



Helping people encounter God in His Word



For use on Sunday, November 30, 2003

Introduction

30

*Core Competencies
of a follower
of Christ*

10 Core Beliefs

TRINITY
SALVATION BY GRACE
AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE
PERSONAL GOD
IDENTITY IN CHRIST
CHURCH
HUMANITY
COMPASSION
ETERNITY
STEWARDSHIP

10 Core Practices

WORSHIP
PRAYER
BIBLE STUDY
SINGLE-MINDEDNESS
BIBLICAL COMMUNITY
SPIRITUAL GIFTS
GIVING AWAY MY TIME
GIVING AWAY MY MONEY
GIVING AWAY MY FAITH
GIVING AWAY MY LIFE

10 Core Virtues

LOVE
JOY
PEACE
PATIENCE
KINDNESS/GOODNESS
FAITHFULNESS
GENTLENESS
SELF-CONTROL
HOPE
HUMILITY

This week's Core Competency:

Prayer

**I pray to God to know
Him, to lay my request
before Him and to find
direction for my daily
life.**

Reality Check: When Life Requires a Balance

Starting at the End . . . When You've Done Everything But Pray

"Hey, Mom," asked college sophomore Trina Dalton, "what is this list of names and stuff I found in the trash can? It is dated January 12, 1992."

"I don't know. Let me see it," said Kathy Dalton, Trina's mother, reaching for the paper.

"Oh, this must have been in my purse when I cleaned it out yesterday," said Kathy as she looked at the list. "It is one of my daily prayer lists."

"Mom, you obviously need to clean out your purse more often than every decade," joked Trina. "I noticed my name was on your prayer list back then. What were you praying for me about?"

"You were 8 in 1992. I know I prayed for you to become a Christian," said Kathy.

"Well, God took care of that when I was a high school freshman at church camp," responded Trina.

"And I am so glad He did, Trina," said Kathy, "What you don't see, Trina, is that I prayed that prayer everyday until you came to Christ. Fifteen years, since the day you were born, until the day you became a Christian, I prayed that prayer."

Trina quickly grabbed a calculator and then exclaimed to her mother, "Mom, you prayed for me at least 5,475 times just to become a Christian!"

"Oh, I know, Dear, and it was worth it," said Kathy smiling. "Look now! You are living a full life by following Jesus too! I can only wait to see what He has in store for you."

"You did this every day?" asked Trina amazed.

"Oh, yes, it is one of the little things I do," said Kathy modestly.

"Mom, this is no little thing," said Trina with certitude. "I mean this was 5,475 prayers!"

"I'm still praying. God has been very faithful and shown me much about Himself over the years," said Kathy unassumingly.

Trina grabbed the list back from Kathy, "Well, tell me if you remember what happened to this person? A, Tony Perkins, he was in the hospital from a car crash it says in 1992. What happened to him?" asked Trina.

"Let me think," said Kathy pausing, "Tony, was Lisa Perkins' son. Lisa and I are college friends. She had a son, Tony, who would have been about 8 years older than you. Tony had a terrible accident with a drunk driver and was almost killed. If I recall, I would have been praying for Tony to live while he was still in the hospital in 1992."

"What happened do him?" asked Trina.

"My and many other's prayers were answered, he lived," said Kathy, "But he was paralyzed from the neck down and had some brain damage. Lisa had to care for him from that time on. It was probably three years later Tony died of pneumonia."

"That's terrible, Mom," said Trina pausing. "It seems like your prayers would have been better off not being answered."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Kathy assuredly, "Because of Tony's accident and subsequent death, his father, Troy Perkins, came to know the Lord during the funeral."

"Mr. Perkins, the church elder at our church, came to Christ through his son's death?" asked Trina.

"Yes, and again God answered a prayer of mine in His unique way," said Kathy.

"Whoa, Mom, that is awesome," exclaimed Trina.

Observation

What do you see?

James 5:13-18 *The Prayer of Faith*

¹³Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Is 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. ¹⁵And 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. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Proverbs 15:29

²⁹The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

Record your first impressions from what you read.

Interact with the passages

- In James circle all the question marks. Then underline the answer to the questions.
- Highlight 'pray,' 'prayed,' and 'prayer.'
- Put a square around the words "well," "raise him up," "healed," "forgiven."
- Double underline "powerful and effective." Draw an arrow back to "prayer." Then draw an arrow from "prayer," to "a righteous man."
- From Proverbs underline "far from the wicked."
- Highlight "he hears the prayer of the righteous."

Interpretation

What does it mean?

God continues to do His supernatural work of changing impossible things, like healing or forgiving sin, that only He can. Our prayers in faith, affirming God's sovereignty and might, make us more dependent and thankful for God's sovereignty as He lovingly and faithfully responds to our requests.

Insights

- The term "trouble" is the same word as seen in James 5:10 which means, "suffering hardship."
- "Pray," "sing," "call," and "to pray" are all commands. The "anoint" can also be understood as a command, but there are other interpretations that could also apply.
- It is thought that oil was a home remedy curative agent in the 1st Century, but using oil could have only had religious significance.
- The terms "well" and "raise him up" are future verbs. "Well" indicates the idea of restoring one to health while "raise him up" refers to getting out of the sick bed.
- The "has sinned" is a subjunctive perfect verb and indicates a third class condition, which means that sin may be related to the occurring sickness.
- The "confess" and "pray" in verse 16 are also commands.
- "Healed" is a passive verb and indicates God is the one who heals.

