

Fervent Prayer – James 5:16b-18

Eph 6:18. This is the 4th sermon in our **Core Values** series, talking about the qualities and attributes that describe who we are and what we do, at the core. And we're focusing on them, because to the extent we *do*, we will embrace them, and abide by them, and unite around them. To the extent we don't, we won't. We'll do what's convenient and easy.

The first was *bold preaching* – expository and applicational. Second, was *intentional discipleship* – personal and in community. Third, was *courageous evangelism* – in word and deed. And this week is **fervent prayer – dependent and expectant**. Believing that God hears and acts, we seek his will and ask for grace, to meet our needs and impact the world. Fervent prayer.

And the main verse on which we base it, is Eph 6:18 – [Put on the armor of God it says previously] *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication* [requests]. *To that end* [praying at all times] *keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints*. (ESV)

Paul says to put on the whole armor of God while *praying*. And not just some of the time, but all the time. Like he said in **1 Thess 5:17** – *Pray without ceasing*. And **Rom 12:12** – *Be constant in prayer*. And **Col 4:2** – *Continue steadfastly in prayer*. Prayer is mentioned 296 times in the Bible, and laced throughout is the idea that we should do so *constantly*.

So we do.

We pray constantly – because it's commanded. (Eph 6:18)

That's the first part of fervent prayer. Far from an option, or a suggestion, or an add-on; it's commanded. God *tells* us to pray.

But for some reason we don't think of it that way. And we certainly don't think of it as sin if we don't. But the prophet Samuel did. Speaking to the people of Israel, he said – *As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you*. (1 Sam 12:23) His failure to pray for those in his care would have been wrong. Because God commands it.

➤ And then there's the *constantly* part. Pray at *all* times he says. *Without ceasing* (1 Thess 5:17). As in, make Jesus the constant companion of your thoughts. Have an ongoing conversation with him in your heart. So we do. We pray constantly, **in our heart**.

But that can't be *it*, because Jesus also said to *go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father* (Mt 6:6). Set aside dedicated times of prayer. By yourself. So we do. We pray **on our own**. Not just as we're *going* throughout the day, but taking time *out* of our day.

It's the very thing Daniel did while living in captivity. (**Dan 6:10**)

When Daniel knew that the document [the law that banned prayer to anyone but the king] *had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously*.

Allowed or not, Daniel made *time* for prayer. On his own. Consistently and constantly,

And third here, we pray **alongside others**. In our heart, on our own, and alongside others.

Like the disciples in Acts 1, shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven. They gathered in the upper room and *devoted* themselves to prayer. Together. As did the new believers in Acts 4. And the church in Antioch in Acts 13. Part of praying *constantly*, is getting together with *others* to pray.

➤ But I'm pretty sure you know all that, don't you? Knowledge isn't the problem, is it? Perseverance is. That's why Paul also said, *keep alert with all perseverance*. (Eph 6:18) Pray with every last *ounce* of diligence. Apply all that you *have* toward it. Because it doesn't come naturally and it doesn't come easy.

So we do. Or try to. Out of obedience, we pray when we feel like it, and when we don't. We pray when there's time, and when there's not. We pray when we're strong, and when we're weak. Trusting that God knows best, and wouldn't tell us to *do* something *less* than the best. We pray constantly because it's commanded.

Second . . .

We pray faithfully – because it's necessary. (James 4:2)

In the middle of a discussion about unity and strife, James lays out a principle that applies to *all* of life. (**James 4:2**) *You do not have, because you do not ask*. Talking about prayer. We often don't *have* what we need because we often don't *ask*. We don't. But in God's *design*, it's necessary. Asking is what he *requires* to meet our needs. *You do not have, because you do not ask*.

What's worse, we expect it anyway. We not only don't *ask* for what we need, we expect him to provide regardless. "He knows our thoughts and needs anyway. What the problem? I shouldn't have to ask." Oh we don't think that consciously, but that's how we operate. We *expect* him to pour out blessings. We expect him to meet our needs.

➤ You know what that is? Entitlement. Claiming a right to something that's not necessarily ours. Sadly in-line with the spirit of our age. Far too many in our day and age expect what they don't earn, or isn't theirs, and then act like a victim when they don't get it.

