

Praying Like Elijah

Rebuilding a Broken Church Culture Part 8 James 5:17-18 11-15-2015

Summary: Prayer is powerful and effective (not a contradiction with God’s sovereign plan), and powerful prayer is accessible to us because Elijah was subject to the same human weakness as we are But God responded to His prayers because 1) he was righteous, 2) he prayed earnestly, and 3) he prayed for what God wanted to do. Ask God to burden your heart with some great thing He wants to accomplish through your prayers.

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James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. 13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the weary person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. 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. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Introduction

Man I hate it when this guy comes. Look at him, standing there in that ridiculous camel hair outfit with the leather belt – what a ... weird-o. I have to listen to him, because his prophecies always come true, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good. Every single time it’s rebuke, judgment, death, destruction. Now here he is again. Just listen - \$100 says his message isn’t going to be positive and encouraging.

“What do you got this time, Elijah? Spit it out.”

1 Kings 17:1 Elijah ... said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

Oh great – a drought. Not one drip of rain or even dew for the next 3.5 years. Fantastic – thanks Elijah. Do you see what I mean about him?

Like I said – his prophecies always come true, although...I’m really not all that worried about this one. You see, Elijah is a prophet of Yahweh. But I think Yahweh might be a little out of his element on this one, because Baal is the god of rain. And we’ve got hundreds of loyal prophets of Baal – I think we’ll be fine.

Well, now what do you do if you were Elijah? The passage in 1 Kings doesn’t tell us, but James does.

James 5:17 Elijah... prayed earnestly that it would not rain

That was Elijah’s prayer request at prayer group the next Sunday: “My request is that it wouldn’t rain – since I just announced to the king that there will be a drought – since I just announced to the king that God said there will be a drought.”

Review

In this closing section of the book James is teaching us how to restore a broken church culture. And most of what he has to say is about prayer - prayer for physical and spiritual restoration. It starts with praying for yourself in verse 13. Next, you need to be *prayed for* in verses 14-15. And then in verse 16 we pray for one another. We serve a God who likes to give His blessings in response to the intercession of His people.

Prayer is Powerful

So, pray for yourself, pray for others, ask others to pray for you – pray, pray, pray. And that is exactly what we see throughout the New Testament – pray at all times, be devoted to prayer, pray without ceasing, above all, always keep on praying for all the saints. So much emphasis on prayer. So why don’t we pray more than we do? Why do we struggle so much with prayer? I think the biggest reason is this: we don’t think it works. We just don’t really believe it does much of anything.

James anticipates that problem, so look what he says at the end of verse 16.

James 5:16 ...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

We talked about that a couple weeks ago when we first looked at verse 16. But we need to talk about it some more, because James is not done talking about it. He makes that statement about the power and effectiveness of prayer, and then the next two verses about Elijah’s example are designed to support that. God does that. He tells us something, and then instead of just expecting us to get it, He gives us some examples and reasons and illustrations that will help us believe it. Verses 17-18 about Elijah are designed to help us understand and really believe that closing statement in verse 16 about prayer being powerful and effective.

God’s Sovereign Plan vs. Human Causation

How many of you have ever been tempted to think this way: “I will pray because God commands it, but I don’t understand how it could actually have any effect on outcomes, because God is going to do what He has sovereignly determined to do before the beginning of time”? We can’t change God’s eternal purposes – nor would we even want to. So sure, I’ll pray because for some strange reason God wants me to go through the charade, but I can’t fathom how it could have any impact on actual outcomes in real life.”

Multiple different people have said that to me just recently. This is a very common way of thinking. And it always has been. People back in James' time struggled with it, which is why James takes the time to giving us a compelling example in living color to help us believe.

The idea of prayer changing what happens is not in conflict with the doctrine of God's eternal, sovereign plan being established before the foundation of the earth.¹ Just as the decisions you make and the actions you carry out through the day have an impact on what happens, so does prayer. And if you don't believe that, you don't believe James 5:16. We don't pray just because God commands it – we also pray because prayer is powerful and effective. Prayer does not change God's eternal purposes, but Scripture is clear that God's eternal purposes will be achieved one way if we pray, and a different way if we don't pray. So while prayer doesn't changes the purposes of God, it does change His actions.

And beyond that, there are some things that God is willing to do, but He is only willing to do them through prayer. He wants to do them, but He won't do them until someone prays for them.

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness."
- Martin Luther

You can think of the work of God as being like a big, powerful locomotive, and He has ordained that prayer would lay the tracks for that train. Without those tracks, God doesn't send the train.

