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Does Prayer Really Change Life's Outcomes?

James 5:16: (KJV) *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Prayer is an almost universal phenomenon. People pray to all kinds of "gods," and we pray about all kinds of things. We use all kinds of tools to help us pray - prayer shawls, wheels, rugs, books and beads, to name a few. People pray to worship, to ask for help, guidance, peace, patience, strength, courage, and tolerance. People pray to complain and vent. People pray to seek revenge, judgment, and self-worth. People pray to dictate, command and get rich. People pray for whatever people want, see, like or wish. People pray - does it do any good?

A summation of prayer based upon biblical words: REFLECTION, DEVOTION, A CONTEMPLATION, AN UTTERANCE, TO INTERCEDE, TO SEEK OR ASK, A HYMN, ENTREATY, TO BEND OR STOOP IN KINDNESS TO AN INFERIOR, AN ORATORY, and PETITION. What does this tell us? It tells us that we, as frail human beings, do many things to try and focus our minds on spiritual things. Our brains seem to be wired for spiritual devotion. **This next text is a good example:** Acts 16:13: They went to a place conducive to prayer. It sounds like a picturesque, peaceful place.

Prayer Development Lesson #1: Prayer can be an event or a state of consciousness. As an event, it is appropriate to develop a context in which prayer can be more focused, deep, thoughtful and sincere. Go to a place - be it a physical place or a condition of mind and heart where prayer is wont to be made!

What motivates you in your prayer life? Perhaps listening to certain music, being at a certain place, or looking at nature. Prayer comes from our mind in conjunction with our heart.

This program explores the lessons of prayer as told to us in James 5:13-18. James 5:13: (NASB) ¹³*Is anyone among you suffering <2553>? Then he must pray... Suffering: Strongs #2553 kakopatheo (kak-op-ath-eh'-o); to undergo hardship*

2 Timothy 2:3: (KJV) *Thou therefore endure hardness <2553>, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Notice hardness and suffering are the same Greek word. In this case, a soldier is strong, disciplined and ready for battle. 2 Timothy 4:5: (KJV) But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions <2553>, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. By the context of this word, suffering has to do with trials of faith as a challenge or test, not trials of illness. When somebody is in a position where they have been trained and ready, they are then tested.*

Prayer is strength to the strong: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: Paul was already strong in the Lord, yet when he underwent hardship, he prayed for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed. But Jesus said NO! **Was Paul crushed? No, rather he was made stronger!** *Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak (physically), then I am strong (spiritually).*

Prayer Development Lesson #2: In those times when we stand and fight the battle, the function of prayer is to strengthen the strong with a strength that is not our own. Embrace this strength (which must be accepted by faith as it is not your own) as a signal to step out further in faith!

Likely Paul was praying for his eyesight: Galatians 4:15: He really believed he could be better if that burden was taken away from him, but the answer was no. So what did he do? He got better anyway, by the grace of Jesus Christ working in his life! That is how prayer can transform. It took his thought of "I could be stronger," to "You (God) could be stronger in me." We don't want to rely on our own strength, rather it must be God's strength working through us. James 5:13: (NASB) *...Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.* It seems only fitting that cheerfulness comes after strength to the strong!

Some examples of cheerfulness and praise: Psalms 34:1-9: (NASB) ¹*I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ²My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice. ³O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. (Praise is contagious!) ⁴I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. ⁵They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed. (That contagious attitude leads to transformation...) ⁶This poor man cried, and the*



*LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. ⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! ⁹O fear the LORD, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. All of this leads to blessing and protection from God - which leads to praise! You have heard of a vicious circle? Well, here we have a *blessed* circle!*

Here is a New Testament example of cheerful praise: Acts 16:22-26: (NASB) ²²The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. ²³When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison...and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; (Note, there is no indication that they were praying for a miracle of freedom) ²⁶and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Even when they were in this miserable situation, their faith was strong and they continued to praise God - *in spite of their circumstance!* Their circumstance did not drive their prayer; their strength drove their prayer. **What is the process to develop cheerful praise?** Colossians 3:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵**Let** the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful... **Let** - this is a choice! Choose this day what will rule in your heart - the turmoil of life or the peace of God! It is a choice. ...¹⁶**Let** the word of Christ richly dwell within you... Choose this day whose words guide you: the words of the world, flesh and devil or the words of Christ! ...with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. Now, act upon what you have **let** into your heart and mind!

