

## James 5:13-15

### *When to Pray, and When to Praise*

**Main idea:** Life in this broken world drives us to pray, which drives us to praise.

If you can remember all the way back to May, you'll remember we were preaching through the book of James, and we're actually in the very last chapter. James chapter 5. So go ahead and turn there with me, and we'll finish the book these next three weeks.

While you turn there, I want you to reflect on the point of some of the hard things you've had to face in your life. Try to remember back. It's usually not fun to remember the hard times, and it's important to count our blessings,<sup>1</sup> but sometimes it's equally important to consider the hard times, too.<sup>2</sup>

Maybe you don't see the purpose behind anything you've had to face, or maybe you see purpose in all of it, but either way, I want you to reflect right now on some of those things that have been particularly difficult to go through, and even ask yourself if you can determine why you went through those things.

Years ago, I used to know how to work on cars a little. One day I was trying to fix my van's air conditioner, so I went to a junkyard to pull the part I needed from a van there. And the cool thing was that I found the van and the part that I needed almost right away. But the bad thing was that I realized right away that I didn't have the

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 103:2

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 23:4

right size socket wrench that I needed to get the part off the old van. And because of how the part was situated in the van, there was almost no way that I could get it with any other tool. All I had was the wrong size socket wrench, and a pair of needle nose pliers with me, so I attempted to use those. And I'm trying and trying, and getting nowhere! I did that for about an hour! Eventually, I prayed, "God, please help me to get this part." And within 2 minutes, I had it.

Now, I'm not saying it always works that way. And I'm not saying that if you pray, you'll get everything you want and you'll get through the hard times more easily.<sup>3</sup> I think God was simply teaching me through that circumstance that I need to be more quick to turn to Him in prayer, whether or not things are going well for me.<sup>4</sup>

Because when do you find yourself praying, not just in terms of time spent, but in terms of your energy and urgency? Do you find yourself praying more earnestly when things are going well, or when things could be going much, much better? Do you find yourself crying out to God when you're happy with everything, or when you wish everything in your life were different? Because I don't know about you, but I generally don't have to remind myself to pray during the hard times. When things aren't going my way, prayer all of a sudden becomes very, very natural.<sup>5</sup>

And so our Scripture this morning will teach us that the point of most of life in this broken world is to drive us to pray, which then ought to drive us to praise.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 5:14-15 reminds us that we need to ask *according to God's will*.

<sup>4</sup> James 4:3

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:26-27

James 5:13-15.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 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. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:13-15)

*Father, we often feel so helpless. We're sick, and we feel the weight of suffering and sin. Remind us today that we can always turn to You in prayer and praise. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

Some of you may know the name Melissa Fokkema.<sup>6</sup> Melissa was 17 years old when she woke up to what seemed like a normal cold. According to the article I read about her, the cold slowly developed into a weird feeling and numbness in her legs. And just a few days later, Melissa's mother found purple-brown bruises on her legs and immediately took her to the hospital.

Melissa was diagnosed with a rare disease called meningococcal disease. It's the fastest killing bacterial disease in the world. Everyone was baffled at her condition. But she never lost hope. She comforted her family and was brave.

She was put into a drug-induced coma by the doctors. She was left in between life and death. Her family prayed for her and hoped she

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<sup>6</sup> <https://icytales.com/top-5-inspirational-stories-about-hard-times/>

would come back to normalcy. Within weeks, Melissa went through several operations including skin grafts, and having her hands and legs amputated. She was treated in the hospital for nine months. She was discharged with prosthetic legs, a hook-like hand replacement, and a muscle-activated hand for another arm. Despite all of this, it never stopped Melissa from doing what she wanted to do.

With no legs or hands, she learned to cook, type, and drive a modified car. She later pursued education to become a primary school teacher. Her story has inspired millions of people, including her own mom Julie, who said that she learned the lesson to appreciate life at every moment. She learned to be cheerful even in the midst of what we would all consider to be great suffering.

