

## Prayer That Is Effective – Part 1

Last week, as we studied through these precious words in James chapter 5, we focused our thoughts on the hopes and the joys that are ours when we experience God's blessed grace of "Healing", whether that healing comes through the "common grace" He provides through our doctors, or it be on those very special occasions when the healing we experience comes directly from God's own divine Hand.

And today, using those same precious words here in James 5, may we center our thoughts on the wonderful privilege that we have as God's beloved children of being able, at any time, to freely enter into His presence and enjoy an intimate conversation of prayer with Him. Listen again to these words!

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 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. 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. (James 5:13-16)

Some years ago, perhaps ten or fifteen years ago now, though I had been a Christian for many years and had prayed to God an untold number of times, I began to question my real understanding of it, was I doing it right, were my prayers truly effectual?

And so, I began to study and to beseech the Holy Spirit to give me a better understanding about prayer, both from my own side of the conversation but especially from God's side of the conversation. And over the span of several weeks of study and of fervent prayer, I was able to gain at least a small glimmer of the understanding God intends for me to have about prayer.

And if you will bear with me, I would like for us to do that again over these next two, perhaps three messages. And it is my hope and desire that you will be as blessed, as I have been, by the study.

My quest to better understand the nature of prayer began with these scripture verses that we have here in front of us today. And may I say that, of all of the verses in the scriptures that speak about prayer, these verses have been some of the ones that have inspired and shaped my thoughts and ideas and beliefs the most concerning this blessed privilege we have of prayer. So, may I read these words again for us.

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May we begin by saying that, although most of us might think that we pray a lot, prayer really is not always the first thing that comes to our minds, especially in the rush of the daily activities of life, and especially if we have the kind of personality that seeks first for rational answers to all those ordinary matters of the day.

Why would that be? It's because "prayer" is not a rational or a logical thing to do. Prayer is of an altogether different realm from that of logic and rationale. Prayer, real prayer, takes place in the unseen mysterious realms of God, realms where rationale does not count for much, but where faith, hope and love do.

It is a realm where genuine faith, hope and love can guide our human heart to believe in and to trust in Someone who is "wonderfully unknowable". It is a realm where the diligent seeking to "know" that unknowable One counts for everything. And for those who do diligently seek Him, they will surely be rewarded beyond measure. God assures us of that in Hebrews 11:6 where He tells us

<sup>6</sup> . . . he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

When by faith, we reach into the realms of God, and call upon His name and seek His intervention into the matters of our life, He will surely come to us and show us His way through those matters.

But with all that being said, as I observe the responses of my own heart and the responses of others, I can clearly see that each of us still does struggle to take that step, to seek Him, to know Him, to believe Him and to fully trust that He will answer our prayers. And because of that, prayer still remains much a mystery to most of us. And sometimes, at best, our prayers are our voicing of a “hope” for “someone”, “anyone” to help us.

But it really ought not and must not be that way! We ought to know and to trust the fullness of the privilege and opportunity that is ours as beloved children of God. And the more that we allow God to reveal Himself and the true nature of prayer to us, the more likely it is that our prayers will turn out to be effectual.

So, beginning this very moment, you and I ought to dedicate ourselves to the task of knowing more and more about the wonderful God we serve and the wonderful privilege we have to pray to Him.

We ought to be asking questions, both of God and of ourselves, finding out the intimate details of God’s plan for prayer. I am convinced folks that “real prayer”, once we grasp it, will be a wonderful and lifelong adventure for us.

Unfortunately though, for most of us, our prayer times consists mostly of asking God for something, for our daily needs, for healing of bad health, ours or someone else’s, or asking God to intervene in our family struggles, or in our finances, and on and on. And that is not a wrong thing to do. God encourages us to turn to Him in our times of need, and He promises in Psalm 46:1 to be our ever-present helper in our times of trouble.

But as we seek God’s help in our times of trouble, we must remember that that is not the first and “only” purpose of prayer, and neither is it the “most important”

reason to pray. We must instead, allow our times of prayer to become an ongoing part of a growing relationship with God, an unending conversation with our loving Father who we know really does care about our joys, our hurts and our needs, and who we know will be kind and compassionate and will always want the very best for us, His beloved children.

And yes, we can also pray directly to the Lord Jesus. And when we do, our prayer is an intimate conversation with our beloved Bridegroom who loves us more deeply than we could ever hope or imagine, the lover of our soul who always comforts, provides for and protects His beloved bride at any peril or cost to Himself.

And yes, we can also pray directly to the Holy Spirit. And when we do, it is a talk with an ever-so intimate and loving comforter, a friend who knows not only our deepest thoughts, and hopes, and dreams, but also knows the deepest thoughts and plans of God the Father and God the Son, and who will minister their thoughts on to you and me as we pray.

And yes, God is always on His throne, high and holy and lifted up. And yes, He resides in the "Most Holy Place", the "Holy of Holies" in the temple, but somehow, at the same time, God, in all three persons, is also living and abiding deeply within the recesses of your and my very own heart. And living there, He is ever and always available for intimate relationship and conversation.

One of my most delightful examples of the intimate conversation that God invites you and me to have with Him is a memory that I have of praying with Dr. Paul Culley, my greatest Spiritual Hero. I was privileged to be able to pray often with him, and it seemed that each time we would begin to pray, Dr. Culley would start his prayer almost in mid-sentence, giving me the thought that he never really finished a prayer he was already involved in. His earlier conversation with God had not really ended. This new one was simply a continuation of one he had begun earlier. He seemed to live in a continual attitude of prayer, all of the time.

