

Praying Effectively in the Midst of the Shaking

By Doug Stringer

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16b)

I was meeting recently with key pastors and leaders in the city of Houston who had come together to seek God about where we are as a city and what God is calling us to do together. As we prepared to pray with one another, the Lord began speaking to me about *effectual prayer*, as referenced in the book of James. In the days that followed, God continued to expound on what He was showing me, and I knew these were principles for my own life and also for the Body of Christ as a whole.

Today, more than ever, we need to be a people who pray effectively. As our cities, our nation, and our world face crisis and disaster, we must be a Church who can pray to bring breakthrough. We need breakthrough for our own lives, for the lives of those around us, and for the lost in our cities.

Hitting the Mark

Effective prayer is prayer that hits its mark. As a praying people, we want to be like archers who shoot out their arrows and hit the bull's eye. But how do we become effective in prayer? A lot of people pray, but is all prayer effective? Do our prayers *avail much*, as the Scripture says? Let's face it, sometimes when we pray it feels as though our prayers hit a brick wall.

James 5:17-18 says, "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.*" Sounds like pretty effective prayer! What is it that the Lord is trying to tell us in these passages?

The message to us here is that we are no different than Elijah. Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours, and we have a nature just like Elijah's. Elijah was anointed and appointed by God. We, too, have an anointed and appointed calling from God. But how many of us believe this? How many of us recognize this fact and walk in it, praying the prayer of faith accordingly? When we begin to recognize who we are and our place within the Body of Christ, we can begin to function in the realm of effective prayer.

Proper Alignment

I recently wrote a commentary called "Body Alignment" for a new Bible released by Thomas Nelson Publishers called *The Maximized Living Bible*, which includes commentaries from Dr. Ben Lerner and other Christian leaders on subjects such

as spiritual fitness, physical fitness, health, nutrition, financial fitness, and stress management.

At the end of every year, I try to get a sense for the coming year. As I was seeking the Lord at the close of 2006, I kept hearing that same word over and over again: *Alignment, alignment, alignment*. There are three areas of alignment that I believe are important for our lives: Kingdom Alignment, Personal Alignment, and Body Alignment.

1. The first, Kingdom Alignment, is about proper alignment to the Kingdom of God and its principles. God's kingdom should be our first priority. Matthew 6:33 says, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* (NKJ) The most important thing is not the building of our own kingdoms, but the establishment of the Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven. As I always say, "as men reached for thrones to build their own kingdoms, Jesus reached for a towel to wash men's feet." It's not about our own agendas, but about proper alignment to God's kingdom. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to focus on the Kingdom. *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10, NKJ). Proper kingdom alignment is essential for effective prayer.

2. Personal Alignment is getting in right order with the Father, connecting spirit to spirit with our Creator. Our hearts must be right before Him. David prayed, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10, NKJ). When our hearts are rightly aligned to God, we will begin to have spiritual authority in our prayers. We will be able to pray effectively and see God move on our behalf. Sin in our lives will keep our prayers from being effective. Isaiah 59:2 says, *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."* (NKJ) That feeling of hitting a brick wall with our prayers often occurs because we need to do business with God and get our hearts in a right position before Him, confessing our sins and experiencing His forgiveness.

3. Finally, proper Body Alignment is essential. Ephesians 4:16 tells us that when each part of the body is rightly fit together, the whole body functions better. The King James Version calls it *"the effectual working"* of each part. Each of us has a function and a gifting within the Body of Christ. When we are in proper alignment within the Body, everything works as it should. I have seen this lesson in action when I go to visit the chiropractor. At times I have problems with my knee. My knee problems cause my hip to get out of place, and pretty soon I feel chronic pain in my back. At that point, I need to go in for an alignment! When I get my spine back in alignment, it causes everything else to feel liberated. The same is true in the Body of Christ. When one part is out of alignment, the whole Body is affected. It takes the whole Body being rightly fit together for the effectual working of each part. When we are functioning in unity, we see great breakthrough for the kingdom of God!

Going Deeper Together

As I often meet with different groups of people to pray, I have noticed the different levels of effectiveness that seems to exist with certain people. There is something different when you pray with people with whom you have an established a relationship. You can let your guard down and pray more intimately with one another. There is a trust and intimacy already built between you, and you are able to go into what I call "gut-level" prayer. You've been through things together, and you know how to go hand-in-hand into intercession.

As a communications major in college, I learned about the different levels of communication that exist between people. When you see someone on the street who is an acquaintance, you usually says something like, "How are you today? Aren't we having nice weather?" This is what we call Level 5 communication. This is not the kind of communication we want to have between us when we gather to pray. We want to go to a deeper level of communicating, with one another and with the Lord.

