

# The Prayer

## 1 Kings 18:41-46

**How are you doing in the area of private prayer?** I do not ask this question to make you feel uneasy or guilty. I hope your own personal examination regarding your prayer life will yield some good results.

If you find yourself neglectful of private prayer, perhaps the question will awaken you to the valuable treasure of intimate prayer.

If you find yourself distracted in private prayer, perhaps the question awaken you to the joyful potential of focused praying.

If you find yourself discouraged in private prayer, perhaps the question will strengthen you to persevere when you are tempted to lose heart.

If you find yourself rejoicing in private prayer, perhaps you will thank the LORD for His kind work in your heart.

Jesus often teaches that private prayer is essential to the life of our soul.

*“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”*  
18:1

**Clearly, always praying and not losing heart is a challenge for everyone.** So Jesus teaches a parable to urge us to persevere in our praying.

*He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’”*

Here is a judge who is not really interested in true justice. He is a cold man who only cares for himself. In **her desperation, this widow stands directly before this godless judge day after day after day, telling him how she was been abused.**

The judge brushes her off. Yet she does not slink home discouraged, thinking, *“It is no use. This judge does not care. This judge clearly favors my oppressor. I will never get anywhere with him.”* No. This widow perseveres in her pleading.

*For a while he refused (to grant her justice), but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”* Luke 18:4-5

Now Jesus drives the lesson of the story home to us:

*And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:6–8 ESV)*

**Jesus points our attention who our righteous God who does care about justice, but more importantly, He cares about us.** If perseverance in pleading moves the heart of an unrighteous judge, how much more will perseverance in our pleading move the heart of our Father who loves us so much!

We open our Bibles to 1 Kings 18:41-46 this morning.

**Central Idea: Pray, pray, pray. Never give up. Do not yield to discouragement, doubt, or delay. Pray and keep on praying. We have a Father in heaven who hears us!**

**How do we persevere in our praying? Let us look to God's working in Elijah to discover the answer!**

**CONTEXT:** After three years of drought, Elijah challenges the people of Israel to make a decision between the LORD God and Baal:

*And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1Ki 18:21 ESV)*

Elijah then confronts the prophets of Baal with a contest on Mt. Carmel. Elijah prays and God sends fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice. The people of Israel cry out, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" **Elijah undoubtedly feels the thrill of victory!** We pick up our story in verse 41:

*And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. (1Ki 18:41-42 ESV)*

Notice that Elijah does not gloat and throw a whimsical party after the victory on Mt. Carmel. **He once again gets on his knees before God in prayer.**

He knows that the spiritual battle is not over. He still needs the LORD to act. So he separates himself from the crowds by hiking his way up to the top of Mt. Carmel and there he pleads with the LORD.

**PROTEST:** But the text does not tell us that Elijah prayed on top of that mountain. We are only told that he bows himself down on the earth and puts his face between his knees. Yes. Good observation.

Thankfully we have James to unwind this story for us.

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, 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 heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” (James 5:16–18 ESV)*

Three and a half years earlier, Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain. Now that Israel had repented of her idolatry, Elijah asks the LORD to send rain. **Elijah knows a simple truth:**

**Truth: Our sovereign LORD works powerfully through the prayers of His people.**

In faith, Elijah tells King Ahab that there is a sound of the rushing of rain before any physical evidence of rain is seen or heard. The sound is a spiritual sound . . . a confidence in the LORD to answer his prayer.

Remember Elijah has very recently experienced the powerful working of the LORD through prayer.

*36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”” (1 Kings 18:36–39 ESV)*

**Five Foundations of Persevering Prayer:**

**Foundation #1: God’s gracious provision**

**Prayer is possible only through of the saving grace of the LORD upon a sinful soul.** Early in this story, we are told of Elijah's standing before the LORD.

