

Elements of Successful Praying 5 - According to God's Word



How to Pray and Get What You Pray For (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. So far this week I've explained four important elements of successful praying. The first, that we pray with confidence, without condemnation. The second, that we pray with the right motive, which is for God's glory. The third, that we pray out of right relationships with our fellow human beings, especially those closest to us. And the fourth, that our prayers are directed by the Holy Spirit.

Today I have one more important element of successful praying to deal with: it is that we pray according to God's word. Yesterday I spoke about the part that the Holy Spirit must play in our prayers. I quoted Romans 8:14:

> "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." (NAS)

I showed you that to live as a son of God you have to be led by the Holy Spirit. Then in Romans 8:26-27, Paul applies this particularly to our prayers:

> "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (NAS)

I pointed out that in a certain sense, the art of successful praying is knowing how to yield to the Holy Spirit, letting Him take over and pray through us the prayer that needs to be prayed. I pointed out that there are various different ways in which the Holy Spirit may do this. In this passage, Paul mentions "groanings too deep for words," and I said that often the things we really need to pray about are too deep for words, too deep for our little minds to get the right words. At other times, prayer in our own language. But it's a prayer that comes from God and not just from our own thinking. And

then, at other times the Holy Spirit can give us prayer in a prayer language, an unknown tongue, something that bypasses our understanding but enables us to communicate with God, spirit to Spirit. So these are various ways in which the Holy Spirit enables us to pray.

But today I want to add to this a very important principle that we have to bear in mind. The principle is this: God's Spirit always works with and through God's word. I'm going to say that again, it's so important. God's Spirit always works with and through God's word. Therefore, it is not enough just to have the Spirit of God but we must combine with that the word of God. There's an example of this in Psalm 33:6, where this principle is applied to the creation of the universe. The psalmist says:

> "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host." (NAS)

Where the English translation says "breath," the Hebrew says literally "spirit." So by the word of the Lord and by His Spirit the heavens and all their host were made. In other words, these are the two agents behind all creation. The entire created universe was brought into being by the combination and cooperation of the Spirit of God and the word of God.

If we turn to the opening chapter of Genesis, we see an example of how this actually took place historically. Genesis 1:2-3, the writer says:

> "...the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. [Notice that the Spirit of God was already there and moving but nothing effective was yet happening. But the next verse says:] Then God said, 'Let there be light"; and there was light.'" (NAS)

"God said" means that God's word went forth. So, where the Spirit of God already was, the word of God went forth and the union of the Spirit and the word of God produced creation. God said the word "light," the thing "light" came into being. Now, there's a tremendous truth to grasp here and I'm going to put it this way. The entire creative power of God can work through us when God's Spirit and God's word are combined in our prayers. We may be in our own sight very weak, we may be very limited, but if we can make ourselves channels with God that we don't stand in the way of God's Spirit and God's word; if we're yielded and submissive and obedient and flexible, then the entire creative power of God can work through our prayers. Because it only required those two things to bring the universe into being. The Spirit of God and the word of God and those two things are equally available in our prayers if we know how to yield ourselves to them and let them have free course through us.

I want to give you an example of the limitless power of prayer through just one man when it's the Spirit of God and the word of God working through that man. The example is Elijah. The passage that speaks about this is found in the New Testament in James 5:17-18. James says this about Elijah:

> "Elijah was a man just like us. [Notice that, no different from the rest of us, a man just like us, but] He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (NIV)

So, Elijah was a man no different from us but by his prayer he controlled rainfall in the land of Israel for three and a half years. That's staggering, isn't it? And yet Elijah is not set forth as someone completely different and unlike us but he's set forth as a challenge and an example. He did it. James is saying we can do it too.

What was the secret of Elijah's prayer? I believe it was this: That his prayer was based on the word of God. That in his prayer he gave release by his faith to the limitless power of God's word when united with God's Spirit. Elijah was not praying on his own initiative. He wasn't thinking up his own prayer but he was praying according to the word of God. When we look at the scene there on the top of Mount Carmel, Elijah has challenged the prophets of Baal and challenged them to call down fire from heaven on their sacrifice and they'd been praying all day, cutting themselves with lances and jumping on the altar, becoming frantic and beside themselves but nothing has happened. At the close of the day, Elijah builds his altar and offers his sacrifice. And then he prays this very, very simple prayer. No shouting, no screaming, no jumping up on the altar but a prayer that's based on the word of God. Listen to what he says in 1 Kings 18:36:

> "Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word.'" (NAS)

What's the key? It's that last phrase. "I have done all these things at Thy word." I've not improvised, I've not followed my own leadings or impulses, I've not based my actions on some kind of human philosophy but I've based all that I've done on Your word, Lord, and therefore I can expect that you'll stand behind me because you're standing behind your own word.

