

# Faith Without Works is Useless

## An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

### 22- The Power of Prayer at Work in the New Testament Church- Part 2

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Church; August 22, 2021

#### **James 5:13-18**

**13** Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

**14** Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

**15** and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

**16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

**17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

**18** Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

To the Glory of God

Now last time- I told you that, in the mind of many people, there is Tension between two biblical Truths:

1. The absolute Sovereignty of God
2. The Gift of Prayer

And so, many people reason to themselves, “*If God is absolutely Sovereign; and gets everything He wants; and cannot be defeated- why should I pray? What can I possibly add to God’s Sovereignty? God doesn’t need me to pray- His Will is invincible.*” And so, the tragic Irony is that the glorious and comforting Truth that

God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time; is sometimes seen as a hinderance to the Truth about Prayer in the mind of some people.

But the Reality is that God's Sovereignty should be looked at as both the *Foundation* of our Prayers and the *Cause* of our Prayers being answered. So, while many would ask, "*If God is Sovereign- why pray?*" I would respond with another Question, "*Why pray if God is NOT Sovereign?*"

I mean, the only reason we pray- is because we want God to answer our Prayers. But if God is not Sovereign- then there are situations that God simply could NOT overcome; and our Prayers would go unanswered. Only because God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time can God answer ALL the Prayers that are in accord with His Will.

But the fact that people ask Questions like this- tells me that far too many people in the modern Church really don't understand WHY God gave us the Gift of Prayer in the first place.

We must remember, dear friends, that God is "*Omniscient*"- meaning that Almighty God already knows *everything* about *everything*. So, Prayer is NOT about us giving God new Information. God knows more about whatever we are praying about than we do. So, Prayer is NOT about informing God.

Yet as important as Omniscience is- believing that God simply *knows* about the future is NOT enough. God absolutely knows about the future- but God's Sovereign extends *way beyond* Him simply *knowing* what will happen at a certain time to a certain person. We must understand that Sovereignty also means that God **CONTROLS** the future. He **CAUSES** His Will and His Plan; and His Purpose to **ALWAYS** come to pass- **EXACTLY** as He designed it. And that means that God's Will NEVER fails. His Decree is SURE and CERTAIN.

And that means that when God says that something will happen- it WILL happen. God's Will and His Promises and His Plans and His Decree NEVER fails. We can plan on it. We can depend on it. We can set our clocks by it. We can base our eternal souls on what God has spoken. And neither satan nor the evil choices of wicked people can thwart God's Will.

And so, when God says that something will happen- He will move Heaven and earth to "see to it" that whatever He has promised will occur. And God will use sinner and saint alike. He will allow Evil and cause Good in just the right amounts; and at just the right time- to *assure* that His Promise is kept.

So, while a lot of people seem to understand that God "knows" about the Future- what they hesitate about- is the concept that God doesn't merely know that something will occur in the Future- but He also sovereignly *causes* what He wants to come to pass- *exactly* as He has determined it. And *that* is the part of Sovereignty that seems to conflict with Prayer.

So, we need to back up and think about just what Prayer is. Because if Prayer is NOT about us giving God new Information; and if Prayer is NOT *mainly* about us trying to get God to give us stuff; and if Prayer is also NOT *mainly* about us trying to get God to do things- then what is Prayer for? Why did God create Prayer; and what is the main Goal of Prayer?

And the first thing we need to remember is that Prayer is a “Gift” from God to His people. And that means that this Gift of Prayer is FOR us. God doesn’t need Prayer- but we do. And God doesn’t need Bible Study either. And God doesn’t fast; and God doesn’t need to hear Sermons either. But these are “Means” of God’s Grace to His people.

So, Prayer is a “Help”; and a “Tool” and a “Means” of God’s Grace. So, Prayer helps us. Prayer is a spiritual Tool that we need that helps us to, first, discover and then submit to God’s Will. So, the Gift of Prayer is all about us finding; and knowing; and understanding and submitting to; and finally enjoying God’s Will.

