

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Let's Pray
James 5:13-18

For Christians prayer should be as natural as breathing. Unfortunately for many professing believers they think that an occasional prayer before meals or a quick prayer before bedtime places them in a position of spiritual health. The fact is, every believer must be continually in the presence of God, enjoying all the benefits which are ours in Christ in order to be fully functional.

Because we enjoy such a free and prosperous society; because we have so many blessings that have been poured out upon us by God, many professing believers have exchanged their birthright for a bowl of porridge. How have they done this? By turning their back on the joy and the blessings of prayer to indulge themselves in the crumbs of earthly pursuits.

When this happens, Christians become for all intents and purposes practical humanists, living as if God were not necessary. Any passionate longing for God and yearning for His help will be missing from their lives ----- along with any empowerment.

Because of this great and common danger, Paul urged believers to “pray at all times” in **Eph. 6:18** and “**to devote yourselves to prayer**” in **Col. 4:2**. Continual, persistent, incessant prayer is an essential part of Christian living and flows out of dependence upon God.

Consider the life of Christ. Though His earthly ministry was remarkably brief, barely three years long. Yet in those three years, as must have been true in His earlier life, He spent a great amount of time in prayer. Christ practiced an unending communion between Himself and the Father. The Gospels report that Jesus habitually rose early in the morning, often before daybreak, to commune with His father. In the evening He would frequently go to the Mount of Olives or some other quiet spot to pray, usually alone. Prayer was the spiritual air that Jesus breathed every day of His life.

He urged His disciples to do the same. He said to them in **Luke 21:36** “**But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place.**”#148;.

The early church appears to have learned that lesson and carried on Christ's commitment to continual, unceasing prayer. Even before the day of Pentecost, the 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room and **Acts 1:14** tells us that they “**with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.**”#148;. That didn't change even when 3,000 were added to their number on the Day of Pentecost according to **Acts 2:42**. When the apostles were led to structure the church so that ministry could be accomplished effectively, they said in **Acts 6:4** “**We will devote ourselves to building better children, youth and adult programs.**” Of course this is not what they said! Rather they said, “**We will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.**”.

Throughout his life, the Apostle Paul exemplified this commitment to prayer (Rom. 1:9-10; cf. 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3, 11; Phile. 4).

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

To the Roman believers in **Romans 1:9-10** he said, “**God is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, (10)always in my prayers making request**”. What a wonderful thing for the Romans to be assured of. According to 1 Thess. 3:10; and 2 Tim. 1:3; his prayers for believers often occupied him both “night and day.”#148;.

Because he prayer for them so continually, Paul was able to exhort his readers to pray that way as well. He urged the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thess. 5:17. He commanded the Philippians to stop being anxious and instead, “in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (4:6). As I shared earlier, he encouraged the Colossians to “devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” in Col. 4:2. And to help the Ephesians arm themselves to combat the spiritual darkness in the world around them, he said, “**With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,**” in Eph. 6:18.

But James is not the only New Testament writer who encouraged his readers in this area of prayer. We also find the same encouragement by James in the epistle that we are now studying. Let us read **James 5:13-18,..... “(13) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. (14) Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; (15) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”**

This passage of Scripture without a doubt focuses on the need of the church to be committed to prayer. Those who possess a saving or living faith will find themselves striving to do this. And those who do not possess a saving or living faith will not find themselves striving to do this.

In examining this passage, we will see three different thoughts about prayer emphasized. In examining this passage, we will see three different aspects of prayer that need to be appreciated.

My hope is that after we have finished this study, each of us here this weekend will be moved to be more fully committed to prayer and be enjoying the benefits and blessings of that commitment.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

PRAYER AND COMFORT

All of us here this weekend who are in need of comfort will hopefully understand the vital role of prayer in light of that need.. And all of us here this weekend who have received comfort hopefully will understand the vital role of prayer in light of that provision. Let us first of all consider the vital role of prayer for those who need comfort.

This weekend I am sure that there are people in this service who are suffering. When we are suffering what are we to do?

Let us look at **V. 13** **“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray....”** The word for suffering (kakopatheia) primarily means to endure hardship, to experience misfortune or calamity. The occasion of trouble “can be physical, mental, personal, financial, spiritual, religious or whatever.” In the context of this epistle, it would seem to focus our attention on the trials that these Hebrew believers were experiencing as a result of their faith. As they experienced these various difficulties James is calling them to pray. It says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”

We must personally heed this instruction for ourselves. Prayer is essential to enduring affliction. Enduring affliction is all about comfort and God is the ultimate source of comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 5:7). Paul in **2 Cor. 1:3-4** describes God as the **“Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction.”** Peter wrote in **1 Pet. 5:7**, **“casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”** From the stomach of a great fish the disobedient prophet prayed in **Jonah 2:7**, **“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into Your holy temple.”**

When professing believers are weak in faith, weary with persecution, and crushed by affliction, they must continually ask God for help and enjoy His comfort. We must do this as a way of life. It must be as natural to us as breathing. This is a basic spiritual truth, but one often forgotten. In the words of the beloved hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” it says:

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.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Where are you this weekend? Are you heeding the instruction of James? Some of you might say, “I would be if I was suffering but I am not suffering.” But this is just not true. I know that you are suffering. Yes, it might be true that you are not presently in prison for your faithful proclamation of the Gospel, it might be true that your marriage is OK and your children seem to be doing fine. But just because you may be doing OK in certain very important areas of your life, this does not mean that your life is free of difficulty and therefore not in need of comfort.

We suffer temptation (Rom. 7:15-24). Is Satan attacking your life in very specific areas? Are you being hard pressed to remain faithful to the word of God and respond in a righteous, holy way? Are you being tempted to do things that you shouldn't, or not to do the things that you should?

