

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Let's Pray James 5:13-18 Part Two

Last week I shared with you that prayer should be as natural as breathing, but I need to qualify that statement. Prayer should be as natural as breathing for someone who has personally come to appreciate the fact that God is love. We know that the Bible teaches this. **1 John 4:8** tells us “**God is love**” but it is one thing to know that the Bible teaches this and quite another thing for us to personally appreciate it.

I would like to demonstrate this for you from the verse that we considered last week. Let us again look at **James 5:13** and consider what it says, “**Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.**”

The Lord, in this verse, is asking professing believers who are suffering, to pray. For those who do not know God as love this might be a difficult command. It may be difficult for the simple reason that they may not see the point of it. Why should they pray? They don't really believe that anything is going to change anyway. But for those who know Him as love, they will invariably see Him as a caring God. They truly believe that their prayers will not fall on deaf ears, but that good things will come because they have taken time to cast their cares upon Him. They know he cares because they have come to appreciate the fact that God is love. For those who know God in this way, when they experience suffering, prayer will be as natural as breathing.

The Lord also in **James 5:13** is asking professing believers who are cheerful to sing praises. As I mentioned to you last week, singing praise is just another form of prayer. For those who do not know God as love, this might be a difficult command. Why should they sing praise? When they look at their lives and the good things which are in their lives, they tend to give themselves credit for what they are enjoying. They give themselves credit for their good marriage, for their obedient children, for their success at work or at school, for their awards, for their honors, for their friends. They do not see that every good thing that they experience is a gift from God. They do not see that every good thing that they are experiencing is a gift from the God of love. But for those who know the Lord in this way, they will invariably come to see Him as the Bestower of every good thing. And for those that have come to know the Lord in this way, they will invariably come to see Him as the giver of every perfect gift. For those who know God in this way, when they experience cheer, singing praise will be as natural as breathing..... Effective prayer starts by personally appreciating this truth: that God is love.

When we come to faith in Christ, will we immediately enjoy a prayer life that is full and uninterrupted? Will we enjoy a prayer life as I just described it? A prayer life that is as natural as breathing? The likelihood of this would be slim. Why is this? Because we are still young in the faith, there is still much for us to learn and to understand about God and particularly about the love of God. Certainly the disciples found that prayer did not always come naturally to them. In **Mark 9:29** Christ makes it clear that the disciples had failed to cast out a demon because of their failure to pray.

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In **Luke 21:40** we see Christ instructing his disciples to pray lest they enter into temptation and then just a few verses later in **Luke 21:46** we see the disciples had fallen asleep. Their hearts were good but they had much to learn, and new believers also have much to learn.

But they will learn! “The child is father of the man,” said Wordsworth. His statement expressed a basic principle of life which we all understand. Babies have a habit of growing up into adults. No one is surprised when little junior progresses from a crawl, to his first tottering steps, to a manly gait, and then to sprints around an athletic field. Maturing and growing up is perfectly natural for a child and so it is with the prayer life of believers as we become day by day more like Christ.

On this communion weekend, I would like us to get a good grip on the process that takes us from a place where prayer is of little or no importance to where it becomes as natural as breathing. It starts with spiritual life.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

It is quite obvious that the prerequisite for physical growth is physical life, and the prerequisite for spiritual growth is spiritual life. There is no exception to this rule. Many people seem to have the mistaken impression that spiritual maturity can be attained without spiritual life.....Nicodemus was such a man. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man of high moral character and deep religious hunger . Apparently, Nicodemus was attracted to Jesus because of His miracles and Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus and the doctrines that he taught. Certainly Jesus could have wowed him with all kinds of information, but he chose to go the heart of the issue. Do you remember what he said to Nicodemus? **“you must be born again.”** In effect he was saying to Nicodemus, “You may be physically alive but you are spiritually dead.” Nicodemus had come to Christ to learn from Him and the first thing that he learned was that spiritual life is a prerequisite for spiritual growth.

This need is not isolated to Nicodemus. Every person born into this world is born spiritually dead (Rom. 5:12). **Romans 5:12** makes this very clear, **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”** What does this mean practically for us in terms of our earthly existence? It means that we are separated from God. It means for all intents and purposes no matter what we might do in order to establish a connection between ourselves and the Lord, it just will not happen. And certainly this means that any attempts to make prayer a vital part of our lives will also be futile.

Why? Because of the sin of Adam we are born into this world spiritually dead. And spiritually dead people are unable to do anything that is acceptable to God (Is. 64:6). Does the Bible actually teach this? Of course it does. In **Isaiah 64:6** **“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind, take us away.”**

Many people know something is wrong. They know that something is missing in their lives. They do all the things that the world tells them to do but they still don't feel complete. They still don't feel satisfied.

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My parents, as they looked at my life, repeatedly told me, “Dale, you will do fine in life.” They saw me as an obedient son. They saw me as a person who was well- liked. They saw me as successful in all my endeavors, and their conclusion was “Dale, you will do fine in life.” Yes, my parents said I would be fine, but I was not fine. I knew something was wrong . Something was terribly wrong, but I did not know what.

