



# PRAYER: THE EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER

*“13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 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. 17 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. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. 19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”*

- James 5:13-20

## **Prayer: The Effectual Fervent Prayer**

For many of us, the problem of us getting along with other people is our inability to get along with ourselves. Everything visible and physical is preceded by something invisible and spiritual. The consequences we are dealing with in our lives, in our homes, in our culture, we are dealing with them because there is a gap between where God is and where we are.

He wants to know that you want Him and not just want His stuff. See, a lot of folks go to church to get God's stuff, but who don't want the God who gives it. So, if you're in distress, don't let that drive you away, draw you near.

When you get close and want to live for Him, want to please Him, want to honor Him, want to exalt Him, want to draw near to Him, then Heaven opens up and He lets you find Him. He lets you find Him. For many of us, prayer is like the national anthem before a sporting event.

It gets us started but has absolutely no connection to what's happening in our lives. We do it because it's tradition. We're supposed to.

It's paying homage while being totally disconnected from the field of play of our lives. And yet, it is the dominant theme of James. In chapter 5 verses 13 through 18, you see the word pray or prayer in every verse. So, for James, this is a big deal. I hope to explain to us today why. God has a conditional will and an unconditional will.

God's will is what He determines to happen, but it can happen in one of two ways. It can happen unconditionally or conditionally. God's unconditional will is when He determines what will happen irrespective of what anybody else does.

That is, it's not conditioned on us or anybody else because He's going to decide that it happens and He's going to cause it to happen without any human involvement. That is His unconditional will. It's not conditioned on our actions or non-actions because He sovereignly decided to make it come to pass all by Himself.

That is His unconditional will. But God's conditional will is different. There are many things He's decided to not let happen until He gets cooperation from earth.

There are many things that He's decided He will not bring from heaven into history unless there is human cooperation with His desire and design. One of the primary mechanisms that God has established to determine much of what He does on earth and in your life and in my life is conditioned by the absence or presence of prayer. James says in chapter 4 verses 1 to 3, you have not because you ask not.

Or when you ask, you ask with the wrong motive. He says, "I wanted to give it to you, but you never came to me for it, so you don't have it. It wasn't because I didn't want to give it, it was because you didn't cooperate with getting it because it was part of my conditional will."

Prayer is relational communication with God. And the goal of prayer is to draw from heaven into history. The goal of prayer is to get eternity to make a statement in time. It is to make heaven visible on earth. It is to get God to touch humanity. The goal of prayer is that up there might do something, fix something, or change something down here.

Now, the problem is you don't always know what's conditional and what's unconditional. Some things are clear, but other things you're not sure. That's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5.17, you better pray without ceasing.

You better bring it all to God so you don't miss nothing. Because all the time it's not clear which way God is operating from. Without prayer, you become limited to the physical.

But the only reason you pray is to get the spiritual God to enter into the physical. The passport to leave the physical and enter the spiritual is in one word in Scripture, and that word is prayer. Now, let me explain.

Prayer does not get God to do something he doesn't want to do. Because you can't make God do something. But what prayer does is access what he already wants to do.

That he has conditioned on your participation and mine. I love Isaiah 65 verse 24. Isaiah 65 verse 24 says, Oh, did you follow that? Before you prayed, I have already answered the prayer.

This concept of prayer is distributing eternity into time. You remember when the disciples were asked by Jesus, how are we going to feed 5,000 men, not counting women and children, 15 to 20,000 people? And they said, we don't know. But they found a little boy with two fish, five barley loaves of bread.

They brought him to Jesus, because there's a problem. How are we going to feed all these people? The Bible says Jesus looked up to heaven and he prayed. And he invited God into the problem.

And all men did was distribute what the supernatural had provided. So help me out. If Jesus had to pray to get his heavenly father to do something up there, to change something down here, how much do you and I need to pray to get God to do something up there that we need him to do down here? Verse 13.

Is anyone among you suffering? Suffering. Suffering meant to be going through a difficult period of time. Suffering means you are hurting. Something is hurting you. It could be physical hurt, financial hurt, circumstantial hurt, relational hurt. All you know is you're in pain. You are suffering. James says, if you are hurting because of circumstances, you must pray. He goes on in verse 13.

Notice what he says. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. It is honoring the Lord physically and verbally. There's no such thing as silent praise. You can have silent worship, but you can't have silent praise. Praise is always visual and vocal. That's why he says sing praises to the Lord. Wait a minute.

Let's rewind. If you're in pain, pray. If you're not in pain, you're not sad but you're glad, praise.

Well, hold it. You're either one or the other. You're either in pain or you're cheerful.

