

PRAYING EFFECTIVELY

All scripture NIV

Text: James 5:13-16 NIV

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*”

The ability to pray effectively will open doors of opportunity and effectiveness in our lives that good intentions will never open. On our own we will wear ourselves out trying to make a difference and trying to accomplish God’s work.

■ Max Lucado writes, “Prayer only makes sense when you have quit trying to do ministry yourself. I’ve learned that as things go smoothly, I pray less. As our goals shrink, I pray less. As things become more manageable, I pray less. But as we reach out, stretch ourselves, and tackle God-sized dreams, I pray more.

-- Max Lucado, Leadership, Vol. 13, no. 3.

Do not expect everyone to see the importance of prayer or to see the power of prayer—just pray, believe and expect.

■ Andrew Murray warned, “The unconverted man says, “Conversion is easy tomorrow, but hard today. I’ll put it off.” Even so, prayer that is now difficult appears easy in the future. Alas, you will find it just as hard in the future as now. ... Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won’t teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won’t teach me to play an instrument.”

-- Andrew Murray in The Spiritual Life. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 2.

No matter what other may do, commit yourself to prayer and you will be effective. Notice the steps that we must take in our prayer lives that will make us effective.

I. TO BE EFFECTIVE OUR PRAYERS MUST BE IN LINE WITH GOD'S WORD.

A. We must first know His word if we are to be effective in prayer.

■ Dwight L. Moody said, "I prayed for Faith, and thought that some day Faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But Faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Now Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had closed my Bible, and prayed for Faith. I now opened my Bible, and began to study, and Faith has been growing ever since."

-- Dwight L. Moody, Leadership, Vol.10,no.4.

■ Romans 10:17 "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

B. We must remain committed to our course.

■ John Powell, S.J., in Through Seasons of the Heart. "Most of us, in our desire for meaningful faith, seem to be saying to God: 'Show me, and I'll believe!' This approach never works. God has made it very clear to us, in the life and teaching of his Son Jesus, that the process must be reversed. He is saying to us: 'Believe in me, and I'll show you.'"

-- John Powell, S.J., in Through Seasons of the Heart. Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no.

2.

■ Jesus said in John 15:7, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

II. TO BE EFFECTIVE OUR PRAYERS MUST BE IN LINE WITH GOD'S WILL.

A. Knowing His will gives us confidence in prayer

■ I John 5:14-15 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him."

We do not need to attempt to manipulate God's will. We can know God's will and ask accordingly.

■ An overweight business associate of mine decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he arrived at work carrying a gigantic coffee cake. We all scolded him, but his smile remained cherubic. "This is a very special coffee cake," he explained. "I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window were a host of goodies. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, "Lord, if you want me to have one of these delicious coffee cakes, let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery." And sure enough," he continued, "the eighth time around the block, there it was!"

B. We can even have confidence when all is not clear.

■ Romans 8:26 & 27, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

The Spirit will lead us in finding God's will.

II. TO BE EFFECTIVE OUR PRAYERS MUST BE IN LINE WITH OUR NEED.

A. A scriptural prayer will always edify the believer.

■ James 4:2-3, "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

■ Jill Briscoe wrote, “When we pray for ourselves, our petitions usually center around what we think we need or what we are sure so-and-so needs. God sees needs in our lives that are far more urgent than those we have written on our heavenly supermarket list and daily present to our "Need-Meeter" in the sky. Our need for changed attitudes, a new acceptance of someone we have been rejecting, our need to be "cut down to size"--these are not things we pray for too readily. On the other hand, we do find we can pray these things for other people!”

-- Jill Briscoe in Before You Say "Amen." Christianity Today, Vol.38,no.12.

B. We do not need to question if God cares about our needs—He does.

■ Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-11, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

■ Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

III. TO BE EFFECTIVE OUR PRAYERS MUST BE IN LINE WITH OUR FAITH.

A. We must ask with a passion to receive.

■ James 1:6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

■ Mark 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

B. We must ask with an expectation that we will receive.

■ There was a five-year-old attending a formal wedding some years ago. The girl was sitting with her grandmother. She had been in Sunday School but had never attended a formal church service. During the wedding, the minister said: "Let us pray." Each person bowed his head in prayer. The little girl looked around and saw all the heads bowed and eyes turned toward the floor and she cried: "Grandmother, what are they all looking for?"

CONCLUSION

Why do we, in all our neediness, resist prayer?

■ The resistance to praying is like the resistance of tightly clenched fists. This image shows the tension, the desire to cling tightly to yourself, a greediness which betrays fear. The story about an old woman brought to a psychiatric center exemplifies this attitude. She was wild, swinging at everything in sight, and scaring everything away from her. But there was one small coin which she gripped in her fist and would not give up. In fact, it took two men to pry open that squeezed hand. It was as though she would lose her very self along with the coin. That was her fear.

The man invited to pray is asked to open his tightly clenched fists and to give up his last coin. But who wants to do that? A first prayer, therefore, is often a painful prayer, because you discover you don't want to let go. You hold fast to what is familiar, even if you aren't proud of it. You find yourself saying, "That's just how it is with me. I would like it to be different, but it can't be now." Once you talk like that, you've already given up the belief that your life might be otherwise; you've already let the hope for a new life float by. Since you wouldn't dare to put a question mark behind a bit of your own experience with all its attachments, you have wrapped yourself up in the destiny of facts. You feel it is safer to cling to a sorry past than to trust in a new future. So you fill your hands with small clammy coins which you don't want to surrender.

You still feel jealous of the fellow who is better paid than you are, you still want revenge on someone who doesn't respect you, you are still disappointed that you've received no letter, still angry because she didn't smile when you walked by. You live through it, you live along with it as though it didn't really bother you ... until the moment that you want to pray. Then everything returns: the bitterness, the hate, the jealousy, the disappointment and the desire for revenge. But these feelings are not just there; you clutch them in your hands as if they were treasures you didn't want to

part with. You sit rummaging in all that old sourness as if you couldn't do without it, as if in giving it up, you would lose your very self. -- Henri J.M. Nouwen, Leadership, Vol. 3, no. 1.