James could have picked lots of different examples in Scripture to reinforce this principle. For example, when Joshua prayed and asked God for more time to finish the battle, and God answered that prayer by making the sun stand still in the sky. And after describing that account, when the Holy Spirit gives us the summary of what happened, it doesn't say, "This is what God was going to do anyway, whether Joshua prayed or not." Here is what Joshua 10:14 says – that was **a day when the LORD listened to a man**. There is no possible way you can be honest with that text and read it to say that God would have done what He did anyway even if Joshua hadn't prayed. If it was going to happen anyway, and the prayer had no actual impact, then it would be a flat out lie to say that it happened because the Lord listened to Joshua.

So James could have picked Joshua as an example, or countless other examples all through Scripture, but the example he chose instead was Elijah.

James 5:16 ...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. 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.

Again, there is no possible way to read that honestly and come away with any other conclusion than "this happened because of the prayers." Never adjust the Scriptures to fit your theology. Just accept what

¹ If you have problems with prayer actually having an impact on outcomes, then you should also have a problem with *anything* having an impact on outcomes. If you say, "Prayer can't actually have any effect on what happens because God has planned everything out before the beginning of time," then you would also have to say that nothing we do has any impact on outcomes. You would have to also say to your kids, "It doesn't really matter what you do or what you decide – everything has been sovereignly planned out from the beginning of time. It doesn't matter if you decide to do your homework or not because God is already decided before the foundation of the world exactly what's going to happen today. It doesn't matter if I get the checkbook out and pay my bills, or just sit and watch TV – God has already decided whether or not my bills will be paid, and I can't change His eternal purposes." We all know that that kind of fatalism would be wrong, because God is clear in Scripture about our decisions having an impact on what actually happens. Many times Scripture says, "If you'd do this, then this will happen. If you don't do it, then something else will happen." If you doubt that, just get a concordance and look up the word "if" in your Bible and you will see it hundreds of times. So our actions really do have an impact on what happens. How does that coincide with passages like Psalm 139:16, which says that every day of your life was written down in God's book before you were ever born? How can we fit those two truths together in our brains? You don't have to fit them together in your brain. You just have to believe them both, because the Bible says both of them are true. Let God worry about how they fit together. Understanding all the details of how time and eternity fit together is God's problem, not ours. We don't need to concern ourselves with things too wonderful for us. But we do need to believe whatever God says. And if God says that our decisions and our actions have an impact, then they have an impact. And if he says that prayer is powerful and effective, then prayer is powerful and effective.

it says - the reason it did not rain for 3 ½ years is because of Elijah's prayers. And the reason the drought came to an end was because of Elijah's prayers. And that is James' example of how prayer is powerful and effective.

Powerful Prayer Is Accessible

Is that encouraging to you? It might not be at first, because Elijah seems like such an unreal figure. He is this legendary figure that lived thousands of years ago, and he might be the most unusual, exceptional figure in the entire Old Testament. The final promise of the Old Testament is that someday the Messiah's forerunner would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. He is like the granddaddy of all the prophets, he performed miracles, God spoke to him directly with word-for-word messages, he is one of two men who never died, and he stood with Moses and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Meanwhile I show up at church wearing one blue sock and one black sock. How can a weak, forgetful, distracted, disorganized klutz like me be encouraged by reading about the answered prayers of this legendary, almost mythical figure of ancient history? Elijah was a Jewish superhero. When Jesus said something on the cross they didn't understand, they assumed He must be calling Elijah to come help Him. The Jews developed all kinds of exaggerated legends ascribing superhuman traits to Elijah. And James is saying, "No, that's wrong. He wasn't superhuman – he **was a man just like us.**" Literally, he was **a man of like passions**. He had the same passions feelings and weaknesses that we have. If you think Elijah was an exceptional case when it comes to prayer, think again. He was not an exceptional case.

What is it that makes prayer hard for you? Is it that you find it difficult to keep speaking to an invisible God without getting distracted? So did he. Why? Because he was a human being. Every human being struggles with that. Alexander the Great once said that any person who could concentrate on one thing for three minutes could conquer the world. Three straight minutes of concentration on one thing is next to impossible for most human beings. And Elijah was a human being.

What about laziness? Do you struggle to do hard things because you just really enjoy comfort and rest? Welcome to the human race. Every human being likes comfort and rest, and Elijah was a human being.

Do you have an important job that demands a lot of time and attention? So did he.

