



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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ISSUE 1

THE PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (**James 5:16**). I’m sure you’re familiar with this verse of Scripture. You’ve read it often. You may even have it memorized. Yet, this verse seems far from daily reality, especially concerning your prayer life and mine.

I’m sure, that like me, you’ve been a little bit intimidated by this verse of Scripture. It’s a powerful verse – an amazing promise. But, my prayers “avail” much? Me, a “righteous” man? It seems beyond me – out of my reach. I’ve often struggled with this verse and my prayer life.

Maybe you have too. Maybe you’re discouraged in your prayer life. You pray but your praying doesn’t seem to live up to what **James 5:16** says it can be. You don’t feel like your prayers avail much.

Yet, God has given this promise to His people. God gives it to us to encourage us and to motivate us to pray. It’s important not to divorce this verse from its context. When you see it in its context, it speaks to every genuine believer. It offers a life of prayer beyond what we can imagine.

James 5:17-18 says, “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. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”

God gives us the promise in **James 5:16** and then offers the example in **James 5:17-18**. He provides us with a flesh and blood example of **James 5:16**. God shows us that we can pray with great power and effectiveness. This kind of praying is not beyond us. God gives us **James 5:16** to deal with our discouragement and to strengthen our faith.

In order to appropriate the promise of **James 5:16**, we need to see the following truths. These truths will help us to understand how the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

The Person

James 5:17-18 refers to the praying of the prophet Elijah. James reminds us of the time when Elijah prayed for drought in Israel and then relief from that drought. He prayed first for drought and it did not rain in Israel for three years and six months. He then prayed for rain after the drought and God sent abundant rain.

As amazing as these events were, the focus of these verses is Elijah. These were miracles of God. However, perhaps the greatest miracle was God’s use of Elijah. God used these prayers of Elijah to bring about miraculous works. Elijah prayed with power and effectiveness.

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You might be wondering, “Why was that such a great miracle?” James writes, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are” (**James 5:17**). Elijah was a common, ordinary man. He was not different from you and me; he was like you and me – a sinful man saved by God’s grace. He had his ups and downs in his relationship with God. He struggled to trust God.

We often have a tendency to exalt biblical characters. We make them larger than life. Yet, the Bible doesn’t do that. The Bible certainly records and commends the faith and example of Bible characters. Yet, it never hides their sins or their struggles. The Bible reveals that these characters, like Elijah, were just like you and me. They weren’t super saints that live above the daily realities of our own lives. They were flawed people who loved God and walked with Him.

God’s purpose in recording this is to encourage you. He wants you to know that powerful and effective praying is not out of your reach. It’s not just for super saints. These verses take away any excuses we would have for Elijah’s success in prayer being because he was a special person or had some special power. Elijah had the same nature we have but he prayed powerfully and effectively. We can do the same.

What kind of a person do you have to be to pray with power and effectiveness? These verses lead us to see that we must possess certain characteristics:

- (1) *We must be righteous.* How does one become righteous? We become righteous by believing God’s promise of salvation through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. One must be accepted with God through faith in Jesus before you can pray with power and effectiveness. To come to the Father in effective prayer, you must first come to Jesus by faith (**John 14:6**). *Rejoice in the truth that God accepts you through His Son; ask God to help you rest in this and that this truth will fuel your praying before Him.*
- (2) *We must strive to be righteous.* Our acceptance with God is based solely on the righteousness of Christ that we receive by faith in Him. Yet, once we trust Christ, we seek to live a righteous life. We do this by confessing our sin and striving to obey God. We cannot expect God to hear and answer us

if we are not striving to confess our sins and live in a way pleasing to Him, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (**1 John 3:22**). *Pray that God will enable you to fulfill 1 John 3:22; plead for a life of obedience that honors Him and unleashes answer to prayer.*

- (3) *We must have confidence in God.* The Bible tells us that Elijah prayed fervently and earnestly. Why did he pray this way? He understood that only the Lord God of Israel could do what he asked. His sense of hopelessness motivated his fervent prayers. When do we pray with power and effectiveness? It takes place when we come to the end of ourselves. It happens when our confidence is in God and God alone to answer and intervene. *Plead with God to increase your confidence in Him. Ask Him to show you in Scripture and in life the truth of His sovereign power.*

The Passion

As stated above, Elijah prayed with fervency. His praying was passionate. The Word of God tells us that He prayed “earnestly.” His praying was the passionate overflow of his heart. Elijah sought God with all his being.

