

Where to Get the Power to Achieve (Part 2)

James 5:13-18

Good morning! In case you forgot, we're still on our series we're calling "God's Spiritual Champion". We did this series because we wanted to tie it to the recently concluded Tokyo Olympics, obviously, and we said that all of the followers of Jesus, and I hope you are, are running a race and God wants us to start strong and finish well. Then, at the end of the race, Jesus is going to reward us with a crown or crowns. There are 5 crowns mentioned in the Bible and we talked about how to receive each crown.

Now, although the Olympics is already done, we're still continuing this series because we want to give you 3 more things that will play a great role in you being able to finish the race of life well. Last week, Bro. Brandon talked about the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life and how he gives the power to achieve to the believer. Today, I'd like to talk about another power. A power that is often neglected. A power that is within reach like a switch that if we would just turn it on will greatly enhance the quality of our lives.

So, this morning, prayer is what I'd like to talk about. Prayer is the one instrument that God uses to bring us closer to him and show his power to us. Sadly, not many people believe this. Even Christians! We believe we have been saved, we believe in Jesus, in heaven, in the virgin birth, in the fundamentals of the faith, but we don't believe in prayer. If that were so, we would make it one of the most important tasks of our everyday lives.

I know we say a prayer here and there and then rationalize that we're praying without ceasing. I'm not discounting that because that's biblical. But the Bible also says to allot a portion of our time to be with God in a concentrated manner.

That's why the Bible says that Jesus went away many times in order to be with his father. **Mark 1:35 says, "Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray."** Should we do less than our master?

So today, I'd like to share with you a message entitled, "Where to Get the Power to Achieve" which, of course, is prayer. Our text comes from the book of James. Let me read these verses.

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

This morning, I'd like to talk about four principles we need to know about the extraordinary power of prayer. I think we can only start to take prayer seriously if we know what's truly involved. So, let me tackle the first principle which is this:

1. PRAYER IS POWERFUL

In our passage, James enumerates just a few of the things that prayer can do. In the first few verses, he says prayer can help you when you're in trouble. Maybe because of circumstances or relationships. Prayer can also make the sick person well. And through prayer we can be forgiven of our sins.

So, pretty much he touches on the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our lives that prayer can make a difference in.

No one can really explain how prayer works. But one thing is sure. It works. The Bible is clear that it is our lifeline to God.

The Bible is clear too that our prayers reach heaven and enters the throne of God. Hebrews 4:16 (CEV) says, *“So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.”*

Because prayer works even the secular world has taken notice of the power of prayer. Scientists, for example, have been studying prayer’s role in healing people who are sick. In general, these studies have suggested that people who are religious seem to heal faster or cope with illness more effectively than do the non-devout. In fact, a study was conducted in 1988 about intercessory prayer at San Francisco General Hospital. That study, one of the only published studies of its kind, found that prayer was beneficial because patients who were prayed for and didn’t even know they were being prayed for were able to go home from the hospital sooner than those who weren’t prayed for.

Now to have a sense of where prayer fits into the whole picture we need to get a heavenly perspective on just how powerful prayer really is. There was a time when a missionary named Irene Webster-Smith was working in Tokyo. This was in the early years after World War II. She was working in Tokyo and she was working with Interservice Fellowship, teaching Japanese college students about Christ. They needed a center for the student work in the city, and so she went and talked to a Japanese woman about a piece of property there in Tokyo and the woman said, "I'm sorry a. It's not for sale anymore. Someone has already agreed to buy it." And so Irene said to her, "Well, in case it falls through, please let me know." The woman said, "It's not going to happen because we already have an agreement."

A day or two later the woman contacted Irene and said, "The deal fell through; so I am offering it to you, do you have the money for it?"

At which point, Irene said, "No, I don't. I don't have a penny of it, but I serve a God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. I will pray about it. Would you be willing to take \$3,000 a month for the next six months for us to pay?" And the woman said yes she would.

So, on the last Friday of every month, Irene was supposed to make a deposit in the bank and it was to be transferred to the woman's account. And she made that payment, holding on to the verse from the Book of Philippians, the fourth chapter that says, "Don't be anxious about anything but through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your request known to God" and so she did, and so she made the payments month after month. But there came one month that that final Friday came, and she did not have the money. On that day, the bank called her saying, "We are doing an audit and doing some inventory in the bank. We are not taking any new transactions today. Could you wait and do your deposit on Monday?"