If you're in pain, talk to God. If you're not in pain, praise God. Which means that you're always communicating with God because you're either in pain or in praise.

So, God wants to hear from you all day nonstop as a way of life. He wants you to thread him into every aspect of your day either in prayer or in praise because you're either in pain or you're in praise. Verse 14, is anyone among you sick? Now the Greek word for sick means to be weary.

That's what the word means. It means to be weary. What happens when you get weary, no matter what's caused the weariness? Then let him call on the elders of the church and they are to pray over him.

In verse 13, you are praying for you. Anyone suffering, let him pray. But in verse 14, you need help because your prayers are not getting through.

In fact, you don't even feel like praying anymore. When life beats you down long enough, deep enough, you can get tired of dealing with God. So, he says, go to the elders of the church.

That should represent the spiritual leadership of the church to get support for a breakthrough you have not been able to get on your own. That's why you're to be a part of a local church so that when you can't go on, somebody else can keep you going on. You're not to be a lone ranger Christian.

Reminds me of the story in Mark chapter 2, verses 1 to 12. You got a lame man, a paralyzed man. He can't get up. He can't get up. He'd been laying there a long time and he couldn't get up. But he had four boys. He had four posse, four of his homies. They came and it says, and they picked him up and took him to the house where Jesus was. It says they cut a hole in the roof and let him down in front of Jesus.

And then it says when Jesus saw their faith, not the man's faith he was laying down, when he saw his homie's faith, when he saw the four brothers who picked him up, when he saw their faith, he healed the man. Oil has all these multiplicity of usages in the Bible. He says when that member comes to the elders, you are to pray for them but then anoint them.

In other words, have the church minister to them at the point of their need. Pour oil on them, verse 15, and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick. The prayer offered in faith, here's a word, I love this word, we need this word, restores. To restore something is to bring it back to its original intent. When something breaks, you restore it, you try to bring it back to its original intent.

God is a restoring God. In the wearinesses of life, he makes an astounding promise. He says God will restore. Now let me clarify. We know that everybody who gets physically sick doesn't always get well or they may get partially well, or they may be just a little better. We know that perfect health is not always restored in every situation.

We know it is sometimes but it's not all the time. Yes, sometimes God takes you out but other times he walks with you through. Other times he walks beside you.

He restores you emotionally even though you're waiting for him to restore you circumstantially or physically. Sometimes he does both. But the restore here is to remove the weariness while you still trust him for the solution.

He says the prayer of faith will heal the sick. It will remove the weariness. And the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, because maybe he didn't, but if he has, they will be forgiven him. Why do we pray for one another? That our circumstances change and if necessary that sin get addressed because sin can keep you sick. All sickness is not due to sin, but sickness can be caused by sin.

First Corinthians 11 makes it clear many are sick, many are weak among you. Why? Because of unaddressed sin. Therefore, confess your sins to one another.

He says in verse 16, acknowledge the sin that's created the weariness for which you need to repent. He says confess to one another and then he says and prays for one another. So, you only confess to somebody who's going to pray for you, not talk about you.

So, the confess to is the pray for. He says that you may be healed, that you may be delivered from or through whatever is taking place in your life. Now he makes a summary statement.

Stay with me here in verse 16. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Effective, the word there means energized. Remember to energize a bunny? The energized prayer. An energized prayer is a focused prayer. It is a prayer that is God-centered.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, he says, can accomplish much. And then he gives an illustration. So, stick with me because this is a doozy.

He says in verse 17 and 18, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. However, this ordinary man was a prophet. It says, he prayed, notice the word earnestly. He wasn't being casual. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

That's three and a half years. Then he prayed again, verse 17 says, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. So, watch this now. He prayed, and he closed heaven down for three and a half years. He's on earth, but he's praying to heaven, and he shut heaven down when it came to rain. Three and a half years later, he prayed again, and he opened heaven up.

Heaven didn't just close and open on its own. It says he prayed, and it closed. He prayed, and it opened.

Ah, so let's go back and see what really happened in 1 Kings chapter 18, because that's where this event took place. He prays beginning in verse 36, but then he comes to verse 41. And Elijah said to Ahab, go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower.

He says, "I hear a thunderstorm coming on." Now, let me start. Stay with me.

Why did he pray this? I mean, what made him pray for this in the first place? Well, look at chapter 17, verse 1. Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except at my word. Oh, now read chapter 18, verse 1. Now it happened after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, go, show

yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth. Oh, in chapter 17, verse 1, God said it's not going to rain.

