

# Communion with God (contd)

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 3  
James 5:13 10-4-2015

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Summary: Pray not only in every circumstance, but also in every emotional state. Emotion gives passion to prayer. Walk with God by lifting every circumstance and every feeling to Him, and reroute sins back into prayer. Jesus' example was a very serious devotion to private prayer. Follow His steps by making a plan and getting away from distraction, draw near to Him and pray about problems in the church. God will respond to private prayer.

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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 weak? 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 weary 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

Your religion is what you do with your solitude. When you are all alone and you don't have to think about any particular thing, what do you think about? What are you like in private?

Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote this: "What a man is alone on his knees before God, that he is, and no more." That is the measure of your stature as a person – what you are alone on your knees before God. I can put on nice clothes and come to church and put my best foot forward, hide my sins, and put on a pretty good show, so a lot of people are impressed with me, but whatever I am tomorrow morning when it's just me and God, that is what I am and no more.

We have been studying through the book of James, and we came last week to verse 13 of chapter 5 where James calls us to personal, private prayer. The rest of this passage is about praying for one another, but he begins with praying for yourself. It has to start with personal, private prayer, because until you are right with God it is not going to do any good to pray for other people. And so I feel burdened to spend one more week on this verse before we move on.

## Fix the Church by Fixing the Members

I told you last time that this closing section of James (from v.12 to the end) is James' remedy for all the problems in the church that he has been exposing throughout the book. And it is mostly focused on prayer - private prayer in verse 13 and then the elders, then everybody praying for one another. That is the solution.

What a novel approach to fixing a broken church. Fix the church by fixing each one of the members. Revolutionary idea. Usually when something is wrong with the church people have all kinds of ideas about how to fix it – add a new program, more of this – less of that in the preaching, change the constitution, right some new bylaws, get new leadership, try different music - and we forget the most fundamental truth about what the church is. We are a body, and a body is healthy when the body parts are healthy. And that happens only when each body part is responsive to the signals coming from the head. And so in fixing the church James points us first to private prayer.

## Pray in Every Circumstance or Feeling

### Internal Events and External Events

And the emphasis is prayer in every circumstance in life.

**James 5:13 Is any one of you suffering hardship? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.**

Hard times and happy times – take it to the Lord in prayer. And that merism covers not only the whole range of circumstances in life, but also the whole range of feelings in your heart. **Is any one of you suffering hardship?** – That is about circumstances. **Is anyone happy?** – That is about how you feel on the inside, which may have nothing to do with circumstances. In fact, you could experience both of these at the same time – trouble on the outside and happiness on the inside. The only other place this word translated **happy** (or **cheerful**) is used is in Acts 27. Paul was on a ship that was being smashed against the rocks in a storm, and it was about to sink. The sailors were all freaking out, and Paul said this:

**Acts 27:22 But now I urge you to take courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.**

That word **take courage** is this same word **happy** or **cheerful**. So that is a situation where they were definitely experiencing hardship on the outside, and yet they are called to be happy on the inside. Not happy in the sense of being giddy or jovial. Obviously if you are on a ship at sea that is sinking in a storm you are going to take that seriously. But even in the midst of their alarm they could be confident, calm, and glad because of the outcome God promised.

Another example of both at the same time is Paul and Silas in prison. Tremendous suffering, and yet they felt joyful and happy, and so it was a time for singing. So this range James gives us is three-dimensional. Externally it extends all the way from the hardest times to the best of times and internally it

extends from the depths of despair to the heights of joy. Every imaginable circumstance in life, outside or inside, calls for prayer. - When things bounce your way, or when the ball bounces right on you and smashes you like a bug; When things work out exactly as you planned, and when nothing works out; When you feel happy, or sad; When you have peace or anxiety; Courage or fear; Humility or anger; Hope or depression; Love or loneliness; Contentment or longing; Delight or dread; Feeling loved or feeling hated; Clarity or confusion. Strength or weakness; Success or failure; Satisfaction or emptiness; Excitement or boredom; Rest or fatigue; Patience or exasperation; So often we pray when we have the negative ones, but not the positive ones. But all emotions – negative or positive – are extremely valuable because they are what give passion to your prayers if you direct them toward God.

