

# Prayer That Prevails

by Paris Reidhead

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*Prevailing prayer is not an item by itself, but rather an expression of a total relationship with God, characterized by repentance, faith, brokenness, thanksgiving, and praise.*

**Duration:** 36:09

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:16-17, Colossians 3:23, James 5:13-16, James 5:20

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of orienting one's life and will towards God's plan and purpose in order to prevail in prayer. Rather than simply asking God for things, the speaker encourages listeners to ask God to teach them how to pray about specific situations. The sermon also highlights the significance of praying about everything in one's life, big or small, and allowing the word of Christ to dwell richly in one's heart. Additionally, the speaker emphasizes the importance of gratitude and thanksgiving in prayer, as it is a foundational block for prevailing prayer.

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## Transcript

Will you turn, please, to James, chapter 5, Prayer that Prevails. I shall read for you, from verse 13 through the 20th verse, that that which we shall use as a text will be found in its context. He is any among you afflicted, let him pray.

He is any merry, let him sing psalms. He is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

And if ye have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins.

I read this portion, as well as the one in Philippians, in order that you might understand that prevailing prayer is not an item by itself divorced from other kinds of prayer and other relationships, but this is an expression that has to be total if it's to be effective. Let us remind ourselves of the kinds of prayer we've considered in days past. Our overall text to which we've anchored our thinking in these weeks is found in Ephesians, the sixth chapter, where we are told that we are to pray always with all prayer.

And we have sought to distinguish between phases or aspects, forms, or kinds of prayer, seeing first the prayer of a sinner, prayer of acknowledgment of guilt, confession of guilt, and expression of repentance and faith, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, given in prayer, which savingly unites one to Christ. Now, if you're a Christian, it's because you pray. No, not because you said prayers, but because having been moved upon by the Spirit of God in his operation of awakening and conviction wherein he had exposed your heart to yourself and shown you the nature of your crime, namely this, that you had been God in your own life, willed your own will, and lived to please yourself.

Then he brought you to that place of repentance, which is this, a change from being God to receiving Jesus Christ as God, renouncing your right to rule and submitting to his sovereignty as well as his Saviorhood. To repent, therefore, is, as is involved in that word in Romans 10, 9, to confess with the mouth Jesus to be Lord, a change of direction from being Lord in your life to allowing him to be Lord. I had mentioned to someone some weeks ago that they'd profit greatly by securing the volume by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, and that first chapter on cheap or costly grace is worth many times the price of the book.

I understand now it's been printed in paper and is much more reasonable than when first I got it. But it sets forth explicitly and clearly what we would mean by the word repentance if we were to understand it in its biblical setting. That it's not an emotion, but it's a change.

So we want to see that people who pray are people that have repented and have believed. They have not only understood that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but they have committed themselves to him and received him. The evidence of the genuineness of their repentance and faith is the fact that Christ has come into their hearts.

It's Christ in you, the hope of glory. So many people make the mistake of thinking it's the Christ set forth in the Scripture that's the hope of glory. Well, the one that's set forth in the Scripture is the same Christ who died for you and rose again and will, upon the basis of your repentance and faith, come into your heart.

But the place of saving relationship is in you. It's Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ be in you, except you be reprobate.

We want to understand the kind of people that pray and what happens in this prayer that savingly unites us to Christ. At the moment that we savingly embrace the Son of God, we are justified in heaven, all our sins counted to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ counted to us, and we're regenerated in our hearts. This is the work of the Spirit of God, giving to us of Christ to that place that we pass from death to life and in one beginning sense become partakers of his nature.

And it is thus Christ in us, the hope of glory. Now, let us understand, therefore. Let us recognize and realize that what happens with that first initial aspect of prayer, we're brought out of death into life.

We are born of God. We are made and put into his family. Something marvelous has happened as a result of that first prayer.

