

Personal Communion with God

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 2

James 5:13 9-27-2015

Summary: The closing section of James teaches how to solve all the problems brought up earlier in the book, addressing all four major themes (persevering in suffering, deeds of love, godly use of the tongue, and avoiding worldliness). And it mostly focuses on prayer (six of the nine verses). In times of trouble we should pray (God is compassionate). Pray for whatever you need most in that time. And in times of happiness, praise God musically (emotionally). In every circumstance in life, involve yourself with what God is doing and involve God in what you are doing.

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James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. 13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Introduction

Charles Vaughan once said: “If I wished to humble anyone I should question him about his prayers. I know nothing to compare with this topic for its sorrowful self confessions.”¹ That’s really true, isn’t it? Why is that? Why is it that the one area where we get shot down more often than any other area of the Christian life is in the area of prayer? I heard one pastor say that prayer is as natural as breathing for the Christian. But if that’s the case, you have to wonder why so many of us struggle at it. Why does almost every Christian walk around feeling guilty about his prayer life? Why are there times when I try to spend an hour praying, and at the end, I have spent 55 minutes with my mind wandering, and five minutes praying? And if it’s so natural, why does the New Testament have to command us over and over and over to pray?² It must not be all that natural if we have to be constantly reminded. Scattered all across the pages of the New Testament are commands like the one before us in James 5, or

Romans 12:12 ...be faithful in prayer

Ephesians 6:18 pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying

Philippians 4:6 in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

1 Timothy 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing ... 18 for this is God’s will for you

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer

That word translated **devote** has to do with strength – strengthen yourself with a hardened, unchangeable resolve.

And not only are we reminded repeatedly, but many times we are exhorted not to give up.

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Then He went on to tell the parable of the persistent widow. In Luke 11 Jesus told a parable about prayer being like a guy banging on his neighbor’s door asking for some bread, and the guy inside the house doesn’t want to get up because he’s already in bed, but he finally agrees to get up and help the neighbor because he keeps persisting. In these parables Jesus is saying, “When it comes to prayer - don’t quit. Keep at it!” Why do we need all this instruction about persistence in prayer and not giving up? It’s because the normal thing that will happen to a Christian in prayer is that we will get all fired up about prayer, and really be diligent about it for a while, and then it will kind of fade away.

So the indication from Scripture is that prayer is something we are naturally inclined to neglect, and when we do finally do it, we are naturally inclined to give up too soon. If God commands an activity, and He keeps saying, “I don’t want you to neglect this activity, and when you do it, don’t give up!” – what does that tell you about the activity? It tells me that it is going to be hard. Prayer is not like breathing. Passionate, persistent, powerful prayer will not come naturally. What will come naturally is inconsistency, giving up, and prayerlessness.

That is why we need so much help from the Holy Spirit in prayer. In Romans 8 the Spirit intercedes for us when we don’t know what to pray for.³ In Philippians 3 the Holy Spirit enables us to worship.⁴ In

¹ Cited by J. Oswald Sanders in *Spiritual Leadership* p.75.

² Php.4:6, 1 Thes.5:17-18, 25 Ro.15:30-32,Eph.6:18-21, 2 Thes.3:1-2, Heb.13:18-19, Lk.18:1, Mt.26:41, Mk.14:38, Lk.22:40, Lk.22:46, Jas.5:13-18.

³ Ro 8:26-27.

⁴ Php 3:3.

Ephesians 2 the Holy Spirit gives us access to the Father.⁵ And twice (Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 1:20) we are commanded to pray in the Spirit.

That tells me two things. First, if I need that much supernatural help, again – that shows me what a difficult thing this is humanly speaking. But beyond that, it also shows me how important it is to God. If the Holy Spirit is that involved, it must be especially important. God must really want us to pray – which is exactly what 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says – **this is God’s will for you**. If you ever cry out in prayer and say, “God, show me Your will,” He could answer back and say, “You’re doing it. My will is for you to pray.” Why is that? Why is it so important to God that we pray? He already knows everything that’s in our heart. He already knows everything He is going to do, and the perfect plan that He established before the foundation of the earth - the events of each day that He has written in His book before any of us were born – none of that is going to change. So why does He keep commending us to be devoted to prayer?

