***Pray Like You Mean It***

**James 5:13-18** – Victory Fellowship

June 29, 2025 - Rev. Roderick Grabski

**HEALING SERVICE**

A man relates a story of the time he asked his Sunday school class: "Does God answer prayers?" And the class erupted with answers like "Of course." "Yes." And "Always." He paused a moment and then said: "Well if that’s true - why don’t we pray more often?" There was an uncomfortable silence in the room. Then they began to open up and many of their replies were these two: "I don’t know how to pray." And "I don’t know what to say."

Now I’m sure that is what they think the problem is… but I’m not convinced.

ILLUS: According to the research by a couple of polling organizations, 65% of Americans pray to God. And even 28% of those who said they had NO FAITH had prayed in the last 3 months. (Pew Forum Dec. 2017 and Barna Research Aug. 2017)

That’s pretty impressive… until you consider another fact about prayer. According to Dr. Jerry Paul of the Church of Christ, there is one study of prayer habits and churches revealed that 85% of people who pray regularly DO NOT EXPECT to have their prayers answered. (from an article at Bible.org in the 1990's)

If 65% of Americans say they pray to God, why on earth would they pray if they don’t expect those prayers to be answered in the first place? It doesn’t make any sense!!! Unless, they don’t believe they are *worthy enough;* OR they don’t think they’re *important enough*; OR they don’t think their prayers are *valuable enough* for God to bother with.

They read this passage in James 5:16 where it says: “*The effective, fervent prayer of a* ***righteous man*** *avails much*” and they think to themselves - “That pretty much leaves me out! I’m not all that righteous. Why would God even bother with my prayers?”

And of course, there’s an even more potent reason why folks might doubt God would answer their prayers: the fear that their request is just TOO big or TOO unreasonable for God to consider.

Now God understands that fear, and so he introduced us to a man of prayer. A man who’s supposed to be a model of what can happen when we pray. A man named Elijah.

Elijah? This is the guy who was fed by Ravens down by the riverside; who raised a young boy from the dead; who stood on Mt. Carmel and defeated the prophets of Baal and Asherah; who rode on a fiery chariot up into the heavens. And this is the guy I’m supposed to compare myself with? Elijah is so far out my league I can’t even compete!!!

And yet God tells us – Elijah wasn’t that much different than you. “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*” (James 5:17). God says Elijah was just like you. He was just like me. But Elijah was one of the greatest men of the Old Testament - the greatest of the prophets of that age - how could God believe He’s just like us?

Well consider this: When God introduces him to us He introduces him as “Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead...” 1 Kings 17:1

Where in the world is Tishbe? Well, it’s in Gilead… but nobody seems to know where in Gilead - they’ve never found it. Most scholars seem to agree that Tishbe must have been a small insignificant town in the middle of no place. It was a backwater community that nobody’s ever heard of.

So if Elijah didn’t come from an important city, maybe he came from a powerful family, or an impressive tribe? Well, we don’t know. The Bible doesn’t tell us. The only description of Elijah can be summed up in 7 words: “Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead...” (1 Kings 17:1). That’s what God calls him 6 TIMES in the Old Testament. He’s an obscure man from an insignificant community. So why would God use a man like that?

Maybe you’ve read this passage in the Old Testament - II Chronicles 16:9 NKJV “*the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him*” God is looking for somebody. But He isn’t looking for mighty warriors, or religious scholars, or people of great wealth, power, or importance. He’s just looking for someone who’s willing to stand up and stand for God. That was Elijah. He was willing to be God’s man and stand in the gap.

ILLUS: Mary Kay Ashe said: “God does not ask our ability or our inability. He asks only our availability."

I believe God picked Elijah because He wanted us to see what could happen when He took a nobody and turned him into a somebody. Because Elijah --- was a man just like us.

So, what can we learn from Elijah’s prayer? How can we shake the heavens and bring down the rain of God’s blessings?

**There are four things we can benefit from in this story:**

**1st** – Did you notice HOW Elijah prayed? He prayed with his head between his knees. I’ve tried that… it’s really uncomfortable, and this seems to be the only time in Scripture where someone does prayer that way. So, why would Elijah pray like that? Well Elijah did it that way… because it was uncomfortable.

ILLUS: Have you ever been in prayer, even a deeply serious prayer, and suddenly have found that your mind has drifted? You’re praying along and suddenly your mind has drifted off to something you have to do today, or you remember a conversation you had yesterday, or you find yourself worrying about an upcoming bill? You didn’t mean to, but you got distracted.

Elijah didn’t want to get distracted. Prayer was the tool God had given him to fulfill his mission. Without this prayer… rain wasn’t coming down. And so Elijah chose the most uncomfortable posture to pray so that he would not get distracted.

