

# James #54 – The Power of Prayer

sermonaudio.com

*James*

By Rev. Allen Harris

**Bible Text:** James 5:16b  
**Preached on:** Sunday, September 4, 1988

**Columbia Presbyterian Church**  
10001 Route 108  
Columbia, MD 21044

**Website:** [www.columbiapres.org](http://www.columbiapres.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/columbiapres](http://www.sermonaudio.com/columbiapres)

Probably sound better. Wouldn't notice a difference, huh? Well, bear with it. I caught that little chuckle in your voice, Ken, as you talked about we've been in James for some time. Just two more weeks after today and we'll be finished, James. A bit of a cheer there. Remember that this evening we will be at our Lord's Supper service having the opportunity to share anything that God has been doing in our lives through the book of James in the last two and a half years. That is not simply some interesting thought that you've gotten from the book of James, but what is something that God has done in you from the book of James? So be thinking about that today. I think it's a helpful exercise to look back over the two and a half years and to say since one of James's main themes is we don't simply look into the mirror and go our way as we were, how am I any different as a result of having gone through this study? And note a couple of things, you know, if you dare to, you may ask your family members, "Do you see any difference in me through the book?" That is a courageous question, isn't it? You'll probably wish it wasn't raining so you could get outside after you ask that question. But, you know, you could give it a try and then tonight we'll have some opportunity and hopefully encourage one another by what the Holy Spirit's been doing in us and seeing how God uses his word.

James tells us, is any of you in trouble? Then you should pray. Are you happy? Then let him sing songs of praise. Is any of you sick? He should call on the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. Do you believe that? Do you believe God is able to do that in answer to prayer in your life? Because that is such a powerful statement of what God is able to do, James adds at the end of verse 16 these words of encouragement, "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James says that prayer is powerful, even in such a life as yours and mine, whose minds wander even after five minutes of praying to begin to notice the dust on the shelves, the cobwebs in the corner, winding up finding ourselves thinking trivial thoughts, even sinful thoughts while we're engaged in prayer. Isn't it terrible, really humiliating, to think sometimes how shallow and how oscillating are our prayer lives and yet James says your prayers are very powerful.

He says this to encourage us and I want to consider this statement particularly this week. He states this in verse 16 to encourage us and then he illustrates it in verses 17 and 18 by the life of Elijah, and we'll consider that next week. And so in the context of James's whole teaching on prayer that we talked about last week, I want to consider just that one statement, the prayer of a righteous man is very, is powerful and effective. Now that statement, as simple as it is, believe it or not, is actually very difficult to translate in the Greek and commentators argue very strenuously over which way that little sentence should be translated. There's a number of problems in it. After a lot of thought and after considering this thing for a long time, I have come up with my own translation of this which you see at the top of your bulletin outline. I'd like to defend that and I believe that that gets at the essence of what James is saying in this end of verse 16.

The petition of a righteous man made effective is very powerful. I'm not going to go into all the ins and outs of the Greek on the thing, but I want to show you why I think that that is, at least in basic terms, what James is trying to say to us, and I want to do it by our noticing four things in this statement. Four things, which are your four points. First of all, what kind of prayer is James referring to? He's referring to a petition and so that's the first blank. What kind of prayer? Petition. You see the word that he uses here is not the usual word in the New Testament for prayer. It's a word that refers to a supplication with the idea of a specific need. How many times have you prayed, how many times have I prayed and we have gone on and on and on with pious religious sounding language and after a while we get so confused that even we're not sure what we're talking about, and we stop and we say, "What in the world am I really asking for?" No, I'm just sort of vaguely running around what I think is generally what I ought to be saying to God about this but I'm not really sure what I'm asking and I'm not really sure how I would know if God answered. It's so vague and it's so general, how do I know if God is going to hear me and answer this specific prayer?

I remember one time when I was out on my Tuesday mornings, which is my regular time of taking a half day or as much as I can get of that of prayer for the beginning of the week of ministry, and I was out sort of rambling around in my own mind wandering around on this topic and that topic and all of a sudden it was as if I pictured Jesus standing before me there in the woods and he said to me, I'm not claiming, you know, some personal revelation here but it was as if I could hear him saying to me, "Allen, what would you have that I do for you?" And you know, just imagining that, just thinking about Jesus standing there asking that made a big difference to me because it was that I was thinking here is the Lord of glory and he's coming to meet with me now and he's asking, "Allen, what is it that you would have that I do for you," and I didn't know. Yeah I'm rambling on for 20 minutes, I didn't know what he really wanted me to do. I didn't know what I wanted him to do. And so that changed my praying from something vague in general to actually beginning to interact with the Lord in his Word and say, what is it that I'm actually seeking for in this area of my life or of my ministry?