On that weekend she spoke to a bunch of American GI's there in Japan and she raised \$3,000 and the next day went to the bank to make the final payment. When it was all over, and she had paid for it all and the property was hers, she talked to the woman who owned the property and the woman said to her, "When you said that you didn't have the money, but that God would give it to you, I made the decision to let you do that because I have been a Shinto believer my whole life, and I have made countless prayers and none of them have been answered. I have lost my husband and my sons to the war and I made a decision at that point that if your God would answer this kind of prayer, then I would follow that God." And so at that point, Irene Webster-Smith led this Japanese woman to know Jesus Christ.

By the way, that center still stands in central Tokyo today. It's called the **Ochanomizu Christian Center.**

Prayer is powerful. It makes a difference. That's the first principle. The second principle says,

2. THE POWER OF PRAYER COMES FROM A POWERFUL GOD

The power of prayer is not the result of the person praying. Rather, the power resides in the God who is being prayed to. **1 John 5:14-15 (NASB) tells us, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."** No matter the person praying, the passion behind the prayer, or the purpose of the prayer - God answers prayers that are in agreement with His will. His answers are not always yes, but are always in our best interest. When our desires line up with His will, we will come to understand that in time. When we pray passionately and purposefully, according to God's will, God responds powerfully!

We cannot access powerful prayer by using "magic formulas." Our prayers being answered is not based on the eloquence of our prayers. We don't have to use certain words or phrases to get God to answer our prayers. In fact, Jesus rebukes those who pray using repetitions. In **Matthew 6 he says, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him".**

Prayer is communicating with God. All you have to do is ask God for His help. **Psalm 107:28-30 (NIV) reminds us, "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven."**

The important thing to remember is that God who answers our prayer is powerful. Because he is alive and real.

The late Dr. A. C. Dixon once said when speaking on prayer, “When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do, when we rely upon education we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do; however, when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do!”

The Bible tells the story of the prophet Elijah who challenges the 450 prophets of the false god Baal to a contest. He wants to prove to the Israelites and to these prophets as well who the real God is. These false prophets make sacrifices, even hurt themselves, to get Baal's attention. But nothing happens after several hours. Then, Elijah prepares his sacrifice. He pours water on it three times, and prepares a moat to keep the water in. This makes the offering difficult to set fire to. Elijah calls on God once. And the Lord sent fire which not only consumes the wet offering, but also all the wood, the stones, the very dirt under the altar, and also took all the water! The people recognizes God and worship him.

This episode in Elijah’s life brings us to the third principle of prayer.

3. A RIGHTEOUS LIFE RESULTS INTO A POWERFUL PRAYER

In verses 17 and 18, James tells us of another time when Elijah prayed, *“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”*

Note that he says Elijah was just like us, he was an ordinary human being. An ordinary man who experienced the extraordinary power of prayer. In fact, most of his prayers were answered by God. Like when he prayed for God to bring back to life a boy who was dead and God did.

What sets Elijah apart from many of us is in verse 16 which says, “*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*” Obviously, James had in mind Elijah when he wrote this. He realized that Elijah lived a righteous life that’s why his prayers were always answered.

What does it mean to live a righteous life? In simple terms, it means to live a life that is right. Right before the eyes of God. Today, many people say that they are right, but they are actually wrong.

We've heard of the term politically correct. It may be politically correct but spiritually wrong. Man's standards are not God's standards. And God's standards are written in his word the Bible.

Let me give just two of these. Two that are important. First is humility. We cannot come to God unless we acknowledge our lowly position before a holy and just God. Unless we admit our sins to God, we cannot come to him.

The Psalmist says, *"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."* (Psalm 24:3-4) He is saying we cannot come to the presence of God unless we are living lives that are pure and godly. And James himself expresses the same principle in his letter in 4:8, *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

The problem is, we don't admit to our sins. Today we use other words. We say, "I goofed" or "I blew it" or we talk about "mistakes" and "weaknesses" and we say "I made a boo-boo" or "My bad." But those terms tend to define sin downward.

