

“Prayers That Heal the Sick and Alter the Weather”

// James 5:13–20 // The Book of James #10¹

Introduction

In the 1850s, an economic crisis roiled America, causing a lot of panic. The crisis was felt most acutely in New York City, our nation’s economic center. Feeling the pressure of the moment, a Christian businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier felt compelled to call members of his church together on Wednesdays, during the lunch hour, 12–1, just to pray.

At that first gathering only six people showed up, but, man, they got after it. They prayed for God to pour out his power on our country and for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit.

Six months later that weekly prayer gathering had ballooned from six to more than 10,000 gathering in locations all across Manhattan. Non-believers even showed up; they’d get prayed over and many came to Christ.

Within two years’ time over a MILLION people in our country had become followers of Christ out of this movement. It was one of our

¹ Sources: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God’s Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Bryan Loritts, “[It Happens After Prayer](#),” sermon preached at Fellowship Memphis, December 1, 2013; Tim Keller, “Healing and Prayer,” sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, April 14, 1996; Joby Martin, “Prayer and Anointing,” sermon preached at The Church of Eleven22 on Sept. 10, 2023; “[Seven Times in Your Life When You Must Pray](#),” Allen Parr. Douglas Moo, *The letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 238–242. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of James and the Epistles of John*, Vol. 14, Baker New Testament Commentary, 175–176. D. W. Burdick, “James,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 204. <http://www.gci.org/series/healing4>. And others as noted throughout.

country’s most significant spiritual awakenings, and it all happened because one ordinary, Jesus-loving businessman felt compelled to pray.

History would label what happened in the 1850s as “the Layman’s Prayer Revival,” and it illustrates a profound biblical truth—that God’s greatest movements have always been in response to normal people praying. It’s like John Wesley, pioneer of our country’s First Great Awakening, always said: “In the end we’ll see that God did nothing significant on earth except as an answer to prayer!”

And pointing to that truth is how James ends his book. James 5 in your Bibles, if you don’t already have it open in front of you.

I ended last week telling you that when you are in pain, or suffering, or frustrated by what is or is not going on around you, to look in three directions. Do you remember what they are? Backward (to the stories of God’s faithfulness in the past); forward (to Jesus’ soon return); and this week, upward (to God in prayer).

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Oh, my goodness, this passage raises SO. MANY. QUESTIONS. It sounds so promising. Healing from sickness? Assured forgiveness of sins? You are like, “Sign me up for that.” But then there’s all kinds of questions, too, like, Is this passage *guaranteeing healing if you pray with faith?* And, *what’s up with the anointing oil?* New Testament

scholars consider this one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament, so let's start by asking a few questions:

1. What Is the "Prayer of Faith?"

- That phrase, "prayer of faith," is very unique. It's not used anywhere else in the Bible.²
- Some people think it refers to a prayer characterized by this incredible certainty—where you pray for something with no doubts that God is going to give you what you are asking, you screw up all your certainty and demand something from God.
 - I've heard, for example, some who believed they had a healing ministry of prayer say to a sick person, *"Now, we're going to pray for healing, but I need you to know that when you ask, you can't have any doubts. And if you doubt at all that he's going to give it, he won't."*
- Which, I want to say, is not only theologically wrong, it's traumatic, because if the healing doesn't come, the only possible explanation is, "One of our 'faiths' is deficient." And the prayer healer always assumes it's not theirs, so it must be yours.
- Praying with absolute certainty about what is going to happen is not what "prayer of faith" means, and here's how I know: We have an example of a prayer of faith in Mark 9:21: A father with a demon-possessed boy comes to Jesus and says, "Please heal my son," to which Jesus responds, "Do you have faith?" And the father says, "I believe... help my unbelief." In other words—*Sort of? I mean, I do and I don't. I have faith, I think. But I don't know that I have enough faith, and I wish I had more. Honestly, I'm not*

sure if you'll do this or not. But I have nowhere else to turn. So, please help me. To which Jesus says, "You aren't absolutely certain about what I'm going to do, which is why you won't get the miracle!" Is that what he says? No; Jesus says, "That's faith" and then heals his son.

- So when someone says, "You can't doubt at all or you won't get the answer," I say, "Here's a guy who doubted plenty and still got the miracle."
- **Similarly, many think that the "prayer of faith" means to slip into some kind of command mode.** In fact, a lot of people who say they have the ministry of prayer and healing don't really talk to God at all—they talk to the person or to the sickness. They'll say, "I rebuke this sickness; I command you to leave this person's body." To be clear, that's not prayer.
 - It's true that Jesus and some of the apostles did it that way, but that's not what James is talking about here, and the New Testament never tells Christians to go around healing like that.
- Plus, you should note here that James, in talking about this prayer of faith, is NOT referring to some **special prayer ministry**.
 - These are regular old elders that do the praying, not special people in the church with the gift of healing.

