

How Do You Spell Relief? ¹

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Purpose: God has given us a way we can obtain relief from our worries. First, be anxious for nothing. Second, give it all to Him in prayer. Third, rejoice in the Lord for He is with us. Fourth, the assurance of His peace is given as He steadies our hearts and minds.

One day a man showed up for work with a big red bump on his nose. "What happened?" he was asked. "I smelled a brose," he answered. "You mean a rose, don't you; a rose doesn't have a "b" in it." He answered, "Well, this one did."



Are you a good speller? Some people are and some are not. Have you ever played Scrabble with someone? It's often difficult to figure out the word with the letters you have



drawn. If you are like me, you may be tempted to use a dictionary or program to help un-scrabble your letters in order to help choose and spell words correctly.

My question to you this morning is how do you spell relief? So many people need relief today. They are under pressure emotionally, physically, spiritually, relationally. How do you spell relief?

Maybe you have heard the television commercial that spells it, “R-o-l-a-i-d-s.” I guess if you have an upset stomach that is a perfect way to spell relief. I guess you could use some other word which promises an instant cure or an immediate relief.



Many of us have come to expect some “quick-fix” solution to our complex problems. However, I don't know of any instantaneous cure for life's problems, life's sicknesses, and life's burdens.



Some of us may have heard a physician say to us about a back problem or some other physical ailment, “You'll just have to learn to live with it.” There are some problems which may never be solved or may never get any better. We may have to learn to cope with them.

And what does that word “cope” mean? A coping saw is a short, thin-bladed saw which allows its users to make short turns and cuts, coping with the wood it can easily make different shapes as it cuts. There are some very difficult situations that occur in life like mental handicaps, deformity, blindness, and deafness, and some long-term addictions in the lives of loved ones that we may just have to learn to “cope” with and continue to work in, around, and through.

A little boy stubbed his toe and it was throbbing in pain. Maybe you have done that to your feet lately. In tears, the boy said to his older brother, “I just can't stand it.” His

brother said, “You'll just have to stand it.” There are some things which have to be stood, things for which there is no apparent relief, except time, and some things which may never get any better.

All of us have had these never-ending difficulties come into our lives. Most wish these problems could be solved quickly, easily, and painlessly. There are synonyms for the word relief, such as “release,” “unloading,” “ease,” “soothing,” “cleansing,” “freedom,” “liberation,” and “deliverance.”

So, how do you spell relief?

THROUGH THE YEARS SOME HAVE SPELLED RELIEF . . . D-E-N-I-A-L

They simply refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem, a sickness, or a sin.



Some religious sects deny the existence of sin and sickness. They say that these things are the result of and the fabrication of wrong thinking. It is true that wrong thinking can lead to illness and to sin, but sin and illness do exist apart from wrong thinking.

An old story tells of a desert nomad who awakened hungry in the middle of the night. He lit a candle and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one and saw a worm in it; so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into a second date, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if

he continued, he blew out the candle and quickly ate the rest of the dates.²

There are some people that deny there is a problem, and attempt to proceed as if everything is alright.

- A careful driver knows that the sound of a flat tire cannot be safely ignored, that an empty fuel gauge must not be disregarded, and that faulty brakes should not be overlooked.
- An airline pilot cannot afford to ignore warning lights which indicate a faulty engine, loss of hydraulic power, low fuel, or a landing gear which will not lower.
- A concerned person cannot safely ignore the problems with their health, and overlook getting proper care.
- A caring physician cannot overlook the telltale symptoms of illness and disease.
- Loving parents cannot afford to disregard the problems they detect in their children's health, behavior, or school work.

Denial is not the answer. Denial does not address the problem.

SOME HAVE SPELLED RELIEF . .. E-N-D-U-R-A-N-C-E



I have met some that have a stoic attitude about life's difficulties. It is the attitude that says “suck it in and deal with it!” That ancient philosophy attempts to resign to the inevitable hardships of life. It admits the problem, but sees no recourse but to live with it. It says that one must “grin

and bear it,” steadying themselves against the pain and the unpleasantness.

I read a story about a 73-year-old Iowa resident Aldin Straight that needed to visit his ailing brother, who lived on the other side of the state. There was no one who could drive Mr. Straight to his brother’s house.

He himself didn’t feel capable of driving there because he can’t read road signs when he drives faster than 20 mph. So, Mr. Straight did what he could. He rode his lawn mower 240 miles across the state of Iowa to be with his brother.

Talking about being committed! That may get you across the state, but endurance does not answer the problems of life.