*"Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."" (1 Kings 17:1 [ESV](#))*

*"And Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today."" (1 Kings 18:15 [ESV](#))*

James tells us that Elijah is "a man with a nature like ours." **This means that Elijah has the same problem that you and I have . . . he has sinned against the LORD.** Yet we are told that he stands in the presence of the holy LORD. Our sin places a wall between us and God . . . a wall so high that we cannot climb it.

*"but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." (Isaiah 59:2 [ESV](#))*

**Question: How is Elijah the sinner able to stand before the holy God and be heard by Him?**

Answer: Only the saving grace of God. In short, Elijah is a converted man. God's kind provision of forgiveness opens a door to real relationship with God. He is a man who confesses his sin before the LORD and who looks to God's grace to give him the gift of forgiveness.

**Truth: If we wish to begin in a life of prayer, we must begin with personal conversion. Only God's washing us of sin enables us to stand before the LORD in prayer.** Without forgiveness, God does not hear our prayers.

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, **(the One who shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sin)**. . . Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14–16 [ESV](#))*

**No one dare draw near to God without Jesus at His side.** Yet when Jesus is our High Priest, we can approach the Father as boldly as Jesus does. He is our sinless sacrifice who washes us with His blood. Jesus is our righteousness . . . our

credentials. He presents us faultless before God's presence with exceeding joy. He is our access to God.

Consider the evidence of Elijah's conversion:

*"And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God?" (1 Kings 17:18 [ESV](#))*

*"And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."" (1 Kings 17:24 [ESV](#))*

**Seven times Elijah is called a "man of God". (29 times for Elisha)**

**What does it mean to be a "man of God"?** This title points not to a person's physical birth, natural talents, religious discipline or moral commitments. The title points to a relationship with the living God. **A man of God is one who knows God, who belongs to God, who obeys God, who listens to God.**

**How does one become a man/woman of God?** By grace through faith! Elijah was not born a "man of God". No one is. Elijah experienced the working of God's Spirit to make his soul alive to God. **Elijah's praying begins with his conversion.**

**Application: Am I converted? Am I a man/woman of God? Has God changed my heart through faith in Jesus?**

**When a person is made alive by the Spirit, he/she begins to pray. Prayer is the fruit of a converted soul!**

If you are neglecting private prayer, it is possible that the reason is because your Christianity is external and not spiritual. Do not quickly dismiss this potential reality. Seek the LORD while He may be found!

**Foundation #2: God's loving invitation**

**Before Elijah speaks to God, God speaks to Elijah. God is always the one who takes the initiative in establishing relationship with man.**

*"And the word of the LORD came to him:" (1 Kings 17:2 [ESV](#))*

*"Then the word of the LORD came to him," (1 Kings 17:8 [ESV](#))*

God's word always precedes prayer. How necessary God's Word is to our praying! If you wish to grow in your life of prayer, first grow in your listening to God's Word.

It is through God's word that we come to know WHO it is to whom we pray.

It is through God's Word that we know HOW it is that we can pray.

It is through God's Word that we come to know WHAT it is that we ought to pray.

It is through God's Word that we come to know that we are INVITED to pray.

God's Word provides our invitation! Listen to Jesus.

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7-11 [ESV](#))*

Illustration: Many years ago, our Congressman invited me to come to the National Day of Prayer in Washington D.C. We were given a beautifully embossed invitation. As we stood in line waiting to get into the room, I thought, "Who am I to be part of a meeting with many world leaders and important people?" I felt the invitation and it gave me confidence. If someone asked me, what right do you have to be here. I would show my invitation. I belonged here on that day, not because of my personal importance, but because I was given an invitation!