Then, of course, we have seen the prayer of affirmation. When you come with concerns for which you must pray, needs toward which you must pray, it does you well to affirm again all that we've seen, that you were a rebel and a traitor and that you were a servant of Satan and a slave of your lusts. And you did rule your life, but you have repented and reaffirm again in this prayer of affirmation, be it daily or as often as you need, lest it, however, avoid that it become ritual to you.

We don't want to establish stations of the cross again. We want to have a relationship to the Lord, which we are affirming by our lives and by our attitudes as well as by our words in prayer. It would be quite possible, for one, to take what I am saying to that point of literalness where what you do is simply repeat certain words.

And this, of course, would be extremely deadening. I'm not prescribing that at all. It's to see something.

It's to understand something. And it's to live constantly in the affirmation of what you've seen and understood and have experienced. Then we've seen the prayer of brokenness.

And we have this before us here. I do not wish to speak at any length on the matter of calling for the elders when one are sick, but the word here translated sick is the word asthenia, and it has reference to that which we currently use, neurasthenia or nervous exhaustion, I'm told, and it has reference to exhausted, sick and exhausted from having sought the Lord. We have told you in days past and shall, as opportunity has afforded, dwell on it even more in the future, that there are at least seven ways to take life for the Lord in our pilgrimage, to take healing and strength from him.

Well, apparently these were understood and someone has not received, and so they're continuing and they're exhausted. They were afflicted and they prayed, and then now they've become sick and they're exhausted in it, and they haven't been able to touch the Lord. So then call the elders, all of whom were spirit-filled to have been spirit-filled men, and in the presence of the elders would be all the gifts and anointings and graces of the Spirit.

And it would be apparently gathered here that as the elders came, they'd join with the one involved and say, Now, Lord, why? And there's the possibility, as it's expressed in verse 16, well, really in verse 15, if he have committed sins, there might be something that's been hidden, something that's been covered, something that hasn't been seen. And so the presence of the elders there was that there might be a discovering of the reason. Now, I think this is the biblical setting of this particular portion, and there is, by their gathering together in their united prayer, Why, Lord, has not so-and-so touched you? Then there came this thing, well, this is the issue, this is the attitude, this is the thing in the past, and if they've committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Confess your faults one to another is the prescription. And so we see, and when it comes to the matter of prevailing in prayer, there has to be, again, brokenness. This is what I want you to see at this point.

If it's true in respect to prayer for the sick among us, it's also true in respect to any other need. Therefore, the prayer of brokenness is not something that you pray on Tuesdays, as it were, or on Good Friday, or some other time. It isn't as some people will, on a given day, go into a place of worship and bewail their sins.

But the prayer of brokenness is the attitude that at any moment the Spirit of God reveals to us that we've grieved God there. Then, at that point, we break before him. The great move of God in Kenya and Uganda, down in Africa, has demonstrated to us that a principle the Spirit of God seeks to establish again in the Church is the necessity of keeping short accounts with God, while instantaneously dealing with whatever grieves him.

But when it comes to a matter of particular prayer and a burden that you're carrying, there has to be an opening of your heart to the Lord. Lord, deal with anything in my life. Deal with any attitude.

Deal with any action, any relationship, anything that grieves me. So, in a sense, it's very good for you to become involved in prayer needs in your life and in the lives of others, because in so doing, you are pressed again to open your heart to the labor and open your heart to the Word and to the Spirit of God. And there ought to be on the heart of every Christian, constantly, not periodically.

Incidentally, I'm remembering something Dr. Brown said. Chicago, in the 1954 Council, the first that I was privileged to attend, there is the Preacher's Chorus Concert at Southside Church. He said, I rather think sometimes we are becoming Catholic Protestants.

We have our annual or semiannual or oftener meetings in which people come to the same altar and confess the same things twice a year or annually or more frequently. And he said, this is a Catholicizing. This is a ritualizing.

And it is to be understood by us that a broken and a contrite heart is the only kind God won't despise. And you can't afford to have something in your heart today and not deal with it until next October in the convention. Because between now and then, you are in a position where God can't answer your prayer.

