

THE POWER OF PRAYER



by
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Please open your Bibles to James chapter five and verse sixteen. I would like to preach a message entitled "The Power of Prayer."

In James 5:16-18, the Bible says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

James is talking about the power of prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Listen to the Bible. In Ephesians 3:20, the Bible says, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." In Matthew 7:7-8, the Bible says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Did you notice the power of that? The power of prayer! "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

In Matthew 18:19, Jesus said, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." In Matthew 21:22, the Bible says, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

From Genesis to Revelation, in every book of the Bible, you see the power of prayer pointed to. But you say, "Preacher! Does it really matter? Does it really matter if you do pray and if you do not pray? Does it make that much of a difference in the life of a Christian who prays and a Christian who does not pray? Does God hear the ordinary Christian? Does God hear the ordinary teenager? Does God hear the ordinary adult? Does God hear the ordinary child of God who, in sincerity, prays? Does God Almighty actually listen to us?" The Answer is, "Yes, He does."

Listen to the Word of God. In John 15:7, the Bible says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." In John 16:24, the Bible says, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." In Philippians 4:6, the Bible says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." In Psalms 50:15, the Bible says, "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

In John 14:14, Jesus said it this way, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Jesus said He would do the very thing that you asked for. My dear Christian friends, that is a promise; that is something that the Son of God said He would do for you if you would ask. God said He would give you the petitions. Now there are times when it does not seem that God is listening. I know what that is like. I know what it is like to pray and nothing seems to happen. You look at the situation and nothing seems to be changing. You say, "I have not prayed hard enough." So you pray harder, and nothing seems to happen. You say, "I have not prayed long enough." So you pray longer, and nothing seems to happen. You say, "I have not prayed the right words." So you work at praying it just right, and nothing seems to happen. I know that feeling. I know what that is like. I know what it is like to pray and nothing seems to happen. You begin to wonder if it really matters. You begin to wonder if it really matters if you do pray and if you do not pray. You begin to wonder if it is the powerful resource that many have made it out to be in the past. Brethren, the Word of God assures you that it is a source of great power. What great power exists in prayer!

There are a lot of things that God wants to do, that God desires to do, and that God would do but does not do, because no one prayed. We are going to be shocked, when we get to heaven, at the things that God wanted to do, that God desired to do, that God would have done but did not do, because no one took the time or made the time for prayer.

Let me ask you something. Why do you think God allows difficulties to come into your life? Why do you think God allows hardships to come into your life? Why do you think God allows problems and needs to come into your life as a child of God? Why does God do that? Why does God allow that? So that you might learn that what God does He does primarily in response to prayer.

As a child of God there are things that you are going through today, things that you would not have to go through, things that it is not the will of God that you go through, but you are going through them because you are not getting a hold of God in prayer. That is not right. That is the sin of prayerlessness. One great sin among God's people today is the sin of prayerlessness. We who embrace God as our Father; Jesus Christ, God's Son, as our Savior and Friend; and the blessed Holy Spirit as our indwelling Comforter, do not take the time, nor make the time, for prayer. It is a great sin among God's people.

One concern of the Devil, our Adversary, Satan, is to keep Christians off their knees. The Devil fears nothing from the prayerless Christians. The Devil fears nothing from the prayerless preachers. He laughs at their toils, and he mocks at all their wisdom.

Have you presumed that God would do absolutely nothing about your sin of prayerlessness? He has already done something about it. In James 4:2, the Bible says, "Ye have not, because...." And He gives you a reason—"Because ye ask not." That's the reason you have not. There is very little praying going on. Have you ever

compared how much time you spend in the newspaper to how much time you spend with God in prayer? Have you ever compared how much time you spend in front of the television set to how much time you spend in prayer? Have you ever compared how much time you spend with your friends to how much time you spend with God in prayer?

You see, folks, you tend to do those things that are important to you. The reason you spend the hours that you do in the newspaper is that it is important to you. The reason you spend the hours that you do in front of the television set is that it is important to you. The reason you spend the hours that you do with your friends is that it is important to you. If prayer is important to you, you're going to do plenty of it. If prayer is not important to you, you're not going to do much of it.

Don't you see? Prayer is how you get things from God. That's why, in Matthew 7:7, Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." He did not say, "it shall be given you." He did not say that. He said, "**Ask**, and it shall be given you."

There are a lot of things that you need that will not be given you, things that God wants to give you but that will not come because you did not ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you" the Bible says.

It matters when you pray. There are folks in this room today who have varying degrees of needs. Some are serious. Some are less serious than others. Some folks are at the breaking point. Some of you folks are not in need right now but you will be shortly. I simply want to remind you that there is power in prayer. God does, in fact, hearken to the voices of men and women, boys and girls. The Bible is clear on this. In Numbers 21:3, the Bible says, "And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites." In Joshua 10:14, the Bible says, "And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man."

