

“DEALING WITH LIFE THROUGH PRAYER”

1 Kings 18:41-46

INTRODUCTION

1. Have you noticed that just about everybody believes in prayer? Someone said, *“There are no atheists in foxholes.”* In other words, life hangs in the balance, just about everybody prays.

Just ask students how many of them ever prayed, *“God, help me to remember what I did not study on this test?”*

Or, ask the guy who has seen the flashing lights of a police car in his rearview mirror if he’s prayed.

2. The simple fact is: The majority of Americans believe in prayer.

A recent Time/CNN poll found that 82% of Americans believe prayer can cure serious illness. 73% believe praying for others can cure illness. And 64% want their physicians to pray with them. In a *Time Magazine* article called, *“Is It Okay to Pray for Your 401K?”*

An author named, David VanBiema, said it like this:

“Prayer is humanity’s conversation with God.”

James Martin, a Jesuit priest wrote,

“... We can’t not do it.”

His point? It’s the default mode for every human being to pray!

Eg. Phillip Yancey, In his book, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?*, says prayer allows us to

“...Bring our fears to Someone who seems quite positive that He’s able to run the world. You can take the panic and anxiety and transfer that to Him.”

Eg. J. C. Ryle wrote,

“Prayer is the simplest of acts. It’s simply speaking to God. It needs nothing but heart and will.”

The weakest infant can cry when he’s hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hands for alms and does not wait to find words.

The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he only has a mind.”

Eg. The great author, Andrew Murray, wrote:

“The powers of the eternal world have been placed at prayer’s disposal. It is the...secret of power and life.”

2. It’s no wonder when we come to the story of Elijah, we find a man who prayed. In fact, James tells us his praying was *“powerful and effective.”*

This morning, we want to turn our attention to lessons from Elijah’s life that will help us learn how to deal with the pressures of life through prayer. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, why don’t you turn with me to 1 Kings 18?

We want to examine four characteristics from Elijah’s life that will enable us to be powerful and effective in prayer.

It’s interesting that the Bible calls Elijah *“a man just like us”* because most of us feel nothing like Elijah. We learned last week that Elijah had a confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. He challenged them to pray to their god while he prayed to the God of the Bible. When they prayed, nothing happened. But when Elijah prayed a simple prayer, God responded and the sacrifice of his altar was consumed by fire.

3. Now here’s the thing: Many of us feel like our prayer lives are more like the prophets of Baal than Elijah. We beg, we hope, we wish and nothing seems to happen.

I’ve talked with people who have said, *“I’ve prayed and prayed and prayed about a problem in my life - and nothing has happened yet.”* Or, somebody else says, *“I’ve prayed and prayed for a new job, and nothing seems to open up.”* Or, *“I’ve prayed that God would help me conquer this sin in my life, and nothing seems to change.”*

So when the Bible says that Elijah was *“a man just like us,”* and he prayed for rain, and it rained...it’s hard for many of us to connect with that. At times, we feel like we pray and pray and nothing happens. Isn’t it frustrating when our prayers don’t get immediate results? Isn’t it frustrating when our prayers seem to lack power and effectiveness?

4. Let me ask you a question: ***“How would your life be different if your praying was powerful and effective?”***

So what does that take anyway? What does it take for our prayers to be powerful and effective?

To answer those questions, I want you to look with me at four characteristics that lead to powerful and effective praying. The first is...

1. CONFIDENCE

I love verse 41. Look at what it says.

“And Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain’” (1 Kings 18:41).

You have to understand what’s going on. How could Elijah say *“there is the sound of a heavy rain”* when there wasn’t a cloud in the sky? They hadn’t seen rain for three years! How could he speak with such confidence?

-Like saying it will be 80+ sunny in Ohio tomorrow

Here’s the answer: He was praying for something he knew God wanted to do. God already promised to send rain to Israel. Look at verse 1 of this same chapter.

“After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land” (1 Kings 18:1).

One of the great principles of Scripture is to pray about something that God wants to do. We should pray in keeping with a promise He’s made. Pray for a goal that would have God’s favor. Pray that the name of God would be honored and people would find a relationship with Him. That’s what Jesus meant when He said it like this in John 14:14:

“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:14).

To ask for something in Jesus' name means we are asking for something we think God already wants to accomplish.

When we pray like that, God gives us some wonderful promises. Look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 7.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

And I love these words of Jesus in Matthew 7:11.

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11).

God is not a genie in a bottle (James says, “we don't receive because we ask with wrong motives.” lottery?) where we can just wish for anything, and He automatically gives it to us. God doesn't automatically say, “Yes,” to every prayer. But, He's a loving Father who wants us to pray in cooperation with His plan for us.

I love these words of an author named Paul Billheimer, who has written some marvelous books on prayer:

“Prayer is not overcoming a reluctant God. It's implementing and enforcing Christ's victory over Satan.”

Because of Christ's victory over sin at the cross-we can have confidence!

When we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, sought His forgiveness and asked Him to direct our lives, God says we can come to Him with confidence!

