

“All Together, Now, Part 10:
‘Pray for One Another’ ”
2 Kings 5:1-5:14 and James 5:14-18

Radiohead’s most famous song is called “Creep.” Thom Yorke sings “I don’t care if it hurts / I wanna have control / I want a perfect body / I want a perfect soul.”

If Thom Yorke came up to you after the service, and said -- “Hey, Can a Christian want a perfect body? Can a Christian want a perfect soul?” What would you say?

Does God want you to be healthy, or holy? Does he want your body to be healed, or your soul to be healed?

You get together with your Christian friends. And everyone is supposed to ask people to pray for one thing. What are you going to ask for: that God would get rid of a sickness that you are suffering, or a sin in which you are stuck?

Now, maybe you think: “Whoa! I would never ask for someone to pray for me---not for my healing *or* my holiness. Telling people about those needs is just too---private.”

I’ll bet your fear runs even deeper than that. Here’s what I think:

Either you are afraid that God is not good enough to care for your health and holiness, or you’re afraid that *you’re* not good enough for God to care for your health and holiness. You *want* a perfect body. You *want* a perfect soul. But you’re not going to ask. And you’re definitely not going to invite people to ask with you and for you. Well, here comes James: Are you in trouble? Are you sick? Have you sinned?

Then do this:

1. Pray together
2. Repent together
3. Praise together

Let’s look at each of these things.

1. Pray together

(13) Are you in trouble? Pray. (14) Are you sick? Pray.

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In both these cases, James asks---is anyone *among you* in trouble or sick? You’re a troubled or sick person *among* other Christian sisters and brothers. And in verse 16 James makes it explicit: pray for *one another*. So the call is not just to pray, but to pray *together*.

You’ve got to have some way to say “yes” to this biblical command. What is it going to be?

One of our home groups has kept a “prayer journal” for 10 years. They pray for one another every week. After a while, they go back and read the old prayer needs. And they celebrate how God has answered those prayers. They pray in faith, God answers, and they pray in even greater confidence the next time. Ten years later, they are convinced of God’s power and wisdom.

Do you need to join a homegroup that prays for one another’s needs? Do you need to ask a few elders and pastors to get together and pray for your healing?

Or how about this? When you have a need, and you’re around Christians, why don’t you just walk up to someone you respect and say: “hey, would you pray for me about something?”

And if someone asks *you* to pray for *them*, instead of saying “I will,” and then forgetting: why not just pray right on the spot? Right here after the service. During fellowship time. If it’s not a super, super, private matter, then you can call over an elder or two; a handful of church members who are standing around. If you’re a Christian, this is your *right*. And if someone asks you to pray, this is your *obligation*. You can ask if you can put your hands on the person’s shoulders. Heck, if there’s some oil around--- put a dab of oil on their head. And if someone says you’re weird for asking for prayer, or for praying, you can say to them, politely: “I like my weird way of obeying James’s command better than your way of *not* obeying James’s command.”

The impact on both the praying person and the one prayed for is felt more deeply. It doesn’t mean that it’s “more effective.” God alone hears and answers prayers

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according to his will, and there’s nothing that we can do that can *make* God answer. But we *sense* God’s presence when we’re praying together.

But you think: I don’t want to trouble other people with my troubles. That’s what you tell yourself.

But really: you think, “I’m not good enough. I can’t pray the prayer of a righteous person, powerful and effective.” Or you think: “God’s not good enough.”

But still, there’s that command. Pray when you’re sick or weak or in trouble. And call on one another to pray with and for you.

2. Repent together

And then this second command: Sam preached on this “one anothering” command this morning, so I won’t say much about it tonight. (If you missed it, be sure to check out the podcast later this week.)

I’ll simply say this: James says (15-16) that we shouldn’t just go to one another for prayer for the needs of our sick bodies; we must also go to one another with our sick souls. If we have sinned, if we are stuck in a pattern of sin, if we suddenly realize that we are not just people who occasionally sin, but *we are sinners*; then we need to go to one another. You can’t bear the weight of your own guilt on your own. You can’t even always carry that weight to the cross of Jesus by yourself. You need people to walk with you *to* Jesus, to help you get this weight off your back, to help you honestly and hopefully say what you need to say to Jesus.

Paul tells the church in Thessalonica: “this is God’s will for you: your sanctification.” Want to know what God wants in your life? For you to be set apart for his purposes alone.

And this is God’s plan for the entire creation, too!--sanctification. And he’s starting with you! He wants to have his image-bearers set apart for holy purposes.

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Whenever you are convicted about some part of your life that is *not* set apart completely for the Lord, here’s what you do: you need to pull together some Christians and ask them to walk with you in repentance. Repentance is when you realize God is right and holy, and you’ve been wrong and unholy. Repentance is when you decide to give some area of your life to Jesus, to answer his call of holiness.

Get the help of the people who are following Jesus all around you. You can’t bear the guilt. And you don’t have the skill, the will power, or the steadfastness to repent all on your own. Repent with one another.