Prayer Development Lesson #3: Cheerfulness can come in many forms, as a result of many things and must be capitalized upon! With those times of cheerfulness and emotional strength, it becomes imperative to sing praises of prayer, for these experiences do come and go in our life. The praises we offer serve as a marker of expression of those victories. Without this marker of praise and thanksgiving, it becomes harder to find the positive side of life when overcome in trial.

Speak out! Praise forward! Show how God has blessed you both in your prayer life and outwardly to others around you. The act of prayer simultaneously activates different parts of our brain. We were created in the image of God with the ability to think, reason, have dominion and to praise. God designed us to be able to connect with Him! Why not avail ourselves of such an amazing connection with our amazing God?

James 5:14-15: The beginning of this James lesson on prayer was about praying when strong and cheerful. That is only one necessary perspective of prayer; the other being overrun and weak. It is appropriate that we first learn how to strengthen the strong and to pass on the praise of cheerfulness as a basis for working through weakness. We have to prepare for the times when life seems to be falling apart all around us. Does this aspect of prayer cover the actual healing of actual physical illnesses? Do these Scriptures tell us we should pray for a physical illness to go away? We do not believe so. Are we asking for the things the Scriptures tell us to ask for? Or do we ask for the things we want instead? Part of prayer is learning how to use the "natural wiring" we have connected to God for the purpose it was intended. Notice there were two words for *sick* used in James 5:14-15: Strong's #770 and #2577. **Sick:** Strong's #770 *astheneo* (as-then-eh'-o); *to be feeble (in any sense)* #770 has been used to describe physical illness as well as spiritual weakness - two different things. It is most often used (but not exclusively) as spiritual weakness in the epistles. Here are a few more examples:

2 Corinthians 12:10: (KJV) ...for when I am **weak <770>**, then am I strong. Romans 14:1-2: (NKJV) ¹Receive one who is **weak <770>** in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is **weak <770>** eats only vegetables.

Now let's look at the second word used in James 5:14-15: **Sick:** Strong's #2577 *kamno*; properly, to toil, i.e. (by implication) to tire (figuratively, faint, sicken): **It is used one more time here:** Hebrews 12:3: For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be **wearied <2577>** and faint in your minds. So, this James text really has nothing to do with physical illness at all, rather it has everything to do with spiritual illness/feebleness.



We do not have scriptural precedence for believers that every time a Christian gets sick, we are to pray for God to take away that illness. The feebleness here is not in the category of just having a bad day, rather it is a deep symptom of a spiritual life turned fleshly that requires much more than a typical “pray for me” request, much more than a sharing of an experience in fellowship. This feeble and tired condition requires intervention because that person is going off track!

This is the responsibility of the shepherds of the flock: James 5:14: (NASB) *Is anyone among you sick <770>? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him.*

Sometimes we need to get help refocusing on things above. This can be serious.

Galatians 6:1-2 James 5:19-20: James proves the context by explaining he meant *sick* as a sinner going down the wrong path. Also we need to remember that humility on the part of one who is spiritually sick is a sure sign that their hope is still alive! James 4:10

Prayer Development Lesson #4: Spiritual sickness and weariness may come to us if we let down our guard and relax our principled stand for Christ. Personal humility and the fervent prayers on our behalf of those who are spiritually strong are required to restore such a potentially deadly condition back to righteousness. Through the prayers of others and contriteness of heart, reconciliation and spirituality can again be attained!

The main purpose of prayer is for us to be in alignment with God’s will, not to tell God what *our* will is so that we can get what we want! **OUR GOAL IS TO GET THROUGH OUR ILLNESSES AND DIFFICULTIES SPIRITUALLY STRONG.**

James 5:16: (NASB) *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.* (Healed from those sins) Now that we have seen the power of humility and prayer in the direst of spiritual conditions, James here provides us with yet another application of prayer: mutual prayer and fellowship. This application of prayer becomes far more powerful once we realize that prayer can strengthen the strong, expand the cheer of the cheerful and save the spiritually sick. This application of prayer covers the rest of our life’s experiences!

Prayer should be a free flowing tool of fellowship and service: John 13:12-15: The humble service that Jesus taught us includes prayer and honesty one to another. We can be vulnerable with one another and heal each other of spiritual faultiness by sharing with one another.

