

James on Prayer

James 5:13-18



Elijah Prays for Rain,
engraving by Otto Elliger
(18th Century)

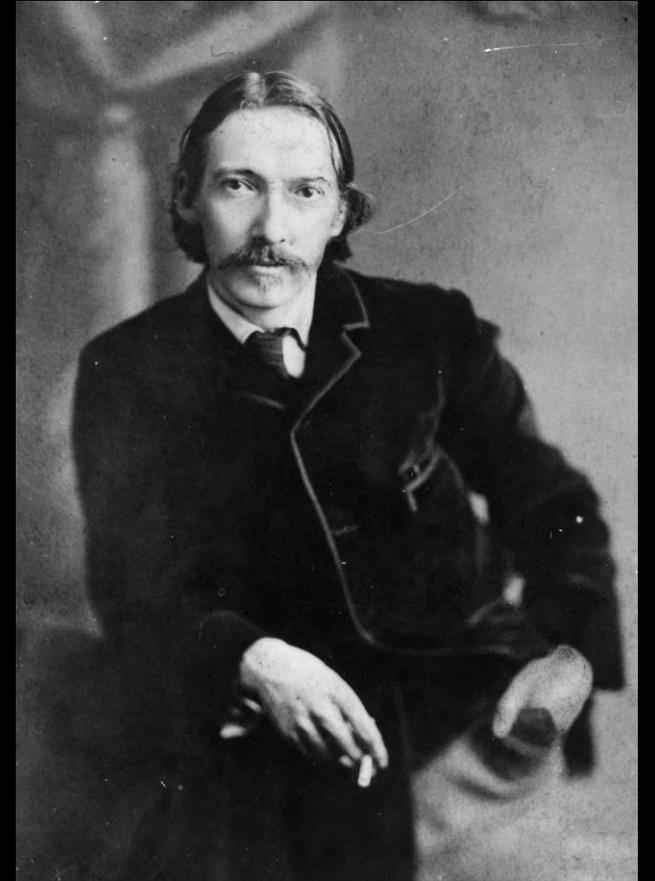
James on Prayer Introduction



James on Prayer Introduction

- This is a story attributed to Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894).

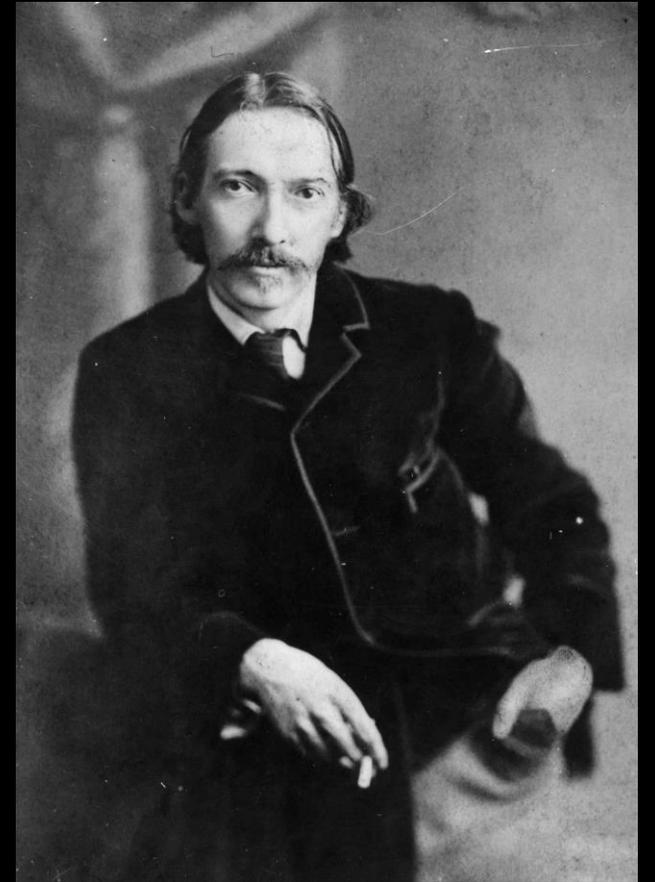
A sailing ship was caught at sea in the midst of a violent storm. As the waves repeatedly hit the ship, water splashed up over the sides. The crew ordered the passengers to their quarters below, where they all sat terrified.



