

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

DECEMBER 2018

Prayer That Avails Much

James 5:16 (KJV): *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 5:16 is comforting for the faithful Christian. The Holy Spirit stressed the need for prayer in **James 5:13-16a**, and then spoke of prayer's effectiveness in **verses 16b-18**. The words "*availeth much*" express great power.

It is significant to note that there are some "qualifiers" placed around the prayer that avails much. Notice that **James 5:16** does not say "prayer availeth much," but rather "*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Scripture teaches that for our prayers to be effective, there are some things needed on our part.

For instance, for our prayers to be effective, we must *live righteously*.

This point is brought out strongly in **1 Peter 3:12**, which says, "*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears open to their prayer; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*"

God does not promise the unrighteous that their prayers will be effective. In fact, He teaches that His face is against the unrighteous. Prayer that avails much comes from *righteous* individuals (cf. **Jas. 5:16**; **1 John 3:22**).

Part of living righteously involves becoming a Christian as God commands. This is not done through "the sinner's prayer," as some teach. Rather, it takes place when a repentant believer is baptized "*into Christ*" for

the remission of his or her sins (**Gal. 3:27**; cf. **Acts 2:38**).

Being righteous involves more, though, than being a New Testament Christian. It involves living in obedience to God's commands (cf. **1 Pet. 3:8-16**). This is needful for God's ears to be open to our prayers.

Something else that is needed for our prayers to be effective is to pray *with the right motives*.

Notice **James 4:3**: *You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it for your pleasures.* This verse shows that those who ask for things to "spend it for their pleasures" should not expect such requests to be granted.

A different application of praying with the wrong motives is seen in **Matthew 6:5**. There the Lord said, "*When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.*"

Some in Jesus' day were hypocritical, rather than sincere, when praying. They prayed to "impress" others with their words.

Matthew 6:7 continues this thought. There Jesus said, "*In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking.*"

The point is not that it is wrong for others to hear us when we pray (cf. **1 Cor. 14:16-17**), or that we cannot repeat words we have used before in a prayer. Rather, the point is that we must pray from the heart (cf. **Rom. 10:1**), sincerely meaning the words we say.

In addition to sincerity and purity of motives, prayers that avail much are also prayed *with faith*.

Notice what is said in **James 1:5-7**: *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. For let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.*

Whether praying for wisdom or something else, one who prays without faith should “*not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.*” We must trust God’s power and promises when we pray.

If we trust what God says about the power of prayer, we should be led to pray *with frequency*. Prayer should be a continual practice of ours in good times and in bad.

Notice what is said in **Philippians 4:6-7**: *In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*

How wonderful is it to know that God’s care for us leads Him to *want* us to cast our cares on Him (**1 Pet. 5:7**)? It is sad when such a privilege is ignored.

As the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* says, “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.”

As the hymn *Did You Think to Pray?* says, “O how praying rests the weary! Prayer will change the night to day, So when life seems dark and dreary, Don’t forget to pray.”

While prayer’s power should lead us to

pray frequently and continuously, another thing to consider as we think about prayer is that God answers prayer according to *His will*.

There are some things we may be tempted to pray for that we know (through God’s Word) are not in harmony with His will. We should not pray for such things.

There are other things that, as far as we can know, *might* be in accordance with God’s will, but they also might *not* be. Such things are not wrong to pray for, but we should desire God’s will to be done above all.

An example of this is seen in **2 Corinthians 12**. In that chapter, the apostle Paul spoke about his thorn in the flesh (**verse 7**). Paul did not initially know what the Lord’s will was for him concerning this thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times that it be removed (**verse 8**). He came to find out, though, that God did not intend to take this thorn in the flesh away (**verse 9**). Paul accepted God’s answer, and became grateful for what good could come from his thorn in the flesh (**verse 10**).

The point is that prayer’s power should not be confused with God promising to conform His will to ours. Though we may not always say these words, an *attitude* we should have when praying is, “*not my will, but yours, be done*” (**Luke 22:42**).

So when we think about prayer, it is important to consider the high value Scripture places on prayer, but it is also important to consider what is needed from us in order for our prayers to be effective. May we live righteously and pray properly, and thus fully enjoy the blessing God offers of prayer that avails much.

- **Michael Hickox**