

A DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

The Prayers of a Righteous Person

Part One: Received, Not Achieved

James 5:16–18 • 2 Corinthians 5:21 • Romans 3:21–24

*A devotional reflection on the awakening at the intersection of
Imputed Righteousness • Lived Righteousness • The Power of Prayer*

***“The prayer of a righteous person
is powerful and effective.”***

— James 5:16

The Awakening

James makes one of the most audacious claims in all of Scripture. He does not say that the prayer of a righteous person is heard. He does not say it is received. He does not say it is filed and will be addressed in due time. He says it is powerful and effective.

The Greek is *energoumenē*—from which English derives “energy.” The prayer of a righteous person has energy in it. It accomplishes things. It moves the unseen realm. It changes outcomes. It is not a religious formality ascending into silence. It is a force that produces results.

But the claim hinges on a single qualifier: righteous. Not the prayer of a talented person. Not the prayer of a well-educated person. Not the prayer of a person who has mastered technique. The prayer of a righteous person.

This raises the most important question any praying person can ask: What makes a person righteous? And therefore—what makes their prayer powerful?

The answer Scripture gives is both more liberating and more demanding than most of us expect.

The Foundational Text: James 5:16–18

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. 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 5:16–18

James does something extraordinary in this passage. He makes the audacious claim about righteous prayer—and then immediately illustrates it with Elijah. But before he introduces Elijah, he inserts a phrase that changes everything:

“Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”

Why does James say this? Because without it, we would dismiss the promise. We would read “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful” and immediately think: That’s for spiritual giants. That’s for prophets and apostles. That’s not for ordinary people like me.

James anticipates the objection and demolishes it. Elijah was *homoioopathes*—a person “of like nature,” subject to the same weaknesses, the same fears, the same failures we are. This is the man who, one chapter after his greatest victory on Mount Carmel, ran from Jezebel’s threat and collapsed under a broom tree asking God to let him die (1 Kings 19:4). He was not a spiritual

superhero. He was a man—with the same flesh, the same doubts, the same capacity for fear that we carry.

And yet his prayer shut the heavens for three and a half years and then opened them again.

The power was not in the man. The power was in the righteousness—and the God who honors it.

What the Text Reveals: Two Dimensions of Righteousness

The Foundation: Imputed Righteousness

The first and most fundamental dimension of righteousness in Scripture is not something we do. It is something we receive. Paul states it with breathtaking clarity:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” — 2 Corinthians 5:21

This is the great exchange at the heart of the gospel. Christ took our sin; we received His righteousness. It was not earned. It was not achieved through moral effort, religious performance, or accumulated good works. It was imputed—credited to our account—through faith in Christ.

“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known... This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” — Romans 3:21–22

This means the most fundamental qualification for powerful prayer is not moral perfection. It is faith. The righteous person is, first and foremost, a person who has been born again through faith in Jesus Christ—having declared Jesus as Lord and believed in His resurrection (Romans 10:9–11). Their righteousness is received, not achieved. It is a standing before God, secured by Christ’s work, not their own.

This is liberating beyond measure. It means the tax collector who beat his breast and cried, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13), walked away justified—declared righteous—not because of his moral performance but because of his faith-posture before God. And if justified, then his prayer had power.

The Expression: Lived Righteousness

But imputed righteousness is not the whole picture. James himself warned that “faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). The righteousness that makes prayer powerful is not merely a legal

standing that exists in the heavenly ledger while the life on earth remains unchanged. It is a standing that produces a life.

Paul describes this second dimension:

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” — Ephesians 2:10

Notice the order. We are not saved by good works. We are saved for good works. The imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith, produces a transformed life—not as the cause of our standing before God, but as the evidence of it. The righteous person’s life begins to look like the righteousness they have received.

This lived righteousness is not perfection. Elijah proved that. It is direction—a heart oriented toward God, a will submitted to His purposes, a life increasingly conformed to His character even while still struggling with the weaknesses of human nature. The psalmist captures the essence: “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). The qualifier is not perfection. It is truth—sincerity, authenticity, a genuine orientation of heart toward God.

How the Two Dimensions Work Together

This is the theological architecture that makes James 5:16 coherent:

Imputed righteousness gives you the standing to approach God at all. Without it, no prayer reaches the throne. It is the access—secured entirely by Christ’s work, received entirely by faith.

Lived righteousness is the condition in which prayer operates with full power. Sin does not revoke your standing in Christ, but it does hinder the effectiveness of your prayers. “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18). Confession and repentance clear the channel so that the power flows unobstructed.

This is why James places confession immediately before the promise: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). The confession is not earning the righteousness. It is clearing the debris so the righteousness already received can operate with full force.

The righteous person, then, is not a sinless person. It is a confessing person—a person who has received Christ’s righteousness by faith and who maintains the channel of that righteousness through honest, ongoing repentance.

The Case Study: Elijah — A Man Just Like Us

James chose his illustration with surgical precision. He did not point to Moses, whose face glowed from God's presence. He did not point to Enoch, who walked so closely with God that he was taken without dying. He pointed to Elijah—the prophet who experienced the highest highs and the lowest lows in rapid succession.

The Prayer That Shut Heaven

Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel did not come from a man in a spiritual vacuum. It came from a man who had spent years in dependence on God—fed by ravens at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:6), sustained by a widow's jar of flour that never ran out (17:16), and emboldened by the experience of watching God provide in impossible circumstances.

