

Privilege and Power of Prayer

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the privilege and power of prayer, highlighting its importance in accomplishing God's will and moving the hand of God to do things that He otherwise wouldn't have done.

Duration: 39:37

Scripture: James 4:2, James 5:16, 1 John 5:14-15, Revelation 8:3

Topics: "Power Of Prayer", "Effective Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the incredible truths found in the Word of God. They use the expression 'enough to blow your socks off' to describe the impact of these truths. The speaker also shares a personal testimony of praying for a fellow Navy member for 50 years, who eventually passed away. They believe that their prayers had an effect on the person's conscience. The sermon also highlights the power of prayer and how it can move the hand of God to do things that He otherwise wouldn't have done. The speaker references James 4:2 and James 5:16 to support this belief.

Transcript

I'd like you to look with me just for a few minutes tonight at 1 John chapter 5. I'm just going to extract a couple of verses from 1 John chapter 5 and verses 14 and 15. 1 John 5 verses 14 and 15. Now, this is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. Two of many verses in the Scriptures promising that our God answers prayers. What a wonderful privilege we have.

One of the fruits of the work of the Lord Jesus for us on the cross of Calvary. I read recently that they have in the White House a special zip code for people who have to have instant access to the President. And if you write a letter and put this zip code on the letter, and that letter comes to the mail room there in the White House, it goes directly to the President without delay.

There's also a fax number that the favored few have. Those who are privileged to have this kind of access to the President, you call, you dial that fax number, and your fax goes right on through. There's no delay, whatever.

Dear friends, we've got something a lot better than that. We have access into the presence of the great Sovereign of the universe any day, instant access at any time of the day or night, whereby faith, we enter into the throne room of the universe. We can talk to Him and call Him Father.

I want to tell you, that's pretty wonderful. I don't think any individual Jew in the Old Testament is ever quoted as calling God Father. Yes, collectively sometimes they did call Him Father, but no individual Jew ever called God Father.

And you know, the wonderful thing is that one of the first words that proceeds out of the mouth of a newborn child of God is Father. I don't know if you ever noticed that. A person just gets saved, and you get down on your knees with Him, and you're going to speak to the Lord, and that's the first word that comes out of Him.

I often think of that years ago in the military, we were out in Honolulu, and it was a black at that time, and all the shades had to be drawn, not a crack of light must get through for fear of enemy planes flying near. And one night this fellow stayed behind in the Bible class there, and he was troubled. He was in soul trouble.

And finally we knelt down with him, and he prayed. And this was his prayer. Father, I've been in the dark out, the dark out up till now, he said, but now I see the light.

You know, the first word he said, Father. Who taught him to say that? The Holy Spirit. The Spirit of adoption told him to say that.

No human being told him to say it. Well, I'd just like to go over with you some of the wonderful things, the privilege of prayer that we have. And first of all, I'd like to remind you that we never come closer to omnipotence than when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus.

You and I will never share that attribute of God of having all power. Some of those attributes of God are His and His alone. We'll never be omnipotent.

We'll never be omniscient. We'll never be omnipresent. But I'll tell you, we never come closer to having all power than when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Why? Because when you pray in His name, it's just the same as if He were presenting those petitions to the Father. It's wonderful, isn't it? Wonderful. It's absolutely the same as if the Lord Jesus Himself was making those petitions to the... And I want to tell you, friends, that power.

And we don't realize that I do believe that one of the greatest regrets we'll get... that we'll have when we get to heaven is that we didn't pray more. A young fellow visiting from Israel said to me, How much do you pray? I wish he hadn't asked me that question. What could I say? I said, I don't pray enough.

That's the honest answer to the question. I don't pray enough. But I know that we have within our power this wonderful instrument that we can come to God and present our petitions to Him, and it's just absolutely the same as if His beloved Son was presenting them to Him.

I like what an old English bishop said once. He said, When I pray, things happen. When I don't pray, they don't.

Isn't that right? When I pray, things happen. When I don't pray, they don't. And to me, that's one of the thrills of the Christian life, is a life of prayer where your service sparkles with the supernatural.

Where things happen that wouldn't ordinarily happen according to the laws of chance or probability. Where the gears really do mesh, and you're in a sense radioactive with the Holy Spirit because of prayer. I really believe with all my heart that Christians... we don't take this in.