In chapter 18, verse 1, God said it is going to rain. So why do you need to know that? Because Elijah didn't just make this up. He was praying based on what God had said. God said it's not going to rain. God said it is going to rain. So, he prayed, watch this, based on God's word. So, the first thing you need to know is you need to pray with your Bible open. You need to pray and say, God, you said this. Let me show you in case you forgot.

God, you said this, and I'm holding you to your word. You said this, I believe this, so I'm going to pray for this. The Bible is full of prayers that you should pray.

When you're struggling, there's Psalm 42. You pray Psalm 42. When you're repentant, there's Psalm 51. You pray Psalm 51. When you are afraid, there's Psalm 34. You pray Psalm 34. You point God back to his word because God has held his word high above his name. So, you start with the word of God about the situation that you faced. All right, let's go on.

He goes on to say, "I hear the sound. I hear the sound, there's a storm coming on." Verse 42, and Ahab went up to eat and drink, but Elisha went up to the top of Mount Carmel and crouched down on the earth.

He goes up to Mount Carmel and it says he crouched down, put his head between his knees. So, he took the posture of a pregnant woman who was in labor. The Bible calls it travail. He was in labor, and he said, "I need some rain. I want some rain. I'm going to push and push and push till I get some rain."

Oh, you know what God wants you to do? He wants you to birth his will from heaven into history by calling it down, drawing it down, pushing it down until that baby of deliverance, that baby of healing, that baby of victory comes forth. This is serious praying. This is not casual praying.

This is crying out, why? Why do I have to work so hard? Because Satan is trying to block your prayer from getting through. It says he said to his servant, go now, look toward the sea. So, he went and looked and said, there is nothing.



He said, servant, go to the sea and look for the storm. The servant went out and said, oh, Elijah, there's no storm out here. But wait a minute, we just read Elijah heard the sound of a storm.

But the servant went out and he didn't see a storm. So, he told his servant, he told his servant to go back seven times. He says, "I want you to go back seven times" in verse 43.

Why seven? Because seven in the Bible is the number of completion. Whenever you see the word seven, it means something has been brought to completion. Sometimes people say, how long should I pray for something? How long should I talk to God? I've been praying for this for years and nothing has happened.

How long should I pray? Well, let me explain something. God only has three answers. Yes, no, or wait.

If he hadn't said yes, and he hadn't said no, that means wait. So, what you do while you wait, you pray till you get a yes or a no. You pray to completion.

When he went out the seventh time, he said, "I saw a cloud coming out of the sea like the size of a man's fist." You know how small a cloud that is? He said, "I just saw a little cloud. I don't see a storm."

I just saw a little fist-sized cloud. Elijah said, he said after the seventh time and he saw the cloud, Ahab, prepare your chariot, verse 44, and go down so the heavy shower does not stop you. He didn't let him see a shower.

He let him see a cloud. See, sometimes when God's ready to move, he isn't going to let you see the whole thing. He just lets you see a little something, something to give you a taste.

That's why the Bible says, Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. He may not give you the whole meal. He may just give you a sample plate. That means that the meal, sometimes God gives you an appetizer. He isn't ready to feed you the whole meal. He's just giving you something, something so that you know what you have to look forward to.

So, he says, we only got a fist, but there's a shower. So, watch this now. He tells Ahab, get in your chariot and go, because this storm is going to get ready to break out. So, get in your chariot and go. That means a horse is pulling the chariot. He's got to go 15 miles from where he is to Jezreel. So, Ahab gets in there and he's riding his horse, but I don't want you to miss the end of verse 46. Then the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel. No, you didn't. Ahab is on a horse. Ahab is riding a horse.

Oh, Elijah picks up his cloak, ties it up and he hoofs it. He hoofs it and he outruns a horse to Jezreel. I believe Isaiah put it this way. They that wait upon the Lord will have new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get weary. They will walk and not faint.

Somebody ought to be willing to touch heaven because the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. I don't just want to preach about prayer, talk about prayer. If you are weary or suffering or hurting, then why don't we do what we just preached about? Are there any Elijah's in the house? One day he prays that it stops raining.

The next time he prays that it starts raining and heaven responds. That's the power of prayer, getting heaven to respond to your earthly request for supernatural intervention. Heaven is wanting to do it, waiting to do it, willing to do it.

How badly do you need him to do it? Well, if you're not praying, if I'm not praying, we're not needing him to do it very much. And if we are praying and we're doing it with the mindset that we want to see his work being done in and through us in time and space, God pays us a lot of attention and he answers a lot of prayers. Let's see some more heaven opening and closing because we prayed, because we're righteous people and we're praying fervently and we're expecting a lot.