

Session 3 Characteristics of Effective Prayer

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There are different ways to pray (see future sessions), but here we will look at the characteristics of prayer that is effective or that makes a difference and accomplishes its intended goal. Prayer is first about relating to God, but it is also about results that serve God’s will on the earth.

“It is not enough to begin to pray...but we must patiently, believingly continue in prayer until we obtain an answer.” George Müller

This is the third session in our class on growing in prayer. The zeal I have about both this course and this topic is from my own story of having really distained prayer, yet having the conviction from the Bible that prayer was very important. It comes from my taking a deep breath and realizing, “Oh no! This is so important, and I so dislike it! I am in trouble!” That was a very real and powerful, yet negative thought to me. Over a bit of time I had the surprise of my life. I began to enjoy it. I am such a satisfied customer that I want to convince people that if they start off with boring prayer, it can be enjoyable prayer before it is over. I want to give you the vision and the confidence to stay with it.

Tonight we are going to look at characteristics of effective prayer. The fact that prayer is effective is remarkable to me—that weak and broken people can say things on the earth and the Almighty God, the Creator, hears it in heaven and moves on the earth at the sound of our words, because He is a Father who loves us. It is remarkable that prayer is effective, that the great Majesty on high intervenes in history in big ways and very, very small ways because we talk to Him.

*Tonight we are going to look at characteristics of prayer that make it effective. That is, the kind of prayer that actually makes a difference or prayer that accomplishes much. That is what James called it. Prayer that avails much or prayer that accomplishes much. We know that prayer is first about relationship with God. That is not **all** that it is about. It is also about results. When you hear the teaching of Jesus, He talked about results. Things happen. He wants us to believe things will happen. It is more than just interacting with Him. That is first. That is not the whole relationship. He wants us to partner with Him in changing the world and releasing His resource into the earthly realm. He wants things to happen. That is part of the partnership.*

George Müller was one of the great prayer warriors in the 1800’s and celebrated in church history. He said, “It is not enough to begin to pray. We have to stay with it. Continue until we get an answer.” He also said, “Praying is not the point only. We pray until the answer comes because the Lord wants us to partner with Him in releasing His resource and His presence into the earth.”

- B. James, the brother of Jesus, was known as a great man of prayer. He gave the church invaluable insight into this subject. He emphasized effective prayer and what it accomplishes. It is the destiny of every believer to release the power of God through his simple prayers.

¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up...¹⁶The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain...¹⁸And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain... (Jas. 5:15-18)

James 5:15-18 is the main passage we will look at tonight in this session. James, the brother of Jesus, was known in history as a great man of prayer. His teaching on prayer is very valuable because he was well known as a man deep in prayer. Let’s read what he said in verse 15 of chapter 5, “The prayer of faith will save the

sick.” He is the one who coined the phrase, “The prayer of faith.” It is a very important term used through church history. He said, “The prayer of faith”—that is a very important principle—“will save or deliver the sick.” The sick will be healed is the idea—those sick emotionally, physically, or spiritually. “The Lord will raise him up.”

I want you to catch two words here in verse 16, “The **effective prayer** of a righteous man.” Those two words I want you to lay hold of. This is about **effective prayer**, not just the motions of prayer. Then it says, “It **avails much**.” That is the second phrase. It **avails much**. It accomplishes much. The challenge is that we cannot always measure all that it accomplishes. We can measure some, but not all of it.

The premier example of effective prayer that accomplishes much, that avails much, is Elijah. The key point about Elijah is that he had a nature like ours. He was a weak and broken man like you and I. He was prone to discouragement. He struggled with fear. He was tempted like we are tempted. We have this idea that Elijah was the super prophet, and we get this romanticized, ideal version of his life. James is saying here, “I promise you by the Holy Spirit, he is just like you.”

I think we will get the shock of our life when we meet Elijah in the age to come and we will say, “Wow, you are kidding. If I had known that, I would have had more boldness.” It is the destiny of every believer to release the power of God through prayer, the presence of God, and the resource of God. Every believer! Every weak and broken believer, not the super saints, like I say over and over that there is no such category as super saints. We like to invent them. We like to change history so we end up with super saints so that it gives us something to really have an ideal that is out of reach. Beloved, there are no super saints. There are weak and broken people who experience the grace of God. People like you and I can do this thing.

- C. James taught that the *prayer of faith* heals the sick (v. 15) and that it accomplishes much (v. 16). Our prayers accomplish much more than we can gauge with our five senses. Our perspective on life changes dramatically when we believe that our prayers really make a difference.

Our prayers accomplish more than we can discern with our five senses. The Lord says that our prayers avail much. They accomplish much. That is one of my favorite subjects in the Scripture. The fact that our prayers accomplish more than we can read in the moment we are praying or even the near future after the prayer. Our prayers really make a difference.

When I began to understand my prayers make a difference in the short-term and the long-term—that means in a few days and weeks, and the other short-term in the next few years. But even in the long-term over generations and even in the age to come your prayers will be making an effect—when I began to understand that, prayer had a whole different feeling to me. I approached it in a very different way. I began to believe my prayers could affect much. It does not mean I will get the answer I am looking for in seven days. Sometimes I do. Many times I do not. The Lord answers in His way, and it unfolds in ways beyond what we can measure in the short term.

- D. James highlighted four characteristics of effective prayer: prayer rooted in faith; prayer in the context of good relationships; prayer from a lifestyle of righteousness; and prayer that is earnest.