But we have to understand that a Help or a Tool or a Means is NEVER the main thing. These things are NOT ends to themselves. They point to something (or someone) else- that is *better* and *more important* than themselves. So, Prayer is also NOT an end to itself. Prayer is a Tool or a Help or a Means to something else that is better and more important than Prayer itself. But what would that be? Well, in order to find out- let’s go through a progression of Logic for a moment.

The Bible teaches us to pray. And Jesus Himself taught us to pray. So, it is God’s Will that His people pray. But why? I mean, God is already Sovereign. So, why does this absolutely Sovereign God- Who never loses; and Who always gets everything He wants- need me to pray? Well, in **James 5:16b**- the first Pastor of the Church in Jerusalem said,

**... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

... so, the Promise from a God, Who CANNOT lie- is that Prayer accomplishes MUCH! So, one of the reasons God wants His people to pray- is so that MUCH will be accomplished! And that means that there is MUCH that God desires to do- that has not yet been done. And that is one reason why we need to pray.

Okay, but James prefaced the “MUCH” that will be accomplished through Prayer- by saying that it is the “effective Prayer of a Righteous man” that brings that “MUCH” to pass. The effective Prayer of a Righteous Man causes the “MUCH” to become Reality. But *how* does the effective Prayer of a righteous man accomplish the MUCH that God desires to do?

Well, we already know from reading other parts of the Bible that it is NOT the man’s own Righteousness that makes his Prayers to accomplish MUCH. So, the man, who is Righteous- got that way- because God imputed or credited the

spotless Righteousness of Jesus to him. And God did that for that individual- “by Faith alone!”

Now the reason it is vital for us to know that the Righteousness that makes a man “fit for Heaven” is not his own righteousness- is because when a person, who has already experienced the Miracle of the New Birth- is “made righteous” by what God alone does for him- even the Righteousness that allows him entrance into Heaven serves to make him humble. It is NOT a source of his boasting. It is NOT something for which he can take credit. It serves to allow him to stand before God in Heaven- yes! But it also serves to break the “staff of his Pride” and to worship God, Who alone made him Righteous (**Isaiah 10:5-15**).

And that is why his Prayers “**accomplish much.**” Even the Righteousness that gives him an “abundant entrance” into Heaven- works to remove all vestiges of Arrogance and Self-righteousness (**2Peter 1:11**).

So, it is NOT merely a man, who is “*right with God*” (*Righteous*). But it is a man, who has been made “right with God”- whose Righteousness *humbles* him; and whose Righteousness is not his own; and a man, whose ability to stand before God “as Righteous”- *causes* him to *worship* God rather than *rob* God of His Glory.

And a man like that *doesn't* ask; he *doesn't* pray for ANYTHING that is contrary to God's Will. A Righteous man ONLY prays; he ONLY asks- for that which is according to God's Will. And the Apostle John taught this in **1John 5:14&15**:

**14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, 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 which we have asked from Him.**

... and that tells us that the *Will* of God; the *Plan* of God; the *Decree* of God; and the *Purpose* of God is what is “better” and “more important” than Prayer.

So, Prayer is the “Tool” or the “Help” or the “Means” by which the “already established” Will of God will be carried out in the earth. So, the “Will of God” is the “MUCH” that will be accomplished through the effective Prayers of a Righteous Man.

So, once we have been justified- we begin to seek to obey the Bible and Jesus. And one of the first things we learn how to do as believers- is to pray. So, we begin to *ask* God; we *petition* God; we *beg* God; and *cry out* to God. And we ask God to do things *for* us that we *can't* do for ourselves. But we also ask God to do things *in* us; and *through* us; and *to* us and *for* us.