We don't really take it in. Christians hold the balance of power in the world through prayer. We think of the mighty empires of the world, you know.

We think of the Russian Empire, you know. But I want to tell you, it's Christians who hold the balance of power. I thought of that when the Iron Curtain came down.

Why did the Iron Curtain come down? I believe it came down because Christians will pray. That's why. And it certainly is true that we can affect the destiny of nations as well as of individuals through prayer.

We really can. It's happened in history, and I believe it's happening now. Why resort to politics? Politics has had centuries of opportunity to prove its worthwhileness, and it's been an utter failure.

Dear friends, you and I can do more on our knees than we can do in the ballot box. We really can. That's where the power is.

Speaking to God in prayer and committing our concerns to Him in that way, we can change the destiny of nations and influence the course of history. I like to tell that story of a group of young people praying out in Oakland years ago. It's in Oakland, San Leandro, years ago, all-night prayer meeting.

And during the course of the all-night prayer meeting, we had a letter from Dick Sanders in Chad. And the Christians in the Chad at that time, they were going through terrible persecution. Time magazine reported that one Christian was buried up to his neck in the sand, and the ants killed him.

Another Christian was placed in the drum, and they beat on the drum until he starved to death. This was in a secular press. And Dick Sanders wrote us, and he said, don't feel sorry for those who've gone to be with the Lord, but he said, pray for the Christians who are still living.

And I remember about two or three o'clock Saturday morning, these dear young people, they got on their knees, and they prostrated themselves before the Lord, and they started crying out for the Chad Republic. You say, come on, just a group of young people, you know, just a group of young people. Nobody's praying at two or three in the morning, you know, what's going to be accomplished? Well, I'll tell you what's going to be accomplished.

I was driving to Bethany Chapel the next Sunday morning, and I just happened to flick on the radio, and through an all-news station, and a special report came across. Revolution in the Chad Republic. The ruler, the cruel ruler was killed, and a general rose to power, and we happened to find out that that general was favorable to the evangelical cause.

Now I want to ask you, could a group of young people praying in San Leandro affect the destiny of the Chad Republic? Yes, it did. It did. Resulted in the overthrow of that wicked, wicked ruler, and it became a new day, certainly for a while there in the Chad.

We can really influence the destiny of nations and the history of the world. I try to remind myself of these things as an encouragement to prayer. The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity.

Have you noticed that? The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. What does that mean? It means you pray best when the going is roughest. You know, when everything is well, and everything is going along smoothly, and the sun is shining, well, it's easy for your prayer life to become dull and listless.

But when you go to the doctor, and certain words fall out of his mouth, you know, I tell you, you can pray. You can really pray. The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity, and that's why it's wonderful to be cast upon the Lord.

Forget all our pillows, forget all our security, forget all our crutches and these things that we lean on, and really be cast upon the Lord and see him working wonderfully. God seldom, if ever, does anything except in answer to prayer. Now, that might shock you.

God seldom, if ever, does anything in answer to prayer. Sometimes when I meet a young fellow, and he's just been saved, I say to him, who prayed for you? And it's interesting, he thinks, well, I had a grandmother who I believe was really a born-again Christian. And almost invariably, something will come out like that, that probably was the line, the prayer line that eventually resulted in that fellow's salvation.

Somebody has said that, a Spurgeon said it, prayer is the forerunner of mercy. Turn to sacred history, and you will find that seldom ever did a great mercy come to this world unheralded by supplication. Prayer is always the preface of blessing.

I say this to encourage us, because sometimes we kind of become discouraged in our prayer life. You pray, and you pray, and you pray, and nothing happens. It does happen.

Somebody else said this, God has limited certain of his activities to responding to the prayers of his people. Unless they pray, he will not act. Heaven may, well, heaven may not act, heaven may will something to happen, but heaven waits and encourages earth's initiative to desire that will, and then to will and pray that it happens.

The will of God is not done on earth by an inexorable juggernaut omnipotence out there, overriding or ignoring the will of man on earth. On the contrary, God has willed that his hand be held back while he seeks for a man to plead, to intercede. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven in this, or that specific situation.

To use one man's words, he bids his will be done on earth. He did his own work wait on man's prayers. He did his own work wait on man's prayers.