What motivated him to pray with such passion? *First, his understanding of God moved him to pray earnestly.* Elijah knew whom he was praying to. He knew that the Lord was the God of Israel and all nations. He knew that God has all power. He understood that the Lord could do the impossible. Elijah prayed earnestly because his faith was in God and not in His praying.

Your understanding of God will determine your passion in prayer. The knowledge of God is at the heart of our praying. When we understand that God is sovereign and wise, it should drive us to seek Him. For many of us, our God is “too small.” We doubt His power. We wonder about His ability. Yet, we serve the great and almighty God; pray accordingly!

Second, the conditions around Elijah fueled his praying. For sixty years, Israel’s leaders had wallowed in sin and led the people to do the same. In those sixty years, there was no

attempt at reform. There was no revival. There was no attempt to stop the headlong plunge into the judgment of God.

At the same time, two religions existed in Israel. One dominated and the other one looked like it was headed for extinction. The worship of Baal dominated the nation. The worship of Jehovah, the Lord God, looked like it was on its last leg. Nothing could be more opposite than these two religions.

The conditions around Elijah fueled his praying. It should be the same with us. As we look around and see lost, wounded hurting people, it should lead us to pray earnestly. As we see people denying God's Word and will, it should break us and stir us to pray with all our hearts. As we see the church powerless and ineffective, it should quicken our seeking of God.

- (1) *Ask God to give you a fresh vision of Himself.* Our prayer lives are determined by our knowledge and understanding of God. How we need a fresh vision of His greatness, sovereignty, wisdom, and holiness! Effectual, fervent prayer flows out of understanding who God is. *Plead with God to open your eyes to who He is; pray for Him to touch your eyes and heart with a renewed understanding of who He is and what He can do.*
- (2) *Have faith in God and not your prayers.* Too many times our faith is in the wrong place. We wonder if we have prayed "right," if we have prayed "hard enough," or perhaps said the "right things". We wonder if we have had enough faith for God to answer. Yet, our faith is not to be in our praying and faith; it is to be in the Lord God Almighty to whom we pray. Our focus must be on God and not our ability to pray. Elijah's faith was in God not His ability to intercede or the amount of faith that he had. *Pray that God will help you to rest your confidence in Him and not in you, your praying, or your faith.*
- (3) *Don't let the conditions around you overwhelm you; seek God and rest in Him.* It would be easy to get overwhelmed as you look at conditions around you. The amount and depth of need around us is staggering. As we look at national conditions, it can be disheartening. Yet, this is why we must seek God. This is why we must run to Him and rest beneath His

throne. It is only as we run to Him, rest in Him, and pour our hearts out to Him that we can face and deal with the conditions around us.

- (4) *Passionate praying leads to courageous preaching.* Because Elijah had spent time with the Lord God of Israel, he was able to boldly proclaim God's Word (**1 Kings 17:1**). Preaching must be saturated in prayer. The powerlessness of the pulpit can often be traced back to prayerlessness in private. If we would speak boldly to people, we must spend time with God. Prayerlessness takes away fervency and fearlessness in preaching.

The Precedence

You might be wondering, "Why did Elijah pray that it would not rain?" It does seem like an unusual request. Yet, this prayer request is rooted in God's Word.

In **Deuteronomy 11:16-17**, God gave this ominous promise, "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them. And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD God giveth thee." You can compare this with **Deuteronomy 28:15, 24**.

Israel had for many years departed from the Lord God. They had forsaken Him and worshiped other gods, particularly Baal. They had broken His commandments and wallowed in sin. Yet, there was no drought. Elijah simply asked God to be true to His Word. He called on God to keep His promise in **Deuteronomy 11** and **28**. His prayer would show that the word of the Lord was not null and void, but living and real.

This may sound like a harsh way to pray. God answered this prayer; Israel experienced a severe famine (**1 Kings 18:2**). Why would God do such a thing? God did this for three reasons:

- **To encourage repentance.** The pain of chastisement is intended to show people how wicked their sin is and to lead them to repent. God sent drought to bring the people to repent.

- **To expose Baal.** Baal, being the god of fertility, was supposed to be especially strong in the area of rain and good crops. The longer the drought persisted, the more powerless Baal would be shown to be.
- **To exalt Jehovah.** God promised to send drought if the people turned to other gods (**Deuteronomy 11** and **25**). The drought would show that God is alive and His Word is real. This drought and the corresponding release of rain (**James 5:18**) would show that God is the only true and living God.

