

"WHY PRAYERS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN PREVAILED"

James 5:16-18

INTRODUCTION: Answered prayer is essential for the spiritual well-being of believers.

A. **"Prayer is to the soul what breathing is to the body."**

1. Breathing is a matter of life and death. People with severe respiratory problems such as asthma, allergies and emphysema are usually *frail physically*.

2. **Prayer is necessary for a strong, healthy spiritual life.** Those with problems of maintaining a strong prayer life can expect to be *frail spiritually*.

B. James tells us **who, how, and what** is essential in getting our prayers answered.

1. He also teaches us the importance of righteous living. **Don't lose sight of it and don't minimize it. It is just as essential as heart-felt praying,**

C. James' statement in **v.16b** is based on biblical fact and history **as indicated by his reference to Elijah in vs. 17-18**

1. James' message is this: **Prayer is a mighty force.** Proof of this is seen in the success of Elijah's prayer. **Speaking of prayer as a might force:**

2. The **late J. Edgar Hoover, past director of the F.B.I.**, said, "The spectacle of a nation praying is *more awe inspiring than the explosion of an atomic bomb*. The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man made or man-controlled powers, because **prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the infinite resources of God.**"

3. **In I Kings chaps. 17-18** we see how that Elijah's prayers turned Israel back to God and delivered them. Ours prayers can turn our loved ones and sinners to God and deliverance. ***Some will say, "But I'm not Elijah."***

a. Important to remember Elijah was ***"a man subject to like passions such as we are."*** **Spiritual high and lows and difficulties, YET he tapped the infinite resources of God through prayer. So can you and I.**

3. **Prayer is not a waste of time, it is time gained.** Prayer is what provides the **cutting edge for believers in their work for Christ in this life.**

"ILLUSTRATION ON PRAYER" - Some years ago a young man approached the foreman of a logging crew and asked for a job. "That depends," replied

the foreman. "Let's see you fell this tree." The young man stepped forward and skillfully felled a great tree. Impressed, the foreman exclaimed, "You can Start Monday!" The young man reported to work.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday rolled by, and Thursday after-noon the foreman approached the young man and said, "You can pick up your paycheck on the way out today."

Startled, the young man replied, "I thought you paid on Friday." "Normally we do," answered the foreman, "but we're letting you go today because **you've fallen behind**. Our daily felling charts show that you've dropped from first place on Monday to last on Wednesday."

"But I'm a hard worker," the young man objected. "I arrive first, leave last, and even have worked through my coffee breaks!"

The foreman, sensing the boy's integrity thought for a minute and then asked, "Have you been sharpening your ax?"

The young man replied, "I've been working too hard to take the time."

How about you? Have you been too busy, too hard at work to sharpen your ax?

Prayer is the hone (WHET) that gives you that sharp edge. Without it, the more work you do, the duller you'll get, **AND LESS EFFECTIVE YOU ARE**.

WE MUST PRAY LIKE IT'S UP TO GOD AND WORK LIKE IT IS UP TO US!!

PRAYER HINDERS SATAN - SATAN HINDERS PRAYER!!

4. James undoubtedly could have named other men of prayer from Bible history who had **tapped the infinite resources of God through prayer**.

E. There are *certain elements or qualities* in a *righteous person's life* that **moves God to do things in answer to prayer that He would not do without these elements or qualities**.

1. This message deals with these elements in the lives of righteous men whose prayers prevailed.

I. ABRAHAM PREVAILED BECAUSE OF COMMITMENT

A. Genesis Chapter 22 tells of the severe testing of Abraham's faith.

1. **Remember**, Abraham was an alter builder!! Worship and communion with God was important to him and it paid off for him!

Gen 22:2-3 *"And he (GOD) said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. 3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."*

2. **We're not told it**, but undoubtedly each step Abraham took in obedience was

supported by a prayer of trust and commitment to God.

3. When God saw his commitment to His will, He intervened.

Verses 11-12 "And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." (Angel knew it by Abraham's obedience.)

4. Does God know that we fear Him enough to obey and trust Him? Does our lack of commitment give us away? Our unanswered prayers may not be due to a lack of faith but a lack of obedience and commitment. (John 15:7)

5. When we commit our will, with godly reverence (fear), totally (**without withholding**) to God's will, our prayers will prevail also. *God knows whether we're committed no matter what comes or is asked of us.* Are you committed to obedience, and prayer??

II. **JACOB PREVAILED BECAUSE OF PERSISTANCE.**

A. Genesis Chapter 31:13 = After 20 years, God told Jacob to **return home**. He did so, but he feared his brother Esau. This fear led to an all night prayer meeting and wrestling match. (Sometimes we need something to get us praying.) *Most of us are crisis-pray-ers.*

1. Jacob prayed with persistence and God answered his prayer.

Genesis 32:26 "And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." **You're not going anywhere neither am I until you bless me with enough strength and courage to face Esau (and this trial)!!** (*You've got me on your hands attitude!*)

2. We must have persistence in prayer if we are to have answers from God. **Sometimes our lack of persistence shows!!**

Illustration: In a certain West African village the native Christians had no place of privacy for prayer in their small huts. So each Christian made off to the bush behind his hut for seasons of prayer. After a while, because of frequent use, there was a worn track from the hut to the place of prayer. Then if it ever happened that the track became overgrown from lack of use, another Christian villager would admonish his neighbor, "Brother, there is something wrong with your prayer track." (**Would there be one from our hut?**)

