

Powerful Prayer

I. Examples to Encourage

James teaches us that God's desire is for our prayers to be powerful and effective. He uses the example of Elijah. So often, we read about the different heroes of faith in the Word of God and begin to think that we would never be able to attain to their level of faith. James points out that although many revered Elijah, he was human and had weaknesses just like every other human, yet God used him, and his prayers were powerful.

In a similar way, James uses Job as an example of patience, yet Job did not develop patience until the very last chapter of the book. In most of the book, Job complained and grumbled against God and his friends. In spite of this, God still met his need.

II. God Will Meet Us Where We Are

We are given examples throughout the Bible to let us know there is hope for us!

James 5:13-15:

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

God's ultimate desire is for us to lift our own needs to him in faith. He desires us to come to a point in our walk with Him where we don't need to call others for help; we can go directly to Him. But not everyone is at that place in life. Every believer has had to depend on someone at one time or another. Our Christian life is not only made up of the goodness of the Lord; it is also made up of the goodness of the believers God has brought into our lives.

The elders being referred to in verse 14 didn't begin as elders. The elders probably began needing others to pray for them. In other words, God loves us so much, He meets us just where we are, but He loves us too much to leave us on that level. This verse says if there are any who are sick and too weak to pray for themselves, they can call for the elders of the church to

anoint them with oil, and the prayer of faith will save them and the Lord will raise them up. In addition, if the sick person has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.

III. Forgiveness and Healing

Divine healing and forgiveness of sins go hand in hand. When God heals a person, He also goes a step further and forgives their sins. We find this true throughout the Word of God.

Psalm 103:3:

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.

Isaiah 53:5:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Outward healing is really a manifestation of God's ability to remove sin from the inside of us. Again, calling for the elders is not the ultimate way to be healed; it is *a* way.

God's desire is found in Mark 11:23 and 24. His desire is that we stand for ourselves, speak to the mountain, command it to be removed, not doubt in our heart, and believe when we pray we receive it, and we will have it. But there are other ways to receive healing if our faith isn't quite at this level or we don't feel like we are strong enough. There is the prayer of agreement. We can have another pray for us. We can have a believer lay hands on us. We can use prayer cloths.

Being anointed with oil is just one way to receive healing and one way to have our sins forgiven. It is not the most common way to have our sins forgiven. God's ultimate for forgiveness of sin is 1 John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Again, God's desire is for us to move on in our personal life into powerful prayer.

IV. Confessing Our Faults

When we think in terms of powerful prayer, immediately certain people come to mind with accompanying thoughts, "Well, I could never pray like sister so-and so. She has prayed for so many years and when she prays it is so powerful! I just could *never* pray like that!" But James wants believers

to know powerful praying is available to everyone. James gives us the key to open ourselves to effectual prayer: Confessing our sins, one to another.

James 5:16:

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.

The Greek word for “*faults*” is *hamartia* and it is translated “sins.” All of us have faults that can be rectified in our lives through application of the Word. But this verse is referring to sins that must be confessed. Not only are we to confess these sins to the Lord, we are to confess them to one another and then pray for one another that we may be healed.

The Greek for “*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,*” would more accurately be translated, “the powerful, operative prayer of a righteous man prevails much.” Our prayers need to be powerful so they will prevail in the presence of God, they will prevail over Satan, and they will prevail over circumstances. God wants our prayers to be powerful.

I have heard ministers comment about “tremendous” services where a member of the congregation has stood before everyone and confessed his or her sins, based upon James 5:16. That is not what this verse means. God highly respects your privacy. Our repentance from sin is between the Lord and us. When God forgives, He forgets. He never broadcasts our sins from one end of heaven to the other. Sometimes, one of the worst things you can do is confidentially tell someone what you’ve done because often you will find that it has been spread to others. God will never do that to us. James 5:16 does not refer to public confession of sin.

When James says, “*Confess your sins, one to another,*” he is referring to confessing your sins to the one you have wronged. Both of you know it is there but you’ve been ignoring it and hoping it will just go away or you’ve just been covering it up. You see the person you have wronged and you go the other direction. You try not to sit anywhere near them in church. You do your very best to ignore them. Through the years, it just keeps growing and soon you are controlled by one sin. James 5:17 is telling us that not dealing with this sin will hold back God’s blessings, including divine healing. God wants to pour out many blessings upon our lives but is waiting for us to make things right between our brothers and sisters. As long as we harbor things against fellow believers, we cannot be healed. We cannot be healed in our body. We cannot be healed in our finances. We cannot be healed from depression. But as soon as we become doers of verse 17, God’s healing, anointing, and blessing are poured out on our life.

James 5:17-18:

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

V. The Sermon on the Mount

The book of James is closely tied with the Sermon on the Mount. James brings out very practical applications to what Jesus taught. Jesus applied the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples. James applied it to the every day lives of his congregation.