So what is the "prayer of faith?", you say. It's very simple: It's just a request for healing.

- **You may not be sure of what God is doing to do, but** you believe that God is real and he's good and that he's listening. I love how Jen Wilkin says it: "The prayer of faith is a faith not in a particular outcome, but in the God of all outcomes."

² The term for prayer here, *euche*, appears two other times in the New Testament. But in both of those instances (Acts 18:18 and 21:23), it is usually translated "vow." "Prayer of faith," or *euche tes pisteos*, only appears here in James. <https://biblehub.com/greek/2171.htm>, accessed 9/20/23.

2. Does the “Prayer of Faith” Promise Healing?

- Some people see that phrase in **vs. 15**, “...the prayer of faith will save the sick...” and they read it like a divine guarantee. If you pray just right, healing will come.
- **But it can’t mean that. Here’s how we know that:** the Apostle Paul prayed prayers of healing that went unanswered.
 - **For example, In 1 Timothy, Paul** said he had to leave one of his most trusted companions, Trophimus, recovering in Miletus from sickness.
 - In the same letter he recommended that Timothy take some medicine to treat his illness—he didn’t just tell him to pray in faith.
 - Furthermore, we know that Paul prayed earnestly for healing from his own physical afflictions and was turned down.
- **Even Jesus had unanswered prayer:** In the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, “Father, if it’s possible, let this cup pass from me.” What did he mean by, “if it’s possible”? He meant, “if there’s some other way to do this.”
 - Jesus prayed with perfect faith—of course. What Jesus lacked was perfect knowledge.
 - You see, when Jesus was on earth, he limited his access to divine knowledge. For example, in Matthew 24 Jesus said he didn’t know the day or hour of his future return; only the Father in heaven knew that. And people say, “Well, if Jesus was God, how could God not know something?” It’s because in the incarnation, Jesus limited his access to that knowledge.
 - So, here’s the point: When Jesus prayed, his faith and motives were perfect, but his knowledge was imperfect. And God the Father turned down his request because he knew more than Jesus at this moment and had a better plan.

- **The same thing happens with us.** I love how **Tim Keller explains this:** If God came to you tonight and said, “I want you to know that from now on, anything you ask for sincerely, with good motives, in complete faith, I will give it to you without condition.” If God actually said that to you, if you have any brains in your head at all, you would stop praying immediately and never pray again. And your friends, if they had brains in their head, would come to you and say, “Please never pray for me again.” **Why? How many times have you sincerely sought after something you felt sure was good for you, only to find out later it was quite destructive?**
 - Raise your hand—something you prayed for but now you are like, “Thank you God for NOT answering that prayer!”
 - All of us, as we age, learn the truth of that great 90s worship song, “*I thank God for unanswered prayer.*”

Well then, you ask, if vs. 15 is not a guarantee, why does James phrase it as, “The prayer of faith will save the sick”?

- A few reasons: First, it’s because God often does grant healing in response to our prayers of faith.
- Furthermore, there’s also a sense in which God does guarantee the healing, even if it’s not in the exact way or according to the timetable we wanted. In the end, Jesus’ wounds heal all our diseases and he wipes away every tear. Even if God doesn’t heal us on earth, he will in eternity—he hears every prayer.
- Most importantly, however, James has a little bit more in mind here than just physical healing.
- Go with me here. We’re going to go deep into this passage and I need you to put on your big-boy theological pants for a moment. You ready?
- There’s an interesting play on words in this verse. **Vs. 15**—this is one of those times you need to be looking at your Bibles, not

me— in vs. 15 when James talks about the sick being healed, he uses the word "saved." *"The Lord will 'save' the one who is sick."* That's the Greek word "sozei," which is usually used for salvation, like soul salvation.

- And then in **vs. 16**, when James talks about us confessing our sins, he says we'll be **healed**. **"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."**
 - So, think with me here: The sick person is saved, but the sinner is healed. Ordinarily, we would think of it the other way around, right?
 - James is pointing to a deep connection between sickness and sin.
 - Ultimately, the reason we get sick is because of the curse of sin. I don't mean necessarily specific sins we have committed, just sin in general brought sickness to the earth. It was part of the curse. And much less important than healing from our temporary sickness is finding ultimate healing in salvation. Less important than your body being healed is your soul being saved, and if God uses the sickness to bring salvation to your soul, that's an even more full experience of healing.
 - Which is why he connects healing here to forgiveness of sins, which is our next question.

