

“A Storm at Hand”

1 Kings 18:41-46

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

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Imagine going on a reality singing show. You would be nervous and excited about picking the right song, dancing the right moves, and so on. But what if you were on a show about prayer, rather than singing. Would you make it through to the next round? What score would you get? A 7? 8? 9? I wonder what Elijah’s ‘prayer score’ would be. After all of the miraculous movements of God that he had seen, surely he would be right up there with the best of the best, right? Maybe there is something to be learned from His example on Mount Carmel, following the dramatic scene in which he disproved the 450 prophets of Baal, when God had sent fire from heaven to consume the offering Elijah had prepared. After that incredible scene, and the destruction of those prophets (in accordance with the law that they were under,) Elijah prays for rain. Today, we will look at this example of prayer to (hopefully) find some elements that you can try to remember to make your own prayer time more meaningful, relevant, and powerful.

Following Elijah’s example, you must pray with intensity and focus. Verse 42 shows Elijah with his head between his knees and his face to the ground in a posture of humility, submission, focus, and intensity. So often, our intent (and thus our intensity) is indicated by our posture. Have you ever seen a professional baseball player bunt the ball? His stance is very different than it would be if his intent was to hit a home run, right? What does your prayer posture indicate about your intent and focus? Are you humbling yourself before God, or are you saying that you are worthy to be in His presence? Are you connecting with God or are you showing that you are disconnected and disinterested in His voice and His answer to your prayer? Are you just checking off the box so you can go to bed? Don’t do that. Instead, pray intense prayers; prayers that you are heavily invested in; prayers that maybe make you break a sweat once in a while!

Prayer is not a show, and it is not supposed to be, but if someone watched you pray, would they say that you pray with intensity? Or focus? A woman named Hannah (1 Sam 1) prayed with such intensity and focus that priest who saw her thought she was drunk! She was moving her mouth to speak but making no sounds – praying in her heart with such passion that her physical actions were hard to interpret. In today’s passage, we see Elijah assuming the crash position and intensely praying with great expectation.

In verse 43, Elijah pauses his prayer and tells his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” Elijah was praying for rain and he was expecting God to answer. In that part of the world, the storms would typically have come onto land from over the sea, so it makes sense to watch that direction, right? Elijah was expecting and answer, but not demanding it. Demanding is something very different from expecting. Elijah prayed, and sent the servant up to check on the answer. No answer came. Twice he prayed, and then a third and a fourth time, and each time, he sent up the servant to check on the answer. When the answer didn’t appear to be

forthcoming, Elijah didn't give up and say, "Well, it's been this long since we've had rain; I suppose another day won't make much difference. Guess we'll try again tomorrow."

Do you expect something to happen as a result of your prayers? Maybe you're not checking out the window every 10 minutes for an answer, but you're definitely anticipating one, right? And yet, how many of us, and how many times, have we prayed and not really gotten our hopes up? This hope we have in prayer is both a desire and an expectation. Powerful prayers always raise hope – real hope, that causes you to expect & watch for the answer. After all, a prayer without expectation is just a wish. And frankly, that's just a waste of time.

James [5] speaks of the effectiveness of a prayer offered in faith. Pray with the faith that God can answer, and with the expectation that He will. Again, expectation is different than demand. Expect that God will move, but don't demand that He move when and how you say, for when the will of God is reflected in the prayers of His people, the work of God shows up in the lives of His people. Pray with intensity and focus; pray with faith and expectation; and finally, pray with perseverance. Elijah has taken on a posture of intense prayer; expecting that God was going to answer. And so, he kept on praying and kept on sending his helper up to see if God had answered. And when the answer didn't come, he didn't give up – he kept on praying.

How many times have you given up on God? Not that you've walked away from the faith, but that you grew weary of praying for the same person or about the same situation. Or maybe you just sort of lost interest. You were praying that God would get ahold of your family member or neighbor or coworker but when nothing seemed to be happening, you gradually started praying less and less, and now you rarely if ever pray for them. Or perhaps you were praying for healing for someone but the healing hadn't come, so you gradually prayed less and less often, and now you rarely pray for that situation, if at all. Sometimes the answers don't come quickly, and sometimes the answers don't come easily.

In those times, keep on praying! Pray in spite of difficulties or delays! Elijah stood as one man against terrifying odds in an absurdly dangerous situation; he had already defied the anger of the king and queen and had dared to ask God to do something He had never done before. He is a model of a courageous, faith-filled life, and one of the distinguishing features of a faith-filled life is persistence in prayer. When the praying gets tough, the tough get praying, while the soft bow out and give up.

What have you quit praying for, that you need to pray for again . . . and again? Maybe your marriage? Your job situation? Your finances? Your health? Hope? Passion? Purpose? A certain individual's salvation? You had been earnestly praying, but eventually you sort of trailed off, right? You still care about that situation, but you tried praying and the answer didn't come quickly or easily so you grew weary and eventually quit. You didn't mean to; you just gradually quit thinking about it; quit praying about it; quit expecting God to answer or even be able to hear you, so before long, your prayers became less and less intense until eventually they were just hollow words that you were repeating for the 10th time / 100th time / 1,000th time until finally, the words quit coming at all.

"Pray without ceasing," 1 Thess. 5 reminds us. If you've given up on praying for a certain situation, the reason may be partially that you had put your faith in the answer, not in the master. When you put your faith in the answer and the answer doesn't show up, your faith is

undermined and shaken. But when you put your faith in the master, who is always faithful, and always fair, and always right on time, your faith can remain unshaken.

A 7th time, Elijah prayed and sent his servant to check – this time something was different – a tiny cloud no larger than a person’s hand was on the horizon. God was answering! Elijah knew the answer was on the way. His prayers had been instrumental both in the withholding of the rain, and in the unleashing of the rain. At Elijah’s warning, Ahab had already taken off toward Jezreel – 14 miles away – but Elijah was able to actually outrun the chariots and arrive at Jezreel first, despite the torrential downpour that had started from this tiny, hand-sized cloud.

Sometimes, God’s greatest works come from the smallest beginnings. So, what small clouds are you praying for? A growing burden for the salvation of souls? An increasing realization of your need to intensely, expectantly, persistently pray? A deepening desire for personal, spiritual growth in your own life? Any of those tiny clouds can quickly grow into a mighty storm in your life. That is my prayer; that God would do a mighty work in your life; a work of transformation for you and for the world you live in, through you. Keep on praying – God will send the right answer, and it will always be right on time.

Takeaways from this message.

Learning to pray powerful and effective prayers...

- Pray with INTENSITY
 - ✓ POSTURE often indicates intent
- Pray with EXPECTATION
 - ✓ Hope is both a DESIRE and an EXPECTATION
- Pray with PERSEVERANCE
 - ✓ Pray in spite of DIFFICULTIES or DELAYS

Sometimes, God’s greatest WORKS come from the smallest BEGINNINGS

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning’s message.

1. What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today’s passage/message? Why?
2. Since God had already promised the rain (18:1), why did Elijah feel that he needed to pray for it, specifically?

3. **If you were up to bat for the last time ever and had 2,999 hits for your career but your coach asked you to hit deep into a sacrifice fly-out in order to win the game, what would you do? Why**
4. **If we didn't have verses 41-44, how would that affect our understanding of the events of Mount Carmel? What would be lost if we did not have these verses**
5. **Of today's "Big 3" points, which is most needed in your prayer life? How will you address that?**
6. **Elijah tells Ahab to eat and drink, then to be on his way before the storm came in. What does this tell us about our own attitudes toward those who disagree with us?**
7. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**