



TIME OF GRACE®

Pray Like a Pro: Your Prayers CAN Be Powerful

Study Notes

Summary

When you pray in faith, God promises things happen because he is the power behind your prayers. He has given us a gracious gift that will always make a very powerful difference. Use it!

- **Matthew 7:7:** Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
- **Psalm 50:15:** Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.
- God takes _____ action when you pray.
- **James 4:2:** You do not have because you do not ask God.
- **James 5:16:** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.
- Two times God doesn't answer prayer:
 1. When you don't _____.
 2. When it's not offered in _____ or when you are holding on to a _____ without confessing.

Points to Ponder

1. Are there any sins or temptations that you're holding on to that might be preventing you from the full power of prayer? Confess them to a Christian friend. Write a prayer of repentance here.
2. Read Matthew 26:36-45. God promises to answer our prayers, but he doesn't promise to answer in the way we'd like. Instead he answers according to his will. Look over Jesus' prayer in this section and note God's answers to his requests.

3. Make a list of ways that you can make prayer a more regular part of your everyday life.

Homework for Next Week

Read Exodus 1:1-2:10.

Time of Grace Ministry
Pray Like a Pro: Your Prayers CAN Be Powerful
Matthew 7:7; Palm 50:15; James 4:2; James 5:16
September 26, 2021

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

In the book of James 5, it says, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

There's a story that's told about a missionary who grew up in Michigan but ended up serving in Africa. And he made a trip back to his home congregation in Michigan, one weekend, to talk about what his ministry looked like in Africa and to share that with his home congregation. So, he was in a bible class kind of setting, gathered around where a number of men and women from the congregation, very excited to hear about how things were going in Africa and what it was like. And he said that he served in a very, very small medical tent basically. And every couple of weeks he had to travel a couple of nights through the jungle in order to get to a bigger city so that he could get more medical supplies that he can use in his ministry. And he said that there's one trip that he was making from his medical tent into the bigger city, when he saw two men who had been fighting. And he noticed that one of the men was very badly injured.

And so, when he was safe, he went to a side, and he gave him some good medical attention. He told him about Jesus, struck up a good conversation with him. It was a good interaction and they both went on their way. He went back to the city, got the supplies, went back, and a couple of weeks later, it was time to make another trip back to the city to get some supplies, and when he was there on that trip, he ended up running into the guy that he had helped a couple of weeks earlier who had been -- the guy who had been beaten. And they struck up a conversation again, and it was in that conversation that the man who had been beaten admitted something to him. He said, "Sir, I know that you are a missionary, and I had seen you even before you saw me that day. In fact, my friend and I, we were working together. We knew that you often traveled through the jungle, and that you were carrying with you money and drugs. And so, our plan was, that when you would go to sleep for the night, camping in the jungle by yourself, after you fell asleep, we were going to come in and rob you. We were going to take your money, and we were going to take your drugs." He says, "On the night that we were watching you, after you fell asleep and just as we were ready to move in, we looked at your camp and surrounding your camp were 26 armed guards." And at this point, the missionary interrupted him and he said, "Well, that can't be true, because I always travel alone. No one ever travels with me." But the man insisted. He said, "No, I'm certain of it, there were 26 of them, the other man was with me, and we both counted, and we both counted 26 men who were surrounding your camp as you slept."

At this point, back in Michigan, as the missionary was telling the story, one of the men who was in that presentation raised his hand and he said, "Excuse me, can you tell me the date -- like, do you remember the date -- the exact date when that happened?" And he thought about it, and he was able to identify the exact date that that interaction in the jungle had happened. And the man from his home congregation, who had asked him about the date said to him, he said "On that night, when you were in the jungle, surrounded by 26 men," he said, "I was here at church. I was supposed to go golfing that day, but I had a feeling that maybe my time could be better spent praying for you and for your ministry, and so I decided to come into church, and I called a number of other men from the congregation to come and join me if they wanted, and a number of men did. A great number of men did, and we came to the church and we spent that evening here at church praying for you." And then he said, "In fact, I think everybody who came to the church that night to pray for you is here today." And then he asked, "Everybody who was there that day who had come into the church to pray for him," he asked them to stand up. And they all did. And how many men do you think stood up that day? 26. 26 men.

