

SUBJECT: PRAYER GOD REJECTS

TITLE: BEYOND PRAYER

TEXT: JEREMIAH 7:16; 11:9-14; 14:10-12; 15:1ff

INTRODUCTION. When Abigail, my five year old granddaughter, was just a few months old, I held her and walked over to a mirror and let her look at the baby in the mirror. This was no major challenge because she loved the baby in the mirror. After several minutes, Abigail looked from her reflection in the mirror over to mine. You could almost see the wheels turning as her eyes moved up and down. Finally, she looked over at my reflection in the mirror. Her eyes were locked on mine in the mirror. Suddenly, something registered in her mind and she jerked her eyes from my reflection in the mirror and looked directly at me. You could see that the processor was working. It had to be me in the mirror, so who was that baby? Could it possible be.....?

So it is with the Book of Jeremiah. If you keep looking at Jeremiah, sooner or later you are going to figure out that what you see reflected in this message is America. No, you will not see modern technology, communication, or transportation in the Book of Jeremiah. What you see is a reflection of spiritual conditions in America. You may look for evidence of worship, evangelism, and ministries without seeing them. What you will see is the apostasy that plagued both ancient Judah and much of modern day America.

Let's face it, a lot of people are going to be shocked to hear a sermon on anything that lies beyond prayer. How can that be? Almost everywhere we go in the Bible we are encouraged to pray. You will recall both sermons and conversations in which someone said something like, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer but that which lies beyond the will of God." How often have you heard someone say, "Prayer changes things"? Perhaps you thought, "No, prayer doesn't change things, God changes things when we pray." Then someone quotes, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." We are told that we must pray without ceasing. We are encouraged to pray for those who need healing, for those who are lost, for our nation, for our troops, for our president, for our church, our pastor, and for the missionaries.

There is nothing new about prayer or praying, nor is there anything new about the desire to pray more effectively. We are reminded, both by Scripture and the testimonies of others that we must have faith, that we must pray in Jesus' name, and that we must persevere in prayer. Then, we are told to pray, "Thy will be done." While it is absolutely essential that we pray in keeping with God's will, I have often wondered if sometimes we get into certain habits, possibly thinking we are being more spiritual, but in reality these attitudes may hinder our prayer. For example, when we pray, "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done", is God's will foremost in our minds, or is it possible that we are giving God an out in case we don't get what we want. We ask for something and it is easier to say it wasn't His will than to face that fact that the Lord,

who promises to hear our prayer and grant our petitions, for some reason could not, or did not come through for us. Oh, we don't blame God - that would be sacrilegious. What we do is question our faith. We have a lot of help because Satan, the accuser loves it.

I well remember praying, trusting the Lord to provide healing, even quoting the Scripture to the Lord, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' - 'and Lord, I am praying as fervently as I know how!" Either it was not God's will, He could not deliver, or there was something wrong with my praying - or something missing in my faith. I never blamed God, I never doubted that He was watching over me or my family. There was never a time when I was angry with God. I am amazed at the psychologists who have determined that it is natural for us to be angry with God when things do not go our way. That may be good psychology, but it is very poor theology! If you spend more time in the Word of God and less time exploring the pop-psychology of certain television shows, popular magazines, and best-selling authors, you will know that God is there, that He is listening to you if you humble yourself before Him, that He loves you and will provide what you need. I did struggle for many years with certain questions, but my questions were always about myself, not God. Believe me, I needed to give attention to my deficiencies but if you are not careful Satan will help you out with that, too.

Since prayer is essential to a right relationship with the Lord, we must study what God has to say about prayer, we must pray about prayer, and depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to pray. Seek help from others who share their experience. I would like to see every Christian read Andrew Murray,'s WITH CHRIST IN THE SCHOOL OF PRAYER. He insisted that the way you know you have prayed aright is to look at the answer, just as you can know that you worked a math problems right by the answer. When you read Andrew Murray you become aware of the fact that it never occurs to him that his prayer was not going to be answered.