SOME HAVE SPELLED RELIEF . . . E-S-C-A-P-E

This is an attempt to run away from the serious realities of life.

1. It may involve trying to move to another place of residence or work.
2. It may involve turning to immorality to obscure the problem.
3. It may involve the unnecessary and excessive use of medicine, alcohol, or illegal drugs.
4. It may involve leaving a family, a location, or a spouse.

Escaping from your problem does not mean your problem will not follow you to your new location, or family, or work.

SOME HAVE SPELLED RELIEF . . . O-B-L-I-V-I-O-N

This is a step further than escape. It is expressed when a person is so overwhelmed by the problems they face, to the extent of making themselves totally insensitive to these things. There are times when we want to be anesthetized, such as when the dentist drills out the tooth decay or when the surgeon amputates a limb or removes an organ. Maybe it is okay to have relief through oblivion for a while, but we do not need to live there very long.

/əˈblɪvɪən/ - o-bliv-i-on

Oblivion

Ray Hodge relayed the story that one day he gave a young officer a ride to the Officers Club for lunch. He said, "I am going to the bar and get stinking drunk." Ray Hodge offered to knock him in the head with a mallet, it would provide the same results with less expense.

Over and over, you hear of someone that seeks to flee from the pressures of life through drunkenness, drugs, or actual suicide.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO SPELL RELIEF

I spell relief, P-R-A-Y-E-R.

Countless numbers of people, including many of us, have discovered that a sure way of finding relief from the many things which beset us is through prayer.



- To pray is not to **deny** one's problems.
- To pray is not the same as **enduring** one's problems, or to "grin and bear them" as the Stoic would advise.
- To pray is not to **escape** from or to run away from one's problems.
- To pray is not to drown one's problems in **oblivion**.
- To pray is a biblical, responsible, and effective response to the harsh realities of life. To look them squarely in the eye, to take our concerns about them to God, and to work in, with, and through them for the purpose and the glory of God is the right thing to do.

To pray is to take seriously the invitation of Jesus. We are to "*bring your burdens to the Lord and leave them there.*" We are reminded in I Peter 5:7 to, "*casting all your care upon him (Jesus), for he careth for you.*"

As so many others have done, we can turn to God at any time, with any concern, and find genuine relief through prayer. There is quite an array of people in the Bible who did just that. Let's think of a few of them.

PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ...

Abraham

Remember his classic prayer and appeal for the few righteous residents of Sodom and Gomorrah in the words (Genesis 18:23), "*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*"



Jacob

There was his wrestling all night with an angel at Peniel (Genesis 32:24).

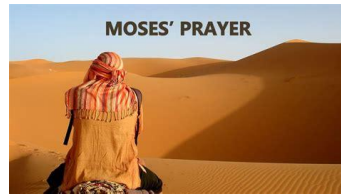
And there was his prayer (Genesis 32:11) that his brother would spare him, in the words, *“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with children.”*

Joseph

He prayed from a dungeon. And God honored his commitment, patience, and prayer. Genesis 41: 41, 43 tells us, *“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, ‘See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt’...and made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

Moses

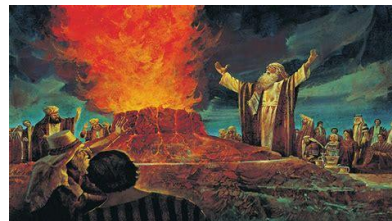
There is his impassioned prayer of intercession for Israel (Numbers 11:11-15). He prayed (verse 14, 15), *“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”*



Elijah

He prayed during his contest with wicked Jezebel and the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:37),

“Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”



David

The 51st Psalm includes the classic prayer of his recognition of his sin and his repentance of his life to God, as he said

(verse 12), *“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,...”* and (verse 14), *“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”*

Isaiah

Isaiah testified (Isaiah 58:9), *“Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: ‘Here am I.’”*

PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT . . .

Zacharias

His prayer drew this response (Luke 1:13), *“But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, and you are going to give him the name John.’”*



Jesus

His teachings about prayer and his use of prayer were numerous.



In Luke 18:1, it is recorded, *“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and never give up.”*

Matthew 6:8 tells, *“Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask Him.”*

John 15:7 states, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

Chapter 17 of John's gospel contains the true Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus prayed for Himself, for His disciples, and for all believers yet to come.

