

**THE IMPERFECT PRAYER LIFE AND THE DESIRE FOR COMMUNION WITH GOD - Part twelve - Sunday, December 22nd 2024 - 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

PRAYER DEPENDS MORE UPON GOD THAN UPON YOU

James 5:13-18 - “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. [14] Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

There is embedded in most of us the idea that proper **method** will end in proper **results**. So many books and sermons on prayer give the impression that if we can just figure out the best **way to do it** and then **reproduce that practice** we will get the best results.

If you practice the piano you will become a good pianist. If you study the perfect golf swing and work it out on the driving range you'll be a better golfer. We want a reproducible process to get a better end result.

In **most** areas of life that works just fine. And I'm not arguing there is no place for the faithful discipline of good habits in the Christian life as well. There is much to be said for "**exercising ourselves unto godliness.**" But **too much** emphasis on this can be counter-productive in prayer. That's what this study is all about.

Take that **promise-box phrase** in our text - "**The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working**"(16b). And before you have that printed on your coffee mug, ask yourself whether this is **good** news or **bad**? Commonly read, it seems to say if I want my prayers to work I need to be righteous. I **earn** the right to be heard by my righteousness. Does that increase **faith** or **guilt**?

I want to argue James is **not** saying our righteousness is what makes our prayers answerable. And here's why:

- 1) **THE CONTEXT SEEMS TO FAVOR THE IDEA THAT PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE FOR IMPERFECT, NEEDY PEOPLE**

James 5:13-16 - “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. [14] Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And *if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* [16] Therefore, *confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Cheerfulness, sorrow, sickness, pain, sinfulness. That’s where we all live in this world. And in each case James says we should pray. Prayer can make a vital difference in each of those situations. Prayer is **effective** in each of those situations. God **hears** His people in each of those situations. And He hears them **while they are in those situations**. God reaches out to needy people. Not perfect people.

2) **HOW CAN PEOPLE CONFESSING THEIR SINS BE CONSIDERED RIGHTEOUS?**

James 5:16 - “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

The two halves of this verse don't seem to fit together. First, James describes a ***sinful*** person coming in prayer and receiving healing. Then, in the second half, James seems to say it's the prayer of a ***righteous*** person that will receive answers. And we all want to ask, ***"Which is it, James?"***

And the only answer seems to be ***sinful*** people - ordinary struggling people like you and I - can ***confess*** our sins and be counted as ***righteous*** people in Christ Jesus. Unrighteous people can pray as totally righteous people as long as they are confessing and repentant people. God can work a miracle of ***righteousness*** in our lives.

No one seemed to rejoice in this grand miracle more than the Apostle Paul: **2 Corinthians 5:20-21** - ***"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

Hear those words like you hadn't read them before. Mull them over. Look at that verb, ***"become"*** - ***"....so that in him we might become...."*** ***"Become"*** is a grand ***change*** word. It's something being there that wasn't before. Something brand new has begun to actually exist. It's real. And in Christ Jesus what has suddenly ***become*** is the righteousness of God in our own hearts.

Now go back to James' words - "...**The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working**" (16). Do you see those words as a **condition** or a **promise**? Read apart from Christ's finished provision they will suck the life and the hope out of prayer. Read as **promise** and they will point you to God the Son as the satisfaction of God's required righteousness. Suddenly praying "**in Jesus' name**" isn't something for kids at the dinner table. It's a confident open door to the throne of divine grace when sinful people need it most.

3) WHAT REMEMBERING ELIJAH HAS TO DO WITH ALL OF THIS

James 5:17-18 - "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."

What point is James trying to make in this reminder of Elijah? It's a very important question. Does James mean Elijah was righteous, so his prayers worked, and we should be like Elijah? A lot of people interpret it that way. And it's the door to a black hole in terms of confidence in prayer.

Fortunately, James **tells** us his point. His point is **not** if we want our prayers to work **we** must become like **Elijah**. Rather, and quite the opposite, his point is ***Elijah was like us and his prayers were effective.*** Elijah was just a man. And a man just like us, to boot. He prayed with a nature exactly like yours and mine.

4) **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Simply put, if you get the notion that the effectiveness in prayer depends on **you**, good luck staying constantly on top of all the commands and rules. Make sure there is not one second of one minute of one day - ever - when you don't love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And good luck pleasing the nagging voice of your own conscience.

But I have wonderful news for you. Prayer works because of **God**, not because of **you**. He has an ear that, in the Old King James, is ***inclined*** toward us. And the righteousness He ***requires***, He ***provides***. And ***that's*** the way to go to your knees.