For if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. Therefore, if you are to have any effect in prayer, effectiveness in prayer, the prayer petition to reach out that releases God to work, then there must be a broken and a contrite spirit. Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.

Now, none of us know that this is our state by nature. We were sinners under the sentence of death. We came to Christ.

All the sins of the past were removed as far as the east is from the west. Where then does this occur? Where does this clean hands and pure heart come from? By our constant dependence upon the Lord. And whenever in attitude or in action or in word we grieve God, there at that point, as soon as it's discovered to us, and if we are walking in fellowship with the Lord, oh, how quickly does He cause the hot flush of grief come to our hearts when we've spoken uncharitably or unkindly or unwisely or we've done something.

And if we will at that moment deal, it's so much easier often than having the thing lay in our hearts for days, weeks, and months until what could have been dealt with as an open, clean cut has to be dealt with as a deep-eating ulcer. And so the prayer of brokenness, when you ought to be constantly on praying ground, therefore, when in conversation you speak that which is grieving to the Spirit of God or in action you do that which is grieving to the Spirit of God or in thought allow that which is grieving to the Spirit of God, there, then, at that point, as soon as you're aware of it, deal with it. Do not allow it to infect your heart and your mind and your spirit.

Deal with it, then, for as long as you are in a relationship or in His grief, prayer will be but a complaint that you make toward heaven rather than a release of God to answer. So the prayer of brokenness is a constant attitude. We've said it again and we'll probably repeat it in the future.

As the Dairy Association says, you never outgrow your need for milk, so we would say you never outgrow your need for brokenness. However long we've walked with the Lord and however close we've come to Him and however dear He's become to us, the moment that we grieve Him, that is the moment that we do again our first works of judging it and forsaking it and confessing it, that there might be a restoration to fellowship and a removal of all the hindrances that would keep prayer from being answered. And it's very clear here in this context that this is a prerequisite.

Now we recognize that there is the prayer of thanksgiving. If you are going to be encouraged to pray for the need of the present, you'd better remember the blessings of the past. And every answered prayer of the past is but another lever to your heart to lift you out of a natural slew of despond into that foundation of faith where you can take hold of the Lord for the need of the present.

And therefore there ought to be this matter of thankfulness as a continuous expression of your heart. What I am trying to say is this, that the prevailing prayer is not the product of a particular effort, but it's the result of a vital constant relationship. And so frequently people go on not praying, not needing to pray, as though they were getting along quite right and then all of a sudden their little world collapses and everything has got to be dealt with at once.

We've all experienced this and some of us have experienced it quite recently since the Spirit of God spoke so plainly to us through our brother Guesswine. How imperative it is, absolutely imperative it is, for us to realize and recognize that the Spirit of God is seeking to keep us in a relationship with God wherein prayer, prevailing prayer, is not something that requires a great deal of preparation, but it is the product of a relationship with Him. We're living in that place of fellowship so that we can go immediately at the moment of opportunity into the presence of God.

Thus the prayer of thanksgiving is so dreadfully overlooked and it is so a sin in a sense, for Paul indicted the generation of which he described in his second letter to Timothy in the third chapter saying that there would come a generation that would have the form of godliness and deny the power thereof in perilous times from whom he warned Timothy and all who would like Timothy, please God, to turn away. And he said you'll know this generation because they're unthankful. They're unthankful.

Ingratitude is a sin in their life. That's why in everything we must give thanks. The good that seems good to us and that which seems bad to us because everything that touches us is from Father's hand and nothing can get through that hand that was pierced at Calvary to us unless it's to the end of conforming us to the image of His Son.

Oh, how important it is that we should, if we're to understand prevailing prayer, we should recognize that the blocks of the foundation are gratitude to God, thanksgiving, and we've rendered to Him the sacrifice of our lips, the calves of our lips in thanksgiving. We see through the Psalms over and over again that David's heart was enlarged and enriched and strengthened to believe for the current crisis because he remembered what God had done for Israel. He remembered what He'd done for David and he was living in, therefore, in the good of all that had transpired in the past because he had a thankful heart.

