Testament teaching? Can you cite a book, chapter, and verse in which that teaching is found?

5. Read Psalm 51:12, then finish the following sentence with at least three different answers: *Salvation makes me joyful because . . .*
6. Psalm 51 proves that God forgives monstrous sins such as adultery and murder. How do the following verses describe God's forgiveness?

   - Psalm 103:12
   - Isaiah 1:18
   - Isaiah 38:17
   - Isaiah 43:25
   - Micah 7:19
   - John 1:29
   - 1 John 1:9

7. Psalm 51 proves that David knew how to forgive himself. How good are you at doing that? If you're poor at forgiving yourself, what do you think is the reason?
8. In 2 Samuel 12:16, David prayed that God would spare his baby, but the Lord took him in death. Read the entire story in 2 Samuel 12:1–23. What do you think David learned about God in that passage?
9. David always found reason to praise God. Read, for example, Psalm 34:1 and Psalm 35:28. What do you mean when you say, "Praise the Lord"?
10. Read Psalm 34:1. Why can you "always" praise God, even when tragedy strikes?
11. Write your own psalm of praise to God for who he is and what he has done in your life.

Secret #8

Expect Results from the Lord

The Prayer Life of Elijah

In the church I serve, the children in one of our Sunday school classes presented me with their craft for the morning. Their teacher had given them cards on which she had written incomplete statements such as "I like this church because . . ." and "I love Jesus because. . . ." The teacher then invited the children to complete the sentences.

Another statement on the cards was, "One thing I wonder about God is. . . ."

A boy answered, "I wonder if he can hear my prayers."

Isn't that what every Christian wonders sooner or later? Perhaps the main reason we see so few results from our prayers is that we don't expect them. Sometimes we kneel humbly before God, claim a promise that he has made in Scripture, ask him to fulfill it, and thank him in advance for the sure answer. Then we rise to our feet and say in our hearts, *It will never be mine.* James 1:7–8 warns, "If you are that kind of person, you can't make up your mind, and you surely can't be trusted. So don't expect the Lord to give you anything at all" (CEV).

When the prophet Elijah voiced requests to the Lord, he expected—and received—results. His prayer life illustrates four specific results for which we can look in our prayer lives.

Expect the Lord to Bring New Life to Spiritually Dead People

Early in Elijah's ministry, God led him to Zarephath, where the prophet performed a miracle that kept a widow and her son from starving to death. But later the boy fell sick and died. After the grief-stricken mother told Elijah what had happened, the prophet "cried out to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?'" (1 Kings 17:20).

If I had been Elijah, I would have prayed, "Lord, please comfort this dear woman in her time of loss. Minister to her through your Holy Spirit in me." But the prophet went beyond that when he asked, "Let this boy's life return to him!" (1 Kings 17:21). Under any circumstances that would be a daring request, but it was doubly so because at this point in history no one had ever returned from the dead.

When we read this story with New Testament understanding, we see that the child who died represents people who have no faith in Christ. They are spiritually dead. Paul's words to the Ephesians are true of us all: "You were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

What if Elijah had told the grieving widow, "Your son isn't dead; he's just sleeping"? Then the boy would never have enjoyed newness of life. That's why we dare not deny that our non-Christian friends and family members are spiritually dead. To do so is to lose our sense of urgency to win them to Christ.

What, then, should we do? Elijah's example offers us three clues. First, when the widow told him that her boy had died, "Elijah . . . took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed" (1 Kings 17:19). When guests visit your home, you invite them to sit on a couch or chair in the living room, not on your bed in the bedroom. A bed is too personal for that. Yet Elijah laid a corpse, of all things, on his bed.

God is telling us that he wants unconverted people to lie on the bed of our hearts. Our tendency is to reserve that personal spot for our family members and cherished dreams. The disturbing thought of a lost soul is unlikely to make it past the heavily guarded door of our hearts. But is that right? How can we be comfortable when others are perishing?

All too easily, I confess. The prominent reason we don't win non-believers to Christ is that they're not lying on the bed of our hearts.