What do you think God would say if you asked Him that question? Do you think He would say, “Oh, no reason really. There’s no real purpose behind it, it doesn’t accomplish anything - I just wanted to command you to do something that’s really hard so I can watch you struggle”? We all know He wouldn’t say that. God is not capricious; God is not arbitrary – everything He does He does for good reason. And when it comes to prayer, He has not kept that reason a secret. He has revealed to us in His Word exactly why He wants us to pray. And when we understand what that reason is and we learn the principles from Scripture about how to pray, prayer can go from being a burdensome chore to being the most satisfying, rewarding, gratifying, and energizing thing you do all day.

Fulfillment of the Whole Book

But before we jump into all that, let me remind you where we are in James. I am really excited about this closing section of James, because it encapsulates the fulfillment of each of the major themes in the book and it teaches us how to restore a broken church culture. You might be relieved to hear that there are no rebukes in this closing section. That’s a change, because the rest of the book is loaded with them. In chapter 1 he rebukes their moral filth, their failure to be doers of the Word, and their self-deception. In chapter 2 he rebukes their favoritism and lack of love and their imaginary faith. In chapter 3 he rebukes their selfishness and pride. In chapter 4 he rebukes their worldly prayers, their love for the world, their pride and boasting, and their judgmentalism. And in chapter 5 he rebukes their grumbling. But in the last half of chapter 5, starting from verse 12 – no more rebukes. He is done pointing out problems. We know the problems now – from here on out James is concerned with solutions. We can see where we are broken as a church – from this point on it is all about how to be restored as a church. And I say *as a church* not just as individuals because I think that is what James has in view.

Whole Church

Notice how explicit James is about gathering the entire congregation into this passage. Sometimes when you read passages in the New Testament it is not really clear if the focus is on the individual, or on the universal church as a whole, or on the local congregation. But here there isn’t any ambiguity. In the section on prayer, James starts with the individual in verse 13 – pray for yourself.

James 5:13 Is any one among you in trouble? He should pray.

But that phrase **among you** tips us off that he has the congregation in mind. Next he talks about the elders in the church.

14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him

Then in verse 16 everybody praying for one another.

16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other

⁵ Eph 2:18.

That is the congregation. So this is about the local congregation.

The Four Themes of James

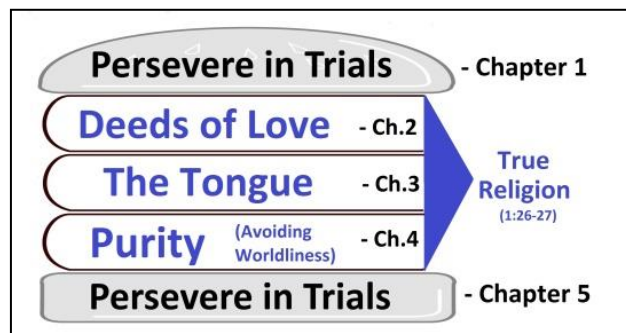
When a church culture has been shattered by wrong responses to suffering, in order for that church culture to be restored, five major things have to happen:

- 1) Profound reverence for God's name
- 2) That reverence must result in transparency and personal integrity (both of those are in v.12)
- 3) Powerful, loving, faith-filled prayer (vv.13-18)
- 4) Confession of sin (v.16)
- 5) Restoration of those who fall into sin (vv.19-20)

Those five things will solve the kinds of problems that James has been addressing throughout the book. They touch on each of the major themes. I believe the message of the book of James can be boiled down to four main themes:

The first one is perseverance in suffering. That is how the book begins and ends. James is a perseverance sandwich. Inside that perseverance sandwich is the body of the book, which is about true religion – being a doer of the Word. And true religion has three main parts:

- Putting faith into action through deeds of love
- Godly use of the tongue
- Avoiding worldliness



He mentions all three in the closing paragraph of chapter 1, then expands on each of the three in chapters 2-4. Chapter 2 is deeds of love, chapter 3 is godly use of the tongue, and chapter 4 is avoiding worldliness. So the sandwich structure of the book of James is a picture of life itself. Hardship is behind us and in front of us and all around us, and in the midst of that we must be doers of the Word - persevering in love, in speech, and in purity.

