

James
Prayer for All Seasons (Part 1)
James 5:13-18
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Well, we have almost ended our journey through this wonderful letter of James, the half-brother of our Lord. We come to the next to last paragraph in this great letter, James chapter 5. We will begin looking at verse 13. Most of us spend very little time thinking about the one activity that we perform each day, that is absolutely essential to life, and that is the activity of breathing. The encyclopedia defines breathing as transporting oxygen into the body and carbon dioxide out of the body. But you spend really no time thinking about this reality. The average adult breathes between 12 to 15 times per minute or about 20,000 times a day. We normally breathe about 500 to 700 milliliters of air with each breath, amounting to 535 cubic feet a day. Most people only breathe through one nostril at a time, the nostril in use changes every 15 minutes to three hours depending on the individual. There's a little fact you can use over lunch. While we can vary the rate of our breathing based on exercise or based on choice, it is impossible for a healthy person to voluntarily stop breathing entirely. If we do not inhale over a period of time and we all have done this is children or perhaps even as adults for various reasons, carbon dioxide builds up in our blood and we experience what scientists refer to as overwhelming air hunger. This is a reflex that God has built within our bodies and it's a reflex it's absolutely crucial to human life. Since without breathing the body's oxygen level falls to dangerous levels within minutes, leading to permanent brain damage and ultimately to death. It's not surprising then, that breath has sometimes been used as a metaphor for life. We'll speak of someone's last breath because that is the most obvious sign that physical life has left the human body. Breathing, I believe is a powerful illustration of a spiritual reality. What breathing is to our physical bodies praying is to our souls. We absolutely cannot survive without it. The human body can survive for weeks without food, can survive for days without water but it can only survive for a few minutes without air. Same is true spiritually when it comes to praying. We absolutely cannot spiritually survive without it. That's the message of James in James chapter 5 verses 13 through 18. Let me read this passage for you. We will have the opportunity to look at over the next couple of weeks.

Verse 13

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 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; 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. 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. 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. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Now, let me tell you that this is one of the most difficult passages to interpret, in the entire New Testament. Almost every phrase, especially in verses 14 through 16 can be interpreted in several different ways. And so, there are many different views, and we'll deal with the heart of that disagreement next week. But, let me tell you that while there is disagreement about this passage, there is almost universal agreement about its theme. The theme of this passage is prayer. In either noun or verb form the subject of prayer occurs in every verse in the passage I just read for you. Now, why does the topic of prayer come up here at the end of James letter. Let me remind you the context in which this occurs. You remember several weeks ago, we studied the first 6 verses of James 5 and in the first 6 verses James takes upon himself the role of an Old Testament Prophet. And he rebukes the wicked rich and powerful of the world who are persecuting these believers who scattered as a result of the persecution in Jerusalem. And he lets us as it were, listen in. Then beginning in verse 7 of chapter 5 and down through verse 12, James addresses the brethren again. He addresses us and he explains to us how it is that we should respond when life just doesn't seem fair; when we are in the middle of injustice, when we are attacked as these 1st century Christians were, without justification. Now, you may recall that along with several excellent commentators, I connected verse 12 with the previous paragraph and I explained it to you this way. In verse 12, as he talks about not swearing with an oath, James is telling us how we should not respond to God when we find ourselves in the middle of injustice. His point is that when we find ourselves being treated unfairly, we are tempted to respond by making rash vows to God. And that is absolutely unacceptable. God does not take it lightly when we take Him

lightly. And if you weren't here then you can listen to that message on the internet and sort of catch up with all that we talked about in verse 12. But now, in verses 13 to 18 James tells us how we should respond to God. We should not make rash vows, bargaining with God as it were, instead we should pour out our hearts to God in prayer. We should seek him in prayer. Now, this passage breaks into two sections very easily. Verse 13 down through the first part of verse 16, we could call the priority of prayer and from the middle of verse 16 down through verse 18 we could call the power of prayer. The priority of prayer in the life of the Christian and then the power of prayer, how God uses it to accomplish great and mighty things.