James on Prayer Introduction

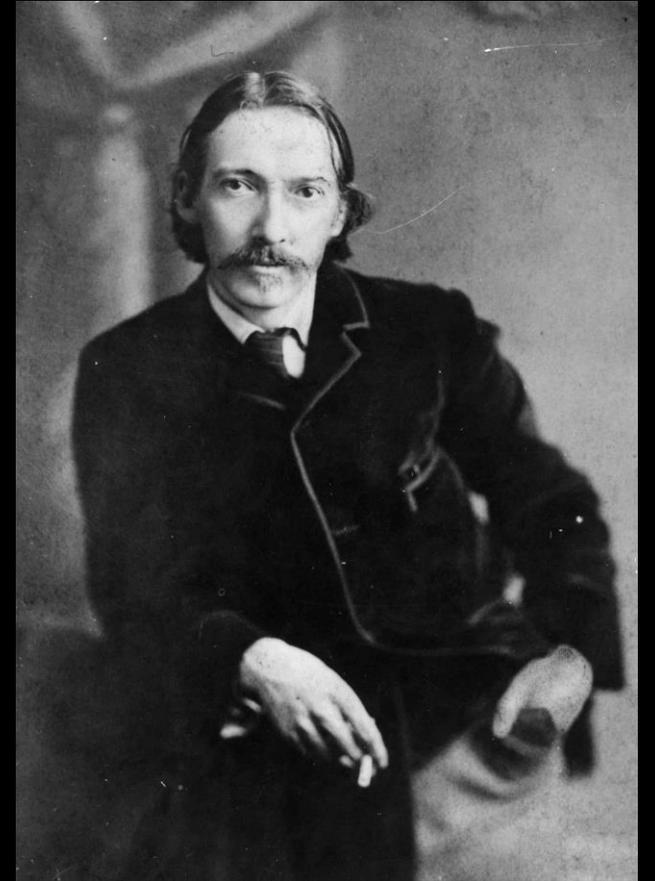
After a time, one daring man, contrary to orders, crept to the deck.

He slowly made the dangerous passage to the pilot house and saw the steersman. He was at his post, lashed to the wheel and holding it unwaveringly. The pilot saw the panicked watcher and gave him a reassuring smile.



James on Prayer Introduction

The daring passenger went back below and passed on a word of comfort: "I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled. All is well."



James on Prayer Introduction

- In the midst of life's storms, God invites us into His presence.
- His smiling face gives us a comforting point of reference.
- He is still at the wheel; everything is under control.

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- In this short passage James uses some form of the words “pray” or “prayer” seven times.
- The repetition is there for a reason.
- James is trying to get us to pray.

James on Prayer Introduction



Faced with a pile of problems, we may say with our lips that only prayer can solve them, yet we talk more than pray, worry more than pray, and scheme more than pray ...

*– Watchman Nee (1903 – 1972),
Chinese Christian Leader, died in prison*

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In sum, everything is put before prayer; other things are placed in prominent positions while prayer is relegated to last place; it is the only thing which is not so important.

*– Watchman Nee (1903 – 1972),
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James on Prayer Introduction

- It's in prayer that we find comfort, strength and forgiveness.
- Also, it is prayer that propels all godly activity and drives all forms of ministry forward.
- Jesus said it clearly when he said, “without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

James on Prayer Introduction

Prayer is powerful because
God is powerful and God
invites us to pray.



James on Prayer Introduction

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13
2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15
3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a
4. Prayer is powerful. 5:16b
5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

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- Let's read the passage through.

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13

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- Consider these alternatives:
- When we are severely afflicted, we may blame God for the affliction and grow bitter as a result.
- We inwardly believe God is cruel.

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13

- Consider these alternatives:
- When things go well, **we may forget God** and just mosey along without ever giving Him a second thought.
- We inwardly believe **God is unnecessary**.

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13



Tell God about your physical or spiritual pain and wait for him to deliver you, if that is his will. You should express your dependence on him ...

*– Solomon Andria,
Madagascan Bible Commentator*

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13



By singing, we tell God of our thanksgiving and tell him what he means to us. We could do the same in a prayer, but singing is better because both the words and the rhythm and melody can express our joy – a joy that can come only from God.