But as we begin to ask God for these things- we notice that we don't always get what we ask for. And, many times, that is a great Mystery. And this absence of God answering our Prayers causes us to ask other Questions such as: “*Why*”

*didn't we get what we asked for? Is God listening? Is He mad at us? Is He busy with other things?"* And some religious groups take advantage of this Mystery by teaching that God is very busy creating other galaxies; and so, He doesn't have time to hear our Prayers. But they also teach that Jesus is also very busy with other important things. So, these religious groups begin to make up false Teachings that say that, since God the Father and God the Son are both very busy- people should go to Jesus' mother with their petitions and requests and prayers. And Jesus loves His mother and so, she will hear our Prayers and take our Prayers to Jesus Who, in turn, will take them to the Father. So, to them, Mary is not only a "Co-Redemptrix" for the Salvation of their souls- she is also a "Mediatrice" between us and Jesus for our Prayers as well.<sup>1</sup>

And, of course, that false Teaching flies in the face of what the Apostle Paul taught in **1 Timothy 2:5&6** that says,  
**5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**  
**6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.**

But aside from the blatant false Teachings that abound concerning why sincere and honest and earnest Prayers are not always answered- we should try to understand what the half-brother of Jesus taught in **James 4:2b&3**:

**... You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

Now this statement by James gives us insight into what John meant when he told us to ONLY pray according to the Will of God. So, praying, "**with wrong motives**" is us praying *contrary* to God's Will. So, asking (or even *wanting*) ANYTHING contrary to God's Will- is the "**wrong motive**". Why? Because God's Will ALWAYS glorifies God; while "**wrong motives**" glorifies our own carnal and sinful Desire (Pleasures) to *rob* God of His Glory and give that Glory to *ourselves*.

So, the thing that is *better* and *higher* and *more important* than the Means of Prayer- yet is brought about BY the Means of Prayer- is God being glorified by His Will being done or carried out in the earth.

And that is why we are to pray "*according to God's Will*". But we are to pray ONLY according to God's Will. In other words, the ONLY Prayers that God answers are those Prayers that are according to His Will. And that Principle

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<sup>1</sup> *The Catholic Catechism*

reveals one of the main reasons God gave us the Gift of Prayer: So, we would learn to humble ourselves to only *want* and *ask for* that which is- God's Will.

You see, God has *already* determined what He wants. Everything God desires was decreed *before* He ever made the Universe. So, God is NOT trying to figure out what His Will is. He already knows. And what He wants- is already *permanently* established. And so, the only thing left to happen is the "*fulfillment*" or the "*bringing into Reality*"- of that which God has already determined will be.

So, God has NO new Desires. His Will and Purpose and Plan and Decrees are ALL laid out. They are *fixed* Realities. And they NEVER change. And so, one of the Purposes as to why God gave us the Gift of Prayer- is so that we will learn how to *limit* our "wanting" and our "asking"- to ONLY that which God has already determined will be.

Now that all sounds great. But it raises two Questions:

1. How should we pray when we don't know what God's Will is?
2. Why do we need to ask God to do something that He has already said He will do?

... and we tend to blow off the first Question by simply saying, "*Just preface your Prayer with a statement like, 'If it be Your Will'*". And since we don't know what God's Will is- that will take care of it.

Yet when we simplify profound Issues like that- we then tend to *muffle* and even *mitigate* the Earnestness and Urgency of our Asking. Because it is very hard to earnestly pray about something that you really, really want God to do- while you're *hedging* your Passion with the thought in the back of your mind that what you are asking for- might not be God's Will.

So, my answer to the first Question is- you *ask*. And you ask *earnestly*. And you ask *believing*. And you ask *hoping*. And you ask because you *really want* God to give that thing or do that thing. But instead of *muffling* and *mitigating* your Earnestness- you revive your Love and Devotion and Admiration of God.

Because God loves people MORE than you do. And God wants to save people MORE than you do. And God wants to give Answers that are Good and Lovely and Beautiful and Helpful MORE than you want to receive them. So, God is *BETTER* than the Answer to your Prayer. And God is MORE Benevolent; and Kind; and Merciful; and Gracious; than you can possibly imagine. And God's Will for that situation; and that individual; and that circumstance is Wiser and Better and filled with more Love than anything you could possibly want.

