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Message for August 20, 2023
“Unlocking the Power of Prayer: The Purpose and Practice of Prayer”
Speaker: Rev. Dr. Iosmar Alvarez
Bible Text: James 5:13-18

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

The major differences among these translations involve wording choices, but the overall meaning remains consistent. The main variations include the use of phrases like "subject to like passions" (KJV), "a man of nature like us" (NASB), "a man with a nature like ours" (ESV, NKJV), "a person just like us" (CEB), and "a human being like us" (NRSV, NAB, NET). Additionally, the durations are mentioned differently, with "three and a half years" (NIV, NLT, MSG, CEB), "three years and six months" (KJV, NASB, NKJV, NAB), and "for three years and six months" (RSV, ESV, NRSV, NET).

The two versions most far apart from each other in this comparison are the King James Version (KJV) and The Message (MSG). The KJV uses archaic language and emphasizes Elias' prayer while describing his struggle with passions. On the other hand, The Message uses contemporary language, simplifies the sentence structure, and focuses on portraying Elijah as a relatable human figure, emphasizing his earnest prayer and the duration of the lack of rain.

James 5:17 (Greek): Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ.

Word for word translation (Greek to English):

Ἡλίας (Elias) – Elias ἄνθρωπος (anthropos) – man ἦν (ēn) – was ὁμοιοπαθῆς (homoiopathēs) - of like nature, of similar experiences.

Grammar: - The phrase "Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν" translates to "Elias was a man of like nature as us."

Introduction.

As believers today we will explore the profound impact of prayer as discussed in James 5:13-18. Prayer is both a privilege and a source of grace bestowed upon us by our Heavenly Father. Through prayer we

can draw closer, to God experience His guidance and intervention and witness the ways He works in our lives. Let's delve into this passage together and uncover the principles for unlocking the power of prayer.

The Purpose and Practice of Prayer (James 5:13-15)

Point 1: Prayer within the Context of Church Ministry

Prayer during Times of Joy and Suffering. James mentions "Are any among you experiencing hardship? They should turn to prayer. Are any filled with joy? They should express their gratitude through songs of praise" (v. 13 NRSV). In both moments of happiness and adversity prayer plays a role in our walk with Christ.

RC Sproul underscores this by highlighting that "Prayer is an acknowledgement of our reliance on God."

James advises, "Is anyone, among you ill? They should reach out to the church elders who will offer prayers on their behalf" (v. 14 NRSV). The significance of prayer being an activity is emphasized in this passage, where the church elders are called upon to intercede for the sick.

NT Wright supports this notion by stating that "prayer is not an endeavor. Rather something we do together as a central part of the Church's life and witness."

In James 5:15 it is mentioned that through the prayer of faith those who are sick can be saved and raised up by the Lord. Prayer offers spiritual healing to those who have faith.

Another point highlighted in James 5:16 is the effectiveness of prayer. It stresses the significance of honesty and confession, within our prayers. James encourages us to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other so that we may experience healing. The prayer of a righteous person holds power and brings about effective results.

To truly unlock the power of prayer we must approach God with honesty and humility confessing our sins before Him. This aligns, with NT Wright's explanation that "prayer isn't intended to change God's perception of us, but transform our understanding of Him."

Point 2: The Power of righteousness in Prayer

In the book of James, it is affirmed that "the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective" (verse 16 NRSV). Our righteous position before God, which we attain through faith in Christ enables our prayers to carry weight. According to RC Sproul, the righteousness of Christ is not just counted or attributed to us; rather it is genuinely imparted to us through the Holy Spirit.

The remarkable example of Elijah's prayer life (James 5:17-18)
Elijah prayed with fervor.

In his writing James directs our attention to Elijah's example and emphasizes how he "prayed fervently.... As a result, rain poured from the heavens" (verses 17-18 NRSV). Elijah's prayers had an impact on the world. Similarly, if we have faith and align ourselves with God's we too will experience power in our own prayers.