*– Solomon Andria,
Madagascan Bible Commentator*

1. We should pray at all times. 5:13

- James reminds us to seek God's face regardless of whether our circumstances are bad or good.

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15

- This is not superstitious, nor does James guarantee results, he just wants us to pray for the sick.
- He recommends that the sick person calls for “the elders of the church.”
- By mentioning “elders” James shows that this is a ministry for every church, not special “healers.”

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15

- As to the oil, we shouldn't get too caught up in details.
- Oil in the ancient world was used both for medicinal and for ritual purposes, so it is not an either/or thing.

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15



When a member is sick, the whole body is concerned. In other words, the church is a place of healing for the sick. But it is neither the oil nor the elders that heal, but it is the Lord himself, since the anointing is done in his name ...

*– Solomon Andria,
Madagascan Bible Commentator*

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15



It is the prayer of faith rather than the repetition of special formulas that brings miraculous healing.

*– Solomon Andria,
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2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15

- On at least two occasions Jesus used His own spit and achieved miraculous results.
- You are welcome to try that if you want.
- (I probably won't.)

2. We should pray for the sick. 5:14-15

- Regarding the “sins” in v.15, James is allowing for the possibility that sin has played a part in the sickness.
- Job’s friends made the mistake of thinking that Job’s sin caused his calamities.
- They were wrong in that case, but sickness can motivate us to check that we are in a right place with God.

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a

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- Confession of this sort is not required for forgiveness, but is still a valuable practice.
- C. S. Lewis strongly advocated regular confession and he did so to a friend on a regular basis.

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a



- Regarding confession, he explained, *We do not doubt that there can be forgiveness without it. But, as your own experience shows, many people do not feel forgiven, i.e., do not effectively 'believe in the forgiveness of sins', without it.*

– C. S. Lewis (1898 – 1963)

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer would have agreed.
- He points out the isolating power of sin when it goes too long unconfessed.

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a



The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation ...

*– Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945),
in The Cost of Discipleship*

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a



Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community.

*– Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945),
in The Cost of Discipleship*

3. We should pray for one another. 5:16a

- Confession assures that our religion is not superficial.
- It allows us to have truer fellowship, letting people understand who we are on the inside.

4. Prayer is powerful. 5:16b

4. Prayer is powerful. 5:16b

- Don't let that word "righteous" scare you.
- The righteous are all those who are in a right relationship with God.
- Receiving the righteousness of God by faith places us among the righteous.

4. Prayer is powerful. 5:16b

- (NKJV) The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- (HCSB) The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.
- (Amplified) The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working].

4. Prayer is powerful. 5:16b

Prayer is powerful because
God is powerful and God
invites us to pray.



5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

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- Elijah was without question a great prophet.
- He was the first, and perhaps the greatest, of the prophets who spoke during the era of the kings.
- But he was not a superhero, not an extra-terrestrial, not any kind of angelic being.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- The phrase “he prayed fervently” is literally, “with prayer he prayed.”
- This is kind of Jewish way of saying, “He really prayed – plain and simple. He just did it.”

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- There is a fascinating story in:
- *The New Book of Lists: The Original Compendium of Curious Information.*
- It is Unusual Lawsuits #38, and is entitled: *Pray for Rain*

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- In hopes of ending a drought in the 1880s, a Presbyterian minister named Duncan McLeod organized a mass prayer session to take place on a Saturday in August.
- At noon, people throughout the area stopped their activities and prayed for rain. By one o'clock, clouds had appeared; by two, a gusty wind was blowing.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- By three, the temperature had dropped 20 degrees; and by four, a thunderstorm had arrived.
- The storm, which dropped almost two inches of rain, washed out a bridge and completely destroyed a barn, which burned to the ground after being struck by lightning.
- The barn belonged to Phineas Dodd, the only farmer in Phelps, New York, who did not join the group to pray.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- Many thought that Dodd had been a victim of divine justice, but Dodd had other ideas:
- When he heard that Reverend McLeod was accepting congratulations for ending the drought, he sued the minister for \$5,000 to cover the damages to his property.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- The minister was put in a difficult situation:
- After repeatedly telling his followers that God had answered their prayers, he could hardly back down and say that the storm was just a coincidence.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- The judge, however, ruled his favor, since the mass prayers had requested only rain.
- The thunder and lightning were an act of God for which McLeod and his parishioners were not responsible.