And they were all encouraged as they saw the power of prayer, how powerful prayer can be when we put it into action. Now I can't verify that story. I don't know the missionary. It's been told to me by a couple of different people. I've read it a couple of different places. I can't verify with absolute certainty that that actually happened. But I can verify this one.

Somewhere between eight to ten years ago, I was driving through the city, it was in the evening, it was very dark but middle of the city, street lights, and stop-and-go lights. But I was driving through the city, and I was driving my car, I took a left turn onto a street that had a number of cross-streets going, you know, crossing as you went along the way. And just as soon as I took a turn onto that street, there was, coming on one of the cross-streets, a car that came flying through the stop sign that was supposed to have stopped it. But it was flying on a street where we're supposed to be going 25 MPH, but it wasn't. It must have been going 50 MPH. And as soon as I turned, it came so quickly, about 50 MPH, that it was, by the time I saw it, its headlights were right next to me. I still very vividly remember the headlights in my driver-side window as I closed my eyes and I braced myself for an impact I knew was coming... but never did. The impact never came. When I realized that I had not been hit by this car that had been traveling 50 MPH, and that was this close to me, I opened my eyes and I looked and it was on the other side of me, going the opposite direction, still about 50 MPH, as if it had passed right through me.

That was amazing all enough by itself, but then I went home that night, a little rattled, and eventually I told my wife about it. And then she showed me something. She took out her prayer journal, and she showed me the entry from the previous day. And in her prayer journal, she prayed that God would spare our family from excessive grief. And we marveled... at the power of prayer, and how obvious it was in that moment to both of us that we have a Heavenly Father who listens.

You ever had a moment like that? Where it's been so obvious to you that God is listening, as you cry out to him? I hope you have. It might be more likely that you've had the opposite though. That maybe you've had the opposite experience, that you've cried out to him and it doesn't seem like anybody's listening. That things are troubling and difficult, and you ask for help and nothing

happens. Those are the kind of situations that God kind of tells us, they're going to be coming in our lives if they haven't already.

And in particular, when He talks about prayer in the Bible -- when he says, "Call upon me on the day of trouble." He kind of implies that you're going to have days in your life that you're going to feel incredibly troubling. Or when Jesus tells us to ask, and to seek, and to knock, he's kind of implying that you're going to go through stretches of life where it seems like you're just banging your hands on the door and nobody's paying attention. When Jesus invites us to come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, I think you know what he's implying about how you're going to feel in life sometimes. We're going to feel, well, much like Jesus himself did.

We see many of these same feelings in Jesus, as we see Jesus on a particular Thursday evening in the garden. He's praying. He's praying the night before he's crucified. And in looking at his prayer, we're reminded what a powerful gift prayer is. We find Jesus' prayer in the gospel of Matthew 26. It says, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' He asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.' When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So, he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'"

That's the Word of God. It says that he was sorrowful and troubled, and that word troubled there, it literally means "far from home." And Jesus certainly was. He was very far from the perfection and the comfort of heaven from which he came. And he knew what was waiting for him. It was a difficult, difficult, piercing pain that no one would ever want anything to do with.

You know, far from home? Picture a kid who has been taken from his -- from their parents, taken by a stranger and taken away to an unfamiliar place, surrounded by unfamiliar people, never knowing if they're every going to see the people they love ever again. That deep feeling was going on in the heart of Jesus, and then he said it this way to His disciples. He said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." He was so filled with so much sorrow that it kind of felt like he was already dead.

