

Effective Prayer

(Adapted from *Path to Righteousness* by Linda Poitras)

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”
(James 5:16).

Introduction

The key verse talks about what happens when a “righteous” man prays. God’s Word often speaks of special things happening to the “righteous.” There is something about walking down the “Path to Righteousness,” that makes many of life’s troubles less difficult.

James specifically speaks about the kind of prayer this “righteous” man prays: it is both “effectual” and “fervent.” We know that “fervent” means to be very eager, excited, or emotionally involved in something. “Effectual” means that it works. It gets the desired results. James was telling us that the “righteous man” (the one who does things according to God’s laws, in a correct way) can pray in a very excited, emotional, involved way for something, and his prayers will work. What an exciting promise. But what is this “prayer” business?

What is Prayer?

According to *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, prayer is “a humble communication in thought or speech to God or to an object of worship expressing supplication, thanksgiving, praise, confession, etc; an entreaty made to someone.”

In *The Accelerated Bible Curriculum – “Lesson 8,”* the story is told of a tourist to China who visited a heathen temple on a great feast day and observed hundreds of worshippers surrounding the hideous idol encased there. Most of the worshippers brought prayers written on small pieces of paper and wrapped in balls of stiff mud to fling at the idol. He inquired of the purpose for the strange and appalling practice, and learned that if the mud ball stuck to the idol, the prayer would surely be answered. If the mud fell off, their god had rejected the prayer.

This story may make us feel sad at the ignorance of praying to an idol, but often we who serve a living God do not know how to pray or get answers.

Many people pray, believing this is a “magic” formula that will get them whatever they are asking for. Prayer is not magic, but law. It works, regardless of whether man recognizes it or not.

Prayer is a need finding a voice. When hungry hearts cry out to God, He always meets them at their point of need (Luke 11:9).

Prayer is essential in a Christian's life. It does many things for and to us, things we will list here to help us understand what it really is:

- 📖 Prayer draws God's attention close to us and draws us near to Him (2 Chronicles 7:14-15; Psalm 25:1).
- 📖 Prayer gives us strength to bear our daily burdens (Psalm 18; Psalm 86:6-7).
- 📖 Prayer is the link that connects God's fulfillment of His promises to our daily lives (Luke 11:5-13; Matthew 9:38).
- 📖 Prayer is the only way we can receive His Spirit (Acts 1:12-14; John 14:12-26). Peter, the rest of the apostles, and even Jesus' mother were together in prayer for the promise of the Holy Ghost, and it came! Jesus always keeps His promises, but He expects us to fulfill our part too. Did the Holy Ghost fall on people who were not in the upper room? Did Jesus fill anyone who was not obeying the command to wait in Jerusalem until they were filled with power from on high (Acts 1:4)? No. The apostles had to obey God's Word, and then He kept His promise.
- 📖 After we have been obedient to His commandment to receive His Spirit, He again commands us to continue our worship in Spirit and truth. It is only through prayer that we can accomplish this (John 4:24).

Prayer is more than important, for without it, we would not have a means to communicate with God or a way to come before His throne. We have the great privilege of becoming acquainted with our God through prayer, just as we become acquainted with our earthly father through daily association and communication.

We learn much about the Lord by reading His Word (the Bible). But we begin to *know* and *enjoy* Him when we pray. Prayer is *talking to God*.

How Do We Pray?

There are many examples of prayer in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus prayed and gave us examples. All His prayers had one thing in common. Jesus was always careful to "give thanks." The Psalmist David knew how to give thanks. Long before Jesus came to earth, David used this key to unlock heaven's door many times (Psalm 100:4; 116:17).

Start With Thanksgiving.

Everyone is thankful *after* a prayer is answered. But it takes divine faith to thank the Lord and praise Him *before* the need is met, or the circumstances change for the better.

- 📖 Do not mention mistakes and failures now; let God know that you understand He is not the author of confusion, sickness, trouble or heartache. He is the Almighty, all-loving, all-powerful Creator of everything good, pure, loving, and holy. Hallelujah!
- 📖 God desires our praise and His Word says He, "*inhabits the praises of His people Israel*" (Psalm 22:3).

📖 In Hebrews 13:15 it is written: *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”* Let us begin our prayer with praise.

Continue With Confession.

It is not easy to confess a wrong that we have done, or something we have left undone. Until we do, it feels like a giant weight is keeping us from the presence of God.

- 📖 Be specific: tell God exactly what you have done that was not pleasing to Him.
- 📖 God is looking for a *“broken and a contrite heart”* (Psalm 51, especially verses 10-12). We must be honest and sincere with our confession. God looks at our heart.
- 📖 Confession bridges the awful gulf between a righteous God and an unrighteous man. If you fall into sin, be sure to confess and ask for forgiveness (1 John 2:1). God’s forgiveness will remove every weight and usher you into the presence of the King (Hebrews 12:1).

Send God Your Supplication.

The Apostle Paul talks of this portion of prayer in Philippians 4:6, *“...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know unto God.”* This expresses concern for our welfare. We tell God about these needs because we cannot supply them from our resources.

“It is strange that in our praying we seldom ask for a change of character, but always a change in circumstances.”
(Bits & Pieces)

Supplication goes beyond communication.

- God’s presence is real, and your needs are specific. The Holy Ghost many times will direct your thoughts to particular needs and then you should voice them to God.
- State the exact problem and circumstances causing you difficulty.
- Let God know you are helpless unless He intervenes.
- Make sure you voice your complete trust in God’s power.
- Let Him know you believe He will perform His perfect will in the entire situation, for He has it in His hands. When you expect Him to answer, He will!

