Prayer that Works- Part One

# How to Pray like a Righteous Man

We are beginning a new message series this morning called "Prayer That Works," and my prayer is that this won’t just inspire your heart for a moment but anchor your spirit for a lifetime. In other words, I’m not here to hype you up and send you home on an emotional high that fades by Monday. My goal is to plant something deep inside you that will strengthen you when the battle gets fierce, steady you when the storms come, and give you boldness to pray prayers that shake the heavens and change the earth.

So, I don’t want you to leave today just feeling good; I want you to walk out stronger, wiser, more threatening to the enemy, and ready to pray like a righteous man or woman whose prayers truly work.

My title this morning is “How to Pray like a Righteous Man” because when righteous people pray, things happen. Chains break, doors open, bodies are healed, prodigals come home, and rain falls on dry ground. So, open your heart and ears, and get ready to receive. God is about to show us how to pray prayers that work.

First, I want to start by sharing with you a Scripture from James chapter 5, verse 16, where it says:

“Therefore, 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” (James 5:16).

The Bible makes it clear that our prayers are not only acceptable but also expected from every believer who wants the kingdom to come and God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In other words, prayer is an integral part of the life of a believer. The Bible says:

“You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2).

And so, when you hold back your prayers, you are cutting yourself off from blessings and answers that God has prepared for you and is getting ready to release. James tells us plainly that if you are standing at a crossroads and don’t know which way to go, don’t guess, ask. He says,

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

And so, if you are in trouble, don’t sit there stressed out, wringing your hands, overwhelmed with fear, but open your mouth and call upon the name above every name: the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says,

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray” (James 5:13).

And so, if sickness has touched your body or your family, don’t suffer in silence, reach out for the power of agreement, the anointing of faith, and the healing that still flows from Calvary’s cross. Verse 14 says,

“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” (James 5:14).

In other words, God never intended that prayer would be a last resort; it is to be our first weapon, a tool, and a direct line to the throne room. If you need wisdom, help, healing, deliverance, or provision, run boldly to the throne of grace.

And don’t be afraid to invite others to join you in prayer because prayer opens the door to heaven wide. It’s not selfish to ask; it’s faith in action. Jesus said,

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

So, ask boldly, knock and keep knocking with determination, because the prayers of the righteous bring heaven’s answer down to earth’s needs.

Deep down, most people believe that prayer works. Even those who rarely step into a church know there’s something powerful about calling on God. Study after study confirms it—people who pray can point to moments when God stepped in, made the impossible possible, and changed everything simply because someone dared to pray. From the upper room in Acts to cathedrals, sanctuaries, chapels, and quiet prayer closets around the world, millions have seen answers—bodies healed, chains broken, and dead things come back to life—because they called on the name of the Lord.

But if we really believe prayer carries that kind of power, why don’t we pray like we know we should?

If we’re honest, many of us would admit—we don’t pray as much as we could. And if that’s you, don’t feel alone. You’re not the only one.

We know prayer moves mountains. We believe God hears us. But life gets noisy. Our schedules squeeze out our time with Him. And doubt creeps in, whispering that maybe God won’t show up this time.

Even the disciples—those men who walked beside Jesus, who saw Him heal the sick and raise the dead—came to Him and said,

“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

The good news is prayer doesn’t have to be complicated. God isn’t looking for polished words or perfect prayers. He’s listening for childlike faith, open hearts, and voices willing to ask. Jesus made it clear how simple it is:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

And the moment you do, something shifts. The line between heaven and earth opens, and the God who answers by fire steps right into your situation.

James understood that truth deep down in his soul, which is why he gave us a flesh-and-blood example of mountain-moving prayer.

“Elijah 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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17-18).

If you want to see what powerful prayer looks like, study how Elijah prayed, because the same God who heard Elijah’s cry still hears yours today.

Let’s take a look at Elijah’s prayer. Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 18. As you find your place, let me give you some background. At this point in Israel’s history, King Ahab sat on the throne. He wore the crown, but he didn’t have a backbone. He was married to Jezebel, a pagan princess whose name still represents wickedness, witchcraft, and immorality.

Under Jezebel’s influence, Israel didn’t fully turn away from God—they tried to mix their worship. They still used the Lord’s name, but they also bowed to Baal and other idols. It was a dangerous and adulterous blend that polluted their hearts and brought judgment on the land.

In that dark season, God raised up Elijah—a bold, uncompromising prophet—who stood and declared, “No more double-mindedness. No more halfhearted worship.” He confronted Ahab and said, “Because of this idolatry, there will be no rain, no dew, only drought and famine until God says otherwise.”

And just as he said, the heavens closed. For three and a half years, not a drop fell. Crops failed, rivers dried up, and the people suffered. But still, their hearts refused to change. Then, at last, God sent Elijah back with a holy challenge: meet Me on Mount Carmel. One prophet of the Lord against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah—a divine showdown between the fire of heaven and the emptiness of dead religion.

All of Israel gathered at the foot of that mountain as Elijah stood boldly and shouted in verse 21,

“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

Then the showdown began. Follow along with me as I read through this chapter, continuing at verse 22,

Then Elijah said, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls. Let them choose one for themselves, cut it into pieces, put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire — he is God” (1 Kings 18:22-24).

All the people said, “What you say is good” (1 Kings 18:24).

