



Week Four: Fervent

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

Day 22: Introduction to Week 4

All of us can relate to going through seasons in which our passion or enthusiasm for doing certain activities decreases. Sometimes we simply lose interest over time. We get busy doing other things. We encounter some type of crisis or resistance that shakes our confidence. We discover that it's harder than we expected to finish what we've started. We begin to question if it's worth the time and energy we're investing. We lose heart.

The same thing can happen in our prayer lives. If we're not careful, we can easily lose our passion and our motivation and, before we know it, we either stop praying altogether or begin falling into patterns of shallow, formulaic, watered-down prayers in which we hastily come before God and spend the bulk of our prayer time mindlessly and superficially running through a list of things we'd like Him to do in our lives.

God doesn't ever want you to forget who you're talking to in prayer. Nor does He want you to be satisfied with a mediocre or half-hearted prayer life. He wants you to earnestly seek Him in prayer with zeal and with your *whole* heart (Jeremiah 29:12-13). He wants a vibrant relationship with you and He wants to use prayer as a means for you to know Him more. He wants to bring you to deeper levels of dependence on Him.

So, are you open to having God do whatever it takes to give you a renewed sense of passion and urgency in your prayer life? If you are, then ask Him to do just that this week.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 4 Fervent

What can we learn about fervent prayer from Daniel?

1. Fervent prayer was _____ in Daniel's life.
2. Fervent prayer is _____ whenever we are immersed in God's Word.
3. Fervent prayer is _____.
4. Fervent prayer _____ God's interests and His glory.

Personal Response:

1. What did you hear?

2. How do you hope to respond?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Who is someone whose prayer life you admire? Why?
2. Read Daniel 9:1-19 in order to better observe the various elements of his prayer. What initial things stand out to you?
3. How does prayer that arises from reading God's Word add energy and sincerity to our prayers?
4. How is Daniel's prayer similar in pattern to the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4)?
5. Why is it significant that Daniel prayed with fasting and in sackcloth and ashes (v. 3)?
6. What role should adoration for God play in our prayers? What words or phrases does Daniel use to express his adoration for God?
7. What role should confession and repentance from sin play in our prayers? What does the fact that confession follows adoration teach us? What words or phrases does Daniel use as part of his time of confession?
8. Would you say that your prayers are primarily motivated by God's glory and His interests? Why or why not? Why is this an important consideration when it comes to praying with greater fervency?
9. Why does God care about whether or not our prayers are heartfelt?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 23

What is Fervent Prayer?

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

James 5:16b (NKJV)

While we should always check to make sure that our prayers are in line with God's will (1 John 5:14-15) and that we are praying with the right motives (James 4:3), today's theme verse indicates that God mercifully and mightily responds when His children offer up fervent prayers.

What, then, is *fervent* praying? And is it possible that we are not as fervent in our praying as we should be?

The specific Greek word that James uses in v. 16 for *fervent* describes having intense feeling or enthusiasm for something. Elsewhere in the New Testament another word for *fervent* is sometimes used which means "to boil" or "to be hot." To pray with fervency, then, is to pray from the heart with great intensity, urgency, and energy. It's to pray with determination regardless of how much Satan tries to discourage you. And as we'll see this week, fervent prayers very often mean taking action.

Fervency in prayer is not about being longwinded or superficially emotional. Fervent prayers are sincere. They are reliable indicators of your priorities, motives, and the condition of your heart before God.

So, if you find you've recently been lacking in fervor, start by reminding yourself of the incredible privilege you have in prayer. Prayer is not some incantation or magic formula, but it is a powerful means of communication with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Ask Him today for the zeal and boldness in prayer that He wants you to have.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

How does today's verse encourage or challenge you?

What does your current degree of fervency in prayer say about what you believe to be true about prayer? About God?

How might last week's topic of desperation for God and this week's topic of fervency in prayer be connected?

Day 24

Fervent Prayer in Action

“Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

James 5:17-18

To illustrate how the fervent prayers of God’s children accomplish much (James 5:16b), the book of James points us to the prayer life of the prophet Elijah.

Like us, Elijah was a normal, sinful human being. Nevertheless, we read in 1 Kings 17 that he prayed earnestly that it would not rain on the land so that Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, would humble himself before God. And in answer to Elijah’s fervent prayer, God caused it to not rain for three and a half years. 1 Kings 18 then tells us that, after the people of Israel finally turned to God in desperation, Elijah prayed once again. In response, God produced a heavy rainstorm.

Notice the earnestness and zeal with which Elijah prayed. He “bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42). And as he waited for the rain to come, he persisted in prayer, even to the point of ordering his servant seven different times to report back on how God was answering his prayers (vv. 43-45).

Do you believe that God can bring about a breakthrough in your circumstances? Consider the influence one ordinary individual can have when they passionately and urgently come before an extraordinary God in prayer!

Your Personal Reflection and Application

What does Elijah's physical posture in prayer indicate about the posture of his heart toward God? Why is this important?

What point might James be trying to make in v. 17 when he says that "Elijah was a human being, even as we are"?

Has God ever stirred within your heart a desire to pray for something so enormous that only He could make it happen? What did that experience teach you?

Day 25

An Earnest Plea for a Prisoner

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

Acts 12:5

The apostle Peter was asleep in prison. Having been placed there by King Herod for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, Peter awaited his trial the following day, at which time he would likely be sentenced to death. To prevent Peter from escaping, Herod assigned four squads of soldiers to guard him. The situation appeared hopeless.

In response, the Christian church prayed together throughout the night – *earnestly*.