I. CONSIDER SOME OF THE THINGS WE USUALLY HEAR ABOUT PRAYER.

A. They Tell Us That God Always Answers Prayer.

So, what do "they" tell us about prayer? First, we should pray because God tells us to do so. Second, we are to pray when we want something, or when we need something. Third, we should pray believing. Fourth, God answers all our prayers: He either says yes, no, or let me do it My way (but He never says "maybe"). Fifth is not believing God can do something, faith is believing God will do it. When I pray I can be sure that the Lord hears me, and that He will answer - if I am really praying. He may say yes; He may say no; He may decide on a better answer; but He always answers prayer.

B. They Tell Us That Prayer Changes Things.

1. We must understand that it is God Who changes things.

Prayer is not some mystical exercise through which - if we "get it right" - we will get what we want from God. Prayer is a privilege God grants to born-again Christians. Prayer is a blessing to the children of God. Have you ever stopped to consider what a privilege it is to be given permission to call your Creator, "Father"?

2. God answers true prayers.

The attitude with which we approach God is very important in praying. The emphasis should never be upon how beautiful or how emotional one's prayer is. I have listened to comments made by people leaving a service that caused me some concern. It was obvious that the person was impressed by the volume of the emotions with which some person prayed. I listened to a teenager introduce a solo by dedicating it to his deceased grandfather. He became emotional for a moment before he sang. As soon as the service was over someone asked me, "Don't you think he has become more spiritual?" Knowing that I had to be both kind and honest, I said, "I don't know. Let me wait until he starts making decisions and then maybe I can comment on that." Sadly, when he started making decisions he reflected a life of compromise.

We are not all alike and we will not all pray alike. We may pray with greater emotion one day than another day, depending upon the circumstances. We may pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving with a young couple you visit in the hospital when their baby is born. You pray for comfort when you stand with a family before the casket of a beloved father.

When I arrived at the Pete Maravich Auditorium for my son's graduation from LSU Law School I was handed a program and I opened it and looked down to see where on the program I would have the invocation. I had spoken to the Christian Legal Society a couple of times and met a few of those young men and women. I suppose John's graduating class sought to honor him by asking his father to have the invocation at his graduation from the prestigious law school. I was surprised to see that I was listed for both the invocation and the benediction. When I mentioned the fact that I did not know I was to have the benediction, the young man with the programs said, "I suppose one of them will have to be extemporaneous." I said, "Both of them will be extemporaneous." I listened and prayed as I felt the Lord was leading me and as soon as the recession was over, a group of people from a Monroe, Louisiana church came to me and a young man began thanking me for the prayers, as others nodded in

agreement. They introduced themselves as the family and friends of Barry Dowd, one of John's closest friends. The speaker was his pastor. They recognized the fact that I was praying with a genuine burden for those young men and women who could make such a difference in the courtrooms of our state. A district attorney from north Louisiana also thanked me, and I made a mental note of it, but when I looked into the eyes of these members from Barry's church I knew they had a deeper reason for commenting on the prayers.

C. They Tell Us we Can Ask Anything In His Name and He Will Grant It.

1. This is true, but it is not simply a formula.
2. To pray in His name is to pray in keeping with His character and nature.
3. To pray in His name is to desire His will above everything else.
4. The primary focus of prayer is not on getting what you want.
5. We must pray intentionally, not incidentally.
6. The prayer that begins in heaven gets back to heaven.
7. The purpose in prayer is not to bend God's will to suit my purpose.
8. The purpose in prayer is to bend my will to suit God's purpose.

D. Now Consider Verses that Encourage Us to Pray Expecting God to Hear Us.

"Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24, HCSB).

"Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and wondrous things you do not know" (Jer 33:3).

"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).