In this passage, James highlighted four characteristics of effective prayer, though there are more than four characteristics. I am going to look at those tonight, and I am going to mention six more besides those. The others are pretty self-explanatory. I am going to look at these four because this apostle of prayer, as he is called sometimes, gives us his insight on effective prayer. This is a premier teaching in the Bible: James teaching us on effective prayer.

The four characteristics are prayer that is rooted in faith, prayer that is in context of good relationships, prayer from a lifestyle of righteousness, and prayer that is earnest. It is earnest prayer. Elijah was earnest in his prayer.

E. **Prayer rooted in faith:** this speaks of prayer that is rooted in a threefold confidence in God.

We will look at a few dimensions of prayer rooted in faith. Faith and confidence are interchangeable. You can use faith and confidence nearly in an interchangeable way. It is a threefold confidence in God.

1. It is prayer with confidence in Jesus' authority over sin, sickness, and Satan.

We come with confidence that the authority of Jesus is greater than sin, sickness, and Satan. We come with confidence that He has all authority, and His is great than the authority of sin, sickness, and Satan.

2. It is prayer with confidence in the blood of Jesus that qualifies weak people such as us to be vessels that release His power and receive His blessings. We boldly enter God's presence by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). We are not to shrink back due to shame or guilt, for He has given His own righteousness to us as a free gift (2 Cor. 5:21).

We come with the confidence that the blood of Jesus qualifies weak and broken people. No matter how weak and broken we are, His blood qualifies us to pray effective prayer. We can come boldly into the presence of God. When guilt and shame want to drive us away from the presence of God—sins we have repented of, but the sting of the shame and guilt of it continue to fill our mind and emotions—we can speak the Word of God to resist it and say, "There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. By His blood we can come boldly into His presence."

3. It is prayer with confidence in the Father's desire to heal, set free, and bless His people by the power and work of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13).

¹¹If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?...¹³If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Lk 11:11-13)

We come with confidence in the Father's desire to release blessing and power and presence. Jesus has authority over all of the powers. The blood qualifies weak and broken people, and the Father desires to release His resource through His people into the earthly realm. The Father desires this.

F. **Prayer rooted in faith:** Jesus emphasized the importance of praying with faith (Mk. 11:22-24).

²⁴I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. (Mk. 11:24)

Over and over through the gospels Jesus emphasized the importance of praying in faith. We can get so accustomed to the fact that He did it that we can end up going on, business as usual, not cultivating strong faith. "I know about faith," but we do not actually develop it.

Faith must be developed intentionally. Faith does not grow by itself. It grows by feeding our mind on the Word of God and by exercising faith. It starts out like a mustard seed, very, very small, and it gets bigger and bigger. It grows as we exercise it, as we speak the Word. I know a lot of believers who really love the Lord, who are really sincere in their walk with the Lord, but they do not really exercise faith much. They are not intentional about feeding their mind on the Word of God, speaking the Word of God, and staying with it against all obstacles when it is a prayer in the will of God.

We read the teachings of Jesus and say, “Yeah, yeah, I know. He was really big on faith.” Beloved, we need to intentionally say, “That is going to be part of my life story. I am going to grow strong and mighty in faith.” It is not okay just to hear stories of history. We need to say, “I am going to be one of those people who knows the Lord in mature faith.” You may never be famous or well-known on earth, but you can be well-known at the throne of God with mighty faith. Faith grows. It starts like a mustard seed, and it grows through speaking the Word, by staying with what God says, even in the face of obstacles and delays.

1. Our faith is anchored in the knowledge of Jesus’ authority over every power that exists.

¹⁸*Jesus...saying, “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**” (Mt 28:18)*

2. We are to pray with faith that our prayers will actually produce results as God answers them by releasing a greater measure of His blessing and power. Jesus affirmed the need for faith. He affirmed the Roman centurion who had great faith (Mt. 8:10), and He told two blind men, “According to your faith let it be to you” (Mt. 9:29). Jesus was unable to do mighty works where there was great unbelief (Mk. 6:5-6). He rebuked the unbelief of the disciples who did not believe those who had seen Him after He rose (Mk. 16:14).

Jesus affirmed the need for faith over and over through the gospels. I could give many verses. He spoke of the problem of unbelief. Unbelief was not a casual, neutral thing. He said, in essence, “Unbelief will keep Me from operating in power. I could not do mighty works in Nazareth because of unbelief.”

3. A man brought his epileptic son to Jesus’ disciples and later complained that they could not cure him (Mt. 17:14-21). When the disciples asked why they could not drive the demon out of the boy, Jesus stated the reason simply: “Because of your unbelief.”

¹⁹*The disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”* ²⁰*Jesus said to them, “**Because of your unbelief...if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move...**” (Mt. 17:19-20)*

Jesus did not rebuke the disciples because of their failure. He rebuked them because of unbelief. They did not believe what He said. They did not lay hold of what He said in a way that was appropriate. That is what they were rebuked for far more than for their other failures. They were corrected on their pride a time or two, but not rebuked. They were rebuked because of unbelief. That is something we do not think about much. We think about rebuke for sinning. The Holy Spirit says, “No, I actually want you to grow in faith. Unbelief is not neutral, casual, and of no consequence.” It has great consequence in our lives.

- G. **Prayer in the context of good relationships:** In teaching on effective prayer, James exhorted us to confess our sins to one another (Jas 5:16). We follow this exhortation most often in context to strong relationship with others. Some are committed to growing in relationship with others, but are content to have a weak prayer life. Others are committed to grow in prayer, but are content to have weak relationships. The Bible sets these two values as complementary, not competing.

