

Studies in James

Lesson 21

The Effective Power of Kneeling

INTRODUCTION:

- I. There is perhaps NOTHING that catches the attention of God any QUICKER than EFFECTIVE, BOLD, FERVENT praying.
 - A. It's been said, "Prayer is the thin, slender nerve that moves the muscle of Omnipotence."
 1. The great men and women of God, throughout time, have men and women devoted to prayer.
 - a. The scriptures are FILLED with the prayers of these men and women – prayers that changed the course of history, and affected the destiny of nations (world empires).
 2. New Testament saints prayed constantly for God to intervene in preserving, protecting and delivering them from persecution.
 - a. Like the prayers offered on behalf of Peter when he was in prison.
 - b. Men, like the apostle Paul, fill their letters to first century churches with prayers.

c. James was also a man known for prayer -- in fact, tradition says he was given the nickname "Camel Knees."

(1). It's said, his knees were enlarged and calloused because he spent so much time on his knees in prayer.

II. We often think **James 5:13-18** is the first time James deals with the subject of prayer, but this is NOT the case at all.

A. In fact, James opened his letter by mentioning a specific time when we NEED to pray.

1. **James 1:2-8** – *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

2. In these verses James talks about bearing patiently under the pressure of trials.

3. But when we are SWAMPED with problems that seem to be too big to HANDLE, James says THIS is the time we need to pray for wisdom.
 - a. The ability to see things from heaven's perspective.
 - b. The ability to put to use the knowledge we have gained.
- B. Another reference to prayer is found in the fourth chapter of James.
 1. **James 4:1-4** – *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*
 2. James says arguments, quarreling and conflicts are often the result of NOT having certain things.
 - a. However, one of the reasons we DON'T HAVE some of the things we need is because we don't "ASK."
 - b. And then, when we DO ASK, we don't receive the things we are asking for because we're praying out of SELFISH, SELF-CENTERED MOTIVES.

c. How many of US do not have because we do not ask? And how many of US ask but don't have because we are trying to get God to comply with our own selfish interests.

(1). How many blessings has God NOT given to us because we either DON'T pray, or because we pray from wrong MOTIVES?

C. And then, there's the passage we want to consider in THIS lesson – taken from the fifth chapter of James.

1. **James 5:13-18** – *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 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. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*
2. In these SIX verses, James mentions prayer SEVEN TIMES.

- a. But what we want to take examining in this lesson are FOUR SPECIFIC and PRACTICAL areas where prayer is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL.
3. And so, let's take a closer look at these verses and see what James wants us to know about the effective power of kneeling.

BODY:

- I. As we said, James mentions FOUR AREAS where prayer is ABSOLUTELY essential. What are they?
 - A. First, James says prayer is absolutely essential when we are SUFFERING.
 1. **James 5:13** – *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*
 2. In these times, James says, "PRAY!"
 - a. James doesn't promise RELIEF or RELEASE.
 - b. But he DOES imply that we will receive the STRENGTH TO ENDURE and COURAGE TO CONTINUE.
 - B. Second, James tells us prayer is absolutely essential when we are SICK.
 1. **James 5:14-15** – *Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the*

sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

2. The situation here apparently involves one who is physically sick.
 - a. The word "sick" in these verses speaks of one who is bedridden, without strength, unable to work or continue on.
 - (1). This "sickness" may be directly related to some unconfessed sin.
- C. Third, James says prayer is absolutely essential when we have trespasses we need to confess, and for which we need prayer.
 1. **James 5:16** – *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*
 - a. Confessing our trespasses to one other is HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION.
 - (1). We're confessing to someone just like us, someone who struggles with weakness in THEIR life as well.
 - b. But when we pray for one other, this is VERTICAL COMMUNICATION.
 - (1). We're praying to God FOR those who are just like us.
 - c. It's also interesting to note, that both of these terms are in a grammatical tense that suggests these activities should go on as a regular habit.
 - (1). Keep on CONFESSING to each other.

(2). Keep on PRAYING for each other.

d. When these two activities (CONFESSING and PRAYING) are done on a regular basis, healing can be maintained – spiritual, emotional and physical health can be maintained.

D. Fourth, James says prayer is absolutely when specific needs occur in our daily lives.

1. **James 5:16-18** – *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. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

2. The heart of this point is contained in the words, *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails [accomplishes] much."*

a. The term *"prayer"* used here is different from the term used in the three preceding instances.

(1). This is the ONLY time this particular term appears in James' writing.

b. The word *"prayer"* here has to do with a "SPECIFIC PETITION made with SPECIFIC RESULTS in mind."