3. What Connection Does Confessing Our Sins Have with Healing?

- James here clearly makes a connection between sin and sickness. Sometimes, our sickness is caused directly by our sin. But let me say this very clearly: Not every sickness is—in fact, most sicknesses are not.
 - Sickness is part and parcel of what it means to live in a broken and fallen world, and it affects the righteous and unrighteous

alike, and it's unwise for us to rush to say that someone is suffering because of something they did or that we must be suffering because of something we did. That's exactly what Job's friends were criticized for and why God called them "stupid" (his words, not mine).

- So, we should never just assume that—that someone's sickness, or our sickness, is because of sin.
- **That said, sometimes God uses sickness to get our attention**, and James wants us to be aware of that.
- **You say, "Well, how am I supposed to know if my sickness is because of a sin that I have committed?"** I don't have a silver bullet answer for that, but I know that the Holy Spirit will reveal that to you if you ask him. I mean, he's not trying to hide it from you. He's trying to get your attention. So he will reveal it to you clearly either through prayer or your study of the Word or through the counsel of other believers. Believe me, if he wants you to know something, he'll get the message to you. I'm not talking about you obsessing or going dumpster-diving through your distant memories trying to figure out something you did and forgot about. Trust that if the Holy Spirit wants to get your attention about something, he will.

Sometimes, God may just be trying to strike at the core of your pride. I don't know about you, but when I get sick, I start to see life much more clearly. Even if it's just a bad cold, I start to see myself as more weak, fragile, and vulnerable than I usually do. When you're healthy, you feel like you'll live forever: I'm in charge of my life and I can do anything! And it's not until I get sick that I realize what a fragile, vulnerable, weak creature I actually am. My wife likes to make fun of me for being helpless "man-sick," but lying there on my back I get a glimpse of my true spiritual condition. And she's like, "What's wrong

with you?” And I’m like, “Just leave me alone and let me contemplate the meaning of life.”

OK, final question here from this section:

4. What’s Up with the ‘Anointing Oil?’

- **Vs. 14** tells us that as we pray, we should “anoint [the sick person] with oil in the name of the Lord.” What is that all about?
- Some say it just means medicine,³ because throughout the Bible oil is a type of medicine. Do you remember in the parable of the Good Samaritan what the Samaritan did with the man whom he’d found beaten? Luke says he poured oil and wine on him. Oil and wine. No, he wasn’t making him into a salad. Oil was for the soothing of the body and wine was an antiseptic.
- So, that is partially what James has in view here, but that can’t be everything James means.
 - For one, there were lots of other medicines besides oil in James’ day, and if James is only referring to medicine here he would probably have said something different than just “oil.”
 - Plus, if all James is referring to here is medicine, you have to ask why he expects the elders to administer it. Why not a doctor? I don’t know about you, but when I’m sick I don’t want the elders rubbing me down with their favorite blend of essential oils; I want a doctor.
 - So, it seems clear James has in mind something beyond just medicine.
- Oil throughout the Bible is a symbol of the Spirit coming on someone for a particular purpose. When David was called to be

king, he was anointed with oil. When new priests were commissioned, they were anointed with oil. This was a sign of the Holy Spirit’s power coming on them for a particular purpose.

James probably has in mind here both uses of oil—both medicinal and symbolic. James is the master of the *double entendre*. He’s saying:

- **Prayer should never be done at the expense of natural means of healing.**
- In the Bible, the miraculous doesn’t have to replace the natural; it supplements and completes it.
 - Paul told Timothy to take medicine for his upset stomach, not just to confess his sins and claim some healing promise.
 - Luke was a doctor when he started to travel with Paul, and all indications are that Luke continued that practice as he journeyed.
 - When I pray for God to heal someone, I’ll often ask for God to do that in natural or supernatural ways. The hands of the doctor can be the answer to the prayer!
- And sometimes—not all the time, but sometimes—when I am praying for healing, if they ask for it, I will anoint someone with oil as a reminder of the Holy Spirit’s power at work in their heart, soul, and body.
- And let me just make that clear that this is not some kind of requirement. I don’t want some of you feeling like you’ve got to carry around a little vial of oil made from olives from the Garden of Gethsemane that you ordered on Amazon that you use on people like some kind of *Harry Potter* potion to make your prayers work (I know people who do that); a can of Pam you spray over people’s heads when you pray (I don’t know anyone who does that but that seems like a cool idea).

