

Victorious prayer

Series: Victorious #3

James 4:1-8

Introduction: Actual answering machine answers recorded and verified by the world-famous International Institute of Answering Machine Answers.

Hello, this is Sally's microwave. Her answering machine just eloped with her tape deck, so I'm stuck with taking her calls.

Hello, you are talking to a machine. I can receive messages. My owners do not need siding, windows, or a hot tub, and their carpets are clean. They give to charity through their church and do not need their picture taken. If you're still with me, leave your name and number and they will get back to you.

This is not an answering machine -- this is a telepathic thought-recording device. After the tone, think about your name, your reason for calling and a number where I can reach you and I'll think about returning your call.

Hi. I am probably home. I'm just avoiding someone I don't like. Leave me a message, and if I don't call back, it's you.

Please leave a message. However, you have the right to remain silent. Everything you say will be recorded and will be used by us.

Aren't you glad that when you pray you don't get an answering machine? You get through to God every time.

There is nothing that reveals more about a believer than his or her prayer life.

How many believe that prayer is important? Knowing that ... let me ask a few more questions:

Have you ever struggled to pray? (Guilt; Busyness; Weariness)

Have you ever struggled to stay focused while praying?

Have you ever been confused about what to pray for ... or how to pray about it?

There is an answer for our prayer problems! There is a way for us to defeat the struggles we so often have in prayer ... and experience a breakthrough that will revolutionize our prayer life and prayer effectiveness ... is anyone interested?

Turn with me to the book by James in the NT. It right after the book of Hebrews. James is Jesus' brother and a leader in the Jerusalem church. His original audience were first century Jewish believers residing in Gentile communities, who were also being persecuted. His purpose was to teach these early believers to have the right Christian behavior.

READ James 4:1-8

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." 7Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.' [NIV]

I'm continuing our Vision theme series called **VICTORIOUS**. My message today is **VICTORIOUS PRAYER**.

Let's start the way Green Bay Packer, Hall of Fame football coach Vince Lombardi started the first practice of every new season. He would gather his team around him, hold up an oblong pigskin, and say, '**Gentlemen, this is a football.**' Then he would proceed to go over some of the basic rules and skills of the game that no doubt all those professional football players had learned when they first began playing the game.

Coach Lombardi knew that the key to winning was not learning a bunch of trick plays but consistently executing the fundamentals of the game with excellence.

The twelve disciples followed Jesus for three years, observing His life experiences miracles, seeing people healed, raised from the dead. But the one question that they asked Jesus was, **‘Teach us to pray.’**

So, what is prayer? Most would say it’s talking to God. That’s not totally correct. Prayer is communication with God...we talk and we also listen for the Holy Spirit to speak to us in our hearts. From communication we get the root word **commune**...from that we get **union**...and ultimately **un**, meaning one.

Jesus said, me and my Father are one. The Holy Spirit’s goal in prayer is that we would commune, for a holy union and get on the same page with God. In other words, prayer is not us telling God what we need and what He needs to do. I’ll get deeper into this in a moment, but first notice verses 1 and 2.

‘What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. ‘You do not have because you do not ask God.’

This portion in the book of James tells us three very important things about prayer. The first thing here is:

I. THE PROBLEM OF UNOFFERED PRAYER

God wants to bless us, and God wants to give us what we need but how often are we so proud, self-sufficient, and arrogant that we don’t even ask God.

So, James describes what happens when we don’t. He says that we fight and we war and we lust and we desire to obtain and we struggle within ourselves but we still do not have the things that we need because we have not prayed. This is the problem of unoffered prayer.

The reason so many of us are not living a victorious life is that we are not living the overcoming life.

We're fighting and quarreling and coveting because we've not asked God to bless. We've not asked God to take control. That's the problem in our hearts and in our lives.

And we need to understand that not only are we cheating ourselves when we do not pray but prayerlessness is a sin. The Bible says, ***"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."***

The Bible says we are to pray without ceasing. We are to always pray. Jesus said to His disciples, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."

Folks, prayer will keep you from sinning and sinning will keep you from praying. And so, here's the problem of unoffered prayer. We are not praying like we ought to pray. My life is no greater than my prayer life. This church will not be greater than its prayer life. So, there is the problem of unoffered prayer. ***"You have not because you ask not."***

II. THE PREDICAMENT OF UNACCEPTABLE PRAYER

In Verse 3 there is the problem of unacceptable prayer because sometimes we pray, but not in the right way.

Verse 3 says, ***'When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.'***

He is saying "Your prayers are not getting any higher than the ceiling. God is not hearing your prayers because your prayer is based on the wrong motives.

