

# SMALL GROUP RESOURCE

Praying in Trouble Times- James 5:13-18

By Rev. Matt March 13, 2022

READ James 5: 13 - 18

## QUOTE

“To someone with no idea of God, of there being a world other than what we can touch and see, prayer looks at best like an odd superstition and at worst like serious self-deception. Fancy just talking to yourself and thinking that will make a difference to anything! But almost all human traditions, right across history and culture, have been aware of other dimensions which seem to mysteriously to intersect with our own. .. [that] sharpens up this general vague awareness of Something Else into not only Someone Else, but a named Someone: the God we know in, through and as Jesus himself. Then suddenly prayer and the patience which it involves, make all the sense in the world.”

- Tom Wright – Pastoral Letters For Everyone

Every person who chooses to follow Jesus will encounter seasons where prayer is a real struggle, feels lifeless or a chore or times of turmoil and trouble that force us to reckon with the necessity and effectiveness of prayer.

Every Christian will encounter times where they struggle to reconcile their feelings of frustration, disappointment or disillusionment with God because of what life has thrown at them and that has an impact on how and how often we pray, and why we pray, or don't pray.

As we head towards Easter and as we continue to navigate these troubled times, I felt to put back on our collective radar the essential nature of being a people whose lives are shaped and deeply informed by prayer.

I want to encourage you to press into God in prayer in a whole new way, rather than settle for feeling paralysed when it comes to prayer or that your prayer life is somehow on pause or hold for whatever reasons.

Our passage in James 5 not only outlines when to pray, reminding us that praying is an all-play for any Christian community throughout every season of life, NOT just the hard times, but gives us some insight into how to deepen our understanding of it and what fuels and can increase the effectiveness of prayer.

James 5 teaches us that prayer is:

Best done together.

Purifies and heals us and others.

Empowers & enlivens & expands our prayers.

Requires a posture of patience and holding tightly to God's big picture perspective.

## QUESTIONS

1. What do you find most difficult when it comes to prayer?
2. Is praying regularly a challenge? If so, what gets in the way? If not, share with the group what works for you?
3. What prayer practices have been the most life giving for you? Discuss and then commit to trying one new practice in the lead up to Easter.

You could pick a psalm because they don't try to clean up the mess of life before prayer. It brings the totality of life to God and invite us to be authentic and honest and come to God as we are.

### **PRACTICE - Praying Psalm 23** (from *The Good and Beautiful God* by James Bryan Smith)

This psalm is a beautiful expression of the kingdom of God, in which God is with us, caring and providing for us, even in trying circumstances. Because of God's gracious provision, protection and care, we lack nothing. God invites us to rest, to be refreshed, to be restored. God leads and guides us even in the most painful situations. And because God is with us we can live without fear and not only provides what we need but more than we need. When we walk with God as our Shepherd we see our entire life – even our trials and suffering – as goodness and mercy.

Read this Psalm together slowly out loud two times. Is there a word or verse or image that grabs your attention?

Ask God what might he be saying to you through that word or verse, if anything?

Take the psalm with you into the week and keep reflecting and praying it through multiple times.

Ask what if anything did you learn about God or yourself through this exercise? James is reminding us that life is hard but the trials and tribulations we experience along the way are life's paradoxical gifts that produce endurance and shape our character.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Honestly assess where your prayer life is at today. Pray for one another about any of the following:

Ask God to re-ignite a desire to pray again for any who have lost it & rekindle our prayer lives where it feels dry / lifeless

Ask God to give you renewed courage to pray for a situation you've long stopped praying for, or that feels impossible or for a situation where we feel stuck.

Ask God to show you how to pray in a whole new way! Not out of obligation or earning spiritual brownie points, or even because it's a good spiritual practice but because we are desperate to know God more and become a people that he can use for his plans and purposes.

