

Why prayers go unanswered

September 28, 2020

JAMES 5:16b - KJV – (16b) The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The term **fervent prayer** in the King James Version simply means “impassioned, forceful, passionate, heartfelt, powerful, or wholehearted.” The verse, as translated in the King James Version, seems to indicate that a passionate, wholehearted prayer will accomplish much, implying that a half-hearted prayer will not be as effective.

Most modern versions translate **James 5:16** differently, so that the fervency or forcefulness applies to the outcome of the prayer, not the earnestness of the prayer: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (ESV); “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (NIV); “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (NASB). These translations simply say that prayer is powerful, without differentiating between “fervent” prayer and some other kind.

“Elijah was a human being, even as we are. 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 refers to **1 Kings 17:1**, where Elijah told Ahab that it would not rain “for the next few years.” This drought was punishment for Israel’s worship of Baal. After three and a half years of drought, Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in a showdown on Mt. Carmel (**1 Kings 18:16–40**), and then Elijah told King Ahab that it was going to rain (verse 41). We might be tempted to think of Elijah as some sort of super saint, but James says he was an ordinary man and that God answered his prayer.

The point of **James 5:13–18** is that prayer is important and God answers prayer, so we must make it a priority. We don’t have to be “super Christians.” However, sin in the life of the one praying can block prayer’s effectiveness. Certainly, earnest prayer is important, and the prayer of faith is important, but this passage does not seem to indicate that the forcefulness with which one prays determines effectiveness. Rather, the prayer of a righteous person is powerful (forceful) and effective. We the church through the power / authority of God, could change many things in the nations. We must fit His description.

Just some reasons why prayers are not answered

(1) Unconfessed sin, **(2)** An unforgiving spirit, **(3)** An unbelieving heart, **(4)** Improper motives, **(5)** An separate marriage relationship: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (**1 Peter 3:7**) and one that does not have anything to do with sin. **(6)** The sovereignty of God. “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” (**Romans 9:15-16**)

SCRIPTURE READING: JAMES 4:3

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Peace does not mean you will not have problems. Peace means your problems will not have you.

“A JOURNEY OF THE HEART”