Luke 22:32: Peter’s faith went off track, but it did not fail. We strengthen through action, example and prayer! 2 Thessalonians 3:1: This prayer was so that the Gospel would be spread - nothing selfish. Christianity and prayer are not here so that we can get wealthy or so that your life can be secure. We are here to walk in the footsteps of Christ. **We are all merely members of a body - prayer and honesty towards other members can only contribute to building up that body:** 1 Corinthians 12:18-26: All members have the ability to contribute to building up one another.

Prayer Development Lesson #5: Prayer is just as vital a tool in the smaller and more mundane experiences of our Christian walk as it is in our more powerful and crisis related experiences. Our lives are made up of so many of the less dramatic type of experiences that those experiences must therefore fill a critical role in the development of the scriptural habit of PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. Your everyday life and fellowship create the necessary muscle memory that prayer needs to deal with the inevitable times of trial and darkness which will assail you.

James 5:16: Here is the conclusion of the prayer lessons in James: No matter what the circumstance - if we are strong, cheerful, spiritually ill, or learning day-by-day, *prayer can be the most powerful resource in our fighting the good fight of faith.* James 5:16: (Rotherham) *...Much availeth (it brings results), the supplication (puts something continually before God) of a righteous man, when it is energized (not an empty repetition of words).* Prayers are so much more than just repetition. If you have prayers that you pray over and over and over again, we strongly suggest you rethink it, because it is not a prayer from the heart or the mind. It is by rote and habit. The energizing of our prayers can accomplish many things! The effectual fervent prayer is what accomplishes much.



Prayer Development Lesson #6: The prayer of a follower of Christ in any aspect and under any circumstance of life is a necessary ingredient to fight the good fight. The energized and active prayer of a willing, humble and hardworking New Creation of God is a necessary ingredient to becoming more than an overcomer! To offer prayer is one thing - to be offered up in prayer is another!

Observations that James has taught us about prayer:

- If you are strong, you need to pray.
- If you are cheerful, you need to pray.
- If you have fallen off the path and need help, you need prayers on your behalf.
- If in your daily experiences you are having struggles, you need to pray.
- If you are focused on doing the will of God, then all of those prayers can avail much!

A closing example of prayer - of being offered up in prayer: Habakkuk 1:2: God! Why? Why is the world so out of balance? Why does evil prevail?! Don't you see...? Why don't you do something??? Doesn't this prayer sound like so many of us today? **How did Habakkuk prepare for the answer? Did he cower in the corner, afraid of the world? No...Habakkuk 2:1-3:** (NASB) *¹I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reprov'd. Habakkuk positioned himself to be of value and use to the cause of God...what faith! ²Then the LORD answered me and said, It was only then that he received his answer: Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets that the one who reads it may run. ³For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it, for it will certainly come, it will not delay.* The answer? The vision is not lost or late. It will be manifest. We just have to wait for God's time. Meanwhile, write it, show it to others and inspire others with the message that God is not gone, He is not blind, but rather, He has a plan, even though we don't see the whole plan unfolding at once before us. Human nature wants the answers right now. In Habakkuk's day, the wicked prospered, just like in our day. Yes, the wicked DO prosper...and it does not mean a thing! We can't do the same as others to achieve great advantage. Earthly prosperity is not part of our Christian sacrifice. What happens to them is not our concern. It doesn't mean anything because this life is just a temporary stopping place where sin reigns. Let it go...God has got this! We, through prayer, need to understand that in the world in which we live that is so turned upside down, our prayers need to focus us on living "above" this world.

Prayer Development Lesson #7: Hebrews 4:16: Come boldly to the throne of grace and receive grace to help in EVERY time of need!

It is interesting to note what Hebrews 4:16 does *not* say. It does not say to come boldly to the throne of grace and physical healing. It does *not* say all our questions will be answered. It does *not* say that every bad situation in our lives will turn good. It simply says we will receive grace to help in every time of need - not that the need will go away or the trial will be made less. You will receive a help to get through spiritually. Just like Jesus prayed, *Not my will but Thy will be done.* Jesus taught us to honor God and put things in perspective. *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is done in heaven.* Everything else is supplemental to the primary concern of the accomplishment of the will of God on earth. God has a plan! God allows sin to happen until the proper time.

Prayer puts us in line with that future hope so that we can deal with our present better.

Prayer is strength to the strong; Prayer is praise to the cheerful; Prayer is healing to the fallen; Prayer is daily encouragement as we go through our lives.

And if we put them all together, the engaged prayer of those who are following after Christ can avail much. We must be focused on the will of God so that our lives can become more like Christ. It is not to get - prayer is to give.

***So, does prayer really change life's outcomes?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***