You're not asking for the glory of God; you are asking so that you can have more, do more, be more. You are asking for things that you want. You are not asking for things that are in the will of God; you are asking for things that you might enjoy. You are asking for things that you think are right. You're asking things you can consume on your own selfish desires.

And when he says in Verse 4, ***'You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.'***

He is reminding us that the Christian life is like a marriage relationship. When you were born again and became a child of God, you became a part of God's family. You became the bride of Christ and Jesus is the bridegroom.

Now there is someone else who comes along, and James says the world is like an ungodly man who would come to the church, the bride of Christ and try to cause God's people to be unfaithful.

He said, "You ask and you receive not because you ask amiss that you might consume it on your own lusts."

You say, "Well, I thought I could get my needs met." You can. The Bible says, ***"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory by Christ Jesus."*** But there is a difference between your need and your selfish desires. God doesn't hear that kind of prayer. That's unacceptable prayer.

III. THE PROCESS OF UNDENIABLE PRAYER

Now the third thing and the most important thing is the process of undeniable prayer. If I were to lay out the process or principles for praying so that God would give you victory in your prayer life. I would highlight the rest of this passage and say.

- A. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.
- B. Submission to the Father.
- C. Standing against the Devil.
- D. Separation from the World.

First, who is the spirit who dwells in us? It's the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit in you and in me is envious for the cause of Jesus Christ. I want you to hear another translation of that verse. And here it is. **"THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH HE HAS MADE TO DWELL IN US, JEALOUSLY YEARN FOR THE ENTIRE DEVOTION OF THE HEART."**

What does the Holy Spirit yearn for in your life; that your heart might be devoted to God completely and entirely. You see the Holy Spirit wants to think through your mind, He wants to see through your eyes, He wants to feel for your heart, He

wants to walk through your feet, He wants to speak through your lips, He wants to pray through your life. You must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, there is no answer to prayer until first you are submitted to God. The Bible says, **"This is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will we know that He hears us and we know that if He hears us we have the petition that we desired of Him."**

Thirdly, Verse 7, "SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU." Have you ever thought about the devil fleeing from you? You know that idea is almost ridiculous to most of us - the devil fleeing from us.

Jesus said, "Behold, I give you authority over all the power of the enemy." We have authority over Satan and in Jesus' name we need to understand that prayer is resisting the devil.

Prayer is spiritual warfare. Prayer is going to battle. Prayer is engaging in warfare against the enemy, standing against the devil, resisting the devil.

The devil would rather you do anything than pray. The devil doesn't mind us having our services, he doesn't mind us singing our hymns, he doesn't mind us having our organization. The devil isn't scared by our buildings but Satan trembles when he sees God's people pray. **The devil will get you to do anything in your life but pray because it's through prayer that we are victorious.**

Lastly, look at verse 8, **'Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.'**

James is talking here about separation from the world. You and I will not be separated from the world until we resist the devil.

Prayer is not convincing God to do something He doesn't want to do. Prayer is not bending your will to the will of God. Prayer is finding out the will of God and getting in on it.

I'm not saying you've got to go through this process: #1 be sensitive to HS, #2 submit to the Father, #3 stand against the devil, #4 separate from the world.

What I'm saying is that **if you communicate, commune, be in union with the Lord, these things will happen and become more pronounced in your life to the point where James 5:16 will be talking about YOU. "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."**

YOU will be that righteous person with a powerful, victorious prayer life.

HERE'S THE BOTTOM LINE — The answer to all our prayer problems is the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only has the solutions to our prayer struggles ... he is literally the spirit of prayer ... a prayer partner who makes connecting with God possible, powerful and Victorious!

Jude 20 — ***"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."***

Ephesians 6:18 — ***"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."***

Romans 8:26,27 - ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."***

To 'pray in the Spirit' ... or 'by the Spirit' are phrases that focus us on the prayer partnership we're meant to have with the Holy Spirit!

There are 3 ways in which the Holy Spirit wants to partner with us in prayer:

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRES US TO PRAY!

There are many of us who view prayer as our idea, as something we initiate, like the pilot of a single engine plane who radioed an urgent message to the control tower: "Pilot to tower, I'm 300 miles from the airport, 600 feet above the ground, and I'm out of fuel. I am descending rapidly. Please advise. Over."

Moments later the air traffic controller responded — “Tower to pilot ... repeat after me — ‘Our Father who art in heaven...’”

Prayer doesn't start with us knocking on God's door ... prayer starts with God knocking on our door!

Revelation 3:20 says, ***‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.’***

Revelation 3:20 isn't about evangelism ... it's about fellowship, communion with God.

