflicted" here means any kind of "trouble" or "misfortune" or "hard experiences." In the book of Job, it says, "Man was born for adversity. As the sparks fly upward, so is man born for trouble."

Have you ever noticed that life is full of sorrow and woe and trouble and difficulties? I love that old song, Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Life is difficult and hard, and as a Christian, it's no different. We get sick. We get afflicted. We suffer harm and loss. We get in fender-benders. We get cancer. We suffer. We die. Just like anyone else. Life for the believer can be even doubly hard, because we have the opposition of the unbelieving world. They ridicule our faith. They mock Christianity. They put down the Word of God. They ostracize us. But Jesus said that they did it to Him, and they would do it to us.

So the word "affliction" means any kind of trouble. Maybe your misfortune is emotional. Maybe you're in an emotional downtime. Maybe it's a sad time. Maybe you're discouraged. Maybe you're struggling in your marriage and you're so miserable. Maybe it's your children; they've caused you grief or pain. Maybe it's physical. Maybe it's social. Maybe it's financial; maybe

you've lost your job, or you've had your salary cut back or you have great debt that you can't pay and you're suffering right now. Maybe you're suffering for your faith or being persecuted on the job or in the home.

Whatever you're going through in adversity, you're to pray. The Bible says in Philippians 4:6 in the Living Bible, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything." I love this translation when it comes to this verse. Tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank Him for His answers. And if you do this, "The peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds." This is a prescription for peace: You don't worry; you pray. You turn to God.

I love the book of 2 Kings in the Old Testament when King Hezekiah, the good king, was being opposed by the king of Assyria, King Sennacherib. Wicked King Sennacherib sent a letter to King Hezekiah of Israel. It was a blasphemous letter saying, "God will not take care of you. God will not protect you. God will not watch over you. We're going to attack you and destroy you, and God will not help you." Then Hezekiah took this letter and walked into the temple. (Isaiah was the prophet at the time.) He actually laid the letter on the temple altar and said, "God, have You read this? Do You know that they are saying You're not going to help us, and we can't trust in You? What are You going to do about it, God? We're Your people. We just want to remind You that we belong to You. You made us Your promises. So, God, You have a big problem right here. You haven't read it; I'll just leave it with You." Then Hezekiah walked out of the temple, leaving the letter on the altar.

That is a beautiful picture of what the Bible tells us to do. The Bible says, "Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you." God actually cares about you. All your hurts. All your pains. All your sorrows. All your fears. All the struggles that you're going through. God cares about you. He wants you to cast them on Him. He wants to bear your burdens. The psalmist said, "Roll thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." God will keep you.

So the first category of prayer—and this is the one that is probably the most easy for us, because when we're afflicted, it's easy to cry out to God.

The second circumstance in which we should pray is at the end of verse 13: "Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms." So when you are sad, pray; when you are cheerful, sing a psalm. The Christian life is not all sorrow. It's not all doom and gloom. The believer in Jesus has great joy in the Lord. The word "cheerful" means to be "merry" and to "be in a good spirit." Another translation has, "Is anyone happy?" or "Is anyone in a happy mood?" I like that. Then what you should do is sing a song and worship God.

Now it's easy to forget God when things are going good. When things are going bad, "We really need to pray. We really need to seek God." I've seen it in my pastoral ministry over the years. People come to church when things are bad. When things are going good, they forget God. The key is maintaining a constant, dependence and reliance and focus on God in every circumstance of your life. When things are going good, keep your focus on God. When things are going bad, keep your focus on God. In all the circumstances of life, you keep your eyes set

upon God, and cast your cares on Him.

There is a danger that we forget God. So James says in verse 13, “Let him sing psalms.” That phrase “sing psalms” in the Greek literally means to “touch or strike a chord.” Some of the musicians on the stage, as we were worshipping God, had guitars. They were plucking the strings of the guitar. They were playing chords. So it’s like your heart is a guitar, and the Holy Spirit is plucking the strings. So you have the joy of the Lord, you’re praising God and the Holy Spirit is plucking the strings of your heart.

