

# Prayer and Praise

by Alistair Begg

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*Alistair Begg emphasizes the importance of prayer and praise in all circumstances of life as taught in James 5:13-18.*

**Duration:** 44:24

**Scripture:** James 5:13-18

**Topics:** "Praise"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the misconception that Christianity guarantees a trouble-free or joyless life. He emphasizes the importance of being realistic and authentic in our faith. The speaker uses the example of Paul and Silas in jail, who despite their troubles, prayed and sang hymns to God. The sermon concludes by highlighting the power of prayer and praise in the face of adversity.

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## Transcript

The following message by Alistair Begg is made available by Truth For Life. For more information, visit us online at [truthforlife.org](http://truthforlife.org). I invite you to take your Bible and turn to James chapter 5. We read from verse 13. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.

The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 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. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the earth for three and a half years.

Again, he prayed and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this, whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. Amen.

Now, Father, as we turn to the Bible, what we do not know, teach us. What we do not have, give us. What we are not, please make us.

For your son's sake. Amen. As a schoolboy, I received a copy of the Gideon's New Testament and the Psalms.

I went looking for it this morning and found it where I thought it was. I wonder how many of you also in the course of your life have received a copy of a Gideon New Testament or a Psalms. You just put up your hands.

I'd like to see. All right. A significant number.

And most of the rest of you will have found these either in a hotel room or perhaps in a business establishment. The work of Gideon's International remains a significant work. And I think primarily because it has never deviated from its course, from its express plan, to take the Bible and to put it in places that it will be read by some of the most unlikely folks.

I actually received this Bible on the 22nd of December, 1964, when I was 12 years old. I was at that time, this book tells me, in class 1C in Eastwood School in suburban Glasgow. 1C, not in 1A, not in 1B, but in 1C.

Pride demands that I tell you that it did go below C, but not a lot. Anyway, I remember receiving this and I remember the surprise and intrigue and cynicism on the part of some of my friends who had already decided by the ripe old age of 12 or 13 that Christianity was useless, that it was a relic and so on. And I remember the fun that they had by looking up the entry pages and discovering that you could find help for all kinds of things.

And where you would find help if you were afraid, you would turn to page 28. If you were facing failure, 165. Some of them, like me, knew what that was, especially in examinations.

If you were in trouble, you went to page 30 and so on. And they had a tremendous amount of fun with it because they said, what a waste of time. If I'm afraid or in trouble or failure, why would I ever turn to this strange little book? Whatever Christianity was, they had determined, it bore no relationship whatsoever to their lives.

And they were pretty convinced of that and went on to live their lives without any reference to God or to the Bible at all. Well, is Christianity just a relic? Is Christianity somehow related to the ebb and flow of life? The book of James, along with the rest of the Bible, clearly refutes the assertion. And from the beginning of our studies that go back a year or so in the book of James, we have, each of us, I think, been forcibly struck by the intense practicality of the issues that we are confronted with in these five chapters.

You will recall, some of you who were present, that he began his book with the striking statement, Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of various kinds. And he reminded his readers that the Christian lives in the real world of testings and trials, and that these come both to prove us and to reprove us. He then had gone on to say that if this was not our perspective, what we ought to do is pray and ask God for the wisdom that we need in order to see things, to view life, to view the world from this perspective.

In other words, he is making it clear to those who read his letter that if we are going to live sensibly, we need to think properly, and if we're going to think properly, then we need God's wisdom. And so we have gone through the chapters, and now as he's drawing his letter to a close, in this final section, it appears that he has deliberately gone full cycle. Having begun with the call to patience and perseverance and the

need for prayer, here he is wrapping up with the very same emphasis.

And in verses 7 through 12, he has been calling his readers once again to the importance of patience, especially in the face of unjust prosecution and persecution, and then having called them to patience in verse 13 and following, he returns to the importance of prayer. And if you allow your eyes to scan what we have just read, you will see, as I have done, that every verse from verse 13 to verse 18 deals with the issue of prayer. First of all, the individual praying, and then the elders praying, and then friends praying for one another, and then even Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, his prayers as a man just like ours.

