

Praying like Elijah

Prayer isn't just for super heroes.

It's for ordinary people just like us.

James 5:13-18 (Amp)

“Is anyone among you suffering? He must pray. Is anyone joyful? He is to sing praises [to God]. 14 Is anyone among you sick? He must call for the elders (spiritual leaders) of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer of faith will restore 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 [your false steps, your offenses], and pray for one another, that you may be healed and restored. The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power].

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours [with the same physical, mental, and spiritual limitations and shortcomings], and he prayed intensely for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its crops [as usual].

Additional reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Introduction

How do you pray effectively?

We often assume that prayer is only for spiritual super heroes. People like Elijah whose prayers are powerful and effective may impress us. But they can also depress us or make us feel inadequate. We may be tempted to assume that we are not as spiritual or as worthy to have our prayers answered. But James reminds us that Elijah was “a human being just like us”. The Amplified translation adds, “*with the same physical, mental, and spiritual limitations and shortcomings*”.

In this and coming studies we will examine the life and prayers of Elijah, so that we can learn to pray more effectively. 1 Kings 17-19 provides an overview of some of the key events, which shaped his relationship with God.

What, when, how?

- Pray, praise, pray with others when you are suffering, joyful, sick or sinning.
- Pray in community, in the name of the Lord, in faith.
- Pray in hope, in grace, with honesty.
- Pray for one another, from the heart, with persistence, depending on God.

What makes prayer effective?

Not all prayers are created equal. Some prayers are effective while others are not.

Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer with these words,

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 'This, then, is how you should pray:'" (Matthew 6:7-8 NIV)

We can be tempted to try and discover a "formula" for answered prayer. This approach leads us to focus on finding the right words or style for prayer. For some people this is "long and loud" for others it's "short and silent". The focus is on our faith, effort and energy. In essence it is about our responsibility and ability to impress God or tap into his power.

On the other hand, we can lack discernment or be fatalistic in our praying. We can assume that, "it doesn't matter how I pray or even if I pray at all. God will do what he wants". This approach appears to be honouring the sovereignty of God but ignores the many exhortations to ask and pray.

So, how are we meant to pray?

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another [your false steps, your offenses], and pray for one another, that you may be healed and restored. The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power]." (James 5:16 Amp)

Conclusion

- Mutual
- Heartfelt
- Persistent
- Righteous
- Made effective by God

Questions

- When have you felt inadequate or unworthy to pray?
- In what ways does it encourage you to know that prayer isn't just for super heroes?
- How does it help you to know that, "Elijah was a human being just like us"?
- What does this reading teach you about the character of God?
- How might you pray differently as a result of considering these readings?