What about discouragement? Do you sometimes get so weighed down with circumstances and the troubles of life that you find yourself falling into discouragement or even despair? You are sounding more and more like Elijah. When he ran for his life from Jezebel, he went 90 miles down to Beersheba (imagine traveling on foot from Thornton to the south end of Colorado Springs), and...

1 Kings 19:3 ...When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

I'm so tired. I'm so sick of this. I don't want to be a prophet anymore. I don't even want to be alive anymore – just take me home.

You wouldn't believe how many different mental disorders Elijah gets diagnosed with by the various commentators and preachers at this point. Those people couldn't be farther off base. You don't have to have a psychological disorder to want to die. You just have to become discouraged to the point of despair. They are trying to kill him. And worse than that, his ministry is a total failure. Three and half years of drought, fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice, then mercy from God ending the drought, and all that had zero effect on the rulers of Israel. If all of that didn't work, what will? What hope is there? His whole life's work seems to be a total failure. And so he wanted to just end it all.

That is not a mental disease - that's normal. Be honest – How many of you have, at a time of overwhelming discouragement, have had a moment when you wanted to die? I have.

Elijah was subject to discouragement. He was also susceptible to exhaustion. It sounds to me like he just completely collapsed from fatigue.

1 Kings 19:4 ... “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life ... 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 ... He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7 The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days...

He slept, God finally woke him up to feed him, he ate, then went back to sleep, then God eventually woke him up again to eat some more. If you sleep all day, wake up to eat, then go right back to bed - your friends and family are going to worry about you. Elijah knew what it was like to be so tired and discouraged – so beaten down mentally and physically that you feel like you just can’t go on.

Elijah was also subject to loneliness. Three different times in 1 Kings 18-19 he brings up the fact that he is the only one of the Lord’s prophets left.² There were other prophets hiding in caves, but Elijah was the only one standing up against the king and queen and the prophets of Baal. When you are doing a really hard job – a really unpopular job, and you are the only one doing it – no one will help you, - that gets really lonely really fast. It was not easy for him being the only one.

So all that to show you that Elijah was not some superhuman freak of nature who was able to pray with amazing results because he just didn’t have to deal with the same roadblocks you have to deal with. He was weak like us.

You Don’t Have To Be Powerful to Have Powerful Prayer

And so here is the point of that – having a powerful prayer life does not require that you be powerful. Please understand that the point James is making is not that we are like Elijah. He is not saying, “Hey, don’t sell yourself short. You’re just as powerful as Elijah.” It’s the other way around. He is not saying we are like Elijah; he’s saying Elijah was like us. He is saying, “Don’t overestimate Elijah. He had the same problems with prayer that you have, nevertheless, God still responded to his prayers in mighty ways.” The point is not that we can aspire to the same level of greatness that Elijah achieved. It is that God has shown that He is able and willing to do great, awesome, mighty things through someone as weak and frail as us. The power of prayer comes from God, not from us. Prayer is weakness leaning on omnipotence.

Now, some of you might be thinking, “Ok – weakness is not a problem for me. I’m as weak as they come. So why doesn’t God answer my prayers?” There must have been something about the way that Elijah prayed. He didn’t have superhuman strength, or special religious power, and yet something about the way he prayed moved God to be especially responsive to his prayers. That is exactly right. And what James is doing in this passage is calling us to imitate that kind of praying.

So what is it, exactly, about Elijah’s praying that James wants us to imitate? What are the ingredients for powerful prayer even when you are weak and distracted and subject to discouragement and you find prayer difficult? I think there are three ingredients for powerful prayer that we can learn from Elijah’s example here.

Ingredients for Powerful Prayer

Righteousness

16 ...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

The more we walk in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, the more powerful our prayers become. Disobedience and unrighteousness rip the power out of our prayers.

² 1 Ki.18:22, 19:9,14.

Earnestness

The second ingredient for powerful prayer is at the beginning of verse 17.

17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly

Your Bible might say **fervently**. Literally the Greek says **he prayed with prayer**, which was a Jewish figure of speech that they used it to intensify something. It means he *really* prayed.

The Puritans used to say “pray until you pray.” How long should you continue in prayer? Keep at it until you have really prayed. When you start to pray, it takes a little time to get past the shallowness and the empty stock phrases that you always use, and really connect with the living God. Keep praying until you have gotten past “saying your prayers” and you actually experience real communion with the Lord, to the point where your will attaches itself to His will so that your prayers can become a vehicle for His will to be carried out.

