

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 4-5-15 PM NOTES  
"THE PRAYERS OF ELIJAH"  
1 KINGS 18, 19  
# 13 in Series, "Learning to Pray from the Experts"

**James 5:17 (NKJV)** "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months."

- It is not the arithmetic of our prayers – how many they are
- It is not the rhetoric of our prayers – how eloquent they are
- It is not the geometry of our prayers - how long they are
- It is not the music of our prayers – how sweet the voice
- It is not the logic of our prayers – how solid our argument
- It is not the method of our prayers – how organized they are
- It is the fervency of our prayers – how passionate they are

I. A Prayer for God's Manifested Power (18:36-39)

A. The Prayer Was Confident in Its Presentation (18:36)

"Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, putting that desire in our hearts to return it in the form of a request to Him."  
- Adrian Rogers

**1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)** "14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

B. The Prayer Was Centered in God's Glory (18:37)

**Isaiah 48:11b (NKJV)** "...I will not give My glory to another."

**James 4:3 (NKJV)** "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures."

"Whenever we can so lose ourselves in prayer as to forget personal interest, and to plead for the glory of God, we have reached a vantage ground from which we can win anything from Him."  
- F. B. Meyer

C. It Was Answered! (18:38)

II. A Prayer That Was Persistent (18:41-46)

A. It Was Prayed with Expectancy (18:41)

**Hebrews 13:5-6 (NKJV)** *“<sup>5</sup> Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ <sup>6</sup> So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”*

“The stately ships of Heaven have come up to the docks, laden with the very blessings we asked; but as we have not been there to welcome and unload them, they have put out again to sea.”  
- F. B. Meyer

B. It Was Prayed with Endurance (18:43)

C. It Was Answered (18:44-45)

III. A Prayer of Pouting (19:1-4)

A. Elijah's Problem

1. Fatigue
2. Self Pity (19:10)

‘Come unto me all you that are grieved, peevish, misused, and disgruntled, and I will spread on you sympathy. You will find me a never failing source of the meanest attitudes and the most selfish sort of misery. At my altar you may feel free to fail and fall, and there to sigh and fret. There I will feed your soul on fears, and indulge your ego with envy, jealousy, bitterness and spite. There I will excuse you from every cross, duty, and hardship.’  
- Unknown

B. God's Provision

1. Rest (19:5-7)
2. Return to the Work (19:15)

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One of the most encouraging verses in the Bible to me is **James 5:17 (NKJV)** “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three

years and six months.” You may wonder why that verse is so encouraging to me. The reason is that even though Elijah seems bigger than life – standing face to face with the evil King Ahab, taking on and killing 450 false prophets of Baal, bringing the end of a massive drought through his prayers, being associated with more miracles than probably anyone in the Old Testament, ending his time here on earth not in death but being taken up to heaven in the neatest chariot ever witnessed by man, and then to appear with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of transfiguration. Whoa! What a man! Yet James tells us that he was a man with a nature like ours. The NIV says that “Elijah was a man just like us.” The New English Bible says, “Elijah was a man with human frailties like our own.” Does that encourage you as much as it does me? Elijah struggled with pride just like me. As we will see in this message, he struggled with doubt. Yet look at how amazingly God used him – especially his prayers. Yes, Elijah struggled with the things that we struggle with, but Elijah knew how to pray! I may not be as bold as Elijah was; I may not have the courage Elijah had, but I have the same God Elijah had and the same access to God through prayer that Elijah had. The main thing that I long to learn from Elijah is not his methodology of dealing with false prophets, a wicked king whose wickedness was only exceeded by the wickedness of his wife, or the spiritually listless people of Israel. The main thing I want to learn from Elijah is how to pray as he prayed.

Elijah is not the only mightily used saint whose weakness is an encouragement to me. In reading biographies of great men and women since the completion of the Bible, we see that they all had struggles just like we struggle. I think of Charles Spurgeon who was known for not only his preaching, but also for prayers. And yet listen to this quote from Spurgeon. “I usually feel more dissatisfied with my prayers than with anything else I do.” There is hope for me and you!

What was it about Elijah’s prayers that made them stand out and move a whole nation? I think that if we boiled it down to one thing it would be the fervency of his prayers. The word “fervent” means hot, burning, having great warmth of feeling, intensely devoted; ardent. The dictionary gives a synonym of fervent as being passionate. That’s it! Elijah’s prayers were simple, fairly short, but fervent or passionate. Learn this truth:

- It is not the arithmetic of our prayers – how many they are
- It is not the rhetoric of our prayers – how eloquent they are
- It is not the geometry of our prayers - how long they are
- It is not the music of our prayers – how sweet the voice
- It is not the logic of our prayers – how solid our argument
- It is not the method of our prayers – how organized they are
- It is the fervency of our prayers – how passionate they are

Oh if we could only see clearly the power of passionate prayers offered from a heart that desires God and His will above everything else. Satan cannot keep God from answering your prayers so he focuses on keeping you from offering prayer.