## **Emotion Gives Passion to Prayer**

The religion of Buddhism teaches that the solution to suffering is indifference. They say suffering is caused by unfulfilled desire, so the solution is to eliminate desire. If you stop wanting things, then it won't hurt so much when you don't get them. That's Buddhism. The Bible teaches the exact opposite. The best examples of prayer that we have are when desires are running hot. In those psalms where the psalmist starts out all upset and by the end of the psalm things are better – it is never because desire goes away. If anything, desire increases. What changes is where they go to satisfy those desires.

**Psalm 43:1 ... rescue me from deceitful and wicked men ... 3 Send forth your light and your truth ... 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.**

**Psalm 73:25 earth has nothing I desire besides you. ... 28 the nearness of God is my good**

Desire is not bad – it just needs to be redirected. In fact, desire is essential for prayer. Emotion and desire are the heart and soul of prayer. That is really what prayer is – desire directed to God.

## **Prayer is Desire**

**Psalm 10:17 You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted**

If you ask the question, “What is prayer made out of?” – The answer is not words. Words are not prayer. Words are the garments of prayer. But the essential stuff that prayer is made out of is desire and emotion. As the body without the soul is dead, so is a prayer not driven by desire. Prayer is not even prayer unless it's animated by desire because desire is what God listens to.

Prayer is interaction with God. Words are of great assistance in that activity, but they are not the activity itself. We can spew forth a million words without a single prayer actually taking place. So if you want to know how to pray, simply pour out your heart to God. Come to Him with your deepest desires. And if something is wrong with your prayer life, probably the thing that needs to be fixed is not your wording, but your desiring. If I go to pour out my heart to God, and I find that the biggest thing in there is my desire for the Broncos to win, the solution to that isn't to try to fool God in my prayers and pretend I'm concerned about spiritual things. The solution is to cry out to God about the calamity of the fact that trivia has taken over my affections.

In Psalm 5 David said, “Consider my sighing.” Everything that makes you sigh – turn it into a prayer. If you can't ask God for it, you need to stop sighing about it. Those desires need to be reformed so you can offer your whole heart to God.

## **Take Advantage of Emotions**

Emotions are a wonderful gift from God because prayer is easiest when you are most emotional. The time when it is easiest to pour out your heart to God is when there is a lot in your heart.

### **Luke 22:44 And being in anguish, [Jesus] prayed more earnestly**

Manton: “It is excellent in religion to make use of present affliction—to use sadness to make us pray, or happiness to make us give thanks. The soul never works more sweetly than when it works with the force of some strong feeling. With what advantage may we strike while the iron is hot!”

And again, emotion can be redirected. Manton goes on to say this: “When the feelings are stirred up because of something worldly, convert them to a religious use.” Even if your emotions get stirred up by some trivial, earthly thing, you can use that to your advantage. It is easier to shift from being happy about this thing to being happy about that more important thing than it is to try to jump start emotions where they don’t exist at all. That is why Scripture sometimes instructs us to take the emotions we already have and redirect them.

### **Jeremiah 22:10 Do not weep for the dead... rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled.**

### **Luke 23:28 Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.**

It is easier to weep for the right reason if you are already weeping. The same goes for happiness. In Ephesians 5:4 Paul says to switch over from foolish talk and course joking to thanksgiving. Once the feelings are aroused, give them a right object so your prayers can have passion. Spurgeon: “True prayer is measured by weight, not by length. A single groan before God may have more fullness of prayer in it than a fine oration of great length.”

## **Emotion through Meditation**

“What if I don’t have any happiness?”

There are several possible causes of that, but one of them might just be a failure to connect the dots between the pleasures of life and the goodness of God.

### **Ecclesiastes 5:19 When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God.**

Any time you are enjoying something, this passage is saying it’s *not* because of your circumstances. It seems like it is, but it isn’t. You have probably had those same circumstances before but didn’t feel that good. The reason you are feeling good is because God not only gave you some favorable circumstances, but He used His mighty power to reach into your soul and enable you to enjoy them. All non-sinful enjoyment of God’s gifts comes as a special gift from God. You can’t wake up in the morning and just decide you are going to feel good. Money can’t buy it. Intelligence can’t create it. Creativity can’t manufacture it. And not even your favorite activities or people can guarantee it. It comes from God and God alone, so when you feel it, connect the dots, realize it’s from Him, and praise Him!