This is consistent with what we read in Ephesians 5:18-20 where Paul says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation...”—or “debauchery”—“...but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord.” I always know when I’m full of the Holy Spirit, because then I’m singing. Not good, but I’m singing. You say, “Well, I don’t know how to sing.” Well then make a “joyful noise unto the Lord.” Groan unto the Lord if you have to. So when the Holy Spirit is filling your heart, He’s plucking the strings. Your heart is an instrument, and you’re singing to God. You’re worshipping God.

This is the point: When we sing, we should make our song a prayer. I love the worship songs that are prayers to God. I need You. I need You. Every hour I need You. We’re praying that to God. If you sing as a form of prayer and worship God, there’s power there. God can work mightily in your heart as you worship Him.

Psalms 34:1 says, “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” So in bad times and glad times, we should pray.

Then there is a third time when we should pray. In verses 14 to the first part of verse 16, it says that we should pray in times of sickness. These are circumstances that are common to our prayer. Notice verse 14: “Is anyone among you sick?” So he says in verse 13, “Is any afflicted,” and he says in verse 13, “Is any cheerful?” Now he says, “Is anyone among you sick?”

Christians do go through affliction, and now we see that Christians do get sick. Even though you’re a child of God, you may get sick. What do you do when that happens? Verse 14: “Let him call on the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will...”—or “shall”—“...save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if...”—so hypothetical situation—“he has committed sins...”—and maybe the sickness is the result of his sins—“...he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

I want to make this very clear: Christians do get sick. Why? I say this with emphasis, because in the church today, it’s not uncommon to find people saying that if you’re truly a Christian and really spiritual, then you won’t be sick. You’ll never get sick. You’ll never have a cold. You’ll have health and wealth. That’s not taught in the Bible. They’re twisting Scripture to appeal to your flesh and to your fallen nature.

Why do Christians get sick? Because we live in a fallen world in an unredeemed body. Sickness came into the world because of original sin. I want to make a very important doctrinal, theological distinction here. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Old Testament, that brought sin, sorrow, suffering and death into the world. In an ultimate sense, suffering is the product of sin. There is suffering and sickness in the world because of man's original sin.

We also sin individually. We sin personally. Not only did Adam bring sin into the world, along with sickness and death, but we sin. As a result, sometimes because of our own sin we suffer and sometimes we're sick. But let me make it very, very clear that not all personal sin or individual sin results in sickness.

Jesus came upon a man who was blind from the time he was born. His disciples asked a penetrating question. They asked Jesus, "Master, who sinned?" They assumed that sin was bringing the sickness into this man's life. Was it him or his parents? This is interesting, because he was born blind; how could he sin? The Jews believed in pre-natal sins; getting too wild in your mother's womb, or something. So you come out blind. They believed that if you were sick, it was always a direct result of your sin.

Don't let anyone ever tell you that. You could be sick just because you live in a fallen world. You could be sick simply because someone sneezed on you. It wasn't your fault. Then you're sick. But there are times that we sin that brings sickness into the world.

Jesus said about the man born blind that it was caused neither by him nor his parents' sin. He said it came so that "I might work the works of Him Who sent Me." And he healed the man, and God was glorified.

There was the case of Job. He hadn't sinned, but he was sick.

There was the case of Paul. He hadn't sinned, but he had a thorn in his flesh.

The Bible says that Timothy was instructed to drink a little wine for his stomach, and his often infirmities. I want to make this clear that that "little wine" there is for medicinal purposes. So don't get too excited; okay? "Oh, praise God! I love this sermon. A little wine. I feel good. Praise Jesus!" No; wine was for medicinal purposes. It was a medicine that they used. By the way, every wino I've ever run into can quote that verse. They all have it memorized. The one verse in the Bible that they know.