This morning we're just going to begin to examine the priority of prayer. For the Christian, prayer is absolutely crucial, and prayer is especially important when we find ourselves in the middle of life's troubles and trials. You remember that James began his letter by making that point; in fact, turn back to James 1:5 as he talks about the issue of trials. He says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." And now, as he finishes his letter, James returns to this crucial issue of prayer and its importance in the midst of life's trials and troubles. By the way, this is common in many New Testament epistles to conclude the letter with a call to prayer. Let me show you just one example. Turn to Romans chapter 15. In Romans 15:30, Paul concludes by saying, "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." Here at the end of Romans, he appeals for them to pray for him. In other books, as he concludes them, he simply appeals for them as believers to be devoted to personal prayer. You see this at the end of Ephesians, at the end of the letter to the Philippians, the end of the letter to the Colossians, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and even in a non-Pauline letter like the letter of Hebrews the writer of Hebrews concludes with a call to prayer in Hebrews 13. Now, why is it that prayer deserves such a high priority in the lives of believers? It is, as I explained to you just a few moments ago because prayer is so crucial to our life as believers. Prayer is to our Christian life, what breathing is to the physical life. Augustine who wrote that classic in his confessions, and by the way, I urge you to read it. It's really the story of God's remarkable conversion of this man Augustine. And he, obviously, was not a perfect man, his theology is not completely in full agreement with what we believe the scriptures teach, but when it comes to the issue of prayer Augustine understood the importance of prayer. In fact, his confessions is nothing more than a 300 and something page

prayer to God, as he recites his biography if you will, to God. And he wrote this, a prayer. He said, “Prayer is the protection of holy souls, a consolation for the guardian angel, an insupportable torment to the devil, a most acceptable homage to God, the best and most perfect praise, the greatest honor and glory, the preserver of spiritual health. It is the column of all virtues, a ladder to God, the fountain of faith.” Martin Luther says, “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.” Nothing is more foundational to the Christian faith than the place and priority of prayer. Now notice in verse 13 James tells us that we are to pray in all seasons and circumstances of life. He begins verse 13, “Is anyone among you suffering.” The Greek word for suffering can refer to persecution for the faith. In fact, the same basic word is used up in verse 10, describing the suffering of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. It's also used in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 2 Timothy 4:5 and it's translated to endure or suffer hardship. So, it can relate to persecution for the faith. But we should not restrict it to persecution; in fact, this word suffering is a general word that literally means to suffer evil. It has the sense of experiencing difficulty. Alec Motyer, an excellent commentator on the book of James, writes, “It is any ill circumstance which may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an on looking friend might say, that's bad.” So, anything that you and I would point to and say, that is bad, is encompassed in this word suffering. We could translate it in English this way, is anyone among you in trouble. That's very similar to how this Greek word is used. It includes physical illness, financial problems, marriage issues, pressures and setbacks at work, family struggles, persecution, loneliness, the death of someone we love, all the way to the daily pressures of work and family and marriage and of life here in the world. Let me ask you this morning, do you find yourself in trouble? Are there circumstances in your life that are pressuring you, that are weighing you down? Is your spirit crushed beneath a load of difficulty in hardship? Are you discouraged? Are you despondent? 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? Have recent trials left you stripped of all of your joy and spiritual energy? If so, how should you respond? Well, James tells you what you must do. Look at verse 13 again. He says, “Is anyone suffering, then he must pray.” D Edmond Hiebert writes, “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.” The Greek word here that is translated pray in verse 13 is the most common Greek word in the New Testament for prayer; it's used some 80 times to

