

# Power in Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last installment of our study through this short letter, but it seems like we've been in it for a little while.

! Right? Right? Yeah, very fresh, Wes. You want me to start at the beginning, Wes, since you haven't been here?

Yeah. Well, I don't know what we're going to move on to after this one. I haven't decided. So, we'll see.

Okay? We'll say that Lee is going to be gracing you with his teaching a couple of Wednesdays that I will be gone, and so you can look forward to that.

I think he offered to go back over James again. It seems I missed some things, so he was going to kind of fill in. No, just kidding.

[ 1 : 06 ] Just kidding. He knows he's free to do whatever God wants him to do. All right. So, in these final verses, and by the way, it would have been much better if I hadn't missed a few verses, and had to digress, and so I put something in between two lessons that are about the same subject.

So, now we're going to get the last part of the epistle, the epistle of James, verses 17 through 20, and their continuation of the subject in verses 13 through 16.

And what is that subject? Prayer. All right. Prayer. Prayer is the subject here. And we, a couple of Wednesdays ago, covered the prayer of faith in that particular section.

And now we're going to kind of close up the letter on that same subject again. And I don't know if you have noticed, you've read through James probably at least a few times in your life.

I don't know if you've ever noticed that James just kind of ends just abruptly. You know, many of the letters in the New Testament always end with, you know, some standard kind of way that you would expect a letter to be ended so that at least you know that this is the end of the letter.

[ 2 : 29 ] And so the author makes some kind of acknowledgement that that's all he has to say in the letter. But James just kind of, it just kind of, it just comes to an abrupt end.

Now, why is that? I have no idea. No idea at all. In fact, I've not even read any speculation on that other than some weird off-the-wall liberals who think, you know, that some of it was lost or it really wasn't part of Scripture to begin with.

But we won't entertain those thoughts because they're not true. All right. So we get to the, we're coming to the end of the letter and the subject is still prayer.

And if you could say that there is an emphasis, a particular emphasis in prayer, the subject of prayer would be an emphasis on the power of prayer.

So these verses that conclude the epistle are dealing with the power of prayer. Powerful praying. And so we kind of can divide these into two parts.

[ 3 : 36 ] And the first part we'll look at in verses 17 through 18 gives James readers an impressive illustration of prayer.

An impressive illustration. I'll go ahead and give you the second point. And you can fill in the blank later on when we get there. But in verses 19 through 20, James then gives his readers an important application of prayer.

So we have an illustration of powerful praying or the power in prayer. And then we have the application of that. The illustration, I say, is impressive because, for two reasons really, and this is not part of your notes, but really two reasons.

Impressive because of who is the subject of the illustration and what his prayer accomplished. And so it's a very impressive illustration.

And I'll go ahead and say here on the front end when we kind of walk through this, it's important to remember that there's power in prayer no matter who you are.

[ 4 : 47 ] No matter who you are. You don't have to be a great Elijah. And, of course, he is the subject of the illustration. What James has to say about prayer and the power in prayer is something that applies to every one of us.

And so we'll see these two parts of this text. The impressive illustration, the important application. The impressive illustration of power in prayer, verses 17 through 18.

And so to illustrate the power of prayer, James goes to the Old Testament. So he draws upon the Old Testament, and a particular character in the Old Testament whose ministry was, at least among the Jews, was universally associated with the power of God.

I mean, think of Elijah, great Elijah, the prophet Elijah, the things that Elijah did, or at least God did through him. In fact, Elijah didn't even die in the normal way, did he?

God took him on to heaven. And so an amazing prophet. Alright, so this is where James goes to give us an illustration of the power of prayer, or power in prayer, the prophet Elijah.

[ 6 : 06 ] Alright, so Elijah is the example, and this is why I say that this really ties in with the preceding verses. He is an example of the righteous man.

The righteous man in the previous verses. And here's the verse. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

I always have to, or at least I always feel the need to interject a disclaimer here. You know, the Bible is, you know, decidedly male oriented.

And so you have righteous man. That does not exclude righteous women. Okay? You're included in that as well. Alright, so the righteous man. So, James writes that in the latter part of verse 16.