Okay, but how do we answer the *second* Question? That takes a little more time. But *however* we answer this Question MUST NOT come from our own ideas; or our own thoughts about this subject. But we should answer this Question

by looking intently at what God the Holy Spirit made sure was recorded for us on the pages of sacred Writ.

So, why should we ask God to do things that He already said He was going to do? And there are at least three situations recorded in the Bible that give us the Answer:

1. Hezekiah's Prayer
2. John's Prayer
3. Daniel's Prayer

... and we looked at Hezekiah's Prayer last time. So, today, I want to look at the other two.

### **John's Prayer**

When the Apostle John was sent to the island of Patmos to die- God the Son revealed a portion of God's Will to him. And in **The Revelation 22:20a**, Jesus said,

**He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly."...**

So, here, Jesus reveals that it is God's Will for Him to return to this earth- "**QUICKLY**". Now the word, "**Quickly**" seems hard for us to grasp- as we read it over 2,000 years later. And there is an Answer to that- but for this Sermon, let's concentrate on the fact that right here- John is told that Jesus IS coming back. "*I AM coming!*"

Now Jesus didn't say, "*I would like to come back*"; or "*I want to come back*"; or "*It might be good if I came back.*" Instead, He made a Statement of Fact- a Revelation of the invincible Will of the invincible God, "*I AM coming!*"

So, now John knows what God's Will is- concerning Jesus' Return. And John fully believes and teaches that God is absolutely Sovereign and that God's Will is going to come to pass- EXACTLY as God has decreed.

So, how does John *respond* to this Revelation of God's Will? Does the Apostle merely rejoice that now he knows what God's Will is? Since it is God's Will for Jesus to come back; and NOTHING can thwart what God has said He is going to do- does John respond to the knowledge of God's Will by sitting back and relaxing? No. So, what does John do? He asks. He prays. And in **The Revelation 22:20b**, John prays,

**... Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Now this is very strange. Why is John praying about the very thing that Jesus just told Him He was going to do? This *seems* to be *redundant* and entirely *unnecessary*. This *seems* to be a complete waste of energy. Why pray about what God said He was going to do anyway? Was John *denying* God's Sovereignty here?

Now before we get too far into this- we need to remember that not only is Jesus' Revelation that He is coming back- inspired; but John's Prayer that he prayed in *response* to that Revelation- is also inspired. And this response is also *inerrant* and *infallible*. And so, *however* this response by this Apostle might appear to you to be a complete waste of words- we need to remember that John's response is part of the Scriptures.

And that means that the way John responded is right. It is correct. It is godly. And this is in the Bible to show us how we are to respond to something that God says He is going to do anyway. We are supposed to pray and ask God to do the very thing that God says He is going to do!

## **Daniel's Prayer**

In **Daniel 9**- this man writes about being forcefully taken into captivity by a pagan nation called, "Babylon". And among all the confusion and injustice and pain and suffering that is associated with being raided by a godless country and forcefully removed from your home and transported- against your will- to live among people who don't know God- Daniel began to do some research.

And after being a captive in a strange land- Daniel- who is now an old man- who has lived the majority of his life in Babylon and NOT in Israel- uncovered the writings of the Prophet Jeremiah. And in **Daniel 9:1&2** we read:

**1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—**

**2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.**

Now look at the setting here. We can tell by the fact that Daniel said that it was the first year of Darius' reign- that the Jews have already spent a little more than 68 years in their Babylonian Captivity. And now he understands, by reading what Jeremiah wrote- way before any of this happened- at least two things:



1. It was God's Will that His people be taken captive into Babylon because of the hardness of their heart.
2. It is God's Will that they be released from their captivity after 70 years has expired.

... which means that in a little less than two years- it is God's Will that the Jews would be released and go back to Israel.

