

Fervent Prayer

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SLIDE 1 Introduction

Each January our focus here at Calvary is fasting and prayer. Some of us get involved in a 21 day fast where we set up a criteria for self-denial and follow it for 21 days beginning on the first of the month.

Others get involved in the National Week of Prayer which begins today and runs through Saturday. For this we open the church each night at 6:30 PM to join together in prayer.

Our National Theme for this year's Week of Prayer is *Awakening*. We have prayer guides available today so you can pray along with us, even if you can't join us here at the church.

SLIDE 2 Losing Our Focus

It's not that this is our only season of prayer, but this focus is to reignite and reinforce our prayer lives. Few recognize the critical importance of the church being a "house of prayer," as Jesus described it in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He said:

SLIDE 3 Matthew 21:13 (KJV) *"It is written, My house shall be called **the house of prayer**; but ye have made it a den of thieves."*

Prayer therefore ought to be a **consistent** part of what the church does. I know we all have **persistent**, personal, and private prayer lives, but we ought to also have public ones as well.

This not only takes training ourselves in prayer, but it takes **boldness** to intercede as we ought to. We need prayer that actually means something. We need our prayers to be effective, over just sounding good and filled with platitudes.

"What's a platitude?" you ask. A platitude is a remark or statement, especially one with a moral content, that has been used so often it no longer provokes interest or thought.

It would be like saying, "Lord bless this person." It doesn't take any effort, mental focus, reference, or boldness to offer well worn platitudes to the Lord in prayer.

SLIDE 4 Series Theme Verse: James 5:16

As we will learn in this series. There are several aspects to an effective prayer life that gets results. We will hit on being specific. We will hit on not asking with wrong motives. We will talk about personal righteousness as a criteria for effective prayer that gets results. And finally we will talk about what true prayer is in God's eyes. First the cry of our hearts, then the praying of God's will according to his revealed Word.

It's a lot to cover in a little time. It will culminate on Sunday the 21st with a united offering of prayer here in our Sunday morning service, kicking off a year of dedicated prayer.

So let's peruse our theme verse from James.

SLIDE 5 James 5:16 (KJV) *"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."*

This verse is well known throughout Christendom. Well, at least the second half of the verse, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* Even in the part we quote we gloss over some of it. It's a case of turning a truth into a platitude.

Nevertheless the truth of this verse, tied to others we often quote, can lay a foundation to a powerful prayer life that gets the results you want and others need of you in your prayers.

But first, let's look at the first sentence of this theme verse. It is often quoted to someone who is ailing in their body before we pray for them at the altar. However, it is intricately tied to the three verses before it, which are also about our prayers.

SLIDE 6 James 5:13-15 (KJV) *"¹³ Is any among you afflicted? let **HIM** pray. Is any merry? let **HIM** sing psalms. ¹⁴ Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."* (emphasis added)

These three verses have become part and parcel of about all we do at our altars these days—asking for forgiveness and praying for healing. Should not the church be more powerful than this? Should not our altars be filled with earth-shaking, life-transforming requests before an all-powerful God?

Let me hit briefly on the opening of this passage (Verses 13 through 15), then we'll get back to James 5:16.

SLIDE 7a A Cure for Gossip

A great cure for so much gossip and badmouthing in the church would be to simply follow the initial instruction laid out here—keep it to yourself. Sunday School, Life Groups, and Church Altars are not the place to air your problems or to vent your grievances.

SLIDE 7b Here are are instructed, *"Is any among you afflicted? let **HIM** pray. Is any merry? let **HIM** sing psalms."*

The emphasis in these short sentences is the word "HIM." It's singular. You got a problem? Take it to the Lord privately, both in the struggle and in the victory. It's amazing how much we hear that we should never know about.

The church needs to do a greater job in protecting and respecting the privacy of the lives of others. If our prayers are going to be more effective, they are first going to have to be more private. Afflicted—do it before the Lord. Rejoicing—do it before the Lord. An effective prayer life that avails much begins with a private prayer life in the secret place—both in the asking and in the celebration of answered prayer.

I know this idea goes against most church culture today. But public prayer in the church today is more like that of the Pharisees than that of the Saints.

Let's note just a few words of what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for. They were the religious leaders of their day and were set forth as the examples of what others should strive for.

SLIDE 8 Matthew 23:14 (KJV) *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, **and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."***

It does not bless others to set them up in the church and make long "pentecostal" prayers over them until everyone gets a certain feeling.

The Apostle Paul's example was pray in private, proclaim in public. What you receive in the prayer room is what you proclaim as real and done in public. Act accordingly.

SLIDE 9 True Prayer

Real prayer has nothing to do with how it makes you feel. It is the same as any other act of faith. You do it and expect God to honor it because you asked in faith.

SLIDE 10 James 1:6 (KJV) *"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."*

Although James is referring to asking for wisdom here, the act of asking is what prayer is all about—asking God to do what we cannot.

SLIDE 11 Confess Your Faults

I know I didn't get very far into all that our theme verse reveals, but it is critical we recognize the first and foremost hinderance to prayer—talking to others and not to God.

However, I must include the part of the passage that does talk about talking—more rightly confessing.

This is all about making things right between you and others. It's not about telling everyone your sins and asking them to pray to the Lord for forgiveness. That's why James 5: 13 though 15 ends with, *"...and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."* Your forgiveness is a natural result of your faith in God.

Confessing our faults to one another ought to take on a more real attitude of letting others know if we have anything we are holding against them. You can't hold something against someone and expect your prayers to be effective. *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."*

Psalms 66 says this:

SLIDE 12 Psalm 66:18 (KJV) *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear me."*

SLIDE 13 Finding Fault

If we desire to move into a more intimate and effective time of prayer before the Father, we are going to have to deal with some long-standing issues we have with those around us.

If a person comes to mind, then the Holy Spirit has already revealed to you where the issue is. Confess. It's the first word in our theme verse and it's the first step to a more fervent and effective prayer life.

How does this step play out? The Bible tells us:

SLIDE 14 Matthew 18:15-16 (KJV) *"¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and **tell him his fault** between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."*

However we just simply refuse to confess our faults to one another in these situations, instead taking it before the whole church and asking them to pray. This is not effective or even kind. We just want people on our side, no matter what we have to say to get it.

Along with the word "confess" that word "fault" is critical to our understanding of how to operate in these principles. The Greek word for fault means the same as a breaking open of a fault line in the earth.

There is an under the surface rumbling showing that disturbance in the crust. The similarity is that we must open it up and expose the root cause behind this lack of peace. In essence it is the exposing of true motives which results in the healing process. Until you get real with yourself, you cannot be real with others.

Too much of the church's prayer life is involved in personal relationship squabbles, rather than matters of the kingdom of God. We ought to be better than this. Forgive those who trespass against you and move on.

SLIDE 15 Parameters

Hold nothing against anyone. It's one of the things God will not forgive you for.

According to James 5:16, this cleansing of confession, resulting in righteous living, is a prerequisite for effective prayer, as Priscilla Shirer says in her book, *Fervent*:

SLIDE 16 *"Separation. That's what sin creates. Which is why the enemy is dead set on crafting temptations for our lives. He knows that the "effectual fervent prayer" that James 5:16 (KJV) says "availeth much" contains parameters. Prayers that have power come from a person in pursuit of righteous living. Yes, righteousness matters."*

(*Fervent* by Priscilla Shirer pg. 168 PDF, 123 Paperback)

SLIDE 17 Altar Time