The next principle is prayer in the context of good relationships. This is in James 5:16 where James said, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Notice he says, “Confess your sins to one another.” When James says to confess your sins to one another, I strongly believe he is talking about much more than just personal struggles. He is not saying, “Get somebody and tell them your personal struggles.” I do think that is a good thing to do, but I think he is talking about more than that.

In James 4, he talks about humility. Several times through James 4, in the passage just before this, he is talking about the strife we bring into our relationships. Husband and wife, friends, coworkers, people in the same

neighborhoods, they get into tension. They get into strife. James is saying, “Bring your confession into the relationship, and you will see healing and power will flow out of that.”

It is not just, “Hey, I am struggling. Will you help me?” It is more like, “You know what I said yesterday? I am asking for forgiveness. I repent of it.” That is the type of confession I believe is being highlighted here. The confession of how we have brought strain and even just difficulty in relationships, even a little bit. Owning our part of the relationship.

In other words, this is a statement about humility more than vulnerability, although I think vulnerability is in this. Often when people read James 5:16, they focus on the “be vulnerable, get a friend, and tell them your struggle.” I believe in that. I think that is powerful, but I think James is talking about something far more common. He is talking about owning our own failures that cause tension in our relationships. I think that is the greater context of James 3-5.

James references this right through the whole letter. That is one of his main themes in the book of James. I do not think he is suddenly abandoning that theme and only talking now about being vulnerable with your friends. I am not minimizing that. Again, I think that is a powerful thing. Here is the bigger point I am making right now: when James talks about confessing our sins—our contribution to the strife of the difficulty, or being vulnerable with our struggles—it is implying that there is strong relationship. People do not do that if they do not have a strong relationship with somebody. If they are not committed to strong relationships, they will not do that. They will ignore the strife they have brought by their bad attitudes or saying inappropriate things, or they will not open their hearts. So confession implies strong relationships.

We follow this exhortation far more often in context to a commitment to grow in strong relationship. Some people are committed to grow in relationship, and they are content to have a weak prayer life. “I am really into the relationships.” They are content to have a weak prayer life.

Other people want to have a strong prayer life, but they are content to have weak relationships. “I am really into prayer. I do not really do all that socializing stuff.”

The Bible sets the two values of growing in prayer and growing in relationships as complementary, not competing or contradictory. They are not competing values where you pick one or the other.

1. A strong prayer life will eventually lead to strong relationships with people. Prayer is not about being anti-relational or antisocial. True prayer has the opposite effect. It is all about love—loving God and people. People of prayer should be the most energized in love.

A strong prayer life eventually will lead to strong relationships. It does not mean you will have hundreds of them, but you will have some quality relationships. Maybe a small number of quality ones. Prayer is not about being antisocial or anti-relational. I have heard that over the years. They say, “I am really into prayer. I do not really do that thing with people.”

I think, “I understand the sincere desire,” but I tell them, “Read the whole Bible. We do both. We do both with zeal throughout our life.” Prayer is about love. It is about loving God and about loving people. That is what prayer is about. People of prayer should be the people most energized in love.

2. The Lord cares so much about relationships that husbands must honor their wives so that their prayers are not hindered. The measure of a husband’s effectiveness in prayer is connected to the measure with which he honors his wife. He can pray with eloquence in public, but if he speaks in unkind ways to his wife in private, his prayers are hindered.

⁷*Husbands...giving honor to the wife...that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)*

As a matter of fact, God cares so much about relationship that he tells the husband, “If you do not honor your wife, your prayers will not work.” The Lord is so committed to quality relationships that He tells the man, “You can be eloquent in the prayer room. You can get on the prayer microphone and be bold, eloquent, quote verses, and wow people, speak in eloquence in public in the prayer room, but speak unkindly at home to your wife, and the Word of God says your prayers will not be answered.” The Lord ties the effectiveness of a man’s prayer life to the level or the measure to which he honors his wife in private. I do not mean just in private but that is where is easiest not to honor your wife. God connects a measure of our effectiveness in prayer to the measure we honor our wives. I am talking about men who are married and men who are going to be married.

3. 1 Peter 3:7 is significant for the global prayer movement. As the prayer movement matures, so the emphasis on honor in marriage will increase, especially honor for wives.

This verse in 1 Peter 3 is a significant prayer for the global prayer movement. Beloved, as the prayer movement matures, honor for women in the home will increase. As the prayer movement in the earth matures, honor for the wife in the home will increase globally. The Lord connects the two together.

- H. **Prayer from a lifestyle of righteousness:** Commitment to a lifestyle of righteousness is essential to cultivating an effective prayer life (Jas. 5:16). This biblical condition is often minimized, even by some who are deeply involved in the prayer-and-worship movement today.

¹⁶*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (Jas. 5:16)*

Let’s go to the third characteristic, which is prayer from a lifestyle of righteousness. This is essential. James said, “The effective prayer of a righteous man”—that is a man or a woman, a person—“that is what accomplishes much.” This biblical condition is often minimized. I have read a lot of books on prayer. I have been to prayer conferences. I do not hear that much on the requirement of commitment to a righteous lifestyle in the subject of prayer. Mostly what I hear when people preach on prayer is the authority we have in Jesus. That is powerful. That is really important to know our authority. That is what faith is about. The whole subject of the prayer of faith is the subject of knowing our authority in Christ, who we are in Christ.