With all this in mind it may shock you to discover that:

II. THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT MAY LIE BEYOND PRAYER.

A. Israel Had Been in Rebellion Against the Lord

1. It Would Be a Mistake not to see America in the Book of Jeremiah.

In this series of messages we have drawn some very clear parallels between ancient Israel and modern day America. As a matter of fact when I read God's indictment of Israel in the great Eighth Century B. C. Prophets, Isaiah and Amos, we see that the same sins that condemned Israel are prevalent in America: Immorality, greed, lying, violence,

rejection of God on their everyday life, and idolatry. Israel was guilty of the false worship of the true God as well as the worship of false gods, both idolatry and pollution of the worship of the true God .

America witnessed the inauguration of President George W. Bush (1-20-05). By the end of the next day committed Christians were praising the Lord that our leader is not ashamed to mention our Lord and to call on Him to bless us. The enemies of the cross, energized and motivated by the prince of this world, are ranting and raging against President Bush for daring to mention God. Jerry Springer declared that it is going to get much worse: "He's talking to Jesus." A former speech writer who had written a book about the president is now picking apart the speech. He declared that the Muslims will be offended because the president mention the truth of the Bible and the "word" of the Koran. He praised Peggy Noonan, a former speech writer for President Reagan who wrote a book on Reagan's faith. It seems that Peggy Noonan was pleased with President Reagan's subtle references to God, and the fact that his strongest statements about God came after he left office. On the other hand, she did not care very much for President Bush's speech because there was "too much God" in it. The enemies of the Cross have been emboldened by the devil to attack Jesus - and believe me many of the attack were against Jesus, not just George W. Bush.

America spent two days watching two Senators shamelessly attack Dr. Condeleeza Rice, President Bush's choice for Secretary of State. Senator Trent Lott was asked about Senator's Barbara Boxer's attack on Dr. Rice and he said, "She has just been elected for six years and it's going to be bad." In other words, she will not be held accountable by her constituents. Senator Byrd, a former Klansman (nicknamed "Sheets" by a fellow senator) took action to delay a vote on Condeleeza Rice, a black woman. Do you realize that Condeleeza Rice is a committed Christian, not just a black woman who has been given a position because of her race? The daughter of a Presbyterian minister is both godly and brilliant.

In case you do not believe that a segment of America is at war with God, consider the action of the ACLU against former Chief Justice Roy Moore of Alabama over the display of the Ten Commandments. Consider all those who are cooperating with the ACLU in an effort to get every expression of faith in Jesus removed from public places. Michael Newdow went to court to try to prevent a prayer at the inauguration of President Bush.

2. Now, let us briefly recall the historical background.

In the Eighth Century B. C., the Golden Age of Prophecy, God sent Amos and Hosea to warn the Northern Kingdom (Israel) that if they did not repent they would be conquered by the Assyrians and the people scattered among the nations. They did not repent and the Assyrians, under Sargon II, swept into the land in 722 B. C. and took

large numbers of the people and settled them in other countries. They settled foreigners in the land from which the Israelites had been moved. Foreigners, with their pagan religions and strange languages now lived in the land - Semitic people, but pagans. The Northern Kingdom was history.

During the Eighth Century B. C., God sent Isaiah and Micah to proclaim His word in the Southern Kingdom, Judah (made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). The message was simple, but powerful: If you do not repent you will be severely judged by the Assyrians. They will not destroy you as they will destroy the Northern Kingdom, but you will come under the judgment of the Lord. Through those prophets, God warned that if they still did not obey Him the day would come when he would raise up Babylon and cause them to defeat Judah and take large numbers into captivity in Babylon. Then He would return a remnant to the land and continue His covenant with them. After a century of rebellion, idolatry, greed, and immorality, God sent Jeremiah with a final warning - He was about to act, but at the same time He gave them an opportunity to repent and avoid judgment. He sent Jeremiah to tell them that their time was running out - and there was no indication that they were about to repent.

Jeremiah began his ministry a year or so before the city state of Babylon rebelled against Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar began the conquests that would make Babylon a great empire. Our God moves nations and empires as one moves pawns on a chess board. He did it then, and He knows exactly what He is doing today.

