

# Here's How to Achieve Effectual Prayer

One very important condition for effectual prayer is to be committed to walking out a lifestyle of righteousness before God and people, as indicated in James 5:16:

“The effective ... prayer of a *righteous* man avails much.” This biblical condition is often minimized or totally ignored, even by people who are deeply involved in the prayer-and-worship movement today.

A righteous person is any believer who sets his heart to obey Jesus as he seeks to walk in godly character with a lifestyle of practicing the truth (1 John 1:6).

Setting our hearts to obey is very important, even if we fall short of mature, consistent obedience. There is no such thing as a person who is so mature in righteousness that he is above all temptation and never falls short in his walk with God. In other words, the prayers of a “righteous person” include the prayers of imperfect, weak people—such as you and me—who sincerely seek to walk in righteousness even as we stumble in our weakness. I am so grateful for the glorious reality of the grace of God!

The apostle John declared that the Lord hears and responds to us because we keep His commands and do the things that are pleasing to Him: “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22). Prayer is no substitute for obedience.

I have met those who imagine that if they pray and fast more, they can walk in a little immorality or be dishonest in their finances or slander the people who cause pressure in their lives. They think that being extra zealous in the spiritual

disciplines will balance out areas of persistent compromise. But praying more does not compensate for unrepented sins that we deliberately continue to commit, as this verse from Isaiah makes clear: “Your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Is. 59:2).

Prayer is far more boring and difficult if we seek to live one part of our lives as if it belonged to God and another part as if it belonged to us. There is a dynamic relationship between our lifestyle and our ability to enjoy prayer. Our spiritual capacity to experience and enjoy God increases as we walk in purity. Jesus emphasized this truth in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

Where there is ongoing, willful compromise in our lives, it will greatly hinder our spiritual growth and our capacity to agree with God in prayer. Sin hinders our love for Him. We must sincerely seek to live in wholehearted obedience because obedience is not optional in the kingdom life.

When we come up short in our obedience, we must acknowledge it and confess it rather than seeking to rationalize it. We call it sin, we repent of it, and we freely receive God’s forgiveness. Then we “push delete” and immediately stand, once again, with confidence in God’s presence. Walking in obedience is not about seeking to earn the answers to our prayers; it is about living in agreement with love because God is love.

The truth of the necessity of keeping God’s commandments is overlooked by some who teach on prayer. It is more popular to emphasize our authority in Christ. That is also an essential truth, but the lifestyle of the one praying does matter. What we do negatively and what we neglect to do positively deeply affect our prayer lives.

### **Prayer That Is Earnest**

Using the prophet Elijah as an example, the apostle James

taught that one characteristic of effective prayer is earnestness in prayer: "Elijah ... prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain" (James 5:17). What does it mean to be earnest? It is important to understand what earnest prayer is because it is one of the primary conditions of effective prayer as set forth in the Scripture.

## **Two Aspects of Earnest Prayer**

First, earnest prayer comes from a heart that is engaged with God. To be earnest implies that we are not praying by rote or just going through the motions. Being earnest is the opposite of speaking our prayers mindlessly into the air. We are to focus our minds and attention toward the Lord when we pray. Second, earnest prayer is prayer that is persistent (Matt. 7:7–8; Luke 11:5–10; 18:1, 7). The Greek word *proseuche* translated as "earnestly" in James 5 literally means "he prayed with prayer," which is an idiom expressing persistence in prayer. Hence, the translators said of Elijah that he "prayed earnestly."

We must refuse to be denied answers to prayers that are in agreement with God's will. We must not stop asking and thanking God for the answers until we see them with our eyes. We must not be casual about our prayer requests but persistent and tenacious.

Jesus taught a parable about the Father's willingness to answer prayer that is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. His message was that because of our persistence, the Father answers. He applied the parable by exhorting us to ask, knowing that the request will be fulfilled; to seek, knowing that we will find; and to knock, knowing that the door will open (v. 9). The Greek verbs for "ask," "seek" and "knock" are in the continuous present tense. In other words, we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. The message is a call to perseverance.

“Because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:8-10).

The apostle Paul called us to pray “with all perseverance” (Eph. 6:18) and to labor fervently (Col. 4:12) in prayer. When we ask casually, with little effort to focus our minds on the Lord, or when we stop praying for something that is in God’s will, we show that we do not value what we are praying for. As we see in Jeremiah’s prophecy, when we highly prize something, we will seek the Lord for it with all our hearts: “‘You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart’” (Jer. 29:13).

*The preceding is an excerpt from Growing in Prayer (Charisma House, 2014) by Mike Bickle. Copyright © 2015 by Mike Bickle. All rights reserved.*

**Mike Bickle** is the director of the International House of Prayer of Kansas City and the founder of International House of Prayer University, a four-year ministry school. He is the author of several books, including *Passion for Jesus*, *Growing in the Prophetic*, *The Pleasures of Loving God* and *After God’s Own Heart*.