Another form of supplication is when we talk to God for someone else’s need. This is *intercession*. There are many examples of this type of prayer in God’s Word:

- 📖 Abraham prayed for Lot and his family (Genesis 18:23-32).
- 📖 Moses prayed for the children of Israel many times (Exodus 32:31-32). He was so serious and concerned that his life became of little value beside the need of the nation he was leading.
- ✓ It is at this point that *intercession* becomes different from *supplication*.

- ✓ Now we are desperate for God to answer for the other person, and we forget about ourselves.
- 📖 There is another special type of intercession, and that is *prayer for our enemies*. This is most difficult, but more powerful than any other.
 - ✓ This type of praying is a direct commandment of Jesus in His “Sermon on the Mount.” *“Love your enemies, . . .and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).
 - ✓ Jesus not only commanded it, but He practiced it. His final prayer from the cross released the power that resulted in the thief’s repentance and salvation (Luke 23:34).
- 📖 It is not easy to forgive an enemy or pray for him as a friend.
 - ✓ When we find ourselves in this type of predicament, we turn to God again – first for ourselves. We ask the Lord to give us the grace and strength to forgive this person and love them. If we keep our bad feelings, we are harming ourselves seriously.
 - ✓ Before we can expect good results from our prayers, we must first forgive someone who has wronged or hurt us.
 - ✓ Then we must seek that person and make peace. Otherwise, we cannot lift clean hands before the Lord and expect Him to answer our requests. *“Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift”* (Matthew 5:23-24).

“One way to have fewer conflicts with our fellow man is to wrestle with God in prayer.”
(Quotable Quotations)

“It is good to pray for the repair of mistakes, but praying earlier would keep us from making so many...When puzzled, go to prayer and LISTEN”
(J. C. Macaulay)

Take Time to Be Quiet.

If we call it “communion,” there must be a two-way conversation. This is a part of prayer that is often forgotten. David knew about this (Psalm 85:8), and we need to practice it.

- 📖 When we stop our talking and listen with an open heart and mind fixed on Jesus, He can speak to our hearts. This usually comes through a Scripture passage or thought from Him.
- 📖 Close friends do not need to talk all the time – they enjoy just being together. The same is true with Jesus and me – He needs to be my closest friend. I need to talk to Him often, listen often, and sometimes, we just need to be together.

Some Requirements of Effective Prayer

Several conditions are needed for our prayers to be the best they can possibly be. According to the *New Life Study Bible* article entitled “Effective Prayer,” these include:

- 📖 Our prayers will not be answered unless we have a sincere, true faith (Mark 11:24).
 - ✓ Jesus reminded the father of the demoniac of this (Mark 9:23).
 - ✓ The author of Hebrews reminds us of this (Hebrews 10:22).

- ✓ James encourages us to ask of God *“in faith, nothing wavering”* (James 1:6).
- 📖 Prayer must be in Jesus’ Name. Jesus expressed this principle when He said, *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:13-14).
- 📖 Our prayers should be in harmony with the person, character, and will of Jesus Christ. God will honor any prayer that He would have prayed Himself. There is no limit to the power of prayer when addressed to God in faith according to His desire.
- 📖 No prayer is effective until it is according to the perfect will of God. 1 John 5:14-15 says: *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”*
 - ✓ Many times we know God’s will because He has revealed it in His Word. We can be sure that any prayer truly based on the promises of God in His Word will be effective (1 Kings 18:1; 21-24).
 - ✓ At other times, God’s will becomes clear only as we earnestly seek it. Then, once we know His will about any issue, we can pray with confidence and faith that God will answer.
- 📖 Not only must we pray according to God’s will, we must be in God’s will if we expect Him to hear and answer us.
 - ✓ God will give us the things we ask for only if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
 - ✓ The Apostle John states: *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (1 John 3:22). Obeying God’s commandments, loving Him, and pleasing Him are indispensable conditions for receiving answers to prayer.
 - ✓ When James wrote that the prayers of the *righteous* are effectual (see memory verse), he meant both a person who has been made righteous by faith in Christ, and one who is living a righteous, God-fearing, and obedient life (James 5:16-18; Psalm 34:13-14).
 - ✓ The Psalmist David lets us know what will happen if we cherish sin in our lives: *“The Lord will not hear”* our prayers (Psalm 66:18; James 4:3). God promises to listen, forgive our sins, and heal our land when we obey His laws (2 Chronicles 7:14; Luke 18:14).
- 📖 Finally, for our prayers to be effective, they must be persistent.
 - ✓ The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-7).
 - ✓ Jesus’ instructions to *“ask...seek...knock”* (Matthew 7:7-8).
 - ✓ The Apostle Paul admonishes us to be steadfast in prayer (Colossians 4:2).
 - ✓ Old Testament saints recognized this principle (Moses – Exodus 17:11 and Elijah – 1 Kings 17 & 18).

<p>A <i>“Ask, and it shall be given you,</i></p> <p>S <i>Seek and ye shall find,</i></p> <p>K <i>Knock and it shall be opened unto you”</i></p>
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(Matthew 7:7).

Study Questions

1. According to James 5:16, what is meant by each of the following terms:
 - 1) “fervent” _____

 - 2) “effectual” _____

2. How does *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* define “prayer?”

3. List five (5) things (with Scripture reference) that prayer does for us and to us.
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
 - 3) _____
 - 4) _____
 - 5) _____

4. What was the one thing all of Jesus’ prayers had in common? _____

5. List (with Scripture reference) and briefly explain the four (4) steps for how we should pray.
 - 1) _____

 - 2) _____

 - 3) _____

4) _____

6. What is “intercession?” _____

7. List (with Scripture reference) four (4) examples of intercession found in the Bible.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

8. Explain what is meant by the term “communion” in reference to prayer. _____

9. List five (5) requirements of effective prayer. Support your answers with Scripture.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____