(No Wonder) The writer of Hebrews says it like this:

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

*Do I pray in cooperation with what God wants?

The first key to powerful and effective praying is confidence. The second key to powerful praying is...

2. CONTRITION

“So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42).

Did you notice Elijah's posture here? He kneels with his face to the ground. That's contrition! It's a posture of humility. The Bible says it like this in Psalm 51.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

*If you saw the news, you heard Eg. Tiger Woods talk about a sense of entitlement and even pride that led him into unfaithfulness. –A spirit of contrition.

The Bible says it like this in James 4:6.

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

- ❖ Is it possible that pride has become one of the most tolerated sins for many of us?

It’s possible to have a steady stream of proud thoughts that pretty much go unchecked before God. We put down others, minimize our own sin or just take God for granted because of pride. The Bible says God opposes the proud. I don’t know about you, but I don’t ever want to be opposed by God! –First step to right relationship with God-humility-confessing my sin-THEN YOU REALIZE YOU NEED FORGIVENESS (first prayer to pray)

Do you know one of the greatest evidences of pride? It’s prayerlessness. If I don’t pray, I’m basically thumbing my nose at God. I’m saying, *“I really don’t need you God. I’ll handle life myself.”*

There is a third characteristic of an effective prayer life. It’s...

3. CONSISTENCY

Let’s read on in verse 43:

“Go and look toward the sea,’ he told his servant. And he went up and looked. ‘There is nothing there,’ he

said. Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back’” (1 Kings 18:43).

Elijah prayed seven times before he saw any semblance of an answer. I don’t know about you, but it’s easy for me to give up after praying just once or twice for something. He didn’t allow the outward circumstances to affect his inward assurance that God was going to answer. He was persistent!

James says it like this...

“He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17,18).

In Luke 18, Jesus told a story about the importance of consistent prayer. He told about a hapless widow who kept seeking justice from an unsympathetic judge.

“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me,

I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?’” (Luke 18:4-7).

Let me ask you a question: *“Where in your life have you stopped praying?”* Phillip Yancey and his book on prayer says it like this:

“Whether it’s climbing Colorado’s mountains, chasing the woodpeckers away from my roof, or getting a high-speed internet connection for my home, I’ll do whatever it takes. Do I show the same spirit in prayer?”

In the very act of praying we open up a channel that God can use in transforming us...persistent prayer changes me by helping me see the world and my life through God’s eyes.”

Now frankly, **this isn’t easy!** If I’m going to develop powerful praying, it involves confidence, contrition and consistency. There is a fourth characteristic required.

4. CLARITY

Let’s read on in the story in verse 44.

“The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.’ So Elijah said, ‘Go and tell Ahab, hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’

Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:44-45).

Did you get this? Elijah sees a small cloud on the horizon, and do you know what he says? Tell Ahab he’d better get moving before he gets soaked!

Elijah knew exactly what he wanted God to do. He was crystal clear.

Have you noticed how easy it is to be real vague when we pray? Our prayers can become so general and so routine that they lose any sense of power.

Frankly, this is what happens when we allow our prayer lives to become routine. There is no sense of passion.

Now to help you with this, through our Missions Department we are inviting you to participate in a Global Prayer Walk sponsored by Grace Brethren International Missions in the next couple of months. This is a 62-day focused time of prayer to impact the world with the message of Jesus Christ. It begins on Wednesday, March 3, and concludes the first Sunday of May.

Prayer guides will be available in your Adult Bible Fellowships. If you’d like to join this focused time of prayer so the Gospel of Jesus Christ would have impact in this world, I invite you to write the two words, **“Prayer Walk”** on the back of your Communication Card right now. We’ll make sure you have information about this opportunity.

In fact, I want to challenge you to pray **specifically** this morning for three different kinds of people:

#1 - Pray for somebody who doesn’t have relationship with Jesus. If you have yet to begin that relationship with Him this is where to start. Pray that God would help you understand what it means to know Him.

#2 - Pray for somebody who has hurt you.

#3 - Pray for somebody who is involved in ministry, maybe one of our pastors or some teacher or missionary who is serving God around the world. Pray for those three people very specifically.

When was the last time you prayed specifically for something God cares about? When was the last time you prayed for somebody who was lost? When was the last time you prayed for one of the children in our orphan homes in Southeast Asia or the Central African Republic?

CONCLUSION

1. Now Elijah was able to pray for rain. I may never pray for rain after a three-year drought. But you and I get to pray that the hearts and lives of people would be transformed. That's a miracle that makes praying for rain seem insignificant!

2. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed with confidence, contrition, consistency and clarity.

How would you describe your prayer life right now? Are you experiencing God moving in your life? If not, spend some time before your head hits the pillow tonight just talking to God. Start a prayer list for people that need prayer. Start journaling your prayers and writing them down. Begin to reflect on what God is doing in your life right now.

- ❖ Prayer can be powerful and effective...not because of us...but because we can know a powerful and effective God. 1st real prayer-faith