



... **“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,”**  
James 5:16.

## **Heaven Will Help**

**Lesson Aim:** to encourage believers to enlist the power of God by meeting daily challenges through prayer.

**L343. Date:** June 1976. **Text:** James 4:1-3, 8-10; 5:15-18. **Topic:** Prayer.

Read the lesson title again. It is more than a catchy saying — it is Bible truth. It is the declaration of the certainty of answered prayer. Today's study underscores the fact that the God of heaven has obligated Himself to succour those who call upon Him. The aim of the lesson is “to encourage believers to enlist the power of God by meeting daily challenges through prayer.” That is what the lesson title means.

How can one be sure that God will answer prayer? (1) God has promised to answer prayer. Jesus promised, **“... Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it,”** John 14:13, 14. Saints of God through all generations and dispensations have certified that He is faithful to His promise to hear and answer prayer. (2) Many testify that God has personally answered prayer for them. **“I love the LORD because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live,”** Psalm 116:1, 2. (3) God will prove His promise by answering one's prayer. **“Ask, and it shall be given YOU; seek, and YE shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto YOU: For EVERY ONE that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened,”** Matthew 7:7, 8. God provides proof to confirm the believer's faith that He hears and answers prayer. The believer should pray with confidence.

Study the lesson comments, after having read and meditated on the Scripture text, with this Scripture in mind: **“The LORD is nigh unto all**

**them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth,”** Psalm 145:18.

## 1. PRAYER (4:1-3)

A. Prayer is the way God has ordained for believers to get what they need from Him, verses 1, 2. Yet, how slow men are to use prayer for their provisions. James 4:1, 2 indicate that in a most vivid manner. When men fail to claim God's promises, and follow God's way to receive what they need, they are left to follow the instincts of the animal nature.

What characterizes human attempts to secure their needs? The Bible answers, “feuds, quarrelling, conflicts, wrangling, coveting, raging, fighting, and killing,” (That is the translation of the various words James used in verses 1 and 2.) How tragic! Even those vicious and destructive efforts, which are inspired by lusts at war in the human nature and not by the Spirit of God, do not result in obtaining the good desired. Review the list: “wars, fightings, lust, murder, desire.” Examine the accomplishment: “. . . cannot obtain . . . yet ye have not,” verse 2. All lust-inspired effort to get what one needs will end in just such confusion and lack.

How simply God sets forth the alternative: **“. . . ye have not because ye ask not.”** What a tragedy! “You do not obtain, because you do not ask.” How much better it is to be free from the coveting, the jealousy, the anger, the wrangling, and to quietly ask and receive. Blessed is the privilege of prayer! Prayer is the way God has ordained for believers to get what they need.

B. Prayer must be offered in the right spirit, verse 3. “But I tried to pray,” someone objects, “and it did no good. I still did not have what I wanted. Why were my prayers unanswered?” God replies “The spirit can spoil the prayer,” James 4:3. There is no magic in “saying a prayer.” Prayer must be offered in the right way and with the right spirit.

James warned, “You ask and fail to get, because you ask with the wrong motive; your object being to waste on your pleasures what you acquire.” Would God answer a prayer for money if He knew the person asking would use the money to commit sin? Hardly? Neither will He answer prayer for many other things when He knows it will only increase one's opportunity to sin. One should watch his motive when he prays. To be effective, prayer must be offered in the right spirit.

## II. HUMILITY (4:6-10)

Be humble when you pray. The spirit of “thy will be done” is essential to an effective prayer life.

A. God responds in grace to the prayer of the humble petitioner. “. . . **He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,**” verse 6. There is no basis for any man to approach the throne of God with an attitude of authority or demand. God meets such a spirit in the same way He deals with any other sin. “. . . **God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,**” I Peter 5:5.

B. God grants strength to the one who prays humbly, verse 7. “**Submit yourselves therefore to God . . .**” James admonished. To “submit” means to be subject to another. It was used in ancient times to describe the soldier's obedience to his commanding officer. Offer yourself to God. Be totally available to obey His instruction. He will strengthen the humble.

Submission is to be to God alone. Resistance is to be made to Satan. He who yields to God can successfully resist the devil. The attitude of submission to God and opposition to Satan go hand in hand. One cannot do one without doing the other. Humble prayer will make one available to God, and His power will enable him to overcome evil.

C. God meets the person who approaches Him in a humble spirit of prayer. “**Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you . . .**” verse 8. If you have a sense of distance from God, that may be the explanation. Are you seeking to approach Him (draw near to Him) in a spirit of humble expectation? He promised, “. . . **I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit . . .**” Isaiah 57:15.

The highest blessedness possible for mortal man is to draw near to God, Psalm 73:2-8. To “draw near” to Him is to be welcomed into His holy dwelling place. No one can visit there without being changed. The supreme good for each person is to draw near to the God of the universe.

The believer who yields to God is able to resist the devil. The believer whose submission to God is followed by opposition to the devil can be sure that God stands with him.

D. God meets the person who comes to Him with clean hands and a pure heart, verses 8, 9. “**Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation,**” Psalm 24:3, 5.

What is meant by “clean hands” and a “pure heart”? The expression refers to purity of action and attitude. Since the hands perform acts, clean hands means pure deeds. Since the heart motivates acts, a pure heart means

inner purity. That is why the Bible admonishes, “. . . **Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit . . .**” II Corinthians 7:1. **“If any man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work,”** II Timothy 2:21. Purity of heart (motive) and hand (conduct) is essential to peace with God and answered prayer.