I suggest to you that if you're having trouble being specific, sometime imagine the Lord asking you that, "What would you have that I do for you this morning? What is it exactly that you want me to do in response to your need as my disciple now?" That's the idea of

this word. It's a specific petition. The petition of a righteous man made effective is very powerful. We need to be specific in our asking so that our faith is built by seeing specific answers. There's another shade of meaning that is in this word also, petition, that's used here and it is that this word in the Greek is used to petition or to supplicate a ruling sovereign as opposed to a petty magistrate. The word that you would use if you come before a magistrate demanding your rights is a different word. This word is the word that you use when you come before a ruling sovereign begging his mercy. It's a word that doesn't demand rights but rather pleads mercy. It's a word of entreaty. It's a word that says, "I have no rights to claim. I am simply begging you of your mercy to do this." That's the idea that's in mind.

It was said on one occasion that Alexander the Great was asked by one of his courtiers to help him in some financial need that he had, and Alexander the Great had a favor on this person and he said, "Go to my treasurer and ask whatever it is that you need." And so the man went to the treasurer, blank check, can you imagine that? Went to the treasurer. He asked for so much money, the treasurer came back to Alexander the Great and he said, "Are you sure you want to give him this much money? I mean, did you really mean that when you said.... This guy is unreasonable. Look what he's asked for." You know what Alexander the Great's answer was? He said, "Give it to him. Give him what he asks, for he has treated me as a king in his asking and I shall be as a king in my giving."

You and I have the favor of Jesus Christ through his shed blood before the Heavenly Father. He bids us to come and bring our petitions to him as a King and what do we do? We hesitate and we halt and our faith wavers and we're not sure that we're maybe asking too much, not whether we're asking in his will but just asking too much, whether we dare ask that much of him because we haven't been good enough to receive more. And so we halt and we hesitate and he's saying, "Ask me as a King that I may give and honor myself in the giving, in showing my power and my love for you, in giving you what you need."

But that idea of asking according to his mercy and not according to our desserts is the idea that's introduced in that next part of the sentence. You see, it's the petition of a righteous man made effective is very powerful. So the second question, what kind of person is offering the prayer? A righteous person. Righteous. Now again the commentators are divided on this and a number of them say that what this refers to is the fact that we must be walking in obedience with Jesus Christ in order to have our prayers answered. I don't believe that's what he's saying. I once dated a girl who said that when she asked God for things in prayer she had to review in her mind all the sins that she could remember and confess them all because Psalm 68 says that, you know, if I know of some sin in my heart, God won't hear me. And so she'd try to think of all the sins she could think of to make sure that she was approaching him righteously; she confessed anything that she thought was between her and the Lord and all that kind of thing. Well, I don't think that's at all what James is talking about because if, in fact, we take that route then you and I will never be finished confessing before we can start asking and we will never be sufficiently righteous and obedient in order to deserve anything from a perfectly holy and righteous God.

Now it is absolutely true that God does want us to examine our motives in asking. James had been very clear on that. Remember back in chapter 4 verse 3 that we talked about last week, he talks about when we ask amiss because we want to consume it on our own lusts, desires, selfishness, then the Holy Spirit will not grant it and he will take us through a process of examining our motives and revealing to us the nature of our true desires and through that he will reveal to us why he's not giving to us what we want him to give. But I don't think that's what James has in mind here. I believe that when he says the prayer of a righteous man, he's talking about any mere Christian who is simply justified by the shed blood of Jesus Christ and has his righteousness as access to the throne of grace.

The reason I believe that James is saying that, rather than anything to do with our own obedience, or acts of righteousness, is because the example that he gives in the very next verse is of Elijah, and you remember what he says at the beginning? Elijah was a man just like us. Now I can't prove it to you, but I don't think he means there that Elijah was as good as us. I think rather what he means is Elijah was as bad as us. Elijah was just as big a sinner as you and me. He was just as frail. He was just as weak and doubting. But look what God did through him. And so I think that James's emphasis here is on the fact that any mere Christian who is in a relationship with Jesus Christ so that his blood has covered our sin, we have his record to our account, we are therefore given through him access to the throne of grace by his righteousness, and therefore can bring our petitions and be heard.

