

Text: I Kings 18:41-45

Title: “Praying Your Way Through Need”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Rhonda Crosswhite emerged as a hero in the aftermath of the devastating tornado that ravaged Moore OK last week. Rhonda is a sixth-grade teacher at Plaza Tower Elementary School in Moore, the school that was hit so hard and in which several people died. It would have been much worse had it not been for the selfless efforts of teachers and administrators like Rhonda Crosswhite. When the alarm sounded Rhonda gathered six of her children into a restroom and literally draped her body over the bodies of the children. She said that one of the little boys kept saying, “I love you, I love you, please don't die with me.” Rhonda, with her school teacher voice, screamed over the noise of the tornado, “Quit worrying; we're fine, we're fine; I'm protecting you.” As Rhonda listened to her children screaming and sobbing she said she did what people say public school teachers are not supposed to do in school: “I prayed – and prayed out loud!” She cried out, “God please take care of my kids.” She may get sued by the ACLU, but Rhonda Crosswhite, in the crucial moment knew the only hope was to cry out to God in behalf of those children.

Today I'm concluding this brief series I've entitled “Praying Through.” God in His grace has given us great privilege and power in prayer. Part of my motivation in this series is to provoke you to prayer. Prayer is essential to our relationship with God and to possessing all that God wants us to have in Christ. Sometimes it's a challenge and we don't feel like we are getting through to God. But the promise is that God is waiting for you to approach Him in prayer. Open your Bibles to I Kings 18. This is going to drop us right down in the middle of the life of one of the great OT prophets by the name of Elijah. Before I read our text I need to explain the context of what's happening here.

This is a time of great rebellion in the nation of Israel. The king is a half-hearted, compromised leader by the name of Ahab. To make matters worse he married a woman named Jezebel, who was a worshipper of the pagan god Baal. She introduced the worship of Baal to the people of God so that there were actually hundreds of priests (or prophets) who led Israel in the worship of this pagan god. So God determined that He would discipline Israel by withholding rain from their land, and He announced it through His messenger, the prophet Elijah:

1 Kings 17:1 - Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

Three years later God spoke to Elijah again and said, “Alright, I'm going to send rain on the land; go tell Ahab.” But before that could happen, God would deal with the pagan priests of Baal. Remember the amazing story of the showdown between the prophets of Baal and Elijah, the prophet of God, on Mt. Carmel. Elijah told the priests of Baal to build their altar to their god and put a sacrifice upon it. Elijah would build an altar to the Lord God and put a sacrifice on it. The God who answered by fire would be revealed as the true God. Of course Baal didn't come through for his guys, but the Lord God answered by fire and consumed the sacrifice and, in fact, the whole altar. And Israel witnessed this and cried, “The Lord, He is God!”

But now there is the matter of the drought, and the promise of God that He would once again send the rain. Now knowing the context we can read our text ... I Kings 18:41-45.

Well, what we've seen dropping out of dark clouds the last couple of weeks it may be hard for us to get excited about praying for rain (in spite of the fact that many places in our state are in severe drought). But here the example of a great Old Testament prophet shows us how to pray our way through our need to a place of provision. Elijah's and Israel's need was rain. Your need may be different ... a job, a restored marriage, the salvation of a loved one, money to pay your bills, or healing for your body. Well, let's enroll in Elijah's school of prayer and learn how to pray our way through need to a place of provision. I want to point out four principles for effectively praying through your needs to receive the provision God has for you.

1. STAND ON THE WORD OF GOD (I Kings 18:1,41).

You see this all starts with God and His Word. Why was Elijah praying for rain to begin with? It is because God SAID, "I intend to send rain." He had already put Elijah in the powerful position of being the one who would call for the rain. There would be no rain, or even dew on the ground, until Elijah called for it. It would not come about unless and until Elijah called for it in prayer.

And this is the amazing grace of God in prayer ... that He has certain things He intends to do, and He intends to do it in answer to the prayers of His people.

So Elijah gets a word from God that it was time for the rain to come.

1 Kings 18:1 - After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."

Notice that "the word of the Lord came to Elijah..." And this was the basis of his prayer for rain." And so after the showdown with Baal's priests, Elijah goes to Ahab. And we're back to ...

1 Kings 18:41 - And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

So the prophet tells the king that the showdown between the true prophet and the false prophets is done, and that he should go and refresh himself. Now this is interesting. Elijah says, "There is the sound of heavy rain." It isn't raining yet, but Elijah hears the sound of a heavy rain. You see, faith hears and sees what others cannot hear or see.

There's another important thing here. The pagan god Baal, among other things, was the "rain god." And yet when the Lord announced through His prophet that there was to be no rain, there's nothing Baal or his prophets could do to make it rain ... for three years. And then when God says, "It will rain," it rained in answer to the prayer of the man of God, not the prophets of the "rain god."

So all of this starts with the word, with the promise, of God. And loved ones, this is the basis for our authority in prayer. We stand on the promises of God when we pray. It is not our power that accomplishes anything; it is His Word that makes things happen.

To effectively pray through our need to a place of provision we must start and stand on the promises of God. Then we have assurance in prayer because we believe, we trust, we have faith, that God has the power to do what He calls for.

John 14:13-14 - And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in alignment with the character and the purposes of Jesus. Now how do we know the character and the purposes of Jesus? We must be vitally connected to Him and to His Word so that He can show us how to pray and what to pray for. That's what Jesus meant when He said:

John 15:7 - If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

This is the same kind of confidence in prayer the psalmist talked about when he said...