Elijah knew for sure that God was going to bring rain, and yet he prayed for rain again and again and again, and he didn't stop until he saw a cloud in the sky. Even though God had made it clear that the rain was going to come, the first six times Elijah prayed, nothing happened. God was going to do it, but He was only going to do it through prayer. And not just any prayer – God was only going to do it through extended, earnest, impassioned prayer.

So often we pray and we are just saying words. Nothing is really going out from the depth of our soul to God. But when you linger, and keep focusing on God, eventually you come to a point of awareness of God's presence, and delight in Him, and rest in His love, and cherishing His will, and getting worked up about something that really matters. Pray until you have prayed. Stay on your knees until you know that you have really done business with God.

Now, do we *always* have to pray that way? No. Short prayers have their place too. There are examples of one-sentence prayers in the Bible. Those kinds of prayers are appropriate and important and good, but that shouldn't be the only way we pray. Sometimes your spouse or best friend communicates to you in a single sentence, but if that is the only kind of communication you ever had, it wouldn't be much of a relationship. God is pleased with that moment by moment interaction all through the day. But very often when God wants to do an especially big, mighty work through one of His servants, it typically doesn't come through quick, one sentence prayers whenever they feel like it. It happens when they follow Daniel's example and make an appointment with God and keep it.

Set Aside A Time

D.A. Carson says too many of us, in our prayers, are like little kids doorbell ditching (where they ring someone's doorbell and then run away before the person answers). We don't stay in prayer long enough to meet with God. Carve out a chunk of time and then stay there until you have communed with the living God.

Some of you are really busy. But you are not too busy to stop for gas when your car is on empty. And if you are too busy to stop for gas, eventually your car will stop for you. It will stop running. Your heart will do the same thing. The more you drive the more often you have to stop for gas; the busier you are, the more prayer you need. If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy to have supernatural power in your life. And too busy to draw near to God. What are you in such a hurry to go do that's more important than meeting with God?

Prayer Is Hard

One thing that has really helped me in recent weeks in my prayer life is realizing that Scripture teaches that prayer is hard. It's not hard because I am doing it wrong; it's hard because it's hard. The reason that helped me so much is because I can do hard things if I have the right mentality going in. If something is supposed to be easy, and it turns out to be hard, I'll probably quit. But if something needs to

be done, and I know going into it that it's a really hard task, I can tell myself, "Okay Darrell, time to be a man. Roll up your sleeves, and get this done." If your pipes freeze in the middle of the night and water is gushing everywhere, you don't sit there and debate about whether you feel like taking care of it. If you are a child you might, but if you're a grown man, you just find the strength and do it. We do that with big, difficult landscaping projects, or painting a room in your house or a host of other tasks that come up in life that are difficult, but important enough or urgent enough or rewarding enough to where you muster the strength and dive in and get it done. And when I stopped thinking of prayer as something that is supposed to be easy, and started thinking of it in this category, it really helped me.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras ... is always wrestling in prayer for you

Wrestling - other versions translate that word **struggling**, or **contending** or **laboring earnestly**. The Greek word is *agonizomai* - we get our word agonize from it. It was used to describe what athletes did in the Olympic Games. JI Packer comments on this term and says, "From these and other considerations it is clear that true praying is a strenuous spiritual exercise which demands the utmost mental discipline and concentration."

Just read the accounts of Jesus prayers and Paul's prayers and it becomes clear pretty quickly that prayer is not just some pleasant, dreamy state of mind. It is hard labor. If you read the biographies or prayer journals of the great men and women of God throughout church history, you will see this again and again. J.H. Jowett said, "All vital praying makes a drain on a man's vitality." Many times prayer can be a refreshment. But there are other times when prayer is an ordeal, and you come out the other end exhausted. When you see Jesus perform His mightiest works, healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the storm - you never see the slightest sign of physical strain. But you definitely see it in His prayers.

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears

You might remember a couple weeks ago I told you the story of when John Piper's father prayed all night that God would save someone through his ministry that next day, and at 2 o'clock in the morning he suddenly had the assurance that God was going to do it. And John asked his dad, "Why don't you pray like that all the time?" And his dad said, "If I did, I would be dead."

When James says that Elijah prayed **earnestly**, how did James know that? It could be the Holy Spirit just revealed that to James but it is also possible that James picked it up just from Elijah's posture in prayer. There has been a devastating drought. It hasn't rained for 3.5 years.