If you eat something and it hits the spot, that’s from God. If you look at the mountains and you are just blown away, that is favor from God. If you spend some time with someone and it ends up being a great time, that is favor from God. If God doesn’t enable you to enjoy that activity, then that exact same activity would leave you empty.

And I realize that emotion comes easier to some than to others. Some of you never have a problem with lacking emotion. But for others, emotion just is not there. Some of you are so even tempered, that if your soul were hooked up to a monitor it would be flat-lined. Then what? What do you do when you don’t feel anything? Meditation – focus on God’s truth until you do feel something. Open up your Bible and don’t close it until it starts to sink in. We all know people who cry at movies, but even those people generally don’t cry in the first two minutes of a movie. Even if the movie starts right out with someone dying or losing a loved one – it doesn’t make you cry. Why? Because you are not into it yet. You haven’t immersed yourself into the story enough for it to touch your emotions yet. And if you never spend more than three or four minutes at a time focusing on some truth of Scripture, of course you’re not going to feel

anything. That is like just watching the first two minutes of the whole bunch of different movies. Stay there in one passage and let it sink in.

For example, Psalm 103.

### **Psalm 103:2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits**

Instead of just reading that and moving on, think it through. Think through all the reasons you have to praise God. And if you don't think you have much reason to praise God, you're not thinking much. Next time you get into a funk, and you are lacking joy – just take some time to go through the psalms and look at all the things for which the psalmists cry out to God for deliverance. And what you will find is that most of those things you don't have to cry out for deliverance for, because you already have deliverance in that area. God's protecting, delivering, saving hand is the only reason you are not, right now, suffering the worst agonies that Satan could possibly dream up. There are people who are currently crying out to God, begging Him with every ounce of strength they have, to take away their cancer. And if they woke up cancer-free tomorrow, they would be filled with uncontainable joy and would shout God's praises. I woke up cancer-free this morning. There are people whose spouse has left them, and they have begged God to restore their marriage. If they woke up tomorrow morning and their spouse was there in bed next to them they would shout praises to God. I woke up with my wife next to me this morning. There are people who would sing His praises if they got a job so they could make a living, or if God enabled them to have a child, or let their sick child live, or if they could find a good church, or if they received their sight or hearing back, or if they could walk again, or if they could find a place to live, or if they could go a whole year without getting drunk or high. There are people who would literally shout for joy if they could own a Bible, or be released from prison. There are people who are suicidal because of guilt, and they would give anything to be free from the guilt of their past sin but they have no idea how because no one ever cared about them enough to tell them about Jesus. But God sent someone to tell you. You woke up this morning with most, if not all, of those blessings I just listed, and thousands upon thousands more – all from His generous, mighty, loving hand. Forget not His benefits – keep thinking about them until it touches your emotions.

That is from Psalm 103, and, as an aside – use the Psalms in your prayers. They focus so much on God. One of the best devotionals you could ever use is to just pick any psalm, and write down on a paper every attribute of God stated or implied in that psalm, and then contemplate the joy of having a God with that combination of attributes. And the psalms are also great for teaching us how to relate emotionally to God in all kinds of different circumstances. I don't have time to get into it now, but in the appendix to the sermon notes I have a list of every single psalm grouped according to categories. I pray you will find that helpful. So use the Scriptures to ignite your emotions. And in the meantime, if you don't have any emotions and your heart is just empty and dry – offer that to God. Talk to God about that. That is the point James is making in verse 13 – go to God with everything.

## **Walk with God**

This is a big part of what it means to walk with God. Every step you take in life – whether it is an action or thought or feeling, every step you take is to be taken with God. All of us are taking steps in one direction or another. Every thought in your mind is a step in some direction. We are all constantly taking steps – we are all walking, but the “with God” part depends on your prayer life. Of all the steps you take on a typical day, how many of those steps are actually *with God*?