5. Prayer is for all of us. 5:17-18

- Duncan McLeod was a lot like Elijah.
- He was an ordinary guy. He prayed. God answered.

James on Prayer **Conclusions**



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How we need the Lord to enlighten our eyes that we may comprehend afresh the importance of prayer and know anew its value. Furthermore, we must recognize that had Satan not deceived us, we would not be neglecting prayer so much ...

*– Watchman Nee (1903 – 1972),
Chinese Christian Leader, died in prison*

James on Prayer Conclusions



We should therefore watch and discover therein all the various wiles of Satan. We will not allow him to delude us any more in relaxing in prayer.

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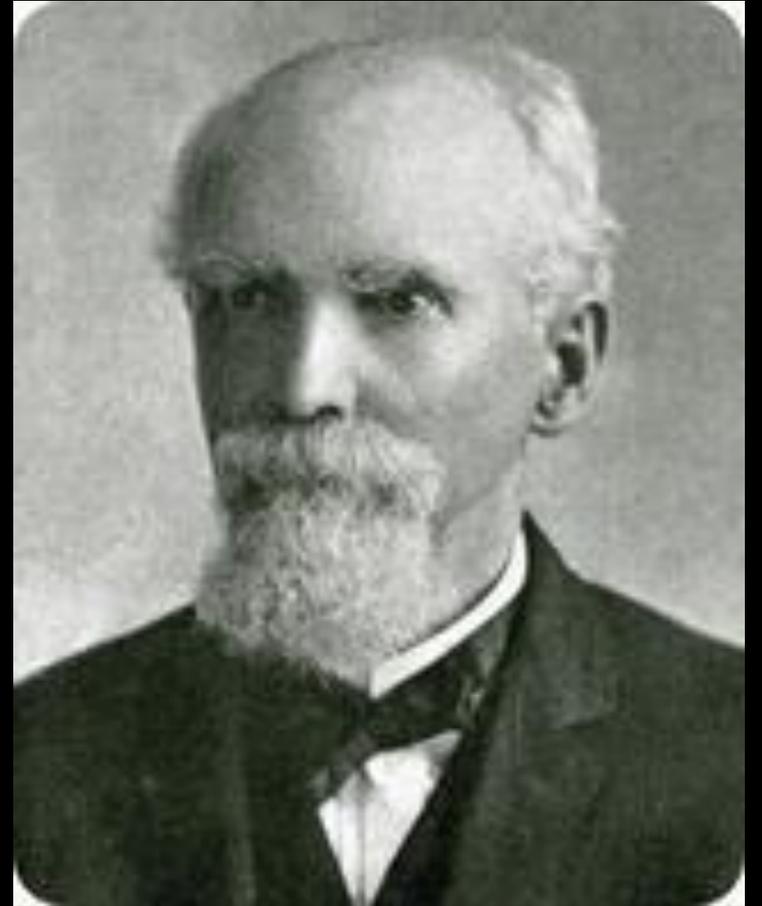
James on Prayer **Conclusions**

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James on Prayer Conclusions

Where are the Elijahs in the church of the present day? Where are the men of like passions as he, who can pray as he prayed? We have thousands of men of like passions, but where are the men of like praying as he was? ...