The Sermon on the Mount is for the every day nitty-gritty of life. James taught his congregation how to apply the principles taught in this teaching from Jesus and taught them how to live the principles out in their daily lives.

VI. Before Giving a Gift at the Altar, Forgive

Matthew 5:23-24:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught 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.

The gift being referred to in these verses is your offering to the Lord. It could be your life of service. It could be finances. It could be your talents. It could be your gifts. It could be your callings. If you come with an offering for the Lord, and then remember that your brother has ought against you because you have wronged him, you need to go make things right between you and your brother so the Lord can accept your offering. Often, we can bury and forget an aught against someone, but the minute we begin to worship the Lord, it will come flooding back to our mind because God's presence has revealed it. When we come to present our gift to the Lord, God wants to accept our gift and bless us. God will reveal to us what is blocking His blessings! Unforgiveness will block His blessings. This verse isn't saying to drop your gift, leave the altar, and never return because you're so bad God can never possibly use you again. No, the verse says to leave your gift, make restitution with your brother, and then return and offer your gift.

VII. We Must Forgive So We Can be Forgiven

Matthew 6:12:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Jesus addressed this prayer to God the Father, because He is the One Who forgives sin. God will forgive us our debts or sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Some have taught this verse is saying God will forgive us the way we forgive others. If we forgive them but hold a little unforgiveness back, God will hold a little unforgiveness toward us. But this is not true. Often, when we forgive someone and a week later find ourselves fighting memories of what they have done to us. But when God forgives, He never fights back memories. The memory of what we have done is completely wiped out and gone forever. God is not bound to the way man does things. He is so much more merciful and forgiving than we are. Hebrews 12 tells us after we have forgiven someone, we are not to allow roots of bitterness to spring back up and define us.

Hebrews 12:15:

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

I have known of cases where someone will run across the path of a person they forgave months or even years ago and suddenly they are flooded with memories of what was done to them. They may even begin to allow bitterness to rise again in their hearts. But God is saying, “When those roots start to spring up, cut them off. Deal with them immediately.” We can’t stop thought from coming, but we do not have to allow them to dominate us. We can’t stop temptations from coming, but we don’t have to yield to the temptations. God isn’t even tempted to remember our transgressions.

Again, Matthew 6:12 says, “*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*” God cannot forgive us until we forgive others. Once we have forgiven them, God can forgive us. It is useless to go to God, ask Him to forgive us, and then refuse to make things right with our brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we don’t make restitution, God is blocked not only from forgiving us but also from blessing us, which includes healing.

Mark 11:23-24:

*For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, **but shall***

believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Verse 23 is the commandment of faith. Verse 24 is the prayer of faith. But notice, verse 25.

Mark 11:25:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

This verse says when you stand praying, *forgive*. When we endeavor to pray or worship or do anything spiritual, if we have unforgiveness toward someone it will be brought to our remembrance. The first thing we need to do if unforgiveness comes to mind is forgive the person who has offended us, then ask the Lord to forgive us.

Unforgiveness does not stop us from praying; it stops our prayers from being answered. We can pray for hours. We can shout, yell, jump up and down, do everything that normally sounds like great prayer, but if there is unforgiveness, we are cut off from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 11:26:

But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

VIII. How Often Do We Forgive?

Matthew 18:21-22:

Then Peter came to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

The entire chapter of Matthew 18 deals with forgiveness. Peter has been listening but as usual, speaks up when he should probably be silent. He was probably very proud of himself when he asked Jesus how many times a person should forgive in a day. He even answered his own question, "Jesus, isn't it great? I wouldn't just forgive my brother one time each day, I would forgive him seven times! Aren't I just so spiritual? After all,

isn't seven a spiritual number?" Peter was probably expecting Jesus to say, "Peter! You are such a wonderful disciple! Wow! You would forgive a brother seven times in one day! I am just so impressed!"

Instead, Jesus said, "No, you should forgive your brother seventy times seven each day if necessary." Why did Jesus choose such a large number? He wanted the number to be so large that it would be nearly impossible to keep track. Isn't it wonderful Jesus forgives us more than seven times a day? Just as Jesus forgives us over and over again each day, we too must forgive others over and over again. This does not mean we are gullible. It means we are forgiving. We do need to use wisdom in our lives. If someone has cheated, lied, or taken advantage of us over and over again, we can still forgive but deal with them cautiously. The Bible says there are some Christians we need to separate ourselves from, but that doesn't mean we quit loving them. Certainly, we are not to harbor feelings of unforgiveness toward them but we can love them from a distance. When it comes to harboring hard feelings toward someone who has wronged us, we are not hurting them; we are hurting ourselves. Forgiveness is so important.

IX. Forgive Others with the Same Forgiveness You Have Received

Matthew 18:23:

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

God is the king and we are the servants. God is watching over His kingdom. Servants are not sinners; they are believers in the kingdom of God. He is our king. We are His servants.

