

Good morning! This is Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I am glad that you are with us this morning. Let me start today's message with a short story.

**[Story]** A substitute Sunday School teacher was struggling to open a combination lock on the supply cabinet. She had been told the combination, but she couldn't remember it. Finally, she went to the pastor's office and asked for help. The pastor came into the room and began to turn the dial. After the first two numbers he paused and stared blankly for a moment. Finally, he looked serenely heavenward and his lips moved silently. Then, he looked back at the lock, and quickly turned to the final number, and opened the lock. The sub-teacher was amazed. "I'm in awe at your faith, pastor," she said. "It's really nothing," he answered. "The number is on a piece of tape on the ceiling."

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Believers are commanded in James 5:16 to "pray for one another." In the immediate context of that passage, the mutual intercessions include "that you may be healed." It's a paragraph about praying in faith for those who are sick. Does it mean that we are to pray for others when they are sick only?

NO! The rest of the New Testament makes it clear that the responsibility for Christians, God's people, to pray for each other is not limited to prayers for the sick. Repeatedly, the Apostle Paul pleads, "Brothers, pray for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). His letters to churches testify of his prayers for them (Ephesians 1:15-23; Colossians 1:9-14). Even Jesus Himself asked for the prayers of Peter, James, and John in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:38, 40-41).

One of top four distinctive characteristics of the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost was that "they devoted themselves to ... the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Can anyone doubt that these corporate prayers included much prayer for each other?

While intercession for others may have become more common among believers after Pentecost, it was not unusual in the Old Testament period. For instance, the prophet Samuel assured his fellow Israelites in the Book of 1 Samuel by saying, "I

would never sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23a, NIRV). Bearing the burdens of others in prayer is a responsibility of Christians. We are to pray for each other if we are Christians. That is the first point James has addressed in today’s scripture.

Now, let’s move on to the next point James is making in verse 16 of today’s scripture. “The prayer of a godly person is powerful. Things happen because of it” (James 5:16b, NIRV). It is not just talking about a prayer, but a powerful prayer, effective prayer, that makes significant differences. This powerful prayer, effective prayer, is the prayer of a godly person. This sounds like the main ingredient in effective prayer, powerful prayer is US—the persons who pray. Nothing is happening because we are not godly enough? or righteous enough? Is this right? No, it is not.

The footnote of English Standard Version (ESV) of James 5:16 spells out, “The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power.” This means we pray as ordinary people who have an extraordinary God!

James 5:16 is commonly understood like this: Be righteous or godly, and then your prayers will work. Honestly, that’s what I used to believe. I thought my wrong doings must be confessed and forgiven in order to have my prayers to be answered. Please know that by my upbringing, I am a Presbyterian. I was brought up in a very conservative Presbyterian church and family. I was not permitted to receive a communion until I finished the confirmation class and confessed my “sin” and asked for forgiveness. I needed to be right with God for receiving a communion. Also, I needed to be right with God for my prayers to be answered.

Later in life as I started to think to myself and explore the knowledge of God, I realized that the source of powerful prayer is not ME or any other persons who pray. That’s the skim-milk meaning. It’s what happens when we fly by the text without questions. So, let’s look at James 5:16 in context.

First, look at the context surrounding James 5:16. James’ whole point is that prayer *is* effective. He asks in James 5:13, “Is anyone among you in trouble?” Then he replies, “Let him pray.” What about cheerfulness? Or sickness? Or sin? In each case, James encourages his readers to pray. Why? Because prayer is effective, which means, God hears His people and acts on their behalf.

Then, in the beginning of verse 16, because prayer is effective (James 5:13-15), he says, “So confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another so that you might be healed” (James 5:16). To make it more clear, he follows this by saying, “The prayer of a godly person is powerful. Things happen because of it.” That line is the second portion in a double dose of support for our praying. James’ point is to repeat his theme to pray because prayer is effective and powerful. His concern is not *how* prayer is made effective, but *that* prayer itself is effective and powerful.

Prayer has less to do with the specifics of how we say and what we say. It is more to do with the one to whom we are saying it. We pray as ordinary people who have an extraordinary God. We’re just regular folks who are seeking God and trying to be godly and holy as our God is. Prayer is effective and powerful, not because of great men or women who pray, but because of *our great God graciously hears His people*. Our mighty God is the main ingredient of powerful and effective prayer. “Prayer is where the actions is” according John Wesley, the Founding Father of Methodism.

So, we pray by fully rely on God. We pray that God would exalt His name in the world (Matthew 6:9). We pray that God would extend His kingdom in the world (Matthew 6:10). We pray that gospel would speed ahead and be honored (2 Thessalonians 3:1). We pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). We pray that God would vindicate His people in their cause (Luke 18:7). We pray that God would save unbelievers (Romans 10:1). We pray that God would direct the use of His words (Ephesians 6:17-18). We pray for boldness in proclamation (Ephesians 6:18-19). We pray for signs and wonders (Acts 4:29-30). We pray for the healing of wounded comrades (James 5:14-15). We pray for the healing of unbelievers (Acts 28:8). We pray for miracles (Acts 12:5, 12). We pray that God would supply the daily need for God’s people (Matthew 6:11). We pray for wisdom and understanding (James 1:5). We pray that God would establish leadership for our country, our community, and our church (Acts 14:23). We pray for unity, harmony, and peace (John 17:20-21). We pray for the encouragement of togetherness (1 Thessalonians 3:10). We pray for a mind of discernment (Philippians 1:9-10). We pray for a knowledge of God’s will (Colossians 1:9). And we pray to know God better (Colossians 1:10).

Surely, there are more things to pray about—pandemic, brush fires, tornados, hurricanes, racism, sexism, classism, and more. Through prayer, God will raise us up from all things. So, everyone! Chin up! Look up! Pray for each other!

Speaking of praying for each other, if there's any way I can be praying for you or your family this week, don't hesitate to let me know. I just want you to know that the first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is to pull out church directory on my phone and call out each person's name on the directory to God in prayer and ask God to protect you and guide you, especially in such a challenged time we are having these days! Regardless I receive your prayer request or not, I am praying for you because offering my prayer daily is the best way I can love you from a distance. However, let me know if you have any specific prayer requests. Les Miller, who is the prayer ministry leader of our church, can be reached out also for prayer.

“The prayer of a godly person is powerful. Things happen because of it” (James 3:5b). Let us pray for each other. Amen.