

• *More words on helping the weak by praying*

1. James uses the example of Elijah to encourage us to pray, for Elijah was an ordinary person

• *An amazing person*

• *Yet just a man like us*

• *He was led by God by being teachable*

• *He could be proud*

• *He could be full of self-pity*

• *He could neglect himself physically*

• *Yet he received a lot of help and correction from God*

• *He received so much because he prayed*

The words about helping the weak Christian by praying for him leads James on to say something more about it. *'Elijah was a man with the same kind of human nature as us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain. And for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth'*¹. Then he prayed again. And the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit². My brothers and sisters, if any among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him around³, let him realize that anyone who turns a sinner away from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins⁴.

1 5:17

2 5:18

3 5:19

4 5:20

1. **James uses the example of Elijah to encourage us to pray, for Elijah was an ordinary person.** Elijah seems such an amazing person. He stood alone, seeming so strong. He was involved in conflict with hundreds of false prophets. Fire fell from heaven, when Elijah prayed. The way in which he left this world was equally amazing. He never died, but went to heaven in a chariot of fire! He appeared on the mountain at Jesus' transfiguration.

But now we are told he was a man just like us! No one is **born** a godly person. God **leads** us into righteousness. We have ups and downs. We have to learn to be teachable. We go through trials, rebukes, chastenings and false starts. It was true of Elijah just as it is true of us. Remember 1 Kings 19. Elijah could get very depressed about himself. On one occasion he even asked to die! He felt a failure. He was not the only one; Moses, Jeremiah and Job also asked to die at one point or another.

Elijah could get very self-righteous, very proud. He lets us know that he wanted to be better than others and complained when he felt he was 'no better than his fathers'. Many great servants of God are more driven by ambition than they would like to admit.

Elijah could become full of self-pity. We all know what it is like to fail in something or not achieve as much as we wished. Then we begin to feel sorry for ourselves. Elijah was not different from us in this way. He could even be bitter in prayer.

Elijah could neglect himself physically. When God sent an angel to help him in 1 Kings 19, the angel gave him food and sleep before anything else. Elijah needed it.

The godly person is an ordinary person who has received a lot of help from God. God sympathises with ordinary people. He let Elijah recover physically. He did not complain at him. He let Elijah know He could use weak things (a small voice) as well as powerful things (earthquake, fire, whirlwind). He corrected Elijah's self-righteousness very gently. He sent Elisha to be a help to Elijah and soon God took Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire.

So how did Elijah achieve so much? James tells us. Elijah prayed. He was in many ways a weak person but he was a man of prayer. Despite all his weaknesses he stayed in contact with God. He stayed open to God. He did not give in to unbelief.

• James mentions ineffective prayer and powerful effective prayer

Prayer is mentioned several times in the letter to James. There is a prayer that does not achieve anything^{□1}. Praying with wrong motives is weak praying. Often it is unanswered. But there is also prayer that is effective. By his praying Elijah was empowered to speak God's word^{□2}. By his praying he had his needs met^{□3}. He experienced God's miracle-working power^{□4} and he defeated the enemies of God's church^{□5}. God kept him safe even amidst fearsome enemies. His ministry kept Israel holding to the truth even at a time of terrible backsliding.

□1 4:3
 □2 1 Kings 17:1
 □3 1 Kings 17:2-16
 □4 1 Kings 17:17-24
 □5 1 Kings 18

2. Our prayerfulness is to be used as we rescue backsliders

• Inconsistent Christians

2. **Our prayerfulness is to be used as we rescue backsliders.** As James goes on to say, the greatest way to show your spiritual power is to be able to rescue the inconsistent Christian. These Christians to whom James was writing were double-minded^{□1}. They played around with temptation^{□2}, and showed discrimination towards needy people^{□3}. They tried to have faith without works^{□4}, and misused their tongues^{□5}. They were friendly with the world's attitudes^{□6}, were proud and confident in themselves^{□7}, and lived for luxury^{□8}.

□1 1:8
 □2 1:14
 □3 2:1
 □4 2:14
 □5 3:1-8
 □6 4:1-6
 □7 4:13-16
 □8 5:1-6

- (i) Loving concern
- (ii) Not despising
- (iii) Willingness to act
- (iv) Optimism
- (v) Boldness
- (vi) One thing at a time
- (vii) Careful about oneself

The backslider needs help from the word of God (as James' letter shows). He gets help by God's chastening^{□1}, and perhaps from fellow Christians^{□2}. How do we help the backslider? (i) There must be loving concern for each other in our weaknesses, (ii) We are never to despise a brother or sister because they have weaknesses. We have weaknesses too! You have them also. (iii) We must be willing to **do** something, to **act**. You must be willing to get involved. Don't avoid the matter or run away or fail in courage. (iv) We need to be optimistic about each other. (v) We need boldness, speed, tact, prayerfulness, in helping the other person. (vi) Deal with one main thing. Never go to a brother or sister with a long list of complaints! (vii) Be careful about yourself. You too might be tempted (as Galatians 6:1 says).

□1 4:1-10
 □2 5:19-20

• Love covers a multitude of sins

If we help a brother or sister to recover spiritually it is wonderful. You have 'saved' him from death. From physical death maybe. From spiritual ruin^{□1}. You have covered a multitude of sins. You have 'covered' his sins in your protecting, loving ways. You have prevented a scandal. God is also sympathetic to your weaknesses. You have shown mercy and you will receive mercy. Whichever way you take it, love covers a multitude of sins.

□1 Romans 8:13; 14:20; 1 Corinthians 8:11; Galatians 6:7-8



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