The Jerusalem Church

The early Church was noted for prayer. It is recorded in Acts 4:31, *“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke the word of God boldly,”* and in Acts 12:5, *“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”*

Paul

He and Silas were noticed for their singing and praying while imprisoned at Philippi. Paul advised in Ephesians 6:18, *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”*

In Ephesians 3:14, he said, *“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* He also said, *“That you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; laboring fervently for you in prayers,”* *“I make mention of you always in my prayers,”* and *“Pray without ceasing.”*

James

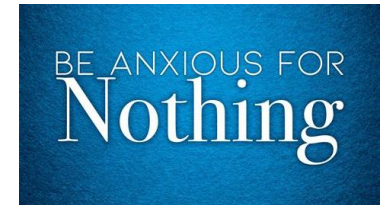
He wrote (James 5:13), *“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray,”* and (James 5:16), *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

HOW CAN WE EXPERIENCE RELIEF?



WE CAN FIND THE ANSWER IN OUR SCRIPTURE READING TODAY

The beginning phrase in Philippians 4:6 says, *“Be anxious for nothing...”*



We all have cares, concerns, and anxieties. We can and should be concerned, but we cannot afford to be “anxious,” to “come apart at the seams,” or to be “disintegrated.”

Everyday each one of us is faced with concerns about health, family, business, children, the opinions of others, financial and physical security, and questions about our faith. We are worried about our nation's economy, local crime, international affairs, what our politicians have done or said, the changing tax laws, the uncertainty of so many things in life. The scripture tells us to ***“be anxious for nothing...”*** We need a resource from which we can get relief and release from the barrage of anxieties we face.

OUR RESOURCE IS FOUND IN OUR SCRIPTURE READING TODAY

What resources are available to us? Look again at the second half of Philippians 4:6, *“but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God,”*



We need to go back to our source, our supply, our Creator, in order to navigate all of life's anxieties. We can meet

with God through prayer. The good news is that God will meet with us as we seek His presence and face.

Many people have learned the joy of turning to God, at any time, to share their joys, their anxieties, and their frustrations. We can turn to Him when we need the desire and the power to deal with temptation, when we need the power to be able to love and to forgive others, and when we need the power to deal with our burdens and sorrows.

This perfect resource is so obvious, and yet some may have totally overlooked it. George Bernard Shaw once told a story about a pious Frenchman, who while visiting London's Westminster Abbey, who knelt down to pray. The verger (similar to a church usher), who had never seen such a thing before, promptly handed him over to the police and charged him with “brawling.” Fortunately, the magistrate had compassion on the foreigner's ignorance and even went the length of asking why the man should not be allowed to pray in church. The reply of the verger was simple. He said, “If we allowed that, we would have people praying all over the place.”



Where can we pray?

Certainly, we can pray in church. But more importantly, we can pray at work, at play, as we travel, as we walk, as we lie in bed, from a hospital bed, from a prison cell, and from a classroom. We can pray at any time and from any place, and be assured that God loves us and is concerned to work out his will in and through our lives.

Philippians 4:4-5, “*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*” We may not rejoice in our problem, but we should rejoice in the Lord, always. We can do this, because He is with us in those valleys of life.

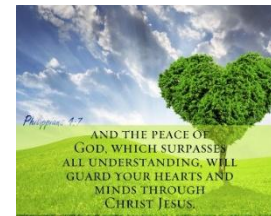


The psalmist said (116:1-2), “*I love the Lord, for He has heard me and listens to my prayer; for He has given me a hearing whenever I cried to Him.*”

OUR REWARD IS FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURE READING TODAY

What can we expect from our prayers? They will all be answered, in time, either "Yes," "No," or “Wait.”

Adoniram Judson (the famous missionary to Burma) once said, “I never prayed sincerely and earnestly about anything but it came at some time. No matter how distant the day, somehow, in some shape, probably the last I should have advised, it came.”



But more importantly than an answer to our prayer, God will give us His peace. Philippians 4:7 says, “*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” We are not promised that we will receive all that we ask, but we are assured that He will keep our heart and mind steady and give us peace as we give our petitions to Him.

When we pray sincerely, it will shape our actions. William Law wrote, “There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him; and when you can once do this sincerely for any man, you have fitted your soul for the performance of everything that is kind and civil towards him.” Maybe that is why Jesus told us to pray for our enemies.

How do you spell relief?
P-R-A-Y-E-R.



Philip Melancthon, one of the great theologians of the reformation, wrote, "Trouble and perplexity drive me to prayer, and prayer drives away perplexity and trouble." May it be so for each one of us!

LET US PRAY

Apostles Creed (180 AD)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord;
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried;
The third day He rose from the dead;
He ascended into Heaven,
And sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
The holy catholic Church,
The communion of the saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting. Amen.

Notes:

¹Outline taken from Sermon by Ray K. Hodge

² Illustration from Sermon Central