**Long Prayer: Wrong Prayer?**

Often in Christian circles we understand prayer as just talking to God. Of course, in one sense, it is. We might use that description when we explain prayer to a small child. But when a child grows up and gains greater knowledge and understanding a more ‘grown up’ definition is needed.

When a small child draws a picture, you would praise them for it, but if an adult drew the same picture you would criticise it. Why? Because you expect more from an adult.

We as mature Christians often have a similar attitude towards prayer. We think that the longer the prayer the more value should be placed on it. But is this what the Bible teaches? We also hear phrases such as ‘praying hard’ which is not a Biblical concept. What does ‘praying hard’ mean anyway? Does it mean praying often or praying for a long time or both? Such phrases are confusing because they have no Biblical definition and so they could mean different things to different people.

Jesus actually rebuked the religious leaders of His day for making long prayers because they were using their oratory skills to take advantage of helpless people.

**14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.**

**Matthew 23:14**

When we look at the prayers of Jesus, we see that He did not pray long prayers. The longest prayer Jesus prayed is recorded in John 17, which is only 26 verses long. In context Jesus prayed this before His arrest and crucifixion. In most of Jesus’ prayers He spoke to situations and commanded things to happen. We see an example of this John Chapter 11.

**41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.****42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.****43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.**

**John 11:41-43**

Jesus never condemned short prayers but spoke against long prayers prayed for show. As we have seen Jesus prayed His longest prayer in private but short prayers in public. I think this is something we can learn from.

Jesus said that we are not heard because of our long prayers. So long prayers aren’t necessarily more powerful than shorter prayers as many people think.

Now let us look at something James taught about prayer.

**16 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

**17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**

**18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.**

**James 5:16-18**

James tells us that effectual fervent prayer avails much (gets success). James then teaches about prayer using Elijah as an illustration. Notice that verse 17 says that Elijah **prayed earnestly** but in verse 18 he says that Elijah **prayed**. What is the significance of this? To understand we need to see what Elijah did.

**1 And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As* the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.**

**1 Kings 17:1 (my emphasis)**

Notice what Elijah did to bring the drought - he spoke to Ahab. The whole sentence only lasts a few seconds! Yet James called it earnest prayer.

Now let us look at how Elijah prayed to bring rain.

**41 And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for *there is* a sound of abundance of rain.  
42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,  
43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, *There is* nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.****44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare *thy chariot*, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not.****45 And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.**

**1 Kings 18:41-45 (my emphasis)**

Elijah went to the top of the mountain and bowed himself down and put his face between his knees. That looks very intense, very powerful but James does not call this **earnest prayer**; no, he said it was **prayer**. Please notice that both times Elijah prayed he had success.

But if we looked at the two prayers that Elijah prayed and were asked what the earnest prayer was, the majority of Christians would say the second example. Yet this is not what the Bible teaches. It is what religious tradition teaches. What we consider as earnest prayer is not what God considers as earnest prayer!

Now let us look at the words **effectual fervent** that James used in verse 16. In the Greek language the words **effectual fervent** translate as one word, **energeo** which means effective, active, fervent. It is from where our English word **energy** comes. In other words we can say it refers to ‘the prayer of energy’ or ‘the prayer of command’.

Earnest prayer is a short prayer of faith power, of faith energy which gets results quickly.