Then there's Epaphroditus in Philippians 2. He was sick and almost died, and Paul never rebuked him for his sickness or said that he had a lack of faith.

I want to look at the steps that a sick person is supposed to take. Notice in verse 14, the sick person is the one who calls for the elders. What do they do? They "pray over him." By the way, the word "elders" is plural. So I think it's good to have multiple pastors or elders to pray for you, so that not just one gets the credit. Then they, "Anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord." This is a mystery, even to me, and I've studied this for years. Why oil? The healing is not in the

oil; okay? So if there's no oil, don't worry about it. People say, "Well, what kind of oil does it have to be?" I don't know. Valvoline 10-30? Take it out of the motor. Get the dipstick and fling it on them or something. "Is that Jerusalem oil?" I don't know. It doesn't matter.

What we do know is that oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It could be—we don't know; James doesn't say—that it's just the idea of saying, "God's Spirit come upon you." It also may be—and I don't reject this interpretation, but I can't say if it's true—that it's actually saying, "Go to the doctor," because oil was used for medical purposes. They would drink wine for their stomach problems, and they would anoint themselves with oil, because it would be like lotion on dry skin. It would be soothing and healing.

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? He came upon the man who was beaten and bloody and bruised, and he poured oil into his wound. So in the ancient world, it was a common medical practice.

If that's true—and I think it's significant—it's actually saying that faith and prayer for healing is not incompatible with going to the doctor and taking medicine. You got that? Some people say, "I'm a Christian; I don't go to doctors. I don't take medicine." God gives us doctors and medicine to bring healing. And ultimately God is the One Who heals. Doctors can do their thing, and you can take medication, but God is the One Who heals. We should always pray and turn to the Lord and trust Him, and then if you can, go to the doctor.

There are those who say they don't pray, but they go to a doctor. Not a good idea. Then there are those who pray, but don't go to a doctor. Not a good idea. God can use both to bring about the healing.

But how do they pray? "In the name of the Lord." It means in His authority and for His glory and according to His will.

And how should they pray? Verse 15, they should pray in faith. "And the prayer of faith..." It's asking God, in faith, believing, that He will heal. I believe that God still heals the sick today. We pray for sick people. God heals and sometimes God doesn't heal. I've prayed and seen God heal people. I've prayed for myself, and God hasn't healed and God has healed. I've prayed for some people, and they get sicker. That's the last time they've come to me for prayer. "Pastor Miller, I'll leave you. I'm going to go to someone over here. The last time you prayed for me, I got sicker, so I'm going to try another pastor here."

God doesn't always heal. God's ways are not our ways. God has a purpose and a plan. Maybe God is trying to teach you something or humble you or keep you in dependence on Him or in prayer. I don't know. But you need to trust Him with your sickness or with your ailment. So you pray in faith.

Now notice the promise. This is what gets people confused, because the promise seems that if you're sick, God will always heal you. Notice verse 15: "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick." I believe that "save the sick" means that He will heal them. "And the Lord will raise him

up.” But notice in the context: “And if he has committed sins, He will be forgiven.” So in the context, He likely is talking about a specific sickness that is a result of specific sin. And the promise needs to be applied to that. So when you repent of that sin, you pray to be healed, and God promises to heal you.

Now again—and let me get back to my theological foundation—there are those who teach that when you are born again, that healing is *carte blanche* or part and parcel of salvation; it's automatic and in the atonement. I disagree. They say, “Well, what about Isaiah 53:5? ‘By His stripes we are healed.’” The whole passage in Isaiah is about salvation. It's about spiritual healing. And the very same passage is quoted by Peter in his New Testament epistles where he clearly says that we are healed from sin and its salvation. So some take the healing in Isaiah 53 and say that it's guaranteed for all Christians. If that were true, then the problem is our faith, and that we don't believe God's promises and claim what is ours in Christ.