³ D. W. Burdick, “James,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 204

- Anointing with oil can be a helpful symbol, but like many symbols, it's not required. I mean, I find it significant that not one time in the Bible do you find Jesus or the apostles anointing someone with oil when they pray for healing. Not once. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, just that you shouldn't feel like it's required for prayer to work.

OK, shew. Those are **four varsity-level questions from this passage**. But James hasn't even gotten to his main point about prayer. That's in the next few verses: **16... The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.**

Prayer not only heals the sick, James says, it's the means by which God gets his work done on earth. And to teach his point, James points to the story of Elijah:

Elijah served as a prophet during the reign of one of Israel's worst kings, King Ahab, and after years and years of unfaithfulness, Elijah went to confront the king face to face. And he told Ahab that as a sign of God's wrath, God was going to withhold rain—there would not be so much as a drop of dew on the ground until Elijah said so.

And it came true—for three and a half years, not a single drop of rain fell, and a terrible famine came over the land. Well, after three and a half years, Elijah went back up to King Ahab and said, "See, I told you," but Ahab still wouldn't humble his heart before God, so that led to the big showdown on Mt. Carmel where they built two altars, one to

God and one to Baal, and then both the prophets of Baal and Elijah prayed to their god(s) to see which one would answer prayer.

Do you remember that story? The prophets of Baal danced and prayed for several hours and nothing happened, with Elijah basically making fun of them the whole time (*Your God must be asleep; maybe he's on the potty!* It's hilarious—you should read the story if you haven't.)

Then when it's Elijah's turn he calmly gets down on his knees, says, "Show 'em, Lord," and fire falls from heaven and absolutely incinerates the altar, and all the Israelites repent and say, "The Lord is God!"

Then Elijah goes up to the very top of the mountain, puts his face to the ground and asks God to send back rain onto Israel. You see, the book of Deuteronomy said that when God's people strayed, he would withhold rain, and when they repented, he would send it again.

Well, after praying for a while, Elijah sent his assistant out to look over the horizon to see if he saw any rain clouds headed their way. Nothing. So he kept praying, and in a few minutes, he asked him to look again. Still nothing. He repeated this process seven times, until on that seventh time his assistant saw a cloud coming up from the sea, "about the size of a man's fist." But this cloud grew larger and darker as it approached them, and by the time it got over the land, it poured out a great rain on the land.

And this kind of experience, James says, was not just supposed to be for Elijah. You and I can expect that, too.

And James knows you'll find that unbelievable, so he addresses you directly, vs. 17, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours..." He's just like you! We tend to see people like Elijah as some kind of faith superhero with a direct line toward God. He's not. He's just a dude who perceived what God wanted in a situation and prayed it into existence.

You see, here's the thing about Elijah's prayers. He wasn't just out changing the weather willy-nilly because he wanted to. As I pointed out, he knew from the book of Deuteronomy what God had said about when he would withhold rain and when he would send it. And he prayed God's heart back to him.

That's what we are supposed to do. **We are to scour the Scriptures to learn God's intentions and pray them into existence.**

I've heard it said that the Bible is a book of promises—more than 3000 of them. Each one activated as we claim it. Some of you have a goal of reading through the Bible. That's great. More important is for you to pray through it.

Just like Elijah, we are to find God's promises, learn Jesus's intentions, and pray them into existence through prayer.

This is hard to believe, but you can pray with the same miraculous effects that Elijah did when you perceive what God wants to do in our generation and believe him for it.

It's not about you being a faith superhero. It's about discovering what the Savior wants and asking him for it.

You can pray like Elijah, and the effects of your prayers can be just as dramatic. The key is figuring out what God wants and asking him for it.

I love Martin Luther's definition of effective prayer: "Effective Prayer = Catching Christ in his own words."

"Jesus, this is who you are and what you said you wanted to do. Do it here, Lord!"

But note, James gives two requirements if we are to experience these kinds of answers to our prayers.

The requirements:

Requirement #1: "Righteous" (vs. 16)

- Vs. 16 says, 16... The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
- God heard Elijah's prayer because Elijah was faithful to him. Even when no one else around him was. You high school, middle school students—are you faithful to God at your school, even when so few others at your school are? If you want answers to prayer, you will be. How cool would it be to know that your prayers are causing effects in people around you?
- In Psalm 66, King David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps 66:18). That means if I have unconfessed sin in my heart, I've put a block between me and God hearing my prayers.
- Have you fully surrendered to him? If you are not God's child, he puts himself under no obligation to hear your prayers! But you can take care of that right now! You can acknowledge your sin and surrender yourself to God right now and receive his forgiveness.

