

James 5:13-20

Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. ¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

I think it would be valuable for me to spend just a minute or two to introduce you to the author of this little book. You see, there are three men in the New Testament named James so it's important to know who which one is responsible for the words we just read together. This man is called James the Just because of his unimpeachable character and conduct. He is in fact the step-brother of the Lord Jesus mentioned in Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. And by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.... and Galatians 2:9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. He was the leader of the Jerusalem church and was martyred in either 62 or 69 AD when he was thrown off the pinnacle of the Temple and beaten to death with clubs.

There is one other very interesting anecdote about the life of James the Just. It is said that he would spend many hours each day praying on his knees in the Temple for the people to be forgiven of their sins, so much so that he developed calluses on his knees and he was said to have the "knees of a camel," and if you have ever seen a camel either in person or in a picture you can see why he received this label, so the title of the message today is "Christians, Camels, and Calluses!" James was a man of prayer and there is much that we can learn from his example.

First, let's look at the key phrase in this passage:

"... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

I. The Opportunity of Prayer

a. An examination of prayer in Scripture

There is every reason to believe that after Adam and Eve were expelled for the garden of Eden, where that they talked to God face to face, that they communicated with God in prayer and that it was primarily private prayer but in the 4th chapter of Genesis we read the following:

Genesis 4:26 To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call upon the name of the LORD.

I could be wrong but it seems that at this point prayer became a regular part of corporate worship.

b. An example of prayer by a Servant

The first thing that James does is to remind us of the humanity of Elijah, that he was a "...man of like passions..." which means that he was not super-human or exceptional in any respect. In other words, he was just like us! The key word in verse 17 is "earnestly," which is translated intensity and indicates that this was a prayer of great concentration, passion and power. How many of us can say this about our prayers. Many Christians don't pray at all while many others pray as a matter of habit or tradition but real prayer, prayers that get heaven's attention are characterized by an intensity of mind, heart and soul! It is an "all in" kind of praying!

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

c. An exhortation to prayer from the Savior

Luke 11:1 reads, It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."

There is much to learn from this passage beyond the significant Lord's Prayer that follows it. For one, we learn that what sparked the unnamed disciples' curiosity to learn about prayer was the fact that he saw Jesus in prayer.

We also learn that John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray and, as a result, the disciples of Jesus were also interested in learning to pray, or at least one of them was! Isn't it interesting that out of all the disciples only one of them asked Jesus to teach them to pray? It sometimes seems the church is in a similar situation today regarding prayer. We talk about prayer, we study prayer, we say our prayers, but how many of us actually seek earnestly for God to teach us to pray?

Why did Jesus pray?

One way we can learn to pray is by looking at the prayer life of Jesus. Although the Gospels don't provide a detailed biography of Christ, they do offer some captivating glimpses into His prayer life. First, however, it will be helpful to answer the question, "Why did Jesus pray?" This is sometimes puzzling for Christians. After all, if Jesus is God, why did Christ need to pray?

Theologically speaking, there are at least three reasons that Jesus prayed. First, Jesus prayed as an example to his followers. This is an example we continue to learn from, as these verses demonstrate. Second, the Incarnation consists of both divine and human natures. From His human nature, it was perfectly natural for a Jewish believer such as Christ to pray. Third, the nature of the Trinity allows for communication between its members. As God the Son, Jesus could pray to God the Father.

Jesus prayed for others. In Matthew 19:13, we read, " Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; " Despite the fact that "the disciples rebuked those who brought them," Jesus said the children should not be hindered "for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (v. 14). In John 17:9 we read, "I [Jesus] ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;" This underscores the need for intercessory prayer.

Jesus prayed with others. Luke 9:28 reads, "He [Jesus] took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray." Jesus prayed alone, as we'll read below, but He also knew the value of praying with others. Acts 1:14 underscores the importance of Christians praying with one another: "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer..."

Jesus prayed alone. Luke 5:16 reads, "But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray." As much as Jesus understood the value of praying with and for others, He also understood the need to pray alone. Psalm 46:10 reads, "Be still, and know that I am God. (ESV)" Sometimes it's important for us to "be still" before God, but the only way to do this, especially in our hectic culture, is to do so alone with God.

Jesus could pray as a sprinter or a marathon runner. The Lord's Prayer is full of wisdom, but it is short enough to be easily memorized and serve as an example of a sprint rather than a marathon prayer. But Jesus also knew how to dedicate long periods of time to prayer. As we read in Luke 6:12, Jesus "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." We, too, need to be able to offer short prayers, as well dedicate long periods of our lives to prayer.