And if you're to understand prevailing prayer, you've got to carry the past with you. This is why allowing disappointment is so disastrous to faith. I've given to you so many times in the past the five deadly D's that absolutely make it impossible for you to pray a prevailing prayer in expectancy.

Disappointment leading to discouragement, to disillusionment, to depression, and to defeat. And these are the steps that take you down to the place where prayer is a mockery as far as effectiveness is concerned. And it all begins with the inability to say thank you to the one thing that you've judged to be unpleasant or hurtful because such ingratitude is an implication that God isn't all you thought He was.

And it strikes at the very character of God. So if you're to have prevailing prayer, at the moment of need there must be preparation for it by thankfulness. Then, of course, there has to be the prayer of praise.

How essential it is that you should remember the distinction between praise and thanksgiving. Praise is gratitude for God's dealing with you in the past. I mean, thanksgiving is gratitude to God for His dealing with you in the past.

But praise is the discovery through the word and by the spirit of the attributes of God. And obviously, if you're to pray in prevailing prayer, you've got to know to whom you come. This is why the word says, must believe that He is, that He is what? That's an incomplete statement, and it's only completed in your need.

He is what? He is what He says He is. And you see in the names of Jehovah in the Old Testament that He said Jehovah is His name, the self-existent one who reveals Himself. But if you see the Jehovah compound names, then you discover something of His nature.

And there you see that He is the Lord our righteousness, and the Lord our victory, and the Lord our provider, and the Lord our shepherd, and the Lord our healer, and the Lord our present one, Jehovah Shammah. In all of these names, He's revealing Himself to us. And it is in the revelation of God to our heart, in praise, as we praise Him for all that we've seen in the word and discovered from the past, and all that God has done, that on the foundation of prayer, there arises this superstructure that can reach right across space into the very presence of God and take hold of Him for the need.

So praise, magnify the name of the Lord is the psalmist's prescription for his own flagging heart. For when he would faint and fear and falter, he would magnify the name of the Lord. And as God became magnified before him, all of the problems receded into proper perspective.

They lost their enormity. Have you ever seen a little chameleon in the ground? You know, if you've got trick photography and mirrors and put that thing on, it would look like one of the enormous prehistoric dragons. Just get it in the right place, wrong place, and see the flame, the little darting tongue, and the color was big enough to sit on your hand.

It wouldn't hurt you if it did. But you just get that in such a way that you photograph it from underneath and put trees and miniature behind it, and you'd be terrorized by your own photography. And this is the strategy of the dragon, the devil.

He tries to get us in such a place that we're looking up at the scales and looking over and seeing the enormous claws and seeing him. But, you know, if you realize that we're seated together in the heavenlies and he's down there wounded with a head wound and only for the little daytime until our Lord comes does he writhe, but he's then defeated. And so it says we praise the Lord and exalt him, that God is magnified, that our problems require the proper perspective.

Then we saw also last week the place of intercessory prayer. Oh, how imperative it is that we realize that the place from which we always pray is not under the circumstances. Our place of prayer is seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

This place that is the source of our intercessory strength and courage is in union with Christ, crucified with him and buried with him and quickened with him and raised with him and seated with him. And all prayer ought to be from that point. But we also have seen in reading from Philippians that the end of all prayer is the glory of God.

Now, if you are to prevail in prayer, this must be clear in your mind and heart. Perhaps it's something very mundane and very necessary. You have your home, you've opened it for visit and ministry and Bible class and the rug in the front room is worn and threadbare and loose and it isn't the testimony that you want it to be.

Now, as James has said, if you ask and you receive not because you ask amiss that you might heap it on your loss. God's not particularly interested in whether you have rug for rug's sake or not. It's not necessary for your eternal welfare.

