

Sunday Celebration (May 10, 2009)

"The Prayer Catalyst" (Pt. 1)

"You can do more than pray, after you have prayed. But you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." S.D. Gordon

"At the beginning of this book, we invite our readers to pause a moment to ask yourselves honestly how you got on in prayer this week or first thing this morning. Our guess is that most of our readers are like us; we want to get things right, but we are more than a little embarrassed to admit how far-reaching are the problems we have in praying. ... It seems then that 'struggle' is the realistic word to describe the typical Christian experience of praying, and we are encouraged to note that when evangelical pietist and theologian Donald Bloesch wrote on our topic he titled his book 'The Struggle of Prayer'. ... in P.T. Forsyth's little book 'The Soul of Prayer', the reality of struggle is central." J.I. Packer, "Praying", p. 15

"Of all the activities in which the Christian engages, and which are part of the Christian life, there is surely none which causes so much perplexity, and raises so many problems, as the activity which we call prayer." Martyn Lloyd-Jones (quoted in "Prayer, Does it Make any Difference", p. 16)

Without question, prayer is held in high regard by many Christians, yet in low pursuit by most. If prayer is a struggle, confusing, poorly understood, and unsatisfying, it is destined for neglect. For many Christians—prayer is neglected and extracted—yet we attempt to go on with living the Christian life.

Does it Matter if/how we pray? Consider Prayer as a CATALYST

Catalyst (def) – something that makes a change happen or brings about an event [Encarta Dictionary];

Jam 5:13-20 This is a **Definitive Passage on Prayer**. Prayer is mentioned 8 times (9 if praise) in this brief section.

- Prayer is the COMMON DENOMINATOR for Every Experience of Life:

"The word [for suffering] is wider than the suffering of sickness. Jeremiah suffered opposition, Ezekiel bereavement, Hosea marital breakdown. It is any ill circumstance that may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an onlooking friend might say, 'That's bad'. J.A. Motyer, "James", BST, p. 187

... In any and all circumstances—PRAY and Call Upon Others to Pray for You.

Matt 6:6 "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 And when you pray...

Rom 15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,

Eph 6:18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints

Col 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving

Phil 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1 Thess 5:17-18 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

...But apparently, **Prayer is EASIER SAID THAN DONE—**

So... WHY PRAY? James feels the need to give us a REASON to pray.

Prayer Produces an Effect

...WHY PRAY? Because it Affects Things! – (v. 16)

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” ESV

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” NIV

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” NASU

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” KJV

“The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]. AMP

“...this teaches us of the inherent power of prayer: it has great power. The word (*ischys*) points to inherent strength, the strength which makes a person or thing sufficient for the task. It means potency, power waiting to be released. ... When we pray about something, the inherent power of prayer is released as an effective power which accomplishes its objectives.” J.A. Motyer, “The Message of James”, BST, p. 204

James clearly links the location of this power to PRAYER

“Prayer, James wants to make clear, is a powerful weapon in the hands of even the humblest believer; it does not require a ‘super-saint’ to wield it effectively.” Douglas Moo, “The Letter of James”, PNTC, p.247

1. PRAYER AFFECTS/CHANGES THE ONE WHO PRAYS

Jam 5:17 ... “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed”

- What might be included in the thought of his having “a nature like ours”?

- ***A nature prone to fear and anxiety?***
- ***A nature prone to unbelief?***
- ***A nature prone to laziness?***
- ***A nature prone to vain imaginations?***

"Elijah is presented to us in 1Kings 17-19 as the man of prayer. In chapter 17 we read of the secret years of Elijah's apprenticeship... Through this Elijah was confirmed regarding the power of prayer. Even in the face of death, he learnt, the mighty, inherent power of prayer is effective both to restore the physically dead and to give life to the spiritually dead. Now he can be sure that "the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah"—in prayer a mere man can move God." J.A. Motyer, "The Message of James", BST, p. 205

"One of the things that seems most necessary for prayer to act as a catalyst on is us—the ones praying. If prayer must change anything, it must change us—lest we never pray or never learn to pray effectively! "

2. PRAYER AFFECTS/CHANGES THE WAY WE PRAY

"It is the 'effectual fervent' prayer that 'availeth much', and not the cold, sleepy, lazy, listless one. This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer. It is called, 'crying, knocking, wrestling, laboring, striving.' J.C. Ryle, "Practical Religion", p. 90

"Look, as a painted man is no man, and a painted fire is no fire; so a cold prayer is no prayer. Such prayers never win upon the heart of God that do not first warm our own hearts. As a body without a soul, much wood without a fire, a bullet in a gun without powder; so are all prayer without fervency of spirit. ... Lazy prayers never procure noble answers" Thomas Brooks, "The Secret Key to Heaven", p. 206

Jam 5:17 " ... he prayed fervently"

"He prayed earnestly" is literally "in prayer he prayed," a Hebrew idiom for intensity or passion. Elijah's prayer was not a laidback request—"God, it would be nice if it would not rain." Rather, he passionately poured out his heart to Heaven." Kent Hughes, "James", p. 268