3. God will answer when we persevere in prayer for ourselves and others.

Luke 18:1 "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought al-ways to pray, and not to faint;" (or, give up or lose confidence in the effectiveness of prayer!) **Such as some people's response, "All we can do is pray. ALL WE CAN DO IS PRAY???** **NO, WE CAN PRAY!!!**

III. **MOSES PREVAILED BECAUSE OF HEART-FELT CONCERN.**

A. In Exodus 32 we read that the Israelites had made idols while Moses was on the

mount receiving the Ten Commandments, and God was prepared to destroy them. Moses interceded in prayer:

Exo 32:32 *"Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."*

1. Moses intervened by putting his life on the line for them. We can too -- by fasting.

2. The intervening, intercessory prayer of concern for unconverted friends and loved ones God will hear and answer, **when backed up with fasting**. Example: Woman asking pastor to pray for husband. Pastor replied, *"Not until you have fasted and prayed."*

IV. DAVID PREVAILED BECAUSE OF CONTRITENESS (REMORSE) BECAUSE OF PERSONAL SIN AND WRONG DOING).

A. Contriteness is needed most when we have erred, rebelled, or sinned. ***How long has it been since we were broken up over others sins and your own short comings?***

1. When David repented of his sin with humility and contrition, God forgave and restored to him the joy of salvation. **Where's yours?**

2. When we err our prayers also must come from a humble and contrite heart. God will forgive; His mercy endures forever.

Psa 106:1 *"Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."*

Lam 3:22-23 *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."*

V. ELIJAH PREVAILED BECAUSE OF CONFIDENCE.

A. Join him on Mount Carmel in prayer in **1 Ki 18:37-38** *"Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God,... Then the fire of the LORD fell,"*

1. Elijah was saying confidently, ***"I know it, I want them to know it!"***

2. Elijah prayed with faith AND confidence in the true, living God. The fire fell, the rain came, the skeptics believed. Elijah's God answered prayer.

3. The prayer of faith in confidence in the same God will move His hand to forgive, cleanse, open or close the heavens, and remove mountains, even answer by fire!!

Heb 10:35-36 *"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."*

1 John 5:14-15 *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."*

4. God is the same miracle-working God who changes not. **Mal 3:6** *"For I am*

the LORD, I change not;"

VI. DANIEL PREVAILED BECAUSE OF COURAGE (DETERMINATION)

I Kings 18:37-38 *"Daniel...his windows open.. kneeled... and prayed...before his God."*

A. **Daniel did not buckle under threat.** God honored his courageous, determined devotion and faith, by protecting him from the lions.

Dan 6:26-27 *"I (Cyrus) make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. 27 He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."*

1. In the face of persecution, pressure and discouragement our prayer of courageous, determined faith will also be heard by God, who can **deliver and honor** us as He did Daniel. **God is no respecter of persons!!**

VII. JESUS PREVAILED BECAUSE OF COMPASSION.

A. In Jesus' darkest and most excruciating hour, He prayed with compassion for those who crucified Him.

Luke 23:34 *"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* **Mat 5:44** *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;"*

1. We must pray with compassion for the unsaved and desire forgiveness for them. When we pray with compassion for those who despitefully use us and persecute us, we too will learn to love them.

CLOSE: A little Chinese girl lived in a school where missionaries taught. When praying one night she asked the missionary, "Do you think God understands Chinese?" "Oh yes," replied the missionary. "Why do you ask?"

Because," said the little girl, "sometimes when I feel bad I like to pray to God in Chinese, and I wondered if He understands Chinese, just the same as English."

"Of course," said the missionary, "God knows every language, and it is not the words we say **as much as the feeling down deep in our hearts** that makes us want to speak to Him.

B. Deep down feelings of: **Commitment, Persistence, Concern, Contriteness, Confidence, Courage, and Compassion, along with right living** prevails with God. These must be the feelings that make us want to talk with God and He will answer, because He is no respecter of persons.

C. **Are these** elements missing in your life and hindering your prayers from being answered.

1. Have you lost your desire to talk with God? Is your prayer "heart-felt" or are you in a rut and follow a form?

2. Is there anything wrong with your "prayer track"? Is it grown over? Is it obvious to others?

3. Do you seem to have lost your compassion for lost souls? **Have you lost your confidence in God to answer prayer?** Is it because in times past you were not committed to prayer? Are you having trouble with contriteness over sin and error in your life and can't pray? Have you lost your concern for others so that you have difficulty fasting and praying for them. **Have you become discouraged about them?**

4. Come and pray and ask God to **instill** these elements of these righteous men in you, or **restore** them if you have lost them so that your prayers will prevail.

D. We need, **must have** a revival of **confident, concerned, courageous prayer** to move the church forward and bring spiritual renewal and revival. // *Backsliders, sinners* God will hear your contrite prayer and forgive you!!

1. If you're battling a problem with the flesh God will hear your prayer and sanctify you. If you need the Holy Ghost He will baptize you. **If you need healing, He stills heals. Come and pray now!**

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