describe prayer. Do you notice in this verse that James doesn't tell us what to pray for? He doesn't tell us what the content of our prayer should be. We may want to pray that the trial would be removed. God, take away this trouble, this trial that I'm facing. That's certainly appropriate to pray. Over and over again, God invites us to call on him to remove the trial. 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, those who found themselves in terrible spiritual distress; "They cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses." It's OK to cry out to God to remove the trouble. Paul certainly prayed like that. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 12. In the first few verses of 2 Corinthians 12, Paul gives us a sort of auto-biographical account of what happened to him as he had the opportunity to be taken as it were, in a vision to the presence of God. And as a result of that verse 7 says, "Because 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!" Now, a lot of ink has been spilled over the issue of exactly what was Paul's thorn in the flesh. Truth is, he doesn't tell us. The most common explanation is that it had to do with a physical ailment, perhaps his eyes, because the end of Galatians he says see what large letters I have written to you. He means by that physically large letters of the alphabet. So, we may surmise that he had some serious physical problem, that may be his thorn in the flesh. Others have conjectured that perhaps it was a person; maybe one of the false teachers there in Corinth who was demeaning Paul and trying to undermine his ministry. We don't know. We don't know for sure what this thorn in the flesh was. But don't miss the point. Look at the next verse, verse 8, "Concerning this", whatever it was, "I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me." Paul says, I asked God to take it away. It's OK to pray for God to take it away, and the Lord may choose to remove the trial or he may choose to give you the same answer he gave Paul. Look at verse 9 "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in your weakness."." It's OK to pray that God will remove the trouble. But God in His own wise providence may choose not to do that and you and I have to trust Him to do what's right. But James doesn't want us just to pray that the trial would be removed. James is concerned that we would pray for something else. Turn back again to James 1:5. I commented on this verse earlier, but I want to remind you of this verse in its context. You remember we studied this at length

verse 5 appears in the middle of a paragraph about the various trials that you and I face and encounter in life. And he says, in the middle of those trials, verse 5 “Any of you lacks wisdom”. Now, the construction here in the Greek text, does not imply that there are some who lack wisdom and there are others who don't; which is the impression you could get from the English text. Instead, the implication in the Greek text is, if any of you lacks wisdom, and you all do, then let him ask of God who gives to all generously without reproach and it will be given him. Now, why is it that we need wisdom in the midst of trials? This is what we ought to be praying for, and about. What is it that we need wisdom for in the middle of our trials? Well, without re preaching the message to you, and I would encourage you if you haven't heard that, have you not reflected on that, to listen to that series on trials because it's so much a part of our lives. But what we need, the wisdom we need in the midst of trials, is, we need the wisdom to see our trials as a source of joy. Because, that's what he's admonished us to do, back in verse 2, “Consider it all joy”. That doesn't come naturally. It doesn't come naturally to us to look at our difficulties and say, oh I can rejoice in that. We need God's wisdom to be able to see it as joy; not to be masochistic and to enjoy the trial, but rather to see the outcome and rejoice in that. To see that by going through this trial, we build spiritual strength and endurance. We also need wisdom in the midst of our trials to know how to respond in a godly way. Pray for wisdom. So, whenever we find ourselves in trouble of any kind, our very first response should be to pray. We serve a God who can be trusted even in the dark. When we can't trace His hand in our circumstances, we can trust His heart.

But, there's a second season or circumstance that James says, calls for prayer. Not only suffering, but notice the second part of verse 13, “Is anyone cheerful?” Now, the Greek word translated cheerful, literally means to be in good heart or soul. It's used only four other times in the New Testament. Three of those times it occurs in Acts 27, where Paul is urging those men who were on that ship that's about to shipwreck with him, that's been caught in a storm for two weeks, he urges them to be cheerful, be encouraged. So, being cheerful; this is important for you to understand, is not describing happy circumstances. The circumstances on on-board that ship in Acts 27 were not happy circumstances. But, Paul says, even in the midst of that, we can be filled with joy. It's a deep sense of joy in spite of circumstances. You can be cheerful in this sense, when everything is going wonderfully and you can also be cheerful when everything is in