This gives us great insight into the praying of a “righteous” person:

- (1) *A righteous person prays according to God’s Word.* Elijah is referred to as a righteous man; his praying was based on God’s Word. The prayer of a righteous man, the praying that avails much, has its foundation in the Word of God. *Ask God to enable you to pray according to His Word; plead with Him to teach you how to pray the Scripture.*
- (2) *A righteous person prays for God’s work of conviction.* Elijah asked for the drought in order to lead people to repentance. He asked God to act in order to show the people their sin and to drive them to repentance. That is how a “righteous” person prays. A righteous person hates sin and loves obedience. This is reflected in our praying; we ask God to use the rod of His judgment or chastisement. In other words, we pray that God will use whatever He must in order for people to see their sin and then to repent of it. God’s work of conviction is often carried out by striking a person or something that they have. It sounds harsh, but it is better for a lost person to suffer a little now than for all eternity; for a believer to suffer a little now than to be given over to the consequences of his or her sin and all its corresponding damage.
- (3) *A righteous person prays that God will expose the false gods of others.* Elijah’s prayer for drought was to show how useless and false Baal was. This is how a righteous person prays. We ask God to show others how useless and false their gods are. We plead that He would reveal to them how

worthless their gods are. We pray that He will tear down anything that has exalted itself against Him in the lives of others.

- (4) *The righteous person prays that God would be exalted.* Elijah’s prayer focused on the exaltation of God and His Word. He desired that the people see and know that God alone is the true God and that His Word is real and powerful. This is how the “righteous” person prays. He prays for the exaltation of God and His Word. When we pray for the salvation of others, it is primarily for His glory and the confirmation of His Word. When we pray for healing, it is to show that God is and that His Word can be trusted. Whatever the righteous person prays for, it is always with a view for exalting God and honoring His Word.

The Productiveness

James 5:16 reveals that the prayer of a righteous man avails much. What did Elijah’s prayer produce? First, it affected the rain. For three years and six months, it did not rain in Israel. Then, after this, Elijah prayed again and God sent rain. This brought blessing to the land of Israel, “He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (**James 5:18**). The land was once again fruitful.

Elijah’s prayer not only affected the rain, but it also effected revival. The reason that Elijah prayed again and the rain came down was the revival that took place on Mt. Carmel (**1 Kings 18:21-40**). The drought drove the people to their knees; the show of God’s power at Mt. Carmel revealed that the Lord is the true God. The people responded with repentance and a return to God (**1 Kings 18:39**); therefore, God sent rain!

- (1) *The prayer of a righteous person can bring both physical and spiritual blessing.* Elijah prayed and God sent rain. Elijah prayed and God sent revival. His praying affected both the physical and spiritual needs of people. It’s always this way with the prayers of the righteous. The prayers of the righteous can unleash either physical/material or spiritual blessing in the lives of others. Remember

- (2) that the prayers of the righteous do avail much!
- (3) *Prayer is crucial for revival.* The revival on Mt. Carmel had its foundation in the praying of Elijah. His Scriptural praying paved the way for God's reviving work. Genuine revival is born and unleashed in prayer. We have a living example of this in the life of Elijah. You've heard it said, you've probably said it yourself. Nevertheless, I hope and pray that you will see afresh that prayer paves the way for revival. We must seek God for revival. We must persist in pleading for His work of revival in our lives, our churches, and our nations.
- (4) *1 Kings 18:39 offers us insight on how to pray for revival.* Elijah prayed, "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." This teaches how to pray for revival. We must ask that people will know that the Lord is God. They must come to a fresh understanding of Him and His lordship. We must also pray that the hearts of the people will be turned back to Him. We must plead that people will turn from their sin and idols to God – worshipping Him, loving Him, serving Him, and obeying Him.
- (5) *Spiritual needs are primary.* Israel needed revival before it needed rain. Elijah prayed first for a return to God and then His blessing. While it is important to pray about the physical/material needs of others, our primary praying should focus on their spiritual need.

Evangelistic Praying

Praying For True Faith In Jesus

The Word of God reveals to us that Jesus is the center of God's plan for salvation. Through Jesus Christ, God saves and accepts sinful people. Because of this, a person must trust in Christ and Christ alone. The following Scripture prayers can assist you in praying for the lost concerning this:

Father, I pray that _____ will receive Christ, believing in His name and becoming a child of Yours (**John 1:12**).

