

"Elijah: Man of Prayer"  
Series, Part 2

Last week I began a short series of messages based on the life of the Old Testament prophet Elijah. I said perhaps *the* outstanding feature about this man was that he had a tremendous impact for God on the pagan culture around him. His ability to be a powerful man of influence was rooted in his relationship with God: that he had committed to serving the God of Israel *and that God alone*, and that he recognized that *he stood before God*, and had a responsibility to represent God to his generation.

But there is another reason why Elijah was able to impact his generation for God: ***Elijah was a man of prayer.*** In the Book of James, James remembers Elijah most as a man of prayer. "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being 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. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest" (James 5:16b-18). Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't – for 3½ years! Then he prayed again that it would rain, and the rains came!

When we read the story of Elijah in the Book of Kings there are other instances of Elijah praying. He prays over a dead boy, and the boy is brought back to life! He prays during his encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. He prays when he is weary and depressed. Elijah is often thought of as a fiery, dynamic, *action-oriented* person. But James pays tribute to him by saying he was a man of prayer!

Howard Hendricks hits the nail on the head when he writes: "You show me a person who is communicating with his generation spiritually, and I will show you a person who is communicating with his God." *I believe it's impossible to influence people and society for Christ in any sustained manner without being a person of prayer!*

**Why is prayer so important if we're going to impact others for God and Jesus?** If you've ever seriously tried to bring your faith to bear on people and situations around you, you probably won't be asking that question! Have you ever tried to get someone who's not interested in spiritual things to recognize their need for a Savior - Jesus? Have you ever tried to change a situation at work, or in your family, or in the neighborhood or at school – a situation that was wrong or unjust – and get people to see how wrong this is, and how they need to change?

Have those of us in the church never felt how inadequate we are when trying to confront the corruption of powerful politicians, the moral stance of social media giants like Google or Facebook, or the bias of both the mainstream media and cable news networks? Over the years I've seen our Annual Conference pass resolutions to send a letter of protest to the Governor of PA, or something like that, and I just smile and say, "Good luck. I'm sure that's going to do a lot of good."

The work of impacting people's lives and society with God's truth and righteousness is a work of God's Spirit. Only God can change the human heart and root out social evil. And in prayer we recognize our dependence on God to do this!

*That's why, if we are to talk to people in public about God we need to talk to God about people in private prayer.*

Let's look further at Elijah's prayer life and how it energized him for public ministry. ***First of all, Elijah prayed with expectancy.***

There's been 3½ years of drought (after Elijah had prayed for no rain). Now he goes before King Ahab: "Elijah said to Ahab, go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of rushing rain" (1 Kings 18:41). There's a sound of rushing rain, but in a later verse it says there wasn't a cloud in the sky! You don't ordinarily hear the sound of heavy rain when you have a cloudless sky! *That's hearing with the ear of faith!*

Look at what happens next: Elijah goes to the top of Mt. Carmel and prays. Then he tells his servant to look – and keep looking. The servant says: "Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand is rising out of the sea." Then Elijah tells his servant to go to King Ahab and say this, "Harness your chariot and go down before the rain stops you" (1 Kings 18:44). See what's happening? There's no rain, hardly any sign of rain, but Ahab is told to get moving on his chariot before the rain is going to stop him! That's *expectancy!* And shortly after, a huge rainstorm comes!

When we pray, how many of us really expect God to respond? A little girl named Trishia had heard some of her friends were going to a swimming party at a friend's house where they had a pool, but she wasn't invited. But for whatever reason, the morning of the party the phone rang and Trishia was invited to go. Her mom said, "Well that's great! Get your swimsuit and I'll grab you a towel. But Trishia said, "Nah. No sense going now. I've already prayed for a thunderstorm." *That's expectant praying!*

There's a story in the Book of Acts. Simon Peter is in prison, and the church is praying for him. "The church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5). God miraculously sets Peter free. He comes to the door of the house where they are praying. A maid looks out and is so excited to see Peter she doesn't leave him in, but goes to the people praying and says, "It's Peter!" "No, Rhoda, you're crazy!" one says. Someone else remarks, "It must be his angel." Another, "Please, let us get back to our praying for Peter!"

How surprised would we be if God answered our prayers? How much do we expect God to hear us and respond? The people we're praying for to become Christians? The situation in our family or in neighborhood or work or church that needs the touch of God for things to change? Elijah prayed with expectancy! It's not just that he was a positive thinker or an upbeat person. He knew God and knew that God keeps His promises!

