

Praying Effectively

James 5:13-16

Preface

Illus: I am reminded of the story about a poor Widow lady with 5 Kids who everyday came out on to her front porch, raised her hands to heaven & prayed out loud, "Lord, you know I have no food in my cabinets to feed my children today! Please provide our daily needs!" Her next door neighbor was an "atheist" who was sick & tired of hearing her "spiritual" talk everyday!

So one day, he thought he would teach her a lesson. He bought several bags of groceries, sat them on the front porch, rang the doorbell, and hid in the bushes! The Widow came out, saw the groceries, and burst into a Joyful Praise! "Thank you God, you have supplied my need! Thank you for answering my Prayer! Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The "atheist" stepped out from behind a bush and arrogantly said, "Ma'am, God hasn't supplied your needs today-I did! See how foolish it is to trust in a nonexistent God and give him Credit for what He didn't do?" Without taking a breath the woman burst into another Prayer: "**Dear God, you are so wonderful! Not only have you provided my family food today, but you go the Devil to pay for it!**" Prayer works!

Suppose someone said to you, "I go to church because it is good for business." "I make all sorts of business contacts and get opportunities to tell people about my product which results in more sales." You would conclude that person was doing a good thing but for the wrong reasons.

Prayer is often like that. Prayer is a good thing but we often pray with the wrong motives and with some bad habits. God's word offers valuable instruction concerning how we should pray.

Scripture

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
James 5:13-16 NIV

Introduction

This scripture promises that when we pray a prayer offered in faith or as the KJV reads, the prayer OF faith, we are promised that our prayers will be powerful and effective.

A prayer of faith doesn't mean that God will give us anything we ask for - in fact, God uses trials and sickness many times to work His will in our lives. But, too often we misunderstand the importance of praying according to God's word.

James 4:2 (NIV) says, "*You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*"

Usually there are two basic problems in the area of faith that hinder the effectiveness of our prayers.

1) We do not really have faith that God can or will answer our prayers so we don't ask or we ask half-heartedly. Do you really believe God can or will address that which is on your heart? Too often the honest answer is "No." This is a reflection of our lack of understanding of God and His resources. It is a lack of faith fueled by a lack of studying His word and knowing Him.

2) We don't have the faith to live for God therefore we ask with the wrong motives. Our desire is for material things to be used for our own pleasure. We have no intention of using them for the kingdom of God because we haven't learned to live for Him; we haven't committed ourselves and our possessions to His glory.

Once we have the two faith problems resolved, our prayers will become different. When we understand the power of God and our motives are for His glory, our ability to prayer becomes the most powerful weapon in our life.

It is important that we learn to pray according to the instruction of God's word. There are certain key things we must understand and practice in order to pray effectively.

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1. Pray Expecting Results

So, often we get the attitude that everything in the universe is fixed and there is nothing we can do about it.

There have been times when I have been at a hospital bed praying for someone to be healed, and yet thinking down in my heart, "this person is not going to make it." But they did.

We face challenging situations in life. Whether it is health, tragedy, financial crisis, and other problems, we often feel in our hearts that even if God can fix it, he isn't going to do so. We might not voice it in words but we think it in our heart.

We don't really believe prayer if going to make a difference. But it can if we will expect results.

2 Kings 20:1 (NIV) In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: 5 "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, `This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. 6 I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'"

Remember the story of Jonah? God told Jonah to go and preach to the people of Ninevah. Jonah despised Ninevah and did not want to preach to them. God told Jonah to tell the people of Ninevah that he was going to destroy the city in 40 days.

But the people of Ninevah believed God and repented and called on God that he might forgive them. And guess what? God heard their prayers and did not destroy Ninevah.

I am afraid that most of us - if we believe God is real, we don't treat Him like He is real. And our prayers reflect that!

If people can cry out to God and God changes his mind about what he had purposed to do, then prayer is the most powerful spiritual tool we have.

When you pray, pray believing; pray fervently and pray expecting results.

