

Calvary United Methodist Church  
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## **THE POWER OF PRAYER AND PRAISE**

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### **Children's Message:**

James 5:13

I invite our children to come forward for the Children's Message at this time. Are there a few that will come up and join me this morning? Please? I always am worrying that I am going to have to resort to the child like adults that we have here from time to time, but we are going to take the children that are here. Good morning! Welcome. We're so glad to have you here this morning. Did you all have a great week? It's nice outside, it's not raining. Is that a good thing? It's a rare thing in Pennsylvania, but it's a good thing.

I want to talk a little bit today if I can get this thing working right about prayer. Do you pray? I hope so, because I pray a lot and I suspect everyone in this house takes time to pray. Prayer time for me is sort of like when I was growing up it was also like talking to my mom and dad. It's talking to my Father, we call him "Daddy", in heaven. And sometimes I pray to God and I ask for things like to help me. If I am sick I want to say, "Please, God, bring healing to me." Sometimes it is asking God to be with me if I'm traveling. Sometimes it is praying for people that I love or if I am worried about something I have to get done and all those times it's like when I talk to my mom and dad, when I was a little boy and probably as you are younger you'll say, "Mom or Dad, would you help me with my homework?" "Mommy or Daddy, I'm not feeling well." "Mom or Daddy, I'm going away. I'm frightened about this. I'm going to visit someone." Do you ever do those things? And sometimes my mother and dad would, they would help me most of the time. They would love me and they would assure me that I was going to be okay. They would, if I was sick, they would try to make me feel better and if I was lonely they would give me hugs.

You see, that's our God. God is our parent. And when we talk to God sometimes we have to do the other thing...to listen. Do your parents ever say that word to you: You have to listen to me? Now, what does that mean? (You have to listen to your parents.) Yeah, listen to our parents, not listening is just hearing the noise, but it's also when we say listen they probably also mean you have to obey, right? If I tell you to do your homework or if I have to tell you to do something else that they want you to do, what they've told you to do. And you know what? Sometimes God does that to me too. God says, "You have to go and help for others. You have to give others. You have to serve others."

And then there are some other things that my parents would do with me that are very much like God. Some days my parents would treat me to wonderful things like I had a bed to sleep in and a bedroom and I had food and I had love given to me and sometimes we did very special things, we would go places. And when special things happen like that do you ever say thank you to your mom and dad? Yeah. So if God is our Father in heaven, there is a lot of things we

could thank God for because God is the provider of all the great things we have.

And so a part of what we do is pray by talking to God and listening to God and a part of what we do is praising God, saying thank you, God, for all that you do. And it's the whole process of what we do as we build our relationship and it's what we do as adults, we both talk to God, asking and thanking God, but we need to always remember to thank God for what God is doing.

Sometimes I have so many questions of God, the things I don't understand like: What do giraffes...do you know what a giraffe is? The animal with the real long neck? God, what do they do if they get a sore throat? Do you ever think things like that? And sometimes I wonder why it rains all the time and we can't have our sunshine and there are all kinds of questions I ask God about things I don't understand. Some of it are the bad things that happen in life and sometimes I just have questions and I want to talk to God and God is already listening to me.

And sometimes I feel like this, it says: Go God! I'm excited. I'm thanking God for everything that God is doing. It's like, God, everything is so ok right now.

Well, the scripture I have for you today is from James. He says this: Is anyone among you in trouble? Have you ever been in trouble? Oh, boy, when I'm in trouble I wanted to talk to somebody. Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

You see, we can pray about the good and we can pray about the troubles in our lives and we can sing praise all the time of our life. And God wants us to be in the same kind of relationship that I would hope you would have with your family. We want to build a relationship that when we become adults, we are friends. We become friends. Friends are a great thing.

God said the best way to know God, because God is kind of way out there. We don't know God. He says, "The best way to know me is to know my Son," because Jesus is about as much as we can know about God, because he came to live with us. He loves with us. He put children on his lap and would listen to them. He taught adults how they ought to live and love and forgive one another. He spent a lot of time and he was a man who loved to bring joy and peace into people's lives.

So, one of the greatest things we do when we pray and praise is build a relationship with God, to be reminded that God loves you, God loves me, God loves all of us every day of our lives.

Some of the moments that I need God most are when I am afraid. Now, Halloween is coming. Do any of you get dressed up for Halloween? Sometimes people dress in spooky, scary things. I was never into scary things, but I tell you what, I still get frightened. Do you ever get frightened? There are times I still get frightened and sometimes it is most like when we are unexpected and something pops up or pops out or perhaps some crazy noise in the middle of the night and God says, "I'm your friend. I'm there in those times of trouble."