And then in verse 17. Now here's an illustration. And the illustration is Elijah. So he's the righteous man that James is going to illustrate here.

[ 7 : 12 ] Alright, so James then recalled a specific example. Now he could have drawn upon a number of examples from scripture. And then even in the life of Elijah.

Certainly, Elijah could be proven a man of prayer. And a man of powerful prayer in many places. But he draws upon, recalls one specific example of the power of prayer in Elijah's ministry.

And here is what James writes. And we're not going to go to 1 Kings 17 and 18. You can go read that on your own sometime. But this is what he's referring to.

What's recorded in 1 Kings 17 and 18. Alright, so this is what James writes. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain. Now, some of you, probably all of us at some point have read this out of 1 Kings.

Or at least we've heard it taught on or alluded to. Or maybe taught on. Preached on, rather. About when Elijah stopped the rain. And there was a drought and so forth.

[ 8 : 18 ] So this is the example that James is recalling. And it did not rain. So he prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And guess what?

It did not rain. It did not rain for three and a half years. Three years and six months. So that's a drought, isn't it? I mean, you can't stop the rain for three and a half years.

And not expect to have a drought or a famine. And a resulting famine. And indeed that's what happened. And he prayed again. Alright, so he prayed once. Rain stopped. Prayed again.

And the heaven gave rain. And a lot of it. So you go from a drought to a deluge. And both those things Elijah prayed for. And the earth produced fruit.

And that's just a reference to the fact that the drought was over. That the famine had ended. And so this is what James says. He's giving an illustration. He's recalling this event in the life of Elijah the prophet.

[ 9 : 16 ] And of course the full story you can read in 1 Kings. Starting with chapter 17. They also have sandwiched in there, by the way, one of the more familiar stories about Elijah.

And that is Elijah and the prophets of Baal. And you know that story probably even better. And that's sandwiched in between the prayers that rain would stop. And the prayer that rain would start again.

And so you can read that some other time. Alright, we can learn four truths from this illustration on the power of prayer. Four truths from this illustration that James gives.

Even though it just, you know, really takes up a very small portion of scripture. Now some of these truths that we learn, we're going to learn not only from what James has to say.

But also remembering the actual story that's recorded in 1 Kings 17 and 18. First one is this, the mankind of prayer.

[ 10 : 22 ] The mankind of prayer. Prayer is something men do. And women. But mankind. It's something that human beings do. And this is important.

And it's interesting that, I mean it's very significant rather that James would include this. He said there in the first part of verse 17 that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.

Now that's pretty important. And it is extremely comforting. Because, you know, we would have a tendency to try to compare ourselves with great Elijah.

And well, there would be no comparison. And so how in the world could I ever expect to have power in my prayer life like Elijah had in his prayer life.

But James is pointing out that Elijah was just a man. Just a man with a nature like ours. And that would include the same physical nature. I mean he was just a man.

[ 11 : 24 ] Now he didn't die like, you know, like a normal man dies. But as, he was just a human being. He was just a man. Just like us.

An ordinary human being. All right, that's the first thing we should know. That's the first thing that's suggested very clearly by the word nature. That he was a man with a nature like ours.

In nature he was just a human being. Same spiritual nature. Same spiritual nature. Same spiritual nature. Elijah was a sinner just like us.

You ever get the, kind of the, or entertain the notion that some of the great Bible characters were somehow perfect?

Well, they weren't. Not any of them. And the Bible reveals that very clearly. In fact, I think that is just one, one of the many proofs that the Bible was inspired by God.

[ 12 : 32 ] Because if it was just mere men writing this, they would write it quite differently. About themselves and about some of the great, great men. And we can go to other literature, historical literature, and find that to be the case.

That what was told about certain leaders or certain notable people was not necessarily true. That their goodness or greatness was embellished because man has a tendency to do that.

But the Bible is very, very straightforward, very open about the sinfulness of man. Even some of the greatest of men. Even Paul, the apostle Paul was a sinner. That's hard to believe, but he was.

And so, Elijah had the same physical nature, same spiritual nature. And this kind of dovetails on spiritual nature, same emotional nature.

