

I was waiting in a queue waiting for petrol at Morrison's last July, and it was just before the Fair holiday and the queue for the petrol pumps was out of filling station. There was a staff member directing cars to the pumps as they became available, and eventually the attendant motioned me to a vacant pump. He noticed my dog collar and he apologised: *Sorry about the queue, it's seems that everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip.* I replied: *I know what you mean, it's the same in my business!* We rarely prepare for life's challenges and we're often caught off guard when problems arise. We rarely pray for guidance when things are going well and its only when we hit problems that our prayer life becomes meaningful. God has given us the gift of prayer, yet we neglect prayer when it could help our lives. James chapter five teaches us not to wait until the last minute before we consider praying, and this teaches has three headings.

First: *When we find ourselves in trouble: Pray!* God gives each of us spiritual gifts and the most obvious of these gifts is the power of prayer. Most of us would have been taught to pray when we were children. Many of us prayed before bedtime or we learned to say grace before a meal. When I was a school we started out day with a prayer, we also opened our Scout meetings with a prayer. Prayer was everywhere and it was considered an essential part of our lives, and for good reason. Through prayer, we enter God's presence because prayer is talking to God either to express thanksgiving or making intercession.

Jesus realized the power of prayer and he regularly sought quiet places to pray. When Jesus was afraid in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, When He was tempted in the wilderness, He prayed for strength. Jesus who was fully human and fully God relied on prayer when He faced challenges. Prayer is a powerful weapon that helps us in so many ways.

It helps us deal with our frustration and anger, because it's hard to remain angry with someone you are praying for, and prayer can be an antidote to that anger. Don't pray to stop being angry but pray blessing on the person you are angry with, and you will find your anger drift away. As I mentioned a few weeks ago; I've tried this and it works for prayer is powerful. Jesus teaches that our welfare depends upon our ability to forgive: ***And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins (Matt 11:25).***

It's this notion that praying for our enemies that makes Jesus' teaching so revolutionary, because it flies in the face of human wisdom. Jesus says in Matthew 5: *But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil.* This is a revolutionary message of peace that the world doesn't want to hear, because we're only concerned with our point of view. *Violence, said Gandhi; will only overcome violence when darkness can be overcome by darkness,* and that will never happen. Darkness can only be overcome with light, just as violence can only be overcome by peace. Praying for those who cause us pain and anguish is the only way to be released from our pain and anguish. Prayer is powerful and it works!

There are recent statistics that support the view that prayer works. Tearfund have stated that nearly half of UK adults pray, that's over 25 million people and prayer is alive and well in the United Kingdom. To break down this statistic, 42% of the adult population say they pray outside of church or religious services. 9 million adults say they pray every day. 12 million adults pray at least once a week, and 13 million adults pray at least once a month. When asked what they pray about, they cited family and friends as their foremost topic followed by gratitude to God.

Then they prayed for the world, for an end to poverty and war. And when they prayed for family their prayer was for guidance and healing. The reason I'm quoting these statistics is to demonstrate that people still rely on prayer. Over 25 million people in the United Kingdom can't all be deluded? Prayer is powerful gift that God has given us, and the Apostle James said that when we're facing challenges; pray!

Next James writes: *When you're ill, seek the prayers of your friends.* There is strength and power in seeking the support and comfort of fellow believers, and this strength is present when we pray on our own and corporately. Corporate prayer is important and Jesus taught that where two or more gathered, God's with us. Prayer for healing is a powerful tool and many can attest to being healed through prayer. There have been several studies conducted that have demonstrated that people who have received prayer when ill have recovered more rapidly and more completely, than those for whom no prayers were raised. This occurred even though the individuals were unaware that they were being prayed for.

There was a study conducted by a cardiologist called Dr Randolph Byrd. Byrd conducted a study of 393 coronary patients. They were divided into two groups. One group would be the beneficiaries of prayer and the other would not. No one knew which group the patients belonged to, and those who were praying were only given the patients first names along with brief descriptions of their medical problems. When the study was completed those who were received prayer benefited in several areas, and there was no medical evidence to suggest why these patients had benefited, and the only answer was that they received prayer.

We have devoted people who attend our prayer meeting and some are involved in Healing Rooms. We have a group of people here is Thornliebank who are willing to pray with you should you wish prayer for yourself or others. We have people who are willing to stand in gap between God and ourselves, people who believe firmly in the power of prayer!

There is evidence that the experience of sharing prayer has a powerful effect on health outcomes. God has blessed us with the ability and opportunity to bring our concerns and thanksgiving directly to Him in prayer, what a wonderful gift! Remember that Jesus told his disciples: *Therefore, I tell you that whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. (Matt 11:24)*. And that's the key to prayer: We must have faith and believe in God's power to receive and answer our prayers! James tell us that when we ask God for anything we must ask in faith: *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. (James 1:6 to 7)*

To recap, the first antidote to life that James offers is this: *When we find ourselves in trouble; pray!* The second is *When you are sick, seek the prayers of your friends.* **The third and last antidote that James offers is: *When you have sinned, confess.*** It's not easy to confess our weaknesses, it's not easy to say *I was wrong* and there's something in us that insists on being right, and believing that the other is wrong. It really takes great courage to admit failure but such confessions work towards our spiritual healing and well-being. Guilt that is unconfessed festers within us, and it produces impatience, rage, stress and even ill health.

Unconfessed sin can destroy friendships and can lead to isolation and hostility. We're much more likely to appreciate and respect someone who honestly admits their guilt, than the self-righteous individual who professes to be flawless. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: *God, I thank you that I am not like other men; robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.* And Jesus said: *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18)* Jesus says that we should confess our sins to another. It's helpful to have a trusted confidante with whom we can share our burdens.

To have someone who will listen without judgment when we confess with our whole heart that we are wrong. It's good to have a fellow Christian who will listen with compassion and tell us we're accepted and to pray for our situation. Often the barrier to confession is the fear of judgement and being rejected. If we think someone is unlikely to reject us then we're more likely to make our confession or apology. We may risk losing a little respect for a time but that's nowhere near as painful as being rejected. So, remember the Lord's Prayer when we pray for God to forgive us as we forgive others. Help others to confess wrongdoing and be gracious and forgiving towards them. And if you can't forgive, then pray and ask God for power to forgive. Prayer is powerful and with God, anything is possible.

The biblical message from the book of James gives sound advice and it offering antidotes to life's problems. When in trouble: Pray. When you or others are sick: Pray. Pray and confess your wrongdoing, ask for forgiveness and then forgive others in return. Pray in your own times of solitude and share in the communal prayer life of the church. And last, relieve yourself of the torture of hidden guilt and find someone you can trust to share with. And in all things, remember that God is with us and that He delights to hear our prayers. Prayer is powerful and in God anything is possible. **Amen and let us pray:**

(1738 words)