

Come Bodly to the Throne

STEPS TO A MATURE PRAYER LIFE

JAMES 4:1-10

Text:

Introduction:

Of all the things a believer can learn to do in this life, one of the most important is to learn to pray!

One day, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him for some instruction.

They did not ask Him how to heal the sick.

They did not inquire about how to raise the dead.

They were not interested in Jesus' secret for walking on the water, or in His recipe for multiplying the loaves and the fishes.

When they came to Jesus, they asked for a very simple, elementary thing.

Luke 11:1

¹ And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

These men knew that prayer was central to everything else in their relationship with God. They wanted to have a prayer life like the one they saw in Jesus!

James, here, is intensely practical.

James is not a scholar.

He's not a philosopher.

He is a very practical preacher, and he's talking to us about a very needful matter, and that is the matter of prayer.

And, there are three things that stand out to me in these 10 verses, as I look at them.

1. THE UNASKED PRAYER OF A STRUGGLING MAN

The very first of which is the unasked prayer—the unasked prayer of a struggling man.

James pictures a man who is struggling to get what he needs, but he fails to ask God.

Look at it, and see if that's not what he's saying in verses 1 and 2:

James 4:1-2

¹ *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* ² *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.*

“Lusting, scheming, warring, fighting, killing, trying to get what we need, when all the time the Father says:

John 16:24

²⁴ *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

God wants to answer the prayers of His.

And, very plainly, many who are in this building, you’ve not come to God, **who invites you to come and ask** God.

Our wonderful God has put it:

Matthew 7:7

⁷ *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*

Illustration:

A little boy was trying to move a huge stone. His father was amused, and watched him. And, his father said to

him, “Son, are you using all of your strength?” He said, “Yes, Daddy, I’m using all of my strength.” And, the dad said, “No, you’re not, Son. You’re not using all of your strength, because you haven’t asked me to help you.”

So many times we say:

“Oh, I’m trying with all of my strength.”

We must remember that, God is our strength.

Have you asked Him?

Have you said, “Father, I want You to help me to do this?”

Are you going to quit trying, and start trusting, and come to the Lord?

Not only are you missing a blessing when you don’t pray, but you’re sinning against God?

Prayerlessness is more than weakness; it is wickedness.

1 Samuel 12:23

²³ Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:

When God the Holy Spirit gives you a prayer assignment to pray if I don't do it, I sin against God?

1 Thessalonians 5:17

¹⁷ *Pray without ceasing.*

That is, constantly, continuously, we're to be praying.

Luke 18:1

¹ *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

The word faint means “to get weary and stop praying.”

“Men ought always to pray.”

Now, if men ought always to pray, and they don't pray, they're sinning.

If God has commanded us to pray without ceasing, and we don't, we sin.

“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”

John Bunyan said in *Pilgrim's Progress*—he said this: “Prayer will make a man cease from sin, but sin will make a man cease from prayer.”

Not only do see in these verses: The Unmasked Prayer of a Struggling Man but also:

2. THE UNANSWERED PRAYER OF A SELFISH MAN

There are some people who don't pray. But then, there are other people who pray, but their prayers get no higher than the light bulbs.

Their prayers are not answered.

The Bible says:

James 4:3

³ **Ye ask, and receive not**, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

Some prayers, indeed, are not answered and never will be.

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”

In of words you're asking for the wrong thing and with the wrong motive—“that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James 4:3-4

³ *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* ⁴ *Ye adulterers and*

adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Friendship with the world is the enemy of God.

When a worldly Christian comes to God and says, “God, give me strength,” why should God give a worldly Christian strength?

Not only do see in these verses: The Unasked Prayer of a Struggling Man, and The Unanswered Prayer of a Selfish Man but also:

3. THE UNHINDERED PRAYER OF A SPIRITUAL MAN

Our prayers ought not to be hindered.

It ought to be normal for God to answer your prayer.

I hear som say at times, “Hey, believe it or not, God answered my prayer,” like that was unusual.

It ought to be the unusual thing if your prayers are not being answered.

It ought to be the normal everyday occurrence for God to answer your prayer.

Close:

God works according to principle.

He doesn't work arbitrarily, impulsively, by whim or fancy.

There are rules for prayer, just like anything else.

I want to give you five principles, of prayer as I close.

James gives them right here—to get your prayers answered.

They come—one, two, three, four, five—right as we go right down through these verses.

Note:

1. There Must be a Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit

James 4:5

⁵ Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

The Spirit that dwells in us is the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9

⁹ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be

that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

The word lusteth to envy means to have a jealous yearning.

Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to cause you to be deeply in love with Jesus Christ?

2. There Must be a Submission to the Father

James 4:6

⁶ **But he giveth more grace.** Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

When there is a sensitivity to the Spirit, there's going to be a submission to the Father.

No longer be proud, like that man who fights, and wars, and schemes, and desires to have and cannot obtain.

He tries to do it himself.

Come to God and say, God, I can't do it. Lord, I cast myself upon You.

I'm unable to do it by myself. Here, Lord, I humble myself before You.

Lord, I want Your will to be done. I submit to You.

Answered prayer is not for rebels, nor is prayer some way that you bend God's will to fit your will, nor is prayer some exercise where you talk God into doing something that He ordinarily would not want to do. Prayer is just simply submitting to the will of God.

3. There Must be a Standing Against the Devil

James 4:7

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Why does he mention this right here? I believe that James is talking about the subject of prayer, and anybody who has tried to pray has known that the enemy will attack.

Have you ever endeavored to pray, and the kids will get in a fight, the telephone will ring, the beans will burn, thoughts will come into your mind, even when you get in the prayer closet?

I'm not trying to tell you this to discourage you, but I am telling you this to forewarn you—that you must resist the devil.

4. There Must be a Separation from the World

James 4:8

⁸ **Draw nigh to God**, and he will draw nigh to you.
*Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts,
ye double minded.*

Defiled hands, dirty hearts, and double minds do not get prayers answered.

5. There Must be a Soberness of Purpose

James 4:9-10

⁹ *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.* ¹⁰
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Another reason that our prayers are not answered is sometimes they're just half-hearted, giddy, frivolous, easily uttered, soon-forgotten prayers.

We rattle off our little "Now I lay me down to sleep" type of prayer. We never get hold of God with both hands and really pray, and plead, and intercede.

Prayer is work. Prayer involves a brokenness, a weeping. That's one of the reasons for fasting. You see, when we fast, it's not that we earn God's favor. You're not going to buy a blessing by fasting. But, what fasting

does—it serves Heaven notice that we mean business, that we're serious about this matter of getting our prayers answered.

There's the unasked prayer of a struggling man. There's the unanswered prayer of a selfish man. There is the unhindered prayer of a spiritual man—the spiritual man, who's sensitive to the Spirit, who is submissive to the Father, who is standing against the devil, who is separated from the world, and who is serious in his purpose. “Ask, and ye shall receive” (John 16:24). God answers prayer, and the hope of your life, the hope of this world, and the hope of this church is in prayer that is answered.