And the same kind of struggles that we had. Elijah struggled with discouragement. You remember, don't you, the story about, you know, it really is after, immediately after all these great things took place.

[ 13 : 39 ] Elijah prayed, no rain, three and a half years. Elijah took on the prophets of Baal. And God mightily used Elijah to show his power over the prophets of Baal.

And then he prayed, the rain came again. And he thought, apparently thought that, well, Ahab and Jezebel will see all that and they'll come around. But they didn't. They said, they put a death sentence on him.

And so what did Elijah do? Go and face them? Now he ran and hid. And he didn't just run and hide. He said, oh, woe is me. I'm the only one left.

You know, he was discouraged and depressed. And so he dealt with those same things. And I think this is just a few examples. And many more examples of his nature being just like ours.

We don't even know. We don't even know the half of it. He was just a man. The second thing would be, the second truth would be the manner of his prayer. We can learn this truth from the illustration very clearly.

[ 14 : 45 ] The manner of his prayer. Elijah prayed earnestly. Some versions of the Bible have fervently, which I think is a good translation of this.

He prayed earnestly. Now, the phrase prayed earnestly. Now, I'll just point this out. And, you know, forgive me for the Greek.

I had a man tell me one time, pastor tell me one time, he said, pastors should know the Greek but never mention it. He said, it's kind of like wearing underwear.

You wear it but you don't want anybody to see it. Okay, I know that's a little crude. But I want to throw this out to you. It's important.

That phrase prayed earnestly. Now, it's two words in the English and it's two words in the Greek as well. Only they're actually the same word.

[ 15 : 45 ] Repeated twice. A little different form. One's a verb, one's a noun. A noun. And so prosuke my, prosuke my means to pray.

That's a verb. And then prosuke, prosuke is the place of prayer. To pray, place of prayer. Verb, noun, two words right next to one another. Two, the same word, same root word. Now, that would be a strange thing for us to do in our language, But it was done here for two reasons.

And one was for clarity, the other for emphasis. In fact, almost always in Scripture, especially in Hebrew quite often, but also in the Greek, same kind of culture, the Jewish Hebrew culture, they would repeat words quite often and did so for emphasis.

In fact, sometimes they would repeat it three times. For example, holy, holy, holy. You know, God's not just holy, not just holy, holy, he's holy, holy, holy.

[ 16 : 54 ] He's the thrice holy God. And that's a very strong Hebrew superlative. It's for emphasis. But there are two reasons here, clarity and emphasis. For clarity, this was real prayer, okay?

You say, well, what other kind is there? Well, just examine your own prayer life. There are times when you pray, and then there are times when you really pray.

There are times when we just kind of speak words, maybe go through some kind of formula or go through some kind of, you know, kind of rote discipline. And, you know, and I'm not saying that's totally without value, but pretty close.

And then there are times when we're really praying. We're really talking to God. And we're really expecting Him not only to hear, but to answer. Not because we deserve it, because of who He is. And there are times when we really pray. And this was what Elijah did. He really was connecting with God in prayer. And then for emphasis, and this is where we get that word fervent, this was fervent prayer.

[ 18 : 06 ] Strong. Not just real prayer, but very strong. Fervent. And this is the kind of praying that we should be doing.

So here's the illustration, the example from Elijah about prayer. Four truths from this illustration. The mankind, that nature of prayer.

The manner of prayer. And then third, the motive of His prayer. The motive. What did He hope to do?

What did He hope to accomplish? What was His motive for praying? Well, that it would not rain. First of all, in the first prayer, that it would not rain. And then He prayed again, James says, Yes. And heaven gave rain. Alright, so it didn't rain. And it did rain. So His motive in prayer was to accomplish something that would get Israel's attention.

[ 19 : 07 ] And did it? Well, yes and no. But this was the motive of his prayer.

Elijah's motive for praying such prayers is revealed in 1 Kings 18. And it's also applied a little bit later in our text in James chapter 5.

We'll get to that here in a minute. This is what it says in 1 Kings 18.37. That you are the Lord God. And that you have turned your hearts back to you again.

That was the motive for his praying. It wasn't just simply to reveal the power of God. By stopping the rain. And then starting it again.

