

“Fervent Prayer” – James 5:16

Well, my dear family, I have good news and bad news and then some more good news...with some real good news at the end. How many of you are going through some sort of battle today? Some sort of difficulty or challenge. You have a physical problem or a financial problem or a spiritual issue you can't solve. Well, here's the good news from the Word of God. [1 Samuel 17:47](#) says, “And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.” [2 Chronicles 20:15](#) says, “And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's. [2 Chronicles 32:7](#) says, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. [Exodus 14:13-14](#) says, “And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” The bad news is that none of those verses were written to us and we can't claim any of them. Those were written to certain people at certain times for certain reasons and do not apply to us today, at least not in and of themselves.

Now the other good news is that Paul says in [1 Corinthians 15:57](#), “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Everybody can claim that one! Thank you, Lord! And Paul also said in [Romans 8:37](#), “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” That's good stuff. I don't care who you are. How about one more just for grins? [Ephesians 6:10](#) “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Those you can claim. Those you can call your own and know that God has spoken truth to you. But that doesn't mean there won't be battles in this life. We know that is true as well. Ultimately, we will be victorious and we will be more than conquerors but we have to fight the battles. The war is won. Jesus made sure of that. But as long as we are in this world, we will have battles.

Some other good news is that God has given us weapons to use in these battles but we do need to know how to use them. Some of those weapons include scripture, the Holy Spirit who lives inside us and the church who supports us. Those are powerful weapons to defeat Satan as he goes around looking to see who he can devour. (1 Peter 5:8) But starting off this new year, I want to focus on the weapon of prayer that God gives us. It is the most powerful weapon in the world. It has the power to kill and destroy but also the power to heal and create. It can make one uncomfortable or bring great comfort. It can bring chaos to the enemy or wisdom to the user. It has been used with great effect for thousands of years and while almost everybody says they use it, very few use it to its effectiveness.

We are literally in the battle of our lives; a spiritual battle that has spiritual consequences but also physical, mental, financial, emotional and every other kind of consequence as well. We have consecrated ourselves in preparation for this battle. We understand why we have to fight since we as believers have been changed by God and want our lives to bring Him glory in everything that we do. We have a long legacy to follow; footsteps to follow of people like Peter, Paul, Abraham and Jesus Himself, not to mention we don't want to let our fellow soldiers down. If we are going to combat Satan and his demons and keep them from ruining our lives and even killing us dead, then we must learn to use the weapon of prayer as it was intended. There is no winning the battle without it. And to do it right is actually very simple but very difficult at the same time. It's not complicated but it's not easy. You'll see what I mean as we go along. I read an article (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5267485/A-quarter-non-believers-pray-faced-crisis.html>) just this past week that said one in four non-believers pray when confronted by tough times - despite insisting they are not religious. For atheists and agnostics, personal crisis or tragedy is the most common reason for them to resort to prayer, with a quarter admitting they pray for comfort or to feel less

lonely. Isn't that fascinating? 25% of people who say they don't believe in God are praying to God for help when they need it. Do you know what that is like? That is like being in the heat of battle and grabbing a gun but not loading it with ammo, not cocking it and not taking the safety off then going "Pew! Pew! Pew!" to the enemy. You might get lucky and accidentally poke somebody in the eye but it is not an effective weapon like that.

I find it interesting that the article also says that a third of people pray in the morning or before they go to sleep. "People are also increasingly likely to solicit support from God while cooking or exercising." Now, I understand that! When I cook and when I exercise are good times for me to be praying because I don't want to do either one nor am I good at either one and one of them is probably gonna kill me.

But the real problem is that too many true believers treat prayer like those atheists do. They have no belief, no faith, no passion...and no results. So, let's see what scripture says about this weapon and how to use it effectively. Turn in your Bibles to the beautiful and powerful little book of **James** in the New Testament. James is between **Hebrews** and **Peter** way in the back nearly to Revelation. In preparing for this message, my challenge was to find the one passage on prayer that would really sum it all up; the passage that would explain things the best and it was hard to find just one. There are so many good passages. There are great examples of prayer from Genesis to Revelation. I love to read Daniel's prayers. Abraham and Moses both talked to God very intimately and powerfully.

