

Rest in Prayerful Peace James 5:13-15

A missionary to Ecuador told this story about the first church he started. He admitted that his Spanish was so-so. One of the early converts had an elderly mother who was in poor health in the hospital. She wondered if the missionary could make a visit. One afternoon he took another new convert to the hospital with him to visit this lady. On top of being in poor health, she had not slept well for two nights so had a high level of anxiety. At the end of the visit the missionary prayed that God would bring comfort to her, lower her anxiety and get some much-needed sleep.

As the two men walked back to the car, the new convert asked the missionary why he had prayed what he did. Textually he said that the missionary had asked the aged mother to ‘rest in peace.’

Less than an hour after leaving the hospital, the missionary got a call from the woman who had asked him to visit her mother letting him know that she had passed away. The man who had accompanied the missionary spread the story about what had happened and how he had prayed for this lady. The missionary recounted that after 30 years on the field no one complained when he didn’t visit them in the hospital or asked him to come pray when they were sick.

With that in mind, turn to **James 5** where the author has some comments to make about prayer. We will be looking today at **verses 13-15** and next week what he has to say in **verses 16-18** on the subject. Prayer is a topic we could spend months talking about and it is my intent to have that as a sermon series next year, so we will only touch on what the text has to say and deal with prayer at greater length in a couple months.

Let me pose this question for you to ponder. **If God is omnipotent, knowing everything, even before it happens, why pray? What are its benefits?**

Let me offer just a couple of thoughts. One compelling reason is that we are commanded to

pray and to pray without ceasing.

At our monthly Board meetings, we discuss a chapter in the book Design for Discipleship by Dwight Pentecost. The topic of our November discussion is on the necessity of prayer in the life of the Christ follower. The author suggests that to be a disciple of Christ, prayer is an essential, even a fundamental godly discipline. It is vital to faith. He suggests that you can be a Christian and not pray or not pray very much, but if you want to be a disciple, one who wholeheartedly follows Christ, prayer is imperative. You can’t be a disciple and not spend time praying. Now by that, the author isn’t claiming that you need to cloister yourself behind the walls of a monastery and spend all day praying. Instead, prayer is like breathing, it comes natural and it’s the first thing, not the last thing you do when facing the challenges and changes of life.

Of all the things the disciples could have asked Jesus to teach them, they asked Him to teach them how to pray. They had seen and heard how the Pharisees prayed. They had even seen how the pagans prayed. There must be something of greater importance in prayer if Jesus spent much of His time alone, praying.

Our passage is a call to pray. **Do you? If so, for how long and for what do you pray?**

A disciple is obedient to the call to pray, and obedience is a mark of a disciple.

We are told who to pray for – **Matthew 5:44;**
I Timothy 2:1

We are told when to pray – **Matthew 6:5**

We are told how to pray – **Matthew 6:9**

We are told to be faithful in prayer – **Romans 12:12**

We are told by what means we are to pray –

Ephesians 6:18

We are told to pray with thanksgiving –

Philippians 4:6

We are told to commit ourselves to prayer –

Colossians 4:2

We are told to pray constantly –

I Thessalonians 5:17

Another compelling reason to pray is that Jesus

spent time doing it. The time He spent in prayer, provides us with an example on the importance of prayer. Most of the time the gospels only tell us that He prayed. I can only think of a few times where we are told what He prayed for.

In **John 17** Jesus prayed for the disciples and for all believers that would follow.

In **Matthew 26** as He prays in the garden before His arrest, He prays that the cup He is about to suffer might be removed, but then prays for God's will to be done.

Then on the cross He prayed several short prayers.

“God, why have you forsaken me?”

“Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing.”

“Father, into Your hands, I commit My spirit.”

He prayed to commune with the Father.

As it was a way for Jesus to communicate with the Father, so it is a way for us to communicate with God as well. Prayer is a way to worship and praise God, to confess sin, petition Him on behalf of the needs of others. We are invited to come in prayer to God with boldness. But, let me remind you that there is a difference between prayers that are bold and prayers that are arrogant.

Let's never forget that when we pray, we are coming into the presence of the Holy, all powerful, all knowing, Creator God. Prayer strengthens our relationship with God. Communication is fragile and any little thing can disrupt it.

If I expect to have a great relationship with Robyn, then my communication with her strengthens it. I love spending time with her talking.