The motive for his prayer was that God's people would turn back to God. And that's what he's saying was the Lord's motive in all of this. That you are the Lord God.

[ 20 : 07 ] You are Yahweh. And that you have turned their hearts back to you again. Now, it's also revealed to us in the latter part of this particular text.

In the last couple of verses of James chapter 5. If anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he will save a soul from death.

And we're going to get into that passage a little bit later. But that's the same kind of scenario. Same scenario for Elijah. God's people had wandered from the truth.

They had wandered from God. They had turned away from him. And Elijah's motive for praying to stop the rain and start the rain was to get their attention so that they would turn back to God.

And in the latter part of James chapter 5, because the subject goes on, still on the subject of prayer. There are people in the church who have wandered from the truth.

[ 21 : 10 ] And someone needs to turn them back. Need to play the part of Elijah. Turn God's people back. Now, I don't think God's going to call on us to pray that the rain would stop.

Or maybe some other kind of cataclysmic thing or supernatural thing. And God can certainly do that. But we're talking about the scenario. The motive is still the same in prayer.

Finally, the mark of his prayer. What marked it? Well, what marked it was it was God. It was the work of God. His prayer was the work of God. And was part of God's will, part of God's purposes.

And we get an implication of that in this word heaven. He prayed again, and heaven gave rain. Heaven gave rain.

[ 22 : 09 ] That's verse 18. The word heaven, in this sense, is an indirect reference to God. He's not talking about, as some translations, I think the New American Standard interprets it in a natural sense.

The heavens as being the sky. The sky. In fact, I think maybe even the New American Standard has the word sky there. I think that's right. Anyway, the idea being, that is, the sky let loose the rain. All right? This is a reference to God here. Not the natural kind of mechanism that causes rain. It's God. God, you see, and this also is something James has emphasized. God is always the giver of what is good. They need rain, and God gave it.

And it's the same God who stopped it. But that's even part of His grace. Because He stopped it so that they would turn to Him. They would become desperate. They would come to the end of themselves. Sometimes God is gracious in our lives to allow things like that to happen to us.

[ 23 : 21 ] Where we have nowhere to turn. Where our resources dry up. Or, you know, whatever it is. So that we would come to the end of ourselves, our self-reliance, and cast ourselves at the mercy of God.

And trust Him. And most of the time, well, I don't know about most, well, maybe most of the time, we don't respond in the right way to the grace of God.

All right? So the rain came because it was a gift of God. He's the giver of what is good. And so then you could say that Elijah's prayer moved heaven because heaven had been moving Elijah.

Or to put it this way, I think it was Adrian Rogers who said this. He may have gotten it from somebody else. But the prayer that gets to heaven is the prayer that starts in heaven.

It's of Him and through Him and to Him. That's the divine cycle. And it's imperceptible to us most of the time. When we're burdened in prayer, we don't realize that the prayer actually came from God as part of His desire.

[ 24 : 31 ] So the prayer starts in heaven, and that's the prayer that gets to heaven. And that's the case not only with Elijah, but for us as well.

Okay. Now the second part of this, we need to move along here, is the most difficult part of this entire text. But it is what I want to call the important application of the power in prayer.

Now He's given us the illustration, the example, and now here's the application for your life, for the life of the church specifically, because this is a letter to the church.

And so this is what He writes in verses 19 and 20. Brethren, if any among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Now, what does all that mean? Among conservative Bible scholars, and I'm not even going to mention the others, there are two views of interpretation for this difficult-to-translate passage.

[ 25 : 40 ] And it is difficult to translate, I've been told. I'm not a Bible translator. But I've consulted a number of, I would consider very scholarly commentators, commentaries on Scripture, and they all say this is difficult language, it's difficult to interpret.

And so among those who are expositors, strict literalists when it comes to Bible interpretation, conservative, fundamental, there are two possibilities.

The one is that a non-believer, this is, what we have here is a non-believer in the church that turns away from the teachings of Scripture. So that seems like a contradiction.

Well, the idea being that in the church, let's just take our church, there may be, and very likely are, a number of people who may even be members of the church.

But they're here, and they come, and they sit under the teaching of Scripture and Sunday school and in our worship service and the preaching of the Word.

[ 26 : 54 ] They're not true believers. They've never truly repented, not converted, never been saved. But they are close, in a sense that they're at least interested in listening, and they've received something, they're beginning to understand it.

Now, none of that necessarily means salvation. Understanding never brought a person to salvation. The Bible says in Romans 3, somewhere in there, there is none that understand.

So understanding is not the same as salvation. But there are those, and have been those, in the history of the church, that have embraced the truth as truth, but they've not yet been saved. So they're in the church, but they're unbelievers, and so there are those who would say that this passage is talking about that kind of person. And so they're there, they've been attending, but maybe now they've turned away from it.

And so the admonition is that we help them to bring them back, and to bring them to salvation, ultimately.

[ 28 : 08 ] Here's a quote from, man, I highly respect, Richard Malick, professor for a number of years in mid-America, left there, and I'm not sure what he's doing now.

But this is what he said. The text states, he may turn from the truth. So it says he's turning from the truth, and it uses a particular preposition in the Greek.

It means from, not turn out from within the truth. What's the difference? Well, to turn from it, that is you have come to it, you've been hearing it and listening to it, but you turn from it, as opposed to someone who has heard it, and received it, and been saved, and then turns out from within.

It's not talking about that. So he goes on to say, therefore, actually that should be an E on the end of that, therefore, the situation depicts one who may be within the church community, but not in Christ.

So someone in the church community, maybe even a member, that is in terms of the church role member, but not in Christ.

[ 29 : 22 ] That is not saved. All right, so that's one view. The other one is, we might consider the opposite. A believer who has turned away from obedience to the truth of Scripture.

Someone who has backslidden. It might be a word that we've heard and familiar with, though it's, I would say, a highly misunderstood concept.

Backsliding. Yeah, I heard, in fact, there was another professor at Mid-America, Dr. Roy Beeman, great, great scholar among Southern Baptists who's with Jesus now.

He's got perfect theology now. But he was pretty close when he was here. But he said, let me describe, he said, describe backsliding this way, that a believer can backslide.

picture an icy, you know, a day, and the ground and sidewalks are all covered with ice.

[ 30 : 28 ] And you're walking, and you're trying to walk up a slight incline. And so you walk, and you start to slide. You don't turn your back and slide.

You're still facing the right direction, but you're moving backward. So that's an analogy of how a believer can backslide.

He doesn't, or she doesn't turn her back or his back on God and completely forsake the faith. That's evidence of a non-believer, not a believer. But that believer can slide in his or her conviction, obedience, even allow, embrace maybe some divergent theologies in some of the peripheral areas, and such, and backslide.

And so, the idea is that James is talking about that kind of person. Here's a quote from Kurt Richardson. Knack is the New American Commentary for James.

Clearly, James is addressing believers. Any believer could stumble and stray from God's truth. Not only this, but a believer may stray outside the restorative fellowship of the church.

[ 31 : 47 ] That the believer would even stop coming to church. Maybe the believer had a major tragedy in life and became discouraged and stopped coming to church and so removing himself or herself from that restorative aspect of the body of Christ, the fellowship.

And so, James may be talking about people in the church who are in danger of this kind of direction away from the truth and were to restore them.

So, there you have the two views that are generally held by conservative scholarship. Which one is it? Well, I don't know for sure. I've made my decision and I think it's the second one, but there are those who are much more serious scholars than I am that take a different view and I see their point. And you could support either view here from the text. I think the overriding thing for me, the decider is, that all throughout the book of James, James has been addressing believers.

Brethren. In fact, he began this section, verse 19-20, with the word brethren. And he says, Brethren, if anyone among you wanders, that is, among the brethren wanders.

[ 33 : 13 ] So, I think he's talking about a believer that doesn't abandon the faith. I don't think a believer could do that. Totally. Jesus said, if they were of us, they surely would have continued with us.

But a believer can have a season or get out of sorts, maybe, you know, whatever the reason. Or even entertain some other theology that is not scriptural and turn from the truth in that sense. Alright, so you can decide which one you want to go with and be fine. But, I want to make this point, we need to move on here real quick. James gives three points of truth about praying for those in the church that can apply to either view.