Well, the Solomon, you think of it. Prayer moves the hand of God to do things that he wouldn't otherwise have done. Now, that's not popular teaching in some circumstances.

Well, you know, God has ordained everything's going to happen anyway, and when you pray, it just brings you into submission with God's will and with whatever he had already planned to do. Is that true? Is that true? Or is it true that God, that prayer moves God's hand to do things that he otherwise wouldn't have done? Yes, James chapter 4, verse 1. Verse 2. James chapter 4, verse 2. And this is very significant. It says it so clearly.

Why did we ever miss it? It says you lust and do not have, you murder and covet and cannot obtain, you fight and war, you do not have because you do not ask. Well, that's pretty clear, isn't it? You do not have because you do not ask. You ask to have.

Prayer moves the hand of God to do things that he otherwise wouldn't have done. Chapter 5, verse 16. Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. So I don't go along with that teaching that all prayer does is bring you into submission to the will of God through what's going to happen anyway. That's a certain kind of fatalism.

I don't think it's true. I think remove the hand of God through prayer. And it's helpful for me to remember that God, I believe God answers every prayer, every prayer that's prayed in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And he answers it in exactly the same way I would answer it if I had his wisdom, love and power. Think about that for a minute. God answers prayer.

He answers every prayer. And he answers it in exactly the same way that you would do it if you had his wisdom, if you knew what he knows. If you had his love, you loved the way he loved.

If you had his power, you would answer it exactly that same way. Quite a wonderful thing to have a God like that, isn't it? God of infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite power. A God who loves us.

A God who couldn't love us more than he loves us at this very minute. I tell you, that melts my heart when I think of that. It's true.

God couldn't, if you're a believer here in the Lord Jesus Christ, God couldn't love you more than he loves you right now. You know why? He loves you with the same love he loves his son. It's enough to blow you away, isn't it? You know, the truths of the word of God are marvelous.

It's marvelous that we can read them without gasping. I like an expression the young people have today. When something is really horrific, they say, it's enough to blow your socks off.

Well, that's a good expression. It says it very well. Enough to blow your socks off.

And that's so true of a lot of the wonderful truths of the word of God. God nothing does. God doesn't do anything or allow it to be done.

But what you yourself would do if you could see the end of all the way he can see it. It's absolutely true. The more you think of it, the more you realize it has to be true.

Has to be true. How about when we pray for unsaved loved ones? How about that? I don't say this pridefully, but you know, I was in the Navy with a fellow and I prayed for him for 50 years, 50 years. And he died last February and he died in his sins.

How do you explain that, McDonald? Explain that one to me. Well, I'll tell you this. I believe when I prayed for him, God acted on him.

God acted on his conscience. I believe that. God doesn't save people against their will.

God's not going to drag reluctant converts into heaven, is he? Huh? Wouldn't be heaven. Imagine a lot of people in heaven who didn't want to be there. It wouldn't be heaven.

God's not going to do that. God's not willing that any should perish. But all should come.

But all don't want to come to him. All don't want to come to him. And I think it's very, very helpful for us to remember that.

When I pray for an unsaved person, I believe God works on that unsaved person. Some way I don't even know. Maybe he's driving along and he sees Jesus saves on a rock.

Maybe he sees a car with the motto, Jesus is Lord on it, which isn't too hard to do nowadays. You can see a lot of them. I had that motto on the back of my car and one morning I went down and both plates were gone and the frame was gone with the words, Jesus is Lord.

Religious thief. I hope it speaks to his heart. I hope it pricks his conscience.

I had to go and buy a new plate for eight dollars and that hurts a Scot, you know. But I do believe, I believe when I pray for the unsaved person, God works in some way. I don't know.

Maybe he turns on the radio and he hears something about the Lord on it. Or TV. Or somebody hands him a track.

I believe that. And then God leaves that up to him. Whether he wants to go to heaven or not.

Because you have that wonderful balance in the Word of God. I would also like to suggest to you tonight that the work of God is done more in prayer than it's done in any other way. Prayer really is the work of God.

That's where it is accomplished. It's the cutting work for any work of God. It's not some supplemental thing that you kind of throw in for good measure.

No, that's not what it is at all. It is the work of God. And that's kind of, it almost seems passe to talk like that nowadays with all the methods of imitating the world's economies and markets and all the rest.