Thomas Manton put it this way: “The Christian life is like a wheel, every spoke taking its turn. God has planted in us affections for every condition, grace for every affection, a duty for the exercise of every grace, and a time for every duty.” What he is saying there is that every new circumstance that comes up in life requires a different grace from God. If I suffer a loss, that requires a certain kind of grace from God. If someone gives me a really wonderful gift, that requires a certain kind of grace from God to handle it the right way. If I get sick, that's something else, if I get a new job, that's something else, if I get married, that's something else - life is one new circumstance after another, and as the wheel of your life roles

along, each spoke of grace takes its turn bearing the weight. And what James is trying to teach us here is the importance of tracing back the line of that grace to the hub. God is the hub. And with every new turn of the wheel we are to look back up the line of that spoke to see the hub where it is attached.

## **Every Decision Driven by the Will of God**

Life has a lot of ups and downs, but for the Christian, whether you are walking uphill or downhill, your orientation stays fixed on one thing: the will of God. We make thousands of decisions every day, and our goal as Christians is for those decisions to be governed by the will of God because we prize His will even above our own will. What God desires is more precious and delightful and important to us even than what we naturally desire. In Mark 3:35 Jesus said the only people who are part of His family are people who do the will of God, and in Matthew 7:21 they are the only ones who will enter the kingdom of heaven. People who do the will of God from their heart (Ephesians 6:6) In 1 Peter 4:1 a Christian is someone who **does not live ... his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.** In John 4:34 Jesus taught that doing God's will is our food and drink in life. Doing God's will sums up the entire Christian life.

**Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.**

It is all about God's will, which is why there is so much instruction in Scripture about how to discern God's will.

**Romans 12:2 ... be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

**Colossians 1:9 ... we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will**

**Hebrews 13:20 May the God of peace ... equip you with everything good for doing his will**

And the Bible writers assume that all it takes to get us motivated to do something is to simply tell us that the thing is God's will.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3 It is God's will that you should ... avoid sexual immorality.**

He expects us to say, "Oh, it's God's will? Then I'll do it."

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you**

**1 Peter 2:15 It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.**

A Christian is a person who longs for the will of God to be done. When Jesus taught us to pray, he told us to ask for God's will to be done on earth. We long for God's will, we pray for God's will, we strive to discern God's will, and we pray for one another to know God's will, because God is so wise and good and loving that whatever He wills is absolutely the best possible thing - better than our best ideas.

So being a Christian means living your life tethered to and obsessed with the will of God. And that happens through prayer.

## **Begin Prayer by Seeking God's will**

Try this – before you pray, ask God what He wants you to pray for. Romans 8 says that the Holy Spirit helps us when we don't know what to pray for. So start by asking God, "What do You want me to pray for?" Sometimes I will make a list: Lord, what is Your will for me today with regard to eating and exercise and rest? With work? Phone calls and emails? Family discipleship? What exactly should I plan to do today in the area of showing love to people? What is Your will regarding my attitudes? My marriage?

Then I just go down through the list and for each one I say, “What do You want me to pray for in this area God? What is Your will?” It is a wonderful exercise, and it can take a lot of guilt away when you realize it is not God’s will for you to do every single thing every single day. It is such a good way to start your day, because it puts right in front of your face the most important thing: God’s will. And it gives you some clear marching orders.

Then all through the day, every detail of your life is connected to God. Every fork in the road, hard times, easy times, feeling sad, feeling happy, green pastures, quiet waters, valley of the shadow of death – everything.

Everything you offer to God becomes sacred. Through prayer we hallow every pleasure and sanctify every pain. Every event and every feeling in life becomes holy as we involve God with it through prayer.

## **Turn Sins into Prayer**

And if we learn to walk with God with that kind of focus on His will, it can be a great corrective for those times when we start stepping off the path. Once you start stepping in the wrong direction away from God, you can’t commune with God. You can’t offer that to God in prayer. But what you can do is let prayer bring you back on track. I think that is exactly what James is trying to do with the readers here. Whenever you start responding the wrong way to suffering, like they were, replace that with prayer. You start grumbling, replace that with praying. You start gossiping, replace that with praying for the person. Prayer is the remedy for sins of the mouth.

And also sins of the heart. If you start worrying, spend that energy praying instead.

### **1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you.**

If you start doubting that God loves you or that he is really good or powerful, spend that energy praying instead of entertaining doubts. Those times when it is hardest to pray are the times we need to pray the hardest.