So, they have already served the *majority* of the Divine Punishment. And now, in just about 1-1/2 years- God is going to set them free! So, isn't this a cause for Celebration? Shouldn't Daniel respond to this Revelation of God's Will by rejoicing and dancing in the streets? I mean God is Sovereign, right? And God's Will CANNOT be denied, right? And so, God is going to do EXACTLY as He revealed to Jeremiah, right? So, it just seems logical that Daniel would be happy about this Revelation. It just seems that Joy and Celebration would be high on Daniel's list as to how he should respond to this amazing news.

So, how did Daniel respond?

### **Daniel 9:3**

**So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.**

So, Daniel responded to the Promise from God that He was going to release them from their Captivity in less than two years from now by Prayer and Fasting? What? Why was this Daniel's response?

Now, again, this is very strange. Why is Daniel praying and fasting about the very thing that God revealed to Jeremiah He was going to do? This seems to be redundant and entirely unnecessary. This seems to be a complete waste of energy. Why pray about what God said He was going to do anyway? Was Daniel *denying* God's Sovereignty here?

Now before we get too far into this- we need to remember that not only is God's Revelation through Jeremiah that He IS going to release His people after 70 years- inspired; but Daniel's Prayer that he prayed in *response* to that Revelation- is also inspired. And Daniel's fasting; and his mourning; and his repenting- is also inspired.

So, how Daniel responded to God's revealed Will; and all that Daniel did; and all that He said; and how he prayed; and how he fasted; and mourned; and repented- everything is fully inspired. And that means that Daniel's response- is also *inerrant* and *infallible*.

And so, *however* this response by this Prophet might appear to you to be a complete waste of words- we need to remember that Daniel's response to knowing God's Will- is part of the Scriptures.

And that means that the way Daniel responded is right. It is correct. And it is godly. And this is in the Bible to show us how we are to respond to something that God says He is going to do anyway. We are supposed to pray and ask God to do- the very thing that God says He is going to do!

Now as we ponder this- we need to think about the Reality that God has no need to change His Mind about His Plans- because what He determined to do (before He created the Universe)- is perfect. And God will "*see to it*"<sup>2</sup> that what He decreed will happen *exactly* as He determined it would be.

So, Prayer CANNOT be about us informing God about anything. God knows more about what we *need* (and *want*) than we do. So, to think that we are giving God some information that He doesn't already have- borders on blasphemy.

But in addition to that- God is much MORE willing to give *to* us; and do *for* us- than we are willing to receive. So, we don't have to try to "talk God" into being nice to us; or try to *convince* Him to do things that He is already inclined to do- with or without us.

But Prayer is also NOT mainly about us simply giving God a laundry list of all the things we want Him to give to us- either.

So, what we should get out of this is,

**"The absolute Sovereignty of God, over every detail of our lives (and everybody else's) is the very Hope and Foundation for our Prayers."**

God's certain and sure Promises (that CAN'T be defeated)- should NEVER become Excuses for us to relax and pray *less*. God's Promises should give us Confidence and Urgency to pray MORE; and to pray HARDER before God's Throne! So, God's people know that they do not draw near to God *without* a Promise- but they also *refuse* to stay away from Prayer *because* of what God has promised.

But here's the Tension. God made His Promise, and that Promise WILL be fulfilled! And NOTHING can stop it! So, why not simply rest and let God to do what He already said He would do? Why should we pray? And here is the ONLY Answer that God gives in His Word:

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<sup>2</sup> God "seeing to something" is what "Providence" is all about. "Providence" comes from two words: "*pro*" and "*vide*", which means, "*to see before*". And this is NOT about God seeing something or knowing about something before the time. It is about God- acting as a Sovereign- "seeing *to* something" or, in other words, "making something happen." So, in **Genesis 22:8** when Abraham said, "**God will 'provide' for Himself a lamb...**" and Abraham called the name of that place, "**The Lord will provide**" (**Genesis 22:14**), Abraham was acknowledging the "seeing to it" and the "working out" of what God had already decreed would happen.

