



## Prayer That Works

### Righteous Prayer

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:40-46

There was a salesman making a presentation to a church committee. After his presentation, the chairman walked to the altar and knelt down and prayed silently. He returned and announced in a solemn tone, "The Lord tells me we should wait." The salesman responded by walking to the altar and kneeling down himself. Then he returned to the group, looked at the chairman and declared, 'He wants to talk with you again.'"

It is interesting that both men saw prayer as a way of getting what they wanted. And there's nothing wrong with using prayer to get what you want. James tells us in Scripture this is a perfectly acceptable function of prayer. He writes in 4:2 that one of the reasons we don't receive what we desire is we don't pray. In other parts of his letter he tells us:

- If we lack wisdom we should pray
- If we are troubled we should pray
- If we are sick, we should call for the elders to anoint and pray.

In other words: If there's something you want from God - you should pray, or have others pray for you. A recent survey indicated 94% of people who prayed regularly believed God had answered their prayers. But, if we believe that prayers have such power, do we pray as often as we should?

James said: "Elijah was a man just like us. 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."

In other words... if you want to have a good model of how to pray, look at how Elijah prayed.

The background to this is about Ahab and his wife Jezebel, an evil woman who influenced Ahab and the nation of Israel to a kind of hybrid paganism. It seemed they worshipped Yahweh but also worshipped pagan gods such as Baal and Asherah.

So - because of their disobedience - God sent Elijah to tell King Ahab that he and the nation of Israel would be punished with a drought. There would be no rain and no dew (this ended up lasting 3 ½ years.) At the end of that 3 ½ years, God sent Elijah back to King Ahab and offered a challenge. Elijah vs. the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel. All of Israel gathered at the foot of the mountain and they heard Elijah confront them with these words:

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him."

There were 850 pagan prophets to match wits and power with Elijah. But Elijah showed that speaking a prophecy wasn't enough without the power of the living God to fulfill it. Elijah challenged the people – follow whoever was the true God.

This precedes the prayer that James says is our example.

**Let's look at why Elijah's prayer makes such a good example for us?**

**FIRST** he “worked” at his prayer. Notice how he prays. He prays sitting down with his head between his knees. I am not sure if you have ever used this particular posture to pray, but I can tell you it is not comfortable. Perhaps Elijah was using this painful posture to help himself focus on the prayer at hand. He didn't want to be distracted by anything else, and the discomfort kept his mind focused on what he was talking to God about.

Next, notice how many times Elijah prays. Not just once, twice, or 3 times. No. Elijah prays 7 times. He kept at the prayer until he saw an answer.

**C.H. Spurgeon once said,**

"Prayer pulls the rope down below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might."

Why should that matter to God? Why should it matter that we "work" at our prayers? Why should He care that we "pull on the bell rope of heaven?" Because when we work at our prayers – it shows the answer "matters" to us.

**ILLUS:** Recall how when you take a small child shopping, and they see something they want, they ask for it....again...and again....and again. Sometimes they become quite creative, thinking up a dozen ways to remind you that they want the object. Why do they do that? Because it's important to them to receive what they're asking for. So, they work at getting your attention. Likewise, Elijah "worked" at his prayer – he made it his business to pray.

**SECOND**, Elijah was specific in his prayers. He didn't simply ask God to "bless" Israel. He was asking for rain. He was asking for a "specific" answer in response to his prayer. Be specific in your prayers – then you'll know when God answers.

**THIRD** - Elijah prayed for something he knew God wanted to do. God wanted to send rain on Israel. That's why Elijah had come back.

1 Kings 18:1 tells us "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.'"

If you look at some of the powerful prayers in Scripture you'll find that they all mention either a specific promise God had made; a goal God was known to favour; a prayer that would result in praise to God or how an answer to your prayer would be a witness to someone.

When we pray we need to think about why God should want to answer our prayers. That's what Jesus meant when He told His disciples: "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 you are asking God for something you believe He would want to do. When I speak to someone in the community on behalf of the congregation - I am speaking in "your name." So the words I speak should be in agreement with what you would want me to be saying. So also, praying in "Jesus name" is to be asking for what you believe Jesus would want you to ask for.

**FOURTH**, Elijah involved someone else in his prayer. Notice that he sends his servant to look for rain. Elijah could have done that. BUT Elijah was involving someone else in his prayers.

Jesus said: "I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. Matthew 18:19

**FIFTH** once Elijah prayed, he behaved as a man who expected an answer. He repeatedly sent his servant to look for a cloud. AND once a cloud was seen, he acted like a man expecting it to rain.

**ILLUS:** The story's told of a small farming town that had experienced a long drought. One of the local churches held a special prayer meeting one night to pray for rain. On that night, the church building was packed, but the preacher

told them to go back home. There'd be no prayer meeting that night – because no one had come expecting to have their prayers answered...

**NO ONE HAD BOTHERED TO BRING AN UMBRELLA.**

Now, I don't know if that's a true story... but I do know that is how God looks at our prayers.

**James 5:6-8** tells us that as far as God is concerned “when a person prays they must believe and not doubt, because he or she who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. When we pray – we need to pray expectantly, believing God WILL answer.

**FINALLY** Elijah prayed with the hope that his prayer would be a witness. Notice that before Elijah prays, he tells Ahab to go sit down and eat. Why do that? The challenge on the mountain top was over; this prayer is just a preliminary before the rain comes. Ahab could have gone home. But I believe Elijah's prayer was also meant as a witness to the King of Israel.

I believe when Elijah prayed, Ahab was just a few yards away. I believe that as Ahab sat and ate, he could see Elijah...And he watched as Elijah prayed. And he watched as Elijah sent his servant. And he watched as Elijah repeatedly bowed in prayer.

And when Elijah gets the news of the cloud in the distance he firstly tells Ahab to hitch up his chariot and get out of there. I believe, Elijah's prayer was partly to serve as a “witness” to Ahab. Otherwise, why should Ahab hang around?

The purpose of the drought, the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, and now the purpose of this prayer was to change the hearts of the people... and to change the heart of Ahab.

As wicked and evil as King Ahab had been – God still cared for his salvation. "God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter.,

**ILLUS:** I once talked with a person who kept a prayer journal (spiral bound notebook). They faithfully spent time in prayer over their list... and they kept track of how and when God answered their prayers.

After several months, they began showing the list to their unsaved friends – telling them how God had shown His faithfulness in the answers they had seen. They used their prayer journal to witness for Christ.

***One man once said: "To become more effective in our praying, we need to remember:***

***It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are;  
nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be;  
nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be;  
nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be;  
nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be;  
nor even the theology of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be -  
which God cares for.***

***It's the fervency of our prayers/ the constant faithfulness in prayer that wins the day and unleashes the power of God."***