So if you want to know what the major themes of the book of James are, I would say it is the bread and the three slices of meat. The bread is perseverance, and the slices of meat are love, godly speech, and avoiding worldliness. So there are four major themes. Now, in this closing section, James is going to show us how all four of those themes come together. Starting with perseverance and suffering.

The Right Response to Suffering

The people James is writing to have not done a very good job with perseverance. They responded to suffering with fighting and quarreling and running to the world for satisfaction and all kinds of sinful responses. What is the right way to handle suffering?

13 Is any one of you suffering hardship? He should pray.

When a church has been messed up by wrong responses to suffering, the solution is prayer. That is one of the best ways to solve the problem of fighting in the church. When Paul gave instructions for all the churches in 1 Timothy 2 he said:

1 Timothy 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

You cannot truly pray for someone and be in some kind of angry dispute with them at the same time.

Love

What about the second one – love? When a church has been showing favoritism, neglecting one another's needs, or any other failures to love one another, what is the solution? The solution is right here in this closing section of the book. Be honest and genuine with one another (5:13), pray for one another (5:15-18), and restore one another from sin (5:19-20).

The Tongue

How about the third major theme – godly use of the tongue? What do you do when a church is destroying itself with grumbling, gossip, boasting, quarreling, judgmentalism, putting each other down, and all the rest? Same solution – honesty (v.13), prayer and confession of sin to one another (vv.14-18), and using your words to restore those who have wandered from the truth (vv.19-20).

Avoiding Worldliness

And how about the fourth major theme? What you do with the church that has fallen in love with the world, so that they are looking to earthly things for their happiness instead of looking to God? How do you fix a church like that? Reverence for God (v.13), true prayer (looking to God to supply your needs and satisfy the cravings of your soul instead of the adulterous kind of praying at the beginning of chapter 4 - vv.14-18), and having the whole church community rescue one another when we start venturing into worldliness (vv.19-20).

Review

We found last week that the starting place for all this is reverence for God and His will, as revealed in His Word. I believe that is what the **above all** means in verse 12. Reverence for God must come first, because until that happens, none of these other things are even possible. And it is worth underlining that **above all**, because this is counterintuitive. When someone is hurting me or treating me unfairly, everything in me says, "Above all, make it stop." That is my most natural first priority. It is not my most natural knee-jerk response to say, "Someone is hurting me? Wow, I need to gain greater reverence for God." But that is the most important solution.

Psalm 119:161 Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word.

The solution to being treated unfairly is not to get them to stop. The solution to being treated unfairly is to tremble before the Word of almighty God. Why? Because

Psalm 119:165 Great peace have they who love your law

What you need, even more than relief, is **great peace**. What good will relief do if you still don't have peace? What you need most is peace, and that comes from reverence for God. And you know you have reverence for God when you tremble at His Word. When you have the proper orientation toward God's Word, it will lead you into God's presence, and that is where you will find joy in your suffering.

Psalm 43:1 ...rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. ...3 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me ... to the place where you dwell. 4 Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, the joy of my rejoicing.

So the starting place is reverence for God. And the result of that reverence will be personal integrity. I am not going to be dishonest with you, nor am I going to be unfaithful and fail to follow through on my word, because as one who bears the name of Christ I am living life under oath, and I fear God way too much to play fast and loose with His name. That was verse 12.

Personal Communion with God

Now let's take a look at verse 13, where James begins this lengthy section on prayer. And of the five solutions James gives us – reverence, integrity, prayer, confession, and restoration – by far the greatest emphasis is on prayer. There is one verse on reverence and integrity, one verse on confession, two verses on restoration, and six verses on prayer. Sometimes people get so embroiled in the debate about healing that they think of this section as being mainly about the topic of healing. It's not. It is mainly about the topic of prayer. Prayer is mentioned in every single verse, and we are commanded to pray no less than five times in six verses. The focus is prayer, and it starts with prayer for yourself.

Start with Yourself

13 Is any one of you suffering hardship? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

He is going to talk to us about praying for one another, but prayer goes out in concentric circles. You begin with you – your own heart before God. Then you move outward to pray for others. And that makes sense, because if your own heart isn't right before God, what good is it going to do to try to pray for other people? It is when you have close, personal communion with God that all your prayers will be most effective, so all prayer starts with that – just you and God. And he brings up two scenarios. The first one is, **is any one of you in trouble** (or literally, **is any one of you suffering hardship**). The word translated **trouble**, or **suffering hardship** is the verb form of the word used for the suffering of the prophets in verse 10. What should you do when that happens to you? Answer: **he should pray**.