Now the concept of believing God for what is already yours in Christ is Biblical but not specifically when it comes to healing. Ultimately you will get sick and die of something. Live long enough, and something will go wrong with your body; right? All the old people say, “Amen!”

You notice that when you get together with some of your really old friends, it's like an “organ recital.” “What's broken on you this week? What's not working with you?” You know you're getting old when you get together with friends and you talk about what doesn't work in your body anymore. It's crazy. Sooner or later your heart will give out, or something will happen and you'll die. “It is appointed to everyone once to die and after this, the judgment.”

So don't be fooled by these Word-faith teachers who say that it's always God's will to heal all Christians all the time. Not so. Many great saints of God have been sick, and God uses it for His purpose and for His glory. We have to pray according to His will, then we know He hears us. In 1 John 5:14, it says, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

There is one last category of when we pray, and that is when we are in dark times, when the nation has turned away from God spiritually, or when it's a time of spiritual darkness. That is the background for this Elijah passage. Notice it begins at the end of verse 16: “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” or “accomplishes much.” So he's saying that an “effective, fervent,” which means “red hot” prayer has great effect; it is accomplishing a lot.

Now Elijah is mentioned in verse 17 as an example and as an encouragement to pray. So technically—and I want to say this for the Bible students out there—he leaves off the circumstances of affliction, being merry and sickness to just encourage us with an example that “effectual, fervent prayer” has great power. He gives us the example of Elijah in verses 17-18. “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 land for three years and six months.” So Elijah prayed, and he prayed fervently, and God stopped the rain from coming for three-and-a-half years.

But notice verse 18: “And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” at the end of the three-and-a-half years. Don’t misinterpret this and say, “God is telling us that we can control the weather.” You can pray about the weather, but God controls the weather. If He wants there to be a drought, they’ll be a drought. If He wants it to rain, it’ll rain. If He wants it to flood, it’ll flood. God’s in control. It’s okay to pray, but maybe you’re praying for rain and someone else is praying for sunshine. Which prayer is God going to answer? It’s like the Super Bowl. A person praying on each side for their team. How’s God going to answer their prayers? What he is saying here is that prayer can accomplish a lot. Prayer is powerful, verse 16.

Then notice the person who prayed. I want to break this down. In verse 17, he “was a man with a nature like ours.” That means that Elijah was a human just like you. You think that this great prophet of God, this great Elijah, could call fire down from heaven. An amazing man of power and prayer. But Elijah was a man just like you. One translation has that “Elijah put his pants on one leg at a time, just like we do.” I like that.

Notice that Elijah prayed. Literally in the Greek it says, “He prayed with prayer,” or “He really prayed.” The idea is conveying that when he prayed, he actually was praying. Have you ever heard people pray, and they’re just words? Their heart’s not engaged? They can say the words, but they really don’t mean them.

At the beginning of Elijah’s ministry, he went into the court of Ahab. During the time of Elijah, Ahab was the wicked king of Israel. Jezebel was the queen. Not good. You don’t want to name your daughter Jezebel, by the way. Not a good idea. She was a wicked woman. Ahab and Jezebel had introduced idolatry and Baal worship to the nation of Israel. The whole nation had turned away from Jehovah, and they were worshipping Baal, this false god.

So God called Elijah and He gave him a promise. He told him to go to the king and tell him that “There will be dew nor rain, but according to My word.” Elijah went into Ahab’s court and said, “Ahab, God sent me to tell you that because of your sin—because you’ve turned away from God, and you’ve led the nation into idolatry—God will stay the heavens, and there won’t be rain but according to His word.” Then Elijah walked out.

Baal was the god who controlled the weather. Archeologists have found little Baal statues with lightning bolts in their hands. So God hit them where it counted; right in their god. They weren’t going to have any rain. That was a judgment God said would come upon that nation, if they turned away from Him.