If you come down with the horrible disease of self-pity turn it into prayer. Self-pity is when you grumble to yourself about how rough you’ve got it. And when we do that, we always exaggerate how bad things are, and we ignore God’s blessings. If you turn that into a prayer of lament, you won’t be so tempted to exaggerate the negatives, because God knows exactly how severe they were. And you won’t be tempted to leave out the blessings. And when you start acknowledging the reality of how things are and God’s blessings, the whole self-pity party goes to pot.

## **Jesus’ Example**

If you are wondering why I am devoting another whole sermon to this verse and to the subject of private prayer, you don’t have to look any farther than Mark 1:35.

### **Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.**

And that wasn’t unusual – Jesus routinely did that.

### **Luke 5:16 Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.<sup>1</sup>**

When He lived on this earth, Jesus set an example for us that we might follow in His steps. And personal, private prayer was so important to Him, He got up before the sun came up, and He left the house, and He traveled somewhere out in the desert where He wouldn’t be interrupted so He could be alone with the Father. You wouldn’t do that if you are going to pray for 5 or 10 minutes. Jesus was a man of prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul evidently followed that example. According to D.A. Carson, “Paul’s many references to his “prayers” (e.g., Rom. 1:10; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:2) suggest that he set aside specific times for prayer.” (From *Praying with Paul*, ch.1)

**Matthew 14:23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.**

In Luke 22:32 He prayed for Peter, which is why Peter's faith did not collapse altogether when he denied Christ. In Matthew 11:25 He praised God for how He reveals things. In John 11 He thanked God for hearing His prayers.

**Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.**

In John 12:27 He was deeply troubled, and He poured out His troubled heart to the Father. In John 17 He prayed a long prayer – for Himself, then for the disciples, then for you! The night before the crucifixion He went off by Himself and agonized in prayer for hours (Lk.22:41). He prayed while He was on the cross (Lk.23:34). Hebrews 5:7 gives this summary of His whole life:

**Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.**

Could someone put your name in there? During the days of Darrell's life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission? Is that my life? And if not, why not? Am I less needy than Jesus? I am so self-sufficient that I don't need as much help from the Father as Jesus did? What kind of pride does it take for a Christian to have a prayerless life?

## **Make a Plan**

So let's follow Jesus' example and be intentional about prayer. Make a plan. We plan our vacations, we make plans at work, we plan dates, we plan meals – anything that we want to actually get done, gets a plan. Don't make a specific plan, and it won't happen. Nobody ever drifts into spiritual life growth or greater intimacy with God. We need to do what Jesus did and carve out some specific time when we will be doing nothing but prayer.

## **Take steps to reduce distraction and mental drift**

And follow His example of getting away from distractions. You have got to shut that phone off. You can't have alerts going off while you are trying to pray – that is what Jesus was trying to get away from. How about this – first God, then Facebook. Who gets the firstfruits of your day?

Fight against mental drift. If your mind wanders while you are praying, try praying out loud. And if you are not in a place where you can do that, you could do what Hannah did and just move your lips. I found that when I do that, my mind doesn't wander. It takes a fair amount of mental energy and concentration to actually form words with your lips as you pray.

One guy who had a problem always falling asleep when he prayed so finally he said, "I've never fallen asleep while walking," so he began walking whenever he prayed. He would just pace back and forth in his study.

Another thing that will keep your mind from wandering is writing your prayers. I found that not only does that keep my mind focused, but I tend to think a lot more deeply so that my prayers are much more thorough than when I am just thinking my prayers.

## **God Will Respond**

Did you catch the last phrase in Hebrews 5:7? Jesus' prayers were heard because of His reverent submission. You would think His prayers would be heard automatically just because He is the Son of God. But it says it was because of His reverent submission. That is great news for us because that is something we can imitate. If we have that same attitude, our prayers will be heard as well.



And that is the implication here in James 5:13. James is not telling us to pray in times of trouble just to give your mouth something to do. The implication is that when we cry out to God, He will respond. I will say a lot more about this when we get down into verse 16 where James starts talking about the power of prayer to change outcomes. But for now I'll just say - God answers prayer. If you go to Him in times of trouble He will comfort you. If you need something to accomplish His will, and you ask Him for it, He will give it to you. If you are in danger, and you look to Him for protection, He will protect you.

Sometimes we are perplexed about prayers that go unanswered, but the reality is the vast majority of prayers that go unanswered go unanswered because they go un-prayed.