Praying in Hard Times

When you suffer, look to God. The heart of God is moved by His children crying out to Him in times of trouble. If you doubt that, just read Psalm 18.

Psalm 18:4 The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. ...6 In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. 7 The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. 8 Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. 9 He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. 10 He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.

It moves the heart of God to action when we appeal to His strength in our weakness. I love this little story from the book, *The Necessity of Prayer* by E.M. Bounds: "A dear friend of mine who was quite a lover of [hunting], told me the following story: 'Rising early one morning,' he said, 'I heard the baying of a score of deerhounds in pursuit of their quarry. Looking away to a broad, open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across, and giving signs, moreover, that its race was well-nigh run. Reaching the rails of the enclosure, it leaped over and crouched within ten feet from where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, when the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. I felt, just then, that all the dogs in the West could not, and should not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength.' So is it, when human helplessness appeals to Almighty God. Well do I remember when the hounds of sin were after my soul, until, at last, I ran into the arms of Almighty God."

You might say, "That's not how it feels for me. The dogs are ripping me to pieces and God seems to do nothing. I cry out to God for help and the heavens remain decidedly unrended. No thunder and lightning against my enemies. Nothing happens." Many times God's love prevents Him from responding in the manner or timing that we had in mind. But it is important that we understand this is His heart. When you hear the shrill screams of your little two year old when she gets her fingers slammed in the

door, and you can tell, “That’s not a fake cry – she’s really hurt” – that sick feeling you get that makes you instantly jump to your feet and come running – God made parents feel that so we would understand how He feels when we cry out to Him in pain – or in fear, or any kind of distress. If you knew everything God knows you would be glad He is responding the way He is, but whatever you do, don’t let your limited knowledge skew your understanding of His heart of compassion for you. If you go outside at night in the winter time you might be tempted to think the sun has gone cold. It’s not cold. It is just as hot as ever, and you will be able to see that soon enough. But I’ll tell you this – the sun will go ice cold before the heart of God will ever go cold toward someone who has faith in Him.

No James 4 Praying

So when trouble comes, pray. Pray what? What is the right way to pray when times are hard?

James has already showed us the wrong way at the beginning of chapter 4. The people James was writing to were not getting their prayers answered because they were doing it in the chapter 4 way. So any time you don’t get your prayers answered, that is definitely the first thing you want to check – “Am I falling into James 4 praying?” James 4 praying is when you are in love with something in this world, and you see that thing as the solution to your problem. It might be a relationship, it might be a possession, it might be a career, health, family, money, knowledge, power – something your heart thinks it has to have in order to be happy. That is the way these people were. So when they prayed, that is what they asked for. Their first priority was not God’s will, or what was best spiritually – their highest priority was getting that thing they wanted.

And when people like that encounter hardship and suffering, usually their prayer is just some version of this: “God, make it stop.” No concern about whether this is the best timing, no concern about God’s will or what He intended this trial to accomplish, no concern about any of that – just “make it stop because my happiness comes not from You, but from comfortable circumstances.” That is worldliness. And having an attitude like that is the best way to get God to say *no* to your prayers.

The Right Way to Pray in Hardship

So that’s the wrong way to pray, what is the right way? What should you be asking God for when trouble comes into your life? It depends on what you need. As a Christian isn’t your goal in life to do His will - to do whatever pleases Him? So if that is your goal in life, then when you suffer, ask God to supply whatever it is you need to accomplish His will.

If you have a bunch of anxiety because of the hardship, what you need is peace. So you seek peace from God.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

On the other hand, maybe what you are struggling with isn’t so much anxiety as it is fear. So you look to God for protection and a sense of security.

Psalm 56:9 Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me. 10 In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise— 11 in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

If that fear is paralyzing you, then you might ask God for courage. If you are reacting with anger, you might ask God for humility. If the trial has beaten you down so you feel you can’t go on, you ask God for strength and perseverance. If the whole situation has you confused as to what to do, you ask God for wisdom. If you are experiencing doubts in the suffering, pray for faith. There is no generic way to pray when trouble hits – it depends on what your spiritual needs are.