But if there's a rug and you're involved in the matter of a rug and it's there, what's the grounds of petition here? What is the reason for believing God should be interested enough to some way engineer and operate and move to the point of bringing a rug to your front room? Well, the answer comes from this. The only reason for asking anything of God and expecting the answer to come is the glory of God, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are to therefore have as the prime reason and motive and purpose for all of our praying the glory of God in Christ.

As soon as this is the case, then we don't just begin to ask God for something. We begin to pray about it. Many times when a prayer matter comes to you, rather than saying, Oh Lord, give me this, beware, he might do it.

You know, he just might. And do as he's done with so many of us. He gave us the desires of our heart and he sent leanness to our souls.

And if prayer is nothing but asking and receiving, then it's exceedingly dangerous because it might be God would give you what you found later you really didn't want. And this is why when you're coming to the place of prayer, you've got to have a motivation in prayer, a touchstone, something that's going to measure it. And the measure is, is this to the glory of God? Now we realize that Elijah was praying and this involved the whole nation.

It was a prayer that might have had great repercussions, one we'd be, I can't even pray for no clear weather on the day of the Sunday school picnic, much less that it won't rain for three years and six months. I've naturally, unless I've prayed about it quite a while, because I don't want to get involved with the meteorological plans the Lord has and to upset them for me. But here was Elijah and this was the prayer that he prayed with fasting and he prayed with tears and with great longing.

And you know why? Because he prayed about this thing until he was absolutely convinced that this was to the glory of God, that this was what God wanted, that this was what God needed to get the glory that he deserved from a rebellious people that had sinned against life. And so he had good grounds for his praying. He was on that place where the reason for it wasn't to prove that he was what he said he was or

to vindicate his ministry.

He was interested in the glory of God. And therefore, when you come to your home, there is, everything is to be prayed about. There's nothing that is to be excluded from prayer.

In everything by prayer entitles us to, and not only entitles us, but actually commands us to bathe our entire lives in prayer. Nothing too small to be included, too unimportant. None.

It is really that we might see the other basic principle given here in Colossians the third chapter in the sixteenth verse where we are told that, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. And in verse seventeen, Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, or on account of the reputation of Christ, or for the glory of Christ. And therefore, if you are to prevail in prayer, it's going to be absolutely necessary for you to have so oriented your life and the will of God that the purpose and stream of your life is in His plan and in His will.

But secondly, the particular item that comes before you, rather than at the initial point saying, Oh Lord, give me this. I believe you would find your heart life greatly enriched if you would say, Lord, teach me how to pray about this. Teach me what's involved in this.

Help me to see it clearly. And instead of trying to get to the balcony, as I've said, by standing down here and jumping and then saying, Well, I don't know why God doesn't answer my prayer. I must not have the gift of faith.

If you'd remember that over there we've got some steps. And you just, instead of standing here and trying to get by one leap, just go step by step. Pray about it and get an answer and move on from that, and then move on to the next aspect.

Prevailing prayer isn't always, isn't certainly just a matter of having faith where you can say, Lord do, and He does. But it is that you so related yourself to Him in all that He asks, and you so related yourself to Him in all that you want Him to do, that you recognize that many things that are presented to you for prayer in your own life and in the lives of others are not sufficiently clear that at the first moment of hearing it you can say, Lord do, because He might do, and then you'd later on find out it wasn't really what ought to have been done or you wanted Him to do. And so many times when we pray and the answer doesn't come, instead of giving it up and saying, well this isn't the will of God, we ought to do finally what we should have done firstly, and pray about it.

And to go through the various things and approach it in different ways and pray to this point and to that and to the other. Well, prayer is to be our life. It isn't just something we do, put the switch on, press the button, the car doesn't stop, so we drop the car, give it away, let somebody... No.

It's supposed to run. It will run. And if it isn't running, there's a principle violated.