Someone might ask “Should being tempted be considered a form of suffering?” Listen to the words of Paul in **Romans 7:15-24, (15) “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. (16) But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. (17) So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. (18) For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (19) For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. (20) But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (21) I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. (22) For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (23) But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”** Now listen to this last verse, **“Wretched man that I am! who will set me free from the body of this death?”** Let me ask you a question: Is Paul suffering under the onslaught of his flesh? And the answer would have to be, Yes! I don't know about you, but I do know about me. I am looking forward to that day in the future when this body of flesh will be redeemed; when I will no longer have to suffer the sin that dwells in my earthly members..... But until that day, as I suffer temptation what am I to do? I am to talk to the Lord about them.

We suffer people (1 Cor. 13:4). Listen to **1 Cor. 13:4, “Love is patient.”** Because of the imperfections of people we are called to be patient with them. Or in other words, we are called to suffer them. The suffering aspect of loving people is not so clear in the NAS translation as it is in the KJV which translates the verse this way, **“Charity (or love) suffereth long.”** If we are truly loving, we will in a very real sense put up with the weaknesses of people. We will not strike out at them or withdraw from them.

Let me ask you a question: Are you perfect? And the answer to that question would have to be, according to the Scriptures, No! This means that people will have to suffer you. Certainly my wife suffers me. My children suffer me. All those who are in a close relationship with me suffer me. And they will need the comfort of God in order to endure me.

One day we will go to glory and all those around us will be perfect. We will no longer have to exercise patience with them. We will no longer have to be longsuffering with them. But until that day as I suffer people, what am I to do? I am to talk to the Lord about them.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

We suffer circumstances (1 Cor. 4:9-14). Certainly this is true of those who are striving to please the Lord and to be actively involved in the advancement of His kingdom. Listen to the comments of Paul concerning the life experiences of the Apostles in **1 Cor. 4:9-14**, “**For, I think, God has exhibited us Apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. (10) We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. (11) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; (12) and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; (13) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.**” Life is not easy for those who are seeking to serve the Lord. Certainly this is clear in the Scriptures. But you might say that though you are seeking to serve the Lord in the limited way that you are now serving Him, you are not suffering in any way close to what Paul describes in these verses. And certainly if you were, you would be praying. But even if you are not suffering in the way that Paul is describing, I know that you are suffering. What does **Job 5:7** tell us “**Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.**”

Everyone here this weekend is suffering in some form or fashion. Everyone in this room this weekend is under the pressure of life, experiencing the burdens of life, the disappointments of life. You are all suffering. There are things that you are unsure about, situations that you care about that are outside of your control. You are suffering. It may not be a terminal illness, a break-up of a marriage, or the loss of a loved one, but you are suffering. In fact you are probably suffering many things. . . When we are suffering, we are to pray in order to receive God’s comfort.

This is an area where I believe many professing believers suffer needlessly. They are willing to pray about the big things, but all the little difficulties and disappointments of life they seem to want to handle themselves. It may be that a single small difficulty would not necessarily cause a professing believer a great deal of pain, but what happens is that each of these little things accumulates and it becomes a heavy load.

One day when we are in glory our circumstances will be perfect. We will be free from the burdens, cares, and difficulties of this life. But until that day what are we to do when we are suffering adverse circumstances, whether or not these circumstances are big or small. We are to pray!

If you have not been consistently praying about the various pressures, disappointments, and cares created by your circumstances, I would like to challenge you this weekend to confess your sin, humble yourselves before the Lord and take the time to cast all your cares upon Him, knowing that He cares for you. We have considered the vital role of prayer for those who need comfort in the midst of their suffering.

Now let us consider the vital role of prayer for those who have received comfort. Not only are those who are suffering instructed to pray, but those who are cheerful, or in other words; those who have received various blessings and the comfort of God in a multitude of different ways, are instructed to sing praises.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Look again at **V. 13** **“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”** The word “cheerful” (euthumeo) is a good translation of the word. It is found only one other time in the NT and that is in Acts 27:22,25 when Paul is encouraging the sailors in the midst of the storm to take courage or in other words to be cheerful. Why? Because he was assuring them that they in fact would all survive the storm. As those sailors were comforted, what should they have done? They should have sung praises to God.

What are you cheerful about this weekend? Then you need to sing praises. When we are suffering and we are in need of comfort we need to pray. But when we have received comfort and are now cheerful we need to sing praises. Praise is simply another form of prayer (Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2).

I am concerned that there are people here this weekend who are failing to bring all their cares to the Lord, but I am even more concerned that there are people here this weekend who have been blessed of the Lord in so many different ways but in their cheer they are not choosing to “sing praise.”

What does it mean to “sing praise?” “Sing praise” does not mean that we have to join the worship team at church, but it does mean that when we are cheerful because of the Lord’s goodness it should produce such an expression of gratitude toward Him in our hearts that in essence it becomes music to his ears.

Listen to **Eph. 5:18-19**, **“And be not drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”** Singing praise begins with a song in our heart, but this song will invariably flow from our hearts to specific expressions of praise to God because the Scriptures tells us, **“out of the heart the mouth speaketh.”**

In light of this, I would like to add to the challenge that I gave you earlier. If you find yourself not praising God when you are cheerful during the course of your day, then I would encourage you to confess your sin, humble yourself before the Lord and as soon as you can make a list of all that God has blessed you with and praise Him.

CONCLUSION

IMAGINE THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES IF WE WOULD SIMPLY PRACTICE WHAT
JAMES 5:13 TELLS US.