## **All that God does in the earth- He does by answering the Prayers of His people**

Now that's NOT some clever idea that I came up with last Thursday. That Statement is the correct exegesis of Hezekiah's; and John's; and Daniel's Prayers. God carries out His Plans in the earth- ONLY- by answering the Prayers of His people!

Now God certainly didn't have to set it up like this- but the sacred Scriptures teach that He did. So, the ONLY way that God moves in the earth- is by answering the Prayers of His people.

Okay, but what if we don't pray? Then God will NOT move. But because it IS God's Will to do certain things in the earth- God WILL sovereignly CAUSE His people to pray! So, that by answering their Prayers- His Will is carried out!

Now if you stop and think about it- we can all testify that people were praying that God would save our souls- even as we are praying for God to save others. But even though God chose to save us before the foundation of the world- one of the Means by which He did save us- was by answering their Prayers- even as some of our prayers will also be answered! And many of us can also testify that, periodically, we are "burdened" to pray for someone or something. That is God- *causing* us to pray- because He wants to do certain things, but He has set certain Means into play by which He carries out that which is His Will.

In other words, BECAUSE God desires to move in certain ways in the earth- God will sovereignly CAUSE His people to ask Him to do- that which He has *already said* He *wants* to do! And this is what James meant when he wrote this in **James 5:16b-18:**

**16 ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

**17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.**

**18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

Neither Hezekiah; nor John; nor Daniel; nor Elijah assumed that their Prayers were redundant or unnecessary. Rather, they assumed that their Prayers actually mattered. And that God meant to accomplish His Will- *through their Prayers!*

William Gurnall, a seventeenth-century English Pastor, explained how Prayer *magnifies* the sovereignty of God, when he said,

“Prayer is a humble appeal from our impotency to God’s omnipotence. . . We give Him *the Glory of His Sovereignty* and Dominion when we acknowledge that He is not only able to procure for us what we ask, but can give us a right to, and the blessing of, what He gives.”<sup>3</sup>

So, neither Hezekiah; nor John; nor Daniel; nor Elijah *robbed* God of His Sovereignty by pleading for His intervention. Rather they all exalted God’s all-powerful, all-wise, all-purposeful Commitment to do *precisely* what He had planned and promised to do- and what would *most* glorify His Name. So, these men knew, and treasured the Fact that God does His Work in the earth- through our Prayers.

Not only was Hezekiah not deterred from praying by his knowledge of the Sovereignty of God, but when he prays, he runs directly *into* God’s absolute Sovereignty.

### **Isaiah 37:15-18**

**15 Hezekiah prayed to the Lord saying,**

**16 “O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.**

**17 “Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God.**

**18 “Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands,**

**20 “Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, Lord, are God.”**

The Sovereignty of God does not compromise or jeopardize Prayer- quite the opposite. The absolute Sovereignty of God- over all the kingdoms of the earth; and over every detail of our lives- is the very Hope and Foundation for our praying. Because if God is *not* Sovereign, but simply waits on the whims of kings and armies and circumstances, then our Prayers may well be in vain. But the Bible teaches clearly and repeatedly that our God waits on no one.

### **Proverbs 21:1**

**The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.**

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<sup>3</sup>*The Christian in Complete Armour*; page 299

Our God turns those channels; and splits the seas; and opens spiritually blind eyes *through* Prayer. God makes our humble, dependent, expectant Cries for Help- the very Instruments of what He does in the world.

We should assume that God has no Plans for the world that does not involve the Prayers of His people. His Will *will* be done whether *I* pray or not. But His Will *will NOT* be done without *somebody* praying- because God has chosen to make Prayer absolutely *indispensable!* The sovereign God hangs the entire Universe on the Prayers of His people, and then *inspires* and *empowers* us to pray. God works *in our praying*,

**“both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12&13).**

Yet I have also come to realize that the Certainty of God’s Promises are NEVER an excuse for me to relax and pray *less*. Rather they give me Hope and Confidence that God will ALWAYS do that which is His Will. And that Truth gives me a sense of *urgency* before His Throne- to pray *harder* and more often.