Sometimes we have to go to doctors and dentists and people to get better. Have you ever gone to those kind of places? Have you ever been afraid to go to those places? Well, I hope you wouldn't be because when we are sick or when we are going to get our teeth cleaned so we keep them healthy and strong, the people who treat us are there to make us well and so we ought not to be afraid of them, but we need to know that they are there to make us better. That's why we cling to moms and dads, do you do that at times when you are frightened? And we cling to God. I cling to God because God is my friend. And sometimes I'm pretty happy in that relationship. You think that young man is happy holding probably his parents? And I think sometimes it switches. What do you think is going on in this photo? Maybe mom or dad is saying, "You need to listen!" See, I used to get that a lot. Did any of you ever get that a lot? And it's not just listening to the noise, it's "I want you to learn something because..." There is a verse in the Bible that tells us why we pay attention to our moms and dads, but why God is just like that: The Lord, or our parents, correct those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.

If your mother and father would correct you, there could be trouble. If they left you ride a bicycle on the road, what would happen? (Run over.) Well, at least it could happen that there would be an accident. If they would let you crawl real high on things where you could fall, you could get hurt. And if they wouldn't correct you for not studying, you might not have good grades. You see, people that correct us are wanting the best and so sometimes when we pray to God, we talk about forgiveness, we have to say, "God, I know you are correcting me. I'm not quite doing things right."

Some of you are in classes already. Have any of your teachers told you you need to do homework a second time? They erase it and say you have to do it over. Why do they do that? Any idea? How about it wasn't good enough the first time? Maybe I made too many spelling mistakes or my math wasn't good enough or the science or English or something. Sometimes we have to do things until we get them right and it's not easy and it is frustrating, but God wants us, because if we practice and if we do it right, guess what? Then we have a victory. We can get 100. Wouldn't that be great? We get a star, because we are reminded that things will improve. And when we get the victories with God, it is knowing that God is with us to build the relationships. It is knowing that we can celebrate and I want to remind you today that just like we have a relationship with our moms and dads who we can talk to and who we listen to and who we celebrate with, that's the kind of relationship we have with God. It's a powerful relationship, one that we praise God for.

Thank you for coming up today. I wish you a most wonderful week.

**Message:**

James 5:13-20

Let us pray: Lord, Jesus, what a privilege it is that we can come to you with our praise, with our thanksgiving and with every trouble and concern of our lives. We submit ourselves to you today and pray that you would speak to us through the message, through the vessel and through

the presence of the Holy Spirit. May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable to Thee, O Lord. Amen.

There is power, lots of power, in prayer. Scriptures tell us that more things are wrought by prayer than this world will ever know. We have to take time, we have to be in communication with God. It is pretty much the same in any relationship that we have. If we don't take time with our children or with our parents, with our spouses, our partners, our business, we don't really have a connection.

We need to prepare for that connection every day of our life, not just when our times of trouble, not just in our times of need. And so it is to remind us again that there is power and we need to connect to that because of the things that are needed in the world today, it's people with God's power to bring reformation...reformation in the world today that has a lot of issues going on and you know that quite well.

I'm not a follower of a lot of sports and don't even know a lot about sports, but there is one common thing I see in a lot of sports: scenes like this. What is it called? Why do folks do it? Every sport. Why do they do it? The new plan, new whatever? It's called "regrouping". It's called "regrouping". What's the next plan? Where are we going? How are we going to get to the goal? How are we going to come out as a victor? If you and I don't regroup, if we don't come together with God, if we don't come together with one another we'll never get to the victory, to the closing line. We want to get to the goal, right? We want to be those who have a victory.

When we come together, we regroup. Every week, and preferably not only every week, but every day. When we get up in the morning, when we go to bed every night and throughout the day wherever we are we don't have to just close our eyes and bow our heads, we can be in thought of God and what it is that God wants us with every breathing moment of our life, that we can recharge ourselves by being in fellowship, by doing what it is that God calls us to do, that we then realign ourselves with what God wants us to do, not just what I want to do. It's very easy to seek what I want to do. Typically it is what feels good to us, what's comfortable, what's easy. Sometimes what God wants us to do, it's to step out of beyond the easy, it's to go into places where we would have never gone on our own, it's to do God's bidding, God's will.

Without that regrouping, things like being lost and confused, unclear, unsure, perplexed, that's a part of my daily life. Is it for you at moments? Lord, what do I do now? Everything has changed.

This past week if there was anything else, actually a better way to put it is, nothing went right, according to my plans, ok? And guess what? I'm here. God made it just okay. More than just okay. God made it all fall into place. You see, we come to God.

We as individuals and we as this body and we called the Body of Christ in the globe need to

regroup. The world is broken and we're not responding. The world around us, our families, our culture, our society, look at the news! It's filled with brokenness, of people who want more and they don't know where to find it and here we are at the best hospital in town with the answer that is free: come to a living relationship with Jesus Christ and we are not taking the answer to the world.