### **James 4:2 You do not have, because you do not ask God.**

Only God knows how many blessings we leave on the table just because we didn't ask. It is like the line from the old hymn:

“Oh the peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.  
Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged—Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?  
(Which one of your friends will bear every single one of your sorrows?)  
Jesus knows our every weakness; Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Let's commit to this. They asked seminary students at one seminary about their devotional life. Only six percent said they had a regular quiet time of reading the Scriptures and prayer. Six percent of seminary students. So it is not surprising that a lot of us regular folks need help in that area. Those of you who have a strong prayer life, please don't keep that to yourself. Find someone to mentor.

## **Morning and Evening**

Sometimes people wonder if it's better to have devotions in the morning or at night. How about both? We try to walk with God all day long, but when it comes to the more focused, intentional prayer, there is a beautiful rhythm of morning and evening prayer that we see in the Psalms.

### **Psalm 92:1 It is good ... 2 to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night**

When you get up in the morning, focus on His upcoming love that you are going to experience through the day. And at night, look back on the faithfulness He showed you that day. When it's time for bed, don't forget to praise God for all the requests He granted from your morning prayers. You can see that same evening and morning rhythm of prayer in Psalms 4 and 5. Psalm 4 is a bedtime psalm.

### **Psalm 4:4 when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. .... 8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.**

Evening prayers are when you want to calm your heart before God. Cast all your cares on Him and rest in Him. Psalm 5 is a morning psalm.

### **Psalm 5:3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.**

In the morning your first priority is to orient your attention on to God, and consider His nature and His attributes.

### **7 But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.**

Then you seek guidance from Him for the day.

### **8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness ... make straight your way before me.**

## Pray about Problems in the Church

If something is broken in this church – this is how God wants to fix it. It is great that we are so committed to praying together in the prayer groups. But let's not neglect private prayer.

I wonder how many times God will bring a person to a particular church because He wants to show that person some problem in that church so that the person will pray earnestly and pound on the doors of heaven until God sends grace to restore what is broken, and what happens instead is the person sees the problem and says, "This church has a problem – I'm out of here!" Either that or they complain and grumble about it – point it out to all their friends, get other people grumbling about it, look down on the people responsible for it, and all the time God is saying, "No, no – that's not why I revealed that problem to you. I brought you here, and I opened your eyes to see that problem because I wanted you to pray – so you could see Me respond with power to your prayer."

It is interesting to me that the solution doesn't begin with the elders praying. It begins with each individual member of the church praying. Always remember – you are the church. And nothing the leadership could ever do will make this church what God wants it to be unless each of you is running hard after God. We can do our best to stimulate your thirst for God, and show you how to seek God's presence, and encourage you, but the health of this church will never be any greater than spiritual health of each member, and so the only way to really improve the church in any meaningful way is for each one of us in the body to draw near to God in fellowship with Him. Could it be that God would have you leave a church because of problems in that church? Yes, but not until after you have done all that Scripture calls you to do to bring grace for the solution to that problem, and you have *spent* yourself in prayer. If everyone in the church were devoted to prayer, can you imagine what God would do? This is God's will for us.

**Benediction: Psalms 9:7 The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne ... 9 The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. 10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. 11 Sing praises to the LORD**

### Application Questions (James 1:25)

Before going through the questions, take a moment as a group and ask God to reveal His will for this time you will be spending together.

- 1) If private prayer is an area of strength for you, would you be willing to meet with someone else in the group who struggles to encourage them in their prayer life? And if you struggle, would you be willing to meet with someone who is strong?
- 2) What aspect of your private prayer life do you think God is most pleased with?
- 3) What aspect of your private prayer life do you think God wants you to take some specific steps to improve?

## Appendix: Psalms by Category

### God's Word (4)

- 1 – like water to a tree
- 19 – natural R declares His glory, special R touches the soul
- 112 – delighting in it brings blessing
- 119 – I love it!

### Wisdom (6)

- 1 – Be inclined toward His Word rather than the world
  - 39 - Life is too short to seek joy from any transitory thing
  - 101 – My companions will be the righteous, not the wicked
  - 112 – Blessed is the man who loves obeying God
  - 127a – Unless the Lord builds a house it is in vain.
  - 127b – Sons are a gift from God
  - 128 – Blessed is the man who fears the LORD
- ### The Righteous and the Wicked (3)
- 36 – The wicked reject the source of all good and have nothing
  - 37 – The righteous will be blessed and the wicked cut off
  - 49 – The unbelieving rich will die and lose everything, but the righteous will be raised.