God loves it when we spend time with Him talking.

Prayer gives us victory over evil.
(**Ephesians 6:12; Matthew 26:41**)

Prayer is always available.

How many of you will admit with me that when you go to the grocery store and stand in the fast check out line, you are counting how many items someone has in their basket. It irritates me when someone has more than the allotted 20 items. I want to ask if they can count. Their inconsiderateness only makes the

rest of us wait longer. Stores ought to have a big screen TV that flashes their picture so everyone can give them the guilt complex look.

Prayers don't have to wait. It doesn't matter if someone else has 50 items and you only have one item. God can hear them all at the same time without our having to stand in line or take a number. You never get a busy signal, and you will never hear Him say “can you hold please.” He's always available.

Prayer requires our humility as we depend on God.

Prayer can serve as a witness to others when they see God work in what we pray for or through the peace we experience because we have cast our care on Him.

Prayer can strengthen relationships between believers as we unite our hearts before God over something being mutually prayed for.

Beginning with **James 5:1**, he has been discussing the issue of suffering. Many of these believers had experienced some form of oppression. Some had been exploited by the rich who withheld their wages. Others had experienced suffering to the degree that they were willing to make unnecessary vows either to the Lord or to the people causing the suffering begging that their suffering be lessened or stopped. James had reminded them that their suffering was a means by which their perseverance in the trial strengthened their faith. In our passage today, James is pointing out how believers should respond when facing trouble. In **chapter 1** he said we should respond with joy. In this chapter he gives us another way we are to respond.

I. BELIEVERS ARE TO RESPOND IN SUFFERING – v. 13a

Still addressing believers, James begins with a question. One that seems quite obvious, one that we could all answer.

“Is any among you afflicted?” – KJV

“Is any among you troubled?” – NIV

The word means to suffer endure hardship. The dictionary adds that trouble is to disturb or agitate; to cause mental agitation, to worry or to harass; to cause pain or discomfort; to cause difficulty or

inconvenience; to pester or annoy.

If I were a betting man and asked you that question this morning by a show of hands, dollars to donuts you would all raise your hand. We have all experienced, to one degree or another, some kind of trouble.

Some trouble we bring on ourselves.

I get caught speeding.

I get caught lying.

I get caught committing a crime.

Lot got in trouble because he brought it on himself.

David got in trouble for the time he numbered the nation or when he had Uriah murdered after his adultery with Bathsheba. Eventually his family was torn apart and he had to flee for his life.

Other kinds of trouble are at the hands of someone else at times because of your faith.

The prophets were mistreated for speaking out for God against the sins of kings or the nation.

Daniel was thrown in the lions den.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow in worship to the king's statue.

Paul was beaten, left for dead, thrown in prison on different occasions for preaching the gospel as were the disciples. All of them, except John, were killed for their faith.

The kind of affliction James is talking about is all inclusive. It's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. It includes disease and discouragement, doubt, anxiety, financial hardship or relationship conflicts – anything that causes trouble.

In whatever trouble we encounter, we often try any number of solutions first, not that there is inherently anything wrong in any of those solutions. But all too often as a last resort, we pursue what James says should be the very first thing we do – pray.

Are you in any kind of trouble? Pray. Too often, prayer is the last option, as if we resign ourselves that since nothing else has worked, we might as well send up a prayer and hope God is listening.

Psalm 34:6 “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard Him; and delivered him from all his

all his troubles.”

The word poor doesn't mean someone in poverty, someone who has no possessions. Instead, it means someone who recognizes that he doesn't have the resources to bring about his own deliverance, safety or well-being. The person who calls out such a time of trouble understands his dependence on God. Any time you are in trouble, shouldn't be a time when you go through the mental exercise of wondering how you are going to get out of the mess you're in. It should though, be a time you immediately call out to God for help.

When David was six months old, Robyn was in the hospital for a week because of her gall bladder. She went in the hospital on a Saturday night, I preached here for the second time the next day. I brought David to church, preached my message and when I went to pick David up from the nursery, I don't remember who was in there that day, but they handed him to me and said they thought he was running a fever. I got him home, fed him a bottle and was changing him when he just erupted on the changing table spitting up all over. I couldn't holler for Robyn, she was having her own trouble in the hospital. Instinctively, I cried out “Jesus, help me.”