For three-and-a-half years there was no rain. Then the contest on Mount Carmel. (I’m making a long story short.) God called Elijah and said, “Bring the prophets of Baal to the top of Mount Carmel.” Elijah said, “Whatever God answers by fire, He is the true and living God.” They called on Baal from morning to evening, and there was no answer. No Baal to hear them. So then Elijah built an altar, poured water on it and called on God in a simple prayer. Fire came down and consumed the altar. Elijah said, “Slay the prophets of Baal.” The people turned back

to the Lord, and Elijah went up higher on Mount Carmel and started to pray for rain to return. So we see in verse 17 that he prayed and the rain stopped. Then in verse 18, he prayed, and rain started once again.

Let me give you the principles of Elijah's prayer. When he prayed, in verse 18, the second time, he was pleading the promises of God. God had made a specific promise that he would send rain. You want to be effective when you pray? Pray with your Bible open; find a promise of God, and plead that promise. Make sure it's for you, make sure you're keeping the condition, and you can claim that promise and pray according to God's Word and God will answer.

Secondly, it was a definite prayer; he was praying for rain.

Then, thirdly, it was a humble prayer. He cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. So he came humbly before God. The Bible says, "The proud God knows afar off, but those who are humble, He will hear."

Fourthly, it was an expectant prayer. He said to his servant, "Go and look toward the sea." If you know the story, you know that when Elijah prayed the second time and he has his head between his knees praying, he told his servant, "Go look over the ocean and see if you see any clouds coming." So he went and then came back and told Elijah, "No; nothing."

Now I would have stooped right there. "Okay, it's not God's will. He said 'No' so just forget it." But Jesus said, "Ask and you shall have. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you." Be persistent.

Then Elijah said to his servant, "Go look again." So the servant ran down and looked out over the cliff toward the Mediterranean to the west, saw no clouds, came back and said, "No cloud." Then the prophet said, "Go look again." He ran down the third time and looked again out over the cliff. No cloud. He came back and said—I'm paraphrasing—"Dude prophet Elijah, no clouds. Okay? Can we go and get lunch or something? God said, 'No.'" Elijah said, "No. Go again."

Seven times he went again. On the seventh time, the servant came back, and Elijah asked, "Did you see anything?" He said, "I just saw a little, tiny cloud way out on the horizon about the size of a man's hand. It really ain't nothin'. Can we go to lunch now?" The prophet said, "No. Go tell Ahab the king that the rain's coming." Then God answered Elijah's prayer. His prayer was expectant, and his prayer was persistent.

We give up too soon. What if after the fifth time when the servant said, "No cloud," Elijah would have said, "Okay. Forget it"? What about after the sixth time of "No cloud"? "Okay. Forget it." What about after the seventh time of "No cloud"? "Okay. Forget it."

Are you praying for a loved one or a family member who needs Jesus? Don't stop. As long as God gives you breath and they're still alive, you keep praying for that loved one; that they come to know Jesus Christ. God answers prayer.

Notice in verse 18 that “The heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” God answers prayer. “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

So when do we pray? Sad times, glad times, sick times and dark times.

John Newton, the man who wrote the song Amazing Grace, wrote:

Thou art coming to a King,

Large petitions with thee bring;

For His grace and power are such,

None can ever ask too much.

“The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Let's not stop praying for the United States of America. I've never seen our nation more divided. Politicians are not going to save us. Political activism isn't the solution to our problems. The solution is prayer.

When we have a school shooting, why doesn't the whole nation get on their faces and cry out to God? Why don't they realize that we're reaping what we've sown? We've sown to the wind, so we're reaping to the whirlwind. We've systematically pushed God out of every facet of our culture. Now we're reaping what we've sown.

But we're not earnest. We're not desperate. We're not calling upon God. It starts with us. The Bible says, “If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land.” The only hope for America is Christians' salt and light of the earth; who pray and get on their knees. We are the people of God, so we need to pray.