The fact remains that the real work of God is done on our knees. Now there are, I confess to you tonight as I'm up here speaking, there are mysteries in connection with prayer. There are mysteries in connection with prayer.

As there are in connection with all the Christian life. But I want to tell you something. I'd rather pray than solve all the mysteries that there are.

I don't let myself get sidetracked by those mysteries of prayer. Just keep on praying. Prayer should be a joy for us.

I like that what Paul says in Philippians chapter 1 verse 4. Philippians chapter 1 verse 4. I don't know if you ever noticed it. He says, always in every prayer of mine, making requests for you all with joy. Yeah, you read that and you say, well I thought prayer was a duty.

I thought it was a command or something like that. And Paul says, pardon me, he says I happen to enjoy it. I enjoy doing it.

What's wrong with enjoying prayer? There's nothing in the Bible against that. I know there are times when it seems to be a discipline, a routine, but we're not allowed that warmth of the Spirit as we pray, which enables it to be a joyous activity. There are times like that, but God wants it to be a joy in our life.

Prayer often deals in the realm of the impossible. I remember when some of those young people were having those all night readings, they'd say, if it's possible, there's no glory for God in it. If it's impossible, it can be done.

That's good, isn't it? Faith wants not grabbers of the possible, but grabbers of the impossible. And I think that that's something that we should ever remember in our prayer life, to pray big things. Think of what prayer has accomplished.

Somebody wrote this. Prayer makes the darkest clouds withdraw. Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw.

Gives exercise to faith and love. Brings every blessing from above. Restraining prayer, we cease to fight.

Prayer makes the Christian's armor bright, and Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees. I remember Mary, Queen of Scots, said that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies of England. That's good, isn't it? That's a wonderful testimony.

Mary, Queen of Scots, feared the prayers of John Knox more than she did of all the armies of England. It's fervent prayers that really reach the throne of God. Fervent prayers.

What does fervent mean? Means boiling. Means hot. Means prayers that just come out from the heart to God.

And those are the prayers that really reach the throne of God. Somebody said, cold prayers are like arrows without heads. As swords without edges.

As birds without wings. They pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers always freeze before they get to heaven.

They do. Fervent prayers, that's what we need. Prayers that make, that are heard in the sanctuary of God.

Somebody said this and I like it. I measure my effectiveness by how many people I pray for and how many people pray for me. Good.

I measure my effectiveness by how many people I pray for and how many people pray for me. I tell you, one of the humbling things in Christian life and service is for people to come up to you and say, I pray for you every day of life. It really humbles me when they say that.

But I want to tell you something tonight. I live off the prayers of other people. I really do.

Last week I had a wonderful answer to prayer. For quite a while now when I'm writing to people I say, you know, I appreciate your prayers for the Russian translation of the commentary. Nothing specific.

We were meeting roadblock after roadblock and it was obvious the enemy was hindering, hindering, hindering all the time. Very, very frustrating. Including computers.

I think computers can be demons at times. I'm good for you. This last week I got a letter from a dear friend in Germany, a publisher.

He said, I'll publish the commentary for you. I think that was an answer that just about broke my heart. I was so moved.

Letter from that dear brother in Germany. He said, I'll take care of the revising, the publishing of the commentary in Russian for you. He's already done it in German.

He's already smuggled Bibles into, Spanish commentaries into Cuba and they took some from him at the border a couple of weeks ago. But he got some and he smuggled some in. And since then, quite unexpectedly he got an authorization from the Cuban government to take in an undesignated number of commentaries and he's ordered thousands to go in.

So God answered prayer. I'll say he answers prayer. I get tremendous help and encouragement from a portion in the book of Revelation.

Revelation, would you turn to it just please for a minute. This really helps me. Let's see if I can just find it quickly.

Chapter 8 and another verse 3. Then another angel having a golden censer came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascended before God from the angel's hands.

Most commentaries, most evangelical commentaries agree that the angel in verses 3 and 4 is the angel of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And what a wonderful picture it is. Here you see the prayers of the saints and they go to the Lord Jesus on the way to the Father.

And he was given much incense. He offers it with the prayers of the saints. You know, I think the incense there is the fragrance of his work, his person and work.

