

“Search Engine Theology: Does Prayer...Work?”
James 5:13-16
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(<https://youtu.be/WpfkFyG5qQ> clip from 2015 movie War Room)

Raise us up Lord! Raise us up!!! You’ve done it again Lord!! You’ve done it again! We need to be people of prayer. We need to raise up generations of believers and pray-ers. Raise up prayer warriors. Raise us up!!! You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Raise us up!!!

As was read in scripture...if suffering---pray. Is anyone among you sick---pray. The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick. Pray for one another. The prayer of a righteous person has great power. Oh, raise us up to be that person, that church that through prayer has great power.

And yet the most common searched phrase on search engines, when you type in...does prayer...is the response work. People are wanting to know if prayer works.

Friends I believe in the power of prayer. Jesus Himself prayed. He taught His disciples to pray. We have already heard from the Book of James that in these 4 verses the aspect of prayer is mentioned 5 times. We are encouraged to pray.

And yet we search and wonder if prayer works. If God is a sovereign God and knows everything then why do we even need to pray? If God is going to have His way any way---then why pray? Prayer changes things. It not only changes the attitude and heart of the one praying, but God desires to hear our prayers and as we surrender to Him, as we put our requests to Him, as we are honest with Him...prayer does work.

So does prayer work—yes.
Do we always get what we ask for---no.

So I ask, are we asking with the right attitude and spirit? And even if we do will prayer always be answered the way we want---no.
I believe God answers prayers---sometimes His answer is not to my liking. Sometimes He says “no.” Sometimes He says “yes.” Sometimes He says “wait.” Oh I hate the wait! I have known people who have prayed for years for certain things.

I believe that prayer changes things. God knows all, but He wants to hear from us. We sometimes ask, “Lord why didn’t you answer our prayer?” Perhaps a better question is, “Lord, why didn’t you answer our prayer the way we wanted?” Beloved I have seen miracles because of prayer. I have seen how prayer makes a difference. Yet we sometimes pray as if God is a genie in a bottle who is just there to do our bidding and pleasure.

Prayer is a request, God works. And God works through prayers.

Oh we all have our rote or memorized prayers.
 Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let this food to us be blessed. Amen.
 God is great. God is Good. Let us thank Him for this food. Amen
 Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Amen
 And unfortunately I even think what we call 'The Lord's Prayer' can become more mechanical and memorized, like saying a poem, rather than an actual prayer.

At the end of September I attended a Leadership Institute in Kansas City at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection. One of the speakers was Adam Weber. Adam is founder and pastor of Embrace. He started the church about 10 years ago. It now has 6 campuses in 2 states based in Sioux Falls South Dakota. They have over 4000 in attendance, one of fastest growing churches in the United States.

He has written his first book, Talking With God---What to Say When you Don't Know How to Pray (2017 Waterbrook) I just finished the book this week and wanted to share some things from his book. He says we need to speak with God, not at Him.

Weber says we often have sentence prayers such as these:

Lord, help my team to win.
 God help me pass this test.
 Lord help my mom to be okay.
 God, I hope this pilot knows how to fly.

I think we can all identify with sentence prayers.

In fact he mentioned Martin Luther who said **(image) The fewer the words, the better the prayer.**

Now Luther makes an interesting statement. By the way this month marks the 500th anniversary that Martin Luther posted his 95 thesis on that door in Germany and thus began the Protestant Reformation. The fewer the words, the better the prayer.

Weber mentioned the verse of scripture where Jesus is being question by the disciples about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus calls to Him a child and says, "whoever becomes like little children."

Weber reminded me that children just simply say what they are thinking. Weber identifies with 3 simple words. **SHORT SIMPLE HONEST**

Isn't that how we should pray. Weber and his wife Becky have 4 children all under the age of 10. He said their Children pray for their stuffed animals, for their owies on their knees to go away. They say it and mean it....they pray. Not long and drawn out. Don't use a different voice. They say what they feel. Short. Simple. Honest.

Other prayers from their children:

Thank you for the mac-n cheese.
 Help me to not dream about monsters.
 Help my sister to not be so mean anymore.
 Help me to find a friend at recess tomorrow.

Weber profoundly says, “My best advice: say exactly what’s inside you.” (page 49)

A little girl was softly saying her prayers at her bedside, mother kneeling beside her. The mother kindly said, “Say your prayers louder dear, I can’t hear you.” The little girl looked oddly at her mother and said, “But I’m not talking to you.” Ah, but God is listening.

Is anyone suffering---let him pray. Oh to have the prayer of faith. Pray for one another. The prayer of the righteous has great power. What type of power? GREAT.

We find ourselves frustrated that God doesn’t seem to answer our prayers...again in our timeline. It is hard to swallow when we realize that God knows best. It is also hard to digest when because of evil in the world it seems like our prayers are not answered. How many one word prayers have you ever spoken... Prayers like, “Why?” A prayer like, “Again?” A one word prayer like, “How?” Short, simple, honest.

We want God to listen. And He does.

Daniel 9:18 New Living Translation ¹⁸ **“O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair...We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy.**

He answers our prayers not because of our merit, how good we are, or even the fact we need help, but he answers and hears us because of His great mercy.

Some may wonder how they should pray. Remember that prayer is conversation with God. There is no right or wrong way. There is no magic formula. God just wants to hear from you. He cares about every aspect of your life. Make your requests known to God. I’m talking about your personal prayer life. Just have a conversation with Jesus. Like children. Boldly, honestly, simply.

Many of you have read Max Lucado. In 2014 Sarah and I had the opportunity with about 20 other people to have a light dinner with him. He had just written his book “before amen. The Power of a Simple Prayer. (2014, Thomas Nelson) This simple prayer can be used just to begin that journey of your prayer life will engage in much more in dept conversations with the one who loves you more than life itself.

The simple prayer can be demonstrated by each finger on your hand:

**Father,
 You are good,
 I need help. Heal me and forgive me.
 They need help.
 Thank you.
 In Jesus name, amen.**

So much is going on today I echo what Adam Weber says, “And so the question is no longer, How can I find time to pray? It’s how can I make it through this day without praying?”

Prayer works.

I remember a song from church in the ‘70’s.

Whisper a prayer in the morning.
 Whisper a prayer at noon.
 Whisper a prayer in the evening to keep your heart in tune.
 God answers prayer in the morning.
 God answers prayer at noon.
 God answers prayer in the evening to keep your heart in tune.

What prayers are you whispering today? Short, simple, honest.

“Why?”
 “How long?”
 “Help me?”
 “Please heal...”
 “That job...”
 “My family”
 “What next?”
 “You’re with me.”
 “Have mercy...”
 “Your will...”
 “Thank you.”