

# Is There Any Afflicted Among You?

By Rick Renner

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.

- James 5:13



Did you ever notice that sometimes people really don't want to change or listen to counsel? Often they'd rather keep repeating all their struggles and problems to whoever will listen to them. Have you ever known a believer like this? Although you deeply loved that person, did it bother you to watch him habitually go from person to person, telling each about all his personal problems? Did he seem to relish every new chance he found to load

down someone else with his troubles?

There is definitely a time when a person needs to have a friend in whom he can confide. Personally, I thank God for my friends who have allowed me to open my heart and talk to them about the various challenges this ministry has faced. But a spiritually mature person knows that in addition to pouring out all his aches and pains to a trusted friend, he must learn to stand up and take responsibility for himself in prayer.

A person who loads all his troubles on others and then expects them to do all his praying for him is revealing his own spiritual immaturity. A time eventually comes when every believer must learn to go to God in prayer and win some of his own victories by himself in the Presence of God.

Yes, it may seem so much easier to talk to people about your problems. However, if you talked only half as much to God as you do to others about those problems, He'd be able to give you the answers and solutions for every situation or dilemma that you're facing.

James addressed this truth in his famous New Testament epistle. It's important to note that the book of James possesses a unique quality, for it contains pastoral counsel that isn't included in other epistles. The reason for this is that James was a pastor, whereas the other New Testament writers were apostles. Therefore, James frequently addressed certain issues differently than the other writers, speaking from a pastor's perspective and giving the kind of counsel that can only come from a man who knows the needs and behavior of people.

It seems that some people to whom James was writing had discovered that their troubles could be used as a way to attract attention to themselves. So these people floated from person to person, repeating their story to anyone who would listen --

probably in an attempt to fill an emotional deficit in their lives.

People who fit this description are like bees that extract all the pollen they can from one flower before moving on to do the same with the next flower and the next, etc. These individuals stay with one person as long as he will listen; then when that person has been drained dry, they move on to drain the next person. However, all they want to do is talk. They don't ever apply any wise counsel that good-hearted people try to give them. Although there is a time to talk, there is also a time when you need to stop talking and start praying! This is why James says, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray..." (James 5:13).

The word "afflicted" is from the Greek word kakopatheo, which is a compound of the words kakos and pathos. The first part of the word, kakos, describes something that is evil. In fact, it is so evil that it produces terribly negative effects in a person's life. It is often translated as the words bad, evil, wicked, or vile, and it frequently denotes something that is hurtful or damaging, such as the personal devastation that results from one's physical illness.

In Mark 1:32,34 and in Mark 2:17, the word kakos is actually translated as "disease" and "sick" to convey the idea of people who were not only sick but whose lives had been devastated as a result of their poor health. The people in these cited verses were bearing terribly negative consequences in numerous areas of their lives due to their continual ill health. But in James 5:13, the word kakos doesn't necessarily refer to sickness (although it could also include sickness). Instead, it refers to a person who is harassed by some problem that is weighing him down and producing devastating results in his life.

The second part of the word kakopatheo is the Greek word pathos. The King James Version generally translates this word as suffering. But although it can be used to picture a physical suffering, this word primarily conveys the idea of a suffering that occurs in the mind. It portrays a person who is affected by something that has happened and, as a result, suffers mentally or emotionally. Even if these troubles are tangible, material, concrete problems, the level of anguish produced in the mind and emotions as a result is a far greater strain than the actual problem itself.

When the words kakos and pathos are compounded to form the word kakopatheo that is used in James 5:13, it gives the idea of a person who is intensely suffering -- perhaps physically but definitely mentally -- due to the evil events that have occurred in his or her life.

There is no doubt, then, that James is speaking to people who have been through a bad experience or a series of bad experiences that have produced real trouble in their lives. Although they may need to initially share their pain with someone else, James says, "...Let him [the person with troubles] pray." The strong Greek tense used in this verse means James isn't suggesting that people take this action; he is commanding them to do it.

The word "pray" is the Greek word proseuche -- a compound of the words pros and euche. The word pros means toward and gives the idea of closeness. Nearly everywhere it is used in the New Testament, the word pros carries the meaning of close, up-front, intimate contact with someone else. The second part of the word proseuche is taken from the word euche. The word euche is an old Greek word that describes a wish, desire, prayer, or vow. It was originally used to depict a person who made some kind of vow to God because of a certain need or desire in his or her life. This individual would vow to give something of great value to God in exchange for a favorable answer to prayer.

In Greek culture, before people verbalized their prayer or offered a sacrifice to a "god," a commemorative altar was set up and thanksgiving was offered on that altar. Such offerings of praise and thanksgiving were called votive offerings (from the word "vow"). These votive offerings were similar to a pledge. The person would promise that once his prayer had been answered, he would be back to give thanks once more to God. These votive offerings of praise and worship were elaborate and well-planned. Giving thanks to a deity was a significant event, so it was done in a serious and grandiose manner to outwardly demonstrate a thankful heart.

All of this is included in the background of the word proseuche, the word used more than any other for "prayer" in the New Testament. Keep in mind, the majority of New Testament readers were Greek in origin and knew the cultural background of this word; hence, they understood its full ramifications.

The word proseuche tells us that prayer should bring us face to face and into close contact with God. Prayer is more than a mechanical act or a formula to follow; it is a vehicle to bring us to a place whereby we may enjoy a close, intimate relationship with God.

This is an especially meaningful message for those who are prone to talk incessantly to people but who fail to speak to God about their troubles. For such a person, there comes a time when he must stop looking for people to talk to and begin to draw as close as possible to God in order to find a permanent solution to his dilemmas.

But the idea of sacrifice is also associated with this word for "prayer." In this sense, it portrayed an individual who so desperately desired to see his prayer answered that he was willing to surrender everything he owned in exchange for an answer to his petition. Clearly, this describes an altar of sacrifice and an act of consecration in prayer whereby a believer's life is yielded entirely to God.

Thus, this particular word for prayer tells us of a place of decision and consecration, an altar where we freely vow to give our lives to God in exchange for His life. Because the word proseuche carries this meaning of surrender and sacrifice, we can know that God obviously desires to do more than merely bless us -- He wants to change us! He wants us to come to a place of consecration where we meet with Him face to face and surrender every area of our lives to Him; in exchange, He touches and transforms us by

His power and Presence.

The tone used in James 5:13 reflects the idea of urgency, letting us know that James didn't want us to take a long time to get into God's Presence and allow Him to change us; rather, we are to get into this place of prayer as quickly as possible. You see, all the answers you and I need are found in the Presence of God. That is why it is so imperative that we come as close to His Presence as possible. And while we are in His Presence, He wants us to open our hearts to Him, tell Him what we feel, and be willing to surrender ourselves to Him completely. As we do this, God will give us the answers and the peace we need to victoriously face and conquer our various ordeals.

An interpretive translation of this portion of James 5:13 could read:

"Is anyone among you going through an extremely difficult time in life that is causing him a lot of grief? I urge that person to draw near to God, to pour his heart out to Him, and to be willing to give up anything and to do anything God requires in order for his situation to be changed."

As I noted earlier, there is definitely a time when you will need to confide in others about your problems. Thank God for real friends in whom we can confide! But there also comes a time when you must go to God for your solution and stop relying on your friends and associates to give you relief.

Is God's Spirit speaking to you today? Have you been going to people for your solutions instead of going first to God? Why don't you take a little time today to quiet your heart and talk to the Lord about the things that are troubling you?