

Authentic Christianity
Pray like Elijah
James 5:16-18

March 21, 2021 am

HDBC

One of the greatest preachers of the church lived during the fourth century and was part of the church at Antioch in Syria. His name was John, but because of his ability to effectively communicate the Word, he was given a nickname that history still remembers him by. Chrysostom. It means **golden-mouthed**. It was a well-deserved title that is illustrated by his statement on the power of prayer.

The potency of prayer has subdued the strength of fire, it has bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest, extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the fates of heaven, assuaged diseases, dispelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt.

There is (in it) a treasure undiminished, a mine which is never exhausted, a sky unobscured by clouds, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings!

In this statement he reveals some of the potency of prayer that is taught and illustrated in the Bible. And he does not exaggerate. There is no hyperbole in his words. What he has declared is truth. He elaborated in **rich illustration** what James stated with **simple directness**.

So, let's look at James 5:16-18. James invites us to **Pray like Elijah**. In the text we'll see two things. **A Powerful Statement** and **A Personal Example**.

Read the Text

1. A Powerful Statement (16)

After offering instructions on how to pray for the sick, James offers a statement of truth about prayer, intended to encourage us to practice what he has taught. That is **how** you should pray (13-16). Here is **why** you should pray (16-18). The most important person when it comes to the results of prayer is God. If God does not work in response to our prayer, nothing happens and nothing matters.

However, we are instructed to pray and God promises to respond when we do. Here, James deals with our part, which is to pray. He reveals two needed ingredients for powerful, effective praying. Here they are.

1) Righteousness

What does it mean to be a righteous person? Three important elements.

a. confession of sin

No one is completely sinless. The righteous person is quick to confess sin as soon as awareness of sin happens. Refusal to let sin remain. Deal with sin quickly and effectively.

Don't miss the statement about confessing our sins to each other found here. Though it has a connection to praying for healing, there is also spiritual benefit to confession of sins to other believers beyond the specific situation of praying for the sick.

In his book Life Together Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared some important benefits of voluntary mutual confession of sins. He points out that sin leads to isolation. It drives believers apart and produces an unhealthy individualism. He wrote *sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.* Confession destroys that isolation and pulls believers back into the necessary community.

The most important confession of our sins is to Christ. But don't underestimate the power and importance of mutual confession in building unity and strength in the church community.

b. determination to resist temptation

The idea is that the intent of the heart is to resist temptation. To say **no** to the enemy and remain pure in Christ. It is recognition that temptation is a tactic of the enemy to weaken us and cause us to be ineffective. The righteous person intentionally determines to resist temptation, knowing that it is a reality of life. We are not above temptation and will not be as long as we are in this life.

c. **determination to grow in Christ**

The righteous person builds into his life the things that will help him grow in your faith. Bible reading, study and memorization. Fellowship with God in prayer. Fellowship with other believers in worship. It involves a recognition that we must not remain stagnant in our spiritual growth.

To be righteous is to be real in your relationship to the Lord. Not merely going through the motions. *Andrew Murray* wrote; **The effective prayer of faith comes from a life given up to the will and the love of God. Not as a result of what I try to be when praying, but because of what I am when I'm not praying, is my prayer answered by God.**

2) **Energy**

Effective – *energeo*. We get our word *energy* from this word. Power. Ability. To bring about action. Praying with passion, energy, fervency. Speaks of a depth in praying that requires us to expend energy.

Watchman Nee, Christian Reader, Vol. 34. **Our prayers lay the track down on which God's power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails.**

When a person is clean before God prays with passion & energy, God responds. Note what James wrote. The prayer of that person **can accomplish much**. Literally means *is very strong or very powerful*.

2. **A Personal Example (17-18)**

There were many examples in the Old Testament that James could have used. I think about **Moses** praying for his people when they sinned against the Lord. I think about **David whose psalms** point to a man who had an intimacy with God that could only come from one who prayed. **Hannah** who desperately cried out to the Lord for a child.

But James points us to Elijah as a personal example of one who prayed. In doing so, he calls on us to learn from Elijah and ultimately to pray like Elijah.

1) **He was just a man, like us**

When his Hebrew readers saw the name Elijah, they probably had the same thoughts that we did. Sure, Elijah could pray and make it stop

raining, but I'm no Elijah. He was, in their minds, like a superhero. He courageously did spiritual battle against the prophets of Baal and won. He showed up with Moses on the mountain to meet with Jesus and three of the disciples. He was larger than life.

There may have been no other character in the O.T. more **captivating** than Elijah. He saw it all and seemed to experience it all, even to the way he left earth and went to Heaven without dying. Chariot of fire in the middle of a whirlwind. He was certainly not cheated when it came to life experiences! He is associated with power and prayer!

However, James makes it abundantly clear that Elijah was no superman. Like us, he was a frail human being who was able to witness and experience the power of God, primarily through prayer. James' point . . . we can experience that power as well.

2) He prayed with passion

He prayed **earnestly**. Literally, **he prayed with prayer**.

Hebrew expression giving intensity. There was a depth to his praying. It was purposeful, determined and passionate!

3) He prayed according to the will of God

He was praying according to the will of God. That is clear in the illustration James mentions. He could pray with confidence and faith because God had spoken. God had been very specific with Elijah about the drought and about the end of the drought. Elijah's prayer was not something that he decided but which had been decided by God. Effective prayer is prayer that aligns with God's revealed will.

3. A Few Takeaways

To pray like Elijah . . .

1. Be Biblical

Elijah prayed according to the will of God. We are not likely to hear the voice of God with our ears but we can read the words of God in the Bible. Make sure your prayers are in line with the Scriptures. **Don't pray for God to bless your sinfulness. He will not. Don't pray for God to bless your dating relationship if that relationship is outside the revealed will of God.**

Don't ask God to bless your **finances** if you are not being faithful with your money, especially when it comes to honesty & generosity.

Our best prayers do not originate with us but with God. The best prayers are those prompted by God, then prayed back to Him by us. For us to pray like Elijah we must be in great fellowship with God. We must be able to hear from Him, to sense His promptings.

2. **Be specific**

We are so prone to pray in vague generalities. *Bless her. Be with him. Help her.* Elijah prayed specifically about rain at a place and time. The same was true when he prayed will doing spiritual combat with the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. As you pray, be as specific as you can.

3. **Be trusting**

Trust without reservation that God's answer to your prayer will be right. Trust His timing, His ability and His wisdom. Recognize that there are two of you involved in prayer, you and God. And of the two, only one is sovereign, and that one is God. Trust Him with the timing & the answer.

John Newton, the slave-trader-turned-pastor and hymn writer believed in what he called **large asking**.

When explaining what he meant, Newton would often cite a legendary story of a man who asked Alexander the Great to give him a huge sum of money in exchange for his daughter's hand in marriage. Alexander agreed, and told the man to request of Alexander's treasurer whatever he wanted. So, the father of the bride went and asked for an enormous amount.

The treasurer was startled and said he could not give out that kind of money without a direct order. Going to Alexander, the treasurer argued that even a small fraction of the money requested would more than serve the purpose. **No**, replied Alexander, **let him have it all. I like that fellow. He does me honor. He treats me like a king and proves by what he asks that he believes me to be both rich and generous.**

Newton concluded: **In the same way, we should go to the throne of God's grace and present petitions that express honorable views of the love, riches, and bounty of our King.**