Father, You loved this world so much that You gave Your only-begotten Son as the Savior. I ask that _____ will believe in Jesus that he/she might not perish but have everlasting life (**John 3:16**).

Father, I plead that _____ will understand who Jesus is and will believe solely in Him and worship Him as Lord (**John 9:35-38**).

Father, I pray that _____ will believe and confess that Jesus Christ is God's Son who came into the world to save sinners (**John 11:27**).

Father, teach _____ that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that only by coming to Christ can he/she come to You. Open _____'s eyes to this that he/she might genuinely trust Christ and come to know You as his/her Father (**John 14:6**).

Father, I ask that _____ will believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and that by believing in His name will have eternal life (**1 John 5:12**).

Holy Father, I plead that _____ will believe with all his/her heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, confessing Him and following Him in baptism and public confession (**Acts 8:37-38**).

Father, I plead that _____ will turn to You in repentance and will have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (**Acts 20:31**).

Father, I pray that _____ will confess with his/her mouth that Jesus is Lord and will believe in his/her heart that God has raised Him from the dead (**Romans 10:9**).

Father, I ask that the grace of our Lord will be poured out on _____ abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (**1 Timothy 1:14**).

Father, I plead that _____ will trust in God's Son and will experience the assurance of salvation (**1 John 5:13**).

Father, You sent Your Son into the world that whoever believes in Him will be saved. I pray that _____ will believe in Jesus Christ, Your Son,

and will be saved from his/her sin (1 John 4:14-15).

Sign Up!

The Prayer Closet publishes two other email newsletters, "**Prayerwalking**" and "**Global Point Men**." When you sign up for The Prayer Closet through email, you receive these other newsletters. **Global Point Men** is designed to help men grow in their relationship to God and their calling as men. **Prayerwalking** focuses on prayerwalking and personal evangelism.

Releasing God's Power On The Streets

Where Do You Prayerwalk?

At a prayer conference, we were taking a break when a lady encountered me in the hallway. I had started talking about prayerwalking before the break. She said, "I want to see God's power released throughout this community. I want to prayerwalk. But where do you do this at?" Perhaps that is your question.

The following is a list of places where you can prayerwalk. This list is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, its purpose is to open you to the possibilities of prayerwalking that are around you.

Churches

You can prayerwalk around your church or neighboring churches. This is crucial for revival and unity among all believers.

Schools

You can prayerwalk around the schools in your area. The schools are one of Satan's primary targets. You can protect the children in the schools from his devious and destructive plans. You can also plead for God's blessings on the school. Prayerwalking can release abundant blessings on schools and bring about genuine change.

Sites Of Past Sin

You can select and target sites of past sin. Prayerwalk around the sites, acknowledging the

sin to God. Confess it to Him, admitting that it is rebellion against Him and His Word. Plead for God to grant repentance to everyone who is committing the sin in the present. Pray that they will seek Him and receive forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Sites Of Ongoing Sin

You might consider prayerwalking at places where sin is being openly committed in the present. Plead for God to put an end to the evil that is being carried out. Pray that God will grant repentance to all that are involved in the sinful activity. Ask God to bless and help those who are being affected by the consequences of this evil.

Workplaces

Believers can prayerwalk around their places of employment. Churches might consider sending prayerwalking teams to the various companies, businesses, and stores in its area. They can plead for God's blessing, good working conditions, and the work of the Spirit in these places.

Real Estate

God often grants real estate to families, churches, ministries, and missionaries that has been faithfully prayerwalked. Churches and believers should consider prayerwalking around land and buildings that it can use for the purpose of ministry. Even a "For Sale" sign can prompt prayer. You can pray for the spiritual needs of those who will move into that house even before they get there!

Overlook Points

You can pray at an elevated place over a city or area. Use this as an opportunity to zero in on particular parts of the city or area.

Sites Of Harm Or Tragedy

Believers might want to gather at a site where tragedy or harm has taken place. The reason for doing this is to ask for God's blessing on those who suffered and those who inflicted the harm. You can plead for God's healing and help concerning the situation.

Courthouses And Government Offices

Believers often complain about the courts and the government. Yet, how often do believers pray for a change? Believers should regularly prayerwalk around courthouses and government offices.

