

LIFE CHANGING PRAYER

God Brings the Answer

People from all walks of life cry out to God.
And it is human to wonder does He really hear?

I love to watch the GPS on our car dashboard. It never ceases to amaze me how the Global Positioning System can immediately pick up where we are located and follow us wherever we drive. Last week as we were eating breakfast at Sawbucks in El Paso, Arkansas, I noticed there was a message on our phone stating that our car was parked at 1118 Highway 64 (the Sawbucks address). When I consider the magnificent ways that mankind has invented to communicate, provide for human needs, heal the sick, etc., it affirms how the One who created us in the beginning can do so much more! **Jeremiah 32:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *'Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. I've noticed that even when we have not communicated our destination to the GPS, it continually stays connected to our whereabouts following us. This is a reminder to me how God stays close to His children even when we have moved away from Him.*

Some may admit that God's hears but then they question, "Does God care?" This is how much God cares for us. **John 3:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. God cared enough to send His Son (a part of Himself) to die in our place. So, yes He cares!!!*

The Word of God inspires prayer. This means that the Word commands us to pray, and makes promises to us
of what God will do if we pray. – John Piper

Our prayers are important to God. Throughout the Bible we see time after time how prayer won victories, opened the Red Sea, brought water from the rock, and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah's sacrifice. Prayer overthrew armies and healed the sick. Prayer raised the dead. Prayer has paved the way for millions of people to know Christ.

When we pray, God works through us in ways that He would not otherwise. God has made certain things dependent upon prayer, things that may never be accomplished unless **we** pray. God can do whatever He chooses without our prayer; however, God has determined that He will use the prayers of His people to accomplish His purposes on this earth. We will consider today how *...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* **James 5:16 (KJV)**

As we consider how God brings the answers to prayer, I am reminded how the old hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus says, "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!"

James 5:13-16 (ESV) ¹³ *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*
¹⁴ *Is anyone among you sick? 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. ¹⁵ *And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* ¹⁶ *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

James provides an encouragement to pray. Pray when we are suffering; praise when we are cheerful; and call on others to pray for us when we are unable to pray for ourselves. This is similar to what Paul said in ***Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)*** ¹⁸ *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication...* and also ***1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)*** ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,*

In this passage, God's Word provides the answer to how we should respond to suffering or other trying circumstances.

Even when we are burdened with afflictions, we can find joy. ***Jeremiah 15:16 (ESV)*** ¹⁶ *Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.* ***Psalms 122:1 (ESV)*** ¹ *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"*

No matter how strong a prayer life we may have when we become ill, it is a blessing to have others interceding to the throne of grace on our behalf since it is naturally difficult to pray when we are sick. The prayers of others pleading, striving fervently has power with God. ***Matthew 18:20 (ESV)*** ²⁰ *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.* Do not be afraid or ashamed to ask others for prayer. It is scriptural to do so.

Some who do not have conversations with God regularly may hesitate to come to God when in need. When we are experiencing troubled times, coming to God who loves us is the wisest and best thing to do. ***Psalms 36:7 (ESV)*** ⁷ *How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

Notice that verse 14 tells us that the sick person is supposed to invite the elders to pray for him or her and to be anointed with oil. Some think that the term "elders" meant older people in the church. However, the title of elder was used in the Jerusalem church for the leadership who made decisions in the early church councils. It is easy to think we do not need to 'bother' the pastor and deacons. Remember, it is scriptural to request the prayers of church leaders. If you are standing in the need of prayer and need 'reinforcement' for your prayers, do not hesitate to call upon those who will go immediately to the throne of grace on your behalf such as frequently happens within our class.

When we are sick we call the doctor and that is one of the ways that our Heavenly Father provides for healing. However, we should never forget our first line of defense is our Great Physician.

Some today still anoint with oil while praying for the sick. In biblical times, oil was a symbol of the Spirit of God when anointing kings and priests. Oil was also used in ancient times for medicinal purposes. In most cases, the oil was olive oil, which was used for everything from body massages to the prevention of skin

dryness in the hot dry climate. The Good Samaritan used oil and wine on the wounds of the man found beside the highway. Anointing with oil can represent both the medical and spiritual side of healing. Anointing with oil is a beautiful picture of the Spirit of God working in our lives. Please do not take James' words as a blanket formula for physical healing of the sick. Our prayer answers can come when the Lord physically heals and our prayer answers can come when the Lord takes us out of pain into eternity with Him.