Samson had probably one good prayer in his life that we know of but it killed thousands of the enemy. Samuel prayed when he was a little boy and didn't even know he was praying. (1 Sam. 3) Nehemiah could give a clinic on powerful and effective prayer. Job prayed quite a bit and some of it was good and some of it I wouldn't recommend copying at all. As for modeling prayer, nobody did it better than Jesus, of course, but in the book of James, James tells us some vital information about prayer; info I hope that will change the way all of us pray. Turn to **James 5, verse 16**. It's just one verse.

Normally I am pretty content reading from the New International Version but today I'm blowing the dust off my King James. I think it better conveys the true meaning and it is important to know exactly what James was saying. I looked at half a dozen different versions and none of them are wrong necessarily, but I believe KJV is closest to the original in this case. It says, *"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."* I like the NIV because it is easier to understand without all the "thous" and "thees" and "availeths" but the two words in front of the word "prayer" are too important to leave out and the NIV does and some of the others do too. But I do like the words that the NIV uses to replace "availeth". It says that prayer is powerful and effective.

So, I'll tell you what. With your permission, or without it, I'm going to mash these two versions up to what I think is the most correct and easiest to understand. I'm also going to leave off the first sentence although it is important and I hope to discuss it tonight. But if you combine the KJV and the NIV in the last sentence of **James 5:16** it says, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* Oh, that's good and that makes me happy. That's the TBV we are using today; the Todd Blair Version. I say the two words (effectual and fervent) in front of "prayer" are important because what is prayer? What's the definition of prayer that we have all been taught since little kids in Sunday School? Prayer is talking to God, right? That's a good definition. Nothing wrong with that but we can talk to each other and hardly use any words. A wife can talk to a husband with a look and a shrug, one word and a frown and they would say they are talking to each other.

But an effectual fervent conversation is different and it is the effectual and fervent part of prayer that makes it powerful and effective. See, those two words are just one word in the original Greek and the word is "energeo". Does anybody want to take a wild guess as to what word we get from "energeo"? We get the word "energy" from it and it means to work at it, to put out some energy and effort, to be active. It also means to be stretched out. All of

that is a lot different than having a casual conversation. It has the picture of a horse jumping over a fence or a baseball player making a diving catch; using all effort to accomplish the goal. There is nothing wrong with having a casual conversation with God. In fact, **1 Thessalonians 5** says to pray without ceasing and you can't always be praying with such effort. We ought to be continually talking and listening to God; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path (Prov. 3:6). But when you are in the heat of the battle and the bombs are falling and Satan is chomping on your leg and your world is falling apart, that is not the time for, *"Now I lay me down to sleep"*! Now is the time for effectual fervent prayer.

One of my all-time favorite preachers was Adrian Rogers. I know I've told this before but it's so good. He told the story of getting a call late one night from a lady church member asking if he would come pray for this woman's husband who had gone missing. The man had gone to the bar and hadn't come home but the young pastor was happy to go over and pray with her and her grown son. He said he got there and the three of them gathered around the kitchen table to pray, the younger man, who was drunk, his mother and Dr. Rogers. He said he began to pray the best he knew how and thought he was doing a fine job of it but after a minute or two the drunk man interrupted. *"Pray, preacher! You ain't praying!"* He said he was a little offended at that but he cranked it up a notch, praying louder and more pastoral than before and that went on for a minute or so and the man said it again with Rogers mid-sentence. *"Pray, preacher! You ain't praying!"* He said that was just too much. A guy can't pray while he's being hollered at like that so he just stopped. But when he did stop praying he opened his eyes and noticed the little old mother wasn't there but he could hear her talking. So, he got up from the table and followed the sound until he found the woman in another room, stretched out on the floor with her face on the rug.

Now, if you've never heard Adrian Rogers preach, well, nobody does it like him. If you haven't then don't look him up because you'll wonder why you put up with me. So, let me read it in his words. *"I listened as she ascended the ladder to heaven. I listened as she pushed back the gates of pearl. I listened as she walked down the golden streets. I listened as she went through the curtain into the Holy of Holies. I listened as she applied the blood there on the altar and pled with God, as she got hold of Him. I listened as she groaned and agonized in prayer, stretched out there on the floor. Then I knew what the son meant when he said, "Pray preacher, you ain't praying." He had heard his mama pray."*