2. Listen When You Pray

Illus: Have you seen the commercial on TV where the man is engrossed in watching TV not really listening to his wife? She stands at the living room doorway and asks, "Does this dress make me look fat?" Not really paying attention, he answers, "Of course dear!" Needless to say, he gets in all sorts of trouble for that answer.

Illus: I recently answered a similar question from Pam. I gave a very positive and polite answer that assured her she looked great in what she was wearing. Being the fool I am, I spoiled it at the end of the conversation by saying, "Is there anything else you want me to say?"

We often treat God in the same manner. We pour out our list of wants and desire to him but don't hang around to hear what God has to say to us. Prayer is a two-way communication. We need to stop and listen for God's voice when we pray.

Illus: I now have hearing aids. They are remarkable and they have affected areas of my life that I did not realize were affected by my hearing loss. I will confess that I struggled to understand and hear many of you. Honestly, for those of you who are soft spoken, conversations have not been easy for me and I have found myself eager to conclude such conversations.

I am afraid we are much that way with God. We want to do all the talking and when we are finished, we are ready to split. We often fail to sit quietly and listen to God speaking to our heart.

If we truly want to hear from God, we must do two things. First, we need to find a quiet place and allow ourselves to really listen. We need to give God the same respect we would give to anyone else if we truly want to hear what they have to say.

Listening is not something you tack on to the end of your prayer. It is a conscious, intentional act when you stop to hear God.

Secondly, we need to get rid of all distractions and clear our minds and hearts to hear what God has to say. When I am frustrated or confused and searching for answer, a few minutes with the Lord and suddenly I see things much more clearly.

Over and over, Jesus says, "Let him who has ears hear." Those who truly desire to hear from God rather than just being heard will take the time to listen and they will hear.

When you pray, listen.

3. Pray Bold Strong Prayers

God's word teaches us to approach the throne with certainty and boldness. The boldness does not come from our strength but our understanding of God's strength.

Illus: One little girl understood this better than most when she prayed, "God Bless mommy and daddy...and dear God, take good care of yourself. Because, if anything happens to you, we're sunk."

God is the creator and keeper of the universe, the one who has all the wealth and resources beyond human understanding. We are His sons and daughters. Understanding who He is allows us to approach Him with confidence that He has the means and desire to answer our requests.

Too often we pray for something and tack on the phrase, "If it be thy will." That sounds pious and spiritual but it isn't biblical. I challenge you to search the bible and find a single instance when someone was praying - and made their request to God and then tagged on "If it be thy will."

We get this idea from one place in scripture. James says...

James 4:13 (NIV) Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

James was not talking about prayer. He was talking about us making individual plans for our lives without giving consideration to God and what plans He has for our life.

James never meant for these words to become a cop-out for watering down our prayers.

Granted, we need to have enough faith to be willing to accept God's will. But real faith is also boldly asking God for the things you believe will honor Him and allow you to better serve Him.

Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) "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."

Illus: We don't go to the banker and ask for a loan with our tail between our legs and say things like, "You probably won't lend me the money but I thought I would ask...." We put our best foot forward and present our case why we need the money and how it will be used wisely. We must approach God in a like manner.

When you pray, pray bold strong prayers.

Conclusion

When I first came to Barnwell Baptist Church, we had several needs that seemed insurmountable. We had a borrowed piano that needed to be purchased. When others said we couldn't do it, we raised over \$13,000 in a couple of weeks to purchase the piano.

We did not have a minister of music. We prayed and God called Mike to serve permanently.

We didn't have a pianist. We had to bring outside people in to play. God answered our prayers and look what we have today.

We did not have a Sunday School class for every age group. We were averaging on 50 people in Sunday School. We prayed and God provided teachers and a class for every age group. Today we average over 100. It is time now for us to pray for 200.

When I returned to Barnwell, I prayed boldly to God. I reminded him that we desperately needed someone to work with our youth. I said, "We need them immediately God, this can't be a drug out process." God provided Jason Moye and his family.

In my person life God has time and time again answered my prayers.

Pray expecting results. Pray and listen. Pray boldly.