

**Series:** “Desperate”  
**Title:** Desperate Prayer  
**Texts:** James 5:16b NIV  
**Key Word:** Characteristics  
**Proposition:** Everyone can pray the desperate prayer by practicing these characteristics of desperate prayer.

Good Morning everyone. My name is Chris Farmer and I serve as one of the pastor’s. We’re thrilled that you have chosen to come and worship with us today. We’re continuing our series called “Desperate.” We learned last week that many folks are living desperate lives. Consciously, unconsciously, many are seeking a relationship with God who alone can give them hope, peace, and security. Many echo the prayer of the Psalmist: “*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*” (Psalm 42:2) Such desperation becomes God’s invitation to draw near to him. Today, we’ll look at a natural response to desperation, prayer.

Many of us, if not all of us, have had something to eat this morning. If not at home, you found something in the gathering area which satisfied your appetite or curbed a craving. After a night’s rest, our bodies are desperate to break a conscious fast. Eating is natural and necessary.

Prayer, desperate prayer, is also natural and necessary. It is part of our human nature. Many people pray, searching for meaning, relationships, and growth. Fundamentally, prayer expresses our desperate hunger for God. I love what Augustine wrote, “For you, were we made, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Prayer is a two-way relationship with the living God. You speak to God and

He speaks to you. It is a mysterious connection between two desperate hearts: God's desperate heart to know and love you, and your desperate heart to know and love Him. What are the characteristics of desperate prayer?

**First, desperate prayer is driven by the Holy Spirit.** Paul, a radiant follower of Christ wrote, *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express... the Spirit intercedes for the saints."* Romans 8:26-27

There have been times when I haven't known what to pray for, or how to pray. Frustration and discouragement prohibited expression. During those times I could only yield my yearnings to the Holy Spirit and allow him to pray for me.

The Holy Spirit talks to God the Father on your behalf. He prays for you. You may not know what to say, but he does. His prayers connect with your heart because he always prays in accordance with God's will.

When our daughters were little, they would come into the kitchen and say, "I'm hungry! I need a snack! Can I have some Doritos?" Melinda would say something like this, "Sure you can. Here's a go-gert." Our daughters recognized their need, but they didn't always know what to ask for, but Melinda translated their request and gave them what they needed, rather than what they wanted.

Other times they didn't know what to ask for. Their bodies had a fever, their stomach was upset, and all they did was cry. During those times, Melinda heard and interpreted their cries, and she gave them the medicine they needed.

Friends, prayer is driven by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us. We don't always know how we ought to pray, but he does, interceding for us according to God's will. So, when we pray, remember we have an all-powerful, all knowing prayer partner in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Sylvia York walked the campus of the University of Florida confused. Like many college students today, she was troubled about the lack of direction in her life. She couldn't decide on her college major. She thought about psychology, sociology and even criminology. But nothing seemed to "fit."

At a mental fork in the road, she cried out to God in prayer, "Lord, you must show me what I am supposed to do, because I don't know." I don't know if she realized it or not, but even before she asked, the Holy Spirit was praying for her. The Holy Spirit drove her to prayer. The Holy Spirit groaned before she cried out to God. The Holy Spirit guided her steps so that she would be standing in front of a building with a sign on the front entrance, "College of Education." At that moment the Holy Spirit revealed the Father's will, dissolving her fear and doubt. She obeyed the Spirit and found a 38 year teaching career. Desperate prayer is driven by the Holy Spirit.

**Second, desperate prayer prevails.** *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much."* (NKV James 5:16b) James notes that prayer taps into God's muchness. God is moved by prayer. I do not mean that God's character is changed or that his mind is changed. Prayer moves such a change in us that God's remains

consistent with His nature. God is ready to pour out His muchness upon us.

I love that word, “much.” Whenever, I go to the Olive Garden for a meal, they give me as much salad and bread sticks as I would ever want. I love the huge crowds at an Ohio State Football game. I love that goal-line stand when the game is on the line. Our lives would be poor without that word, “much”.

The word for prayer in James 5 means *"to call out in the time of need."* Desperate hearts cry out in great need. Think of the contrast. There is the God of muchness and here I am in my need and emptiness.

Take note of these qualifications. *Fervency* and *righteousness* triggers the muchness of God. "Fervent" means energy and passion directed at accomplishing something. This is not ritual. This is not, "Thank you, Lord, for the food. Amen." It's an energetic prayer—prayer of passion, boldness, and persistence from the heart.

Jesus described fervent prayer with the story of a man with a guest who arrives at his house at midnight, and he has no bread. In the Palestinian context, you bake bread at the beginning of the day, and you only make enough for that day. Palestinians also practice generous hospitality. So this guest arrives at midnight and the person realizes, *Oh, I have no bread.* So he goes running over to his friend's house. He knocks on the door and calls to his friend. "Hey, a guest has come. Do you have any bread?" The friend replies "Get lost. The doors are locked and our kids are sleeping." That's not how a Middle-Eastern person is supposed to respond. Jesus says: Because of the shameless and bold cry for help, your friend will get up and

bring you bread, even if it's inconvenient for him. How much more would your Father in heaven, the God who loves you, care for you? If you persist in prayer with passion and energy, how much more will your Father in heaven give to your need?

