

THE PRIORITY AND POWER OF PRAYER, Part 1

James 5:13-18

¹³*Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.*
¹⁴*Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to 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 would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.* ¹⁸*Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.*

The Context

5:1-6	James rebukes the wicked, powerful rich who were persecuting believers by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fraudulently withholding their wages (v. 4) • unjustly dragging them into court (v. 6)
5:7-12	James tells these persecuted believers how they should respond to this injustice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient until the Lord's coming (v. 7-8a) • Be strong in your resolve (v. 8b) • Be gracious toward one another (v. 9) • Be encouraged through the example of others (vv. 10-11) • Beware of rash vows to God (v. 12) ← <p><i>Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.</i></p> <p>[How we should <u>not</u> respond to God]</p>
5:13-18	James tells these persecuted believers to seek God in prayer ← [How we <u>should</u> respond to God] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The _____ of prayer (vv. 13-16a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ James calls to prayer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ _____ believers [v. 13 - <i>Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray.</i>] ▪ the _____ [v. 14 - <i>Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him</i>] ▪ the _____ [v. 16a - <i>Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another</i>] • The _____ of prayer (vv. 16b-18)

When to
Pray
(13)

How to
Pray
(14-16a)

Why
Pray
(16b-18)

1 THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

- James begins (1:5) and ends (5:13-18) with the importance of prayer in the midst of trials
But if any of you ↓ lacks wisdom, let him ask of God
- Many New Testament epistles conclude with a call to prayer
 - Romans 15:30 - *Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.*
 - Ephesians 6:18-19 - *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, and pray on my behalf*
 - Philippians 4:6 - *In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*
 - Colossians 4:2-3 - *Devote yourselves to prayer...praying at the same time for us as well*
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25 - *pray without ceasing...Brethren, pray for us*
 - Hebrews 13:18 - *Pray for us*

Q: Why does Scripture place prayer as a high priority in the lives of believers?

A: Prayer in our Christian life is what _____ is to our physical life

- Augustine - *“Prayer is the protection of holy souls...the preserver of spiritual health. It is the column of all virtues, a ladder to God, and the fountain of faith.”*
- Martin Luther - *“As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.”*

WHEN TO PRAY: At all times—in all seasons and circumstances of life

① The _____ seasons and circumstances of life

v. 13a - *Is anyone among you suffering?*

- *suffering* (kakopatheō)
 - To suffer persecution for the faith
 - James 5:10 - *As an example, brethren, of suffering (kakopatheia) and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*
 - 2 Timothy 2:9 - *I suffer hardship (kakopatheō) even to imprisonment as a criminal*
 - 2 Timothy 4:5 - *endure hardship (kakopatheō)*
 - To suffer evil (to experience trouble, distress, hardship)
 - Alec Motyer - *“It is any ill circumstance which may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an onlooking friend might say ‘That’s bad’.”*
 - Alternative translation: “Is anyone among you in trouble?”
 - It includes:
 - physical illness
 - financial problems
 - marriage issues
 - pressures and setbacks at work
 - family struggles
 - persecution
 - loneliness
 - the death of someone we love
 - the daily pressures of life

- Are there circumstances in your life that are pressuring you or weighing you down?
- Do you feel crushed beneath a load of difficulty or hardship?
- Are you discouraged or hurt or hopeless in certain relationships?
- Are you worried about the future?
- Do you wonder how it is you're going to be able to accomplish all that's required of you?

v. 13b - *Then he must pray*

- Edmond Hiebert - *“James directs the sufferer to make it a practice to turn to God whenever he is in distress and emotional tensions assail. Instead of indulging in introspective self-pity, or complaining loudly to others of his terrible situation, let him turn to God for refuge and strength.”*
- *pray* (proseuchomai)
 - That the trial be _____
 - Psalm 50:15 - *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*
 - Psalm 91:15 - *He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.*
 - Psalm 107:6 - *Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distress.*
 - 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 - *⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*
 - For _____
 - 1:5 - *But if any of you lacks wisdom (and you _____), let him ask of God, who gives to all generously without reproach, and it will be given him.*

Q: Why do we need wisdom?

A1: To see our trials as a source of _____ (1:2 - *Consider it all joy*)

Q: How can we do that?