**Application: Respond each day to Jesus' loving invitation to talk with Him about everything!**

**Foundation #1: God's gracious provision**

**Foundation #2: God's loving invitation**

**Foundation #3: God's intimate communion**

"And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees." (1 Kings 18:42 [ESV](#))

**At this moment of need, Elijah went to a quiet place to commune with the LORD in prayer.** On top of the mountain Elijah talks with God one on one away from

the distraction and commotion of the throng. I do not think that this was an uncommon thing for Elijah. This appears to be his practice. **This was not the first time, Elijah got alone with God to talk. I believe that this was his habit.**

### **Remember when the widow's boy became sick and died in chapter 17?**

*And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed.<sup>20</sup> And he cried to the LORD (1Ki 17:19-20 ESV)*

**It seems natural for Elijah to take the dead child into his room to talk with God about a miracle.** Elijah's relationship with God is intimate, close and precious.

When we have important matters to **discuss with a spouse**, a son or daughter or a close friend, do we not often try to find a quiet place where we know we won't be disturbed by other people or interrupted by life's distractions in order to focus on our conversation? This conversation is going to be important and we want to give our full attention to it. **If we practice this in our important discussions with people, why would we not practice this principle with God?**

Jesus' first words to us on the subject of prayer encourages us toward finding a quiet place to talk with God.

**But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Mat 6:6 ESV)**

**Jesus recommends a solitary place where we can unclutter our minds and give focus to our conversation with God. I think much of our praying falls off the tracks at this very point. We fail to give our full attention to our praying.** Satan will do anything to distract us from our conversation with God. The moment we sit down to pray we think of a dozen other duties we need to fulfill.

**"Satan will do anything to keep you from praying even if it means adjusting the window shade." D. L. Moody**

**Even** Jesus felt the need to get to a quiet place when He communed with His Father. Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus would often . . . withdraw to desolate places and pray. (Luk 5:16 ESV)

**Friend, do you have a quiet place to retreat where you can get away from distractions in order to focus on the Lord and calm your heart and gather your thoughts before Him?** I think much of our praying is ineffective because we allow it to be interrupted and distracted. I know that separating yourself can be difficult, especially if you are a busy mom or dad with little ones. But it is worth it!

**Principle: Prayer is not a series of cold requests made to a stranger. Prayer is first and foremost an intimate encounter with God. Prayer is fellowship with our Father.** I love Jesus' words in Revelation 3:

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20 [ESV](#))*

We are right to think of our time in prayer as a time of dinner with Jesus. Not a formal, religious kind of experience. But a warm, natural, personal kind of experience.

**In the Gospel, God offers to be our very best friend . . .** the dearest in heaven and on earth to us. A friend of the highest quality, a friend of the sweetest measure, a friend of constant communion. Yes, He is our King and our LORD. He deserves our highest praise and reverent worship. But He is also our loving Father to whom we can cry out, "Abba!!"

**Truth: Prayer is simply talking to God as a friend talks to a revered friend. Friendship with God opens the door to prayer, but then prayer deepens the quality of the friendship.**

*As I considered Jesus' invitation for us to dine with Him, seven qualities of intimate communion with God came to my mind:*

1. *Personal*
2. *Humble*
3. *Believing*
4. *Specific*
5. *Direct*
6. *Engaging*
7. *Interactive*

**Foundation #1: God's gracious provision**

**Foundation #2: God's loving invitation**

**Foundation #3: God's intimate communion**

**Foundation #4: God's past faithfulness**

Elijah had witnessed God's personal intervention in his life:

- The drought that began with Elijah's praying
- Ravens who fed him.
- Widow's oil and flour.
- Protection from Queen Jezebel for three years.
- Widow's son made alive.
- Fire from heaven upon the bull at Mt Carmel.

On the basis of God's past faithfulness, Elijah KNOWS that God will not fail him now. So he prays.

**Truth: Reflecting on God's past faithfulness to answer our prayers gives energy to our present prayers.**

**Application: Friends, take some time to reflect on God's past faithfulness. Recall to your mind the many times that the LORD has answered your prayers.**

Begin with scripture . . . remember how God has acted in recorded redemptive history.

Illustration: Malakai . . . Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. What do they teach us? That God will stand with us when we stand for Him!