The king in this parable was taking an account of his servants. One servant was brought to him that owed him ten thousand talents. In today's terms, that would be approximately ten million dollars. Some have taught the ten million dollars represents the debt of salvation, but if that were the case, a few would be able to afford to pay the debt. The debt being referred to is the debt of sin.

Again, this servant was brought before the king and since he had not paid his debt, the king demanded that his wife, children, and all of his possessions be sold to go toward the debt he owed. This portrays how strongly God feels about sin in our lives. But the servant fell down and worshipped the king and begged him saying, "*Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.*" The king was moved with compassion, loosed the servant, and forgave him his debt. Think how grateful you would be if

you were forgiven a ten million dollar debt. That is the kind of gratitude we should have each time we use 1 John 1:9.

This servant had just been forgiven a tremendous debt in his life. Unfortunately, he did not extend the same mercy that had been extended to him. He went out and found a fellow servant that owed him a hundred pence, which is equal to approximately fifteen dollars. He actually took the man by the throat and demanded payment. The fellow servant begged, just as he had, "Have patience with me and I will pay you all." But instead of forgiving him, he threw the servant into prison until he could pay the debt. It probably would have taken this man a very short time to pay off his debt.

In this portion of the parable, unforgiveness toward a brother or sister who has wronged us is being portrayed.

X. The Little Foxes Spoil the Vine

How often does God forgive us, yet we refuse to forgive someone who has wronged us. When we give our gift at the altar, unforgiveness we may have toward someone will be brought to our mind. James is saying, "Confess your faults one to another. These fifteen-dollar debts stop up the wells of God's blessings!" What is holding back the floodtide of healing or prosperity in your life? More than likely it is one of these fifteen-dollar debts.

When we don't see answers to our prayers, we often looking for the big things stopping up our prayer life. But it's the little foxes that spoil the vine. We are told this is the books of Proverbs and Song of Solomon. In the ancient world, tall fences were built to keep large foxes out so they wouldn't eat the grapes off the vine. The fences did keep the large foxes out, but the little foxes would tunnel under the fences and gnaw at the vine until the entire grapevine fell to the ground and then they would eat the grapes. They did more damage than the large foxes that only ate the grapes. James was telling his congregation, "Get rid of the little foxes. Get rid of the fifteen-dollar debts."

Matthew 18:31-34:

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on they fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

When others saw what this unmerciful servant did to his fellowservant, knowing he had been forgiven a much greater debt, they went to the king and told him what had happened. The king called the man back and reinstated the original debt. This is so sad. A ten million dollar debt was reinstated because the servant had been unwilling to forgive a fifteen-dollar debt. God cannot stop Satan from reaping havoc in our lives if we continue to harbor unforgiveness toward others.

XI. Unforgiveness Will Block God's Power

James 5:16-18:

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.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that is might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Unforgiveness will keep the power of God from flowing to and through our lives. We can yell, stomp our feet and try to make our prayers sound powerful, but if we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us.

Powerful prayers prevail much in Satan's kingdom and in God's kingdom. Again, Elijah is used as an example of one who prayed powerful prayers, yet was subject to like passions as we are.

The word *passions* doesn't refer to mild emotions. Elijah experienced passions of both elation and depression. His life was comprised of great peaks and valleys. This didn't occur from week to week; it was minute by minute. He was constantly up and down emotionally.

XII. Elijah, Our Example

Elijah was one of four Old Testament saints James used as examples in his letter. In chapter 2 he used Abraham. He was used not only as an example

of faith, but also of works—actions that accompanied his faith. Toward the end of chapter 2 he used Rahab as an example of using her faith to hide the spies. In chapter 5, Job is brought out as an example of patience. And finally, Elijah is used as an example of righteousness. James pointed out that Elijah had emotions just like us, yet he prayed powerful prayers that stopped the rain for over three years. He prayed again, and the heavens poured out rain and the earth brought forth fruit.

1 Kings 18:41-45:

And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,

And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and indeed, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

James mentions what is not mentioned in this account: Elijah prayed! James was telling his congregation, “Isn’t Elijah one of our Bible heroes? Yet, he was a man just like us and he prayed powerful prayers that had results.” To pray such prayers we can be certain Elijah had no unforgiveness in his life!

It has been a long time since some believers have seen “rain” in their lives. It has been a long time since they have seen God’s blessings of healing, prosperity, peace, and joy. Family situations are bad. Job situations are bad. Health is being attacked. Many of those facing these trials have prayed fervently, loudly, earnestly, run around the room, pounded their Bible on the table, bombarded the gates of both heaven and hell and have seen absolutely no results. James is saying, “Look for the little foxes. Unforgiveness is holding back the floodtide of God’s blessings. Forgive those fifteen-dollar debts knowing you have been forgiven a ten million dollar debt!”