But---once again---you think to yourself: I am too guilty. I am too messed up. I am *too* caught in this sin, or this pattern of unholiness. There’s no way he’s got the patience to endure all my pathetic attempts to set my life apart for him *again*, and *again*.

And so you *don’t* go to Jesus with your guilt. Not by yourself. And certainly not with one another.

3. Praise together

That leads us to the final thing James commands. (13) Is anyone among you happy? Cheerful? Merry (KJV)? Then praise. Praise God *together*.

You’re probably thinking to yourself: OK, you’ve just told us these two commands of James. Pray for bodies and circumstances with one another. Pray in repentance for holiness with one another. And then you’ve told us that we’re often---maybe even *usually*---too ashamed to do it; and too suspicious that God wouldn’t want to hear and answer us even if we did it.

And now, on top of all this, I’m supposed to feel happy? And to praise God, too? When does *that* ever happen?

Actually, I see it all the time. Someone comes in to speak with me. They are frustrated by the way their sickness is impacting their work, and stealing their sleep, keeping

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them from serving God. Or they are frustrated with the way their sin has wrecked their life. And as their story comes out, tears come out. Their tears, and often my tears.

And then there’s this moment. Either they remind themselves, or I remind them, of something much bigger than their hurting health or their heavy heart.

They remember that Jesus didn’t heal everyone; but that he healed many people, and even raised some people from the *dead*. And they remember that Jesus was showing a bit of what he will one day do for all who are his.

They remember that Jesus didn’t go around randomly telling everyone that their sins were forgiven; but that he did say this to many people---surprising people. They remember that by forgiving these people, he was showing what he would do for everyone who comes to God through him in simple faith and neediness.

In between tears, these simple Christian believers will catch a glimpse of the fact that, as James says in chapter 1, their trials are producing steadfastness in them. And that if they make it through this struggle with their health, or they make it through this struggle against the sin in their heart, by the grace of Jesus, they can make it through *anything*, by the grace of Jesus.

Their steadfastness will have its full effect: they’ll one day be perfectly complete, lacking in nothing.

James means that we can have happiness while our health is bad, and while our heads and hearts and hands are slowly becoming holy. This happiness comes when we know that we’ve been given every grace we need to persevere while it’s hard; and that we *will* be given every grace we need to finally make us perfect and complete *one day*. And then forever.

And you know what? Those times in my study when I’m having these conversations with a struggling believer---yes, I’m pastoring them. I’m a professional. But usually all I’m doing is two things---two things which any of you can do, too.

I’m listening.

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And, when there is an opportunity, if they haven't already reminded themselves, I remind them of something bigger than their sorrows and struggles: the determination of God to make all things new, perfect, and complete in Christ---everything in the whole creation, and therefore everything in our lives.

And then, once we've reminded ourselves of these things, guess what we do together? We pray. For relief from hurts. We repent of our sins together. And together, we praise God for being greater than our health and greater than our hearts, and for the promise that we'll be made perfect and complete, one day.

Conclusion

Thom Yorke sings “I don't care if it hurts / I wanna have control / I want a perfect body / I want a perfect soul.”

Actually the truest human cry is the same, but with one essential difference—a difference that makes all the difference in the world and in heaven:

“I don't care if it hurts / Someone is in control / I want a perfect body / I want a perfect soul.”

To pray for one another means we come to one another and say:

“I accept the fact that this hurts now, and it may hurt for my entire life. But I do not accept the fact that it *it MUST be this way* now, and I believe with all my soul that it will NOT be this way forever. Will you, sister, brother, church, come alongside me and help me give control of my health and my holiness to Jesus, who is already Lord of those things, just like he's Lord of all things? Will you ask with me and for me that Jesus would show himself to be All in All right here in the middle of my difficult life, within my not-yet-perfect body, within my not-yet-perfect soul? Will you sing with me when I remember that in him my body and soul, along with the church and the entire creation, will one day be made perfect and complete? And will you weep and pray and hope with me when I believe this, and especially when I still have a hard time believing this?”

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You can't bear the weight of the brokenness of the world—or even just the brokenness of your own body and soul—on your own. So call upon one another. Pray for one another. Repent with one another. Praise Jesus for what he will do to hear and answer your groans and prayers that you make with one another.

And, in between tears; in between sighs and groans; in between prayers of faith; in between anointings by the elders; don't forget to step back and catch a glimpse of Jesus the Redeemer. The one who asked his friends to pray for him, only to watch them fall asleep. The one who prayed that he could be delivered from his suffering, but had to face it anyway. The one who prayed, while he was dying with the weight of your sins and mine heavy on his body and soul, “Father, forgive them.” And the one who, at the very end of our Bibles, says, “behold, I am making all things new.”

And if you can keep your eye on Jesus when you struggle with sin and sickness, you'll grow in joy and steadfastness, even if your struggle continues. And the more confident you become that God is good enough, and has, by his pure grace, made *you* good enough, the more joy you will have in sharing sorrows and joys with one another, in prayer and in praise.