Although I will say this - one thing you can always ask for is comfort in His presence. God is supremely glorified when we are able to find comfort in Him even in the midst of our suffering. He is the God of all comfort and He delights in comforting the afflicted. The one thing we are allowed to complain about is that we don't have enough closeness with God. That is the one kind of complaining that glorifies God – “Not enough of You, Lord. I need more closeness with You.” That pleases Him. We are never more on track than when we are desiring more closeness with Him – greater experiences of His presence. And we are never farther off track than when we are desiring anything else. David understood that. When he was out in the desert running from his own son who was trying to kill him, what was the deepest desire of his heart at that moment?

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you ... 3 your love is better than life ... 5 My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods ... 6 On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Praying in Happy Times

So I told you that verse 13 gives two scenarios – the first is **is anyone of you suffering hardship** - in that case you should pray. Now let's look at the second scenario.

Happiness is Dangerous

13 ... is anyone happy?

James is going to teach us what to do in those times when you are caught up in a situation of happiness. That first scenario we understand. There are countless books out there on what to do when you are suffering. But if I wrote a book on what to do when you're happy, I don't know if it would sell. I have never had anyone come to me for counseling where I say, “How can I help you?” And they say, “Lately I've just been feeling kind of ... I don't know, happy, and encouraged, and just in really good spirits and I just don't know how to handle it. You've got to help me, Pastor – what should I do?” We don't think we need instruction about what to do when we're feeling happy, but evidently we do. The Holy Spirit seems to think we need instruction on that. Here is what we need to keep in mind: you can handle happiness wrongly just as easily as you can handle suffering wrongly. In fact, we might even be more prone to misuse our happiness than to misuse our suffering. The right way to handle suffering is to go to God with it.

13 Is any one of you suffering hardship? He should pray.

And the right way to handle happiness is to go to God with it.

13 ... Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

If you are suffering hardship, look to God is the solution. And if you are feeling good, look to God as the source.

Forgetting God

I mentioned earlier that very few people walk around thinking, “How am I supposed to handle all this joy?” And I have to say, I find the second one more convicting than the first. If things get painful enough, I will eventually end up on my knees. But oh, how prone I am to forget God when I'm feeling good. Scripture warns us about that.

Deuteronomy 8:7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into ...a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; 8 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig

trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; 9 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing ...10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God ... 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.⁶

If we fail to praise God in our happiness and prosperity, pride will set in, and we will forget the Lord. Things work out well, and we sit back and think, “I sure am glad I...” and we end up attributing the situation to our hard work or brilliant decision making. And we forget about God. That is pride.

Hosea 13:6 When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.

The pleasures of life can pull you away from God just as fast as suffering can push you away from God. We have to watch out for both. Remember the parable of the soils? One plant got scorched by the sun, and another got choked by the weeds. The scorching sun represents hardship and persecution. And the weeds represent riches and pleasures of life (Mk.4:16-19). Both can be lethal. Good gifts from God do not automatically draw us to God. We need to be reminded to connect the dots with the source, and sing praises. And when we sing, we don't just sing anything. People in the world sing when they are happy. They sing “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah,” or “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,” or “I can See Clearly Now...” But the point isn't to sing; the point is to sing praises to God.

Musical (Emotional) Praise

Now, that's not to say the singing part is unimportant. The word does mean to sing. It is good to speak praises as well, but here we are called specifically to musical praise. Why? Because music moves the emotions. Really good music can have the effect of taking the emotions you already feel and amplifying them. If you feel a little bit of joy, the right kind of music can triple that feeling. If you feel a little bit of awe and reverence, the right kind of music can put you on your face before God. Now, if the emotions are just a response to the music itself, then that is worthless. Atheists respond emotionally to music. But if you use music to boost the godly affections you have for God, that can be a very powerful thing. That is why we are so thankful for songwriters and people who can sing beautiful harmonies, and for guitar players and drummers and bass players and we are praying that God would supply us with a pianist. These people help us not only express our joy in the Lord, but to also amplify it.