Now if, in fact, you are this morning not in that relationship, a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ, you have no access to the throne of grace. God is not your Father. You cannot come to him and ask him to help you give his Spirit for your needs this week, supply your daily bread, anything, nothing can you ask of him and expect to receive it. The only thing you can ask of him is to grant you forgiveness of sin on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. But there is hope because you can ask that. You can ask that this morning. You can ask that this afternoon. And if you're outside of Jesus Christ this morning, you can have that peace of knowing that Jesus Christ is sufficient in his death and his resurrection for your sin to bring you into that relationship with God as Father and the one who will hear and supply all of your needs because the most basic need has been taken care of in the death of Jesus Christ for you.

Don't say that he won't hear you. Perhaps you're saying, "I've tried that, I've talked to him, it just doesn't work. I don't feel any different." That's just not true. Don't dishonor God by your own feelings ruling whether you think he hears you or will hear you or not. I promise you based on the reliability of the very Word of God, if you come to him this morning in this service and ask, "Lord Jesus Christ, I have sinned against you. I have nothing to offer to you but my sin and ask you to take that away because of your death on the cross and your resurrection and make me right that my sins are taken, I've been forgiven and that you will present me before the Father as one who is forgiven with your righteousness," he will hear you. I promise you that. Maybe you've been putting that off, maybe you have been fooling around with that, but I invite you to come in the name of Jesus Christ. But that's how you become righteous. That's how you come into what James is talking about, one whose petitions are heard.

Now if we're in that position, if you are in that situation of one who is righteous, not because of what you have done, but only because of what Jesus has done, then you realize that when you pray, the ground of your praying, the ground of your access, is never how good a boy or girl you've been in the last week or two. It is always and only based on the perfect obedience and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Therefore don't fool around with your introspection and you're coming before God claiming that you have been good therefore maybe you have the right to ask God to do this. Now that sounds silly, but we do it don't we? "Lord I've been trying to serve you. Now here's something I need and so I feel a little more confidence to come because I've been trying." Come on the ground of the righteousness of Jesus. James says, any mere Christian justified by faith in Jesus, whose prayer is made effective, will find that prayer very powerful.

Now then, you notice that I say, whose prayer is made effective and that brings us to the third part of it. What kind of potential does this prayer have? And here's what the blanks are. It is made effective by the Spirit. It is made effective by the Spirit. This is the most difficult and the most controversial part of the verse to translate, and it's one that I think is very important for us in our prayer lives to understand. The Greek could be translated basically, when you boil it all down to, in one of two ways. It could be translated either of these two ways. In essence, it could be made to say that the petition of a righteous man in its inherent effectiveness is powerful. You see, the NIV, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. That's kind of the approach that they take; the very prayer itself is powerful and effective. There's another way you can translate it. It's equally valid. Neither has any preference in terms of which way the Greek construct is, but the other way you can translate that is that the petition of a righteous man, passive, being made effective by some external agency. The prayer of a righteous, the petition of a righteous man being made effective is powerful.

Now again, it's interesting to see the commentators, you know, they're going for pages and pages, telling why the other guys are all fools and translated differently from the way they think it should be translated. And I've read them all, 15 of them I've looked at. And I am convinced that some of the best commentators translated the prayer is inherently powerful, that it should be translated the prayer made effective is powerful. Why is that? Well, because first of all, that word effective is the word from which we get our word energy or energized and it's a word that's used in the New Testament in every single case to refer to the power of God. It's never used to refer to our power to do anything. It's always God's power in accomplishing something. The prayer, the petition of a righteous man being energized by God. You know, God's not stated there but the prayer of a righteous man being energized, being made effective, fits the general use of that word in the rest of the New Testament. But even more so, I'm compelled by the fact that there is nowhere in the New Testament that we're taught that prayers have any inherent effectiveness or power. Our own experience teaches us that, doesn't it? How many times have you prayed to no effect? How many times have you prayed and felt like, "There certainly wasn't any power in that prayer? I've been praying that thing for three weeks and nothing happened. In fact, the opposite happened from what I prayed." How many times have we prayed and seen no power connected to the prayer that we prayed? I'm not

going to ask for a show of hands, but you know, in your own experience, as I know in my experience, there's many times we've seen that. It's the kind of praying of James 4:3. James himself says there are many times that you pray and there is no power and no effectiveness in that prayer. And so I believe that what James is saying is that the petition of a righteous man when it is made effective, that petition in itself has to be made effective to be powerful.