And in it all, he is calling his readers to discover, if you like, the glad acceptance of the will of God, to discover that there is no greater joy than to cast ourselves into God's care and to ask him to fulfill his purposes in us and through us. This final section suggests, Alec Motyer, is an exercise in practical consecration. Practical consecration.

What does it really mean to sing the hymn, Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days and let them flow in ceaseless praise. Well, James gives us some start in relationship to this.

We're learning that in the rough and tumble of life, the Christian, on any given day, may find himself or herself facing trouble, being profoundly happy, being diagnosed with a significant sickness, facing the issues of ongoing sin. That pretty well covers it all, doesn't it? Is anybody in trouble? Well, that would cover a few. Any happy? Some more.

Any sick? A few hands. Anybody dealing with sin? Every hand. Very practical.

That's what I want us to notice. In other words, what James is doing in this final section is akin to what they do in the Gideon New Testament. What do I do if this happens? Turn to James chapter 5 and verse 13 and following, and you'll find out.

Now, we're not going to go through all of these areas, but we are going to tackle just the first two, which come in verse 13. Is anyone in trouble? Pray. Is anyone in trouble? Pray.

Now, it all seems so straightforward, doesn't it? And we are immediately saying to ourselves, oh, we're already doing this. Well, let's just wait and see before we make those proud affirmations. In the King James Version, the word that is used here is the word affliction.

Is any one of you afflicted? And that notion of affliction or trouble or calamity should be in our minds if we want to understand what James is addressing. It really is a fairly generic word describing anything of which we or an onlooking friend may say, now that's bad. That's bad.

That is tough to deal with. That is hard. That is a calamity.

That is an affliction. That is suffering and so on. It's the same word that is employed by Paul when he talks about his ministry of the gospel.

And he says in 2 Timothy 2 verse 9, this is my gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. He was in trouble and he doesn't want to gild the lily. And so he tells Timothy, his young assistant, that if he's going to pick up the baton that Paul is laying down and himself be involved in the gospel ministry, then it is important for him that he keeps his head in all situations and he endures

hardship.

Again, the same word that is employed by James here in verse 13 of chapter 5. But James hasn't introduced this just out of nowhere, because in the previous section he has referenced the example of patience in the face of suffering, verse 10, that is provided for us by the prophets. Brothers is an example of patience in the face of suffering. It's the same word that is translated trouble here in verse 13.

Now, if we go to the prophets and we could spend a long time there, we will understand that what James does in employing them as an illustration is very sensible. Let me give you just three illustrations to make the point. First of all, let's consider Jeremiah, the wailing prophet, as he's referred to, the man who comes with these great lamentations.

And eventually the people get sick and tired of him. They didn't want to hear the word of the Lord anymore. And so they took him--you can read this story in Jeremiah 38--and they threw him into a cistern.

Into a cistern, like a huge, gigantic oil drum, in which there was no water, the chronicler tells us, so that when he dumped in, it would hammer him as he hit the bottom. And the chronicler says that he was put there in that cistern so that he would starve to death. How are you doing, Jeremiah? Prophet of God, bringer of good news and bad news, I'm in trouble.

You're in trouble? I didn't think the prophet of God would be in trouble. Well, then you didn't think. That's Jeremiah.

Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 24. And God says to his servant Ezekiel, I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes.

He's referring to Ezekiel's wife. You're about to undergo the pain of significant bereavement, Ezekiel. Trouble.

And what of Hosea? In perhaps the most dramatic display of God's redeeming, chesed love. And God says to Hosea, go and show love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Look back at verse 10.

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering. Now, this is nothing superficial here. This is not somebody who spilled their coffee on the way to the office.

Is any one of you in trouble? You know, they lost one of the stays for the collar of their shirt or something like this. No. What he is referencing here is the facts of life.

What do you do when cruel opposition comes your way, when you are unjustly punished like Jeremiah? Or what do you do in the loss of a loved one like Ezekiel? Or what do you do like Hosea when you face the disruption of marital infidelity? When trouble comes, what do we do? Well, let's be honest for a moment. What do we do? What is the natural response to these circumstances? The natural response is to be disappointed, disheartened, perhaps despairing, grumble, complain, engage in self-pity. Go in a corner and say, nobody else has ever experienced this.