And if you've ever felt any of these same things, then Jesus knows how you feel. Jesus knows how you feel. And you've ever felt any of these same things then, there's one word in the Bible that is incredible important to hang on to. It's one word that comes up so often in the passages

that talk about the prayers that we offer to our Father in heaven, and that is the word "will." Will. "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you." "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you," God says in the Psalms. These things will, not might, not possibly, not "Well, if he catches you on a good day. But these things -- these things will happen.

In other words, God takes definitive, definitive action when we pray to him. He promises it too. It's the power behind the word will. He takes definitive action when we pray to him. In fact, they're really only two prayers -- or two times that God will not answer our prayer.

The first time that God will not answer our prayer is when -- well, he will not answer a prayer that is -- that's never prayed. In the book of James 4, we're given a very simple explanation as to why, very important things might be missing from your life, when it says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." When we stop whatever else it is that we were doing, and we make the time to talk to our Father in heaven, we are saying -- we're saying, "God, I can't go through this without you. I need to have You by my side. I can't do this alone." Which means that, when we don't make the time to pray, we're saying the opposite. We're saying, "Maybe later, God." Or, "God, I think I can handle this all by myself, thank you very much." And when that's the case, when we don't make the time to pray, very often we let it go that way. He lets us go through life without God. So that hopefully we learn to never do that ever again. God will not answer a prayer that is never prayed. So, take the time, make the time to pray.

The second time God will not answer a prayer, is that he will not answer a prayer that is not offered in faith. In Hebrews 11, it says that "Without faith, it is impossible to please God, even with our prayers." And secondly, you can't offer a prayer of faith while you are also holding on to a sin. In the book of James 5, it says, "Confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that you can be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

The very next person you see, this is what I want you to do. I want you to walk up to them, whoever it is, and I want you to confess to them the worst thing that you have said, or done, or thought, in the last week. No, I don't -- I don't really want you to do that. Some bad things might happen, but -- I do want you to do something else. And at first it's going to seem like I'm going to ask you to do something that has nothing at all to do with prayer, nothing to do with what we're talking about today, so I'm going to ask you to bear with me.

But this is what I want you to do. I want you to think about your favorite color. Okay? And when I tell you to, I'd like you to say the name of your favorite color without making any sound. And so, I want you to move your lips as if you're saying the name of your favorite color, but don't let any sound come out. You know what I mean? Okay, if you're willing to try it, give it a shot. We'll do it on the count of three, we'll say "one, two, three" and then you say the name of your favorite color but don't actually say anything out loud. No sound comes out. You ready? Okay, here we go. One, two, three. Did you get it? You got it? Nice job. Well done!

My favorite color of course was green. No, it wasn't. If you were reading my lips, you probably could, then you might know that my favorite color is blue. That's what I said, but I didn't say it

out loud. And so, if you did that, well done, congratulations. Now, I want you to do the exact same thing, except, instead of saying the name of your favorite color, I want you to say the name of your favorite sin. Or maybe favorite isn't exactly the right word there, but it's something in your life of which you're ashamed. It's a temptation that snags you so often. Or something about your life that you know needs to change.

You know, James tells us to confess our sins to each other, and really, the only way that we can do that is out loud. He's not opposed to us confessing our sins privately to God, just between us and him. That's a good thing. But there is also something very good that God does when we verbally confess our specific sins to a Christian sister or a Christian brother. And I want to give you some practice discovering what that is in a very safe way.

And so, if you're willing, I want you to do this. Think of a word, or a phrase that accurately depicts or describes your sin. And then when I tell you to, I want you to say that. Move your mouth, as if you're saying it. But without any sound coming out. Think you can do it? Give it a shot. Okay. I'll give you a one-two-three count again. Are you ready with what you're going to say? Here we go. One, two, three. I bet that for many of you, that is the closest you have ever come to admitting that to anyone. And if that's the case, then I bet that it's true for many of you, that, that I felt kind of good. Carrying a burden like that on your heart without ever letting it off of your heart can become an impossible, impossible burden. And verbal confession is one way that God has given us to release that burden.