Now what is he saying, then, in that? I believe that he's saying by the "made effective" idea in here that there are ways that you and I seek to make prayer effective that are irrelevant to its power. We try to make prayer effective in a number of ways, don't we? I've listed three of them that we try at various times. One is religious eloquence. Somehow we have the idea that if we use the right language, that will make our prayer more effective, don't we? We have this idea that if I somehow superstitiously can say it the right way, it'll get through. If I could only pray like the preacher or the televangelist or somebody who is so eloquent and articulate and sounds so profound in his praying, somehow then God will hear that prayer more. It's like when my kids come for their allowance. Can you imagine if Dean came to me on Friday in our house's allowance day and he came and he said, "Oh, dear Father, who dost bounteously give to mine sisters all that they desire and need for their life and breath. Oh, dear Father, wouldst thou deign to give me mine allowance this day?" Hey, you know, what's he trying to prove, you know? He says, "Hey, Dad, can I please have my allowance?" But you and I somehow think that if we come before God in some religious language and jargon, particularly the current evangelical jargon. You know, some people just throw the word "just" in all the time. "You know, just give me Lord and just here, and we just want to..." You know, there's all kinds of ways we do it. That's kind of a reverse eloquence, you know, but there's all kinds of ways that we do it. That's the kind of language and James is saying, no, the petition of a righteous man made effective.

You don't make it effective by something superstitiously that you do. Other people try length. "I've got more of a chance if I'll pray 15 minutes for this than if I just hit it in two minutes," you know. Now, let me be quick to add that length is important in terms of the James 4 idea, having our motives examined by the Holy Spirit. Some people say if I pray once for something, that's all I need to do. I don't believe that's true because my heart's too deceitful. I need to pray and interact with the Holy Spirit so that as I pray, he shapes my praying. And so there is something to be said for praying over a period of time, whether for a half hour or for a period of days or weeks or whatever it is, but let's be clear, it is not the length in itself that accomplishes anything. If I can hit the nail on the head in 30 seconds, that's enough. If that is made effective by the Spirit, because it is in line with his purposes, that will be very powerful. The trouble is, I'm so sinful, it takes me two days to come up with that thirty-second prayer that hits the nail on the head.

But it's not the length in itself, nor is it the repetition. That's the other idea you see you have here. Repetition, you notice, I have in itself. Now again, it's like the length, the fact that I am forming this idea and interacting with the Holy Spirit as I pray can be very helpful in examining and revealing my false motives and in coming up with something that's more in the name of Jesus, but the repetition, the fact that I think, "Well, if I just

keep saying this, I keep bugging God every day on this, you know? God, you remember this, remember?" You know, and God's saying, "Yes, you don't even need to mention it anymore, you've said the same thing, the same words for 15 days now." And, you know, "If you have it, Lord, you told about that widow that kept bugging the judge, remember? And he gave it to her." And we forget that Jesus contrasted God with the judge. He said, "Yeah, he was an unrighteous bugger, that he would only do it because he was worn down. Now, in contrast to that, your Heavenly Father wants to give you." But the fact is we do need to persist because that's how God changes us and teaches us and builds our faith.

So you notice that it's the repetition of the heart that Jesus wants us to keep coming to him, not the repetition of words which he condemned when he said, "Don't babble on repeating your prayers like the pagans thinking that they will be heard for their repetition." That does not make prayer effective. What is it, then, that makes prayer effective? I believe it's the Holy Spirit. I believe that what James is saying or implying in this verse is that the petition of a righteous man made effective by the Spirit is very powerful. In Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18, and Jude chapter 20, both cases, Paul and Jude tell us to pray in the Spirit. Now he's not talking about Spirit with a small "s" there. They're saying pray in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? I believe it means the kind of thing that Paul talks about in Romans 8:26 when he says it's the Spirit who teaches us to pray. It's the Spirit in us that groans and longs for the will of God to be formed in us and through us, and it's that Spirit who when we don't know what we ought to pray for begins to teach us what is that holy, acceptable, perfect will of God that God wants to accomplish through us. It's the Spirit who then changes your heart and my heart to want that will. So it's something that we want to pray. It's something that we begin to desire. It's something we begin to long for. Our petition becomes more formed because we are now entering in our hearts to that will of God.