I am convinced, without a shadow of a doubt, that God, in His heaven, waits, desiring to hear the petitions of His people. And when His people pray, God does, in fact, answer prayer. Sometimes instantly. Sometimes a little later on. Sometimes later on yet. But mark it down—God does, in fact, answer every sincere prayer of a Christian who is right with God. He misses none.

We are going to notice three things: First, the Scriptural statement; second, the spiritual illustration; and third, the conclusion.

Please notice, number one: the Scriptural statement. In James 5:16, the Bible says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." What is the Bible saying? The Bible is simply saying this: When you pray, something is going to happen. God is simply saying that there is something about prayer that is effectual. There is something about prayer that produces results. There is something about prayer that renders petitions granted.

In verse 17 the Bible says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain." What is the Bible saying? The Bible is simply saying this: He prayed prayer. It speaks of intensity. The praying of James chapter five is not passive praying. It is not the prayer, "Dear Lord, bless the food. In Jesus name, Amen!" It is talking about prayer that is earnest. It is talking about prayer that is urgent. It is talking about prayer that is sincere and not casual. This effectual, fervent prayer calls upon you to get serious about praying; and I don't think most of God's people are that serious about praying.

Question! How much time does prayer take up in your life today as a child of God? I am not saying that, unless you spend two or three hours a day in prayer, you are not a prayer warrior. I am not saying that. There are Christians who never spend long seasons in prayer, but they pray all the time. They just don't quit. They never stop.

Brethren, you need to get so serious about praying that you become less concerned about the mechanics of it, and that you become more involved in real earnest prayer. You need to get so involved in prayer that you set aside eating for prayer. You need to get so involved in prayer that you set aside schedules for prayer. You need to get so wrapped up in prayer that you do everything that is necessary to accomplish praying because it is your prayers that move the heart of God to action.

Don't you see? You're not going to get anything, anything at all, from God if you don't take the time or make the time for prayer. It is that simple.

You ought to be praying all the time. In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." In I Thessalonians 5:17, the Apostle Paul said, "Pray without ceasing." In Ephesians 6:18, the Bible says, "Praying always...."

So let me ask you something. Does that describe your prayer life? God wants you to be praying all the time. God wants you to be praying about everything. Why? God wants you to see Him answer your prayers.

Let me ask you this. Are you getting your prayers answered? Are you getting results when you pray? It ought to be the norm for the child of God to get his prayers answered because God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

Think with me! Why would Jesus say, in Luke 18:1, that men ought always to pray and not to faint if He was not a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God?

Why would the Apostle Paul command us, in I Thessalonians 5:17. to pray if God Almighty was not a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God?

I submit to you folks that God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, and it ought to be the norm for the child of God to get his prayers answered. If you can go day after day, week after week, and month after month

without getting your prayers answered, there is a serious spiritual problem in your life.

The Bible says that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James is talking about prayer. He is talking about asking. The word prayer here simply means "to ask." Prayer is simply asking God for what you need. Certainly godliness has power. In I Timothy 4:8, the Bible says, "Godliness is profitable unto all things." Certainly being filled with the Holy Spirit of God has power. In Acts 1:8, the Bible says, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." But the power that James is talking about is the power of prayer, and it is great power. What great power exists in prayer? The Bible says it availeth much.

Any child of God can pray. Did you know that? A five-year-old child of God can pray and get answers. A sixteen-year-old teenager can pray and get answers. A young adult can pray and get answers. A married man, a married woman, a single man, a single woman, can pray and get answers from God. A senior saint can pray and get answers from the Lord. The Bible simply says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And that is exactly where many of you miss it. You see, personal godliness is essential to getting your prayers answered. God does not answer the prayers of selfish people. In James 4:3, the Bible says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

If you are not living in the will of God today, there is one reason. You are selfish. Everybody outside of God's will is selfish. Everybody. Not some of them. Not part of them. Not a good portion of them, but all of them. There is no such thing as a Christian who is dead to self who is out of the will of God because the very essence of being in the will of God is dying to self and living for Christ. The very opposite of living in the will of God is saying "I don't want God's way. I don't want God telling me what to do. I want to do my own thing."

Listen! When you are out of God's will, when you are selfish, then all of your requests reflect that selfish nature; and the reason God Almighty does not answer the prayers of the selfish is because they are not concerned about God's will. They are not concerned about God's glory. They want what they want. They want what they can get out of God. Something comes up in their life and they want to ring God's bell and say, "Come bail me out, and I will call you again when I need you." God is not interested in that type of praying. However, God does hear and answer the prayers of those who are right with Him, who are in fellowship with the Lord.