1 Kings 18:41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

That's pretty bold. You have got to be pretty sure that it's going to happen before you make that kind of absolute announcement to the king - who is your enemy who would love nothing more than for you to be discredited as a prophet of God. Elijah knew for a fact that the drought was going to end. God made that clear to him. But looks what happens next.

42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

He goes on to pray seven times for rain. And look at his posture. He is all alone, so this isn't for show. This is just the expression of what's in his heart - how he feels. He gets down on the ground, and he has got his face between his knees. When is the last time your prayers became so earnest that by the time you are done, your face is between your knees?

Giving Birth

A while ago I was talking about the difficulty of understanding how to reconcile God's eternal plan with the idea that prayer actually changes outcomes. One reason why that is so hard for us to understand is because there is nothing in our everyday life that we can compare that to. But there is one illustration

that comes close. Think about a woman giving birth. If it is not time for the baby to come yet, then it's not going to come no matter what the woman does. But one day, the contractions start, and now they are every three minutes. Now, at that point, is there any question whether that baby is going to come? No – it's coming for sure. So if there is no question that the baby's coming, and it's going to for sure happen no matter what, then it doesn't matter what the woman does, right? If it is going to happen no matter what, why doesn't she just relax and wait for to happen? That is the one time in life when you know for sure what the outcome is going to be, so why doesn't she just light a couple candles, pick up a good book, and just enjoy a nice relaxing evening - since this thing is going to happen no matter what?

It is going to happen, but what takes place between now and when that baby arrives – there's a name for that period of time. It's called "labor." How is it that the one time in life when you know for sure what the outcome is going to be, the name of that period of time is called labor? It is because God brings the baby, but the way God brings it is through the most intensive ordeal known to mankind. Yes, the baby is going to come for sure, but the way that is going to come is through the mother's labor. It may be the most difficult hours of her entire life. The fact that it's going to happen for sure doesn't mean her actions are irrelevant. It is only going to happen through the excruciating efforts of her muscles – accompanied by intense pain and anxiety.

That is similar to the way God brings about His will through prayer. If it's not God's timing, if it's not His plan, then no amount of human effort will bring it about. But when it is His time, very often He will bring it about by means of an inescapable pressure laid on the heart of one of His people that drives that person to arduous prayer. Like giving birth to a baby, this thing is not going to happen until that saint or a group of saints push and push with all their might, and it almost kills them.

It's likely that there was someone at the time of Nehemiah who also had a burden for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. He had a burden for it, but it seemed so impossible, that he just put it out of his mind. Or maybe he prayed and asked God for it, but without much passion or faith or persistence. He just gave up after a while. God wanted to rebuild that wall, but only through prayer. And so God waited until there was a man who was ready to go through the ringer to be the instrument of God's plan.

So maybe the key to passionate prayer starts with getting pregnant with some seed of God's will. Something that will implant itself inside you and grow and develop until that day comes when it drives you to your knees in heavy labor of prayer until that baby comes. That is the way Paul was with the Galatians

Galatians 4:19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you

That is a reference not only to Paul's prayers, but his work as well. He prayed ceaselessly and tirelessly, and then he worked. Prayerless work will accomplish nothing. A.J. Gordon: "You can do more than pray after you have prayed; but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed."

Be the Answer to Your Own Prayer

Sometimes prayer is what it takes to get you to be willing to do the work. If I keep on praying, "Lord, please bring comfort to my brother, bring comfort to my brother," sooner or later I am going to think, *Maybe I should go speak some words of comfort to him.* If I say, "O God, please save my neighbor. Please bring my neighbor to faith in Christ," eventually I'll start thinking, *Maybe I should go share the gospel with him.*

Praying God's Will

James has described what Elijah was like, and how Elijah prayed, but there is one more point – what Elijah prayed for.

17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain

He prayed for a drought. That's quite the prayer request, isn't it? Have you ever heard that one in your prayer group? Of all the things Elijah could've asked God for. God calls us to come to Him and ask Him for the desires of our hearts. Elijah can ask God for anything in the whole wide world, and that's what he asks for? Where did that come from? Do you suppose Elijah just woke up one day and said, "You know what would be really cool? Three and a half years of abject misery and total economic devastation and suffering and death in the place where I live. That would just be awesome."