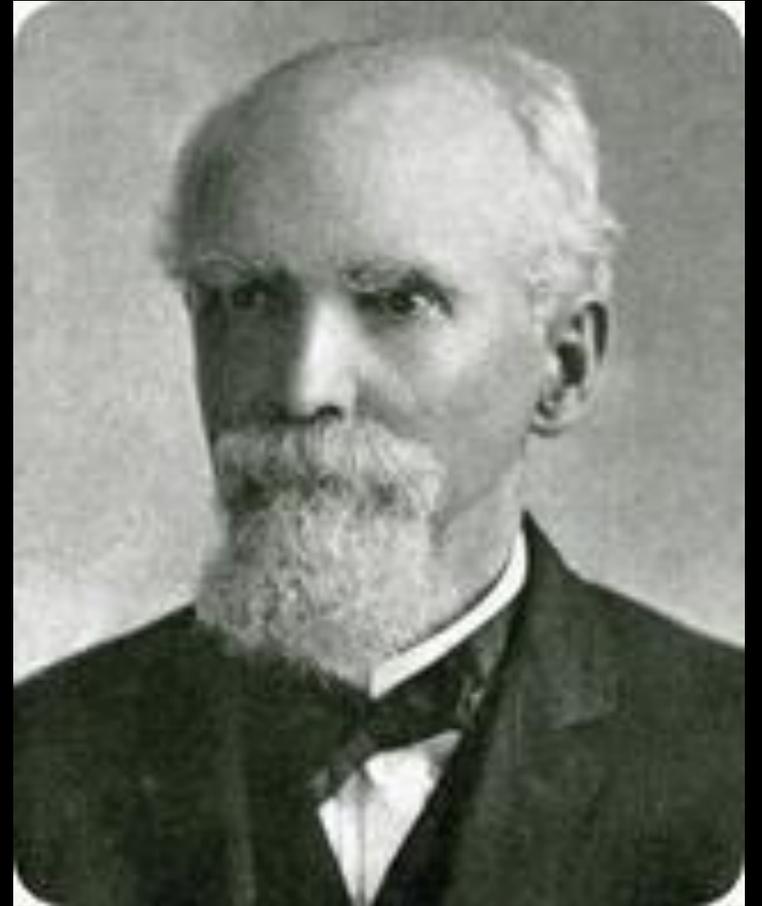
*– E. M. Bounds (1835 – 1913),
Methodist Minister*



James on Prayer **Conclusions**

Elijah prayed really, truly and earnestly. How much of praying there is at the present time which is not real praying, but is a mere shell, shucks, and mere words! Much of it might be termed non-praying ...

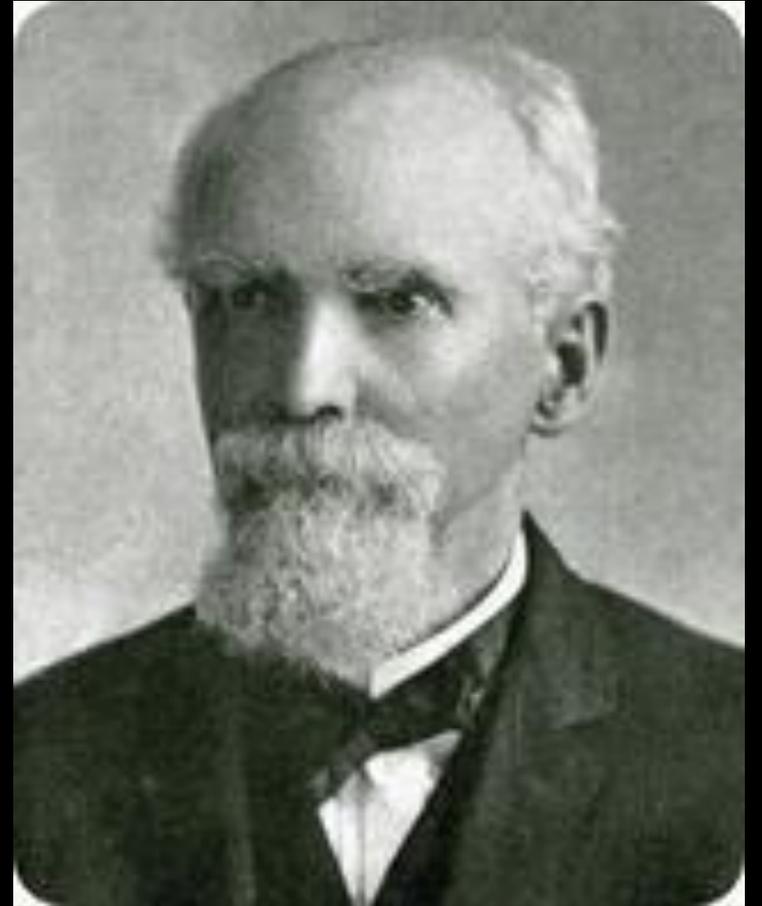
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James on Prayer **Conclusions**

The world is full of such praying. It goes nowhere, avails nothing, it brings no returns. In fact, no returns nor results are expected. So in praying, we must pray.

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Methodist Minister*



James on Prayer **Conclusions**

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