When it comes to this matter of prayer, fellowship with God is essential in getting your prayers answered. In Psalm 66:18, the Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." What is the Bible saying? It is simply saying this. If there is a sin in your life and you know it and you are not willing to abandon it, you can pray for your family; you can pray for your friends; you can pray for your loved ones; you can pray for your finances; you can pray for your church; you can pray for your preacher; you can pray for all kinds of good things, but God does not hear you. Why? You are tolerating known sin in your life.

So don't go on in your sin. In Proverbs 28:13, the Bible says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

You say, "Preacher! What must I do?" You need to have your sins washed away. In I John 1:9, the Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In I John 3:21, the Bible says, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

God knows everything about you. God never comes to learn anything. He is everywhere present at all times. In Hebrews 4:13, the Bible says, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." In Proverbs 15:3, the Bible says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. "

Many of you have already lost power with God in prayer, and you don't even know it. Take heed! In Proverbs 1:25-31, God said, "Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

God Almighty is not going to answer your cry for help. You say, Preacher! I don't believe that. Listen to the Bible. In Isaiah 59:1-2, the Bible says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

I said that to say this. God does not demand sinless perfection in order to get your prayers answered. What does God demand? God demands that a Christian be doing right as best that he understands the right, doing what the Word of God says the best that he understands it. That's what God demands.

The Bible says that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. That word "availeth" means "to have much force." The Bible is simply saying that the prayer of a godly man is energetic and has much force to it. Prayer, when exercised properly, has much force. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, produces much. It has much force to it.

No matter who you are today, no matter how long you have been saved, God simply says, if you are right with Him, if you are in fellowship with the Lord, if you will be honest with God, if you will be sincere in your praying, if you will be urgent in your praying, then those prayers will have much force to them; and God Almighty will hear and answer your prayers according to His will. If you are asking God for something and it is not the will of God that you have it, don't you worry about that. You just keep on praying; and, after a while, God will change your mind and get you to see what you are to pray for. If you don't know if it is the will of God for you to ask for something, go ahead and ask. If your heart is pure, if your heart is clean, if your heart is right with God, and you want to do the will of God, God will change your heart after a while. But until He changes your heart, ask and ask and ask until He either gives you what you asked for or until He changes your heart. Prayer was not meant to be hard. Prayer was not meant to be difficult. Prayer was meant to be the sweet experience of the child of God.

We have noticed the Scriptural statement, but notice number two, the spiritual illustration in verse seventeen. In James 5:17, the Bible says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Elijah was just like the rest of us, Brethren! He had fears. He had problems. He had difficulties. But notice what he did. The Bible says that he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. That's interesting! You don't read that in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit of God revealed that to James. You find out in the Old Testament that he prayed for the rain to come, but you never read until you come to James that he prayed for the rain to stop the first time. Somewhere along the way Elijah said, "I don't believe Ahab is going to come to his knees. I don't believe that the nation of Israel is going to come to her knees with the worship of Baal, with the following of Jezebel the Queen. I don't believe that it is going to happen unless God does something drastic."

Perhaps Elijah prayed and said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Perhaps God whispered and said, "Elijah, if you ask Me, I will stop it from raining." I don't believe God would have ever stopped it from raining if Elijah had not prayed the first time; and, if Elijah had not prayed again, it would still be dry and dusty in Israel today. Therefore, Elijah began to pray. After a while God said, "Okay, I have heard thy prayer, Elijah! You go tell Ahab I am not going to let it rain." Then the rain stopped for three and a half years.

Do you realize how long that is? You folks go a few months around here without rain and you think you are going to die. These folks went one month, and two months, and three months, and four months, and five months, and six months, and one year, and two years, and three years, and a month, and three months, and six months without any rain. It did not rain for three and a half years because Elijah prayed the heaven shut. God placed His miracle to the prayers of Elijah; and, after it was all over, Elijah said, "I think I will pray for it to rain." And he prayed.

Let me ask you something. When Elijah prayed for rain the first time, did anything happen? Not a thing. When he prayed the second time, did anything happen? Not a thing. When he prayed the third time, did anything happen? Not a thing. When he prayed the fourth time, did anything happen? Not a thing.

At this point most of you would have been concerned about your reputation. You would have been terrified that your reputation is going down the drain, that your ministry is through. Elijah could care less about his reputation. He could care less about his ministry. All he was concerned about was getting rain. Finally, after seven prayer meetings, the servant said, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." And Elijah said, "That's it. God has answered my prayer."

Hezekiah prayed. It was the prophet Isaiah who told Hezekiah to set his house in order because he was about to die. The Bible says that Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, and he wept sore.