It's the Spirit who gives faith to believe the promises of God, to believe that he hears our prayers, to believe that we can come with full access through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and be heard in our praying. It's the Spirit who brings those prayers haltingly, faultingly, so deficient in how they're offered, and offers them up to the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ and makes them effective. I believe that what James is saying here is that the petition, brothers, whether you're praying for healing as we prayed for Deanna and have rejoiced to hear how God has answered in the surgery going as good as could have been hoped for, the best that we can tell at this point, we say we pray. Why? Because we believe that the petition of a righteous man, not that we're righteous in ourselves, but the petition of a bunch of sinners at Columbia Presbyterian made righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ, offering that petition on Wednesday, before and since, before the Father, made effective by the Spirit because it's in line with his purposes, becomes very powerful.

Very powerful and that's the last point. On the back side of it, what kind of power does this kind of prayer have? It has great power. Great power, with an exclamation mark. How powerful is it? Ephesians 3, chapter 3, verse 20, Paul says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine, according to his power that is

at work within us." That power that he says he longs for us to know in chapter 1 in verse 19 when he says, "I long that you know that your eyes would be opened to know the incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand far above in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion." It is the power of Jesus Christ. The petition of a righteous man made effective has the very power of the risen Christ. That's what I think James wants you and for me to see and to believe.

Do you believe that? Do you believe this morning that your prayer has the very power of the risen Christ when it is made effective by the Spirit? That's something to believe, isn't it? That's something to stop and to consider. Do I believe that my prayers, not because of me or my righteousness, but because of Christ's righteousness and the Spirit's effectiveness, will be that powerful? Because Jesus is the strong man who has come and he has released me from Satan's grasp when his coils were wrapped around me and there was no other hope for me. Jesus has released me from the grip of the law, whose iron justice had condemned me to the wrath of a righteous God. And Jesus suffered under that law. Jesus defeated Satan at the cross and at the empty tomb. And Jesus has come as the strong man forth to say, "My power is available to you in your praying because you're mine. And because you're my disciple, come." When you and I realize that we come and have access to the Father because of what Jesus has done, how can we come and simply selfishly present our own desires to him? We come and we present the desire to want the things of Christ and then the Spirit begins to change our hearts and change our desires and he makes our prayers effective.

I think of a pastor in Alabama, Frank Barker, pastor of a Presbyterian church in America. He gathers with a small group of people to pray on Thursday mornings, just like we do. [unintelligible] I don't know when he prays. I think it's Wednesday evenings. But it's a group of people come to pray with him, just like we have our concerts of prayer on Thursday mornings. On this one particular evening, a fellow showed up for the first time he didn't know, and the fellow said, "I don't believe in prayer. I'm here to watch. I'd like to observe what you Christians do and I want to sit and watch while you pray. So you pray and I'll watch." How would you like that if somebody came into your prayer meeting and said, "I just want to see what there is to this that you Christians do." It's a little intimidating, huh? So Frank Barker said, "Well, what would you like us to pray about?" And this fellow had an answer ready. He said, "Pray that your church will be full this Sunday." Well, it was the middle of the summer and the church tended to be about two-thirds full at best during that time. But, you know, you're sort of intimidated by this guy, what are you going to do? You sort of defend yourself and so he said, "OK, we'll pray that. We'll see what God does." Maybe it's just kind of an impulse, but they joined together that night, and they prayed that the church would be full that Sunday.

Well, this guy went even further. He said, "I want to set a criterion for this so it's objective. It's got to be full enough so that you got to get out the green chairs." See, that was the overflow chairs and they met in this little place that wasn't the facility they owned, but they had this facility and when they had to get the green chairs out, that meant



they were really full. So he said, "You've got to get the green chairs out." So they prayed, and that Sunday they all came and they set up as usual and it was emptier than it had been for weeks. Now, how would you feel?

So he began to pray rather quickly, reminding God of what he had said to him earlier in the week and how God's reputation was on the line before this guy, and as they began to pray, cars began to pull into the shopping center where they were meeting. In fact, so many cars began to pull in the shopping center, they wondered if somebody had opened up and they didn't know it and so they began to look outside and the people were all coming toward them for worship. And hastily the set up crew ran and they got the green chairs and they set them up. You know what happened? That fellow was converted to Jesus Christ right there on the spot that morning. And here's a fellow who had seen the power of prayer and as a brand new Christian, he began to join with him every week to pray, believing that the petition of a righteous man made effective by the Spirit is very powerful.