I am the only one that knows this. That would be natural. But the believer's response, says James, is supernatural.

His counteraction to the experience of trouble, affliction, calamity, difficulty, is to count it all joy and to pray. When he begins his letter with the striking statement that we noticed, he is teaching the readers what we have been learning throughout. Namely, that an important characteristic of genuine faith is that it doesn't collapse when it's tested.

An important characteristic of genuine faith is that it doesn't collapse when it is tested. So that like the writers of the Hebrews were able to affirm, we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but we are those who continue and are saved. Trials, they become a source of joy.

When we respond to them in the way that God intends and in light of the fact that we understand that God has plans and purposes to accomplish in them and through them. But how do we get to that point? Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. He should come before his heavenly father, before her heavenly father, in childlike trust and say, I'm in trouble and I need your help.

But says somebody, when I'm in trouble, I don't feel like praying. Understood? Well, then, if you can't find your own words, use someone else's words. Use the psalmist's words.

Use the prayers of Paul. Use the prayers that you find scattered throughout the Old Testament. And tune your heart on the strength of what others have said in similar experiences.

But remember this. It is on the occasion that I feel least like praying that I need to pray the most. And the devil understands that.

And that's why he will seek always to make trouble as an occasion for despair, for disappointment and for bailing out. You don't need this. You shouldn't have this.

Forget him. Forget it. The fact is, we do have plenty of words, don't we? It's not that we're missing words.

It's how we employ the words and to whom we address the words. In what various hindrances we meet when coming to the mercy seat, the fourth verse always smacks me on the nose. And it asks the question.

It says, have you no words? Ah, think again. Words fly apace when you complain and fill your fellow creature's ear with the sad tale of all your care. In other words, you can sit down and drive your spouse to distraction as he or she listens to you go on and on and on and on about all this trouble.

And yet we haven't spent a couple of minutes going to our Heavenly Father, which is supposed to be the reaction of the believer to the experience of trouble. Jesus, in the face of the most extreme suffering, the writer tells us, prayed more earnestly. Prayed more earnestly.

An opportunity to come to the Father and experience what is described for us in 1 Peter 5, verse 7, that we can cast all our cares upon him because he cares for us. Who am I going to talk to? Who will listen? Who knows? Who even cares? Answer, we do not have Hebrews 4 in Jesus, a high priest who is sort of up there and out there and beyond there. But we have one who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

Therefore, in light of that, let us come before the throne of grace where we may find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need, in our time of trouble. But remember this, that what it says is any one of you in trouble, he should pray. Full stop.

Then on to the next topic. Some of us are disappointed because we want another two or three sentences that say, is any one of you in trouble, he should pray. And when he does, everything will be hunky-dory.

As soon as he finishes praying, as soon as you stand up from praying, whoo, it's all gone. Shazam, the thing has come, or bazook, the thing has left. We're fine.

Trouble, prayer, gone. No. Trouble, prayer, trouble.

That's the reality. You see, and that's why when we make ourselves the center of the universe and our well-being the key to answered prayer, we just pray like the unbeliever. The only reason the unbeliever thinks ever of praying is to get what he wants.

I want this. I need this. Give me this.

No reply? Forget it. I'm not doing that again. The Christian, when he prays, must learn to pray as Jesus prayed.

This is what I would like, but nevertheless, it's really what you would like, Father. Because you are my father. And I absolutely trust you.

Yeah, you may take this from me. But since you're powerful enough to take it from me, I also recognize that you're powerful enough to have prevented me ever having to deal with it in the first place. Therefore, I'm going to have to trust you.

I'd like to be delivered. Will you deliver me? The reply may be, no, I won't deliver you. Certainly not immediately, but I will strengthen you.

You see, is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. That's all it says. And some of our prayers will just be laments.

Laments. If you listen to Scottish music at all, and you should do so sparingly, especially listening to bagpipe music. The bagpipes were sent by the Irish to the Scots as a joke.

And we never got the joke. But the fact is that bagpipe music will do things to you. It can stir you and make you wish you were a soldier.

It can make you think that you could score tries in international rugby with just a plumb. But can it also reduce you to tears? And there is a place for lament, isn't there? You see, there is a place for, is anyone in trouble? I'm in trouble. Let him pray.