Jesus prayed regularly. This insight is gleaned from a passage cited earlier, Luke 5:16: "But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray." The word "often" is not hidden, but makes it obvious that Jesus prayed regularly. Throughout the Gospels whenever we read of Jesus and prayer, it comes up regularly and naturally. It was simply a part of His worldview, integrated into every aspect of Christ's life. Can we say the same about prayer in our life?

The prayers of Jesus were heartfelt. Jesus did not pray in a cold, distant manner, but in heartfelt supplication, demonstrating empathy and a genuine love for God. This is demonstrated clearly in John 17, where Jesus prays for Himself, His immediate disciples, as well as for all believers.

Jesus prayed based on His knowledge of God and His truths. The prayers of Jesus were based on God's revealed truths and, as such, were in line with a solid biblical worldview. In John 4:24 Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." He also said, "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32), underscoring the importance of truth in the life of Jesus and, in turn, our lives. Proper prayer requires us to have a truthful understanding of God and what He has revealed to us through His Word.

Jesus taught persistence in prayer. In Luke 18:1 it says "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart". The parable Jesus shared is not meant to depict a pestering disciple who finally bugs God enough that He chooses to respond, but about persistence in prayer and waiting on God and His timing.

Jesus knew that not all his prayers would be answered as expected. This is a difficult prayer lesson to learn, but the fact of the matter is that not all our prayers are answered in ways we expect. Even Jesus knew this hard lesson as he cried out to God the Father from Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44). Three times Jesus prayed for God to allow an easier path, but Jesus knew, "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (26:39). Unanswered prayer is such a challenge to the Christian life.

II. The Operation of Prayer

"... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

a. Prayer must be structured

Prayer must be both intelligent and intentional. Remember that we are praying to the "omniscient One," and that our prayers are interaction between the finite men with an infinite, all-knowing, all-seeing being who is the Creator of all things and the controller of all things. A few years ago Pastor Tim taught a simple yet profound acronym that helps us to pray intelligently and intentionally. It is ACTS which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Our prayers must be thoughtful and based on the truth of who we are praying too!

b. Prayer must be sincere

A literal rendering of this last section would read: "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." First, there is the issue of a "righteous man," and this is important. It does not say a perfect man but a man who has been made righteous through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has "...put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and is living by faith. Notice that the first response of Isiah the prophet in chapter 6, after he had seen the Lord, was to confess that, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

Psalms 66:18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (ESV)

c. Prayer must be sustained

We not only have the opportunity to pray but we also should practice "importunity" in prayer. This word means persistence, insistence, and also pestering, and we know what that means. Jesus told a story about a widow and an unjust judge that illustrates this truth.

In Luke 18:1-8 we read about the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. Have you ever heard that, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease?" This a classic example of this principle. Judges in Jesus day were political appointees and the public had no confidence in them. This widow would have been over 60 years old with no male family member to help or support her. We don't know what her issue was but we do know that she kept coming and "pecking" and "pestering" this judge and until he gave in to her! That is what the word importunity means. It means don't quit, be persistent and "keep on keeping on."

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

Galatians 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

d. Prayer must be strident

This is not a "now I lay me down to sleep" type of praying, that is fine for children but those who would have a mature prayer life must "strive" in prayer. The word "fervent" is important. Literally the etymology of that word is "boiling, hot, glowing." Figuratively it means "violent, impetuous, furious." One of the early uses of the word is "empassioned." While our prayers probably should not be "violent, impetuous and furious" they certainly should be passionate.

There is an example of this type of prayer in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Romans 15:30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

Luke 22:44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

The Greek word is a one from which we get our English word "agonize." Epaphras agonized in prayer, Paul called the Romans to agonize together with him in prayer and Jesus himself agonized in prayer!

III. The Outcome of Prayer

"...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (NLT)"

This passage literally means that that "prayer has much force or power...when it is exercised."

a. The energy of prayer

Availeth much comes from a Greek word that is translated "energy." Prayer is powerful, forceful, and effectual!

Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan. ~ John Bunyan

Prayer is an effort of will. ~ Oswald Chambers

Our prayer and God's mercy are like two buckets in a well; while one ascends, the other descends. ~ Arthur Hopkins

If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and un-prayed for. ~ Spurgeon

It is because of the hasty and superficial conversation with God that the sense of sin is so weak and that no motives have power to help you to hate and flee from sin as you should. ~ A.W. Tozer

Prayer is not monologue, but dialogue. God's voice in response to mine is its most essential part. ~ Andrew Murray

Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees. ~ Corrie Ten Boom

Prayer is the acid test of devotion. ~ Samuel Chadwick

Prayer -- secret, fervent, believing prayer -- lies at the root of all personal godliness. ~ Williams Carey

The power of prayer does not flow from us; it is not special words we say or the special way we say them or even how often we say them. The power of prayer is not based on a certain direction we face or a certain position of our bodies. The power of prayer does not come from the use of artifacts or icons or candles or beads. The power of prayer comes from the omnipotent One who hears our prayers and answers them. Prayer places us in contact with Almighty God, and we should expect almighty results,

whether or not He chooses to grant our petitions or deny our requests. Whatever the answer to our prayers, the God to whom we pray is the source of the power of prayer, and He can and will answer us, according to His perfect will and timing.

b. The exercise of prayer

Passionate prayer is powerful when it is put into practice! S. E. Trail

Jesus said this about prayer. "... You do not have because you do not ask and in James 4:3 he writes, "... You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives."

Have you ever thought about what happens when we are negligent in prayer? Many of the books written by avid prayer warriors point out that the reason the world is in the condition it's in today is because God's people don't pray. The authors are quick to add that there is a definite union between prayer and God's accomplishing His work in this world. One isn't done without the other. In His great wisdom, you see, God made prayer the essential work of man that drives the essential work of God.

So what happens if we neglect to pray? Does that keep the Sovereign God of the universe from carrying out His work? In some instances, "Yes." Or at the very least, our omission to pray delays the work of God. Although He will ultimately accomplish His purposes, sometimes it may take longer simply because we failed to pray as we should.

What does this say to us then? It means we must persist in prayer for that lost one. We mustn't give up on getting an answer to a difficult decision. We must keep taking it again and again to the Lord in prayer, spending time with the Father while pouring out our hearts to Him in love and adoration. Bottom line, we must know the One who created us so intimately that prayer becomes like a next breath.

If we would pray as God desires us to pray, we would see amazing and miraculous happenings take place in our world. As it is, we see them only occasionally. That's not because God cannot do them--or doesn't want to do them--it's because we quit asking Him to do them.

Prayer is the work He has given us to do so that He can finish the work He wants to do. It would behoove us to pray that God will help us not neglect the obligation He gave us to pray. His will may be waiting on us.

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness." Martin Luther

c. The excuse for not praying

1. "I'm too busy!"

(Jesus had a packed ministry schedule but he made time to pray.)

2. "I don't know how to do it right."

(How about just try talking to God like you would a friend?)

3. "It doesn't work anyway."

(That's not how Jesus or the early church treated it. So neither should we.)

4. "Prayer just changes us, not situations."

(Who told you that, the providence fairy? It changes both!)

5. "I don't sound good when I pray."

(Look true prayer is a heart utterance, not a speech competition.)

6. "I'd rather read the Bible than pray."

(Without both it's just a one-way conversation.)

7. "God won't take me seriously."

(Yeah, especially if you never talk to him. So start now!)

8. "It feels weird."

(So does the skin of a pineapple but it tastes great underneath. Remember if you do it you will get used to it.)

9. "People may mock me if they see me praying."

(Good! Persecution toughens you up! Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.)

10. "I wouldn't know where to begin."

(How about using the Lord's Prayer as a way to grease the tracks? In Matthew 6:9-13 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ 'Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'])

There is a great deal of hypocrisy in the lives of most Christians but it is especially harmful in the area of prayer. I looked online and the average preacher prays 9 minutes a day on average; (makes you wonder what the average is for laymen.) We are told to "pray without ceasing" but many don't pray at all unless it's in a crisis. We have the privilege of communicating with our Creator but many do not think it is important. In closing I would like to read the lyrics of an inspiring song by Albert Simpson Reitz called

Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray; This is my heart-cry day unto day; I long to know Thy will and Thy way; Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray.

2 - Power in prayer, Lord, power in prayer! Here 'mid earth's sin and sorrow and care, Men lost and dying, souls in despair; O give me power, power in prayer!

3 - My weakened will, Lord, Thou canst renew; My sinful nature Thou canst subdue; Fill me just now with power anew; Power to pray and power to do!

4 - Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray; Thou art my pattern day unto day; Thou art my surety, now and for aye; Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray.

Living in Thee, Lord, and Thou in me, Constant abiding, this is my plea; Grant me Thy power, boundless and free, Power with men and power with Thee.

Let's pray. Father God you are awesome. We come before you confessing that we are not perfect and we need you. We thank you for loving us so much and for giving your son to save us! Father we ask that you would teach us to pray! We thank you and pray in Jesus name. AMEN

ACTS Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication