

Essential Truths I: Living With God

18 Prayer

The time we spend with the Lord in prayer can release the most dynamic, history-changing power this world has ever known. **Psalm 91:15-16** describes the power of prayer in this way:

“He will call upon me, and I will answer him and show him my salvation.”

The Bible describes many different kinds of prayer. But the most important kind starts in the hidden place of our homes.

The Secret Place

Read Matthew 6:6

The *Amplified Bible* translates this verse in this way:

“But when you pray, go into your most private room, and closing the door, pray to your Father Who is in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you in the open.”

We have been invited into intimate prayer by none other than the Lord himself. This kind of “private room” prayer presupposes:

- Proper motives (**Matthew 6:5**)
- A right relationship with God as Father (**Luke 11:11-13**)
- A real trust in the Lord (**Psalm 55:16-17**)
- A dispensing of false fronts (**Mark 7:6-7**)

Dimensions in Prayer

Read Ephesians 6:18

The Word
 God
 Origins
 Jesus
 The Cross
 The Blood
 Resurrection
 Repentance
 Faith
 Grace
 Water Baptism
 Holy Spirit
 Temptation
 Fellowship
 Generosity
 Kingdom of God
 Worship
Prayer
 Eternity
 Second Coming
 The Call

Paul encourages us to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Notice the two “alls” that Paul mentions in this verse:

- All occasions
- All kinds of prayers and requests

There is a great variety in the way that prayer can be offered to God. As we express our heart in conversation with God, it can be in the form of:

- Adoration (**Psalm 34:1-4**)
- Confession (**1 John 1:9**)
- Request (**Matthew 7:7**)
- Thanksgiving (**Ephesians 5:4,20**)
- Intercession (**1 Kings 13:6**)

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-3

An Example of Prayer

Read James 5:16-18

Elijah is given to us as an example of a praying man yet he was “a man just like us.” In other words, there was nothing particularly special about Elijah, nothing that set him apart as superior to you or me. Yet God heard his prayer! The Bible says:

“Elijah...prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

What gave Elijah – “a human being with a nature such as we have – with feelings, affections and constitution as ourselves” (*Amplified Bible*) – the audacity to pray that God would close the heavens for three and a half years, then to pray that it would rain again?

The *New King James Version* describes Elijah’s example in these terms:

“...The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

There are three key words used by the *New King James Version* to describe the prayer of Elijah:

- Effective
- Fervent
- Righteous

Let’s take a closer look at these three terms in the light of Elijah’s prayer.

Elijah was effective

Effective simply means “to have effect.” But what made Elijah’s prayer effective? What gave him the boldness, as an unknown from the highlands, to march right

up to the king of Israel and make this dramatic declaration, as recorded by **1 Kings 17:1**:

“As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word”

Elijah could speak with such audacity because he knew the Word of God!

Read Deuteronomy 11:13-17

The nation of Israel had been in sin and idolatry for a long time but nothing had happened – the rain had not stopped. But to Elijah, this was not just a statement made by God in by-gone days. God’s word was a living reality to Elijah for his generation.

Read 1 Kings 18:36-39

Do you notice what Elijah says in his prayer to the Lord on the top of Mount Carmel? The New Century Version translates Elijah’s prayer in this way:

“Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people *that you commanded me to do all these things.*”

Elijah had heard the command of God. This is what gave Elijah the authority to speak so boldly. And this is what enabled Elijah’s prayer to be *effective*. When our prayer is based on God’s Word and upon his command, we know that our prayer will be answered!

Read Daniel 9:2-3

Daniel was another example of a person who prayed effectively. Again, we see the same principle at work: Daniel prayed according to God’s Word. One day he was reading from the scrolls of Jeremiah and he came across **Jeremiah 25:11-14**:

“This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will make it desolate forever. I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

On the basis of this prophecy, Daniel “turned to the Lord and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (**Daniel 9:3**). He could have just sat back and said, “It’s been prophesied, so let’s wait and see if it happens.” Rather, he used the Word of God to pray for the very thing that the Lord had prophesied. Notice, when the answer to Daniel’s prayer comes, the angel Gabriel says in **verse 23**:

“As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed...”

It was only as Daniel *began to pray* that the answer was given. Daniel's prayer was effective not only because it was based on God's Word, but also because God was waiting for someone to take up the promise of his Word in prayer!

Read John 15:7-8

Read 1 John 5:14-15

Elijah was fervent

Read 1 Kings 18:41-46

This passage describes just one of Elijah's prayers – the prayer to send rain again – but we know it is exemplary of all Elijah's prayer. Let's take a look again at what James says about Elijah's prayer in **James 5:17-18**:

“Elijah...prayed *earnestly* that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. *Again he prayed*, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

Only Elijah's prayer to send the rain is recorded, not his prayer to stop the rain. But we know from Scripture that both prayers were earnest and fervent. As we see from the example of Elijah, fervent pray doesn't give up until the answer has come!

Read Matthew 7:7-8

The Amplified Bible translates this passage with these words:

“Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and the door will be opened for you. For every one who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened.”

Read Matthew 15:22-28

Elijah not only knew the promise of God, he knew the God who had made the promise! Like Abraham, Elijah “considered him faithful who had made the promise” (**Hebrews 11:11**). It is because of our intimate understanding of God's character that we are able, like Elijah, to pray earnestly and fervently.

Elijah was righteous

Elijah's righteousness was not based upon himself – his own worthiness or goodness. As James specifically notes, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...” (**James 5:17**, NKJV).

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

This account reveals just how human Elijah was – “a man subject to like passions as we are” (KJV) – yet this was the man who prayed with such dramatic effect!

As believers in Christ, we are declared righteous because of Christ's work on the Cross on our behalf. It is a free gift from God, and as **Romans 1:17** declares, this

righteousness has been designed by God to be “by faith from first to last...” Like Elijah, we too are able to pray with great effect because we have been made righteous before the Lord (see **2 Corinthians 5:21**).

Read Proverbs 15:8,29

The original Greek wording of **James 5:16** is rich in meaning. Here are just a few English translations of this verse:

New International Version: “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

New American Standard Bible: “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

New Living Translation: “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.”

God’s Word: “Prayers offered by those who have God’s approval are effective.”

New Testament in Modern English: “Tremendous power is made available through a good man’s earnest prayer.”

The Message: “The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.”

Amplified Bible: “The earnest (heart-felt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available – dynamic in its working.”

Let’s summarize the three words that used to describe the characteristics of Elijah’s prayer life:

- **Effective prayer** is based on the promises of God
- **Fervent prayer** is based on the character of God
- **Righteous prayer** is based on relationship with God.

Five Commands to Pray

- Watch and pray always (**Luke 21:36; Mark 13:35-37**)
- Pray lest you fall into temptation (**Matthew 26:41**)
- Pray for workers in the Lord’s harvest (**Luke 10:2**)
- Pray for those in authority (**1 Timothy 2:1-2**)
- Pray for your enemies (**Luke 6:28**)

When to Pray

Read Daniel 6:10

Many of the heroes of faith had regular times of the day set aside specifically for prayer, often three times a day - at morning, noon and evening. In **Psalms 55:16-17** (KJV), David exclaimed:

“As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening and morning, and noon, will I pray and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.”

The best example of a daily pattern of regular, whole-hearted prayer, however, can be found in the Lord Jesus himself:

- Early in the morning (**Mark 1:35**)
- Before each meal (**Mark 6:41**)
- Occasionally all night (**Luke 6:12**)

As Francis of Sales once said:

“Every Christian needs a half hour of prayer each day, except when he is busy, then he needs an hour.”¹

Martin Luther echoed these words when he said:

“I am so busy now that if I did not spend two or three hours each day in prayer, I would not get through the day.”²

These men had discovered the importance of prayer, not as a law to obey, but as a life to live. It is said that Francis of Assisi spent 75 percent of his time in prayer and 25 percent in preaching. Yet we think of him primarily as a preacher. His preaching was energized by his prayer. The two went hand in hand, so that you could not have one without the other. In the same way, as believers in the Lord Jesus, we are called to imitate those who have pioneered a life of prayer.

Who to Pray For

- For ourselves (**1 Chronicles 4:10**)
- For one another (**James 5:16**)
- For ministries in the Church (**2 Thessalonians 3:1**)
- For the sick and distraught (**James 5:14-16**)
- For those ensnared by sin (**1 John 5:16**)

Aid in Prayer

Read Romans 8:26-27

The Holy Spirit has been given to help us in our prayer. There are many times when we simply do not know how to pray or what to pray for, and this is when the Holy Spirit joins us in our prayer. He teaches us how to pray and energizes our prayer with his anointing.

Read Ephesians 6:18

Read Jude 20

To help us in prayer, the Holy Spirit has also provided a special gift to the believer: the gift of tongues – speaking in an unknown language to the Lord in prayer (note **1 Corinthians 12:4-11**). This is what the Bible calls “praying in the Spirit.”

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

In **1 Corinthians 14:1**, Paul establishes the two important principles that should operate in prayer and in all operations of spiritual gifts:

- Follow the way of love
- Eagerly desire spiritual gifts

While tongues is not the most important gift of the Spirit (prophecy, for example, is more important – note **1 Corinthians 14:4-5**), Paul encourages us to use this gift (**1 Corinthians 14:5,18,39**). The Corinthians used the gift of tongues to an extreme, and this had to be corrected by Paul, but the gift is still a valuable one in prayer.

In **1 Corinthians 14:2,4**, Paul describes the primary purpose for the gift of tongues:

“For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit...He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...”

The gift of tongues is more than a “filler” when we have a gap in our prayer, or don’t know what to pray. It is a mode of prayer which builds up the believer (note again **Jude 20**).

Read 1 Corinthians 14:14-17

Here Paul describes two modes of prayer:

- Praying with your mind
- Praying with your spirit

Each mode has its proper time and setting (see, for example, **1 Corinthians 14:18-19,39**). As we spend time in the Lord, we can learn how to pray more effectively in and through the Spirit.

Praying Together

Whenever Christians pray together in agreement, there is special authority. For example, Jesus gave a special promise in **Matthew 18:19** (KJV) for two believers joining together in prayer:

“Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

Read Ecclesiastes 4:12

If there is tremendous power when two people pray, what about the whole assembly of God’s people praying in one accord? **Acts 4:24-31** tells us:

“...they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘...consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’” After they

prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

Joining the Lord in Prayer

The Bible says that Jesus “always lives to intercede for [us]” (**Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34**). One of his great ministries now is that of prayer. As the Holy Spirit searches for those who will join Jesus in his intercession for the nations, his words echo the question of Jesus himself in **Matthew 26:40**:

“...Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?”

Prayer is so much more than just bringing a list of requests to God. Prayer is the privilege that we have to join with the Lord in his purposes. Although God is totally sovereign – he can do as he pleases, without needing to ask permission from anyone (**Romans 9:20; 11:34-36**) – he has limited his action to our involvement in prayer. For this reason, Paul tells us to “pray continually” (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**). In **Colossians 4:2**, he encourages us:

“*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*”

As we join with the Lord in prayer, we will discover the reality of the promise from **Philippians 4:6-7**:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

¹ Francis of Sales (1567-1622), quoted from *Draper's Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

² Martin Luther (1483-1546), quoted from *Draper's Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

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