

How You Can Be the Answer to Someone Else's Prayers and Dreams

The short New Testament epistle of James, our Lord's half-brother, is filled with wisdom and practical insights for Christian living. Please join me in this brief overview that can guide us and equip us for living in these last days.

The English name James appears to be a Latin derivative of the Hebrew *Jacob*, who was the patriarch Abraham's grandson. This "James" self-identifies in the very first verse as a servant "of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," linking God to Jesus (Yeshua), as the Lord of all mankind and the promised Jewish Christ (the Messiah).

Can you so-identify? Are you consciously looking today for ways to serve God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Are you publicly attesting to His lordship over your life and your servant-like relationship with Him? James was very up-front and bold in his witness to this lived truth. Your faithful witness can be an encouraging example to other believers.

Sharing Hope and Encouragement

In this letter or epistle, James is writing practical words of hope and encouragement to scattered Jewish believers, following the severe persecution of Jesus' followers in the early Jerusalem-based church. See Acts 11:26, where scattered disciples were first derisively called "Christians" (or little Christs) at Antioch, in the Syrian coastal area north of Israel.

Are there many fellow believers living or working near you? Ask God to help you become aware of even a few—to start with—and regularly pray for them and encourage them with your

friendly fellowship, Christian concern and practical prayers.

Practical Prayer Points

James gives some practical points about prayer that we need to review and rehearse today. First, we must learn to be patient (James. 1:2-4), knowing that our Lord is coming again and He will faithfully sustain us as we endure to the very end of our lives on earth (Matt. 24:13). Our discerning lives and faithful endurance during difficult times will encourage others to follow our examples.

James uses the final paragraphs of his epistle to guide us regarding our personal problems and sicknesses. In chapter five, verse 13 (NIV), he advises: "Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise."

The "trouble" he mentions is implied as suffering evil unjustly and we are told to "pray about it." Prayer is talking to God. He wants to hear His kid's voices. Have you tried to parent young teens and have them avoid talking to you? God wants to get our attention and have us talk to Him about our problems and dreams. He may allow us to face certain "troubles" to bring us around to humbly talk to Him about them. So, our first point in prayer is: talk to God about it!

Second, if we are happy or "glad at heart," we should bubble up with joy and songs and choruses of praise and thanksgiving from our inner selves. Such praise is an expression of thanks, as well as a proud affirmation of our practiced union with Father God.

David was a psalmist. He wrote words of praise or deep emotional struggles and then put a melody to them. We can do the same. You might even use a melody you already know and just add your own words of praise. Hum it. Sing it. Share it! Be happy!

Third, verse 14 says those who are sick are to “call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” Notice that the initiative starts with the sick one, who is to call for the officers of the church (see 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). These are the recognized leaders in the congregation who are spiritually mature, characterized by integrity and able to discern the needed areas for prayer.

These leaders are to “anoint with oil in the name of the Lord.” This oil is not used for medicinal nor magical purposes, but as a symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit and God’s power to bring healing. James stresses that faith is granted to one or more of the elders and “the Lord will raise [the sick one] up” to enjoy physical restoration, spiritual renewal and continued service to that body of Christ.

Fourth, we are instructed to “confess [our] sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed...” (v. 16). To do this requires unusual humility and godly trust among fellow disciples. This can only happen if we have spent time with our fellow believers and gained confidence in their growing spiritual maturity.

The Amplified Version calls these sins “your faults—your slips, your false steps, your offenses.” The purpose of confessing them and praying for one another is “that you may be healed and restored—to a spiritual tone of mind and heart.” Our confessed offenses and our earnest and heartfelt prayers will make tremendous spiritual power available and be dynamically effective—based on the righteousness of Christ in us.

For What or Whom Should We Pray?

The New Living Translation (NLV) renders Philippians 4:6, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.” It

is human nature to pray for things that impact us the most. Our foibles, finances, family and friends are natural and appropriate objects of our prayers. But, if we are not careful, we can become so consumed with answers to our own problems and priorities that we lose sight of what other disciples are facing.

We Can Become the Answer to Someone Else's Prayers.

In the previous chapter, James says we ask "amiss" (NKJV) if we pray with the wrong motives or selfish purposes. "And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure" (James 4:3; NLT). If our prayers are misaligned, we will miss the mark.

The apostle Paul told the Romans, that when we do not know how or for what to pray, we should trust the Holy Spirit to make intercession for us "according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-28).

Rather than praying only for our own needs and interests, we need to pray for God to reveal how we can also focus on the needs and concerns of others. We can become the answer to someone else's prayers and dreams. {eo}

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