A. The Holy Spirit Inspires Us To — Fellowshipping prayer!

Larnell Harris captures the essence of the fellowshipping aspect of prayer in a song he wrote called — 'I Miss My Time with You!'

It's a song that Larnell wrote when he realized that he was busy doing things for God ... but in his hectic ministry schedule he had lost his first love for God!

B. The Holy Spirit Inspires Us to — Fighting Prayer!

How many know that our greatest battles aren't physical, financial or relational ... our greatest battles are spiritual!

Ephesians 6:12 — ***"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."***

Prayer is an offensive weapon in the armory of God ... that's why Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:4 — ***"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."***

There are times when the Holy Spirit wants to stir us to stand in the gap for someone or something ... to battle in prayer ... to fight or wrestle for God's will to be done!

The Holy Spirit stirs us to prayer so that we might fellowship with God and fight for the will of God in the lives of those we love, and lives of those God loves!

Not only does the Holy Spirit, 1. INSPIRE US TO PRAY!

Note secondly that —

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT STRENGTHENS US TO PRAY!

The Holy Spirit doesn't just stir us to fellowship with God and to fight for the will of God ... and then leave us on our own to make it happen

That's why Romans 8:26 says — ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."***

There are three vital ways in which the Holy Spirit strengthens us to pray:

A. The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — energizing us!

Romans 8:11 — ***"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."***

This isn't simply a promise of life after we die ... it's the promise of an overcoming and victorious life while we live!

Why could Jesus pray through the night ... while his disciples couldn't pray for an hour? Jesus gives us the answer when he said — ***"The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."***

There is an energizing that comes from the Holy Spirit

B The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — enlightening Us!

Not only do we struggle physically and emotionally ... we often struggle mentally to know —

- what to pray for ... and ...
- how to pray about it!

PAUL WRITES — "We do not know what we ought to pray for..."

A PASTOR TOLD HIS CONGREGATION — "Many of our prayer requests are for the sick rather than for the lost. We are more interested in keeping the saints out of heaven than we are the sinners out of hell."

The Holy Spirit wants to shape our prayers ... and give us a strategy for our prayers! (That's what's meant by praying in "Jesus name" ... according to his purposes and power!)

C. The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — engaging us!

"...helps us in our weaknesses..."The Greek word translated 'helps' is an interesting word ... it's only found in one other place in the New Testament ... when Martha asks Jesus to make Mary help her in the kitchen!

The word literally means — "To come to the aid of another, helping them bear a load but not taking the load from them."

We've noted that: The Holy Spirit stirs us to pray! The Holy Spirit strengthens us to pray!

There's a third thing our prayer partner does.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT STANDS FOR US IN PRAYER!

Not only does the Holy Spirit help us pray ... by stirring us and strengthening us ... but there are times when He steps in and personally stands for us in prayer!

Paul writes — "***...but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.***"

- Have you ever been so burdened ... so overwhelmed with a need or a situation that there were no words to express the cry of your heart?

At that moment, the Holy Spirit literally lifts our wordless cries to the throne of God ... where they are heard and understood...

Jesus intercedes for us from the father's right hand ... the Holy Spirit intercedes for us from our hearts ... there is hope and help when we don't know what to do or where to turn or how to pray ... because the Holy Spirit stands for us in prayer!

If God is for us ... who can be against us?

Conclusion

I The Holy Spirit Stirs Us to Pray!

A The Holy Spirit Stirs Us To — Fellowshiping Prayer!

B The Holy Spirit Stirs Us To — Fighting Prayer!

II The Holy Spirit STRENGTHENS Us to Pray!

A The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — Energizing Us!

B The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — Enlightening Us!

C The Holy Spirit Strengthens us by — Engaging Us!

III The Holy Spirit Stands for Us in Prayer!

STORY: Let me share with you an example of Victorious Prayer... Jim Cymbala was the pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in Brooklyn New York ... he writes:

Our oldest daughter, Chrissy, had been a model child growing up. But around age sixteen she started to stray. I admit I was slow to notice this—I was too occupied with the church, starting branch congregations, overseeing projects, and all the rest that ministry entails.

Meanwhile, Chrissy, not only drew away from us, but also away from God. In time, she even left our home. There were many nights when we had no idea where she was.

As the situation grew more serious, I tried everything. I begged, I pleaded, I scolded, I argued, I tried to control her with money. Looking back, I recognize the foolishness of my actions. Nothing worked; she just hardened increasingly. Her boyfriend was everything we did not want for our child.

How I kept functioning through that period I don't know. Many a Sunday morning I would put on my suit, get into the car to drive to the Tabernacle early, ahead of Carol ... and cry for the next 25 minutes, all the way to the church door. "God, how am I going to get through three meetings today? I don't want to make myself the center of attention. The people have problems of their own—they're coming for help and encouragement. But what about me? I'm hanging by a thread. Oh, God, please ... my firstborn, my Chrissy."