Only the prayer of a righteous person has great power. And, I know for some of you this raises another question. You'd say, "Well yes, Pastor J.D., I have surrendered to Jesus, but I'm still such a weak Christian and my track record is so bad ... I don't see how I could ever be righteous enough for God to hear my prayers. I'm no Elijah."

And that's where I have really good news for you. You may not be that righteous, but if you are surrendered to Jesus, you have someone praying on your behalf who is.

I actually love the way the ol' KJV translates this verse—it's how I memorized it. **"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16 KJV).** **The implication is that the more righteous you are, the more your prayers avail.** And that would mean that the prayer of a perfectly righteous man would avail perfectly, and we've got a perfectly righteous man interceding for us. Paul tells us that Christ stands on our behalf at the right hand of God, ever living to make intercession for us. He tells us in Romans that Christ's Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be captured in words. You don't see it, but when you're walking with Jesus, he's always there with you when you're praying, translating your prayers and praying for you.

My pastor growing up, when someone would ask him for prayer, would often say, "I will pray for you ... but more importantly, Jesus is praying for you. And when I don't pray perfectly, he does. When I don't know what to ask for, he knows exactly what you need. And when I stop praying for you, or I forget, he never does. Hebrews says he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea ... A great High Priest whose name is love, Who ever lives and pleads for me.

So when I don't feel righteous enough to pray, or wise enough to know what to ask for, I know that he is praying for me. **J.C. Ryle** said sometimes we come to God like one of our kids comes to us, and they're hurt but they don't know how to describe their hurt so they just point to the part of their body that hurts and expect us to fix it. Your kid ever do that to you when they were young? They come running to you, sobbing, and all they can do is point to their bloody elbow. Sometimes I come to God and I don't know what to say about one of my kids, or my broken heart, or my marriage, or my loneliness or whatever, and all I can do is just point to it and cry ... and he knows what to pray.

The first requirement is that you be righteous, surrendered to Jesus, and trusting in him to pray on your behalf.

Second requirement: "Fervent" (vs. 17)

- Fervent means "persistent."
 - I love the image of Elijah praying for a while, then sending out an assistant to look for a cloud, seeing nothing, and then continuing to pray. Seven times! He does it seven times.
 - You ask, if it was God's will to send the rain, why didn't God give it the first time Elijah asked?
- I don't know. But y'all, if there's one thing Jesus taught over and over, it's that God rewards persistence in prayer. Some things only come through persistence.
- It's not enough to pray once about something and then drop it. Jesus said we should be like the man at midnight desperately

trying to wake his neighbors up because he has surprise house guests and needs to borrow food, or the poor widow who has no money to fight in court and instead shows up at the judge's front door day after day after day to demand justice.

- It means there's some things about which we have to pray and pray and pray and pray and refuse to quit until God responds.

Some of Christian history's most powerful prayer warriors have testified to this. The nineteenth-century American evangelist **D.L. Moody**, whose preaching spawned an incredible revival in our country, **carried** around in his pocket a list of names of 100 people who needed Jesus that he prayed for every day. And he did this for decades. At his funeral, 96 of the 100 had become Christians. A 96 percent success rate isn't bad! But it gets better. At the funeral, the remaining four were in attendance and they all accepted Christ there.

Or, I've told you about **George Mueller**. In his book *Power Through Prayer*, Mueller tells the story of how he committed to pray for five young men—friends of his sons—to be saved. He committed to pray daily until they became believers. It was 18 months before the first one came to faith in Christ. (Which is a long time—18 months is over 500 days. Have you ever prayed for the same thing 500 days in a row without seeing an answer?) When that first friend was saved, Mueller wrote in his journal how he praised God for the answer, but that there were four more left. So he kept praying. After another five years, the second came to Christ. He kept praying. Another six years, the third one came to Christ. He kept praying. 52 years later—63 years after he had started praying, and a few years after his death, for these five young men by name—the final two were brought to faith in Christ.