(1). James is saying when "SPECIFIC PETITIONS" are being made to God, with "SPECIFIC RESULTS" in mind, this prayer will accomplish MUCH!

c. But, the qualifying term is "*effective*."

(1). The Greek word translated "effective" is the Greek word "energia" (inner-GUY-uh), and is the word from which we get our English word "energy."

(2). It is a term that has the idea of adding an ingredient to something AVERAGE and turning it into something EXCEPTIONAL.

II. The question that naturally comes to mind is, "How can we make our prayers more effective – prayers that are exceptionally powerful?" Consider four ways.

A. We cannot pray effectively if we are ignorant of biblical truths.

1. People who pray effectively know the word of God.

a. They know what is right and what is wrong – the requests that will fit into God's will, and those that won't.

B. We cannot pray effectively if our prayers are not focused and specific.

1. We need to avoid GENERIC – no brand name-type prayers -- but pray FOCUSED and SPECIFICALLY for the people, things or results for which we are seeking God's intervention.

2. Children are GREAT at this kind of prayer – they pray for EVERYTHING and EVERYBODY. Follow THEIR example:
 - a. Don't simply pray for:
 - (1). The sick – mention them by name.
 - (2). Those who are hurting in their lives – mention them by name.
 - b. Take a sheet of paper (if necessary) and write down the names of the people you're praying for, and the specific needs they have – and pray for that.
 - (1). Years ago, my daughter Kammi came out of her Wednesday night Bible class and told me her teacher handed out a sheet of paper with every child's name on it who was in the class, with room at the bottom for visitors.
 - (2). The teacher then asked each child in the class to tell what they wanted the others to pray for concerning them.
 - (3). That sheet became kind of a "prayer list" for each student to take home and use when they prayed that night.
 - c. What a wonderful idea!
 - (1). Those children not only learned the importance of praying for others, but they learned an even MORE important lesson – feeling free to tell others of their deepest needs, and asking others to pray for THEM.

- C. We cannot pray effectively unless we are praying NATURALLY – as though we are speaking to our FATHER IN HEAVEN.
1. I CERTAINLY understand and stress the need to be reverent toward God – He's God in heaven and we're His creation on earth.
 - a. But He's ALSO my father, and I can go to Him like a child in the first century would go to his own earthly father.
 - b. I can address God as "*Abba Father*," that term of tenderness and endearment.
 2. If you want to know how to pray naturally – without using all those clichés we've added to our prayers – just listen to a child pray.
 - a. I remember once when my daughter Kathi wanted to pray, but didn't know exactly how to approach God, so she just said, "Hi God, this is Kathi!"
 - b. I'm not suggesting we need to begin our prayers with those words, but I am suggesting that's the VERY KIND of child-like innocence God WANTS to hear – completely open and unafraid to approach the throne of God in heaven.
 3. We need to quit praying with the intentions of trying to impress others.
 - a. We might be impressing them, but we're not impressing God.

- D. And finally, our prayers cannot be effective unless we are praying in faith, confident that God not only HEARS our prayer, but will ANSWER our prayer ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.
1. Our prayers must be FILLED with FAITH.
 - a. How many times are we like the saints in Jerusalem who prayed for Peter's release from prison, and then didn't believe it when it happened? **(Acts 12)**
 - (a). When God answered their SPECIFIC prayer, the text says they were "*astonished!*"
 - b. Has that ever happened to you – you've prayed for something, and God answers the prayer, and you're ASTONISHED at how QUICKLY and how DIRECTLY He answered your prayer!
 2. Someone once said, "One of the requirements for a faith-filled prayer is that you're never surprised -- NEVER!"
 - a. I told you a long time ago that someday I would tell you the story of why I became a gospel preacher. Well, here it is.
 - b. When I was about 6 or 7 years old, living in San Bernardino, California, I prayed for God to let it snow. It always snowed in the mountains to the north, but virtually NEVER snowed at the lower elevations in town. In fact, I think it's only snowed in San Bernardino proper about 2 times in the past 60 years.

However, I promised God, if He made it snow that night, I would become a preacher. It was a Wednesday night, and my mother and father took me along with them to mid-week services. And when services were over, we all walked out of the building to see the ground literally covered with a thick blanket clean, white, freshly fallen snow.

- c. Although I don't remember all the specifics, my mother later told me that I was standing there at the top of the steps, folded my arms folded across my chest and said confidently, "I knew it would snow."
 - d. I may have been only 7 or 8, but THAT prayer was a FAITH-FILLED prayer – and it has accomplished much ever since.
3. Let me add that we shouldn't expect God to always answer our prayers with a YES, nor should we expect God to always answer them IMMEDIATELY.
 - a. We need to allow Him to answer our prayers ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, and IN HIS OWN TIME.
 4. Look at Elijah – He prayed for a specific need for a specific purpose, and those prayers were answered.