Same for us. We don't get something in life that we want or need, and we grumble about it. Or cop an attitude toward God. "Where's my spouse? I want a wife. I want a husband. Where's my promotion? I've worked hard. Where's my position of leadership? I deserve it."

Or maybe something happened in your life that caused you get *mad* at God. An accident. Infertility. Disease. And you blame him for not preventing it. Not only expecting what you don't deserve, but failing to ask for it in the first place. Failing to *ask* for protection. Failing to *ask* for strength. Failing to *ask* for good health. It's entitlement at its worst.

➤ The solution to which, is not a self-help book, or rugged individualism. Rather, it's faithfully asking him for what we need, and being content with what God gives. *Faithfully* asking. Regularly. It's one of the reasons I have a prayer list.

It was the *persistent* widow that Jesus commended in his parable. The *faithful* woman. Saying, *will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night* [who pray to him faithfully; devotedly]? *Will he delay long over them? [8] I tell you, he will give*

justice to them speedily. (Luke 18:7-8)

Jesus commends and requires *faithful* prayer. Persistent prayer. Disciplined prayer. Relentless prayer. Incessant prayer. Enduring prayer. Tireless prayer.

So we do. Or at least try. We discipline ourselves in the strength that God provides, to pray faithfully, day and night. Because it's necessary. Necessary to receive all that we need, and all that God wants to give.

Third . . .

• **We pray fervently – because it's _____.** (James 5:16-18)

I want to take these next 3 points one part at a time. We pray fervently. As in ardently, and passionately. Pressing it and leaning into it as if our *life* depended on it. And the lives of others.

Like Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified. He labored in it. Pouring out his soul and crying out for mercy. Struggling in it and staying with it to the point of great tears and drops of blood. He was fervent.

➤ Or how about Elijah in James 5:17? An Old Testament figure held up as an example for us to follow. In fact, I want you to see it. James 5:16-18.

James 5:17 says – *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours* [he was just like us], *and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.* And we know from the Old Testament account, that was fervent too.

James cites Elijah as an example of someone just like us, who prayed fervently. Implying that we should too.

And no wonder. V16. After just saying, *pray for one another that you may be healed*, James gives the reason. *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Great power. As it is working.* As God hears our prayers and acts on them. No wonder we should pray fervently.

➤ But don't miss the key; the key to great power in prayer. Righteousness. *The prayer of a righteous person has great power.* Not a perfect person. Not a particularly spiritual person. But a person cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, and living like it. A person **with a pure heart**. We pray fervently, with a pure heart.

James says it, and so does the Psalmist. Ps 66:18. *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* If we harbor our sin in our lives; if we love it, and hang on to it, and refuse to come clean; God won't listen. And if God won't listen, there's definitely no power. The fervent prayer of a *righteous* person has great power.

So we do it.

We pray fervently – because it's powerful. (James 5:16-18)

Powerful to heal. Powerful to change the course of events. Powerful to overcome insurmountable odds. Powerful to thwart nations and rulers. Powerful to withstand the devil. Powerful to invoke God's blessing. Fervent prayer, with a pure heart, has great

power.

You say, "Pastor, I haven't seen any of that. I haven't seen great power from my prayers." Then maybe you're not paying attention. Or asking for great *things*.

Or maybe you don't really *believe* in the power of prayer. That God will do more as a result of 5 minutes of fervent prayer, than you can do in a lifetime. So it's just short prayers; small prayers; convenient prayers. If anything at all.

Or maybe you *do* believe, but you don't pray like it. When was the last time you prayed *fervently*? Believing that it's powerful? When was the last time you *pleaded* with God in prayer? When was the last time you poured out your soul to the point of tears for something? When was the last time it cost you a substantial amount of time and effort?

We don't see the *power* of prayer, even if we do believe in it, because we lack the *fervency* of prayer. Pray fervently. It's who we are and what we do.

4th . . .

We pray dependently – because it's _____. (James 1:17)

Our core value is fervent prayer – *dependent* and expectant. Dependent, because *every good and perfect gift is from above*. James 1:16.