**What is your first thought when you are in trouble?
Where is the first place you turn when there is
hardship?**

James says pray.

I asked Elaine to include What a Friend We Have in Jesus as one of the songs to sing this morning.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and GRIEFS to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;

Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Can we find a friend so faithful
 Who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our every weakness;
 Take it to the Lor in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
 Cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Savior, still our refuge;
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
 Thou wilt find a solace there.

Or how about this from John W. Peterson:
 No one understands like Jesus;
 He's a friend beyond compare.
 Meet Him at the throne of mercy;
 He is waiting for you there.

No one understands like Jesus,
 Every woe He sees and feels.
 Tenderly He whispers comfort;
 And the broken heart He heals.

No one understands like Jesus,
 When the foes of life assail.
 You should never be discouraged;
 Jesus cares and will not fail.

Chorus:
 No one understands like Jesus
 When the days are dark and grim.
 No one is so near, so dear as Jesus;
 Cast your every care on Him.

Hugh Stowell wrote this hymn:
 From every stormy wind that blows,
 From every swelling tide of woes,
 There is a calm, a sure retreat;
 'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.

Ah! Whither could we flee for aid,
 When tempted, desolate, dismayed;
 O, how the hosts of hell defeat,
 Had suffering saints no mercy seat.

God does not right away end our trouble.

Paul and those on ship still had to go through the storm that landed them on the island of Malta. Daniel still had to spend the night with hungry lions.

His three friends still had to get thrown into the fiery furnace.

Let's learn to cast our cares on Him because He cares for us. (**I Peter 5:7**)

Let's learn that God **"gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" and that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."** (**Isaiah 40:29, 31**)

Is anyone in trouble? He should pray. The tense in the Greek is to pray repeatedly, to pray continuously, to keep on praying. Don't stop!

One author states that when we are in trouble, we should pray instead of grumble and complain.

Paul reminds us that in any trouble we might find ourselves, God's grace is sufficient to carry us through it. (**II Corinthians 12:7-10**)
Hebrews 10:19-23

Paul asked in **Romans 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"**

His response preceded the question: (**v. 31**) **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"**

Now, let me pause here for a little commercial of sorts. You may find yourself in a good place right now, relatively speaking. You may not be experiencing any trouble in your life right now. You may not need to pray out of response to any affliction. Hallelujah and amen. But let me encourage you to pray anyway, if not for you, pray for others who are going through trouble. There are people all around you who are hurting and need prayer. Pray for them.

We have brothers in sisters in Christ around the world who are in trouble, undergoing persecution for their faith that we need to pray for.

I have printed off a couple sheets that give ways to pray for the persecuted church.

The rack on the foyer, has a few copies of the Voice of Martyrs magazine. This month's issue is on Ethiopia. You can go to their website and get on their mailing list to receive it each month for free. They also have an app you can download on your phone that gives you a country to pray for each day. It gives some information about the country and how you can pray.

We have inserts in the bulletin to pray for countries that Pastor Jim updates every week and we include in the prayer leaflet a country to pray for each day that is on the persecuted watch list.

I have ordered some 2022 calendars from Voice of Martyrs that list a country each day to pray for.

Our response when we are in trouble is to pray and we should be praying for one another.

Another response for the believer is on the other end of the spectrum from affliction.

II. BELIEVERS ARE TO RESPOND IN SINGING – v. 13b

James asks a second question, the response to which also should be obvious.

“Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.”

The word for song is psalm. Originally it meant to play on a stringed instrument. Praise is another form of prayer. **Philippians 4:6** reminds us that when we offer our petitions and requests to the Lord when we pray it is to be accompanied with thanksgiving. Praise is always the right response when we offer our prayers. In it we are acknowledging God, honoring God for who He is and what He has done, or will do in the thing for which we are praying.

Some translations use the word cheerful or merry instead of happy. Of all people, Christians have the most to be thankful for and to give praise about. This verse isn't to suggest that we should never experience times of sorrow or grief in times of suffering or hardship. On the one hand, Job praised

God – **“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”** But then he also grieved the day he was born. But that said, neither should we walk around with a sour face.

Romans 15:9

Ephesians 5:19-20

If you have something for which you are thankful, if you are happy, sing songs of praise. The tense is such that it means to keep on singing.