Isn't that the most delightful thought about prayer that you could ever imagine, that you could remain in the presence of God, curled up there on His big knee

telling Him about the happenings of your day . . . and Him, listening attentively to every word that comes out of your mouth.

Have you ever thought about that folks, that God can easily manage all of the difficult matters of the whole world, while at the same time giving His full, undivided attention to every thought that enters your mind, and every word that you say?

I do fear that most of us don't enjoy that kind of comfort with God. We envision Him as being unreachable, untouchable. And we act as if He doesn't know about our deep sorrows, our hurting hearts. We find ourselves saying short, panic type prayers, over and over again as if we are trying to arouse His attention to get Him to hear us.

And I've heard people say things like, "well, I don't think that we are supposed to bother God with the smaller matters of life. He expects us to take care of some of those matters ourselves". When we think those sorts of things, it is evidence that we don't know Him very well.

Others have said things like, "we are not allowed to get up real close to God, because He is God, and no one has ever seen God's face and lived. Only Jesus has done that."

And to some extent, that might have been so in former days, as in the days of Moses when he was not allowed to see God's face. But not anymore! The moment that Jesus died there on the cross, the "veil of the temple" that separated us from God's holy presence was "rent", "torn asunder" removing any barrier between us and God the Father, giving you and me complete, free and unhindered access into His presence.

And now, you and I are able to freely rush into God's presence, as a little child would do, without any concern for protocol or decorum. And we can be confident that we will be lovingly received by a gentle and loving Father who is ever and always attentive to every possible need that we might have.

. . . Perhaps this is a good time for us to pause and to rethink exactly who we perceive God to be. "What exactly is our vision of the person and the character of God?"

What is your vision of who God is? What is my vision of who God is? If in our minds, God is a rigid, demanding and sometimes intolerant ruler, then we really do need to change that vision, because that is not who God is.

But how do we make that change? How do we turn our vision of God the Father from where it is into a vision of a gentle and loving Father?

Let me suggest that we begin by simply looking at Jesus. Jesus revealed the true nature and character of God the Father to us. And He plainly said so. He said, "If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father". "I and the Father are one."

In Jesus, God presented Himself as being the kind of Father that truly would not only allow, but would instead continually invite you and me to come straight into His throne room with even the most mundane of prayers.

And even and especially if we had nothing at all to ask of Him, just to visit, just as a little child wanting to curl up on his daddy's knee and watch his daddy take care of the business of the day.

Jesus said, "suffer the little children to come unto me". You and I are encouraged to come as simply as a child would come, unreservedly and without concern that "Daddy" is busy with other, more important business of the world.

While it may be difficult for us to envision, you and I really are His beloved little children, and He is our loving Father, or as Romans chapter 8 words it, He is our "Abba Father", our "Daddy". Listen to these words! Romans 8, beginning in verse 14.

<sup>14</sup>For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if

children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:14-17)

You have heard it preached often, and it is true, this word “Abba” is an expression of deep, loving intimacy, literally meaning “Daddy”. And in our accepting Christ as our personal Savior, a special, immediate and eternal form of adoption took place, an adoption that cannot be “undone”. We immediately became a full and complete member of God's family, joint heirs with Christ, able to have and to enjoy all of the benefits of being a “son” or daughter of God, and able to enjoy all of the closest intimacies that a child would enjoy with his or her loving Father.

But none of that is of any value to you or to me until we step on forward and fully receive the joys of our newfound relationship as sons and daughters of God. And how foolish we are to continue to stand just inside His door, never fully entering on in!

God is saying to us, “You are my child. Come on in and let's get to know one another. You tell me about you, and I will tell you about me. And if you will do that, then I will promise that you will have joys unspeakable.” Isn't that a wonderful thought folks? Let me assure you and me that it is all true and the fullness of a loving family relationship stands waiting for us.

But how do we begin? What is the first step? The first step is simple “surrender”. Yes, we surrendered our soul to Christ in salvation, but while it might seem strange to hear, that step of surrender is really not all that we will need to do. Jesus must also be the “Lord” of our life.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus is almost always spoken of as being the “Lord Jesus”? On 345 separate occasions in the New Testament, Jesus is called the “Lord Jesus”. And folks, that is not just incidental, and that is not just a “title” that goes with His name. No, “Lordship” is a position of absolute authority, authority which is able to rule and command every thought and movement of our being. In Acts 17, it is said of Jesus that,

<sup>26</sup> . . . he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel

their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for in him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:26-28)

Are not these words precious beyond imagination. Jesus created you and me for His own purposes and His pleasure. And not only that, He determined the exact time and the exact place where we would live and move and have our being. That folks, in loving intimacy. And He absolutely must be our “Lord”! Nothing less is an option. Does Him being our “Lord” in any way diminish the gentle loving “bridegroom” relationship that we have with Him. No! Not at all. It actually enriches it.

We need to just get alone with the Lord Jesus and say to Him, “Lord Jesus, I don’t know how to do this, but I do want to do it. Won’t you show me how?”

And as you do that, let me also strongly encourage you to remain there quietly for long periods of time, and to do that often until it becomes your ordinary way of life, an enjoyable time of visiting with someone who loves you more than you could ever imagine.

. . . I’ll stop for now and leave us with these simple thoughts for this day and if the Lord wills, we will continue with them next week.

Hear these words again,

<sup>26</sup> . . . He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for in him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:26-28)