Now, we know that our physical position while in prayer is not the most important aspect of our prayers. In scripture we see people praying while standing, walking, kneeling, with arms up, head up, eyes up or laying on the ground. Jonah even prayed a powerful and effective prayer in the fetal position in the belly of a fish but there is something powerful, something humbling, something respectful about being on your knees or even on your face. It's hard to be proud in that position and prideful prayer never did anybody any good. In all the paintings of Jesus praying in the garden, how do you see Him praying? It seems like in every picture it shows Jesus as a brown-haired handsome man, kneeling with holy hands clasped in front of Him with angelic face upturned to Heaven. The problem with those pictures, well, one of the problems, is that **Matthew 26** is where we find this story and it says, *"38Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed."*

Now, the wrong thing to take away from this is that if you lay on the ground, God has to answer your prayer. We all know that's not the case. **1 Samuel 16:7** says, *"The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* God doesn't care your physical position but He looks at your heart and if your heart is tender toward God and humble and desperate for His grace and mercy, then that prayer becomes more powerful and effective.

I used to love to hear my Mama pray. She couldn't say the blessing for the meal we were about to eat without her voice cracking and she would start to cry. In fact, I don't think I have ever heard my mom pray that she didn't cry. It

wasn't fake or ginned up. She honestly had such a respect and fear of God and I think she had an understanding of Who she was talking to. She was talking to the Creator of the universe, the great I AM, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the One who gives and the One who takes away. She had known Him for years and was still moved when she went into His presence as we all should be. This is God we are talking to, not your buddy at Walmart. It ought to be a fearful and wonderful, amazing thing to come into His presence for anything...even just lunch.

There is more to say on that subject but I have to get to the other part of this verse that makes prayer powerful and effective. Going back to **James 5:16**, it says that the effectual, fervent prayer of a RIGHTEOUS man is powerful and effective. That word "righteous" is vitally important but it is a problem, isn't it? We have no ability to achieve righteousness in and of ourselves. But Christians possess the righteousness of Christ, because "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). This is an amazing truth. On the [cross](#), Jesus exchanged our sin for His perfect righteousness so that we can one day stand before God and He will see not our sin, but the holy righteousness of the Lord Jesus. (gotquestions.org)

We call that imputed righteousness when God looks at us with the righteousness of Jesus but there is also imparted righteousness which is different. Don't worry. You don't necessarily have to know the difference. Just know that you want both imputed and imparted righteousness. Simply put, imputed comes the moment you accept Jesus to be Lord of your life and trust in Him for forgiveness and eternal life in Heaven. Imparted righteousness is what we get day by day as we ask God to forgive our sins and we remain in "right" standing with Him. Right standing is imparted righteousness. The word literally means to be declared not guilty by God. I say all of that to say that one of the biggest hold-ups to powerful and effective prayer is not being in right standing with God. Remember, sin always puts a barrier between us and God. Isaiah 59:2 says, "*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*" That's pretty plain.

Sin takes all the power and effectiveness out of our prayer. Yes, God is merciful and gracious and is oftentimes very generous but without the power of God in your prayer through righteousness...you are going into a gunfight with an unloaded gun. This is just another example of why sin is the very worst thing that can happen to us. There are benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience. (BOOCOD) Now, I hear all the Joel Osteen lovers out there. "*Oh dear, he's talking about sin again and that makes me uncomfortable. Why doesn't he just talk about God's grace and love and rainbows and unicorns? Maybe show some puppy and kitten videos every now and then? I want to feel good when I go to church, not feel like I need to repent.*"

Dear ones, there are plenty of places to go if that is how you feel but Christ Fellowship is where you come to hear truth and the truth is that if you want to be victorious over our enemy Satan; if you want to overcome temptation; if you want to have peace and joy when difficulties come then you will pray fervently and effectually and you will see its power and effectiveness if you are the righteous man James talks about.

Today, of all days, is when you need to come to the front to pray if you feel God leading you to. Come to the front. Stand up, lay down. Nothing done for show or for others to notice. You don't worry about what other people are doing. They won't worry about you. This time of prayer is between you and holy God.

Now is the time to do business with God. Speak to Him. Listen to Him. Be still before Him and know He is God. Maybe you need to repent for the daily sins you have committed. Maybe you need to truly repent for the very first time and ask God to be Lord of your life and forgive you of all your sins and let Him change your life. Do that right now.