

Prayer Letter 4

Excerpts from the book “Spiritual Warfare through Intercession” (chapter 11)

Elijah – An Effective Intercessor

Often, when we read of some of the Godly men and women in the Bible, we are inclined to feel that we can never aspire to their greatness or holiness. How encouraging it is, therefore, to read that “Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves”, and yet he prayed fervently, and the effective fervent prayers of this righteous man availed much! “The petition of the righteous, being made effective, is very strong” (James 5:16b-18). If we are righteous in Christ, if we pray fervently, then we too can see great power released and effective answers to our prayers. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (AV) – such praying is powerfully effective, releasing God’s power and allowing Him to act in a certain situation.

Keys to Elijah’s effective prayer life

Read 1 Kings, chapters 17-19 and 2 Kings, chapters 1-2.

1. Righteousness

Only a person who is in right relationship with God, who is righteous in Christ, walking in the Spirit, can expect to really pray unhindered prayers, because sin hinders prayer (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:1-2). If our prayers seem to go no higher than the ceiling, the ceiling is probably sin (or unbelief – which is also sin!) Even wrong relationships, especially within marriage, can hinder prayer (1 Peter 3:7).

2. Fervency

Praying fervently implies praying with faith (James 1:6-8), and with perseverance (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8). We need to pray through and then stop (you can stop firing when the victory has been won!) We are engaged in spiritual warfare, but not in vain repetition.

3. Specific

Elijah prayed specific prayers and got specific answers (cf. Jabez, in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Having asked specifically, we then need to give specific thanks (Luke 17:12-19).

Note how Jesus, on seeing blind Bartimaeus, asked him what he wanted. His need was obvious, but Jesus wanted him to ask specifically, and then He fulfilled his request! (Mark 10:46-52).

4. Earnestness

Elijah cried to God from his heart (not his head) – he was earnest and sincere in his prayer; in one sense he was desperate (1 Kings 17:20-22). He cast himself on God, and God answered his earnest prayers.

5. He knew the word and will of the Lord

At least 8 times we read that “the word of the Lord” came to Elijah. Elijah knew God’s word, he knew His will, and was therefore able to speak forth, “Thus saith the Lord ...” Hence he knew what to pray for and how to pray. Imagine what would have happened if God had not answered his prayer on Mt Carmel! See also 2 Kings 10:10.

Elijah’s obedience to specific directions from God led to miracles (e.g., 1 Kings 17:16, 22; Luke 4:25-26). God confirmed His word with signs following, thus setting His seal on Elijah’s prophetic ministry (1 Kings 17:24).

6. He bound and loosed

Elijah bound and loosed (rain) what God had already bound and loosed in Heaven (Matthew 18:18). At his word the heavens withheld their rain for three and a half years; again, at his word it began to rain again, just as God had told him (1 Kings 18:1).

7. He was ruthless with evil

Elijah was uncompromising with evil – he slew the prophets of Baal, and King Ahaziah and his servants were destroyed (2 Kings 1:9-17a). Unfortunately the wicked Queen Jezebel was not also destroyed at the same time as the prophets of Baal. As a result, Elijah became afraid and discouraged because of her and her threats on his life (1 Kings 19:1-4).

8. He was human, but God upheld him

Elijah at this time was ready to give up, but God, understanding his weakness and with still further work for him to do, sent an angel to strengthen and encourage him (1 Kings 19:1-8). Praise God for His ministering angels who come when we are low, discouraged or battle-weary! (cf. Matthew 4:11).

9. Elijah sought to honour God’s Name

1 Kings 18:36-37. We will never get very far in spiritual warfare if we are simply seeking to defend ourselves, vindicate ourselves, or honour our own name. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake and on Christ’s account

(Matthew 5:10-11), not those who are trying to justify themselves! We need to watch our motives!

10. Unity

See Romans 11:2-5 and compare with Matthew 18:19-20 where “agree” means to “harmonise together” or to be “in symphony together”. Elijah is never described as having prayed with other people. There were 7000 other people he could have prayed with, but in ignorance and fear on one occasion he hid himself away, depressed and lonely, rather than joining with others to be lifted up by their prayers and encouragement.

Praise God for the times of prayer and fellowship we have alone with God. But there is also great encouragement and power when we pray together, harmonise with, and unite with, others in prayer! This is especially true when the battle is long, tough and discouraging. We need others to pray with us and encourage us so that together we are victorious – praying powerfully effective prayers!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of stating that Elijah was “a man of like nature with ourselves”? (James 5:17)
2. In what ways can wrong relationships hinder our prayer lives?
3. How can we avoid “*vain* repetition” when the answer to our prayers is delayed?
4. Why is it necessary both to pray alone, and with others?
5. Our motives are very important when we are interceding. What are some wrong motives, and what are the right ones?
6. What is the practical meaning of “agree” in Matthew 18:19?