Psalm 37:4 - Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Get yourself in a place where all you want is what God wants. And all your life you have all you want.

So the first thing is to stand on the Word of God. But Elijah shows us that next we...

2. KNEEL TO DO THE HARD WORK OF PRAYER (I Kings 18:42).

Effective praying is hard work. And the reason most of our praying falls short of effective praying is because we are not willing to do the hard work of prayer.

1 Kings 18:42 - So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

Note: Now we may read this story and think, "Elijah was an extraordinary man. He had an anointing from God that I will never have. There's no way I could have this kind of power in prayer." But in James 5 there's a little commentary on this very episode in Elijah's life:

James 5:17-18 - Elijah was a man just like us. 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.

Elijah was just like us. He was an ordinary guy who accomplished extraordinary things in prayer. How? It it because Elijah didn't *presume*; he *prayed*. He did the hard work of prayer ... "he prayed earnestly."

Well, the Bible shows us that when God's people submit to the hard work of prayer, it is richly rewarded by God.

1 Kings 18:42 - So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

Now this verse show us that ...

- **Elijah found a place for prayer** – “he climbed to the top of Carmel.” If you've ever travelled to Israel you have likely visited this site. It's a very popular attraction. Carmel is a “mountain.” And Elijah goes to the top, away from the crowds where he could watch and pray. Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul went to a river outside of Philippi to find a place of prayer. Where is your place of prayer ... the place where you run to meet God regularly in prayer?
- **Elijah assumed a posture in prayer** – He “bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.” His posture indicated the urgency of his prayer. You see, the posture of your body can reflect the posture of your soul. Often we are so casual about our praying like we're not really taking God or prayer seriously. This is the posture of desperate prayer. For many of us, our situation is desperate ... but we aren't!
- **Elijah displayed persistence in prayer** – the prayer was not answered immediately, and Elijah had to keep going back to God. Seven times Elijah prayed; then he sent his servant to see if there was an answer. We don't know how long this went on. But it really doesn't matter whether it was seven minutes or seven years. We have to learn persistence in our praying.

There are many reasons why our needs are not met on our timetable. It may be because we are not *praying*; we are *presuming*.

James 4:2b - You do not have, because you do not ask God.

Or it may be that we are praying with the wrong motivation. You see, the power of God only flows in the direction of His purpose. God's power over nature would serve the purpose of God in showing Ahab who was God in Israel. What is your true motivation in asking God to meet a need in your life? Is it to fulfill His greater purposes, or to get your own selfish desires?

James 4:3 - When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

So effective praying means we stand on the Word of God, and then kneel to do the hard work of prayer, and then we...

3. WATCH FOR THE ACTIVITY OF GOD (I Kings 18:43).

1 Kings 18:43 - “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

After some time in prayer, Elijah sent his servant to a higher vantage point where he could see the Mediterranean Sea. That was the direction rain normally came from. Seven times Elijah prayed, and seven times he sent his servant to check.

Do you pray with that kind of expectancy? P.U.S.H. = Pray Until Something Happens.

Colossians 4:2 - Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Well on his seventh trip to the summit, the servant spotted a small cloud no bigger than the palm of a man’s hand. But it was a signal that God was about to move ... the provision of God was on its way. But there’s one more principle to effective praying:

4. ACT IN FAITH THAT GOD WILL MOVE (1 Kings 18:44-45).

You see, while we are praying, and before God answers, we demonstrate faith by what we think, say and do. Notice what happens:

1 Kings 18:44 - The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’ ”

So way off on the horizon there’s a small cloud; but Elijah’s faith is strong. God will move and Elijah acts on it before it happens. Elijah said to Ahab not, “it *might* rain so just to be safe you better take precaution and get across the river before it floods.” No, Elijah says, “King, it *will* rain and you need to leave now.” Do you see the difference?

ILLUSTRATION – It’s one thing to pray for rain. It’s another thing to pray for rain and keep your umbrella handy for when it does rain.

1 Kings 18:45 - Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

Now what does this look like, practically speaking? It may simply mean that you will not worry. Worry is a choice. And when you are really trusting God to take care of a matter, you act in faith when you choose not to worry ... when, in fact, you choose to rejoice and praise God in advance for what He is going to do.

It may mean that you will give yourself to prayer alone, and not ask for anyone else to help.

ILLUSTRATION – One of the great prayer warriors in the history of the church was a man named George Mueller. In the mid-1800s God put it on the heart of this evangelist to start an orphanage in Bristol, England. Over a span of sixty years he cared for 10,000 orphans. It’s an amazing story. The campus of the orphanage in Bristol grew to take up 13 acres. When God first gave him the vision to

start the orphanage Mueller had the equivalent of 50 cents in his pocket. But he prayed and trusted God. He determined that he would never ask a man for money ... only God. The millions of dollars (in today's dollars) that were required to build and run this orphanage in the 1800s was supplied by the hand of God in answer to prayer. On several occasions George Mueller would gather the children in the dining room for a meal. He would stand and give thanks for the food that were to receive ... in spite of the fact that there was no food for them to eat. And on these occasions, at the last minute a baker would show up with surplus bread from his bakery, or a grocer with surplus groceries from his store.

Mark 11:24 - Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Now some of you are facing a great need today, and it hasn't occurred to you that the reason there hasn't been a breakthrough is because you haven't reached the point of earnestly praying about it, like Elijah earnestly prayed for rain. Oh you have sort of "piddled" at your praying, but you haven't reached the point of urgency. Or you've been presuming rather than praying. I challenge you today to pray through ... to take God seriously and to take prayer seriously, and watch what God will do.