Our passage this morning contains a series of questions, but it also causes me to ask some questions of my own. Questions like, what if you're not suffering? Shouldn't you still pray? And what if you're not cheerful? Shouldn't you still praise God? And if someone is sick, and we pray for them, and they don't get well, did we not have enough faith?

It's interesting that as you begin to read the Bible, you often have more and more questions. But that's ok, because as you continue reading the Bible, you'll find that the Bible answers all the questions that we need to know,<sup>7</sup> and even when it doesn't answer questions that we may wonder about, it still gives us hope as we trust in God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 15:13

So let's look first at the questions the Bible asks, and as we do so, I think we'll find that it satisfies all of our other questions as well.

The first question is in verse 13. It says:

Is anyone among you suffering? (James 5:13a)

So, are any of you suffering? Well, yeah. We suffer from all kinds of circumstances.<sup>9</sup> We suffer at the hands of others.<sup>10</sup> And we often suffer because of sins that we ourselves have committed, that cause us to face the consequences of what we've done.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the Bible says that all the earth is suffering. Romans 8:22.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only that, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:22-23, NASB)

So yeah, we suffer. And maybe you're even suffering right now because of my preaching. Be patient, I'll only be two or three hours.

And even if you're not suffering right now, at this moment, I think we all know what it's like to suffer. We've been there. All of our suffering today makes us long that much more for eternity, when all suffering will be done away with. In Revelation 21:4, it says that:

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

<sup>10</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 3:17

[Jesus] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.  
(Revelation 21:4)

So we look forward to when Jesus returns,<sup>12</sup> which will usher in His kingdom,<sup>13</sup> and then the rebirth of all of creation, in which there will be no more suffering. But for now, we suffer. And in all of these circumstances, James gives us a very simple invitation in the middle of verse 13. It says to those who are suffering:

Let him pray. (James 5:13b)

So a lot of you may be doing a lot of praying for these next two or three hours while I preach. If you're suffering, pray. If you feel like you have nowhere and no one to turn to, turn to God. You see, the point of praying while you suffer is so that you would learn to take it to God, and trust Him. Prayer gives us hope because as we talk to God, God gives us hope.<sup>14</sup>

Paul said it like this, even while enduring all kinds of suffering from his missionary journeys:

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the

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<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 9:28

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:32-33

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 39:7

things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

In other words, all the hard times we face today are nothing, like light momentary affliction, compared to how awesome eternity will be with Jesus. So when you're suffering, pray, and God will give you hope and strength to endure.<sup>15</sup>

The second question James asks in this passage is also found in verse 13. It says:

Is anyone cheerful? (James 5:13c)

Maybe these next two or three hours of preaching won't cause you to suffer, but cause you to be cheerful. Maybe, just maybe, you're so happy in Jesus that my preaching isn't a drudgery to endure, but a delight to hear.

So to you, I apologize that I probably won't be preaching for two or three hours today. I know, you really want at least two hours, but maybe next time.

But more likely, your cheerfulness has nothing to do with me and how long I preach, and everything to do with your relationship with God.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes when we take our eyes off of how good God is to us, we can lose our cheerfulness, but when we have God's goodness so incredibly fixed as a permanent pillar in our lives, we

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 5:10

<sup>16</sup> John 16:33. If your hope is in Jesus, you can have peace even in the midst of great tribulation.

can't help but be cheerful. And in that scenario, James instructs us at the end of verse 13:

Let him sing praise. (James 5:13d)

Worship is not merely singing songs, but singing songs IS an *expression* of worship.<sup>17</sup> So when we come together to sing songs at church, we're saying that we always have reason to be happy in Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

It's funny how we sometimes think that sin can lead to happiness. C.S. Lewis wrote:

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. - C.S. Lewis

You see, even when life doesn't seem to be going our way, we always have reason to be happy in Jesus! Although we've all sinned, Jesus paid the price for our sin.<sup>19</sup> Although we all deserve death and hell because of our sin, God shows us His mercy and grace so that we inherit eternal life, and therefore always have reason to praise Him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Psalm 105:2

<sup>18</sup> Colossians 3:16

<sup>19</sup> Romans 3:23-24

<sup>20</sup> Romans 6:23

So it seems that according to the Bible we're always suffering, so we should always pray, and it seems that we should always be cheerful, so we should always praise.