You see, I don’t always know what God’s Will is. So, I have to pray a lot- *searching and seeking* to find God’s Will, through my Petitions.

Yet our great hope in Prayer is NOT to change what God has planned, but to actually *bring about* what God has planned. So, we *do not*; and we *must not* strive to change the Heart of God. But we SHOULD desire to *draw out* God’s Heart in our Circumstances. Martin Luther said,

“Prayer is not overcoming God’s Reluctance but laying hold of His Willingness.”

So, when we pray, we do not change the Mind of God as if He might have chosen wrongly. We *act out* the infinite Wisdom of God, in the midst of all the Brokenness in front of us. And we welcome the inscrutable Goodness He had always planned to do from the very beginning *through our Prayers*. A.W. Pink warned us,

“There is *no need* whatever for God to change his designs or alter his purpose, for the all-sufficient reason that these were framed under the influence of perfect goodness and unerring wisdom. . . . To affirm that God *changes* his purpose is either to impugn his goodness or to deny his eternal wisdom.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Sovereignty of God*; page 168

Pink went on to say,

“Here then is the design of prayer: not that God’s will may be *altered*, but that it may be *accomplished* in his own good time and way”<sup>5</sup>

We never change God’s eternal Plan when we pray, yet we are called to pray, and pray expectantly, for great change- in us; and in the world around us. For example, we are to pray that the sick would be healed (**The Acts 28:8**). We are to pray that the lost would be saved (**Matthew 9:37&38; The Acts 26:18**). And we are to pray for all kinds of change in our own hearts and bodies; and in our neighbors; and in our families; and in our workplaces; and in our nation; and in the world. But we are NEVER to pray for any change in God. And so, in all our praying- we have one Prayer that is a Banner over all of it-

### **Mark 14:36b**

**... not what I will, but what You will.**

God was utterly Sovereign in Assyria’s rise; and in John’s Persecution that put him on Patmos; and in Babylonia’s brutal enslavement of God’s people; and in Ahab and Jezebel’s cruel reign; and in the Taliban’s slaughter of the Church in Afghanistan. And God will be every bit as Sovereign in calling them, and every other Evil, to account on that day (**Romans 12:19**). The most fearsome armies we can imagine are as but feeble livestock before the God to whom we pray. They all go *where* He pleases, *when* He pleases, and ONLY as He pleases.

Part of our Discomfort with God’s Sovereignty over Evil lies in the fact that we assume that we know better than He does- that we can imagine and carry out a better Plan than the one He is unveiling. And part of what Salvation does to a person is to stop them from thinking like that. Because, periodically, God does not mean for us to understand His sovereign Plan at every turn. And when God’s Plan is a Mystery to us- it is God acting as a wise Parent and treating us as His dear, immature little children, with whom He has no intention of giving us all the information. The Reality is that we will spend the majority of our lives completely clueless to the next surprising twist and turn that God’s infinite Wisdom will take.

But while the Owner and Creator of the Universe does not always mean for us to understand His Plan- He DOES mean for the glimpses we get of His Sovereignty to humble us and make us awestruck; and to make us put our hands over our mouths; and make us fall before Him; as they inspire us to run *TO Him- NEVER* away from Him, and certainly to NEVER rise up against Him!

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid; page 172

God means for us to see the destruction of Assyria's Evil; and the collapse of the Roman Empire; and the fall of Babylon; and the end of Ahab's Sins; and the even greater Fury of His righteous Judgment against ALL Wickedness; as a means for us to fall on our faces- as we pray and live in desperate Dependence on Him- never presuming on His Grace and Mercy.

