



Do You Believe This Is True?

Do You Know Someone in Desperate Need of Prayer?

I like to listen to music developed by YouTubers and often the sites have a chat room associated with them. In one, named Tokyo Café, a regular visitor to the chat room often complains about how terrible his life is; his fears, inability to maintain friendships and boredom. One time I entered the chat and offered to pray for him. He does not know me nor I him, but he refused my offer. In fact he chastised me, insisting that the chat room for that site was no place to espouse religious beliefs. I was a bit stunned by the venom in his response and chose not to press the matter. There are literally billions of people going through difficult and for many, terrible circumstances. As Pastor William reminded us last week, it is a broken world. How many of these various ones believe in the value of praying, think it would be good if someone prayed for them?

As we come to the final part of James, the brother of Jesus does not buy into the skepticism so many have when it comes to prayer. He in fact saw firsthand what God could do as he watched his older brother help the poor and the needy. He wrote, **The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.** (James 5: 16b-18 NIV) Elijah is one of the most fascinating men in Scripture. As James points out, Elijah was a man of prayer. Let me share a few examples of his praying and I am certain you will find them not only inspiring but also helpful as you wrestle with what you think about prayer.

Elijah first turned up in the historical record when he approached the wicked king Ahab. He told the king there would be neither rain nor dew for the next few years. It would rain he told him when he said it would. Quite a bold and daring declaration. That is what happened though. God sent Elijah to a brook out in the country where miraculously ravens brought him bread and meat and he drank from the stream. But then the brook went dry and so the Lord led Elijah to the home of a widow who God promised would provide for him. When he got there, the widow protested. **"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die."** (1 Kings 17: 12 NIV) God however kept filling the jar of flour and the jug of oil and so they all survived the drought. Disaster struck however when the widow's son died. Distraught, she blamed Elijah for the tragic death. "What do you have against me, man of God?" Elijah prayed a quite simple prayer in response. **"O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"** (1 Kings 17:21b NIV) And with that, the boy returned to life.

Perhaps the most famous event in Elijah's life was when he challenged the pagan priests in Israel to a contest of sorts to see whose God was the true one. On Mount Carmel 450 prophets of Baal gathered to call on their gods. Each side had a bull cut into pieces placed on a pile of wood set up on a roughly assembled altar. Neither Elijah nor the prophets of Baal were allowed to light the wood on fire. Each had to pray and ask their god to set the sacrifice ablaze. First the prophets of Baal tried. They screamed to the Baals, danced wildly about the altar, and cut themselves in an attempt to get the attention of their gods but nothing worked. The heavens were silent and there was no sign of anything supernatural. By mid-afternoon, the prophets of Baal were exhausted from their wild whirling dervish efforts to get their gods to

send fire down from heaven and finally they threw up their hands in defeat. In contrast to the riotous efforts of the false prophets, Elijah calmly prayed for the Lord to intervene and set the sacrifice he had on the mountain ablaze. **At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."** (1 Kings 18: 36-37 NIV) There is nothing spectacular about his praying, not even a hint of the chaotic screaming and cavorting of the Baal prophets in their attempts to reach their false gods. He just offered a simple prayer to God, asking for His help. Help did come. **Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.** (1 Kings 18: 38 NIV)

There is a third prayer of Elijah's that needs to be explored. After his great victory on Mount Carmel, proving the LORD God Almighty was the true God, he found himself running for his life. The queen of Israel, Jezebel, was unmoved by what transpired. She remained devoutly loyal to the hundreds of false gods she worshipped and furiously ordered the execution of Elijah. Terrified, he fled into the desert wilderness. Exhausted and hopeless, his prayer this time was noteworthy on several levels. **He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."** (1 Kings 19: 4b NIV) This borders on the edge of suicide and yet it most certainly is not. Rather than taking his own life, he wanted God to do it for him. Elijah is not the first to make this request and he certainly won't be the last, but it is critical to note that when God refused, instead sending an angel to revive his spirits by providing food for him, Elijah accepted God's verdict. He chose to live because God made it clear he was to live. In fact, the Lord took it one step further. Not only did God refuse him death there, but He also didn't let Elijah die at all. Rather, God took Elijah up into a fiery chariot and brought him directly to heaven. **As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.** (2 Kings 2: 11 NIV)

There are three points that we need to make. 1. God's people pray. They pray with faith that God will give them what they ask. They don't have to yell or dance or make a big show of things to get God's attention. Quiet confidence in God to do what is right is the best way to go. Have confidence in Christ to hear you and care even more than you do that everything turns out for your best. 2. Don't be upset, frustrated, or lose your faith in God when He does not give you what you ask. You may have to suffer for a while. It might not be easy what you face. God not granting your request does not mean you weren't good enough or faithful enough. Sometimes He just won't give you what you want. Parents do the same thing. Should their children rise up in rebellion or hate them forever when that happens? Of course not. 3. Test your faith and your relationship with God. Pray for big things. Impossible things. Life changing things. Stop settling for small prayers that probably would have happened even if you never talked with God about it. God does something special with His friends who shoot their shot and bring major requests to Him. Who knows if you will ever experience something super miraculous when you pray but why not try anyway. Give God the opportunity to at least consider it with you! The first time I went to Russia to teach, I did not have the money to go. I had to ask friends and family members to support me. I thought there was no way even part of the funding would be given. I didn't feel worthy, and I was sure the trip would not resonate with anyone else. I prayed and asked God for help. Imagine my shock when twice as much money came to me as I needed for my expenses. I was able to buy clothes for all the children in an orphanage with the left over funds.

James invites all of us to pray more and pray for more. **You do not have, because you do not ask God.** (James 4: 2d NIV) Perhaps the biggest problem Christian people face is a lack of gumption when it comes to praying. Pray more and pray for more. Today!