### Praise (44)

- 8 – For making man supreme on earth
- 9a – For being a refuge and just
- 18- For deliverance
- 21- For giving the king victories
- 29 – Ascribe glory to the awesome God of the storm who strengthens His people
- 33 –Praise God with exuberant joy for His supremacy
- 34 – For deliverance
- 36 – For being the source of all good
- 46 – God is our refuge and is more powerful than any threat
- 47 – For being the King of the whole earth
- 48 – For being the great, delivering God of Zion
- 57 – For deliverance from Saul in the cave
- 65 – Blessed are those You choose to bring near
- Forgiver and universal joy-Giver
- 66 – For deliverance in answer to prayer

- 68 – For God's triumphant rule in Zion
  - 71 – I have praised You and will praise You more and more. Punish my enemies.
  - 81a – For His deliverance from Egypt
  - 87 – For the future exaltation of Zion
  - 89a – For love and faithfulness
  - 92 – For deliverance
  - 93 – For His power and majesty
  - 95 – Let us sing and shout and bow before the great King above all gods and not rebel
  - 96 – For His glory and strength all the earth
  - 97 – For His awesome, joy-giving supremacy
  - 98 – For His salvation and justice all the earth
  - 99 – For His holiness and salvation
  - 103 – For forgiving, redeeming, restoring love!
  - 104 – For His works in creation
  - 105 – For His saving works
  - 108a - For deliverance from Saul in the cave
  - 111 – For His amazing works and precepts
  - 113- Universally for exalting the lowly and caring for the needy
  - 114 – For His miracles in the exodus
  - 115 – For reigning in heaven as opposed to impotent idols
  - 117 – All peoples for His love and faithfulness
  - 134 – Bless the Lord in the Temple
  - 135 – Because unlike the idols He is powerful and has done great things
  - 145 – For His greatness and love
  - 146 – For being a worthy object of our hope
  - 147 – For His providential control and for blessing His people
  - 148 – Everyone and everything! For His supremacy and creation of Israel'
  - 149 – His Saints, for He takes delight in them
  - 150 – With music!
- ### Thanksgiving (7)
- 75 – For being in control of the nations and for justice
  - 100 – Joyfully! For His goodness, love, and faithfulness
  - 107 – For the varieties of His restoring, delivering love
  - 116 – I cried out and You saved me
  - 118 – For deliverance

136 - For creation, deliverance from Egypt, and victory in the Conquest (His love endures forever!)

138 – For His love, faithfulness, answered prayer, supremacy, protection, sovereignty God’s Nature (3)

8 – For making man supreme on earth

90a – You are eternal and we are a breath

139 – You know me thoroughly  
Desire for/Satisfaction in God (9)

16 – God is my only good

23 – The Lord is my Shepherd

32 – Blessed is the forgiven sinner!

42-43 – I long for God, my soul is downcast

62 – My soul finds rest in God alone

63 – I long for God in a dry and weary land

81 – If you would turn to Me I would satisfy you

84 – I long and faint to be in Your courts

90 – You are our home, satisfy us with Your love  
God’s Presence (5)  
(from 120 through most of the psalms focus on the Temple, which is synonymous with God’s presence. So really all of those could go in this category)

15- Only those who carry out righteousness can approach

24 – Only the righteous can approach God

62 – My soul finds rest in God alone

84 – Presence = utter blessedness

132 – God will dwell in the Temple (abundant blessing)

Messianic (7)

Ps.2 – The Son will reign

24? – Only the righteous man can approach God – the King of glory (God)

45 – Wedding song, Your throne, O God, will last/nations will praise You forever

72 – The king will reign forever from sea to sea

78 – The people kept rebelling against God as He kept showing mercy, then finally – He gave them David.

89 – You promised David would rule forever, but now we’re defeated. Restore us!

Ps.110 – God will extend His rule with willing followers

Deliverance/Refuge (39)

3- Protect me from enemies

4- Protect me from enemies

5- Protect me from enemies

7-Protect me from enemies, give me justice

9b – deliver me from my enemies so I can praise

10 - The LORD rescues the weak from the practical atheists

11 – The Lord will deliver me

12 - God will protect us from the wicked

17- Deliver me from the wicked & give me justice

18 – The Lord delivered me!

