

REACHING OUT TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GOD

Personal Testimony

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How many of you have ever heard of a man named Frank Laubach? If not, you are not alone. Let me introduce him to you this morning. He is known as "the Apostle to the Illiterates." While serving as a missionary in the Philippines in the early 1900's, he realized that many people living in the remote areas could not read. So he developed a literacy program called "Each One, Teach One." It was so successful that it had a world-wide impact, even right here in America. Millions of people have been taught how to read using the literacy techniques inspired by Frank Laubach.

Frank Laubach is also known for his devotion to prayer. He really believed that prayer could make a difference. He wrote a book in 1946 called *Prayer, The Mightiest Force in the World*. Years ago I acquired a copy of it, a little paperback volume of just 124 pages. As I read it, three short sentences captured my attention. Dr. Laubach boldly proclaimed, "Prayer is the mightiest power on earth. Prayer's power has been proven many millions of times. Enough of us, if we prayed enough, could save the world."

Now let me ask you, is that true? Do you really believe that prayer is powerful? Do you really believe that prayer can change the course of human affairs? Do you really believe that prayer can transform people's lives, or are we simply expressing hoped for outcomes when we pray? Expressed simply and straightforwardly, do you believe that prayer is powerful?

The people of the Bible knew that prayer was powerful. There are literally hundreds of accounts where people prayed and God responded in a powerful and at times, in a miraculous manner. For example, in the New Testament there is this account in the twelfth chapter of the book of Acts. Peter had been arrested by King Herod who was going to execute him the next day. Meanwhile, the church was earnestly praying for his release. That night an angel appeared to Peter waking him up. The angel told him to get up and when he did his chains fell off. He was then escorted by the angel through locked doors that swung open until Peter found himself standing outside of the prison where he had been confined. Only then did he realize that what

he had experienced was not a dream, but in actuality a miraculous escape from jail.

These and countless other passages of Scripture in both the Old and New Testament provide vivid accounts of the power of prayer. Additionally there is one verse of Scripture which I want to call to your attention this morning. Do you remember our study of the book of James, especially verse 16 in chapter 5. James says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." This means that prayer releases power to bring about positive consequences. This past week we've seen just the opposite. The power of water was destructive. But that same power can also be constructive. Take, for example, the water rushing through the turbines at Smith Mountain Lake. That power produces electricity which lights our homes. So what we are talking about here is the kind of power that makes life better. This is the kind of power that is released when righteous people pray.

But what kind of people possess that kind of prayer power. James describes them as righteous individuals. They are righteous with regards to their relationship with the Lord.

Proverbs 15: 29 declares, "The LORD is far away from the wicked but hears the prayers of the righteous." James echoes that sentiment emphasizing that effective prayers require the confession of sin in our lives. Regarding prayers for the sick, he says, "Therefore confess your sins one to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." When I was a little boy the pastor of the church we were attending visited our home. Wanting to do the right thing, I went to the kitchen and filled several glasses with water that I could serve to the minister and my mother. There was only one problem, the glasses had not been washed. They were still stained with a residue of milk from breakfast. I was gently admonished to return to the kitchen and clean the glasses before offering the minister a glass of water. The same is true when we step into the presence of the Lord. Psalm 51:10 declares, "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me." We should never approach God in prayer with a dirty, sin filled life. We should also come before Him with a right spirit if we desire our prayers to be powerfully answered.

James does not mention this requirement for prayers that are answered in a powerful way, but he does allude to it earlier in his letter. He says, "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive

because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). What are the wrong motives that he is talking about? Some of them are the worldly pleasures which we are tempted to crave and pursue. But looking a little deeper, it is that inherent desire to treat God as a grandfatherly provider whose duty it is to give us what we want. That, however, is not the purpose of prayer. The real purpose of prayer is to ask for that which God desires, specifically what will bring glory to His name, what will advance His kingdom, what will bring more people into the circle of His love, what will show the world that He is a powerful God who is anxious to care for those who call upon His name.

In closing, I want to call to your attention to an old friend of mine. His name was Charlie. When I met him he was getting up in years and he had a blood condition which required frequent hospitalizations. I could spend a long time describing the kind of person he was. Let me simply say that he was a kind and generous individual who loved people and who loved the Lord with a bit of gentle humor that everyone warmed up to. Above all he wanted to be a witness and that's precisely what he did. Yes, we prayed for his healing and yes, he had prolonged periods of remission. Most importantly, however, was his desire to introduce others to the love of God through his life, even when he was in the hospital. That was the focus of his prayer life and the focus of the way he lived. You know what, his prayers were powerfully answered, not because he was healed, but because healing of another kind was extended to those who cared for him. The doctors and the nursing staff almost looked forward to his arrival, because they sensed that he was a man of God who knew the Lord and wanted them to know Him as well.

So cast aside, in fact, remove those things in your life that are displeasing unto the Lord and start praying about the things you know God would like to see happen in your life and in the lives of others. Once you do, you will become a real prayer warrior, one of those whose prayers are both powerful and effective.