

Keep on Praying

Message for Sunday, April 19, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 5:13-20

1) Pray at all times

I heard about a man who went to see his doctor because he wasn't able to do all the things around the house that he used to do. When the doctor had finished the examination, the man said, "Now Doc, I can take it. Tell me in plain English what is wrong with me."

"Well, in plain English," the doctor replied, "you're just lazy."

"OK," said the man. "Now give me the medical term so I can tell my wife."

His response to his problem was to hide it. That's probably more common than we care to admit.

The Scripture we're looking at today has several verses which talk about sickness, but also about suffering in general. These verses, however, tell us to pray about our problems. Instead of hiding our problems, or pretending we don't have any problems, or worrying about our problems — all of which are pretty common methods that people use to deal with their problems — we are to take our concerns to God. In fact, the words "pray" or "prayer" occur five times in these verses.

James 5:13-16, New Living Translation:

Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.

- Are you suffering? Pray.
- Are things going well? Sing your prayers.
- Are you sick? Pray, and ask others to pray as well.
- Have you sinned? Confess it to someone, and ask for prayer.

Keep on praying. Paul echoed this, even while he spent years in prison waiting probable execution:

**1 Thessalonians 5:17, Today's English Version:
Pray at all times.**

2) Prayer: our lifeline to God

One of the most famous pray-ers ever was George Müller, who ran an orphanage in England. His policy was that the orphanage was God's work, so he never asked for donations. When supplies or money were running low, he never said a word to anyone, but just took it to God in prayer. And he did this for almost forty years.

One day it was time for breakfast, and there was no food, none at all. Furthermore, there was no money in the orphanage account to buy food. A small girl whose father was a close friend of Müller was visiting in the home. Müller took her hand and said, "Come and see what our Father will do." They entered the dining room, where the children were sitting at long tables set with empty plates and empty mugs.

Müller prayed, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." The moment he finished the prayer, they heard a knock at the door. When they opened it, there stood the local baker. "Mr. Müller," he said, "I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you had no bread for breakfast, so I got up at 2 o'clock and baked fresh bread. Here it is." Müller thanked him and gave praise to God.

Soon, a second knock was heard. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. He said he would like to give the children the milk so that he could empty the cart and repair it.

Many of you have told me stories about yourselves or about people you know, where prayers have resulted in healing or other answers to prayer.

Truly, prayer is a wonderful thing.

Max Lucado, in an essay called *Prayer: A Heavenly Invitation*, wrote the following:

Imagine yourself in a dark room. Windows closed. Curtains drawn. Shutters shut. In the darkness it's hard to believe there's daylight beyond the drapes. So you grope and try to feel your way across the floor. You take a step, disoriented and unsure where you're headed. Progress is slow and the journey painful. Stubbed toes, bruised shins, broken vases. It's hard to walk in a dark place.

Harder still to walk in a dark world. But many try. And, as a result, many are wounded in the effort: tripping over problems, bumping into one another in the shadows, ramming into walls.

But occasionally one of us makes a discovery. Reaching through the blackness, a hand finds curtains and a window latch. "Hey, everybody! The walls have windows!" The drapes are pulled back and the window opened. The sun floods into the room. What was dark is now bright. What was opaque is now clear. What was stale is now fresh. With the light comes a peace, a power, a desire to move closer to the light, and a confidence to step forward. Our timid steps are replaced by a certainty to our walk. A certainty to move through the corridors of life, opening one window after another to illuminate. What a difference! And all it took was one small gesture of opening curtains and raising the window.

Prayer does the same thing for us. Prayer is the window that God has placed in the walls of our world. Leave it shut and the world is a cold, dark house. But throw back the curtains and see His light. Open the window and hear His voice. Open the window of prayer and invoke the presence of God in your world.

I'll say it again: Prayer is a wonderful thing. It is our lifeline to God. Through prayer we can have a relationship with our Creator and Lord. Just think of what an incredible and awesome gift this is!

3) Pray even when we don't understand

But there is also mystery with prayer.

Verse 15 of James 5 says that when the elders of the church pray for the sick, "**their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well.**" [my emphasis]

While we celebrate and give thanks to God for the miracles in answer to prayer, I am sure that everyone here knows of times when sick people were prayed for, and they did not get well. What, then, does this Bible verse mean? What about the similar promises made by Jesus?

Mark 11:24, New International Version:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

I heard a story about a father and his young daughter had gone to a worship service. On the way out, the

father commented to the daughter: "That was rather nice, having someone play the piano during the prayers, wasn't it?"

"Oh," said the daughter, "I thought God had put us on hold."

Maybe sometimes it feels like God has you and your prayers on hold.

I come before you today and I tell you, I don't understand this. Why is that some people are healed, while others are not? It's a mystery to me. All I can offer is that God knows and God cares. I choose to trust God, no matter what happens.

It must have been a mystery for the apostle Paul, too. He had some ailment which he called his "thorn in the flesh." He prayed for the Lord to remove this suffering, but he didn't get his request either. *Instead, he got something even better!*

2 Corinthians 12:9, The Message:

The Lord told me, "My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness."

I read a devotional in which the author wrote, "I've prayed hundreds, if not thousands, of times to be healed. Finally, the Lord healed me of my need to be healed."

Keep on praying! Pray in all circumstances. Trust God, no matter what happens.

I asked the Lord to heal me and to make me whole, but he made me lame to teach me humility.

I asked him to make me rich, but he impoverished me to teach me to trust him.

I asked him to let me run my life today and do his wishes tomorrow, but he admonished me that there may never be a tomorrow.

I asked him to let me enjoy the sin of pride in material things, but he took them away to make me dependent upon him alone.

He gave me nothing that I asked for, and everything that I wanted.

I have no choice but to trust him with everything, from now to eternity.

– written by Wendy Welch, shortly before she died