I think what he says will fit pretty well with whichever the scenario. whether this person's a non-believer and been sitting under the truth and now abandons it or whether it's a believer who's been sitting under the truth, of course, embraced the truth and yet now is turning somewhat from it. And so, there are three truths. The reason, the reason why I'll be praying for those within the church, whether they're non-believers or believers, whichever, is because they have wandered from the truth.

[ 34 : 42 ] Here's the reason for our prayer and really more than prayer. There's an activity involved here too. If anyone among you wanders from the truth, sometimes there will be a person in the church who begins to wander from the truth.

Listen, we've seen it all the time. Now, whether they, you know, are unbelievers who are just doing what's natural or whether they're believers who are just now backsliding or disobeying God, whichever the case, we see that happen in the church.

The word wanders or strays, I think in the King James, refers to a gradual drifting away from the truth of Scripture. So, it's not, and all of a sudden, you know, they're here one Sunday, here for a month of Sundays or a year of Sundays or been here for years and then suddenly you don't see them anymore.

And you find out they have joined Jehovah's Witnesses or something like, or become a Muslim or something like that. You know, some drastic, dramatic kind of change.

The word wanders means that they're drifting in the wrong direction. And it's a gradual thing that takes place. So, that's the reason that we ought to be on the alert and ought to be praying for people like this.

[ 35 : 55 ] And so, since nature abhors a vacuum, no one can drift away from the truth without drifting into some area of error. Whether it's just an error of justification, justifying yourself, you know, for staying at home on Sundays or, you know, going fishing on Sundays instead of going to church and so you kind of get away, you know, whatever, or maybe even some error.

Verse 20 speaks of the error of His way. And so, that includes, I think, could include moral sin as well as a doctrinal error. Second, responsibility, the truth about responsibility, whose responsibility? The believer's responsibility, those who are mature and strong in the church. Someone turns him back. That someone needs to be us or you.

when you see a brother, you don't know, I mean, you assume he's a brother or sister. We don't have to put ourselves in the place of judgment whether the person's saved or lost.

We see someone who is drifting away. And so, we seek to restore them, to turn them back. And our first step is in the area of prayer.

[ 37 : 13 ] Every Christian in the church is responsible to help others in the church to believe and obey the truth. And then finally, the reward. There's a reward here.

God's not paying a bounty for all those backslidden believers if you recoup or restore. But there is a reward.

To save a soul from death. That's the reward. Save a soul from death. Now, that could refer to spiritual death or physical death. Now, I believe it's talking about physical death.

I believe a believer who turns from the truth and continues in that direction belligerently is either not saved to begin with and really has no warrant to believe that he or she is saved or they're headed for big trouble with God.

Big trouble. Maybe even death. Maybe even death. Sin always has an effect and a lot of illnesses. In fact, we covered that when we were looking at the verses just before this about that one who calls for the elders.

[ 38 : 23 ] I think the primary scenario is a person who is on the deathbed because of sin.

Unrepentant of sin. And so, James could be talking about saving someone from that ultimate end of their life and sickness and death and so you save a soul from death.

Save a life from death in the physical sense or it could be spiritual of course. And obviously if you're going to be praying for a non-believer who has been sitting under the truth but now is straying

gradually drifting away then we're praying for their salvation and we're praying that they would be saved, their soul would be saved from spiritual death.

So you can have it either way. You can't have it both ways, I'm sorry, but you can have it one way or the other. And not only that but also to cover a multitude of sins. And that refers to not the sins of the one praying.

You're not going to be rewarded and have your sins covered because you prayed for someone in a back sudden situation. He's talking about of course the sins of the one who has wandered in the past and future.

Just think about it. In similar sense to saving a soul from death, we're also saving that person from continuing on in sin and committing sins that will have ramifications that are irreversible.

[ 39 : 54 ] And so that's the reward of this kind of pray. Okay. well, you didn't have your place to be, did you? Real quick.

Sorry if you're late. Okay. Well, you didn't have your place to be, did you? Sorry if you're late. Thank you.