E. God exalts the person who is willingly humble before Him, verse 10. True humility never debases a man. He who is humble “in the sight of the Lord.” not just in his own eyes or in the eyes of his peers, will be honored by the Lord.

The athlete yields to the training and discipline of the coach so that he may learn to play the game to his highest possible ability. Having yielded to the instruction of the trainer, he performs so well that he receives the praise of the sports fans that watch him play. The Christian humbles himself under the mighty hand of God. He grows in grace and is honored of God, and those who love the Lord, as a faithful and productive Christian. One of the paradoxes of the Christian life is, “The way up is down.” Jesus expressed it, **“. . . Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister,”** Matthew 20:26.

Humility is essential to one's prayer life. It is impossible to be effective in prayer if one is filled with a spirit of proud self-sufficiency. It is as impossible to receive an answer to prayer, apart from humility, as it would be apart from faith. Pride is sin. **“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time,”** I Peter 5:6.

“WHAT IS HUMILITY?” That is an appropriate question, is it not? Since humility is so essential to answered prayer and effective Christian living, it demands an answer.

Humility is that strange Christian virtue which, the moment one is pleased that he has it, he has lost it. It is the absence of pride; it is a mild and patient disposition which is marked by absence of pretension, boasting, or conceit. True humility before God arises from a sense of one's failure and inability in the light of God's infinite sufficiency.

Humility is a basic quality in Christian character. God declares Himself to be the opponent of the proud and the helper of the humble. The greatest Christian is the humblest, since there is no conflict between spiritual greatness and true humility. Jesus said, **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 18:4.

### III. TRUST (5:15-18)

Behold the promise which is extended to “the prayer of faith,” James 5:15. What is “the prayer of faith”? It is prayer offered in faith. It is prayer marked by “an unwavering confidence in God, a belief that He will do what is best, and a cheerful committing of the cause into His hands” — Albert Barnes.

Prayer must be accompanied by faith, or it is ineffective. Earlier in the epistle, James warned about one's doubting when he prays. The “now-I-believe and now-I-doubt” man is like a wave on the sea, blown about by the wind. James warned. “. . . **Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord,**” 1:7.

Jesus added His sovereign sanction to the necessity of faith in praying. **“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them,”** Mark 11:24. Again, He said, “. . . **All things are possible to him that believeth,**” Mark 9:23. Take Jesus' word for it: you must pray in faith.

How is faith expressed through prayer? John replied, “. . . **This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him,**” I John 5:14, 15. Is that your confidence when you pray?

Elijah is a fine example of a man who prayed in faith and God did what he said in prayer. He was a man with feelings and subject to human frailties just as other men are. When he prayed earnestly that it not rain, however, no rain fell upon the land for three and a half years. When he prayed again, the clouds brought forth rain and the earth yielded its crops. What an example of “the prayer of faith!”

How could Elijah pray in faith for a drought to come? How could he trust God to do it when he prayed? Elijah knew the Word of God and prayed according to it. God had said, **“Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit . . .”** Deuteronomy 11:16, 17. Knowing God's Word, Elijah prayed, “Lord, do what you said you would do.” Anyone can pray with faith when he knows God's Word and prays in agreement with it.

That same kind of assurance that God will do what He says He will do undergirds all prayer. Praying for healing, for instance, is like Elijah's prayer for rain to stop and to come. Such a prayer recognizes that all healing is of God; that it is proper to ask God to heal; that God commonly works through

medical means to effect healing; that sometimes God heals in methods beyond men's understanding; and that whether healing is effected or not is dependent upon God's will regarding that particular illness. Whether your prayer is for the healing of body, mind or spirit, or whether it is in other areas, pray in agreement with the Word of God and you can pray in faith.

So many things are clearly stated in God's Word in which it is not necessary for you to pray, "if it be Thy will." Learn those things. Know that God is still faithful to His written Word. Make the Bible part of your prayer experience. You can then pray in faith.

Hear the conclusion to the study: **“. . . The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,”** James 5:16. What does that mean? It means the heartfelt supplication of a righteous (upright, just) man is responded to by tremendous power from God. Believe it. Pray with assurance. Ask God to do something great, then watch Him do it in answer to prayer.

The lesson comments began with the observation that “Heaven Will Help.” They continued with a discussion of how to pray effectively. The reason for that approach is that the God of heaven helps men in response to their prayers. The lesson may be summarized in the following truths. (1) God hears believers when they pray and responds to their prayers. (2) Petition is a valid part of prayer. (3) One's motive in asking will determine whether or not God gives what is asked. (4) Only a humble person can approach God through prayer. (5) Faith must undergird each prayer. (6) Fervency adds strength and meaning to prayer. (7) One's life must be clean in motive and deed if he would have a meaningful prayer life. (8) Believers should pray much more, for they can receive much more from God.

How can you apply those principles to your prayer life?

## Questions

1. What is Jesus' promise in John 14:13, 14?
2. What does Matthew 7:7, 8 mean to you?
3. What resources are open to a man who does not pray?
4. Why do some pray and receive no answer?
5. How is submission to God related to resisting the devil?
6. What are “clean hands” and “pure heart”?
7. What does II Timothy 2:21 mean?
8. How can you be truly humble?
9. How can you pray in faith?

10. How can you make your prayer life more meaningful and powerful?