I have mentioned that in my drive to church in the morning I like to use it for my Scripture memory. But sometimes I turn the radio on and the volume up and sing along with the praise music. It cheers me up.

Who can cheer the heart like Jesus,
By His presence all divine?
True and tender, pure and precious,
O how blest to call Him mine!

All that thrills my soul is Jesus;
He is more than life to me.
And the fairest of ten thousand
In my blessed Lord I see.

Most of you know that my mom went through a lot in her life, especially near the end. Three rounds of cancer, an amputation, but still there was a cheerfulness about her that led to lots of singing. But even before that growing up she was always singing. Singing on the good days will help you sing in the bad days too.

Warren Wiersbe offers this advice when it comes to our praise.

1. Praise must be intelligent – **I Corinthians 14:14**
2. Praise must be from the heart – **Ephesians 5:19**
3. Praise must be motivated by the Holy Spirit – **Ephesians 5:18**
4. Praise must be based on the Word of God – **Colossians 3:16**

John MacArthur notes “The suffering and the happy, the wounded, broken spirits and the whole, rejoicing spirits are both to pray. One is to plead,

the other is to praise.” No matter which end of the spectrum we are on, prayer and praise should be natural responses of the believer. Believers are given one additional response seen in **verses 14-15**.

III. BELIEVERS ARE TO RESPOND IN SICKNESS – vs. 14-15

This is a passage that has generated a lot of discussion, disagreement, and controversy. What does it mean that the prayer of faith will heal the sick? Does sick really mean sick?

Some believe just what it says – if you pray in faith, with enough faith, healing for the sick is guaranteed. Others believe that the prayer of faith offered by the elders of the church provides the sick person with spiritual and emotional comfort rather than physical healing.

Let me say that it is always appropriate to pray for the sick. Our prayer leaflet is filled with people who have some kind of health concern from COVID to cancer and everything in between. But that said, the literal rendering of the word sick means to be weary. Keep in mind that the context here is related to those who have been suffering. Many have become weary and worn from all they have endured. From what they have been experiencing they are morally and spiritual tired. If that is the case, James provides some encouragement in the recommendations he offers. This is something that we don't hear much of these days.

First, he says the weary person should call the elders, the leaders of the church.

Second, the elders are to anoint the sick and weary person. Some suggest that this is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Others believe the oil had medicinal properties that would bring healing. This is not a ceremonial anointing as we see either for a new king or for someone who became priest. It's a different word used here. The word anoint literally means to rub. There are times when I have been working out in the yard on some exhausting projects and at the end of the day Robyn will take some oil

and rub my shoulders and muscles. It is soothing.

Third, the elders are to pray in the name of the Lord. That means to pray for His will to be done. I agree with Walvoord and Zuck who write: “James’ point is that the weak and weary would be refreshed, encouraged, and uplifted by elders who rubbed oil on the despondent’s head and prayed for them. For the fallen, discouraged, distressed, weary believer, restoration is assured and the elders’ prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well, i.e. restore him from discouragement and spiritual defeat and the Lord will raise him up.”

This verse does not teach that the anointing oil is what heals, but that it is the Lord. This prayer of faith is in accordance with God’s will. If this verse was talking solely about physical healing, then no one should die.

That this is a spiritual and not a physical healing is evident in what James says next. If the person has sinned, if the weariness he has been experiencing is because he sinned, this prayer of faith by the elders will result in forgiveness because the sinning believer has asked them to come, perhaps as a way of confessing.

Again John MacArthur adds “If sin has contributed to or resulted from the spiritual weakness and defeat of a fallen believer, that sin will be forgiven him when he cries out to God for forgiveness. The elders can encourage him to confess, help him discern his sins, and join their prayers for his forgiveness to his. That is an essential element of their ministry of restoration.”

The prayer of faith does not mean that the elders have more faith than others to evoke healing, but that each is looking completely to the Lord to effect a change in the weariness of the believer by encouraging and then forgiving any sin if necessary. The prayer of faith is absolute confidence that God will do His will. We have the guarantee from verses like **I John 1:9** that the sinning believer will be restored.

We are called to pray when suffering. We are called to praise when we are cheerful. We are called to petition the elders to pray for us when we are weary, when the load is too great and we feel overwhelmed. If sin is involved, we are forgiven.

May you truly rest in peace through prayer/praise.