**2nd** – he prayed REPEATEDLY. How many times did he pray? SEVEN TIMES! Why? Because the power in making it rain depended upon the prayer of Elijah. Granted, God could have done it all by Himself, but He gave that power to Elijah - just like He gave that power to us. But a serious prayer often takes more than one time on our knees. Notice, Elijah prayed the first time, sends his servant to check the sky… and nothing happens. He did that again, and again, and again – 7 times. And on the 7th time this small cloud comes rising out of the sea, and Elijah knows that prayer has been effective.

ILLUS: I think we can compare prayer to a man who has an unwanted boulder in his backyard. He lives in town so blowing the rock up isn’t an option. He doesn’t have the money to have it hauled away. So what does he do? He gets himself a sledge hammer and he begins to hammer away at the rock. He strikes it once, twice, 10 times, 20 times, and eventually – on the 100th blow – the rock cracks. Now, a question: which blow cracked the rock? They all did, didn’t they?

It’s the same with prayer. Too often Christians give up when they don’t get an answer after the first few tries. Think about this – if Elijah had quit praying after 6th prayer… would it have rained? Probably not. That’s why the Bible says we *“… ought always to pray and not lose heart.*” Luke 18:1

**3rd** – Elijah prayed specifically. Elijah prayed for rain!

ILLUS: Have you ever been like me - praying for a certain person’s needs and catch yourself saying – “God Bless so and so.” Then it suddenly occurs to me – what did I mean by that? How am I asking God to bless this individual? What was I asking God to help this individual with? Think about this: Did Elijah pray “God BLESS Israel?” or “God HELP Israel?” NO! He prayed for rain. He prayed a specific prayer. We should be clear on what is it we want God to do. If we don’t pray for a specific thing/purpose… how will we know if God has answered our prayer?

**4th** - Elijah prayed in faith. James 1:4-8 tells us to “*ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*.”

Do you remember at the start of the sermon where I mentioned a study where 85% of those who pray DO NOT expect their prayers to be answered?

ILLUS: I’m going to go from preaching to meddling here: How many of you have ever doubted that God would answer your prayers? I have!!! And I would wager that Elijah might have, too, because he was just like us. In fact, there’s a lot of folks in Scripture who suffered doubt. Abraham doubted God. So did Moses. So did the Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Even the most seasoned Christians can find it hard to avoid doubt. That’s why one of the most comforting passages in Scripture is when Jesus was approached by a father who wanted him to heal his child. And Jesus said He would IF this man believed. And the father replied: "Lord, I believe; HELP MY UNBELIEF!" Did Jesus just turn and walk away because he had doubts? Oh no. Jesus healed that man’s child. Why? Because God RESPECTS that kind of honesty, but God EXPECTS faith in our prayers.

Now, if we are honest, don’t we sometimes tend to “hedge our bets” on our prayers. I wonder, at times, if when we pray, THIS is what God hears: “*I know this isn’t going to happen… but I’m going to pray for it anyway because I know that’s what I should be doing*.”

One of the most common ways we do this is by praying “IF it is your will… would you please do this?” It’s like we’re trying to give God an out just in case (*as we may feel inside*) He decides not to do this. It’s like we don’t want to embarrass Him or anything. We don’t want to hurt His feelings when He doesn’t act.

But the truth is - God can do whatever He decides to do! Do you believe God would answer your prayer if it was NOT according to His will? Do you think God doesn’t need YOUR permission to answer your prayer? No? So pray that way. We all know God doesn’t have to answer our prayers - you can’t force Him to do things. And we all know He won’t do something that is not according to His will. So don’t bring it up!

Instead, we should pray AS IF HE WILL DO what we’ve asked. Don’t give Him “an out”; don’t try to NOT hurt His feelings. He’s a big God, He can handle it. Just tell what it is you’d like Him to do - and say it like you believe He WILL do what you’ve asked.

Still, I’ve had many prayers God didn’t answer the way I prayed. It’s OK. I’ll just keep on praying in faith anyway.

Hebrews tells us that, because of the blood of Christ, we now have the right to enter BOLDLY into the presence of God. So don’t be timid! Just tell God what is on your heart and let HIM figure out whether to answer the prayer or not. THAT’S HIS JOB… NOT YOURS.

Here’s the deal. God doesn’t have to answer our prayers and He will only answer according to His Will, but God expects us to pray boldly and in the faith that He WILL answer if we ask.

Don’t give God an out, don’t try to save Him embarrassment or His feelings. Pray with boldness to an awesome God who really cares for you.

**Come for prayer and anointing for healing.**

**SONG: *Somebody Prayed***

**James 5:13-18** (NLT) 13Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. 14Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. 16Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. 17Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! 18Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.