I think it's pretty obvious this is not something that came from Elijah. It came from God. God made it known to Elijah that this was what He wanted to do. Way back at the time of Moses, when God first gave His law and made His covenant with the people of Israel, He told them, if they went after idols, and they were unfaithful to Him, they would experience drought. God was merciful and patient for a long time, but now the time has come to bring judgment. And God made that known to Elijah. When God does marvelous things in answer to prayer, it's not because someone prays and God says, "Hey, great idea! Why didn't I think of that?" The reason great, awesome things happen through prayer is God purposes to do it, then burdens that on someone's heart, and the person prays for it. That is what we learn from the example of Elijah. It was God's idea, and that is what brought about the earnestness in Elijah, because he knew it was from God.

Ask God to Burden Your Heart with Something

How did he know? He was a prophet. So how does that help me? My dad always used to say, "I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet; in fact, we are a non-prophet church." None of us are prophets. So if that's the case, how does this example have any relevance for us? Clearly it does, or James wouldn't offer it as an example.

God does not speak to us with inspired, word-for-word messages like He did with the prophets. But He does guide us into His will. Doesn't Romans 12:2 promise that if we are transformed by the renewing of our minds we will be able to test and approve what God's will is?

Romans 12:2 ...be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Doesn't Romans 8:26 promise that the Holy Spirit will reveal God's will in our hearts in those times when we don't know what to pray for? Even if you are not a prophet, it is possible for you to discern what God has laid on your heart to pray for in specific situations. Sometimes God allows his guidance to be difficult to discern, but other times He makes it crystal-clear. And the clearer it is, the more we can pray like Elijah. We can keep praying earnestly and say, "I am not letting go of this, because I know for a fact that God has laid this on my heart."

George Mueller is famous for how often God answered his prayers. Shortly before he died in 1898, Arthur Pierson asked him, "Have you ever had a prayer that *wasn't* answered?" Mueller said, "Yes, there are two men that I've been praying for for 62 years and they still aren't saved." Pierson asked: "Do you still expect God to convert them?" And Mueller said, "Do you suppose that God would put upon His child for 62 years the burden of two souls if He had not purposed their salvation? I shall certainly meet them in Heaven." George Mueller died and eventually both those men came to faith in Christ. He knew God had laid that on his heart, and so even on his deathbed, after 62 years of praying, he had no doubt.

Why didn't Mueller pray that way for every unbeliever in the world? Because God had not laid that on his heart. In order to pray this way, it has to be something God has decided that He wants to do. It has to start with God. He decides something He wants to do, and He decides that He only wants to do it through your prayers, and so the Holy Spirit burdens your heart with it.

Is that exciting to you? This has revolutionized the way I think about prayer. It is so exciting to think that God would do that – that He would bring about some big, marvelous thing by burdening my heart with it so that I am driven to passionate prayer. Do you want that? You could start asking for that right now. Just breathe a quick prayer to God right now, "God, give me something. Put something big on my heart to ask You for. Burden my heart with something like that – where I know it's from You, and so my

soul absolutely won't let go of it, and I will pour myself out in prayer until it happens." You could ask Him for more than one – maybe something for your own life, something for your family, and something for the church.

Hudson Taylor: "The power of prayer has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge, 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!'" There are some really, really big, huge things that God wants to do, but only through one of His people "giving birth" to it in powerful, agonizing, passionate, persistent prayer. I have been asking God that for the past couple months, and He has put some things on my heart. I want to invite you to do it too.

Maybe it is already on your heart. Maybe there is already something that you are burdened with. Maybe there is something missing in the ministry here at Agape that just presses on your soul, and God is pressing it there and it's driving you crazy, not so that you will grumble about it, but so that you will be God's instrument to usher in a marvelous change by giving birth to what God wants to do in that area through intensive prayer. If you could pick one really great thing that would come to pass through your prayers, what would it be?

I want to urge every one of you to begin asking God, "Lord, what do you want me to pray for Agape? What big thing do You want to do here?" Keep asking God every day – every time you pray, "What do You want me to pray for, God?" The elders are asking all of you to do that for the next few weeks. And then at the end of that time we will all compare notes, and we'll see how the Lord answers. Wouldn't that be exciting if a whole bunch of us ended up with the same answer? Do you think God would be willing to answer us if we ask Him to show us what He wants us to pray for? Let's commit to that for the next few weeks.

Benediction: Jeremiah 33:2 This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it—the LORD is his name: 3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Is there already something big that your heart is especially burdened with? If you knew there was a 95% chance God would say yes to your next prayer for Agape, what would you ask for?
- 2) What would you ask for your family?
- 3) What would you ask for yourself?