

Faith & Effective Prayer

Faith is the key to the Christian life. Through faith we have access to the impossible! (Mark 9:23). Faith is the key to gaining the ear of God (Is. 65:24; Matt.6:5), the approval of God (Rom. 5:1; James 2:23), and the full inheritance He has for us, His people (Heb.11:1; John 14:12-14). In fact, the whole Gospel is unlocked by our faith (Rom.1:16-17).

Kinds of Knowledge

2 Corinthians 5:7

This scripture reveals two kinds of knowledge that we can receive:

Sense knowledge - based on appearance

Revelation knowledge - based on God's word (Rom.10:17)

Faith Pleases God

Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 1:6-7

Many Christians see faith as just being a way to get things from God. But faith is more than that. Faith in itself is something that pleases the heart of God. Some people think that true faith is where you get the answer straight away. But the Bible talks about the "trying of your faith", like gold being refined in a fire.

We often see only our immediate need, but God is after something far deeper in our lives than just the answer to our requests. The moment God answers our prayer, we don't need faith anymore - we already have our answer. So God sometimes delays the answer just long enough to prove our faith genuine. We still get the answer, but something far more valuable is worked into our hearts - our character is strengthened by our faith in God. In fact, some of the greatest examples of faith in Scripture are examples of enduring faith (see Mark 7:25-30; Rom.4:18-21).

How Faith Works

God has designed the Christian life around the principle of faith, which has four stages:

A word from God

Firstly, God encourages us with a word relevant to our circumstances. This may come through the written Scripture or by the inner voice of the Holy Spirit (see Gen.15:3-5; 17:15-21; Josh.1:8; Ps.1:2).

Obedience to the word

For faith to operate in our situation, we must take a step of faith and obey that word. Faith is active, not passive. Most of God's promises are conditional - He will do His part, if we do our part (see Genesis 15:6; Matthew 7:24-27; James 2:17).

The crisis - or "trial of faith"

This is a period of testing. Everything happening around us appears contrary to what God has said, and there seems to be no natural evidence for our believing. At this point, our faith rests completely on God's word (see Rom. 4:16-21; Ps.105:17-20).

The result

The end result is victory on the part of the believer, bringing glory to God (1 John 5:4; Genesis 21:1-3; Psalm 105:20-22; Acts 3:16; Heb.6:13-15).

The Life of Faith

What I am - righteous by faith (Eph.2:8; Phil.3:9)

What I have - promises by faith (Heb.6:12)

What I can do - exploits by faith (Mark 16:17-18; John 14:12)

Effective Prayer

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 (KJV)

Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16 (NKJV)

What is the key to prayer? Why do many Christians pray and not see the answer to their prayer? The answer is in this verse, which gives us three points that are necessary to make our praying Effective:

EFFECTUAL PRAYER

What is it that makes our prayer effectual (or effective)? James gives us Elijah as the example of effective prayer in action (see verses 17-18). What gave Elijah the boldness and audacity to pray that the rain would stop, and then, at his word, start again? (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-45).

The Key to Authority in Prayer

Elijah's prayer was BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD!

All of Israel had turned away from the Lord to worship Baal, the idol-god of a cruel heathen religion. Up stands one solitary man, a total unknown, and boldly proclaims to the king that "there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word!" But his authority was based on a promise and warning found in Deuteronomy 11:13-17:

"So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today - to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul - then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains . . . Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, AND HE WILL SHUT THE HEAVENS SO THAT IT WILL NOT RAIN and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you" (1 Kings 17-18).

Daniel also Discovered the Secret

Another example of effective prayer is found in (Daniel 9:3-19) Daniel poured out his heart in prayer before God that his people, who had been taken out of their homeland and held as captives in Babylon, would return to their land. The basis of his prayer can be seen in verse 2:

" . . . I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years" The Lord had spoken right at the time when Judah had gone into captivity that they would be in Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Daniel, reading the Scriptures one day, came across that promise and realised that the 70-year period was almost completed. However, he didn't just sit back and wait for God to do it. Daniel began to PRAY that what God had promised would be fulfilled. The Lord has chosen to give us the privilege and responsibility of being involved with Him in His purposes on earth. Daniel lived to see his people return!

In Summary

Effectual prayer, then, is prayer that is based on God's Word. When we know the promises that He has given, and understand His character and the principles by which He works as revealed in His Word, we can pray with confidence and authority, knowing that our prayers will be answered.

FERVENT PRAYER

Fervent prayer is praying with **THE WHOLE HEART** prayer that will not give up until the answer comes. This does not mean an incessant crying out to God because you are not sure if God has heard, or if He will answer. That is unbelief and grieves the heart of God. Fervent prayer is just the opposite. It is the prayer of FAITH. It is only possible because we have learnt the first principle, which is effective prayer - we now know God's character and what He has promised, and we will not give up until we see it come to pass.

Persistence brings Result

In (Matt. 15:22-28) The Canaanite woman would not take no for an answer. She asked for her daughter's healing, and three times she was rejected. But she wouldn't give up. She understood the heart and character of the Lord Jesus. She not only received the healing of her daughter, but was commended by Jesus: "Woman, you have great FAITH!"

The Experience of the heroes of Faith

Fervent prayer is true faith in operation. As we examine the experiences of the heroes of faith in the Bible (Hebrews 11), we see that God not always answered immediately. Some had to wait years, but their faith never wavered, and they knew that God would answer (Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11:11). Peter calls it a "trial of faith" and declares it to be "of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire" (1 Peter 1:7).

Fervent prayer does not give up even when everything seems to be against an answer coming. Many times God does answer immediately (see Isaiah 65:24), but fervent prayer has a two-fold purpose: Not only does it bring us the answer to our prayer, it also produces spiritual "gold" within us - character that will last us throughout eternity. Peter says that it will result in "praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:7).

“James 5:17 says Elijah "prayed EARNESTLY that it would not rain, and it did not rain .

RIGHTEOUS MAN

It is impossible for us to pray effectively and with fervent faith if we are under any sense of unworthiness or condemnation. James says Elijah was a man "of like passions as we are" (KJV), yet he uses Elijah as the example of a righteous man praying. Our righteousness is not based upon ourselves and our own worthiness, but upon what Christ has done for us. We are righteous not because of who WE are, but simply because we are IN CHRIST (Ephesians 2:6; Romans 6:3-11). Because of the totality of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross, we are encouraged in Hebrews 4:16 to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" when we pray (also in Ephesians 3:12; Romans 8:1).

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience . . . for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:19-23).

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