Elijah's Prayer Life

Elijah instructed Ahab by saying, "Go and eat and drink because I hear the sound of rain coming" (1 Kings 18:41). While Ahab followed this advice and went off to eat and drink Elijah went up to Mount Carmel. There he bowed down to the ground with his face, between his knees. Then he told his servant to go and look towards the sea.

He went up to take a look. "There's nothing " he said. Elijah told him seven times "Go" The servant reported on the time "I see a small cloud rising from the sea like a man's hand." So Elijah instructed him "Go and inform Ahab to prepare his chariot and go down before the rain stops him." Meanwhile the sky turned black, with clouds the wind picked up heavy rain began to fall. Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt as he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Elijah prayed with faith in Gods ability to answer prayers again. His prayers were effective because he believed that God could intervene through prayer.

As RC Sproul explains, "prayer is not something done casually. Requires commitment. We should persistently seek Gods will. Trust that His timing and purposes are perfect."

Application:

To tap into the power of prayer we must approach it sincerely honestly and persistently. Let us confess our sins align our lives with Gods will and have faith, in His righteousness bestowed upon us through Christ.

Let us come together both individually and, as a community to seek Gods intervention and support one another through prayer. The passage in James 5:13-18 conveys a message about the importance of prayer confessing our sins and helping within our community.

1. Embracing Prayer: In our lives whether we are facing challenges or experiencing moments of joy these verses guide us to turn to prayer. When we encounter times, we should pray for strength and wisdom. When we are filled with gratitude for blessings and happiness it is equally important to express our thankfulness through prayers. This practice becomes a part of our lifestyle.

2. Confession and Support Amongst One Another: The passage also encourages us to confess our wrongdoings to each other while providing support through prayer. We can apply this principle in times by fostering an environment of trust within our community where individuals feel comfortable sharing their struggles and seeking help when needed.

3. Faith and Healing: Another significant lesson centers, around healing. The passage assures us that the "prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." This reassures us that our faith has the potential to bring about healing in aspects—be it physical, emotional, or spiritual.

Let us remember these teachings as we come together in unity.

Let us reflect, my brothers and sisters on the importance of evaluating our prayer life. Are we truly embracing its potential?

May we commit ourselves to strengthening our connection, with God through prayer displaying persistence and hopefulness for we know that God hears and responds to the prayers of His children.

Call to Action:

1. Make Prayer a Priority: Let prayer be your response than something you turn to, as a last resort.
2. Become Part of our Community of Prayer Warriors: Seek out to become part of our community of prayer warriors, where we seek to promote personal prayer without ceasing, but also corporate prayer in small groups.
3. Confession: Do not let guilt or shame hinder your confession. Free yourself from the burden of sin by confessing and seeking forgiveness, and then pray fervently.
4. Living Out Your Faith: Allow your faith to bring about healing by placing trust in its power and effectiveness of prayer. Pray for other people. God is still in the business of healing.
5. Inspire Others: Share the principles of prayer, confession, and mutual support with others. Encourage them to take these steps in their lives and go deeper in their prayer life.

Conclusion:

When we tap into the power of prayer we experience a connection, with God, His desires, and the transformative work He does in us.

Let us never underestimate the privilege and responsibility that comes with prayer. May our lives serve as a testimony to the power of God that is unleashed through unwavering earnest prayer.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father we approach You today with a sense of humility of the privilege prayer offers us. Help us grasp the impact it can have on our lives. Grant us hearts that acknowledge our shortcomings and align ourselves with Your will.

May our prayers be filled with faith as we persistently seek Your intervention in both our lives and the world around us. We are grateful for this gift of prayer. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit guide us to live as people who embrace prayer in all aspects of life. May the assurance and awareness of Your presence lead us to live persistently in prayer.

Regardless of our circumstances. Whether in times of joy or suffering uncertainty or certainty. May we always find strength, comfort, and guidance through our communication, with You, our Father.

Now, as we go forth, may the peace of God that goes beyond our understanding and the love that binds us together as a community of faith and the hope that God bestows through the gift of prayer be, with all of us today and forevermore. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, go in peace. Amen.