difficulty, in trouble. Let me ask you this morning, are you cheerful today? Is your perspective about your life, whatever your circumstances, one of deep inner joy? Then here's how you respond, look at verse 13, "He is to sing praises." We get our word Psalm from the Greek word translated sing praises. It originally meant to pluck a stringed instrument and then it came to mean singing and being accompanied by a stringed instrument, and ultimately it came to refer simply to the singing itself. It doesn't describe a particular kind of music, in other words, God's not telling us here that we have to sing one of the Psalms. Instead, it describes any song of praise to God. This is to be our response. Do you find yourself this morning genuinely filled with the joy, with a deep sense of joy and satisfaction in God's goodness to you and the life he's given to you? Then your response should be to flood over with praise to God. Praise, by the way, singing praises, is simply another form of prayer. Do you realize that, when you and I sing praises to God as we've done this morning, if it's done correctly, it is another form of praying to God. It is the overflow of our hearts speaking to God and reciting His goodness and His grace to us. Scripture constantly resounds with the praises of God's people, because of the joy that's within their hearts. Let me show you just a couple of examples. Turn back to Psalm 95. Psalm 95 is the sister Psalm to the Psalm 100 that we studied a couple of weeks ago. Psalm 95:1 says,

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 or the depths of the earth, The peaks of the mountains or 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.

We are to let the overflow of our joy turn into praise to our God. You see this in the New Testament as well. Turn to Luke 24. Luke 24:50, Luke records the ascension of our Lord. He says, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." How do you respond in the midst of that? They were worshipping Him and then they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. So, what do you do if you're filled with joy? Look at how the disciples responded,

verse 53, “and” they “were continually in the temple praising God.” This is to be the expression of our hearts. You see it again in Ephesians chapter 5. In that great passage about being filled with the spirit, we’re told in Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation but” instead be controlled or permeated with the Spirit. And how does that express itself, verse 19, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” In the parallel passage in Colossians chapter 3. Colossians 3:16, and I’ve explained this to you before, but, you’ll remember that being filled with the spirit is identical to letting the Word of Christ dwell richly within you. The same thing; to be filled with the spirit is to be controlled by the Word of God; to be controlled by the Word of God is to be filled with the Spirit. And how does that express itself? Verse 16, “with all wisdom teaching, admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” This is to be our response. Are you in trouble this morning? Then you’re to pray. But if as you sit here this morning, you can say that your life and your perspective about your life, whatever your circumstances, may be, is one of a deep sense of inner joy, then you are to respond by singing praises to God, a different kind of prayer to God himself.

Now, turn back to James chapter 5. I want you to see the big picture here. Let’s step back and look at the big picture of what James is telling us, with these two questions in verse 13. Is anyone suffering? and Is anyone cheerful? James intends to encompass every season and circumstance of life to put bookends if you will, on all of life. Every experience that you and I can encounter in life, is included in verse 13. Listen to great commentator on the book of James, **Alec Motyer**, he writes, “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.” You ever thought about that, listen to what he says, “Trouble can give rise to an attitude of surly rebellion against God and the abandonment of spiritual practices.” Ever been tempted in the midst of trial and trouble to turn in anger on God, to question His goodness, to rebel as it were against His Providence; why are you doing this to me? why are you doing this to my family? and to actually fail to practice as he says here, spiritual practices for a time, to ignore the word of God, to ignore prayer, to ignore the corporate gathering for worship. Trouble can lead us there. But he goes on to say, “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.” You see just as trouble can lead

us into rebellion, ease can lead us into forgetfulness. Whether we find ourselves in trouble or in triumph, and everything between, James says we are to pray, we are to remember God. So, every circumstance is included; every circumstance of life is included in verse 13. But there's more in verse 13. Look again at the word cheerful. Notice the word cheerful does not describe a circumstance, but rather, our response to our circumstances; our emotions. What James wants us to understand is that, not only should every circumstance we face drive us to God, but our emotional response to our circumstances, whatever that may be, should also drive us to God. You see emotion is a God given gift. It is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. Biblical language tells us that God has emotions of various kinds. Now be careful here; it's important that you think about this accurately. All the biblical descriptions of emotion and God are what theologians called anthropopathic; that means God doesn't experience emotions in exactly the same way we do. Our emotions are physical responses to external stimuli. They are physical responses to something we perceive or something we think or something we believe. For example, you're riding down the freeway, God forbid on the way home from church and you have a near accident. What emotion do you experience? Fear. Now, why? I mean you didn't have an accident, why would you experience fear? It's because your perception to the external stimuli of that near accident causes your body to respond with fear. Because that's how you perceive the situation. But God isn't like that. God doesn't react, because nothing surprises God. So when emotions are given or prescribed to God in the scripture, we're simply being told that to help us understand something that's true about God, but it's not exactly like our emotions. But nevertheless, listen carefully, God doesn't react, but he describes himself as experiencing emotions. That means there is something in God which can best be explained by comparing it to our emotions. And our God given emotions whatever they are, should always drive us to God. Whatever emotion it is that you're experiencing right now, that is to be an impetus to go to God; whether it's in prayer or whether it's in praise. If you want to see what that looks like in real life, I encourage you to study and meditate on the Psalms, because the book of Psalms serves, as G Campbell Morgan calls it, "the book in which the emotions of the human soul find expression." Another author says, "The Psalms are a mirror into which one can peer and see himself and his emotions reflected." Psalms provides us with a divinely intended record and pattern of man expressing himself to God; a pattern if you will of prayer and praise, based on not only all of the different experiences of life, but also based on our different emotional reaction to all the