And so after a few weeks of praying, he said, "You know, fall's coming here now," and he said, "that parking lot is not big enough. We need another parking lot. I'd like to pray that God would give us a parking lot by the fall. That's two weeks away. I'm going to pray that God will give us to begin construction on a new parking lot within two weeks." Well, Barker, the pastor, tried to remind him gently that there had been a committee, of course, duly constructed to consider this problem and that they weren't even scheduled to report within two weeks, they were going to report sometime later on in the fall, you know. And so this fellow says, "I believe that God can do it." Well, what are you going to say? This guy had just become a Christian through answered prayer. So what are you going to say? "No, he really isn't going to do that." You know, so, "OK, well, we'll join with you. You pray that. We'll see what happens."

The next Sunday, they got to the service, a woman came up after the service. She said, "I believe we need a new parking lot and God's laid it on my heart and here's a check for \$5,000 to get that parking lot begun to be built." Two days later, somebody from the committee came in and they said, "You know, this contractor just came to us and he's given a bid that he'll do it for \$5,000. Now we couldn't think anybody would do it for \$5,000, but this guy says he's between jobs, he'd like to fill it in, and if we do it beginning right now, he'll do it for \$5,000." The parking lot was constructed beginning 12 days after that fella had prayed within two weeks that God would do it. Do we believe that the petition of a righteous man, brand new Christian or a saint who's walked up and down for years, made effective by the Spirit is very powerful?

I think finally one last example of the thing that John White says in his book on effective leadership, he talks about how we as Christians often fussily pray over a thousand details but White says one of the things that God has shown me through the years is the benefit of seeking the strategic simple petition to pray in a very complex manner. Now he says, that'll often take me a good deal of praying to discover what that matter is. He says it's sort of like Napoleon, who in his genius as a General would stand up on a hill and he would watch the battle and as he'd watch the troops fighting back and forth, he would say

to one of his commanders under him, "Take that farmhouse at any cost is strategic to the battle and hold it." And they would take it and they would hold it and they would win because it was strategic to the winning of the battle. And White said, I found that praying is like that, that oftentimes what the Holy Spirit wants me to do is understand the strategic matter and offer that as a simple, specific petition to break through all the rest of the complexity so that God will answer that specific matter and will honor himself.

He gives an example of that at one point when he was the head of intervarsity in this particular country and he says of that matter, "On one occasion, a serious situation was developing because one influential leader was leading large numbers of groups in a dangerous direction. The issue was to come to a head at a certain meeting, a meeting that I could not possibly attend. How ought I to pray? What ought I to do? As I waited on God, it seemed that he was saying, 'Pray that he will repent and admit his error at that meeting.'" What would you have done or I have done in such a situation? All kinds of things we could have prayed about, what was developing to be a very volatile situation, destructive consequences all over. He came down to that one thing, God was saying, "Pray for that fellow to repent." But Lord, he's not the kind of fellow to do that. "Pray that he will repent." But Lord... "Pray that he will repent." "And so I did. And a week later, the astonishing news of his profound change of heart reached me. The crisis was over. The tragedy that I dreaded never took place. It was not by my powerful praying that had changed matters, but the fact that I was simply collaborating with God's plans."

You and I have an awful lot we need to learn about praying, don't we? To learn about the fact that, as James tells us, the petition of a righteous man, any mere Christian justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, when made effective by the Holy Spirit, is very powerful. How do we need to learn that as a congregation? I wonder how many of you will want to join with me on Thursday morning, 6:30 to 7:25, when those of us who desire to do that gather over at the Potter's House right over there on 108 to pray that God will show us as a congregation his power for our needs. And how many of you have as the motto of your own life, "Why pray when you can worry?" And how many of you will then take this week and claim that verse and say, "Lord, I believe that the petition of even someone like me because of the righteousness of Jesus can be made effective by your Spirit and accomplish great things." As a church in our concerts of prayer, as individuals in our own worries and frets, let's see the power of God.

Let's pray.

*Lord our God, we pray that you would show us your great power, for Lord, we know that as we hear what you have done in that church in Alabama, what you have done in Frank Barker's life, what you've done in John White's life, we long to see you show your power in our lives. Lord, you know how I have been discouraged in my own prayer life recently and how you have encouraged me and strengthened my faith through this verse, through James's counsel and encouragement. I pray that each one of us will take that to heart, will believe your word and see that your very reputation is at stake in whether that is true or not, and that we will be a people who will learn to pray expectantly. Teach us, we pray, as a congregation. Draw numbers of us together in our concerts of prayer this fall*

*that we will have to multiply them again. Bring some of us together, Lord, just those that you want to be serious in learning with me how to pray and see prayers answered this Thursday morning and in the Thursdays to come. Teach us in our families, teach us individually. For Jesus' sake and honor. Amen.*