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire” (1 Kings 18:25).

So they took the bull and prepared it. They called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “O Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made (1 Kings 18:26).

At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Maybe he’s deep in thought, busy, traveling, or sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27).

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they kept their frantic prophesying until the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention (1 Kings 18:28-29).

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins (1 Kings 18:30).

Elijah took twelve stones, one for each tribe descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord and dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed (1 Kings 18:31-32).

He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces, and laid it on the wood. Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood” (1 Kings 18:33).

“Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it a third time (1 Kings 18:34).

The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench (1 Kings 18:35).

At the time of sacrifice, Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” (1 Kings 18:36-37).

Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and licked up the water in the trench (1 Kings 18:38).

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord — he is God! The Lord — he is God!” (1 Kings 18:39).

Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there (1 Kings 18:40).

All this leads us to the moment James points to — Elijah’s prayer for rain. Let’s see what’s so powerful about how Elijah prayed. Look with me at 1 Kings 18:41.

“Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.’ So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:41-42).

“‘Go and look toward the sea,’ he told his servant. And he went up and looked. ‘There is nothing there,’ he said. Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back’” (1 Kings 18:43).

“The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.’ So Elijah said, ‘Go and tell Ahab, “Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you” (1 Kings 18:44).

“Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on, and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:45-46).

Let’s look together at what made Elijah’s prayer so powerful. First, notice how he prayed—it wasn’t easy or comfortable, but he pressed in. He climbed the mountain, bent low, and put his face between his knees. That position wasn’t just uncomfortable; it was humbling. It shut out every distraction so he could fully focus on the God who holds the rain clouds in His hands. Elijah was desperate for the rain God had promised, and he was willing to pray until it came.

Look at his persistence. He didn’t stop after one prayer. He prayed seven times, sending his servant again and again to look for a cloud. Elijah refused to give up. He kept knocking on heaven’s door until the skies shifted and the answer broke through.

You might wonder why this kind of persistence matters. I believe it’s because it shows how much the answer means to us. It tells heaven that we care enough to weep, wrestle, and war in prayer until breakthrough comes.

That’s why we gave you a prayer guide this morning. It’s not a decoration—it’s a tool, a battle cry, a weapon. Put it by your bed, in your Bible, on your desk—anywhere you’ll see it every day. There’s even space for you to write your own specific prayers—things you’re committed to keep praying for until you see God move.

Second, Elijah prayed specifically. He didn’t just say, “Lord, bless Israel.” He asked for rain—real, measurable rain that would soak the earth and break the drought. That’s why your prayer guide includes 30 specific prayers you can declare until you see them fulfilled. We don’t want to pray vague prayers—we want to pray with clarity so that when the answer comes, there’s no question who did it.

Now maybe you’re wondering, “How could Elijah pray so boldly?” He prayed with confidence because he knew it was God’s will. First John tells us:

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Elijah’s confidence came from knowing he was praying in agreement with what God had already spoken. Back in verse one, we read:

“After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: ‘Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land’” (1 Kings 18:1).

Elijah simply took God at His word, received it in faith, and prayed in a way that would bring God glory. That’s what Jesus meant when He said:

“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:14).

Praying in Jesus’ name means praying for what Jesus Himself would want—aligning our hearts with His. So when you open your prayer guide, ask yourself, “Is this something God wants to do?” If the answer is yes, then pray with boldness and passion.

Third, Elijah didn’t pray alone. He brought someone with him. He had a prayer partner—his servant—who watched for the cloud and stood in agreement. Elijah pulled someone into the miracle. That’s what Jesus was talking about when He said:

“I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

Use your prayer guide with your spouse, your kids, your friends, your church family. Stand together in agreement and watch what God will do.

Fourth, Elijah prayed expecting an answer. He kept sending his servant to check the sky—not hoping but knowing the sign would come. And when that tiny cloud rose up, Elijah moved, because he knew the rain was on the way. James tells us:

“But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

In other words, believe when you pray. Know that God hears you, that He’s working, and that His answer is on the way.

Fifth, Elijah prayed as a witness. He didn’t pray in secret; he prayed where Ahab could see. He wanted the king to know that this rain wasn’t a coincidence—it was the hand of the living God who controls drought and downpour alike. Elijah’s prayer wasn’t just about rain; it was about revival. God used his prayer to call a wicked king and a wayward nation back to Himself. As Scripture says:

“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Church, it’s not the length of our prayers, the beauty of our words, or how spiritual we sound that moves heaven. It’s our passion, our faith, and our refusal to give up. That’s what opens the heavens and brings the answer.

So pick up that prayer guide and pray like Elijah. Pray with passion. Pray for specific things. Pray together for America. Pray, expecting God to move. And pray in a way that shows the world our God still answers with fire and rain—for the glory of Jesus Christ!

As we close, stir up your faith like never before—fan it into flame and refuse to settle for dry ground. Open your mouth and cry out to heaven with boldness, knocking on the door of breakthrough and refusing to let go until you see that small cloud rise on the horizon, the first sign of God’s answer on the way. Let us be men and women who know how to travail in prayer, who stand in the gap with fire in our hearts and persistence in our spirits, so that our children see the rain, our families are refreshed by the rain, our city is saturated with the rain—and through it all, the name of Jesus is lifted high and glorified.

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