Mueller kept meticulous prayer journals, and over his lifetime he cataloged 50,000 answers to prayer. But here's the thing: Of those 50,000 answers to prayer, only 5,000 came on the day he asked for them. For 45,000 of them (90 percent of them!), he had to persist for a while. Mueller wrote: *"Don't let yesterday's seemingly unanswered prayers stop you from praying in faith today."* The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Those prayers for your kids, for your campus, for those friends, for that people group—God hears them. **DON'T EVER GIVE UP.**

Just this week one of our Summit team members, Kelsey Fowler, shared how in 2020 she was diagnosed with multiple autoimmune diseases that began to greatly affect her abilities to do her job; it was affecting all her relationships, and so she came to the Brier Creek elders and asked for this prayer in James 5. They prayed over her, anointed her with oil. She said, "I'd like to say I walked out of that prayer meeting immediately healed of all the pain. But it wasn't like that. I do see now that the Lord began a work of healing in my heart on that day though—removing anger, bitterness, and lack of forgiveness." And since then, she said, he answered those prayers. "I have now, contrary to all expectations, come off my medication completely and have had no symptoms for over four months! I truly believe that God is a healer," she says. "We took the Lord at his Word when he says that if any of you are sick, to pray and trust him with the outcome. Praise God for healing!"

Vv. 19–20 close the book: **19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.**

James ends the book thinking about people around him who need Jesus, and in context of prayer, it raises this question: Of all the things you are praying for right now, how many of them involve people who need Jesus? Are your prayers all about yourself—Lord, get me this job, get me a spouse, fix this, heal this...”? Or are you praying kingdom prayers? **Here’s another way to ask it:** “If tonight, God answered, in one fell swoop, all the prayers you prayed last week, how many new people would be in the kingdom tomorrow?” Are your prayers kingdom-focused, or you-focused?

God has given us prayer to bring his kingdom onto earth. *Are you using it?*

Back in 2013, WestJet airlines, out of Canada, ran a TV campaign in which they had filmed real passengers who, as they scanned their boarding pass, had the option of chatting with a “virtual Santa” on a big screen. If they said “yes,” the virtual Santa would say his signature “ho, ho, ho” and ask them what they wanted for Christmas. They’d type something in and go on through the security line to their gates. What they didn’t know was that, once they got the requests, WestJet sent people out to buy the Christmas presents at their destination city and so, when they got off the plane and stood at the luggage belt, along with their luggage came everything that they had asked for, for Christmas.⁴

It was a great advertisement, but there was this one guy in the commercial I always felt sorry for, because not realizing what he had been offered, he typed in “socks and underwear.” So as they are all standing by the luggage belt and you are watching these people see

widescreen TVs and iPads and golf clubs and an ATV come out on the belt with their names on them, one dude gets a pair of socks and some tighty-whities.⁵

I don’t want to get to heaven with just socks and tighty-whities in my hand. I want to bring with me a multitude of souls I’ve prayed away from a multitude of sins.

Summit, do you realize what is being offered to you? Look at the brokenness around you! Look at the brokenness in your family! You can bring the kingdom of God to earth! Your prayers can heal the sick. Your prayers can alter the weather. Literally. Your prayers can change the destinies of your children. Your prayers can restore, redeem, and renew. Don’t stand at the luggage belt of heaven with socks and tighty-whities.

I can’t say it better than John Chrysostom, the fourth-century Christian preacher—keep in mind this quote is 1700 years old: *“The potency of prayer has subdued the strength of fire, it has bridled the rage of lions, it has expelled demons, it has broken the chains of death. It has assuaged diseases, it has rescued cities from destruction, it’s stopped the sun in its course, it’s arrested the progress of the thunderbolt. There is in prayer an all-sufficient armory, a treasure undiminished, a mine never exhausted, a sky un-obscured by clouds, a heaven unruffled by any storm. Prayer is the root, the fountain, the mother of thousands of blessings.”*

Or, as James would say, “You have not, because you ask not.”

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIElvi2MuEk>

⁵ Thanks to Sam Allberry for this great illustration!

Prayer Time / Open Altar

- We want to open the altars for prayer this morning. If you need prayer for healing, off to both sides we have elders ready to pray over you and anoint you with oil if you want.
- Or, right here in front, these altars are open for you to come and pray for other things: prodigal children to come home, for financial provisions. For someone to be saved. Maybe it's a spiritual oppression you or someone you know needs deliverance from. Come and pray. If it would help for someone to pray with you, there are a few people down front at every campus. If you want, grab one of them and let them pray over you. If not, just kneel and you ask God for whatever you need.
- You say, "Well, I'll just pray here in my seat." That's fine, but I promise you it will be significant, a statement both to you and to God, if you come and pray around the altar.
- As the worship team comes, let's turn this place into a house of prayer.