Next, the fervent prayer must be added with personal righteousness. Every sinner, like me, who comes before the throne of God to tap His muchness needs to come in humble repentance. Because you have the muchness of his abundant forgiveness, you can start your prayer with confession and become righteous at his throne.

God wants to bless us. God wants to give us what we need. Our pride though can get in the way of knowing God's amazing love that moves mountains. A little boy was trying one day in his play to move a huge stone in his sandbox and was trying with all of his might to roll it up and out of the box. His little muscles were bulging. Perspiration ran down his face. He even bit his tongue as he tried to move that stone. His father was watching and said to him, "Son, are you using all of your strength? And the little boy said, "Yes, Daddy, I'm using all of my strength. And his dad said, "No you're not. You haven't asked me to help you.

Sometimes we are burdened down with weighty problems; we strive; we cry; fight; we war; we wrangle and we're saying *I'm doing everything I know to do*. Have you asked your Father to help? Have you linked your life with his? Could it be that God wants to bless you and the reason that God is not blessing you could be so simple? You have not because you ask not. Desperate prayer prevails over the rocks.

**Third, desperate prayer reaches up in faith.** Jesus teaches us about the power of faith in prayer. *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”* (Mark 11:24) By faith we can say to this mountain, "Scram!" and it complies. Does this mean prayer is magic? It would seem so. Jesus goes on to say that we can ask for anything, and as long as we believe, it will be done.

But note this: Jesus would have been looking directly at the Mount of Olives. This was actually a series of four summits, the highest reaching some 2,500 feet above sea level. Jesus was likely referring to a prophecy in Zechariah 14, describing the Day of the Lord God Almighty, when the king returns to his own. The passage says on that day the Lord will stand on the Mount of Olives, and it will split in two, half tumbling away to the north, half to the south. Jesus is **not** referring to some whimsical, impulsive, self-serving use of prayer, nor is Jesus promising that prayer is the key to every obstacle in our way. Rather, Jesus is saying that prayer is about *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."* At the heart of the prayer of faith is a joining with God in his kingdom purposes and a quickening of their fulfillment. If you are truly living the faith-centered, prayer-soaked life, more and more your life gets pulled up into the grand, sweeping, global purposes of God. Your life rushes toward what God is accomplishing in history. If you think prayer is about harnessing God's power to accomplish your own ends, to fulfill your own ambitions, you've got it backward. It is

about aligning your heart, through abiding, to long for the coming of the king and to play your role in its fulfillment.

By faith, we already know the end from the beginning. God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called to his purposes. So trust God. Pray in faith that the kingdom you long for is going to be delivered. That mountain will split in two and fall away. The Lord will stand on it and return to us. Desperate prayer reaches up in faith knowing that the King's good purposes will be accomplished.

**Finally, desperate prayer gathers a crowd.** Luke tells of time when the early church waited in prayer. *“When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present ...joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”* (Acts 1:13,

14) God in his infinite grace has created us to be social beings. Because we're created in His image we communicate our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes with one other. We're interdependent upon each other.

The story is told of a pastor visiting a prominent Chicago citizen when the idea of church membership and involvement came up. The man said, “I believe I can be a good Christian without participating in church.” In silence the pastor moved to the fireplace, blazing against the winter's chill and removed one burning coal, and placed it on the hearth. The two sat together and witnessed the slow death of the ember. The man humbly said, “I see.”

The first Christ-followers knew that if they desired to live life as God intended then must stay together. After the death of their Lord and after witnessing his ascension, they kept meeting together. Luke says they constantly prayed together, waiting for something, someone whom Jesus would send. Finally, the Holy Spirit came and the God's glory filled them.

There is nothing like being together with other radiant Christ-followers and sharing life together: laughing, praying, crying, talking, and sharing. There is nothing more inspiring, nothing more spiritually engaging than uniting in a spirit of prayer with others. There is nothing more powerful than a church coming together praying for their world. This kind of fellowship empowers, heals, transforms, delivers, and binds together the body of Christ. If this is not part of your experience then, you're missing out. If all you do is come to church on a Sunday morning, then I want to say to you that God has something more. That something more is found in a small group who prays together, who laughs and cries together, who reflects on Scripture together. God brings Himself each and every time to the group pray that together. Jesus said, "*When two or three gather in my name, I am truly in the midst of them.*"

Gary Locker, a Radiant Life devotional writer, told the story of a time he attended a men's meeting. Even though he was not personally invited, Gary went anyway to a friend's company where the meeting was taking place. As he walked in, he quickly learned that he didn't recognize any of the men except his friend who was

from our church. Doubt began to creep in. But God took over. He was welcomed with open arms and a loving heart, just as Jesus would have. He experienced God's unconditional love for the stranger, a stranger at his own admission filled with conceit and selfishness. Gary says that at the close of the meeting they prayed together. There were many different expressions of faith and prayer. During this prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke to Gary and said, "Be still and listen I am speaking to your conceited heart." Like the early church, Gary was shaken to the core for God has clearly spoken to him. God told him to leave that place pass on the lessons he learned on prayer with humility and love. Since then Gary has served on our prayer team and shared his knowledge on prayer. Desperate prayer gathers a crowd and appoints desperate witnesses.

Sylvia and Gary are just a few who have discovered the power of desperate prayer: desperate prayer that is driven by the Holy Spirit, prevails through life, reaches up in faith, and gathers a crowd. So can you by surrendering to desperate prayer. 2431