But for some of you, I bet that was also a little bit scary. Especially if you're with other people right now. Because what if somebody read your lips? What if somebody noticed? What if somebody was watching? In fact, I want you to imagine that somebody was. And that they know exactly what you said without saying anything. How do you think you would feel?

Well, you might feel like the conductor of a train back in 2013. In 2013, there was a high-speed train that was traveling across the country of Spain, to the city of Santiago de Compostela, I think that's how you say it. That's the city where, every year, thousands of Christians go there every year to celebrate the festival of Saint James. It's the disciple of Jesus whose bones, they say, are buried in that place. And this high-speed train, when it was about two and a half miles outside of the city, it was rounding a curve at 120 MPH, which wasn't good, because the speed limit around the curve was only 50 MPH, and for good reason. Because the train was going way too fast to round that curve, eight of those cars came flying off the tracks. Slammed into a concrete wall, and of the 276 passengers on the train, 78 ended up dead. Both of the conductors who were driving the train that day, they survived the crash. And one of the conductors, as soon as he realized what happened, they crashed, and he came to his senses, he got on the phone and he said -- he said, "I've derailed, what should I do?" And then he said, "I hope there are no dead." But of course, there were. 78 of them. Which is why that particular conductor hasn't driven a train even since that happened. He doesn't trust himself, and the train company does not trust him.

And if there are certain people that we don't trust to drive trains, then does it really surprise us that there are certain people that God does not trust with the resources of heaven. I mean isn't

that what prayer is? Prayer is the privilege of being able to use the resources of heaven to change this world's direction. And who is that that God entrusts with the resources of heaven? That passage from James earlier, it didn't say that the prayer of anyone is powerful and effective. It said the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective. Which, by the way, does not mean that the righteous person will always get everything for which they're praying, and we know that by looking at Jesus again. I mean there was no one more righteous than Jesus, who we knew made time every day to both listen and pray to his Father in heaven.

And yet, on that night, when he was in the garden of Gethsemane, on that Thursday evening, when he was praying, he asked his Father in heaven... for something specific that never ended up happening. He felt troubled, he felt weary, he felt burdened, and he did not want what was coming, for the same reason you wouldn't want to be in that mess of a train that ended up crashing in Spain. Just the piercing sting of iron -- iron rubbing up against your bones and strangling the sensitive nerves normally protected by your skin. It's not a pleasant sensation.

Take this cup from me, Jesus begged, but his Father said... no. He said no! Because he also heard another prayer from his righteous Son that evening. The one that went like this: "Your will be done." And we know he meant it, because the next day, it wasn't a train that ended up in a crumpled mess, it was the body of God's only Son. It wasn't metal that was all twisted and mangled. It was the human skin that He had put on. It wasn't 200+ passengers screaming for help. Just one innocent man, screaming for help from a cross, while his Father answered those screams with silence, so that you could know once and for all, that the one thing that God wills and wants more than anything, is you.

It's you! And your salvation! "Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." You who live in a world that is so troubling. You see it's pain in the eyes of our oldest adults, and of our smallest most vulnerable children. We feel it in the tears that run down our own skin. Yeah, God has given us a gracious gift that will always make a very powerful difference. So, let's use it.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we're so grateful for the gift of knowing that in Christ, we are the righteous ones that you mentioned in your word. Righteous ones whose prayers are powerful and effective, not by our merits, but by the merits of Jesus.

We thank you for the privilege of being able to walk through life knowing that your will is to love us, no matter the cost, to hold us in your everlasting arms, and to bring us home to the place where we will never hurt, or feel troubled, or burdened ever again. As you have been so faithful in loving us, and reaching out to us in your love, help us to be faithful in reaching out to you with our prayers, trusting your promise that they are powerful prayers, that you hear them, and that you will always answer them according to your will. A will which only desires to love your children.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.