Then reflect over your life. Most of us have poor memories and do not write down God's faithful actions. Take some time with friend or spouse to think of all the ways God has answered your prayers!

**Recall the times God delivered you from danger or fears.**

**Recall the times God provided for you in a time of need.**

**Recall the times God led you when you did not know what to do.**

**Foundation #1: God's gracious provision**

**Foundation #2: God's loving invitation**

**Foundation #3: God's intimate communion**

**Foundation #4: God's past faithfulness**

**Foundation #5: God's sure promises**

**Notice that Elijah based his prayer on a promise from God.** Look again at the promise that God gave to Elijah in 18:1:

*After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." (1Ki 18:1 ESV)*

God promised Elijah that rain would come after Elijah finished meeting with King Ahab. This promise was the motivation for Elijah's praying. **PROTEST:** But if God promised rain, it seems that Elijah would not need to pray. Ahhh, we miss the purpose of God's promises.

**Truth: God's promises are not given so that we can presume upon God, but so that we can pray with confidence!**

God's promises help us to know WHAT to pray for.

God's promises help us to persevere as we pray!

Elijah did not think, "Since God made a promise, I do not have to pray." Elijah thought, "Since God made a promise, I can pray with confidence!"

**Application: Pray with a Bible open and specific promises in review.**

**If you are praying for the forgiveness** of some sin that you committed, you might pray: Lord, your Word promises in that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**If you are praying for an unbelieving friend to come to Jesus as Savior**, you might pray, "Lord, your Word teaches me that you desire for all to come to repentance and that you sent your Son into the world to save sinners and that you miraculously open the eyes of those blinded by sin your glory. Here is my friend, whom You love, please open his eyes to see your glory in the face of Jesus. Save him, Lord!"

**If you have a worry that is robbing you of your peace**, you might pray: Lord, you have promised to be my Shepherd so that I would not want; you promised to supply all my need according to your riches in Jesus . . . Lord, please help me to know the faithfulness of your provision so that your peace would guard my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus.

I challenge you to try this kind of praying this week. I believe it will give you greater confidence and clarity as you pray. **When we pray with God's promises in view, we have absolute confidence that we are asking in accordance with His will and that He will answer us.**

**If we have a promise from God, we are right to persevere in our praying to God.**

*And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you. (1Ki 18:43-44 ESV)*

**Elijah kept looking for God to fulfill his promise and did not give up when an answer did not immediately come.** He prayed and then saw nothing. He prayed and then and then saw nothing. He prayed and then saw nothing. He prayed and then saw nothing. He prayed and then saw nothing. He prayed and then saw nothing. He prayed and then saw nothing. Six times he made petition and six times nothing happened! Have you not had experience with this?

**Truth: God is not reluctant, nor forgetful, nor negligent, nor unwilling to answer our prayers, but He does often delay His answers. The LORD knows that our perseverance in prayer brings more glory to Him and more joy to us!**

It is for **our good that He delays** His hand. Pray and keep on praying! God is not tired of your voice. He loves you and invites to ask and keep on asking.

Prayed the seventh time and there was a cloud the size of a man's hand. The answer is finally coming! What joy!

**Conclusion: End with Foundation #1. Prayer is the fruit of a converted life. Does your praying give evidence to your conversion? Do your conversations with the LORD bring confirmation that you are now alive in the Spirit?**

*“Acts 9:10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,”(Acts 9:10–11 ESV)*

If you are wondering if you are born again, the answer is NOT to do better in praying. The answer is to seek the LORD while He is near. To look to Jesus in faith and ask Him to give you eternal life.

**Central Idea: Pray, pray, pray. Never give up. Do not yield to discouragement, doubt, or delay. Pray and keep on praying. We have a Father in heaven who hears us!**

**Five Foundations of Persevering Prayer:**

**Foundation #1: God’s gracious provision**

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