circumstances of life. Let me show you just a couple of examples from the life of David; life and pen of David. Turn back to Psalm 3. I want you to see how the Psalms are intended to show us that whatever emotion we're facing, and whatever experiences caused that emotion, all of that is to drive us to God. Psalm 3, the title says, it's a Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son. Now, I want you for a moment to try to put yourself in David shoes at this moment. The moment that the song was written, in the circumstances that led up to it. Is there anything worse for a king than a rebellion against his kingship? It's hard to imagine anything getting much worse than that and yet it was worse, because the rebellion came from his own son. David is on the run, he's lost his throne, he's lost his Kingdom, and it's because of his son. Notice his response; verse 1,

O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, There is no deliverance for him in God.” But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory and the One who lifts my head. I was crying to the LORD with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about. Arise O LORD; save me, O my God! For you have smitten all my enemies on the cheek; You have shattered the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people.

You see, David here in the wide range of his emotions through this experience, this circumstance; everything from the despondency and despair that come with being attacked by your own son and having people in your Kingdom rally to him, to the hope that God will act on his behalf. But all of it drove him to God. Notice, Psalm 6, here you have a prayer for mercy in time of trouble. Again, you see the heart of David poured out before God. This is a pattern for us folks. This is how we are to pour out our hearts before God.

O LORD. do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am pining away; Heal me O LORD, for my bones are dismayed. And my soul is greatly dismayed; But you, O LORD how long? Return O LORD, rescue my soul; Save me because of Your

lovingkindness.” ... “I am weary.” verse 6 “with my sighing. Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolved my couch with my tears. My eye has wasted away with grief; It has become old because of my adversaries.

What I want you to see is that when David found himself in trouble, where did he turn. When he found himself discouraged and the emotion of absolute and utter discouragement came upon him, where did he go? He went to the Lord. But you see the opposite is true as well. Turn to Psalm 9, just a few pages over. David writes “I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and exult in You. I will sing praises to Your name, O Most High.” And he goes on through the Psalm to recite the goodness and greatness of God caring for him. A totally different tone an emotional tone in totally different circumstances. Turn over to Psalm 30, and you see again this sense of joy overflowing in praise. It's a song at the dedication of the house and it's written,

I will extol You, O LORD, for you have lifted me up, And have not let my enemies rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to You for help, and You healed me. O LORD, You have brought my soul from Sheol. You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night but a shout of joy comes in the morning.”

You see how David, whatever the circumstance in his life and whatever his own emotional response to that circumstance, he let it drive him to God. He's open and honest about his emotions, but they push him to his God. James is telling us exactly the same thing; whatever our circumstances, whatever season of life we may be in, and whatever our perspective or emotions about those circumstances maybe, we are to turn to God in prayer. This is reminiscent of Paul's constant call to pray always. Remember Ephesians chapter six he says, “pray at all times”. In I Thessalonians chapter 5 he says, “pray without ceasing.” Jesus himself, our Lord, taught us to make this kind of prayer a priority. In fact, turn with me to Luke 18. In Luke 18, Jesus teaches a parable to communicate the importance of prayer. Luke 18:1. “Now, he was telling them a parable” and here was its purpose, “to show that at all times, they ought to pray and not to lose heart”, keep praying. And whatever your circumstances, don't lose heart, pour out your heart to