But beloved, when you read Genesis to Revelation, all through the Old and New Testaments, it emphasizes a lifestyle of righteousness. That is not a small thing for us as people involved in the prayer movement; I do not mean because you are at the Bible School, in an internship here, or on the staff here. There is a prayer culture the Holy Spirit is raising up among a billion believers worldwide, in the whole body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is bringing a prayer culture into the whole church worldwide. In all the different streams and denominations, this is what He is doing. It is not the only thing He is doing, but He is doing this. The commitment to a lifestyle of righteousness is critical for that prayer culture to be strong.

1. The righteous person in this passage is any believer who *sets his heart to obey Jesus* as he seeks to walk in godly character. Setting our hearts to obey is very important, even if we fall short of mature, consistent obedience. I have never met a person who is so mature in righteousness that he is above all temptation and never falls short in his walk with God.

*The righteous person, or the righteous man who is being referred to here in verse 16, is not the perfectly mature believer who does not struggle anymore. I have never met the guy who does not have any more temptations or struggle. I do not know who that guy is. I do not believe James is talking about that man. I think he is talking about men and women like Elijah who had a nature like us. It is the people who **set their heart to obey**. That is a key phrase. They set their heart to obey. Even when they fall short, they reset their heart. They may fall short again, but they are never casual about falling short.*

When they stumble in compromise, they say, “This is not good. I am not okay with this. I am not at peace with this. I am declaring war on it. I am calling sin a sin. I am resisting it. I am warring against it, and I am taking a stand to obey the Lord in this area.” They may stumble again, again, and again, but they are sincere about obeying in that area. That is what I believe is being referred to as a righteous man. I do not think it is the person who is fifty years old in the Lord and does not struggle with anything anymore because they almost walk on water, nearly. No, He is talking about people like Elijah who had a nature like us. Talking about weak people, prone to difficulty.

2. The prayers of a “righteous person” include the prayers of imperfect, weak people who *sincerely seek* to walk in righteousness even as we stumble in our weakness.

The reason this is good news is that the prayers of a righteous person include weak and imperfect people like us. People who are sincere. I mean weak in their flesh, but sincere.

Let’s go back to the subject of righteousness. I am talking here about a lifestyle of righteousness. This is not the gift of righteousness. We receive that as a free gift the moment we are born again. That is involved in this, but here in this passage, in verse 16, he is talking about a lifestyle of righteousness, not just the free gift. You will never have a lifestyle of righteousness without drawing on the power and boldness of the free gift, of course. But do not confuse this as the gift of righteousness. He is talking about the man or woman who sets their heart to obey. Do not let anybody lie to you about this.

There is a distorted grace message escalating around the earth that minimizes the heart set to obey God. That is not the Holy Spirit, and it is not truthful to the Word of God. They magnify the grace of God in a way that is not biblical to the point where “obedience does not really matter because Jesus obeyed for you so you do not need to set your heart to obey.” It is true that He obeyed for us to get a relationship with the Father as a free gift. However, Jesus obeying for us is not a substitute for us setting our heart to obey now and to be like Him. In the gratitude of love we set our heart to obey Him because we are so grateful for how He loves us. We want to be near Him; we want to be like Him. We want to be in unity with His will and His heart.

3. The Lord responds to His people because they seek to keep His commands and do the things that are pleasing to Him.

22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 Jn. 3:22)

*1 John 3:22 is very important. We need to have this right in the center of the prayer movement. 1 John 3:22, “Whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments.” **Because we keep His commandments**—we do the things that are pleasing. It is called obedience.*

*Some might say, “Well, John, you obviously did not understand the grace of God because you said whatever we ask we receive **because** we keep His commands.” Let me tell you, John understands what grace teaching is about. He is saying the grace teaching that takes root in a person’s life emboldens them and energizes them to grow in the spirit of obedience. Again, their obedience might not be at the maturity they want it, but they are not content with compromise in their lives. They are warring against it whenever they see it.*

He says, “Because we keep His commandments.” Do not read that out of the context of the whole New Testament, and even out of the context of 1 John because, in the larger context, it is clear that our relationship is by the blood of Jesus; we have a relationship with the Father through the blood of Jesus. It is clear in 1 John that the reason for our prayers being heard is the love of God and the blood of Jesus. John is not stumbling. He has made that clear through the whole of his letter. He is saying in essence, “I do not want you to mistake. It

matters that we obey.” Again, the distorted grace teaching presents it as though obedience does not matter. Some will not actually say it does not matter, but the complete absence of exhortation about righteousness leaves a clear impression it does not matter. Beloved, it does matter. It really matters that we set our heart to obey.

4. Prayer is no substitute for obedience. I have met those who imagine that if they pray and fast more, they can walk in a little immorality or be dishonest in their finances or slander people who do not treat them in the way they want. They think that being extra zealous in the spiritual disciplines will balance out areas of persistent compromise.

²And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. (Isa. 59:2)

Prayer is no substitute for obedience. I have met people over the years that have some immorality going on in their life, or maybe they have had some dishonesty about their finances, or some area of compromise they are continuing in. I do not mean they just stumble. It is something they are embracing. They say, “I am going to keep doing this.” I am not talking about failing and repenting. I am talking about saying, “Well, a little of this sin, a little of that. I tell you what; I will pray and fast more. I will go on a fast, and I will increase my prayer life. Maybe that will balance out my sin.” Beloved, it does not balance out! The Lord is not asking you to pray and fast more to balance out disobedience. Prayer is about relationship. We are not praying to earn something. We are praying because He wants dialogue. He wants interaction with our heart. He wants connection with our heart. That is what prayer is about.