3. God had brought a shocking indictment against His People, Jeremiah 2:13.

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.”

Let me repeat what I have just said: there is a lot of repetition in telling this history in the Bible. Israel, the northern Kingdom had fallen in 722 B.C. and Judah, which would in time take back the name Israel, had been guilty of the same sins as their brothers and sisters in the north. They had been warned by Isaiah and Micah that if they did not repent they would face the judgment of God - not through destruction at that hands of the Assyrians, but a seventy years captivity in Babylon. They are guilty of two specific sins. First, they had forsaken the fountains of living waters. God was that fountain, just as Jesus is the Living Water today. The people of Judah, like their kinsman, rejected God. This implies iniquity, not ignorance. They chose to reject God

Secondly, they had “forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns that can hold no water.” They had not only forsaken the one true God, they had turned to idols, false gods (which are no gods). False gods, false worship of any kind is a broken cistern that can hold no water. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and all the other religions of the world are broken cisterns that

can hold no water. Make not mistake about it, Islam is a broken cistern. New Age religions are broken cisterns. Animism is a broken cistern that can hold no water. Mormonism is a broken cistern. Jehovah's Witnesses is a broken cistern. Secularism is not a broken cistern, it is a system without a cistern. Paul nails it, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Actually, they were made fools - made fools by the prince of this world, Satan.

B. Judah, in Jeremiah's Day Was Beyond the Reach of Prayer.

1. They had not learned from God's judgment of Israel a century earlier.

"I hate, I despise your feasts! I can't stand the stench of your solemn assemblies. Even if you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept [them]; I will have no regard for your fellowship offerings of fattened cattle. Take away from Me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:21-24).

2. A century earlier, Isaiah had been sent to warn Judah of God's judgment.

God would hear individuals, but the nation was set for judgment. Because Israel had refused to repent when Amos delivered God's dramatic warning, God finally declared that they it was not too late for the nation to repent, so He declared, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!" Judah knew that and still refused to repent. God had said that they were more evil than their wicked sister, Israel. They could not plead ignorance any more than people today who reject the fountains of living water and hew for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water, be it Islam, animism, or secularism.

C. God Told Jeremiah to Stop Praying for the People of Judah.

"As for you, do not pray for these people. Do not offer a cry or a prayer on their behalf, and do not beg Me, for I will not listen to you" (Jer 7:16)

This is shocking, but there is more:

"Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to bring on them disaster that they cannot escape. They will cry out to Me, but I will not hear them. Then the cities of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods they have been burning incense to, but they certainly will not save them in their time of disaster. Your gods are indeed as numerous as your cities, Judah, and the altars you have set up to Shame – altars to burn incense to Baal – as numerous as the streets of Jerusalem'" (11:11-13).

I discovered something I consider to be very important many years ago, but it is something that is easily overlooked. When I was writing a commentary on one of the

Pauline Epistles in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK series, I came to understand that you need to stop and consider the word, "Therefore."

When you see the word "therefore" in the Bible look back to see what case God has laid before the people. Then look beyond the word to see what the consequences are going to be. "Therefore" is pivotal - based on what has been said, consider the consequences of your behavior. Here, the Lord tells Jeremiah to warn the people of Judah that because of their rejection of Him, he is going to bring disaster on them, "disaster that they cannot escape."

Now, He has a word for Jeremiah:

"As for you, do not pray for these people. Do not raise up a cry or a prayer on their behalf, for I will not be listening when they call out to Me at the time of their disaster" (Jer 11:14).

They, as a nation were beyond the reach of prayer. This may be disturbing to those who believe God must answer all prayer, based on certain promises. How do you respond to that? First, God is sovereign. He can do whatever He chooses to do. Secondly, God's definition of prayer may differ from ours. What man may consider praying God may consider "saying prayers". There may be a lot of difference.

