



*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

## Faith That Works

### *An Exposition of the Book of James*

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, confess your sins to one another<sup>a</sup>, and pray for one another so that you may be healed<sup>b</sup>. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much<sup>c</sup>. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a man with a nature like ours<sup>d</sup>, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain<sup>e</sup>, and it did

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<sup>a</sup> **5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another.** The word translated “confess” here is a form of the word used in 1 John 1:9 (“If we confess our sins...”). It means “to agree or admit” (literally “to say the same thing”). The idea is that when you sin you must call it what it is. If you show unrighteous anger toward someone, you don’t say, “Sorry. I just had to let off a little steam.” True confession to God or men demands that you say, “I had an outburst of anger.” True confession offers no excuses.

Confession of sin “to each other” is not a requirement that believers are to share all their acts of sin with other believers. Such a practice would destroy any church. It does mean that believers are to be humble enough to go to those they have wronged and make things right. Private sins should be confessed privately and public sins should be confessed publicly. In this context it means that when the possibility exists that an illness is sin-induced, the sick person should take the initiative and tell the elders about it. The sick person should not be offended if the elders ask about it.

<sup>b</sup> **5:16 and pray for one another so that you may be healed.** Notice there is no mention of the oil here. When you pray for a sick person and he is healed, you can give God the credit even if medicine is the means God used to heal.

Aside from the potential for God’s direct judgment on his disobedient children, the troubled conscience itself can produce a number of physical ailments. David testified to the physical effects of unconfessed sin:

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32:3-5

<sup>c</sup> **5:16 The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.** James is not urging us to be eloquent. He is calling us to work hard at prayer. He is urging us to pray out of our own weakness and from our righteous standing before God. This is blue collar prayer. Young’s Literal Translation makes the meaning of this statement clear: “very strong is a working supplication of a righteous man.”

<sup>d</sup> **5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.** This familiar statement is one that is easily dismissed even by those who believe the Bible. Most of us do not class ourselves with the prophet Elijah. But Scripture does not hide the weaknesses of God’s best servants. Elijah was prone to despair and self-righteousness (1 Kings 19). In some ways he was like Jonah and used fear as an excuse to run far from the commission of God.

<sup>e</sup> **5:17 he prayed earnestly that it would not rain.** Part of the hard work of prayer is knowing what to pray. We pray more effectively when we know what God has promised in his word. Elijah did not make up the judgment mentioned here. God had said he would stop the rain if the people broke their covenant with him (Leviticus 26:19). Israel and its leaders had abandoned the law of God and Elijah simply prayed that God would do what he promised to do.

James 5.16-18  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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not rain on the earth for three years and six months<sup>a</sup>. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit<sup>b, c</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> 5:17 **it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.** Elijah did not have some special power over the amount of time the judgment would last. He claimed God's promise to withhold the rain and prayed again when it was evident that God could again bless Israel with rain.

<sup>b</sup> 5:18 **Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.** Elijah prayed again for deliverance on Mount Carmel when the people turned away from Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:39-46).

<sup>c</sup> 5:16-18 Our culture has defined prayer in such a way that it keeps most of us from praying much. Here is the common view: Prayer is to be used only in an emergency unless you know how to put the words together eloquently. That is why certain people are asked to offer public prayers. We do not want to be embarrassed by the words we use.

James is very blue collar. He urges those who have been declared "righteous" by God to pray all the time:

1. God wants his people to have that kind of relationships.
2. Prayer is for ordinary people.
3. Prayer is powerful.

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