Now let's discover what the principle is, rectify it, and proceed. And I believe that prevailing prayer is on the basis of principle, not just on the basis of personality. Some people can and some can't.

I believe that God has made it abundantly clear that prayer is to be the breath, life of the child of God, that all of us have the same privilege of any of us, namely being believer priests, free to go into the presence of God. Now let me ask you a question in closing. How long has it been since a particular request that you've offered to the Lord has been answered clearly enough, specifically enough, and near enough to the time

of being prayed that you know you haven't answered a prayer? We've asked in the past, congregations, now tell us the last time you had a clear-cut answer to prayer.

And they've had to go back sometimes 20 years, sometimes 30 years since there's been an answer to prayer. This is wrong, dear friend. You and I ought to recognize that prayer is not only our privilege, but prayer is our responsibility.

And that part of all the other aspects of prayer is to bring us into a relation with Jesus Christ where the prayer of faith, prevailing prayer, is not the unusual, but it's merely the expected outflow of a relationship that He has made our life. Oh, if you can see this. There isn't some Hudson or George Mueller, you know, who didn't have a life of prayer simply because his name began with M, or he was a German that was living in England.

This wasn't the reason why he had this. No, you can't trace it to some accident. George Mueller had a life of prayer because he lived a life of prayer.

He had answers to prayer because he recognized that prayer was his business. Prayer was his life, his responsibility, his privilege. Now, I'm not saying for a moment that you will have the same ministry in prayer that George Mueller had.

I don't suppose that's the case. But you have the same privilege of prayer that George Mueller had. You pray to the same God who is as willing and ready to answer.

And it's therefore we could properly say this, that your total, my total ministry for Christ is going to be in direct ratio to my relationship with Him in prevailing prayer. And therefore, if you have a prayer need, don't just make a little flare of incense, send up, put it on the altar, sort of a tissue, let it burn. Well, the answer didn't come.

Now we'll see what we can do this way. This isn't the attitude at all. Prayer is to become our life.

And these principles of prayer are all related to God's great and glorious purpose that we as church, me and members of His body, should have this high priestly privilege of prayer. Oh, that God can press upon our hearts that prevailing prayer, answered prayer, petitions that are answered, is not to be the unusual, the unexpected, but it's to be the normal outflow of a relationship of a believer, as God wants him to be with the Lord Jesus, a church as God wants it to be. And may it become to your experience, perhaps I could say that the level of faith of the whole body of believers is geared to yours.

How many times we fail to see ourselves a chain. We want all the other links to be strong. And we are not prepared to recognize that part of it, perhaps the faith leverage is no stronger than our own relationship with Him.

So prayer that prevails is not a goal toward which you should look longingly and hopelessly, but it's to be an attitude and an action and a relationship that becomes your constant privilege in Christ. Oh, that the Spirit of God can press upon our hearts the word that we are to always to pray and not to faint. Shall we bow our hearts together? Our Heavenly Father, this tremendously important privilege and this great responsibility that rests upon every one of us in Christ, and how frequently we've lightly carried it, carelessly allowed it, rather than recognizing that this is to be our life.

Ours is to be a life of prayer, just as our Lord Jesus prayed. This was constantly a ministry of prayer. So is ours to be.

Not just asking constantly, but in such a relationship with Thee through prayer, that when Thou dost press upon our hearts needs for which we are to pray, we know that Thou dost hear us. And knowing Thou dost hear us, we know that we have that for which we pray. Lord, teach us to pray, how to pray, what to pray, when to pray, with whom to pray.

And grant, our Father, that Thou wilt get here at all cost a praying church, and Thou wilt have to begin with the one that is speaking to this people in ever deepening and enlarging ways. Lord, make me increasingly a man of prayer and a ministry of prayer. And what I pray for myself, I pray for elders and deacon and deaconesses, and all whom Thou hast joined to what Thou art doing here.

Lord, make us a people of prayer. And every sense and every degree and every manner Thou dost please. And for this we'll give Thee all the praise and the worthy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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