

18. Learning the Power of Prayer

In our last topic, we looked at what James wrote about praying for one another. We saw that James teaches several very important lessons about prayer. In our topic today, we will be looking at a related topic. We will see how to help our physical and spiritual children understand the power of prayer. This is important because many Christians have not developed to spiritual maturity. As a result, their prayer life often consists of praying primarily for their own needs and their own problems. Other Christians pray primarily for physical needs. We want to help our children understand the power of prayer, so that they will learn to pray for spiritual needs, as well as physical needs.

James 5:17 says, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” The first thing we see in this verse is that Elijah was a man who had a nature like ours. The word that is translated “a nature like ours” means *a nature that has the same feelings or affections*. In other words, Elijah was not a super saint. He was just an ordinary follower of the Lord like each one of us.

In fact, we see how much Elijah was like us when he was driven by fear. 1 Kings 19:2-3 says, “Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.’ And when he saw *that*, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there.” Elijah had been in Jezreel and he ran to Beersheba. He ran about one hundred miles because of his fear of Jezebel. This shows that he could be controlled by fear, just as we are controlled by fear at times.

Next, 1 Kings 19:4 shows that Elijah became suicidal. That verse says, “But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!’” We see that Elijah asked the Lord to take his life. Here, we see that when any person becomes focused on their own problems, they can become very depressed and even suicidal. Again, this reminds us of the fact that Elijah had a nature just like ours.

Elijah continued on from there to Mount Horeb. This was the area where Moses had received the law many years earlier. When Elijah came to Mount Horeb, 1 Kings 19:9-10 says, “And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ So he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.’” In these verses, we see that Elijah had gotten to the point where he felt like he was the only one left who was serving the Lord.

We see that more than three years and six months before Elijah had become controlled by fear and depression, and focused on his own problems, he had prayed and the Lord had answered his prayer. We see that he had prayed earnestly that it would not rain. After his prayer, Elijah went and spoke

to Ahab, the king of Israel. 1 Kings 17:1 says, “And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.’” God heard the prayer of Elijah and stopped the rain in Israel for three years and six months.

At the end of that period, Elijah challenged Ahab and the prophets of Baal in front of the people of Israel. Elijah told the prophets of Baal to build an altar and prepare a sacrifice to Baal while he built an altar and prepared a sacrifice to God. Then, Elijah said that the God who answered by fire was the true and living God. The prophets of Baal cried to their god all day and got no response. Elijah then had twelve barrels of water dumped on his sacrifice and altar. 1 Kings 18:36-38 tells what happened next. Those verses say, “And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the LORD God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back *to You* again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench.” Here, we see two things about Elijah. He was obedient to God. He prayed and trusted God to answer his prayer.

After telling the people of Israel to destroy the false prophets of Baal, Elijah prayed again. 1 Kings 18:43-45 says, “And said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ So he went up and looked, and said, ‘*There is nothing.*’ And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh *time*, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!’ So he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, “Prepare *your chariot*, and go down before the rain stops you.”’ Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.” Here, we see that God answered his prayer by sending rain so that the land became fruitful again. In each of the prayers of Elijah, we are given an example of the power of prayer when one comes to the Lord in prayer.

James gave this illustration of how God will answer our prayers to teach us some very important lessons. We want to help our children understand these same lessons. James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Here, we see that it is possible for a weak or immature Christian to wander from the truth. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” Many times, new or immature Christians will be deceived by false teachers. Others can become controlled by fear and act out of fear. In fact, Galatians 2:11-14 show us that even Peter and Barnabas had that happen in their lives.

Here, we see that any Christian who wanders from the truth, either because of deception, or fear, needs to be brought back to fellowship with the Lord by someone who has a real concern. We want to show our children how to minister to such individuals by turning people back to a right relationship with the Lord when someone has wandered from the truth. The word that is translated

“turn back” can mean to turn someone from a lost condition to salvation.

However, it can also mean to turn a person back to love and obey God. An example of this use is found, in Luke 22:31-32, when Christ told Peter, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.” Christ said that He had already prayed for Peter. As a result, He knew that Peter would turn back to Him after denying him. Peter felt like such a failure. He felt that he could only return to fishing (which he and six other disciples did in the first verses of John 21). We see in that chapter that Christ went right to the place where Peter and the others were fishing to put His prayer for Peter into action.

Notice how Christ restored Peter and turned him back to love and obey God. Christ went to Peter, and the other disciples, where they were fishing. He prepared breakfast for them. He gave them a great catch of fish. While they were eating, Christ never condemned Peter, or the other disciples. Finally, after the meal, Christ asked Peter one question, in verse 15, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” At that moment, Peter had to decide whether he loved fishing more than he loved Christ. Even though Peter used a lesser word for love the first two times he answered Christ, Christ told Peter, “Feed My lambs and tend My sheep”. The third time the question is asked is recorded in John 21:17, where we read, “He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” Here, we see that Christ restored Peter three times, because Peter had denied Christ three times.

We see that Christ gave us a model we can show our children of how to restore a brother who has wandered away from the truth. Christ knew that Peter had experienced the words of Romans 7:24 which says, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He did not need more condemnation. Just the look of the Lord, in Luke 22:60-62, had already reminded Peter of his sin. Christ never even had to mention the fact that Peter had denied him three times. What Peter needed was restoration. He just needed to be reminded of his love for the Lord. He needed to understand that the Lord still had a ministry for him. As a result of this restoration, Peter was the one who preached on the Day of Pentecost just a few weeks later in Acts 2.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the power of prayer. We also want to help them understand how to restore a brother who wanders away from the truth and feels like a failure. As we show our children the power of prayer, through our own example, they will learn to pray. As we show them how to restore other Christians, we will prepare our children for an effective ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your example the power of prayer.