[16] *Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* [He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And then he cites us, the church, as an *example* of the good and perfect gifts he gives.] [18] *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth* [the Gospel], *that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.* (James 1:16-18)

Don't be deceived it says. Everything good in your life came from God. Yesterday, today, all of it. Your salvation, life, health, family, abilities, job, everything. Which makes us *completely* dependent on him. We are. Top to bottom, start to finish, inside and out. We are completely dependent on God.

So we pray accordingly. *If every good and perfect gift* comes from God, how else would we pray? If he's proven himself over and over, why *wouldn't* we pray dependently? Why *wouldn't* we show our reliance on him? We *pray* dependently, because we *are* dependent.

➤ And we do so, **in the Spirit**.

We pray dependently, in the Spirit. Like Paul said in Eph 6:18. *Put on the whole armor of God . . . praying at all times in the Spirit.* Meaning, "under his influence and according to his lead."

It *doesn't* mean praying in tongues. *In the Spirit* is a phrase used 21x's in the New Testament, and only once is it used in the context of tongues. And even then, it still means "under the Holy Spirit's influence, and according to his lead."

The point being, dependent prayer, depends on the Spirit's influence. To lead, and guide, and bring to mind the very things God wants to give. The very things he wants to do.

And that makes it wise.

We pray dependently – because it’s wise. (James 1:17)

Think about it. Submitting yourself in prayer, offering supplication to the one who created and sustains the universe, the one who made you and loves you, is one of the smartest things you can do. Wise through and through. He’s omnipotent, he’s good, and he does good.

On the other hand, thinking you’re *independent*, and *failing* to pray, is unwise through and through. Bowing in humble need before the One who can meet every *single* need, is prudent. Acting as though you’re self-sufficient, is foolish. In fact, it’s a denial of reality. *Do not be deceived.* (James 1:16)

We pray dependently, expressing our reliance on God with our requests and our posture, because it’s wise.

And last . . .

We pray expectantly – because it’s _____. (John 14:13)

Jesus said in John 14:13 – *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* Talk about great expectation. *Whatever you ask . . . this I will do.* Unbelievable.

And that, by the way, is the reason we end our prayers “in Jesus’ name.” Have you ever wondered? *Whatever you ask in my name* [Jesus said; by my authority and with my blessing], *this I will do.*

So we do. We pray expectantly **in the name of Jesus**. Acknowledging his lordship; his authority. “In Jesus’ name, amen.” In Jesus name, please make it so. It’s the ultimate name drop.

➤ And then there’s **1 John 5:14-15**.

[14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him [toward Jesus], that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

We pray expectantly in the *name* of Jesus, and **according to his will**. For the things *he* wants to do and give. And just like John 14, Jesus will grant them. *If we ask anything according to his will . . . we have the requests.* (1 Jn 5:14-15) If that doesn’t increase your expectation, I don’t know what will.

➤ Except a firm belief. We pray **with a firm belief** as well. Like Jesus said in Mk 11:24 – *Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* Believe that you have received it. Trust that God will answer. Have faith that he will reward.

So we do. We pray expectantly – in the name of Jesus, according to his will, and with a firm belief – because it’s rewarded.

We pray expectantly – because it’s rewarded. (John 14:13)

This I will do, Jesus said. And it will be yours (Jn 14:13; Mk 11:24). And per the Apostle John, *we have the requests* we ask for (1 Jn 5:15). Can you think of a *better* reward?

It’s like our kids who ask us about the things near to our heart at bedtime. Because they know we’ll bite, and they’ll be rewarded with some extended waking hours.

I was talking to a dad in our church recently, who loves history and told of that very thing. At bedtime, his kids will invariably ask him to tell them about a certain war. And they do so with great expectation. Why? Because they know he can’t refuse. It’s the very thing *he* wants to talk about, and one of the things they need to *know* in the course of life.

➤ Same with God. Minus the manipulation of course. We pray expectantly, because when we do so in Jesus’ name, according to his will, and with a firm belief; it’s rewarded.

Put all that together, and you come to this. *Believing that God hears and acts, we seek his will and ask for grace, to meet our needs and impact the world.* Fervent prayer – dependent and expectant. It’s who we are and what we do.

Prayer – God, sanctify us in the truth. Conform us to the prayer life of Jesus. Add fuel to the fire of our fervency. Remind us to obey your command. Spur us on to be faithful and constant; dependent and expectant. We pray, *in Jesus’ name*, amen.

You Are Loved