What was my problem? I was spiritually dead. Spiritually dead people will never truly feel complete (Col. 1:16). Listen to **Col. 1:16, “For all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him.”** I had been created by God and for God, but I was separated from Him and unable to enjoy a relationship with Him or fulfill my created purpose to Him. And no matter how successful I might have been in the eyes of the world, no matter how good I tried to be, I could not fill the void. I could not do anything that would change my miserable condition. Why? Because spiritually dead people are dead to God and are unable to make themselves alive. And if they cannot make themselves alive so that they come to know God and the love of God, they will never have a prayer life that is as natural as breathing.

Spiritually dead people cannot make themselves alive but praise the Lord, what we could not do God has done for us through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son (1 Cor. 15:1-4). This is made clear to us in **1 Cor. 15:1-4.** We could not solve the sin problem but the Lord solved the sin problem for us. **Is. 53:6** tells us **“All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord has laid upon him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all.”** When Jesus died on the cross, He suffered the judgment that rightfully should have fallen to us. And when He had suffered fully for the sins of the entire world, including the sin of Adam, He said “It is finished” and at that moment Jesus opened a door to heaven for anyone who is willing to transfer their trust from themselves and their good works to Him alone for their salvation. (Eph. 2:8-9). **Eph. 2:8-9** tells us, **“For by grace are you saved through faith and not of yourselves; it is a gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast.”**

I chose to go through that door when I was in high school. I was invited by a friend from school to a church volleyball tournament. After the tournament, the youth pastor called everyone together and shared with us how people, because of sin, were separated from God. He shared what the Lord had done for us through His Son to solve this problem and then invited us to transfer our trust from ourselves and our so-called good works to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, and I did that.

For the very first time I understood my problem and I knew the solution and I acted. At that moment in time almost 40 years ago, I was born again. I was not only physically alive but I was also spiritually alive. The void I had felt in my life had finally been filled. I was no longer a stranger or an alien but a member of God’s family.

Have you taken this step? Have you seen your spiritual need? Have you seen God’s provision through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? Have you taken advantage of that provision by faith, transferring your trust from yourself and your so-called good works to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Have you done this? If your answer is yes, then praise the Lord. If you have not done this, I beg of you now to take that step. Just simply, in the quietness of your own heart, pray this simple prayer: “Lord Jesus, I need you. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my life and make me the kind of person you want me to be.”

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If you have prayed this prayer, sincerely transferring your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, then you have stepped through the door that Christ opened for you at the cross 2000 years ago and you are now born again. You were dead in trespasses and sins but you are now alive in Christ Jesus.

But being spiritually alive does not necessarily mean that you will immediately enjoy a dynamic prayer life. Being born again is the necessary first step in achieving a dynamic prayer life, but it is only the first step. The second step now also must be taken. The second step in enjoying a dynamic prayer life is spiritual growth.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I shared with you that many people seem to have the mistaken impression that spiritual maturity can be attained without spiritual life. We obviously have seen that a person cannot mature spiritually if they are spiritually dead. But just because we become spiritually alive by placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we should not be led to believe that we are born spiritually mature. When we are born, we are born spiritual infants and not spiritually mature adults. And therefore we are in need of nourishment which comes from God's Word (1 Pet. 2:1-2). Listen to **1 Pet. 2:1-2, “(1) Therefore putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, (2) like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”**

1 Pet. 2:1 is a very important verse. If we do not put off sin and yield ourselves to the Lord we are going to be spiritually sick, and we will have no appetite for the Scriptures (1 Pet. 2:1). If you are here this weekend and you happen to be one of those who are spiritually sick, you must confess and forsake your sin. If you do this, you will be immediately restored to spiritual health. And when you are spiritually healthy you will long for the Word. How strong a longing would Peter like us to have for the Word of God? Let us read **V. 2 “Let us therefore like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”** How interested is a newborn in milk? He is obsessed with milk.

Hopefully you will have this same obsession for God's Word. Assuming that you are free of unconfessed sin, your growth in respect to salvation will be directly proportional to the amount of nourishment you are able to draw from the Word.

Growing in respect to salvation will impact every area of our lives, but there is one area that I believe, from the Word of God and my own personal experience, will be impacted more dramatically than any other area, and that is a growing appreciation of the gospel of Christ.

From my own personal experience, as I have grown in respect to my salvation, I have grown in my appreciation of the gospel. I have grown in my appreciation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

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I have grown in appreciation of all it's implications in respect to God and in respect to myself and I am left with one overriding incredible conviction. And the conviction is this, God, truly and infinitely in Christ, has loved me, He continues to love me, and will always love me.

What are my feelings this morning? I would like to read you the words of the song entitled "My Tribute." "How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me? Things so undeserved, yet you gave to prove your love for me; the voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude, All that I am, and ever hope to be; I owe it all to thee. To God be the glory. To God be the glory, To God be the glory for the things he has done. With His blood he has saved me; with his power he has raised me; To God be the glory for the things He has done. Just let me live my life -- let it be pleasing Lord to thee; and if I gain any praise, Let it go to Calvary.

CONCLUSION

How does one come to the place where their prayer life will be as natural as breathing? It will only come after they are born again and possess spiritual life. It will only come after they, while pursuing righteousness, feed on the Word of God, and grow in their appreciation of the gospel of Christ and the Great love our heavenly father has for them.

If this process actually is taking place in your life, what will happen to you when you suffer? You will pray. And what will happen to you when you are cheerful? You will sing praise.