But what if something's wrong with us, so that we don't feel like praying when we're suffering, and we don't feel cheerful enough to praise?

James asks a third question in verse 14. It says:

Is anyone among you sick? (James 5:14)

We usually assume this verse is only talking about physical sicknesses, but the original Greek word actually has a much bigger meaning than that.<sup>21</sup> It refers to those who are either physically or morally weak. It refers to those who are lacking the power to do what they ought to do, like prayer and praise.<sup>22</sup>

And like with the other two questions, James immediately gives us an instruction if and when we fall into that category of people who are either physically or morally sick. He writes:

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. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:14b-15)

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<sup>21</sup> ἀσθενεῖ (770). to be weak, feeble

<sup>22</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:29, 13:3

So we're all suffering, so we should pray, and we should all be cheerful, so we should all praise. And I think if we're honest, we're all physically and morally sick from time to time. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Now, this passage isn't saying that when you're physically sick, you should come to church and share your germs with everyone else. However, it is saying that sickness is another occasion to pray, and that it's an opportunity to share your struggles with your church, so that they can also pray for you.

It's interesting that James also says that they were to anoint that person with oil. It became a practice in the church for people to anoint sick people with oil for healing. But if you read this passage carefully, healing from sickness actually isn't even the focus.

As we saw in our Old Testament reading today, people and things were anointed with oil as it was recognized that they were set aside for a special purpose.<sup>23</sup> They anointed priests, and all the stuff of the tabernacle, and temple, and they even anointed those who were appointed to be king. It was a symbol, showing that they were special, set apart, and that God had chosen them to rise up among their peers for that purpose.

So notice that when James tells us to anoint the sick person, it also says that the Lord will raise him up. It's like the sick person has a special responsibility and commission to use their sickness as an opportunity. It's an opportunity to show everyone around him that their hope is not in the things of this world, but in God.

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<sup>23</sup> Exodus 30:25-32

You see, life in this broken world drives us to pray, which drives us to praise. And even when we fail to do these things, when we're weak, even then, God has a purpose for us. Even after we've failed over and over again, and we've proven that our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately sick, God still wants to heal us, forgive us, and raise us up to glorify Him.<sup>24</sup>

You see, God is able to save the one who is sick. And He's promised to do so when we pray. There's no ambiguity in this passage. It says that the prayer of faith WILL save the one who is sick. God WILL do it.

Now, I want to point out that this passage doesn't tell us when a person will be saved from their sickness or weakness. It doesn't tell us when we will be raised up. But when you turn to God in faith, you can trust Him that in His timing, you will be saved. You will be raised up.

So if you feel weak in a particular area of your life, ask others to pray for you. And praise God that He will deliver you from it.

So, when should you pray? Always. And when should you praise God? All the time, because all the time, God is good.

End of verse 15.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:15)

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah 17:9, 14

“If he has committed sins...” “If...” Of course he’s committed sins! We all have. And yet, sometimes we’re so focused on praying for ourselves, that we neglect to pray for others.

Now, this passage isn’t saying that you can immediately save someone by praying for them, just as it wasn’t saying that you can immediately heal someone by anointing them with oil. It’s still all in God’s timing. However, I think the truly amazing thing about this passage is that it’s saying there’s a community aspect to our salvation. In our culture, we’re so focused on our own individualistic faith, whereas the Bible is focused not just on saving each of us, but all of us.<sup>25</sup>

So, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you would be forgiven.

So here’s what we’re going to do. This morning, I want you to ask the person next to you, “Have you confessed your sins to God? Have you received Jesus as your Savior and Lord?” If the answer to either question is no, pray for them. Pray with them. And lead them to confess their sins to God, receive Jesus, and be saved.

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<sup>25</sup> John 3:17, John 12:32, Romans 11:32, 1 Corinthians 15:22, Philippians 2:9-11, 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 2:6, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Peter 3:9, Titus 2:11, 1 John 2:2