So many times, when God wants us to grasp a glorious truth, He shows us a flesh and blood person with the same struggles we have to demonstrate that truth to us. That is what He does with Elijah in the area of prayer. “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly...”

In this message, I want us to look at three prayers that Elijah prayed and learn some life changing truths about prayer.

#### I. A Prayer for God’s Manifested Power (18:36-39)

Even though many know the background of this prayer, allow me to quickly summarize it. Elijah had primarily been sent to Israel as a prophet of judgment, especially to the wicked King Ahab and his even more wicked wife Jezebel. God’s message of judgment included a drought on the land that wouldn’t end until God told Elijah it would end. After about three and one half years of drought, Elijah and King Ahab have a divinely engineered encounter. Elijah (at God’s direction) makes an outrageous seeming challenge. He tells Ahab to gather the people of Israel and the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel to meet Elijah.

At Mount Carmel they would determine whose god is the one true God. That didn't seem like a fair battle, but Elijah knew the truth that one person plus God was a majority.

Ahab spreads the word and the people began to gather. It must have been something like a Super Bowl atmosphere. Elijah addresses the crowd in **1 Kings 18:21 (NKJV)** "And Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word." The Israelites were fence straddlers, and they responded with silence. Basically the encounter involved each side (the prophets of Baal and Elijah) putting a sacrifice on their altar and the true God would send fire to consume the sacrifice. The prophets of Baal went first. They went through all sorts of rituals and incantations, but nothing happened. There was no fire. Now it is Elijah's turn. We see the set up for God to manifest His power to the people of Israel in **1 Kings 18:33-35 (NKJV)** "<sup>33</sup> And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid *it* on the wood, and said, Fill four water pots with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.' <sup>34</sup> Then he said, 'Do *it* a second time,' and they did *it* a second time; and he said, 'Do *it* a third time,' and they did *it* a third time. <sup>35</sup> So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water." What happened next must have caused a collective gasp among the crowd of on-lookers. He had them dig a trench around the altar and then go to the sea and get 12 barrels full of water and pour on the sacrifice and the wood. Then Elijah prayed a simple prayer that asked God to show His power. Let's examine this prayer.

#### A. The Prayer Was Confident in Its Presentation (18:36)

Elijah's prayer was concise and to the point. He reminds the LORD that this is all being done at His instruction. Elijah was simply obeying what the Lord had told him to do. This was not some "grandstanding" event that Elijah had thought up. Confidence in prayer is from God's yielded servant praying what he knows is God's will. All too often we approach God as though He is our servant and our task is to convince Him to do our will. That is why most prayer is only a wish flung upward and that is why there is little confidence in prayer. Notice again in verse 36, "...You are God in Israel and I am your servant..." Is that the way you approach prayer? Someone described prayer this way: "Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, putting that desire in our hearts to return it in the form of a request to Him." [Adrian Rogers]. Of course, the primary place where we find the Father's desire in His Word. That is why the most confident prayer we can pray is when we pray the Scriptures. **1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)** "<sup>14</sup> Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." Certainly there are issues where we struggle to know God's will, but the vast majority of the things that we need to pray for are revealed in the Word of God and when we line up with the Word, we can pray with confidence.

#### B. The Prayer Was Centered in God's Glory (18:37)

Elijah wasn't out to make a name for himself. He was not after the admiration of the people. He was not "grandstanding". He desired to make the one true God famous among the Israelites. So many of our prayers lack power because we have selfish motives in seeking the answer. I think that if we spent more time asking God to reveal our true motives, we could root out all self focused requests and pray with confidence that we are seeking only the glory of God. I cannot overemphasize this point. God is jealous for His glory. **Isaiah 48:11b (NKJV)** "...I will not give My glory to another." When your motive is self promoting or self serving, or self aggrandizement, you are praying as **James 4:3 (NKJV)** "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures." I believe that this is the number one reason most Christian's prayers lack power. We are not consumed with His glory – consumed with making God look good. Elijah could have made the same request of God with the wrong motive and would not have seen God answer in power. It could have been, "LORD, would You send the fire so that I would look good and the people would admire me?" If that had been Elijah's motive there would not have been the confidence in prayer.

Analyze every prayer you lift to the Lord. Is your highest desire that God is elevated, spotlighted, and made famous? If that is not your highest desire, you have the reason that your prayer life isn't powerful.

Dr. F. B. Meyer in the mid-1800's said, "Whenever we can so lose ourselves in prayer as to forget personal interest, and to plead for the glory of God, we have reached a vantage ground from which we can win anything from Him." [F. B. Meyer, *Elijah*, page 87].

### C. It Was Answered! (18:38)

Because of Elijah's confidence and his pure motive of desiring only God's glory, I don't think that he was surprised in the slightest when the fire fell. Not only did the fire fall on the sacrifice, the 450 prophets of Baal were all executed.

## II. A Prayer That Was Persistent (18:41-46)

Notice Elijah's position of prayer in **1 Kings 18:42b (NKJV)** "...he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees". When Elijah stood before men on behalf of God, he stood as tall and erect as an oak. Now as Elijah comes before God on behalf of man he is bowed as low as he can get.