He ties the releasing of His resources into the earthly realm; He ties it to us talking to Him, agreeing with Him. He wants us in relationship. He says in Isaiah 59, “Your sins have hidden His face from you.” This is talking about continual sin that is not repented of.

Some of you might say, “Oh no! I have done the same thing 100 times.”

Or maybe someone says, “I wish it was just 100 times.” They are thinking they are out of the running already. No, no, no. You are not out. That is not what this verse is talking about. It is talking about unconfessed sin.

I am not talking about some secret sin way back when that you forgot about, and you think, “Oh no, I forgot to confess it. Wait, wait, wait...Lord, when I was fourteen years old I think I did something, but I cannot quite remember it.”

Not that kind of stuff. I have seen people do that, and sometimes it gets kind of silly. I think, “Come on.”

They say, “The Lord is showing me something back when I was nine.”

I would think, “Good for you. I would not put a lot of time on that. But maybe the Lord is dealing with you on that, so I will be nice about it.” Some people get weird about it. Here he is talking about sin that is right in front of you and is obvious. If God wants to talk about what happened when you were nine, then that is between you and the Holy Spirit. Again, most of what I heard about that over the years I think is just a big distraction. James is talking about what is going on in the last few weeks that we are not repenting of. That is what He is referring to here.

It says He will not hear you. It is not like God will not actually hear you. God is saying in essence, “I will not approve of your prayer.” For God “to hear” prayer, it means He “approves” of it. God hears the prayers of everyone. He hears the groans of everyone in the earth. When the Bible talks about God hears prayer, it is talking about He hears with approval.

5. Prayer is far more boring and difficult if we seek to live one part of our lives as if it belonged to God and another part as if it belonged to us. There is a relationship between our lifestyle and our ability to enjoy prayer (Mt. 5:8). Ongoing, willful compromise in our lives greatly hinders our prayer life and our capacity to agree with God in prayer.
6. When we come up short in our obedience, we must acknowledge it and confess it, rather than seeking to rationalize it. We call it sin, we repent of it, and we freely receive God's forgiveness. Then we "push delete" and stand with confidence in God's presence.

This is very important. I say this like a broken record, but it needs to be said over and over. When we do sin, we just acknowledge it to God. Tell Him. Confess it to Him. Do not rationalize it. Do not look for Bible verses to make it okay. Confess it to Him. Call it sin. He knows it. You are not going to fake God out with a Bible verse. Repent of it. Declare war on it. Say, "This is not okay with me." Receive the free gift of forgiveness. We already have the gift of righteousness. Receive that renewing forgiveness. That renewal of your heart. That forgiveness. Push delete on it and stand with confidence in the presence of God.

Within the hour you can be there with full confidence as a first-class citizen in the kingdom. The devil will be whispering in your ear or shouting, accusing you, "How can you stand with confidence with what you did one hour ago?"

You say, "By the blood of Jesus and on the basis that I have repented of the sin, I can stand with confidence in the love of God right here, in the full gift of righteousness."

7. Walking in obedience is not about seeking to earn the answers to our prayers; it is about living in agreement with love because God is love. Some who teach on prayer overlook the necessity of obeying God. It is more popular to emphasize *only* our authority in Christ without mentioning the necessity of setting our heart to obey Jesus.

²¹He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."(Jn. 14:21)

Do not get into the confusion out there that obedience is about earning your prayers. When I run into somebody who wants to minimize obedience—and it is pretty obvious when you are talking to some folks that they want to get rid of obedience—they will say, "Obedience means you are trying to earn the love of God." That is the standard argument.

It is true that sometimes someone is trying to earn the love of God. That is called legalism. They need to stop. But most of the folks I have heard say, "You are trying to earn the love of God," are folks who do not want to obey the commands of God. It is religious rhetoric to cover up a big problem. Do not buy into that false argument. When someone comes and says, "You are earning the love of God," it might be true. You might be trying to, but more times than not, what I have watched over the last couple decades is that this is normally code for, "I do not like the teaching that obedience is important." Do not be tricked by that. It is the old trick of the enemy. He has used it the last 2000 years quite successfully.

Obedience is not about earning anything. Obedience is about agreeing with love. God is love. When we agree with God, we agree with love. We receive it freely. We respond in gratitude. That agreement with God is the relational part of what the Scripture is talking about here.

- I. Prayer is not about informing or persuading God, but about connecting with Him in relationship. He is looking for conversation and dialogue with us. Some believers think that by praying more they earn the answers to their prayers. God wants us to talk with Him more because He loves relating to us. We do not *earn* answers to prayers by *either* our persistence *or* our obedience.

*I say it again because we cannot say it too often in this course. **Prayer is not about informing God.** He already knows what you need. You are not telling Him something He does not know. You are not persuading Him, “Lord, if I really work myself up, You will know I am so sincere that You will go with this.”*

He would say, “I already know where you are at. I do not need another argument.” It is not about deserving the answer. That is confusion. That is just a distraction. Prayer is about the conversation. He wants us connecting with His heart, and He is so adamant about that because He is love. He connects the release of His resource into the earth realm to people talking to Him. He could just wave His hand and give all of His resources freely. He does that through history. It is called the sun shining every day and the rain coming. He says, “I give that to the unrighteous. I give it to the wicked.” He continues, “I want to give more blessings related to talking to Me because I love talking with you. I want the relationship.”

II. EARNEST PRAYER

- A. **Prayer that is earnest.** It is important to understand what earnest prayer is because it is one of the primary biblical conditions of effective prayer.