My younger son, Mark, was asked to fly to Chicago to spend a week with a friend while his fiancée'

was having major surgery. The young lady was going to have a liver transplant and that surgery was complicated by a cyst on her brain which had caused some serious problems with her heart. When Mark met his friend the morning of the surgery he told him that Angie had called him about 2:00 A.M. to ask him to pray for her. Her fiancée' asked, "May I see your prayer?" Mark's surprise must have shown so the man repeated his request, "I would like to see your prayer." He told him that he did not have a written prayer, and then his friend asked, "Did you read one out of the Bible?" It was hard for his friend to understand extemporaneous praying. In recent days, however, he has sent e-mail messages in which he tells me that he is praying for Becky and me. Is he praying or simply reading a prayer?

A few more verses from Jeremiah should prove my point:

"This is what the Lord says concerning these people: Truly they love to wander; they never rest their feet. So the Lord does not accept them. Now He will remember their guilt and punish their sins. Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of these people. If they fast, I will not hear their cry of despair. If they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. Rather, I will finish them off by sword, famine, and plague" (Jer 14:10-12).

I really do not believe America has reached this point yet as a nation. I do believe that there are Americans who may have reached that point. We must warn lost people of the danger and tell them what it means to reject God to the point that they have their request granted forever. Now are you reach for an even more startling warning?

“Then the Lord said to me: ‘Even if Moses and Samuel should stand before Me, My compassions would not [reach out]to these people. Send them from My presence, and let them go. If they ask you: Where will we go? you must tell them this is what the Lord says: ‘Those [destined]for death, to death; those [destined]for the sword, to the sword. Those [destined]for famine, to famine; those [destined]for captivity, to captivity. I will ordain four kinds [of judgment] for them’ – [this is] the Lord’s declaration – ‘the sword to kill, the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the land to devour and destroy’” (Jer 15:1-3).

Has America reached this point yet? I do not believe we have - yet. On what do I base this? The Lord instructed Jeremiah to go out onto the streets of Jerusalem and see if he could find a righteous man. America is filled with men, women, and young people who bow humbly before the Lord and call on His name. They love the Lord. They are sincere, obedient, righteous. Now the next question is can America reach that point that God would refuse to hear their prayers? That is altogether possible, but whether or not America reaches that point before the Lord returns, Americans most certainly can. I have been trying to bear a witness to a man for many years who seems to be spiritually blind. He wishes there might be something beyond death. He wishes he knew there was a heaven and that he would go to heaven, but when I try to witness to him he is quick to see that he doesn’t believe anything I read from the Bible - after all, he is a scientist!

C. The Bible Gives Some Reasons God May Not Answer Prayer.

Let me stress that what man may call prayer God may not even recognize as prayer. There are, however, a number of conditions of the heart that may lead God to turn a deaf ear to one’s prayers. We will simply note a few passages from the Bible.

1. DISOBEDIENCE may cause God to reject your prayers:

“So Saul inquired of God, “Should I go after the Philistines? Will You hand them over to Israel?” But God did not answer him that day” (1 Sam 14:37).

“When you returned, you wept before the Lord, but He didn’t listen to your requests or pay attention to you” (Deut 1:45).

2. SECRET SINS may cause the Lord to turn a deaf ear to your prayers:

“If I had been aware of malice in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalms 66:18).

3. INDIFFERENCE may deny you God’s blessings:

“Then they will call me, but I won’t answer; they will search for me, but won’t find me. Because they hated knowledge, didn’t choose to fear the Lord, were not interested in my counsel, and rejected all my correction, they will eat the fruit of their way and be glutted with their own schemes” (Prov 1:28-31).

4. SELF-INDULGENCE may lead God to reject your prayers:

“You ask and don’t receive because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your desires for pleasure” (James 4:3).

5. SIN will cause God to turn a deaf ear to an individual:

“Then they will cry out to the Lord, but He will not answer them. He will hide His face from them at that time because of the crimes they have committed” (Micah 3:4).