Merism

So those are the two scenarios – hardship or happiness. And here is something important for you to know - James is using a figure of speech here known as merism. A merism is when you refer to two extremes as a way of referring to not only those two extremes but everything in between. For example, if someone says, “I've been working night and day at this,” that doesn't mean he worked one minute during the day and one minute during the night. It means he has been working around the clock. If someone says, “I've searched high and low for that thing...” That doesn't mean he only looked on the floor and on the ceiling. It means he also looked everywhere in between. When James says go to God when you are suffering hardship and go to God when you are happy, the point is go to God in absolutely every circumstance in life. In two words James gathers in all of life's experiences, and calls us to a prayerful response no matter what happens.

⁶ See also Dt.6:11-12.

And the verbs are in the present tense which means the praying and the singing are not seen as points in time, but ongoing responses. These responses should be a regular, routine part of our lifestyle. Paul said it in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – **Pray without ceasing.**

Give thanks in all circumstances.

And, as an aside, I honestly don't know how you will do that unless you have some great hymns or praise songs memorized. If you commit a few of your favorite hymns and praise songs to memory, I promise you won't regret it. Pick the ones you will need to praise God in happy circumstances that you face fairly often.

Connection with God

So the main point of this verse is to look to God in absolutely every context of life. And that gives us some insight into the “why?” of prayer. Why is it important that we pray? Because prayer connects us with God. It is a joining of our whole life with Him. Prayer involves us with what God is doing, and it involves God in what we are doing. Prayer is important to God because God does not want a relationship with us where we are down here doing our thing, and He is up there doing His thing, and we are disconnected. When we are not walking in step with Him, are not cooperating with what He is doing, are not involving Him with our lives- that's the way people who don't know God live. But as His children, God wants us to have intimacy with Him step by step, moment by moment, day by day as we walk through life.

We want to be involved in what He is doing, because we desire His will more than anything else in the whole world. We love His will, and so we want to involve ourselves with it, and that is done through prayer.

And not only that, but we want to involve God in what we are doing. Why is that important? It is important because the whole purpose of the whole creation is to show the supremacy and goodness and glory of God. And so God spoke the whole universe into existence, and at the center of that created universe He placed these beings called humans. And He made them incredibly needy and weak, so that they would constantly have to appeal to Him for everything they need. He is eager to give us all kinds of wonderful things, but He waits to give the best of them only through prayer, so that He can be seen as the great, generous, magnificent provider that He is, and so that we can see every good thing we get as coming from His hand.

Conclusion: Devotions

Here is a process that might help you with your daily time alone with God. (And if you haven't been carving out any specific daily time alone with God, I'm asking you – try this for the next seven days.) Find a place where you can be alone and undisturbed for at least 15 minutes. You might find it will go for an hour or two before long, but for now, start with a reasonable chunk.

Search Your Heart

Ask: Where am I in James 5:13? Suffering hardship? Happy and encouraged? Both? Neither? Something else? “What are my circumstances, and how am I feeling?”

Ask: What would God desire me to ask for when I'm in these circumstances and feeling this way? What do I need most from Him today, and what do I most need to express to God today?”

Pray earnestly along those lines.

Respond to Scripture

Then turn to the Bible. Take a paragraph of Scripture and read it slowly and carefully four or five times. Think deeply – go beyond the surface. And begin to cycle back and forth between meditation and prayer. Meditation is when you are talking to yourself about the meaning and implications of what God said. Prayer is when you are talking to God about it. A good example of meditation is Psalm 103 where the psalmist is talking to his own soul. Meditation is when you explore an idea and unfold it and unpack it as you mull it over in your mind.

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light

The truths of God's Word are folded up – compressed, like a zip file on your computer. And they need to be unzipped or unfolded through careful thought. The following questions may help you meditate. Write down the answers to these questions:

- List everything the passage tells you about God.
- List everything it tells you about yourself.
- List any:
 - commands to obey
 - promises to trust
 - new ways God wants you to think

After you have pondered all that you have written, pick whichever one or two strike you as the most important for today. Ask the following questions about those one or two:

- How would my life be different if this were explosively alive in my inner being – I really believed it?
- What would I gain?
- How would life be better for the people around me if this were real in my life?
- What problems result when I forget what's in this verse?
- Why is God showing me this now - on this day?
- What do I need to confess?
- What should I be grateful for? (Try to think of a good praise song to express your joy over that thing.)