Listen folks! Before Isaiah could leave the middle court, the Lord told Isaiah to go back and tell Hezekiah, "I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears; I will heal thee. I will add 15 years unto thy days and I will deliver thee out of the hand of the king of Assyria." Hezekiah lived fifteen more years because he prayed--for no other reason than that he prayed.

God spared Israel from destruction during their wilderness wanderings because of the intercessory prayers of Moses. God said many times, "Let me alone; I am going to destroy Israel. I am going to wipe them out." And you see Moses praying. And because of the prayers of Moses, Israel survived the wilderness.

Joshua prayed, "Sun and moon, stand thou still;" so the sun stood still, and the moon stayed in the midst of heaven and did not go down for the space of a whole day. Joshua stopped the sun and moon in its course. They stopped in their place because he prayed. They stopped because he asked God to do it.

Hanna's womb was shut up so she went to the house of God and she began to pray. Samuel was born simply because she prayed.

Do you remember Daniel who got into and out of trouble because he prayed? The Bible is full of stories just like that, and what God did He did primarily in response to prayer.

I don't know what God is going to do in your life. I don't know when God is going to do it in your life. But if God is going to do something in your life today, He is going to do it in response to your praying. And if you stop praying; and if you do not take the time or make the time for prayer, you're not going to get anything, anything at all, from God because it is your prayers that move the heart of God to action.

We have noticed the Scriptural statement; we have noticed the spiritual illustration; but notice number three, the conclusion. First, nothing must hinder you in the pursuit of prayer. If the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, you must let nothing hinder you in the pursuit of prayer. You must not be hindered by faithlessness. In Hebrews 11:6, the Bible says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

In Romans 1:17, the Apostle Paul said, "The just shall live by faith." In II Corinthians 5:7, the Bible says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." In Mark 11:22, Jesus said it this way, "Have faith in God." That's good advice!

You must not be hindered by impatience. In Luke 18:1, the Bible says, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." In Philippians 4:5, the Bible says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

You must not be hindered by known sin in your life. In Psalms 66:18, the Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." In Isaiah 59:1-2, the Bible says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

If there is anything at all in your life today that keeps you from praying, you had better get rid of it because it is not worth leaving it there.

Second, you must make time for prayer. If prayer is how you get what you need from God, and if you don't get what you need from God because you do not pray, you had better make time for prayer. Why should the preacher plead with you to pray? Why should the preacher remind you to pray? Is it because you have forgotten the great power therein? In Jeremiah 32:27, the Bible says, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?"

So let me ask you something. Is there anything too hard for God? Why then don't you act like it? Why then don't you pray? It must be that you have truly forgotten the great power therein.

Third, you must have confidence in the God of prayer. God has told you in the Word of God that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, yet you won't spend 10 minutes a day in prayer. That doesn't make much sense, does it?

If you were sold on prayer, you would rarely stop the act of praying. If you truly believe that God Almighty would give you everything that you asked for, you would rarely stop the act of praying. Why then do you go day after day with your needs being unmet, with wisdom being absent, because you do not pray?

How foolish you are! How you must anger the God of heaven when He has opened the door of promise in Jeremiah 33:3, which says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." And you wont spend 10 minutes a day in prayer. That doesn't make much sense, does it?

Dad and mom, your children are going through some things today that they would not have to go through, things that it is not the will of God that they go through; but they are going through them because you are not spending time with the Lord in prayer. Grandpa and grandma, your children and grandchildren are going through some things they would not have to go through, things that it is not the will of God that they go through; but they are going through them because you are not spending time with the Lord in prayer; and it doesn't have to be that way.

There are a lot of things that God wants to do, that God desires to do, and that God would do but does not do because no one prayed. We are going to be shocked, when we get to heaven, at the things that God wanted to do, that God desired to do, that God would have done but did not do because no one took the time or made the time for prayer.

What a shame that is!

How is a Person Saved?

Salvation is all of God. God does the saving. Just take God at His Word and claim His salvation by faith. You will never be able to work your way into heaven. God does not have a scale in heaven whereby He weighs your good and bad works. That is a lie of the Devil – Romans 3:24; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:18; Romans 5:8.

Salvation is as simple as believing on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead – John 1:12, 3:16, 6:47; Acts 16:31; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 10:13.

Simply admit that you are a sinner and believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Saviour. You will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith – Romans 3:10, 23; I Corinthians 15:3-4.

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you some 2,000 years ago on Calvary's cross. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him more than to save you today.

Won't you go to Him right now in prayer and tell Him in your own words that you will trust Him as your Saviour? Or pray this simple prayer: Dear Lord, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for me and that He arose from the grave. Here and now I ask You to forgive me of my sin and save me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

If you prayed that simple prayer, I would like to hear from you. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (813) 760-4028.

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