When he stood before the prophets of Baal and called down fire from heaven, he was not performing a stunt. He was standing on the accumulated weight of a life lived in genuine dependence. His prayer was powerful because his life was aligned—not perfect, but oriented—with the God he was calling upon.

“LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God.” — 1 Kings 18:36–37

Notice the structure of his prayer. It is not self-centered. It is God-centered. Its purpose is not Elijah's reputation but God's glory: “so these people will know that you, LORD, are God.” This is the prayer of a righteous person—one whose orientation is toward God's purposes, not personal vindication.

The Collapse That Followed

And then—within hours of the greatest prayer answer in Israel's history—Elijah ran. One threat from Jezebel, and the man who had faced down 450 prophets was hiding under a bush, asking to die (1 Kings 19:4).

James knew this. James knew the whole story. And he still pointed to Elijah and said, “He was a human being, even as we are.”

This is not an embarrassing footnote to Elijah's story. It is the very reason James chose him. The point is not that righteous people never falter. The point is that the power of their prayer does not depend on their perfection. It depends on their orientation—their standing in God's righteousness and their willingness to keep turning back to Him even after failure.

Elijah's collapse did not invalidate his prayer life. It revealed the truth James is teaching: the righteous person is not a superhuman. He is a justified human—clothed in a righteousness not

his own, honest about his weakness, and still willing to approach God despite the evidence of his frailty.

The Core Truth of Part One

Here is the theological foundation this awakening establishes:

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful not because the person is perfect, but because the righteousness is Christ's. It is received by faith, maintained by confession, and expressed through a life oriented toward God's purposes. The power is in the righteousness—and the righteousness is a gift.

This is simultaneously the most humbling and the most empowering truth about prayer. It is humbling because it strips away every pretension of self-earned spiritual authority. You do not pray with power because you have earned it. You pray with power because Christ has qualified you. It is empowering because it means the power of prayer is not reserved for spiritual elites. It is available to every person who has received Christ's righteousness by faith and who maintains the channel through honest repentance.

Elijah was a human being, even as we are. If his prayer shut heaven and opened it again, then the promise stands for every justified, confessing, God-oriented believer who dares to approach the throne.

The Question That Closes Part One

James does not ask whether you feel righteous. Feelings are not the standard. He does not ask whether you have achieved perfection. Perfection is not the requirement. He asks, implicitly, a far more searching question:

Have you received the righteousness of Christ by faith—and are you maintaining the channel through honest confession?

If the answer is yes, then the promise applies to you. Your prayer is powerful and effective—not because of who you are, but because of whose you are.

If the answer is no, that NEW LIFE is available to you—right now. The righteousness that makes prayer powerful is not something you must build over years of effort. It is something you can receive by walking through the path Scripture itself lays out. The Bible describes this path in seven steps that spell NEW LIFE:

N — New Heart Needed. Recognize that you need God’s transforming power. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26). This is the Holy Spirit’s work of conviction—the moment you see your sin clearly and know you cannot fix yourself.

E — Eternal Life Offered. Hear the good news. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God is not waiting for you to become worthy. He is offering life to you as you are.

W — Willing to Repent. Turn from sin and turn toward God. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out” (Acts 3:19). Repentance is not cleaning up your life first. It is turning—changing direction—from self to Savior.

L — Lord Jesus Confessed. Publicly declare Jesus as Lord of your life. “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is the declaration that changes your standing before God.

I — Identify with Christ’s Death, Burial and Resurrection in Baptism. Be baptized in obedience as a demonstration of your faith. “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).

F — Filled with the Spirit. God regenerates you—makes you spiritually alive. “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). This is being born again—the new creation that 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes.

E — Empowered to Walk in Newness. Live in the power of your new life in Christ. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8). This is not the end of the process. It is the beginning of the righteous life—the life whose prayer is powerful and effective.

You have just received the most consequential gift in the universe—New life in Christ Jesus, and the righteousness of God.

Part Two will examine what the righteous person's life looks like in daily practice—the heart postures, the observable behaviors, the balance of dependence and urgency, and how this lived righteousness connects to the call of revival.

A Prayer from the Awakening

Father,

We stand before You clothed in a righteousness we did not earn. Christ bore our sin so that we might become Your righteousness. This is not a theological abstraction. This is our identity—the standing that gives us access to Your throne, the qualification that makes our prayers powerful.

Forgive us for believing we must earn what You have freely given. Forgive us for the silent assumption that our prayers are powerless because we are imperfect. Forgive us for disqualifying ourselves from the very promise You made to people just like us—people of like nature, with the same weaknesses and the same access to Your grace.

Search our hearts. Reveal what needs confessing. Clear the channel so that the righteousness You have given us can operate with full power in our prayer lives.

And then give us the audacity to pray like Elijah—not because we are extraordinary, but because You are.

In the name of Christ, our righteousness,

Amen.

Scripture Treasury — Part One

Foundational texts on the theology of righteousness and prayer

The Promise: Righteous Prayer Is Powerful

James 5:16 — “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

James 5:17–18 — “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.”

Proverbs 15:29 — “The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.”

The Foundation: Righteousness Received by Faith

2 Corinthians 5:21 — “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Romans 3:21–24 — “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known... This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Romans 10:9–10 — “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified.”

Philippians 3:9 — “Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

The Channel: Confession Clears the Way

Psalms 66:18 — “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

1 John 1:9 — “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

James 5:16a — “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

Psalms 32:5 — “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

The Access: Confidence Through Christ

Hebrews 4:16 — “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Ephesians 3:12 — “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”

Romans 5:1–2 — “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

Continued in Part Two: The Life That Gives Prayer Its Power