Not every prayer is answered as speedily as was the prayer for the fire to fall on the sacrifice. The prayer for the drought to end required persistence. It is faith that enables persistence, and faith is the medium of exchange in Heaven.

### A. It Was Prayed with Expectancy (18:41)

Elijah fully expected it to rain as his comments to King Ahab indicated. What was the basis of his expectancy? **1 Kings 18:1 (NKJV)** "And it came to pass *after* many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'" As with Elijah's prayer for the fire to fall, his confidence was in the Word of God and he fully expected God to do what He said. I remember reading a true story about a young girl's class at church (9 year olds?) that were participating in a class project of writing letters to missionaries. The teacher told the girls that missionaries were very busy and they may not have the time to write them back. One little girl, desiring to be gracious to the missionary she was writing to said in her letter, "Dear Mr. Smith, I am writing to tell you that we are praying for you and your family, but we don't expect an answer." Though we would never be that blunt, I wonder if many Christians are saying, "Lord, here are my requests, but I don't expect an answer." Faith manifests itself with expectancy. Faith refuses to give up on what God has promised. It exists with a sense of expectancy. God said that it was going to rain and Elijah believed it. That may seem oversimplified, but it is not. **Hebrews 13:5-6 (NKJV)** "<sup>5</sup> *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'* <sup>6</sup> **So we may boldly say:** *'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'*" When God promises, it will come to pass.

Again, allow me to quote F. B. Meyer, "The stately ships of Heaven have come up to the docks, laden with the very blessings we asked; but as we have not been there to welcome and unload them, they have put out again to sea." [F. B. Meyer, *Elijah*, p 97]. Faith manifests itself in expectancy.

### B. It Was Prayed with Endurance (18:43)

As Elijah prays, he sends his servant 7 times to look for a sign that the rain was coming – a cloud perhaps. God does not always answer immediately. For a generation that is used to immediate response, that is difficult. If we want to know the score of a ballgame the night before we just get online with our cell phone or tablet. If we want to know the weather in Nairobi, we can get it in a matter of seconds. We, even more than generations before us don't handle endurance very well. Persevering endurance while waiting for God to answer is foreign to us. We'd prefer, "Just a little talk with Jesus makes it right".

In the Scriptures, there is significance to the number 7. It is the number of completion. The message is that we are to endure until the time is complete – until God's timing is fulfilled. Because Elijah had a promise from God, he never gave up.

### C. It Was Answered! (18:44-45)

Elijah wasn't surprised when God answered; he expected it to happen. He had the assurance before he had the rain. Charles Wesley wrote these encouraging words in the 1700's.

*Faith, mighty faith the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone,*

*Laughs at impossibilities  
And says, it shall be done!*

What are some things you are now believing God for and will not be surprised when it happens?

### III. A Prayer of Pouting (19:1-4)

This sounds like someone else – surely it is not Elijah! This is probably what James was speaking of when he said in **James 5:17 (NKJV)** “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” Could this be the same man that stood before the 450 prophets of Baal and the King of Israel? Yes it is the same man. Now, he is pouting and asking God to kill him.

#### A. Elijah’s Problem

There were several things that came together that Elijah allowed to bring him down.

##### 1. Fatigue

Think for a moment how physically and emotionally exhausting were the events that Elijah had been through. The atmosphere on Mount Carmel must have been tense. There were the prophets of Baal who wanted Elijah dead and also the crowds that were unwilling to take a stand for God and His rule. Next comes the slaying of 450 prophets. We don’t know exactly how this was carried out, but it sounds like Elijah did the executing. However he executed them would have been both emotionally and physically taxing. Then on top of all that, he ran a marathon plus about 6 or 7 miles to get back to Jezreel before Ahab could get there in his royal chariot. Elijah was worn out – physically and emotionally. Look at your own life; when discouragement has come, it is most always at a time of exhaustion (mostly emotional exhaustion). It may be tension in your home, your finances, or your ministry. When you are tired, discouragement comes and often leads to pouting, “woe is me” prayers.

##### 2. Self Pity (19:10)

Somebody wrote this about self pity: “Self pity weeps on the devil’s shoulder, turning to Satan for comfort. His invitation is, ‘Come unto me all you that are grieved, peevish, misused, and disgruntled, and I will spread on you sympathy. You will find me a never failing source of the meanest attitudes and the most selfish sort of misery. At my altar you may feel free to fail and fall, and there to sigh and fret. There I will feed your soul on fears, and indulge your ego with envy, jealousy, bitterness and spite. There I will excuse you from every cross, duty, and hardship” [Unknown].

#### B. God’s Provision

##### 1. Rest (19:5-7)

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to go to bed.

##### 2. Return to the Work (19:15)

Sometimes it is just as simple as “do the next thing that needs doing”.

### CONCLUSION

Missionary E. Stanley Jones used to have this motto – “When life kicks you, let it kick you forward.” Amen! Learn how to pray from Elijah. But remember that none of us are above getting down in the work of prayer. Remember Elijah! **James 5:17 (NKJV)** “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.”