And the prayer just goes, Father, Father, sit. Nothing. Why? He knows.

And if you don't know that he knows, you're not reading your Bible. Or you don't know him. Is anyone of you in trouble? Pray.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Secondly, is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. King James Version translates this.

Is anyone merry? Merry. M-E-R-R-Y. As in God rest ye merry gentlemen.

Okay. Since I saw the word merry, it started me off on Christmas carols. And then it took me about 15 minutes to get myself back on track.

People always ask me, young pastor always ask me, and how do you study the Bible when preparing these talks, you know? I say, you don't ever want to find out because it won't be helpful to you at all. The word that is used here is actually used only here and also in the Acts. In Acts Chapter 24 and also in Acts Chapter 27.

27 may be most memorable to us because that's the account of the shipwreck where Paul is on board with the sailors and he tells them we're going to be wrecked here pretty soon. And he precedes that by telling them to be happy. He says we're about to face a shipwreck.

Be on good cheer. Be of good cheer. Fascinating, isn't it? This is not, you see, we won't be shipwrecked.

Therefore, hey. No, we're going to be shipwrecked. Therefore, be of good cheer.

A reminder to us that this kind of happiness, this genuine joy, may be known both in good times and in bad times. It is something more than a superficial response. A kind of happiness that results from the well-being of or the outcome of that which we most hope for.

So what he's saying is, I'm speaking to you as a congregation, as it were. I'm writing to you all. I want to know, is any one of you in trouble? Make sure that you are coming to God in prayer.

And is any one of you happy? Are you buoyed? V-U-O-Y-E-D. Are you encouraged? Well, then this is what you should do. Sing songs of praise.

You may read that and say, well, you know, there's nothing quite like stating the obvious, is there? Of course. I knew that. Is anyone happy? Songs of praise.

Really? Really. Are you unprepared to admit that when the sun shines and when prosperity beckons, you are not tempted to forget God? That when the storm settles and we move into an era of plain sailing, we forget about the captain of our salvation and the Lord of our destiny and the champion who runs before us? I actually found myself in studying verse 13 far more challenged by the second part of the couplet than the first. Oh, trouble may turn me from God.

It may make me bitter. It may drive me away in self-pity. But the chances are it will take me finally there if I have a living relationship with him.

But when happiness comes, when success beckons. There is a genuine danger of us falling asleep. Falling asleep.

And we should not be surprised by this, because God himself warned his own people about this very issue in Deuteronomy chapter six. And following the words of the Hebrew Shema, he gives clear directives to his people who are going to go into the land of promise. And listen what he says.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you a land with large flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant. Then when you eat and are satisfied, here it comes. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt and out of the land of slavery.

You see, if we forget that we're involved in a continual and irreconcilable war in living the Christian life, then we will be caught off guard when the insinuations of the evil one in the face of trouble come to us and

say very strongly, you should just bail out on this operation. After all, look what's happened to you. Look at the trouble you're in.

This is worthless. Forget God. And in the same sneaky way, when everything's going so fine, you don't need to read your Bible.

You don't need to be involved in that stuff. You're doing so well. Forget him.

I think you can identify with this. If you're honest, I know that I certainly can. You see, there is a choking of spiritual life that doesn't come simply by way of worries, but also comes by way of riches and pleasures.

You can read that in Luke chapter 8 in the story Jesus told of the farmer who went out to sow. And when he sowed his seed, it fell on all kinds of soil. And the pictures of the human heart and the response of the human heart to the good news.

And some are instant bloom and instant fade. And others disappear within a matter of time. And then the third soil is represented by that which goes along for a while, says Jesus.

And then the very life is choked out by worries, by riches and by pleasure. So, in other words, here we go. The plant is bedded.

It is starting to grow. And then trouble comes. The person decides, I won't do what I'm supposed to do with God's help and take it to him and bow before him and trust his sovereignty.

I'll try and muscle through myself. And they begin to be choked by disappointment, doubt, self-pity. And then the upswing comes.

And there are riches and there is advancement and there's promotion and there are options and so on. And before we know where we are, the very same thing happening. Riches and pleasure, choking out the very lifeblood experience of our Christian faith.