In some situations, it is the presence of sin that brings sickness. We should never look at someone else and conclude sin is the cause of their problem. That is between them and God. Instead we should look into our own hearts. The KJV of the last half of verse 16 says: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* Whether they realize it or not, this is most likely the reason that non-believers in their times of woe and distress often turn to Christians to pray for them. Prayers of the righteous are prayers that make the difference and we should be willing to beseech the Lord on the behalf of unbelievers asking that the Holy Spirit of God will reveal their need for God and His great salvation. And yes, even believers can get caught up in sin to the point that they become ill. Those are the times the 'best medicine' is to confess our sins and turn to God in faith.

While waiting for answers to prayer, it is best not to be a grumbler. **James 5:9 (ESV)**⁹ *Do not grumble against one another, brothers...* When suffering comes stay in step with God and His Word and please do not blame Him for your sufferings. **James 1:5 (ESV)**⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* We are to 'keep the faith' while God brings the answers.

Hebrews 11:5-6 (ESV)⁵ *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.*⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

When you study Enoch's story, it is clear that God's Word uses the example of Enoch's life to show that faith in God grows as we fellowship with Him. Prayer, meditating on the Word, worship, discipline—all of these help us in our walk with God.

It is not necessary to read large quantities of God's Word at one time but we should meditate on God's Word every day.

Psalms 119:11 (ESV)¹¹ *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

McGee has this to say concerning this verse, "Many people believe that this verse only means that Scripture should be memorized. I think memorizing God's Word is a wonderful thing, but some of the meanest little brats I have seen in Sunday school were the ones who could stand up and quote one hundred verses of Scripture." Memorizing scripture is a blessing. But, more important than quoting the Bible word for word, is obeying it. The psalmist means by hiding God's Word in our heart, we have meditated on it to the point that it directs our actions.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)⁷ *for we walk by faith, not by sight.*

As we reflect continually on God's Word and hide its principles in our heart and obey Him, we will recognize the many different aspects of God's answers (yes, no, wait) in our lives.

Is your faith childlike or is your faith childish?

Matthew 18:1-3 (ESV) ¹ *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* ² *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them* ³ *and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Sometimes it is children who have greater faith than adults. Wise adults should cultivate childlike faith. It is easy as an adult to buy into the Devil's lie that children have faith because they don't know any better.

The Bible records the lives of children who possessed great faith. When the high priest Eli, his sons, and the nation of Israel failed to heed the Word of the LORD, God spoke to a young boy, Samuel, whose mother had dedicated him to God. When he was grown, God used Samuel to lead Israel. We see the example of childlike faith in young David when he willingly and quickly defied and defeated Israel's enemy, Goliath, while the entire nation of Israel stood around trembling at the giant's roar. It was the faith of a little girl living as a slave in Syria who generously pointed the Syrian commander, Naaman, to God's prophet Elisha so he could be healed of his leprosy. In the New Testament a little boy who followed Jesus gave up his lunch of five loaves of bread and two fish to feed more than 5,000 people. Is it any wonder that Jesus said *unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*. It is clear that we do not have to be some kind of 'spiritual guru' to walk by faith – we just need to trust with childlike faith.

Our Lord is not done using children for His work and that is why it is so important to train the next generation to know Jesus.. Recently two 12 year olds, Max Duren and Miles LaPointe, wrote lyrics and music for a Spirit-filled song entitled Glorious God. Sometimes it is a child who praises God the best! Here is part of what they said:

You poured out the water, raised up the mountains,
 imagined the heavens,
 I can't even fathom how good you are.
 With one single motion you wrote every birdsong,
 composed my emotions,
 I can't even fathom how good you are.
 Glorious God, glorious God, wonderful Maker,
 I will sing with the stars and praise my Creator.
 O glorious glorious God, O glorious God."

Childlike faith – that is what pleases our Creator.