Picture a rope that is fully stretched out, pulled tight, without any slack. Or picture a hand that is extended and desperately grasping for something. That is actually what the Greek word for *earnestly* means in Acts 12:5. The same root word is used in Luke 22:44 when it says that Jesus prayed “more earnestly” in the Garden of Gethsemane and, in agony, actually sweat drops of blood.

The idea that Luke, the author of Acts, is conveying is that the church was not simply running through a casual listing of prayer requests. They were fervently and strenuously praying to God for Peter with all of the passion and energy they could corporately muster.

As a result of their earnest prayers, God broke through and did the unthinkable, rescuing and releasing Peter from prison.

Never doubt the power of prayer. Prayer is not a last option – something to turn to when all else fails or you’ve explored every other possible option. It is the first, best, and most powerful thing you can ever do.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

While God can respond to the prayer of just one person, today's story also illustrates the power of corporate prayer. It's an encouragement whenever we're willing to share prayer burdens with other believers. How might praying for a particular need with others stimulate you to pray with greater fervor and faith? When have you witnessed God do something miraculous in response to corporate prayer?

Think of some Christ-followers who are currently undergoing persecution for the sake of the gospel. (If you need some ideas, a quick internet search may be helpful.) List their names below, and spend some time today interceding on their behalf. Pray that the message of the gospel would spread as a result of, or in spite of, this persecution.

Day 26

Fasting for a Breakthrough

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Matthew 6:17-18

If you are sincerely interested in growing in zeal for God and praying with greater levels of desperation and fervor than ever before, one of the best – and also one of the most neglected – practices you can undertake is the discipline of fasting.

Fasting – intentionally and temporarily forgoing a normal necessity or routine in order to devote yourself to prayer and to drawing closer to God – has been practiced for millennia by Old Testament saints on down to the present day. It is often done when making important decisions (Acts 13:2; 14:23), to express repentance (2 Samuel 12:16) or humility (Psalm 35:13-14), when embarking upon a new season of life or ministry (Matthew 4:1-2), or to simply demonstrate your dependence upon God.

Jesus’ statement above (“*when you fast*”) indicates that fasting is normal, acceptable, and expected in the Christian life. And yet, many people never consider fasting when they’re praying for a breakthrough. We don’t think we can go without food (or caffeine, media, technology, or whatever it is that you normally depend upon). But that’s precisely the point. Fasting is putting your fervor into action. It is saying to God, “Lord, you are more important to me than _____. I long to hear from You, so take my eyes off of the things of this world in order to focus more completely on You.”

Your Personal Reflection and Application

What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial? What are your concerns?

Should fasting be considered as a way to manipulate God to do what you want or as a way to demonstrate that you are more spiritual than others? Why or why not?

What kind of “rewards” from fasting might Jesus be referring to in today’s Scripture passage?

Day 27

Praying the Scriptures

“Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long.”

Psalm 119:97

How should you pray when you don't know what to pray? How can you keep your prayers from becoming stale or monotonous?

Hopefully this week's devotionals have been helpful in addressing some of those concerns. One further action step to consider making a regular practice, though, is to pray Scripture back to God. The early church prayed the Scriptures (Acts 4:23-31). Many parts of Scripture – especially the book of Psalms – are, in fact, ready-made prayers (e.g., Psalm 63; Matthew 6:9-13; Ephesians 3:14-21). Bible verses are a great means for praying more earnestly and fervently, because they can focus your mind on what matters most and ensure that you are praying in accordance with God's will (1 John 5:14).

Start by using a verse or a passage to shape your prayer. Simply pray the verse or passage back to God. Personalize it by substituting in your name or the name of someone for whom you are interceding. Use verses to cry for help to God or to give thanks to Him because of who Scripture reveals Him to be.

As with fasting or praying in general, your focus should always be on God first, rather than viewing prayer as some type of formula to get God to give you what you want. Prayer is less about how and what you say, and more about fervently drawing near to the merciful, miracle-working God to whom you are praying.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

What prayers of the Bible have helped you in the past?

How might praying Scripture add new life and fervency to how you normally approach prayer?

As you reflect back upon this week's devotionals and teaching on fervent prayer, what specifically has God revealed to you? What are some next steps you need to begin taking?

Day 28

Application Day: Fasting

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

Isaiah 58:6

We took a brief look this week at the discipline of fasting, particularly as it pertains to fervent prayer. You don't have to have previous experience with fasting in order to benefit from it. It is a meaningful way to express your devotion to God and to seek God's will and grace beyond your normal habits of prayer and worship.

With this in mind, prayerfully consider an appetite (e.g., a meal, media, technology) from which you can abstain for part or all of today. Here are some suggestions to get the most out of this exercise:

- Pray for wisdom (James 1:5) about what God would want you to abstain from today in order to more fully attend to Him in prayer.
- If you decide to fast from a meal, be sure to stay hydrated.
- You should consider postponing your fast if you are sick or in a hurry today. It's important to be able to give God your full attention during the fast.
- If you are new to fasting and aren't sure how to start, simply spend the time with God in prayer and in Scripture that you would normally spend on whatever activity it is from which you are abstaining. When your stomach growls or you are tempted to give in to your appetite, use that as an opportunity to express your desire for God to speak to and sustain you.
- Keep in mind that the Enemy will try to discourage or dissuade you from fasting. Expect temptation or discouragement.
- Be mindful of your motivations. The point of fasting is not to focus on yourself, but to focus on God.

Write down any insights God gives you during your fast. You may not necessarily see or sense any immediate “fruit” from your fast, but offer your desires and prayers to God in faith and as a sacrifice of praise.