Seems fairly straightforward, doesn't it? Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. So sing, we must. But again, you say, there's nothing in this.

Is there people sing when they're happy? You come around the corner and you see someone at his work or someone at her work. And they're like, you know, hey, diddly diddly diddly, oh, diddly diddly diddly. You know, there's no words around.

And you say, well, it's lovely to see you so happy. The person says, yes, I am happy. I say, well, there you are.

That's what you're supposed to do. Is anyone happy? This is what you do. Diddly diddly diddly diddly.

Now, anybody can do diddly diddly. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. The word that is used here, the verb is *sallow*, from which we get our English word *sums*, which is a reference to the fact that the distinguishing feature of the Christian in happiness is where they direct their adoration and their praise is perfectly normal for somebody who is feeling fairly good.

It says, you know, the sun will come up tomorrow, you know, hey, or I can see clearly now the rain has gone. I can see everything, you know, in my rearview mirror. We're good now.

Is that what he's saying? No. Anybody does that. That's natural.

What he's saying is supernatural. Supernatural. Back to 18 verse 18 of chapter one.

What is he said about these people? God has chosen to give them birth through the word of truth so that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. It's akin to what Peter says in first Peter two verse nine, where he says, you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and so on, in order that you may show forth his praises who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Now you can go to your friends and neighbors and say, you know, I lived in darkness and now I live in light and they can say, OK, that's fine.

You know, pass me the salt. But I'll tell you this. When they discover that you don't praise yourself for your success.

But you praise God. When they discover that you have a view of looking at science. That looks to the genius of a creator.

When they find that in your enjoyment of art. You look to he who is a great artist. Then they'll say, you tend to look at things a little differently from me.

Why is that? The answer is, well, God, the creator, chose to give me birth through the word of truth. I discovered who Jesus is and why he came. I discovered that I was actually upside down in my thinking and in my living.

And I came to Jesus and he turned me the right way up. And ever since he's turned me the right way up, I find that I'm looking at things in a far different way. You see, the believer considers all the good gifts of God.

James 1, 17, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow due to turning. So one of the ways that we know ourselves to be in Christ is in our response to things that everybody makes a response to. I'm so happy to have this vacation.

I'm so glad to have this wife. I'm so thrilled to enjoy these children. I'm very thankful for the provision of employment.

I love to read good books. I love it when the snow crusts over at midnight and sparkles under the moonlit sky. And I say, oh, Lord, my God, when I an awesome wonder.

Consider all the world your hands have made. I see the stars. I hear the rolling thunder.

Your power throughout the entire universe displayed. That's not natural. Our friends say, I don't see that at all.

I look up in the Milky Way and I say, Milky Way, man, that's fantastic. And I'm glad that Darwin figured it all out for me. Well, you might say to them, well, you should sing your songs to Darwin.

Or maybe you'll sing your songs to yourself, which is, of course, exactly what our friends and neighbors do, making ourselves God, ruling over our own little empires. Not the Christian. When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees, you either look at that and say, evolution is a fantastic thing.

Or you look at that and say, the genius of God to do this. And certainly, and when I think that God, his son, not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin, then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee. You are great.

See, that's the Christian view. Are you a Christian? You see, the challenge in it is that a happy heart, which is good in itself, may become the occasion of that which is bad. If the very happiness draws us away from God and therefore we need to be alert to these temptations.

And with the help of the Holy Spirit, obeying them, feeding them so that neither trouble nor happiness will prevent us from prayer and praise. It's very, very important, and I need to draw to a close, but it's very, very important that we recognize that in the everyday events of our lives, Christian faith does not anesthetize us from trouble. It doesn't anesthetize us from trouble.

You don't become a Christian and get a Teflon suit and then you just go through and things that affect everybody else don't affect you because, quotes, I'm a Christian. No, no, no, no, no, no. If you have one of those lumber things and you're a Christian or you're not a Christian, guess how it feels.

The exact same. Oh, you can ask God for help and he will give you peace, perhaps, but in terms of when the thing goes in, it goes in. So it's a silly thing to try and suggest to our friends and neighbors that they might want to opt for Christianity because in Christianity, trouble, bye bye trouble.