III. Let me close with four simple lessons we need to learn from James' teaching on prayer.

A. First, we need to learn that prayer is to be CONTINUOUS and NOT for emergencies only.

1. Prayers need to be constant – not every minute of the day – but "without ceasing."

a. Never let there come a time in your life when you stop praying.

2. Aside from giving thanks for a meal, and for praying in the worship assembly – when was the last time YOU prayed for something

OTHER THAN AN EMERGENCY?

B. Second, we need to learn that prayer is designed for every part of our life.

1. What parts of your life need God's assistance?

a. Do you have a problem with contamination from sin?

b. Are you worrying about something that you have no control over?

c. Are you laboring under the some tremendous difficulty that is beyond the ability of human hands to lift?

d. Is there some physical ailment or illness that you need the help of God with?

2. Prayer is specifically made for these kinds of situations.

- C. Third, we need to learn that prayer is not a substitute for responsibility and intelligent thinking.
 - 1. Don't ask for someone to pray for a particular situation in your life unless you have done all you can to remedy that situation.
 - 2. But when we've done all we can do, and the problem persists, or it's beyond our ability to deal with, then we need to rely on the power of persistent prayer.
- D. And finally, we need to learn that prayer is not for the perfect, but for the imperfect.
 - 1. If we were perfect, we would have no needs.
 - a. But since none of us are perfect, we all have needs that can be supplied by God through prayer.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How does all this apply to you in your life?
 - A. I don't know how this hits you, because I don't know where you are spiritually.
 - 1. But, wherever you are, prayer is the answer.
- II. I don't want this to be just another sermon on prayer.
 - A. For just a moment, think back over the past week.

1. Were there times when you should have prayed about something?
 - a. Was there some situation that arose, or some important decision you needed to make, where you could have taken the matter to the Lord – but didn't?
 - b. Was there some instance when you ACTED, when you should have first PRAYED – and it turned out all wrong?
 - c. Are you STILL harboring some sin in your life that you need to confess to God, and ask Him to forgive?
- B. How different is your prayer-life going to be THIS WEEK?
 1. Is there anything about your prayer-life you plan to change?
 - a. Are you going to pray with a greater understanding of biblical truths, knowing what will and will not fit into God's plans.
 - b. Are you going to pray with specific people, things and results in mind?
 - c. Are you going to pray more naturally, and without all those "prayer clichés?"
 - d. And, are you going to pray in faith, being confident that God not only hears our prayer, but will answer it according to His will?

III. Let me end by telling you the story of Joseph Scriven:

- A. Joseph Scriven was born in Dublin in 1820, was a graduate of Trinity College, and lived in Dublin for the first 25 years of his life. While attending Trinity College, Joseph met a young woman with whom he fell in love and asked to marry him. With all the wedding plans set, just four hours before Joseph and the love of his life were to say their vows, his bride-to-be tragically drowned in a horrible accident. Heartbroken, Joseph left Ireland sometime in 1845 and emigrated to Canada, as many another Irishman has done, seeking his fate in the New World. For a while he taught school in Ontario Province, and became a tutor for the children of a wealthy family. It was there that he met and became engaged to Eliza Roche. But, tragically, shortly before their wedding, Eliza grew ill and died. Following the death of his second fiancée, Scriven joined a religious organization whose mission was to help the aged members of the community. He managed to survive several episodes of severe illness until he finally died in 1886 at the age of 66 in Port Hope on Lake Ontario, after a life filled with heartbreak after painful heartbreak.
- Shortly after the death of his second fiancée, and after learning that his mother in Ireland was sick and not expected to live much longer, and knowing he would never see his mother again, Joseph Scriven sat down and wrote a poem that was later turned into a beautiful hymn. From a

heart pained with loss after loss, Joseph wrote of great hope and comfort that comes from prayer. The words of that poem are:

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

- B. Are YOU weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
1. We have a God who SPECIALIZES in helping the weak, and of easing the burden of those who are heavy laden with a load of care.

2. And He will help YOU TOO.
 - a. All He asks of you is to come to Him in complete trust and obedience – submitting your life to Him through your obedience to the gospel of Christ.
 - b. And for those of you who have done that, and yet are encumbered by the burden of sin, He also asks YOU to come to Him in complete trust and obedience – confessing your sins and letting the effective, fervent prayer of the righteous heal you.