You can have great cordial relationships with people at Level 5, but to experience more effectual prayer, we need to go deeper together to places of trust and unity in the Spirit. I've noticed that large, corporate prayer events sometimes don't have the same kind of effectiveness that you get when you pray with people you know, people who have gone through things with you, and people you know you can trust with the things of your heart.

By no means do I want to imply that large corporate prayer meetings are a bad thing. It is great to get people together to pray all the time! God sees the unity and the heart in these gatherings, and He is pleased. But there is another level of substance and a depth of power that is released when you gather with people of like heart and like mind, going before the throne together, with one voice and one sound to cry out for breakthrough.

Breakthrough for our Land

When Elijah prayed for rain, he was praying for breakthrough for the land. We live in a day and a season when we must step up to the challenge to be a people like Elijah. We must pray with effectiveness so that our arrows hit the mark. Our land is in need of breakthrough.

All around us today we see crisis and challenge: storms, shakings, wars, and rumors of wars. Natural disasters, human disasters, and spiritual disasters threaten our cities and our world. And in listening to many voices within the Body of Christ, there is a consensus that these challenges are going to continue to come. We, as the Church, must be prepared and know how to pray effectively.

With all these challenges that face our world, many are living in fear and anxiety about what is to come. How do we, as God's people, position ourselves so that we are not overcome by anxiety? Philippians 4:6 says, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...*" (NKJ)

An Attitude of Gratitude

So many times, our posture in prayer is one of supplication and petition before the Lord. We are in places of desperation, in need of breakthrough, and we rush to the Lord to beseech Him for what we need. God certainly wants us to come to Him with our needs, and even commands it. But I believe we would see greater breakthrough if we remembered to come with an attitude of thanksgiving. As Paul said to the Philippians, "*In everything...with thanksgiving.*"

I can remember times of great desperation in my life when I needed personal and spiritual breakthrough, like the time I was living in an apartment with nothing but a mattress on the floor and a couch that had been given to me as a gift. I got home late one night, after witnessing on the streets and seeing little fruit. I was frustrated in ministry. I was tired and discouraged. I didn't feel like praying. I didn't want to worship. I could feel my heart getting hard.

I remember falling down on my mattress in that dark room and crying out to the Lord. I sensed the Lord telling to read about the woman at the well, so I picked up my Bible and began to read the story in John 4. As I did, I heard the Lord speak to my spirit the same words Jesus said to that woman: "Give me a drink." I responded by thinking, "Lord, *I'm* the one who needs a drink." But God spoke to my heart once again: "Doug, there are plenty of times to come with supplication. There are plenty of times to ask me for your needs. I want to hear those things. But sometimes you need to just come to me and thank me for what I've already done."

I stood up in the dark, and out of sheer obedience, I began to thank God for what He had done in my life. I still didn't *feel* like praying, but the Bible says we are to give a *sacrifice* of praise. I began to sing, "Praise the Name of Jesus." Then I began to thank Him for all that I had. "Thank you, Lord, that I have this mattress. Thank you, Lord, that you gave me wonderful friends who bought a couch for me. Thank you, Lord, for the roof over my head."

Then it started to hit me. The Lord began to remind me of where he had brought me from. I had been homeless at one time and now I had a roof over my head! Suddenly, I wasn't just thanking Him with my mind. My spirit had come alive and I was praying in the Spirit and worshipping God. I was pacing around that bare room with just a mattress on the floor with a new freedom in my spirit. Before I knew it, it was light outside and I was still praising God!

God had brought me the liberation and breakthrough I needed—not because I came with petitions and requests, but because I came with thanksgiving. There are times where we need to realize that a little gratitude can go a long way toward effective prayer. When we begin to appreciate God for who He is, we gain access to His presence in a new way. We enter into the gates of His presence when we enter with thanksgiving. And in His presence, there is great blessing and power released.

A New Season of Prayer

My prayer for all of you is that this coming year will bring a new season of prayer in your lives—a season of *effective* prayer. As you align yourself with God's kingdom and His righteousness, and as you align yourself with others He has put in your life, I know you will find new levels of release.

Make a commitment to come before the Lord with thanksgiving. Be diligent in your times of prayer, both individually and in coming together with people of like spirit. Armed with the prayer of faith, we will see God working in us and through us as vessels of breakthrough for our land.

DOUG STRINGER IS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF TURNING POINT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL AND SOMEBODY CARES AMERICA INTERNATIONAL, FAITH-BASED MINISTRIES THAT RELY SOLELY ON THE SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO PARTNER WITH US IN PRAYER AND RESOURCES. YOU MAY MAKE A DONATION ONLINE AT WWW.TPMI.ORG OR WWW.SOMEBODYCARES.ORG.