Prayer for me is pouring out my heart before God. Sometimes it is in praise and thanksgiving and sometimes it's more than just the "give me, God." It's "Lord, I'm lost, I don't know what to do, I'm not sure what in this big decision." This is what we do when we make decisions in business and in relationships and in future plans. We come to God and pour out our lives before God, truly expecting God to listen to us. Sometimes I think God must be saying, "Here I am again, God, I have one more thing" and God says, "That's okay. You are not bothering God."

Can you ever imagine a little child coming up to their parents and they just push them away? I hope we are not that kind of parents. There might be those moments if you are busy you have to say, "Honey, I'm busy right now. I will be right with you." But a loving parent like our loving God wants us to come to God often as we can and one other problem is that we don't take the time to listen. We don't take time to listen. We often talk to God and then turn it off like it is the radio and get back to it. God demands that we take that quiet time to listen and God will speak.

I've said many times I have never in my life heard the audible voice of God, but I have felt the nudgings of God. I have felt that God has put some things right in front of me as an answer to say: This is the direction you need to go, this is the person you need to visit, this is a call you need to make, this is the choice in...

Someone said to me yesterday they walked into their home after seeing five and they just knew that this was going to be their home. You've had those kind of decisions, right? You were in relationships and you didn't know whether it was right or wrong or to get in or to get out. You are making big purchases and you are making big decisions on your life changes and in employment. You know if God is speaking to you, not necessarily by verbal means, but by things God puts before you.

Sometimes I am not still enough, but when I can become still, it is almost like God says, "Hello, Jeff!" I have this picture because you'll understand it. Hey, human, would you look at me? You know my need, right? We are big into dogs nowadays. That's God, "Hey, Jeff! How about opening up! You know where you need to go."

God gives you a path and if you listen to God, it's like a board up along the side of the head. Yeah. And God says, "See, all along you know what you needed to do. You knew what you needed because I have a path for you." But we must be attuned, we must listen to Almighty God.

We must develop a friendship with God. One of the things that's lost in this world: that we

have religion. Some of it is out of duty, it is not a personal things. We come, we go, it's that club mentality, but we don't have it. I don't want religion. It's about a relationship; it's not about you with me, necessarily, although I love that if we can be in relationship. But it's about all of us with God, growing in the likeness of God, growing in the knowledge, growing in the wisdom, growing in a personal relationship with God. And when it is at the very best, God is my healer. God is my provider. He is my strength. He is my light and He is even my comedic God.

One of the greatest things I saw years ago, I taught a class on laughter in the Bible because we often think it's too serious. I think our God laughs, and I think there are times God says: Ahhh, through Jesus, Jeff, you finally opened your eyes. You've finally opened your ears. You finally know. It's that clear. God wants to be in relationship with us.

One of the favorite, one of my favorite songs in recent years was: you are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek, you are my all in all. I want God to be my all-in-all. I want God to be number one. I want us to all desire that kind of relationship.

So, I'm asking: how about you? Is God your all-in-all? Is God the one you are turning to? Because it is tempting to turn to our bank accounts. It is tempting to turn to the politics and to the government and to everyone else for security and it will never be enough. It will never be enough.

When my father passed, I made some advance directives for myself. What do I want as I face my time to meet my Maker? And the reason we do that is to make sure that we have a path of peace. God gave us advance directives. They are found in the Holy Bible. Now, a lawyer has my advance directives and they are there so that people will follow. Advance directives are stop signs along the road, that's an advance directive, if you don't do it. Yesterday I'm sitting in the office and I hear this BANG! It's about once every other month, broadsided here at the Houcks and Locust Lane. You know what? And advanced directive, the bridge is out and you say: ah, I'm not going to believe that directive, I'm just going to keep on driving. It can have an unhappy ending.

Folks, the advance directives found in God's Word, especially the ones dealing with love God and love your neighbor as self and love God with your heart and your soul and your mind and all your strength, if we do those things, we will find peace. We will find a culture that's changed. We will find our communities and our lives changed forever. The advance directives are already present. We need to follow.

This scripture of James today continued on not only about prayer and praise, but giving examples of others who were in relationship with God and one of them was the prophet Elijah. Oh, to have the strength of Elijah. He went up to King Ahab who wasn't a very godly man and said: if you don't change your ways I'm going to pray to God and hold up the rain. It didn't rain for three and a half years. Now that's a powerful prayer! He is the same Elijah who later

told all the people to put the water on the wood, he was going to have that contest between the gods of Baal and the truly living God of Jehovah and his first lit right up.

