

# Learning to Pray with Impact

## Part 1

### Opening text: James 5:13-18

7 references to prayer - in 5 verses! I want to talk to you today about prayer. I don't think that there has been a time when this has become more important, than right now. Prophetically I believe that something has shifted in the calendar of God, and we have entered a time like no other.

A while ago I felt in my heart to study every passage in the New Testament about prayer. Looking at all those passages, I saw how they all point to 3 central ideas. They all lead to 3 conclusions that I call, *the absolutes of prayer*:

1. That prayer is absolutely vital in the life of the believer
2. That prayer is absolutely sure
3. That God absolutely desires to answer prayer

Let us look at these '*absolutes of prayer*' in detail:

#### **1. Prayer is absolutely vital in the life of the believer.**

##### **a) V. 13 - *Is anyone among you suffering?***

The Greek word used here for *suffering* has also been translated as "*ill-treated, afflicted, distressed, troubled, enduring hardship*".

According to one Greek scholar, "*this word describes a person who is intensely suffering – perhaps physically but definitely mentally due to evil events that have occurred in his or her life*".

Life in this world can sometimes be hazardous, without the power of prayer. We face 3 enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil) that can only be conquered with prayer.

##### **b) V.14 – *“is anyone among you sick?”***

The word in the Greek for 'sick' is '*astheneia*' which refers here to physical sickness but it was also used in the NT with different meanings:

- It was used in **Romans 14:1-2** to describe someone **weak in faith**,
- In **2 Corinthians 11:29** to describe someone **fearful**,
- In **Acts 20:35** to describe someone with **financial needs**
- In **Romans 5:6** to describe someone **without Christ**

***Is there anyone sick, fearful, weak in faith, in financial need or still without Christ? – let him pray! Prayer is the key that addresses every dimension of human suffering!***

Prayer is the key to overcome all that life throws at us – every condition and every circumstance.

The letter of James was written at a time when one of the prevailing philosophies was that of the stoics. They believed that everything in life was unavoidable and unchangeable – a little bit like people who believe in fate or karma. They believed that everything that happens to us is fixed unchangeably in advance. However, the Bible shows us the opposite: everything is subject to change - prayer changes things and Jesus changes everything!

## **2. Prayer is absolutely sure**

Prayer is a sure thing - this is the second 'absolute' of prayer. Looking at every passage about prayer in the Bible, we see how prayer is never described in any passage as some empty religious exercise, or some pious deed without any real impact, or something unsure not to be relied upon.

**V.15 Amplified** (AMPC) - *And the prayer [that is] of faith will save him who is sick, and the Lord will restore him; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

There is no uncertainty in this statement about prayer. Every Scripture about prayer carries a sense of certainty. Let's hear it from the very lips of Jesus:

**John 16:24** - *Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

**Matthew 7:7-8** - *7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

You may say, 'well Ps Luis but that is not my experience'. We need to believe based on what Jesus said and not based on our experience. We cannot lower the level of our belief to that of our experience but rather elevate our experience to the level of the Word.

Prayer is a sure thing and that is why we need to pray always, in all things, with all kinds of prayer and Jesus told us to pray always and never lose heart.

## **3. God absolutely desires to answers our prayers**

The second part of **verse 15** says, ... "*and the Lord will raise him up*"

**John 14:13-14** - *And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*

If you have doubts about the fact that God absolutely answers prayer, you will never pray with impact:

**James 1:6-8** - *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; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

These are *the 3 absolutes of prayer*, the 3 central ideas that every passage in the NT about prayer emphasizes. However, James wants to take our understanding of impactful prayer even further:

#### **4. Prayer makes tremendous power available, dynamic in its working!**

**Verses 16b and 17** in the **Amplified Bible (AMPC)**:

***The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have [with feelings, affections, and a constitution like ours]; and he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, and no rain fell on the earth for three years and six months.***

- a) The obvious example of impactful prayers is Elijah. Because of this prayer, the normal course of nature was altered. In the ministry of Elijah, that happened 7 times!
- b) Prayer defies and invades the impossible! Viewed in that light, prayer is an exciting thing.

#### **One last thought**

Probably everyone today agrees with these 4 absolutes of prayer:

- Prayer is vital,
- Prayer is sure
- God answers prayer
- Prayer makes tremendous power available

However, there may be someone hearing me today and finding it hard to believe that *their own prayers* can be impacting. Someone may say, ‘*well, that was good for Elijah, a righteous man*’. That mindset is such a stumbling block in the prayer lives of so many. That is precisely why God gave us **verse 17**:

**V.17 (The Passion Translation)** “*Elijah was a man with human frailties, just like all of us, but he prayed and received supernatural answers. He actually shut the heavens over the land so there would be no rain for three and a half years!*”

The enemy may attack you with a sense of unworthiness or that you don’t quite measure up. However, the Bible says that Elijah also had weaknesses, moments of despair and the discouragement we all sometimes, face. However, look at how he prayed! God encourages us to pray like that! The prayers of the righteous avail much!

(Romans 5:21 says that Jesus made us righteous).

## **Conclusion: we need to pray like never before!**

Our world is facing unprecedented existential challenges:

- Growing escalation of tension between nations – there are some 40-armed conflicts being fought in the world right now (according to a news agency).
- Our ability for self-destruction has never been quite like now: there are hypersonic weapons able to reach any nation, including ours, in a short space of time. When carrying a thermonuclear warhead, they can deliver an explosion 1000 times bigger than that of Hiroshima.
- Displacement of peoples like never before (some escaping wars, some looking for a better life). There are currently around 36.4 million refugees in the world.
- Nature seems off-balance – rapid changing of weather patterns, global warming, floods, strange natural phenomena, and earthquakes (more frequent than ever) etc.
- Tremendous growth of social unrest and radicalised groups within society
- The breakdown of the kinds of values that held our civilization together for millennia and the disintegration of the family unit with all its consequences.
- An unprecedented global mental health crisis – at least 13% of the global population, have a mental or substance use disorder.
- The realistic prospect of Artificial Intelligence taking over... etc etc.

The only hope for our world is a Spirit-filled, praying church! We are the only force in the world that can push back the works of darkness.

That is one the reasons we are starting today this series on learning to pray with impact.