- One interpretation of the participle “effective” is “prayer is powerful when energized by God,” the other interpretation is “the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.”
- In Proverbs the term “far” means a great separation between God and the wicked.
- “Hears,” or *shama* in Hebrew, when referring to God’s hearing, did have connotations that God not only heard the words spoken in prayer but would answer the request.
- The “righteous” are ethically sound in their conduct and just in their character.

Answering Questions of Interpretation

Why call the elders? The elders, according to Paul’s writings, have authority in the local church, but the focus on James’ writing talks about prayer. James points out that Elijah was a common man who prayed too, so why the elders? Does James want the elders to have an anointing prayer ministry as part of their normal activities? What does anointing with oil really mean? Why should they use oil when praying for the sick person? Does this imply that the elders should always make this a practice when praying for the sick? Why or why not?

James 5:15 is often abused by people. Many times people say, “You weren’t healed because you have sin or did not have enough faith.” This judgmental view and simplistic answer to someone who is not being healed is detrimental to the person seeking healing. From this passage how can we seek to temper this erroneous thought that sin and sickness are always found together? How can we also temper the error that one is not healed because they do not have enough faith? Also, what does the passage mean when it says the sick person will be “well,” in Greek this word also means “saved?”

Confessing one’s sins to one another is a command. Why is it that in many churches we do not see this going on regularly? What sins are to be confessed? What healing does confession bring to a church or individuals? Does this healing refer to spiritual or physical healing or both? Explain.

Application

What do I do?

How is my prayer life? Keep track of how much time you spend in prayer in a week. What does my prayer life tell me about my dependency upon God? What does my prayer life say about my faith in God’s responsiveness? Write down the last prayer that you sense God answered. Write down a prayer that you sense God has not answered yet. Have I continued to pray for this unanswered prayer? Why or why not? Again, what does my answer tell me about my faith in God’s faithfulness to respond? What do I sense the Spirit wants me to do to grow in this area?

Do I have the view that God will always answer my prayer with a “yes?” Why or why not? What have I learned from this passage that gives me some indication of how God responds to prayers and people? How have I responded to God saying “no,” to a prayer? Did I have hope and peace with God’s “no,” or did I have anger, sadness, or despair? What struggle do we have when our desire and will do not match up with God’s desire and will? How can I begin to attune my thinking and desires to match God’s will, or begin to accept God’s will when it is different than my own?

What do I do with this command to confess my sins to other people? Is this a habit I have ever incorporated into my spiritual development? What fears do I have in doing this? What benefits does the passage say comes from confession? What faith steps do I need to take regarding this issue?

Correlation

How do we work this into our Home Group, Family, youth group, ministry, class, small group?

Core Competency: Prayer

Creed: I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Commentary: The “World’s Strongest Man and Woman” competition pit the strongest people on earth in strange feats of strength. Many times you can go to a sports channel and see this bizarre competition of men and women pulling buses, flipping huge tractor tires, and lifting tons of rocks. These competitions and the media try to glamorize strength and the ability to do unusual and almost superhuman things.

Unfortunately, the media doesn’t glorify people with true power and strength. The neglected people, who get neither press nor praise, but have true power and strength to make real change in the world are praying Christians. When Christians ask and depend upon God’s power to make things change, God responds. Only through God’s power do supernatural events really occur, like people coming to know Christ, miraculous healings, and God taking a terrible event and making good come of it. As James writes, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

We as Christians, although very average and normal people, should be people who become powerful long-term change agents. We can each become a powerful and effective person of prayer. So instead of glorifying people with passing and short-term physical strength let’s become people with true strength by going on our knees in prayer.

Question: Did you ever have a time that you sensed your prayers really changed things? Were you surprised how things turned out? How did that affect your relationship with God? Did your dependency upon God grow? Why or why not?

Kid’s Corner – The Strong Man/Woman

Say: Today we are talking about prayer. Prayer is when people talk to God. He is always ready to hear us, and willing to respond to our prayers. We are going to do something fun. I need two volunteers. One will be the strong man or woman, and the other will be Elijah. We are going to have a competition to how strong these people are. I’ll be the announcer! (Have the 2 volunteers read the responses below & do the actions.)

Ask: Strong Man, can you lift this heavy boulder? (Show strong man a pillow.)

Strong Man: Yes, I can lift it. I have pulled a school bus full of kids up a hill. (Lift pillow)

Ask: Elijah, can you lift this heavy boulder?

Elijah: No, I cannot. Physical strength I do not have, but I do have spiritual strength because I have faith in God. (Do not lift the pillow up)

Ask: You do know, Elijah, this is a competition about strength. What good is spiritual strength?

Elijah: Well, I ask God for something and believe He’ll do it. If it is His will then it happens. I did pray to God one time that the rain would stop and the rain stopped.

Say: The rain could have stopped on it’s own, Elijah. You really want us to believe that God stopped the rain because you prayed?

Elijah: Yes, because the rain stopped for 3 and a half years, just like I prayed. Then I prayed it would rain again and God made it rain again.

Say: Wow, that is some super spiritual strength you and God have. Your prayers do make a difference. Strong Man, can you stop the rain with your brute physical strength?

Strong Man: No, but, uh, I can pick up this boulder. (Lifts the pillow again.)

Say: Well, there you have it! Elijah is the winner hands down, in prayer, no doubt, because he depends upon the mighty God to answer his prayers. The incredible power of God is seen when Elijah prays. God can do the impossible, and it is so much more impressive than lifting a mere rock like Strong Man. Stopping the rain, now that is real power! So from here on out don’t only seek to be physically strong, but seek to be spiritually strong, and get on your knees and pray! Thank you and good night!



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