



ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

Answering your questions about
life, the Bible, and God

An open book with yellowed pages, resting on a dark surface. The book is the central focus of the image, with its pages slightly curved as if being turned. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Please explain James
5:14-15. How literally
should this be applied?**

PRAYER IN THE CONTEXT

- Addressed throughout James' epistle, one of the biggest problems facing the early church was a lack of unity based on economic or social status. Some Christians took a "high and mighty" approach to religion because of their wealth, standing, or background as faithful followers of Judaism.
- James 5:13-18 serves as a great equalizer, reminding all Christians that illness, discouragement, distress, and sin are universal problems with only one ultimate solution: faith in God. Sadly, this text is also misapplied in such a way as to give some the idea that God will heal ALL physical maladies if we only pray hard enough!

DOES GOD ANSWER EVERY PRAYER?

- Of course, the answer is “yes”, but not without some explanation. There were prayers, even in the age of miracles, that were answered in the negative, or at least, temporarily left unanswered.
- God told Elijah “no” when he asked to die (1 Ki. 19).
- The disciples were told they would suffer, without any promise of physical relief (Matt. 10:17ff, 5:10-12).
- “Let this cup pass from Me” received a “no” answer.
- Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).
- Why couldn’t Paul miraculously heal Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23) or Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20)?

A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer over an open book. The person is wearing a dark blue shirt with white stripes on the sleeve. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with light-colored ground and some greenery.

WHY PRAY?

- It illustrates our belief that God *can* do all things, but not necessarily that He *will*. Remember, part of what makes prayer effective at all is when it is in line with God's will (John 14:13-14, Matt. 6:10).
- Prayer is not always about asking for deliverance. Often, the suffering *is* God's will. Only suffering can produce certain results (James 1:2-4, Rom. 5:3-5). So we must learn to pray for the treasures of endurance, hope, and proven character.

JAMES 5:13



- Notice that “let him pray” is left open-ended. Pray for healing? Pray for endurance? Pray for a quick, painless transition into the afterlife? Pray to be a good example of courage and faith? How about all of the above? Stop seeing prayer in such a narrow way – which can lead to disillusionment.
- The word “suffering” in verse 14 is actually a very broad term for various hardships. Also translated “suffer misfortune.”
- “Is anyone cheerful?” Don’t forget to praise God when times are good. Health is a great blessing, and it can be fleeting.

JAMES 5:14

- “Sick” means a very serious condition. Also used of the royal official’s son who was about to die (John 4:46-47), of Lazarus (John 11:1-3, 6), and Dorcas (Acts 9:37).
- Prayer for the sick is an important duty of the elders. When a sheep is injured it looks to the shepherd for aid. This relationship cannot be fabricated, though. Building and maintaining relationships happens over a long period of time, through thick and thin.
- “Anointing with oil” – A common practice of the time, whether for healing or simply as a comforting luxury. It has the idea of “no expense spared.” Also, an action coupled with prayer.

JAMES 5:15

- As has already been noted, we should not expect to have our prayers answered exactly how and when we see fit. What might seem like tragedy now (or what seems unfair) might actually be a necessary step in the accomplishment of God's will. We lack the eternal perspective to see as God sees (Isaiah 55:8-9, Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 14:24).
- Our confidence is not just in God's ability to heal, but also in the ultimate fulfillment of His promises. After all, man is not intended to live on earth forever, so we all die eventually. No amount of prayer can prevent the inevitable. But we trust that all the saints will one day rise from the dead, just as Martha astutely points out in John 11:24-27.

JAMES 5:16

- Don't let unresolved and unconfessed sins stand between you and a healthy, effective prayer life. Be open and honest with others you have hurt, and never fall for the rather foolish lie that you can hide anything from God (1 John 1:8-10).
- The “healing” might be physical healing, if such is the will of God. But the deeper implication is that a robust prayer life, including honest confession, leads to spiritual health.
- Illnesses may or not be healed, but your physical condition means nothing compared to the question of your salvation. If prayer is powerful enough to stop the rain (vv. 17-18), how hard is it for God to forgive sin (Mark 2:8-11).