And our prayers are so failing, they're so weak, you know. And sometimes we commit such doctrinal absurdities in our prayers, you know. It's so wonderful to know that the Lord Jesus takes those prayers and he removes all impurities from them and he adds that incense to them, presents them to the Father.

They're absolutely perfect. That's a help to me. I hope it is to you too.

I hope it is to you too. When they get to the, when they get to the Father, they're absolutely perfect. Prayer is more important than service.

Somebody has said, God is looking, the Lord Jesus is wooing a wife, not hiring a servant. The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a wife, not hiring a servant. Very, very good.

We honor God by the greatness of our prayers, by the greatness. I like that story of Alexander the Great. You know, he used to have open court one day when people could come to him from the kingdom and just make any request they wanted to.

One day a beggar came to him and he asked, what did he ask? He asked for a dowry for his daughter, an education for his son. And Alexander said, it's granted. And some of his aides came to him and said, why did you grant those requests to that beggar that came to you? Alexander said, I get tired of these people who come asking for a gold coin.

He said, that saucy beggar treated me like a king. He asked big. He treated me like a king.

He asked big. Thou art coming to a king. Large petitions would be great, for his love and power of such you can never ask too much.

If you had been living when Christ was on earth and had met the Savior kind, what would you have asked him to do for you, supposing you were stone blind? Child considered and then replied, I suppose that without doubt I'd have asked the Lord for a dog with a chain to lead me daily about. How often thus in our faithless prayers we acknowledge with shame surprise we've only asked for a dog with a chain when we might have had opened eyes. Ask big.

God loves you to come and ask big from him. It's wonderful the answers to prayers that are going on every day. I don't know whether I ever told you this, but, you know, years ago a young fellow came from overseas.

He'd been doing missionary work. He came to my apartment in Oak Park, and he shared a problem with me that I knew the elders of an assembly should know. And I said to him, Greg, after you leave here, you're going to go to this city, and I want you to go to the elders of this assembly, and I want you to tell them what you told me today.

And before he left, we prayed. And Greg, Greg went to that city, and then he went on to Los Angeles from there. And he wrote me from Los Angeles and he said, you know, he said, he said, I wanted to do the Lord's will, but he said, I had meetings, I had appointments, I had, he said, I never did get to see those elders.

But he said, I'm still open to the Lord's leading, you know. Well, he had two weeks of meetings out on Los Angeles, and it was time to go back to Midland Park, New Jersey. So he got, he got on a Greyhound bus.

And when he got on, the bus was fairly empty. But as it worked its way through Los Angeles, it started filling up with passengers. And when he got to Riverside, when they got to Riverside, there was only one empty seat.

It was the one beside Greg. And Greg bowed his head, and he said, Lord Jesus, lead some young person on so that I could witness to him for you. And he opened his eyes, and an older man was getting on board.

And the man came, and of course he had to sit beside Greg because that was the empty seat on the bus. So Greg said, Lord, young or old, I have my duty to do. So he started to witness to this man.

And the man said, well, that's a funny thing you should talk to me about, the Lord. He said, I happen to be a born again Christian. And Greg said, you are? He said, he said, my name is, Greg said, my name is Greg Livingston.

And this man said, my name is, he gave the name of the elder, one of the elders from that assembly that he was supposed to have visited. That elder was in the Midwest. To be specific, was in Milwaukee.

He said, well, how could he get from Milwaukee to a bus in Los Angeles? Well, he and his wife got a drive-away car in Milwaukee to go out and visit a daughter in Phoenix. And so he dropped his wife off in Phoenix and went on to Riverside to deliver the car. The car had to be delivered in Riverside.

And then he had to go back to Phoenix on a Greyhound bus. And he sat beside Greg Livingston. You know, when you think of all the Greyhound buses in the United States, when you think of all the cities they stopped at, when you think of all the seats on a bus, when you think of all the time schedules, wasn't that quite a coincidence? I tell you, it was remarkable.

Absolutely remarkable. What? God answers prayer. And doesn't that add sparkle to your life when you see him answering prayer? Have you learned to move men through God by prayer? Well, Lord, bless his heart.

And encourage us in lives of prayer, knowing that if I wasted every one of the answers, just the same way you would answer it, if you had his wisdom, love, and power. Thank you.

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