

Pacesetters Devotional James 5:16-20

James 5:16 Therefore . . . pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous person can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a person with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. ¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Most of us have friends and family members who have received Jesus, but who are currently not following Him. It is painful and distressing to see them in this condition. What can we do to influence them to return to the Lord? This passage reminds us that our prayers can have a powerful impact on such people.

James' encouraging words in 5:19,20 follow his exhortation to pray in 5:16-18. In other words, we "turn them back" from sin and error to the truth through our prayers for them. We pray for them "that (they) may be healed" (5:16).

James reminds us of Elijah as an encouragement to pray in this way. Elijah was "righteous" in the sense that he was in right standing with God, and we also are in right standing with God through our faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). Elijah was "a man with a nature like ours" – he had flaws, and he sometimes became despondent (see 1 Kings 19). Yet God worked through his prayers for wayward Israel to influence them toward repentance. James reminds us of two ways that Elijah prayed for them.



First, Elijah prayed for drought to come upon Israel as a discipline for their waywardness. “He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.” As a prophet of God, Elijah knew that God had warned Israel that He would discipline them through drought when they turned away from Him (Deuteronomy 28:15,24). God therefore answered Elijah’s prayers for drought, which created a crisis that ultimately led many of Israel’s leaders to turn back to God (1 Kings 18:39).

Are you willing to pray for your wayward loved ones that God will discipline them – through painful hardship if need be – in order to soften their hearts? This is certainly not a popular idea in our culture, but it is a biblical idea. How grateful many of us are that Christians were praying for us along these lines when we were far from God! It is worth it to experience hardship, if that hardship influences us to reconsider our rebellious attitude and turn back to God.

Second, Elijah prayed for God to bless Israel as soon as they began to show signs of repentance. “Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.” Immediately after he saw some of Israel’s leaders turn back to God, Elijah prayed to God to end the drought. And God answered his prayer with a heavy shower (1 Kings 18:41-44). How consistent God’s answer was with His character! He disciplines us for our good, and He is merciful when we turn back to Him. He loves to bless His people at the first sign of our willingness to trust Him.

We can pray in a similar way for our wayward loved ones. Having prayed for God’s discipline when they were stubbornly resistant, we can also pray for God’s blessing when they show the first signs of turning back to Him. Their wayward years may have deceived them into fearing God as an exacting task-master. But our prayers for God’s blessing when they begin to repent can help them to regain a proper view of God. What a privilege to partner with God in this way!

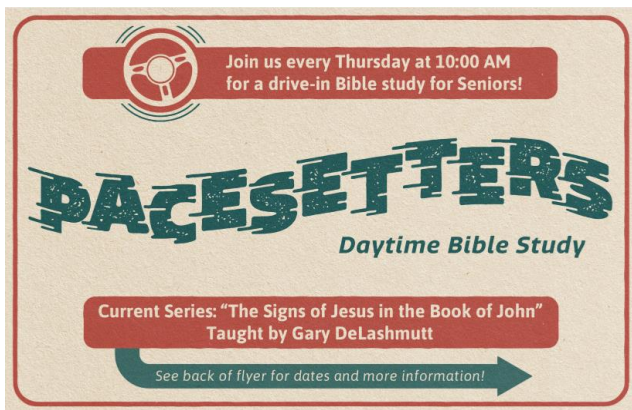


Elijah prayed for Israel for many years. When Israel was obstinate during Samuel's day, he said to them: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). Some of us have likewise prayed for wayward loved ones for many years. Let us persevere in prayer for them, trusting God's promise that our prayers unleash His powerful influence into their lives.

"Praying is the most powerful thing we do on earth. Let us be faithful at it . . . It may be prayer for the repentance of a child or of a fellow Christian under the grip of Satan. (Such) people may not be open to listen to us when we advise them . . . But we can take the battle to a higher plane. We can fight Satan, who holds them in his grip, so that the grip will be loosened and they will be less resistant to the wooing of God's Spirit."¹

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for allowing me to partner with You through prayer for my wayward loved ones. I know that You will not violate their free will, but I also know that Your influence is far greater than mine. Help me to love them enough to pray for their discipline when they are stubborn. And help me to pray in faith for their blessing at the first sign of their repentance. Thank You that the day is coming when You will show me all of the ways that you have answered these prayers. In the meantime, help me to persevere in loving them in this way.

**Come hear Gary in person at our Pacesetters Drive-in Bible Study!
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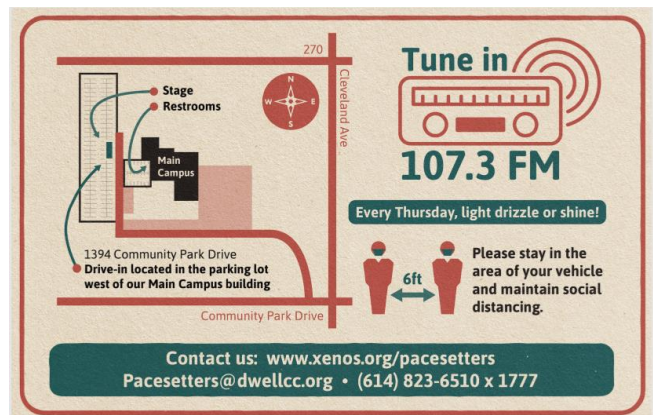


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¹ Ajith Fernando, *Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (Zondervan, 1993), p. 153.