People who are making an impact for God and for Christ and His kingdom believe that God can and will do great and extraordinary things when they pray with faith and a sense of expectancy! Jesus had a word about this. He called it "believing"! "Therefore I say to you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive it, and it will be so for you" (Mark 11:24).

*In addition, Elijah's prayer life was marked by earnestness.* His body language shows that: "Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees" (1 Kings 18:42). Have you ever prayed like that? With that kind of heartfelt emotion? James 5:17 says Elijah "prayed fervently". Literally it says "he prayed with prayer" or "he prayed in his prayer".

Probably all of us who pray have found times when our thoughts have drifted and our mind wanders. Or sometimes we pray words we really don't mean – it's like we're just going through the motions. *We're not "praying in our prayers"!* This can happen not only in our private prayers, but when we pray in our small group, or Sunday School class, or church service.

*Praying with honesty and heartfelt intensity is so much more important than worrying about whether our prayer sounds nice or not.*

New Christians, have a lot to teach us about being honest and sincere in our prayers. In one of the churches I served a young man, a bartender, got converted. He was fresh and new in the Lord! I used to love to hear him pray. His prayers were so honest, so down to earth - unembellished and non-churchy! I would often pray, "Lord, help Scotty to always be able to pray like this, and not be spoiled by trying to say the right words and sound so religious."

Howard Hendricks tells about a man who was led to Christ in a home Bible study group. He came to know the Lord on a Thursday evening, and after the meeting someone instructed him, "The purpose of this study has been fulfilled in your life. It's meant to lead you to the Savior. We'd encourage you now to come to our church, where you can build on this foundation. So, he showed up Sunday morning. The pastor announced that there would be an evening session, and the man didn't know enough to stay home, so he came Sunday night! That evening, the pastor announced a bible study and prayer meeting on Wednesday, and again, he didn't know enough not to come! So he showed up! Before the prayer session, he turned to Howard Hendricks and said, "Do you think they'd mind if I prayed?" "Of course not," Howard responded, "that's what we're here for." "I know," the guy said, "but I've got a problem. I can't pray the way you do." "Thank God for that!" Howard shot back!

A number of people in the group prayed, and finally Dr. Hendricks put his hand on the man to encourage him, and his prayer was this: "Lord, this is Jim. I'm the one who met you last Thursday night. Forgive me, Lord, because I can't say it the way the rest of these people do, but I want to tell you the best I know how. I love you, Lord. Amen." Dr. Hendricks said that man's honest, unassuming, heartfelt prayer ignited energy into that whole prayer meeting. Hendricks remarked, "We had been doing a fantastic job scraping the Milky Way. But he prayed!"

Elijah prayed *earnestly*. He prayed so intensely that he "bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees" (1 Kings 18:42). Have you ever prayed so intensely that you were flat out on your face before God? You may say, "Well, that's a little bit radical. Sort of like being a religious fanatic." Not really.

The Bible says that's how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane! On His face before the Father, so fervent a prayer that He sweat drops of blood. There have been times when I've been flat out on the floor, my face in the carpet, praying!

When might we be more likely to do that? Probably when *we ourselves* are facing a crisis. When a parent, or a son or daughter, are deathly sick or in big trouble. And that's good – there's no more important thing to do than to pray.

But can we have that sense of urgency when we pray for people outside our own family and circle of friends, for lost people at work or in our classroom or in our neighborhood, for God to intervene in world events and guide the decisions of world leaders, for a moral and spiritual awakening in our country for renewal and revival in our church?

Don't you think if Christians (individually, and in the church as the body of Christ) would be on our faces before God (whether literally or figuratively), praying for others, praying for the world, praying that we can impact our generation for Jesus Christ, that God would do some great and mighty things as a result!

Elijah prayer *with expectancy*...Elijah prayed *earnestly*...*and it rained!* After 3½ years, it rained. Not just a little itty bitty shower. Not just a tiny trickle. "In a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain" (1 Kings 18:45).

Michael W. Smith has a song entitled "Let It Rain". Over and over these phrases are repeated, "Let it rain...let it rain. Open the floodgates of heaven." It's a plea, a prayer, for God to pour out His Spirit, for God to show His glory!

Elijah knew what it was to pray, and have the rains come! I believe God wants His people to pray, to pour out His Spirit and do great and mighty things for His glory!