After Hezekiah prayed, Isaiah said this in **Isaiah 37:21b&22a**

**... Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him...**

Mark these words, brothers and sisters,

***Because you have prayed to Me.***

And that tells us that Prayer is NOT an afterthought in God's Plan. Prayer is not a "*Plan B*"; or a "*spare tire*" in case Life breaks down. Under God, Prayer runs the world. For sure, God does countless Miracles in the world every day that no one ever mentioned specifically in Prayer- I mean, after all God ...

**... upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3b).**

... but God does His most *important* Work in the world, and in our lives, *precisely* because one or more of His children asked Him to.

God fought for Israel because Hezekiah prayed. And in doing so, God did *exactly* what He had always planned to do- *through Prayer!*

**Isaiah 37:36-38**

**36 Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.**

**37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh.**

**38 It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.**

God did what Hezekiah could not do without God. And Hezekiah did what none of us can do without Prayer. And God did precisely what God planned to do *through Prayer*. And that is why James said this in verse 15:

**and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.**

James- inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak on behalf of God- promises that the wonderful Results of the Elders' Comfort and Ministry of Intercession is that their “**prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick.**” Again, just as was true of **James 5:13**- the translation of “**sick**” here is misleading and *not* the best translation of the Greek word, *kamnō*- which in its only other New Testament usage (**Hebrews 12:3**) clearly does *not* refer to physical illness.

### **Hebrews 12:3**

**For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary (*kamnō*) and lose heart.**

As has been noted, James speaks here of a *spiritual* Restoration of weak, defeated believers- *NOT* physical Healing. Nor does the Greek word, *sozō* (**restore**) necessarily refer to physical healing either. This word is most commonly translated as "save" throughout the New Testament.

It also makes no sense to suggest that physically sick people could receive Salvation due to the prayers of Elders when the Scriptures are clear that Salvation is by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone. The idea that James is teaching here is that the Elders' Prayers will deliver weak, defeated believers from their spiritual weakness and “**restore**” them to spiritual wholeness. But even at that- those Prayers are ineffectual alone- James says that it is the “**Lord**” Himself Who “**will raise up**” or encourage the weak.

The Greek word that was translated into English as “**raise up**” (*egeirō*) also means "to awaken" or "to arouse." So, James is teaching here that through the righteous Prayers of godly Elders- God will “**restore**” His battered sheep's Enthusiasm and Trust in Him.

Now as an important foot note- James's also says that “**if**” one of these spiritually weak believers “**has committed sins, they will be forgiven him**”. And this provides further Evidence that this entire Passage has NOTHING to do with physical Healing. The Bible nowhere teaches that all Sickness is the direct result of an individual's Sins. Spiritual defeat, however, is often both the *Cause* and *Result* of individual Sins. And when that is the case- the Antidote is to *always* confess those Sins to God and obtain His Forgiveness.



### **Psalm 32:5**

**I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD "; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.**

David's son Solomon- the wisest man in the world- echoed that comforting Truth:

### **Proverbs 28:13**

**He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.**

... and in the familiar words of **1John 1:9**,

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

... so, if Sin has *contributed to* or *resulted from* the spiritual Weakness and Defeat of a fallen believer- James teaches here that that sin **will be forgiven him** when he cries out to God for Forgiveness. The Elders can encourage him to confess; help him to discern his Sins; and join their Prayers for his Forgiveness to his. And that is an essential Element of their "Ministry of Restoration".

### **Galatians 6:1**

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**

And now we come to the *amazing* part of this Passage- the part where James says,

### **James 5:16b-18**

**16 ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

**17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.**

**18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

Now sadly, I won't be able to finish this today. But here, James reminds both the Elders and all genuine believers- by way of encouraging them- that this kind of Prayer is very **effective**. Now the English word, "**effective**" is translated from the Greek word, from which our English word "*energy*" derives (*energeoe*). So, James tells us here that the Prayer of a righteous man "**can accomplish much**".

And Lord willing, I'll finish this Passage next time.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.