Segments Of The City

You might consider dividing your city or area up into segments that teams can prayerwalk on a regular basis. By doing this, you will be covering your city or area with regular intercession.

Non-Christian Places Of Worship

By using the phrase, “Non-Christian Places Of Worship,” I am referring to worship centers for false religions and cults. In the Bible, God commanded His people to dismantle places of counterfeit worship. He spoke of them as being offensive to Him (**Numbers 33:52; 2 Kings 17:11, 18:4; Psalm 78:58; Jeremiah 19:5, 32:35**). You can pray that God would bind and remove the evil forces that fuel the group or cult. You can ask God to set them free from their bondage. You can plead for God to save those who are involved!

Coming In The March/April Issue:

Preparing For Christ's Return
Overcoming The Big Breakthrough Syndrome In
Prayerwalking
Honestly Dealing With Sin
And much more!

Learning To Pray Through The Psalms

Praying For Protection Psalm 141

Psalm 141 teaches us to pray for God's protection. What kind of protection do we need to pray for others and ourselves?

(1) *Pray for protection from sinful speech.*
(**141:1-3**).

In this psalm, David finds himself under attack from ungodly people. He is dogged and hounded by wicked people who intend to harm him. This reveals the urgency of his praying, “LORD, I cry

unto thee, make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee” (**140:1**). He “sets forth” his prayer to God. He knows that God and God alone can deliver him. He lifts his hands to the Lord in utter helplessness and dependence on God (**140:2**). What does David pray for? He asks, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (**Psalm 140:3**). Harassed and under pressure, it would be easy for David to utter foolish, rash words. Yet, he asks God to enable him to speak holy and right words. He desires to be delivered from sinful speech – speech that would not glorify God.

- Pray that God will help you guard you speech, especially when provoked.
- Confess your inability to control your speech.
- Ask God to help you develop a holy dependence on God through prayer.

(2) *Pray for protection from sinful seduction.*
(**Psalm 141:4-7**)

Not only does David want protection from sinful speech, he longs for protection from evil influence. Evil comes in many forms; it attacks us in different ways. First, he asks for protection from the flesh, “Incline not my heart to any evil thing” (**Psalm 141:4a**). He understands that he cannot conquer the flesh on his own. He pleads for God's help in the daily battle against his flesh. Second, he pleads with God to deliver him from the evil influence of others, “to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity, and let me not eat their dainties” (**Psalm 141:4b**). In this section, David asks for righteous people to confront him and correct him (**Psalm 141:5**). He wants rebuke from the godly rather than encouragement from the wicked. His heart was tender to hear and respond to correction. If we are to resist temptation and seduction of the world, we must have hearts that are tender and open to the correction of God's Word whether through preachers, teachers, family, or friends.

- Pray that God will help you confront and overcome the desires of your flesh; ask Him to empower you through prayer and the Word to resist its sinful desires.
- Ask God to cause you to hate the deeds of the wicked; plead that you will not allow these things to become a part of your life.

- Yield yourself to the preaching and teaching of God's Word. David says in this psalm that the words of the righteous are like "excellent oil." This refers to anointing oil, which was helpful and refreshing. Pray that God's Word will be helpful and refreshing to you as you hear it and respond to it, even though it corrects you.

(3) Pray for protection from sinful snares
(Psalm 141:7-10).

David closes his prayer with a plea for protection from the snares of the wicked. Those who do not know God love to see God's people sin and fall. They labor to put "snares" in the path of His people. **Psalm 141:9** records his plea for this. At the same time, he prays that the Lord will boomerang on the heads of the wicked what they have spoken with their lips (**Psalm 140:9**). We are to pray that people will taste the bitter consequences of sin that they might repent and turn to God. No matter what, we must fix our eyes on God (**Psalm 141:8**). The darker the times, the more you must fix your focus on God.

How do we overcome the snares of the enemy? We fix our focus on God, asking for deliverance from the sinful snares, and praying for those who persecute us.

- We should regularly pray for deliverance from the snares that our enemy, Satan, sets for us.
- We must express our confidence in God (**Psalm 141:8**). He alone is able to defend and protect us. We must trust in Him and confess that trust in Him.

Moving/Change of Address?

If you are moving or have changed addresses, please let us know. This will allow you to continue to receive the newsletters without interruption and will help us to save money. Thank you for your help in this!



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