For the next seven days, let's take the first steps toward greater devotion to prayer.

Benediction: Ephesians 1:16 I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Share with the group one of the most satisfying times you have ever had alone with God.
- 2) Of all the blessings God has given you in the past few months, which one stands out as one especially deserving of musical praise to God?
- 3) In your most recent suffering, what do you feel you need the most from God?
- 4) Which aspects of your life are most prone to keep you from times of extended, private communion with God? Share with one another ideas for overcoming those obstacles.

Expanded Application Questions (James 1:25)

James 5:13 - Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

Summary: The closing section of James teaches how to solve all the problems brought up earlier in the book, addressing all four major themes (persevering in suffering, deeds of love, godly use of the tongue, and avoiding worldliness). And it mostly focuses on prayer (six of the nine verses). In times of trouble we should pray (God is compassionate). Pray for whatever you need most in that time. And in times of happiness, praise God musically (emotionally). In every circumstance in life, involve yourself with what God is doing and involve God in what you are doing.

In this sermon we are taught the importance of prayer and our connection to God in an intimate way both in suffering and in blessing.

From the Sermon: “So the main point of this verse is to look to God in absolutely every context of life. And that gives us some insight into the “why?” of prayer. Why is it important that we pray? Because prayer connects us with God. It is a joining of our whole life with Him. Prayer involves us with what God is doing, and it involves God in what we are doing. Prayer is important to God because God does not want a relationship with us where we are down here doing our thing, and He is up there doing His thing, and we are disconnected. When we are not walking in step with Him, are not cooperating with what He is doing, are not involving Him with our lives- that’s the way people who don’t know God live. But as His children, God wants us to have intimacy with Him step by step, moment by moment, day by day as we walk through life.

We want to be involved in what He is doing, because we desire His will more than anything else in the whole world. We love His will, and so we want to involve ourselves with it, and that is done through prayer.”

We might all experience satisfaction in many forms, such as a deep sense of contentment, a sense that the Lord is lifting some emotional burden, or profuse tears as we sense God’s mercy covering us...or just a sense that God has listened and heard your heart...and you rise from your time on your knees confident that connection was made...

1. Share with the group one of the most satisfying times you have ever had alone with God.
 - a. Does this happen often?
 - b. As you listen to others in the group share their satisfying times, is your heart drawn to desiring more intimacy with God, or do you feel like this is something that is difficult for you?
 - c. If it is difficult to have intimate times, do not feel condemned, but rather, take the first steps toward intimacy by making a real commitment to pray everyday, in a place separate from distraction...make it a holy habit...

From the Sermon: “Now, that’s not to say the singing part is unimportant. The word does mean to sing. It is good to speak praises as well, but here we are called specifically to musical

praise. Why? Because music moves the emotions. Really good music can have the effect of taking the emotions you already feel and amplifying them. If you feel a little bit of joy, the right kind of music can triple that feeling. If you feel a little bit of awe and reverence, the right kind of music can put you on your face before God. Now, if the emotions are just a response to the music itself, then that is worthless. Atheists respond emotionally to music. But if you use music to boost the godly affections you have for God, that can be a very powerful thing.”

2. Of all the blessings God has given you in the past few months, which one stands out as one especially deserving of musical praise to God?
 - a. Do you feel most comfortable expressing this alone or in the congregation?
 - b. Michal despised David when David celebrated before the Lord, but David continued to praise God, is praise a difficult thing to express around others, and what might be some of the hindrances to your expression of praise thru a song sung aloud?
3. In your most recent suffering, what do you feel you need the most from God?
4. Which aspects of your life are most prone to keep you from times of extended, private communion with God? Share with one another ideas for overcoming those obstacles.

Take away: From this discussion of James 5:13, we should:

- Be encouraged to praise God, using our voices as instruments of praise, knowing that God is blessed when we praise Him from a heart that appreciates His provision and presence in our lives.
- Be challenged to develop a more intimate prayer life both in suffering and in prosperity.
- Be encouraged to know that the most satisfying times in our walk with the Lord can be found as we press into intimate times of prayer, which can change our minds concerning what really satisfies.