God. And here's the parable, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man." In other words, this guy didn't care. He didn't care about justice, he didn't care about the people he was supposedly serving, he only cared about himself. "And there was a widow in that city and she kept coming to him saying, "Give me legal protection from my opponent." For a while he was unwilling. But afterwards, he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God and respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise, by continually coming she will wear me out." And the Lord said," ... don't miss the point, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect." Here's the point, the moral of the story. God is nothing like that unrighteous judge and if that unrighteous judge gave in to the persistence of that woman simply to get her off his back, then how much more eager is our loving father willing to respond to us. So, turn to him in the midst of your trouble. We ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

Now here's the main point and I don't want you to miss this the main point of verse 13; is that every circumstance and every emotion is intended to drive us to God. As John Calvin said of this passage, "James means there is no time in which God does not invite us to Himself." I love that. There is no time, there's no circumstance, there's nothing you might be feeling that would cause God not to invite you to himself. **Alec Motyer** writes, "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." He goes on to say, "In particular, this is an exercise in glad acceptance of the will of God." This is the common denominator, that is accepting God's will, is the common denominator in prayer and praise. In praise, we say to him your will is good perfect and acceptable; this is what you've done for me and I rejoice in it. And ask for prayer in time of trouble. In attempts however poorly we may succeed to copy the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus, in saying not my will, let yours be done. That is exactly what James is saying in verse 13. As John Blanchard describes it, "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? Because when we pray to God in our trouble, we acknowledge His sovereign power to meet all our needs. When we pray in the middle of trouble and say, God I need Your help, we're saying, God everything I need in the midst of this difficulty is in You. And when we, in the midst of our joy, saying in praise, we acknowledge that God in His sovereign goodness has brought those

circumstances into our lives. We say, God, the reason I'm in joy, I'm in these great circumstances, the reason my heart can be filled with joy, even in these difficult circumstances is because of You. On the other hand, when we don't pray, we are revealing to ourselves and to everyone around us that those things are not true. You see when we pray and when we praise, we acknowledge God as our all sufficiency. But when we don't, we are acknowledging that we don't believe He's our sufficiency. If you find yourself in trouble and you're not praying, you know what you're saying; you're saying, God, what I really need in this situation isn't coming from You. You can't help me. Or if we find ourselves in the midst of joy and a deep sense of inner peace and joy of the circumstances in which we find ourselves or through the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and we don't praise God, then we're saying, God, You had nothing to do with this. You see as we contemplate the priority of prayer, don't forget the theme of James' letter. Remember what it is, test of a living faith. There is a living faith that is a saving faith and there is a dead faith like that of demons that will not save. A simple grasp of the facts about Christ that will not bring Salvation. And one of the tests of the reality of our faith is whether or not we continually find ourselves resorting to God in prayer and praise. D Edmond Heibert writes, "Christian faith finds its center and power in a vital relationship with God through prayer in all the experiences of life." You see, the habit of prayer should be an in fact is one of the most profound marks of genuine Christian faith. Is your faith living or is it dead? Take a look at your prayer. James not only understood this he practiced it. Listen to the early church father Eusebius, quoting an ancient tradition, he wrote this of James, "James' knees grew hard like a camel's, because of this constant worship of God in prayer." May God give us a commitment to the priority of prayer like that.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for this passage. We thank you for the reminder that all of life, that every circumstance we face, and that every emotional response we have to every circumstance we face, that all of these things are merely catalysts to drive us back to you and to your great heart, Father. Teach us as believers to live like that, to think like that, Lord. May every emotion that we experience this week drive us to you. May every circumstance in which we find ourselves drive us back to you. Father, I pray for the person here today who has to honestly say that they failed the test of living faith, because prayer is such a foreign thing to their heart and life. Lord, I pray that you would help them to see no matter what their claim of Christ maybe, but they may in fact have a dead faith, that is not saving faith, and may they today

awaken to new life; life that beats with a heart after yours. We pray this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.