21 – May He deliver you

22 – Deliver me from my enemies

25 – I look to You for satisfaction, guidance, redemption – don’t let me be disappointed

27 – God is my refuge

28 – Listen to my cry for help – You listened!

31 – Deliver me from my enemies because I look to You as my refuge

30 – God delivered me from the catastrophe of my sin

44 – Deliver us; we are innocent

54 - Deliver me from enemies; You have delivered me!

55 – Deliver me from my close friend

56 – Deliver me from the Philistines, I won’t be afraid

61 – Deliver me for You have been my refuge

62 – My soul finds rest in God alone

63b- My enemies will be destroyed

64 – Deliver me from my lying enemies

69 – Deliver me from persecution and from the catastrophe of my sin

74 – How long will You reject us? In Your awesome power defend Your name.

76 – The enemies tremble at His awesome delivering power

89 – You promised David would rule forever, but now we’re defeated. Restore us!

90 – Relent and have compassion

106 – You punished Israel for rebellion, now gather and restore them (and me).

120 – He delivers me from my enemies and will punish them

126 – Joy over past and future restoration

140 – Protect me from my enemies – don’t let them succeed.

141 – Protect me from evil, evildoers

142 – Deliver me from my enemy who is too strong for me.

143 – Deliver me from my enemy for Your sake because I look to You alone

144 – Deliver me from my enemy (Blessed are those protected by You!)

Imprecatory (11)

35 – Destroy my opponents, whom I've loved  
52 – God will bring you down Doeg, because you trusted in wealth rather than Him as stronghold  
58 – The righteous will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked  
59 – Deliver me and punish my attackers Oh my Strength  
69 – Punish those who treat me unjustly because of Your chastisement for my sin  
70 – Come quickly to save me  
71 – I have praised You and will praise You more and more. Punish my enemies.  
79 – Deliver Jerusalem from those who have sacked it and punish them  
83 – Deliver us from the alliance of enemies and punish them.  
109 – Curse the leader I was kind to and vindicate me  
129 – The Lord delivered me; may He curse those who hate Zion  
137b – Punish Edom  
140b – Punish those attacking me  
Help (6)  
60- You've been punishing us, now give us victory  
80 – Restore Jerusalem from Your punishment  
86 – Help me, for I'm in trouble and You are powerful and good  
88 – Help me – You have afflicted me from birth  
108b - You've been punishing us, now give us victory  
123 – We look to Your hand for mercy  
124 – Had the Lord not protected us we would have been swallowed up  
Comfort (6)  
23 – The Lord is my Shepherd  
77- I sought and sought after comfort, then I recalled Your past deeds  
91 – He will protect you  
121 – He will watch over you  
125 – The LORD preserves His people

131 – I have stilled and quieted my soul hoping in You

Justice (7)

26 – Treat me according to my righteousness  
53 – God brings justice on the wicked  
73 – I envied the wicked until I realized God will eventually bring justice.  
94 – The Lord will judge the wicked and deliver His people. Blessed are those whom He disciplines.  
101 – David's resolve to mimic God's justice as king?

Penitential (10)

6- Don't discipline me  
32 – Blessed is the forgiven sinner!  
38 – Relent from Your anger toward me  
39 – Relent from Your anger toward me  
40 – Deliver me from chastisement again  
41 – Deliver me from the consequences of my sin because you favor me  
51 – Have mercy and cleanse me  
85- Forgive/restore us again like You did before  
102 – Your judgment is heavy on me; but the time has come for the eternal God to have mercy  
130 – Have mercy on me as I wait & long for You

Indictment (2)

50- Stop supplying Me with food while continuing in sin. Be thankful and ask of Me. (thankful receiving rather than ungrateful giving)  
81b – If you would obey I would satisfy you, but you won't.  
82 – Judgment on the gods

For Blessing

20 – May the Lord deliver you  
67- Bless us for the sake of the nations  
Fellowship  
42 – I remember how I used to go with the multitude  
122 – Delight in the prosperity of Jerusalem  
133- How pleasing when brothers dwell together in unity