You see, we need to have a faith. We need to have a relationship. We need to pray to Almighty God and what he was praying for was people to rise up. Folks, it's time to rise up. When I typed in the word rise up and was looking for slides there were: rise up for America, rise up to reach your full potential. You know what, I love America, but I'm not rising up for America. I want to rise up to holiness. How about we rise up to be godly people. How about we rise up to do what God would want us to do to bring the Kingdom of God? All those other things will come into place. If I'm seeking God, I'll meet my potential. If I'm seeking God and we as a nation seek God, America will be what America should be, a godly people. We are not even close because we have journeyed so far from our personal relationships with God and it's only going to change when we learn to both pray and to praise Almighty God from whom all blessings flow. We need to unite, we need to rise up in prayer and in service and in faithfulness in all we do.

Why do we let go of religion? I love these words: I thirst with the relationship with the Living God. My God has to be real for me. It just can't be talking and walking and it's more than just prayer. It's a daily lifestyle where I choose daily to live for Almighty God, to try to walk the path with God and we need to focus not on what I want out of life, but if we focus on the cross and what God wanted for us, it's not the negativity of the loss, it's the possibilities of what the cross made possible: New life, new life every day.

The prophet Malachi mentioned Elijah again when he said this: Because of God he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, the hearts of the children to the fathers. And there is a song I know and it continues: And the hearts of us all to one another. You see, we have to find what our ministry is. We all have a calling. I don't know what your calling is, but it is for God and we're not just practicing. This is what we are called to, to be children of God. And sometimes we get worried that we can't measure up with these other people like Elijah. I want you to begin reading your Bible because as you do you will find that they are just like us. They set out with good intentions and they sinned and they failed and they came back and God said, "Try it again!" How about that? I am going to try to do the right thing and I fail and I'll come back again and again and again.

The scriptures are filled with people who were imperfect like you and like me and God said, "I love you anyway, and not only love you anyway, I will love you always." Even when you don't feel so lovable, God says, "You are mine." God is faithful and invites us to be just as faithful in our walk today.

There is a real issue I have in the churches, some of the grander churches, not all of them. The churches become a place where we preach this "God makes everything right all the time." Now, I believe in my life it makes it right because I have peace, but just because I pray for someone to live, including me, doesn't mean it's going to happen. We are not always going to

get well. Not everything I pray for in relationships and in business and in wealth, just because I follow God doesn't mean that the heavens are going to open up and a million dollars is going to fall in my lap. To me, that is a lie from the devil, that if you follow God all of your life will be perfect. I've never met perfection on this side of heaven. What I have met is faithful people who no matter what the losses have been, no matter what the gains have been, they realize that God is with them in the storm, in the troubled, in the joys, in the celebrations that they are never left without the faithfulness of Almighty God.

We have to distinguish between the two because life will throw up problems from time to time. One of the greatest things the scripture reminds us is do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

You see, Jesus said you can't serve two masters, so I am asking today, who? Who will be serve? Are we going to be just serving the world, the idols of this world and what we can get and what we can do? You see, the world glasses says everything is about me, about my comfort, my joy, my pleasures, my expectations all those things, but the Kingdom of God was moving away from these idols of what this world has to something new.

I was grumpy this week. I don't like to be grumpy. It was because I wasn't seeing God's blessings because God has blessings. Even in our trials, God does great things. He tells us in those latter scriptures that one of the greatest things we can do when we see someone like me who is grumpy, you see someone who is suffering, who is sad, who is brokenhearted, that we should be praying for others for there are many who are lost and they are alone. Again we look across this nation, you hear the words of the addictive cycles of America, the amount of young people taking their lives, the hopelessness in the world. We have the answer. It's Jesus Christ. It's a relationship with the Living God, the One who hopes to bring healing just that quickly. If we could just come to God and humble ourselves before Almighty God, give our hearts and lives to God that we can find peace. This I'm sure of: Jesus Christ is alive. Read this and you've heard it before: whatever circumstances we are facing it is said life is 10 percent of what happens to you, 90% of how you respond to what happens to you.

I've met some of the most difficult folks in the world who have faced things I cannot even imagine and they are praising God and they are thanking God because they stand tall. Everyone in this room has been through the ringer at one time or another and God says: Stand tall and be faithful because I'm going to be with you. I want you to plug into the power of prayer and the power of praise. I know this: in my heart of hearts, even in the crying tears of my losses, when I have lost those I have loved, when I have been disappointed in relationships, when I have lost some of my dreams, I have the blessed assurance that God has never left me and that God will never leave me. Of all the things we pray about and praise today, I hope you can remind yourselves that you have that blessed assurance that you are God's and God will keep you in the palm of his hands all the days of your life.

Thanks be to Almighty God.