

THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN

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Satan will strive to convince you of 2 great lies that will leave you powerless and defenseless: that you are alone, and that you are helpless.

If you are truly saved, the Bible proves that both of those propositions are false. You have the Holy Spirit sealed within you, so you always have Christ near. You will never be utterly alone.

And you are invited to **“come boldly unto the throne of grace, that”** you **“may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”**¹ So long as you pray, you are never helpless.

2 kinds of prayer are referenced in James 5 — prayers for yourself, and prayers for others.

Praying for yourself is highlighted in:

 James 5:

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Presented here are the 2 extremes of human emotion: affliction (better known to us as depression) and merriment (which we call fun, or having a good time).

When you're happy, it's good to sing psalms of praise to the One who has bestowed such sunshine and joy upon you that day. It's also wise to balance enjoyment with sobriety so that you don't become addicted to pleasure, to the detriment of your spiritual disciplines, which are the only means whereby you can continue to **“rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”**².

On the other hand, when you're miserable, you need to pray, for only the Lord can reverse the causes of your depression and thereby alleviate its symptoms of dark forebodings and stark unhappiness.

Prayer for others is found in:

14 Is any sick among you? 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 shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

This **“prayer of faith”** is on behalf of one who is physically afflicted. It is especially powerful when exercised by **“the elders of the church”** at the request of a sick church member. But that opportunity and responsibility is broadened to Christians in general in:

¹ Hebrews 4:16

² 1st Peter 1:8

- 16 **Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

For such prayer to be effective (“**that ye may be healed**”), it must be employed: “**pray one for another**”. I believe the Holy Spirit means by this that we’re to continue praying actively until the answer is achieved, or the need is relieved.

The prayer you offer must be **effectual**, which means you must be very specific in the petition. A quick, all-encompassing, generalized prayer will not suffice.

It must also be **enthusiastic**. You must put your heart in it. Passionless praying is powerless praying.

Finally, the prayer must come from one whose walk with Christ is **excellent**. The Lord, who is holy, responds most quickly and surely to the appeals of one who is actively striving to be righteous.

An example of prayer power is given in:

- 17 **Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**

Elijah was a righteous man. Yes, he “**was a man subject to like passions as we are,**” as is evidenced by his request to die prematurely; but he kept his priorities straight. He was, and always remained, a man of God.

Elijah “**prayed earnestly**”. There’s the fervency that the Lord requires.

He “**prayed earnestly**” for something specific: “**that it might not rain**”. That’s effectual prayer, naming exactly where the saint wants to direct the power of God.

On the basis of his personal **excellence**, **efficacy**, and **earnestness**, Elijah received his request: “**and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**” Once Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves on Mt. Carmel, and had thereby achieved his ends, we’re told in:

- 18 **And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.**

We again see the power how “**The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**”

Now it’s time to appropriate this power where it will do the most good — and that’s *not* in praying for your own needs, nor even for praying for someone who is ill. The far greater need is to pray for a brother in Christ who is straying away from the Lord, the church, and the path of righteousness.

- 19 **Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;**
20 **Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.**

☒ *In the context of this passage, what is the means whereby you may convert “the sinner from the error of his way”?*³

³ Prayer

When you love someone who is failing spiritually, you can and should talk to him about his poor choices. But if he will not hear you, and he continues to deteriorate, take your concerns to the Lord. Focus the power of God on his disobedience. Chastisement may well succeed where argument has failed.

But you have may to lay long siege to the wayward soul. During that time, you must employ prayer **effectually**, naming to Christ exactly what needs to be changed in your brother. You employ prayer **enthusiastically**, keeping alive the flame of fervency. Love alone can achieve this. And you employ prayer from **an excellent heart**. You dare not fail in your own spiritual walk, lest your prayers lose their power, and God releases your friend from His omniscient grip.

To keep you employed in the business of prayer effectively, enthusiastically, and excellently, the Holy Spirit offers you this encouragement:

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

That death may be one of any number of ways that the person may pay dearly for his rebellion. **“The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”**⁴ **“For the wages of sin is death...”**⁵ These **“ways of death”** and **“wages of sin”** that result in **“death”** may include divorce (the death of a marriage), estrangement (the death of a relationship), poverty (the death of plenty), illness (the death of health), unemployment (the death of employment), etc.

Upon his conversion, the wayward saint will seek his Saviour’s forgiveness, and thus **“shall hide a multitude of sins.”** Those sins will not come back to haunt him at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Such praying demands true love for the sinner and devotion to the Saviour, for you yourself are not promised any particular reward or benefit from the conversion of a rebel from wickedness to righteousness; nevertheless, you can be assured that our Lord does abundantly recompense the servant who labors diligently in spiritual service. For one thing, if that reclaimed brother goes on to win many souls to Christ, and to edify fellow believers to greater faith and effort, you know that the Lord will recognize your part in his conversion, and will reward you accordingly. After all, we do serve a just and generous Master!

⁴ Proverbs 14:11-12

⁵ Romans 6:23