What word of God gave Elijah the right to pray concerning rain - to withhold rain or to pray that rain could be sent? First of all, let's look at what the scripture says about the withholding of rain. In the book of Deuteronomy 11:16-17, before Israel ever entered their land, God warned them through Moses. He said this:

> "Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit, and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you." (NAS)

Notice God told Israel, "If you turn away from Me and worship other gods," and that's exactly what the people had done in Elijah's time, God said He would shut up heaven and there would be no rain. So when Elijah prayed for God to shut up heaven all He was asking God to do was stand behind His own word, already given. That was the authority in his prayer.

And then later, after Solomon's temple had been built, at the prayer of dedication, Solomon prayed this way, 1 Kings 8:35-36:

> "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee, and they pray toward this place and confess Thy name and turn from their sin when Thou dost afflict them, then hear Thou in heaven and forgive the sin of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Thy land, which Thou hast given Thy people for an inheritance." (NAS)

There's the scriptural right to claim rain. When God's people turn back and repent and pray toward Him, then God says, Now you have a scriptural basis for claiming the rain." So both when the rain was withheld and when the rain was given, Elijah had a scriptural basis in the word of God for what he prayed. And that was his authority and it explained the effectiveness of his prayer.

Now in the same context, James speaks in the same chapter about our praying for the sick. In chapter 5:14-15, he says this:

> "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." (NIV)

What is the basis for this prayer offered in faith? Just the same as for the prayer of Elijah. That what we are doing we are doing according to God's word. This anointing of the sick with oil is really a beautiful picture because the oil is a type of the Holy Spirit. But it takes obedience to God's word to release the power of the Holy Spirit. So when we act on God's word and do what God's word says and anoint the sick with oil, our obedience to God's word releases the power of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick.

All right, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again next week at this same time Monday through Friday. Next week I'll be explaining various specific way in which we can pray according to God's word and thus release the power of the Holy Spirit to produce results which "are exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." Stay tuned now for some important announcements. In particular, how you may obtain my book, Appointment in Jerusalem. This is the dramatic true story of my first wife, Lydia. It tells how Jesus appeared to her while she was a schoolteacher in her native Denmark and called her to leave her home and all that she had and go to Jerusalem where she became mother to a family of fatherless children. Many times in the midst of countless dangers and pressures, her own survival and that of the children depended on her knowing how to reach God in prayer. Her story will give you new insight in what prayer can do. The announcement that follows will tell you how you may obtain this book.

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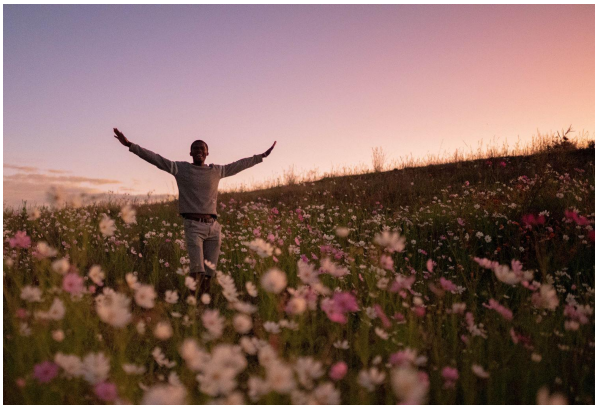

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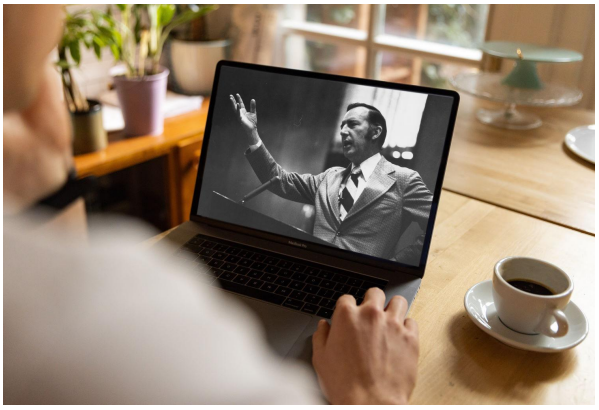

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