She was a kind and gracious lady, living to serve others. She genuinely loved not only her immediate family, but also her extended family and their friends. You would never consider her a threat to anyone. This dear lady surprised me when she told me she did not believe God answered all prayer because she had prayed for years for God to show her the face of the man who had killed her brother. Why would anyone ask something like that. If she was praying for justice, God is also interested in justice. If she was motivated by hate or a desire for vengeance I understand why God would not answer that kind of prayer.

IV. GOD ALWAYS HEARS THE SINCERE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE.

A. The Bible Tells Us God Will Answer the Prayers of Those Who Love Him.

1. He hears the prayers of the faithful:

“Know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for Himself; the Lord will hear when I call to Him” (Psalms 4:3).

2. He hears the prayers of the righteous:

“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them from all their troubles” (Psalms 34:17).

3. He hears the prayers of those who look to Him:

“But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me” (Micah 7:7).

B. Jesus Invites Us to Call on the Lord.

He taught, “Therefore, I tell you, all the things you pray and ask for – believe that you have received them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24). This promise is made to all believers, to all who love and serve Him. This is a broad and open promise, but there is a definite and uncompromising condition. You must “believe that you have received them, and you will have them.” I have read this verse many times. I know what it says. I believe it. But I have a confession: I continue to go before the Lord and pray wishing for something, hoping I will receive that for which I pray. I am ashamed to admit that I do not always believe that I will absolutely receive that for which I am asking before I pray.

Will you confess with me that when we do not see an answer to pray that it may well be because we pray believing that God could do what I ask if He decides to do it, but I do not always pray believing that He will do it. Even more to the point, I do not always believe that I have already received - in the mind of God - that for which I am praying. Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned.

C. The Holy Spirit Will Assist You When Your Pray Sincerely.

I am so thankful that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to instruct us in prayer. I am also thankful that communication is not a matter of chance - you may get through to Him and you may not. It seems that there are people who still think they only get God’s attention through a sort of holy speech - religious cliches, or through long, often emotional prayers. I thank the Lord that He did not leave something so important to chance, human striving, or to some formula. Paul wrote:

“In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings. And He who searches the hearts knows the Spirit’s mind-set, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).

CONCLUSION. If you reject God He will not bless you. If you pray selfishly He will not hear you. If you are insincere He will turn a deaf ear to you. God refused to hear the prayers of the people of Israel - he even told them to take their offerings away from Him. He told Amos to tell them that their prayers and offerings had become an offensive odor in His nostrils. He told them He refused to listen to their songs and

prayers. In our language we would say that what they called worship made Him sick to His stomach. Jeremiah was sent to Judah to tell them that they guilty of a worse sin than Israel.

Is it possible for America to get in to same position as backsliding Israel, or rebellious Judah? Absolutely. Some 44 million unborn babies have been slaughtered in America since 1973 - but as I add this note, Pro-Life demonstrators are marching in a driving snow in Washington D.D. today, January 22, 2005, on the anniversary of Rowe v. Wade. American air waves are filled with filth as all sorts of actor types lead a nation in celebrating gross immorality through TV movies, and music today. Yet, the American Family Association and James Dopson's Focus on the Family have carried on a crusade for decency that has produced victory after victory for the Lord. Liberals attack God daily, and nightly, on the networks, but Franklin Graham steps up with as clear a presentation of God's provision for salvation one could imagine under the circumstances.

Is America approaching the point at which God will refuse to hear her prayers? Are we there yet? I do not think so. I do, however, believe that individual Americans can and do reach the point where God will not hear them. He may even get sick of our music and reject our tithes. The fact that you call them tithes and offerings does not necessarily mean that God does. If you persist in rejecting God, you can expect God to grant your request - forever.

Let me appeal to you to humble yourself before God and enter into a fresh relationship with our Lord. We must pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ His Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Listen to this invitation to pray: "Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful" (James 5:13-16).