While this was going on, we learned that Carol needed an operation—a hysterectomy. As she tried to adjust afterward, the devil took the opportunity to come after her and say, You might have this big choir, and you're making albums and doing outreaches at Radio City Music Hall and all the rest. Fine, you and your husband can go ahead to reach the world for Christ—but I'm going to have your children. I've already got the first one. I'm coming for the next two.

Like any mother who loves her children, Carol was smitten with tremendous fear and distress. Her family meant more to her than a choir. One day she said to me, "Listen, we need to leave New York. I'm serious. This atmosphere has already swallowed up our daughter. We can't keep raising kids here. If you want to stay, you can—but I'm getting our other children out." She wasn't kidding.

I said, "Carol, we just can't do that. We can't unilaterally take off without knowing what God wants us to do."

Carol wasn't being rebellious; she was just depressed after the surgery. She elected not to pack up and run after all. And it was at that low point that she went to the piano one day, and God gave her a song that has touched more people than perhaps anything else she has written:

In moments of fear,
Through every pain, every tear,
There's a God who's been faithful to me.
When my strength was all gone,
When my heart had no song,

Still in love he's proved faithful to me.

Every word he's promised is true;

What I thought was impossible, I see my God do.

He's been faithful, faithful to me,

February came, and one cold Tuesday night during our congregation's prayer meeting an usher handed me a note. A young woman whom I felt to be spiritually sensitive had written, Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and all pray for your daughter.

I hesitated. Was it right to change the flow of the service and focus on my personal need? Yet something in the note seemed to ring true.

In a few minutes I picked up a microphone and told the congregation what had just happened. "The truth of the matter," I said, "although I haven't talked much about it, is that my daughter is very far from God these days. She thinks up is down and down is up; dark is light, and light is dark. But I know God can break through to her, and so I'm going to ask Pastor Boekstaaf to lead us in praying for Chrissy. Let's all join hands across the sanctuary."

As my associate began to lead the people, I stood behind him with my hand on his back. My tear ducts had run dry, but I prayed as best I knew.

There arose a groaning, a sense of desperate determination, as if to say, "Satan, you will not have this girl. Take your hands off her—she's coming back!" I was overwhelmed. The force of that vast throng calling on God almost knocked me over.

When I got home that night, Carol was waiting for me. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee, and I said, "It's over."

"What's over?" She wondered.

"It's over with Chrissy. You would have had to be in the prayer meeting tonight. I tell you, if there's a God in heaven, this whole nightmare is finally over." I described what had taken place.

Thirty-two hours later, on Thursday morning, as I was shaving, Carol suddenly burst through the door, her eyes wide. "Go downstairs!" she blurted. "Chrissy's here." "Chrissy's here?" "Yes! Go Down!" "But Carol---I..."

"Just go down," she urged. "It's you she wants to see."

I wiped off the shaving foam and headed down the stairs, my heart pounding. As I came around the corner, I saw my daughter on the kitchen floor; rocking on her hands and knees sobbing. Cautiously I spoke her name: "Chrissy?"

She grabbed my pant leg and began pouring out her anguish. "Daddy—I've sinned against God. I've sinned against myself. I've sinned against you and Mommy. Please forgive me..."

I pulled her up from the floor and held her close as we cried together. Suddenly she drew back. "Daddy," she said with a start, "who was praying for me? Her voice was like that of a cross-examining attorney.

"What do you mean, Chrissy?" "On Tuesday night, who was praying for me?" I didn't say anything, so she continued: "In the middle of the night, God woke me and showed me I was heading toward this abyss. There was no bottom to it—it scared me to death. I was so frightened. I realized how hard I've been, how wrong, how rebellious.

But at the same time, it was like God wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. He kept me from sliding any farther as he said, 'I still love you.'

Daddy, tell me the truth—who was praying for me Tuesday night?"

Chrissy's return to the Lord became evident immediately. By that fall, God had opened a miraculous door for her to enroll at a Bible college, where she not only undertook studies but soon began directing music groups and a large choir, just like her mother. Today she is a pastor's wife in the Midwest with three wonderful children. Through all this, Carol and I learned as never before that persistent calling upon the Lord breaks through every stronghold of the devil, for nothing is impossible with God."

There are times when the Holy Spirit wants to stir us to stand in the gap for someone or something ... to battle in prayer ... to fight or wrestle for God's will to be done!

The Holy Spirit stirs us to prayer so that we might fellowship with God and fight for the will of God in the lives of those we love, and lives of those God loves!