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. (Jas 5:17)

*James 5:17 says, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.” A nature like ours means he was weak and broken like we are. Same temptations. Same propensity to fear, discouragement, “But he prayed earnestly.” This word **earnestly** is a very important word. Elijah is one of the great examples of prayer of all redemptive history. The main thing that is said about Elijah is that he prayed earnestly. Whatever earnestly means, we want to get it. We want to get it because that is the main description of that prayer warrior, Elijah. He prayed earnestly. There are many examples in the life of Elijah. You can read the life of Elijah in 1 Kings in the Old Testament. Start in 1 Kings 17 and work your way through, and you will read all about Elijah. You will find a number of examples about his prayer life. The example here is that he prayed it would not rain, and it did not. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. It was not just his faith that was being highlighted. He had faith, but it was his earnestness.*

- B. The work of the kingdom is based on who Jesus is and what He did on the cross, not on how we feel. God answers our prayers because of the blood of Jesus and His desire to partner with His people. If we measure ourselves by a wrong idea of what passion or earnestness in prayer is, then we will be tempted to pray much less.

The work of the kingdom, we know, is based on who Jesus is and what He did. It is not based on how we feel. A lot of times we feel tired, we feel discouraged, we do not feel the presence of God. The work of the kingdom is not affected if you feel tired or you do not feel tired. Like, “I feel really tired today. I am in a really down mood. I do not want to pray now.” The work of the kingdom is not based on if you are tired because God is not tired. When we pray for the sick, we can feel tired. We can feel in a negative mood. We can feel all kinds of distractions. Take your hand out of your pocket, and say “in the name of Jesus,” because God is not tired and He is not in a bad mood about it. It is confidence in the nature of God, confidence in the blood of Jesus, confidence in the cross, confidence in our heart that God desires to release His presence through us.

The reason I say that is because if we measure earnestness in the wrong way, we will stop praying. This is a big point to me because I have had to face this over the years. If earnestness means really energetic, powerful, praying on the microphone donating your tonsils to the cause, if that is what earnestness means, and everything that is not that is not earnest, then it means most of your entire prayer life is not going to be effective. Some folks get an idea that this is what earnest means, and they say, “I cannot stay with that,” so they draw back in prayer.

That is why I have passion about this. You can whisper your prayer and have it be earnest, if it is “in the name of Jesus.” You can be in a bad mood. You can feel bad. You can be struggling with condemnation and still have earnest prayer. It is not a style of prayer. That is not what it is talking about. The reason I have passion about this is because if you think it is style of prayer, then you will say, “I cannot do that. Or maybe I can, but I do not feel like that today, so I will not.” You are missing a huge reality that James is talking about because earnest prayer can be yours when you are feeling out of it, tired, and down. That is the reason I have energy about this.

- C. First, earnest prayer comes from a heart that is engaged with God. To be earnest implies that we are not praying by rote or just going through the motions. It is the opposite of speaking our prayers mindlessly into the air. We are to focus our minds toward the Lord when we pray.

Earnest prayer comes from a heart that is engaged with God. I can be praying for someone and having a horrible time myself, tired and distracted, but when I lay hands on that person, I am talking to God. I am engaging with God. The Lord knows I might be going through A, B, C, D, but I am saying, “Lord, I am believing You to heal them now.” Earnestness means engaged with God. It involves the attentiveness of your heart to a real person, God the Father through the blood of Jesus. It is a focus of our mind on the Lord while we are praying. We are not just praying some kind of memorized prayer into the air. It is okay if you have a memorized prayer. That is not my point. It is not mindless prayer said to get it over with. Not, it is engaged prayer. It is not the volume of the prayer. It is the engagement of the heart.

- D. Second, earnest prayer is prayer that is persistent (Mt. 7:7-8; Lk. 11: 5-10; 18:1, 7). The Greek word *proseuche*, translated as *earnestly* in James 5:17, literally means, “he prayed with prayer,” which is an idiom expressing persistence in prayer.

Secondly, earnest prayer is persistent. You do not quit. It is engaged, and it is persistent. If you are whispering it—as in you are praying while you are out in the park or in the grocery store, so you are whispering it—you can actually be engaged in prayer earnestly. It is not about working up a sweat or some religious fervor. That is not the point. I do not mind that, but that is not the essence of engagement, working up fervor beyond what most are capable of working up. Some folks, some cultures really value that working up, that religious fervor, and they say that this is what it is about. Then ninety-nine percent or the ninety percent hear that and say, “I could never do that. Even if I could do it one day, I certainly cannot do it all the time.” What do they do? They conclude that earnest prayer is not for them. They draw back and say, “Until I am in a better frame of mind, I am not going to pray.” That is the attitude I am confronting here.

1. Elijah refused to be denied answers to prayers that were in agreement with God’s will.
2. We must never stop asking and thanking God for the answers of the prayers that are offered in His will until we see them with our eyes. We must be persistent. We are to pray “with all perseverance” (Eph. 6:18) and to “labor fervently” (Col. 4:12) in prayer.

Never stop asking. Never stop thanking God for what He has promised until you see it with your eyes. If it is in the will of God, never give up. That is what earnest prayer is. Paul talked about praying with all perseverance.

Do not give up on a “will of God” prayer. I do not care how many years it takes. Do not give up. That is what earnest prayer is.