Get your Teflon suits here, not a problem. Raising your children, a breeze. Finances, under control.

The future, not an issue. Come and join us. Come and join us in the mental hospital.

Nor does our Christian faith spiritualize the experience of happiness. You know, this kind of super pious approach to things. No, that doesn't really make me very happy.

I'll tell you what makes me happy. Oh, when I think of these. Oh, give me a break.

Come on. When Manchester United win, I am happy. I am really happy.

Why? Because of a football match. Should I be that happy as a Christian? Yeah, I think I should be even happier than the non-Christians. Because I know the creator who made all these guys to do these phenomenal things.

So don't let's try and present to our non-Christian friends that this kind of weird approach to life. Like our unbelieving friends and neighbors, we face bereavement. We face the loss of employment.

We face disappointment. We face failure. And in it all, we are seeking to do by the help of the Holy Spirit what James is calling us to do here.

The flip side of it is we also enjoy success. We also appreciate beauty. We also enter into the opportunities of sport and of art and of scientific discovery.

And all of that is transformed for the Christian in light of their discovery of who God is and what he has accomplished. It is a sad caricature of basic Christianity that offers Christianity to people as either being the introduction to a trouble-free existence or the introduction to a joy that frankly doesn't pay any attention to the earthly joys. You know, you could say that what James is saying here is, hey guys, get real.

Get real. Is any one of you in trouble? Okay. Is any of you happy? Okay, here's what to do.

That when the two prisoners were brought into the jail in the late evening, all the other prisoners must have just been watching to see who they were and what they were on about. They would have been familiar with the sounds of their arrival, with the horrible sounds of the beatings and the floggings. They would have winced as they realized what was going on, they themselves having experienced it before the two who had now arrived.

All of that was usual. All of that was the enactment of Roman law. Nothing unusual about that.

But what they would have been unprepared for was what they saw and heard in the midnight hour when these two prisoners, Paul and Silas, were praying and singing hymns to God. Praying and singing hymns to God. Man, Silas, that guy near killed me there with that beating.

I just want to go to sleep. I don't know what I want to do. I want to die.

Silas, hey, come on, Paul, you're the apostle for goodness sake. You can't be saying that. I'm looking to you for encouragement.

Why don't we pray? You go ahead, Silas, go on. Oh, Father, we were telling the good news about Jesus. We never bargained for this.

Look at us, a sorry spectacle. How could the world ever think we were worth anything? All beaten up in here. Do you want to sing? We could sing.

Silas, you're starting to really get on my nerves. Well, what else are we going to do? Complain? You know what? You're right. And about midnight, Paul and Silas were in trouble and they were praying and singing hymns to God.

And then Luke says, and the other prisoners were listening to them. I love that line. And the other prisoners were listening to them.

Of course they were. That's unusual. What's usual is people cussing the jailer out.

If you let these get these chains off me, I'll tell you, you, your wife, your family, the whole rotten lot of you is going to get this. That was standard stuff. No, the jailer, his wife and family were all going to get some of this.

Some of what? Some of God's grace. When Paul conducts the baptismal service for the whole family. Why? Because he was trouble free? No, because in the face of trouble, he prayed.

And in a reminder of what he had in Christ, he sang songs of praise. Here's the conclusion, and I think it's just as simple as this. This is what I was struck with.

And therefore, I leave with you. I found myself saying, perhaps my friends and my colleagues will be more inclined to listen to me when my troubles give way to prayer and when my happiness issues issues in God focused. Our God and our Father for the Bible, we thank you for the comfort that it gives, for the direction it provides, for the other worldly dimension into which it calls us, freeing us from saying silly stuff about being trouble free or simply finding a basis for happiness and all the same things that are offered to us in our transient journey through life.

But we realize that when you bring us to yourself and take us out of slimy pits and put our feet upon a rock and establish our going, our going goes through bereavement, it goes through sickness, it goes through darkness and doubts and disappointments and failures. And these things call us again and again to humble ourselves before you, and then even through our tears and our stammering tongues to sing your praise and make us like little lights that shine into the darkness and disappointment of people's troubled lives and into the darkness and emptiness of superficial happinesses so that God might be known and praised for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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