It has been said that the three hardest words to say in the English language are: "I was wrong." Every husband soon learns how hard it is to say those words. But when all is said and done, no wife likes to say them either. Most of us would rather do anything than to admit we were wrong. Do you remember how much trouble Fonzie had with this issue on the TV series Happy Days? Fonzie was too cool to ever admit he was wrong. Richie Cunningham would say to him, "Go ahead, admit it, you were wrong." So Fonzie would go, "I was wr-r-r-r-r-r-r."

And he couldn't get the word out. So, he would end up saying, "I was wr-r-r-Not right!" But "not right" is not the same thing as "wrong." If you're wrong, you're wrong. But if you are "not right," nobody really knows what you are.

The second standard is Obedience. To live a righteous life means to obey God and obeying God means living according to God's will. So, after confession, repentance must follow. Repentance is doing what God requires us to do. It means forsaking our old ways and doing what is right before God. The Bible says in **1 Samuel 15:22**, *"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."* This is repeated in **Proverbs 21:3** which says, *"To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."*

So, the question is, is there anything in our lives that we need to confess and repent of? Are we harboring grudges? Are we sneaking to our computers in the darkness of night to get to the internet? Do we have a critical spirit? Do we gossip? Do we desire things we shouldn't? Do we say things we shouldn't? Do we have secret sins? Do we love our neighbors as we should?

Finally, the fourth principle we need to learn about prayer is that

4. Being Prayerful Unleashes the Power of Prayer

Now, it is easy to believe and apply the first two principles, prayer is powerful and the power of prayer comes from a powerful God. The third principle, a righteous life results into a powerful prayer, could be a bit hard. But the fourth principle is where the rubber meets the road. Because it demands something from us. It requires us to do something every day and every moment of our lives.

By the way, the writer of this passage we are talking about, James, has been dubbed as "Old Camel Knees". James was called such because his knees were calloused from time spent in prayer--on his knees. He prayed so long and so much that his knees were known as camel's knees.

Now, of course, you don't have to kneel to pray. Any position will do just fine. God knows the position of your heart. What we're talking about here is if we want answers to prayer, we need to pray and pray more often. Prayer is not a one-shot deal. It requires patience and persistence. That's why we haven't scrapped our prayer meeting every Wednesday night even though there are only a few people praying there sometimes. I still want us to see and to know that prayer matters in this church. But I do hope that more of you would come to our prayer meeting. It's about time we experience again the extraordinary power of God through prayer.

Let me tell you another story about Irene Webster-Smith. Actually, she became a missionary in Japan in 1916. She learned to teach the Bible in Japanese and felt God wanted her to rescue girls who were being trained as Geisha girls. She taught them to trust God and believe he would answer their prayers. She took care of them in a small house they called home. The problem was there was a small mountain behind their home that blocked the sun which they needed for the healing of many of the rescued girls. They prayed to God to move this mountain. Then, for weeks the girls hauled a load of dirt away each day, but they realized that the mountain was not diminishing.

So, they remembered the words of Jesus as he spoke to his disciples some time after his transfiguration, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible to you." (Matthew 17:20)

One morning when the girls and their leaders awoke, the mountain was gone! A large truck full of workers had come with their tools and moved the mountain—they needed the dirt for a landfill. After the mountain was moved, their home not only felt the sunshine—the empty space became a much-needed playground.

God does answers prayers. All we need to do is to pray and pray mightily. The Bible says, that “[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

If you’re a Christian, you know that God is a just a prayer away. Whatever you’re going through right now, whatever your circumstances are, if you’re feeling sick, if you need money to pay your bills, if you need to make a decision, if your spouse is cheating, if you’re afraid, if you need strength to ward off temptations, whatever your need in life is, just come to God sincerely. Believe that there is power in prayer and believe that that power comes from God and that God will answer prayers.

If you’re not a follower of Jesus, you need first to become his follower for our heavenly Father to hear your prayers. The Bible says that Jesus is our mediator and we should pray in his name. Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) He also says, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

In order to become his follower, you need to confess your sins and repent. You need to turn away from them. You need to acknowledge that you cannot save yourself. The Bible says that we are saved not because of our good works but because of the work of Jesus on the cross. He died on the cross to forgive your sins. Then he was buried and rose from the dead in order to give you eternal life. If you want to receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you can do that right now. Jesus is waiting for you.