Stay engaged. Talk to the Lord. Do not just speak to the air, and do not give up. Those, to me, are two of the important elements of earnestness. When Elijah prayed earnestly in 1 Kings 18 for the rain, he was kneeling down with his head toward the ground. I do not know what kind of noise he was making. I do not know if anybody could hear him. Maybe they could or they could not. I do not know. That is the earnestness. He was deeply connecting with the Lord, meaning the intention of his mind. I do not necessarily mean he felt great power. That is not what I mean. He was talking to a real person.

3. Jesus taught a parable emphasizing persistence in prayer (Lk. 11:5-10). The Greek verbs for “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are in the continuous present tense (v. 9). Thus, we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking.

⁸...yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. ⁹So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Lk. 11:8-9)

Jesus taught a parable emphasizing persistence. Persistence is the essence of earnestness. He said, “Ask and keep on asking.” When He said, “Ask,” it is in the continuous present tense in the Greek. Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking. That is the idea.

4. When we highly prize something, we seek the Lord for it with all our hearts (Jer. 29:13). When we ask casually, with little effort to focus our minds on the Lord, or when we stop praying for something that is in God’s will, we show that we do not value it very much.

¹³And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jer. 29:13)

When you highly prize something, you seek it with all of your heart. You do not give up easily on something that you prize in the will of God.

- E. Earnest prayer doesn’t have to be loud. We should not conclude that our prayers are ineffective or that we lack earnestness simply because we do not have a loud, aggressive public prayer style.

I have talked with so many about praying on the microphone, and you may say, “I cannot pray like so many of those guys pray. I cannot do it.” Do not worry about it. Do not even think about it. Do not even try to do it. Talk to Jesus, stay with it, and you are earnest. You are passionate. Passion is not about volume. Passion is about engagement of the heart.

I saw an example of passion once. I was in the store years ago, and I saw a mom. She had little Billy in the store with her. I did not hear all what she said, but she began, “Come here. You better stop that right now.” I did not hear all of it, but it was with passion. I was afraid. I went in the other aisle. I thought that mom was serious. She was focused, and she was staying with it.

Do not imagine that when you speak the whisper of your heart it is somehow categorized as non-passionate or non-earnest. Most of your prayer life is speaking the whisper of your heart. You may pray on the microphone every now and then, some of you, but most of your prayer life, even for the people who pray on the microphone, it is the whisper of your heart through the day, and that is passionate prayer. Passionate means engaged. I am trying to free some of you to press in. That is what I am after right now.

1. Passion in prayer is not mostly about energy and volume; it is about being engaged with the Lord from the heart while praying and persevering in faith without quitting. So keep at it and do not draw back, even if your prayer style is softer than that of others.
 2. Some conclude that they lack the necessary “passion” for God to answer them because they do not express themselves with great emotion or volume. If we define earnest prayer by shouting, then I guess about 99% of our prayers would be classified as non-passionate prayer, because most of our prayers are offered as whispers from our hearts throughout the day.
 3. Hannah prayed for a child with great anguish because of her barrenness. She wept as she spoke from her heart so softly that Eli the priest could not hear her (1 Sam. 1:13, 27).
 4. The NKJV translators used the word *fervent* in James 5:16 to convey the concept of *earnestness*. This word is not found in Greek manuscripts. It was inserted because the translators sought to emphasize the strength of the word “earnestly” in James 5:17.
- F. Earnest prayer doesn’t depend on what we feel. Some draw back in their prayer lives because they think they must feel God’s presence when they pray. Thus when they feel discouraged or tired, or when they simply feel nothing, they assume their prayers will be of no effect, and they stop praying. I have good news—our prayers are effective even when we are discouraged, or not in a good mood. We offer our prayers to the Lord who is in a good mood and is not tired.

Earnest prayer does not depend on how you feel. You can feel discouraged, you can feel tired, or you can feel nothing and still be earnest.

- G. Weak people can pray earnestly. Elijah was a weak man with a nature like ours. He was prone to fear and discouragement, and he faced the same temptations that we do; yet his prayer life was effective (1 Kgs. 17-19). James emphasized this to give us courage to pray in our weaknesses.
- ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain...¹⁸And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain... (Jas. 5:17-18)***
- H. If we ask anything according to God’s will, no matter how difficult it is, God will answer us. For God to “hear” our prayers means that He approves of them, no matter how impossible it seems.
- ¹⁴Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 Jn. 5:14)***
- I. We must not assume that a prayer is outside of God’s will when we don’t receive an immediate answer to it. God may answer in a *different way* or *different time* than we expect (Isa. 55:8-9). The delay of answered prayer is designed to provoke earnestness in us to continue to seek Him.

III. THE DIVINE AND HUMAN SIDES OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

- A. The divine side of effective prayer is Jesus’ work on the cross and His power being released through us. We receive God’s favor as a free gift. When we combine agreement with God as seen in our believing, righteous, earnest prayer, then we experience more of what is freely given to us by Jesus. God doesn’t love us more when we live in greater agreement with Him, but He is able to use us more, and we are able to experience a greater measure of blessing in our life.

The divine side of prayer is the work on the cross, the power of God, etc. The things we know well as the main and plain truths of the gospel, of the cross.

- B. The human side of effective prayer is coming into agreement with God—living and praying in accordance with His will, heart, and priorities. As we pray with faith, we pray in agreement with God’s authority and Jesus’ work on the cross. As we live righteously, we live in agreement with God’s character. As we pray persistently, we live in agreement with God’s priorities.

The human side is agreement. The divine side is the nature of God and the work on the cross, the release of His power. The human side is agreement. That is what He is after. When you pray in faith, you agree with His authority. You say, “He has more authority than the devil does.”