A: v. 3 - *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance*

A2: To know how to respond in a godly way

- James 3:16 - *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*

Douglas Moo - *“James’ concern when he deals with trials elsewhere (1:2-4, 12; 5:7-11) is to encourage believers to endure the suffering with the right spirit (joy) and with a divine wisdom. Presumably, then the prayer that he encourages here is for the spiritual strength to endure the trial with a godly spirit.”*

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

*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 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;
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.*

② The _____ seasons and circumstances of life

v. 13c - *Is anyone cheerful?*

- *cheerful* (euthymeō) = “to be in good heart or soul” or “to be well in spirit”
 - Acts 27 - ²²*I urge you to keep up your courage* (euthymeō)...²⁵*keep up your courage* (euthymeō)

➤ Do you find yourself blessed with a deep sense of satisfaction in God’s goodness to you and in the life He has given to you?

v. 13d - *He is to sing praises*

- *sing praises* (psallō) = _____
- This is another form of _____
- All throughout Scripture we see the praises of God’s people because of the joy in their hearts
 - Psalm 95:1-7 - *O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God and a great King above all gods. In whose hand are the depths of the earth, the peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.*
 - Luke 24:50-53 - ⁵⁰*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they, after worshipping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³and were continually in the temple praising God.*
 - Ephesians 5:18-19 - ¹⁸*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.*
 - Colossians 3:16 - *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Summary:

- Are you in a trial or difficulty? Then _____
- Are you experiencing a time of blessing and goodness? Then _____

Simon Kistemaker - “*In short, we ought to be prayerfully patient in adversity and thankfully happy in prosperity.*”

The Big Picture

Is anyone suffering?
Is anyone cheerful? } Encompass every season and circumstance of life

- Alec Motyer - *“Here then, in two words, the word suffering and cheerful, are all life's experiences and each of them in turn can so easily be the occasion of spiritual upset.*

“Trouble can give rise to an attitude of surly rebellion against God and the abandonment of spiritual practices.

- Trouble can lead us to _____

“Equally times of ease and affluence beget complacency, laziness and the assumption that we are able of ourselves to cope with life and God is forgotten.”

- Blessing can lead us to _____

Whatever our circumstances, season of life, perspective, or emotions, we are to turn to God in prayer.

- Ephesians 6:18 - *pray at all times*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 - *pray without ceasing*
- Luke 18:1-7 - *¹Now, he was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ²saying “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. ³There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ ⁴For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise, by continually coming she will wear me out.’” ⁶And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night.”*

- The moral of the story:
 - God is not like the unrighteous judge. So if the unrighteous judge gave in to the persistence of the woman to get her off his back, then how much more easier is our loving Father willing to respond to us.
 - So, turn to Him in midst of your trouble.

The main point of v. 13: Every circumstance is intended to _____ us to God

- Richard Wolff - *“As life is divided between joy and sorrow, the whole life would thus become prayer.”*
- John Calvin - *“There is no time in which God does not invite us to Himself.”*
- Alec Motyer - *“Our whole life should be so angled towards God, that whatever strikes upon us, whether sorrow or joy, should be deflected upwards at once into His presence. In particular, this is an exercise in glad acceptance of the will of God.”*
 - Accepting God’s will is the common denominator in prayer and praise
- John Blanchard - *“To sum it up: in times of pressure we are to pray and in times of pleasure we are to praise. We have a God for all seasons. If you find the world on top of you, pray. And if you find yourself on top of the world, then praise.”*
 - Why is this important?
 - When we pray to God in our trouble, we are acknowledging His sovereign _____ to meet all our needs.
 - When we praise God in the midst of blessing, we are acknowledging His sovereign _____ in our lives.
 - When we pray and when we praise, we are acknowledging God as our all _____.
 - When we don’t pray, we are revealing to ourselves and those around us that these things about God (His power and goodness) are not true, and that He’s not our sufficiency.
 - If we find ourselves in trouble and we don’t pray, what does that say about us?
 - If we find ourselves in the midst of blessing and we don't praise God, what does that say about us?
- Edmond Hiebert - *“Christian faith finds its center and power in a vital relationship with God through prayer in all the experiences of life. Through prayer the believer habitually lays hold of God’s power for victory amid all these diverse experiences ...The gloomy valley and the sunny height can both be dynamic instruments in strengthening the believer’s conscious relation to God.”*
- Eusebius - *“James’ knees grew hard like a camel’s, because of this constant worship of God in prayer.”*

In times of _____, _____

In times of _____, _____