When you live righteously, you agree with God’s character. “I want to live in purity, humility, and meekness.” You are agreeing with godly character, with God’s heart.

When you pray persistently, you agree with His priorities. In other words, “I am going to stay with it because it is important to God. I am not giving up because the answer is not coming now. I am buying into God’s priorities. Even if it takes decades, I am staying with it.”

- C. Effective prayer is earnest prayer that is in agreement with God’s will and is offered in faith in context to building strong kingdom relationships and walking in righteousness.
- D. The characteristics of effective prayer include the following conditions:
- Faith (Mt. 21:21-22; Mk. 11:23-24; 1 Jn. 5:14-15)
 - Right relationships, including husbands honoring wives (1 Pet. 3:7)
 - A righteous or holy life (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 59:2; 1 Jn. 3:19-22)
 - Earnestness or persistence (Isa. 30:18-19; 62:6-7; Mt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8; Jas. 5:17)
 - In accordance with the will of God (1 Jn. 5:14-15)
 - In the name of Jesus (Jn. 14:13-14, 26; 16:23-24)
 - Pure motives (Jas. 4:2-3)
 - Boldness (Heb. 4:16)
 - Forgiveness (Matt. 6:15; 5:23–24)
 - Prayer of agreement or unity (Mt. 18:19-20)

These are the four characteristics I looked at plus a few more. Faith, strong relationships, holy life or a commitment to righteousness, earnestness, praying in the will of God, praying in the name of Jesus. To pray in the name of Jesus means you acknowledge His leadership. It is not like you can pray what you want and it is okay so long as you say “in Jesus’ name.” It means you are praying a prayer He can endorse. Can He co-sign the check? You are acknowledging His leadership, the will of God, and His authority. He has more power over the obstacles. He has the power, and He has the leadership. We are praying something that He can write His name on and endorse.

IV. OUR PRAYERS REMAIN EFFECTIVE FOREVER

- A. The prayers of God’s people *avail much* or *accomplish much* (Jas. 5:16). Indeed, our prayers accomplish much in this age *and* in the age to come. The challenge is in not being able to measure fully right now the extent to which our prayers impact us, other people, and the nations.

This is one of my favorite subjects. Our prayers remain effective forever. Beloved, your prayers do not only accomplish something in the next few weeks or in the next few decades, they also accomplish something in this age and in the age to come. The challenge of this truth is that we are not able to measure it very well right now. Because we cannot measure it, we can give up on it.

- B. All the prayers prayed in God’s will throughout history are stored in bowls near God’s throne. The bowls of prayer will one day be “full” (Rev. 5:8). The fact that the bowls of prayer in heaven “fill up” implies that God does not forget our prayers. We may forget them, but God does not.

⁸When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders... each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (Re 5:8)

³Then another angel...was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints...before the throne. (Rev. 8:3)

In heaven there are golden bowls full of prayer. The fact that those bowls will one day be full means they are filling up. Even over the generations they are filling up. It means God is not forgetting the early prayers that are in that bowl. The bowl is filling up. The prayers from thousands of years ago are still effective in God’s heart. When you pray in the will of God, you agree with His heart. My opinion is that it lasts forever in God’s heart. He says, “I will never forget anything you do in loving Me. I will not forget it.”

- C. The Lord will never forget the love we show toward Him in ministering to others in prayer or in other acts of service (Heb. 6:10). He would consider it an “injustice” if He forgot anything we do in love for Him. Knowing that our “weak” prayers are not forgotten motivates us to persevere.

¹⁰For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Heb. 6:10)

God is not unjust to forget any of your love, any of your labor, which you have shown in His name. Beloved, when you are praying for the saints, you are showing love to Jesus and love to the saints. He says, in essence, “If I forget any of that, charge Me with injustice.” He remembers the cup of cold water that you give. He remembers every prayer you pray that is in the will of God.

We have been praying over the years for North Korea. We have prayed for North Korea so many times. We need to do it more. Beloved, things are going to happen in North Korea. Powerful things are happening, and more is going to happen. The saints around the world are praying for North Korea. In the age to come, in the Millennial Kingdom, you will have an inheritance in North Korea because you have prayed for it. Some of your prayers will be answered now. We will say, “Wow,” but later we will be surprised when our prayers are answered fully then. We will exclaim, “Wow, wow! I thought it already happened.”

The Lord would say, “It did in part. That revival in history, that did happen, but there is another revival in that same geographic area, a greater manifestation of glory in the age to come that is related to the manifestation of glory in this age.” Our prayers are connected to all of it.

I have been in this city I think thirty-two years. I have been in daily prayer meetings, except for my day-off type thing and travelling. For thirty-two years I have prayed for Kansas City. I am believing for now, but no matter how glorious the things happening now with thousands of prayers of thousands of believers and multitudes of ministries in this age, thousand churches plus—I am looking forward to how God is going to answer in this age—but I believe in the age to come I will be shocked. I will say, “Oh my goodness, how could I have known?” Amen.

- D. Our prayers avail so much that they remain effective, or “alive,” in God’s sight long after this life. I assume that they “live” forever in God’s heart. Even the prayers from the distant past—from thousand of years ago—are still effective in God’s presence. I believe that the prayers we offer today will still be effective in the distant future, hundreds or thousands of years from now. There is continuity between what we pray and do now and what happens in the age to come.

- E. The prayers for revival and justice did not “die out” after they were partially answered by the revivals in history. Our prayers have a significant, partial release in our generation and a greater, more complete release in the future, even in the age to come.