After Elijah placed the corpse on his bed, he "stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD" (1 Kings 17:21). As an adult, Elijah was taller than this boy. When he placed his body on the boy's body, we'd expect him to contract himself, but he stretched while he prayed.

We need to stretch ourselves in prayer for the lost. It's so easy to pray without passion. To shed no tears. To have unbroken hearts. Elijah placed his body on top of the boy's, but we find it hard to identify with people who are dead in sin. Our hearts don't like to touch their hearts. Their problems haven't become our problems. Instead, we like to keep our distance, but then God seldom uses us to raise spiritually dead people to newness of life in Christ.

Once we place nonbelievers on the bed of our hearts and stretch ourselves in prayer for them, we must believe that our Lord can give them life. Elijah prayed, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" (1 Kings 17:21). What a daring request! And sure enough, "the LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived" (1 Kings 17:22).

If Elijah could trust God for a *physical* resurrection, can't we trust him to bring about a *spiritual* resurrection for people who are dead in their sins? I think that the latter kind of faith is easier, don't you?

But that's where we show our weakness. When someone does give his or her heart to Christ, we're often surprised. We read in Scripture that "God . . . wants all people to be saved and to know the truth"

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But that's where we show our weakness. When someone does give his or her heart to Christ, we're often surprised. We read in Scripture that "God . . . wants all people to be saved and to know the truth"

(1 Tim. 2:3–4 NCV) and that he is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). But we still don't expect to see people converted.

Occasionally, the heavenly Father will encourage our weak faith. A stranger came to my office to ask a personal favor of me. He introduced himself and told me about his church background. So I replied, "Does that mean you've invited Jesus Christ into your heart as your personal Savior and Lord?"

Quickly, he answered, "No, sir."

I was surprised and pursued his reasons for neglecting to do that. After I clarified his misconceptions about the new birth, I asked him if he'd like to receive Christ. When he said yes, I could hardly believe it! I had just met this man fifteen minutes earlier.

As I look back on that incident now, I think God was teaching my skeptical heart to expect lost people to say yes to the gospel. After all, it *is* good news.

Expect the Lord to Revive the Church

Elijah's next prayer took place during his celebrated contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He had proposed that two altars be set up. First, his adversaries would pray for Baal to send fire from heaven on their altar, then he would make the same request of the Lord. The God who answered by fire would be the true God. The false prophets agreed but saw no response to their all-day ranting and raving.

Then Elijah set up his altar, drenched it with water, and offered this simple prayer: "O LORD, 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, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (1 Kings 18:36–37). The

people of Israel had grown indifferent to the Lord and were worshiping Baal. They needed revival desperately.

And that's precisely for what Elijah prayed. He asked that the fire would fall ". . . so these people will know that you are God and you have brought them back to yourself" (1 Kings 18:37 TLB). We have a word for this result: *revival.* It's made up of two Latin roots: *re,* meaning "again"; and *vivere,* meaning "to be alive." Revival is the reawakening of someone who no longer acts alive. Someone has defined it as "the inrush of the Holy Spirit into the body that threatens to become a corpse."

That's the great need of the body of Christ, the church. How many times have you heard of a dead church? Too many local congregations, as well as the members who comprise them, show no signs of life.

In his book *Revivals of Religion,* Charles Finney offers the following seven signs of a church in need of revival:

1. A lack of brotherly love among believers
2. Division, jealousy, and gossip
3. A worldly spirit
4. Gross and scandalous sin by some of the members
5. An unwillingness to work together
6. Deserved criticism of the church by nonbelievers
7. Indifference toward the spiritual plight of lost people

Does that describe your own spiritual condition? I think that it fits many churches today. That's why we should be praying for revival.

Many of us are pleading with God for revival, yet we still don't see it. Why not?

Perhaps it's because we desire revival for the glory it will bring to us or our congregations. We want people to say, "Have you heard about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on their church?" That

sounds impressive. It makes us look as though we've got a corner on God.

But the Lord can't trust proud people with revival. Before God pours out the showers of blessing, we must be willing for them to fall somewhere we aren't. We must be eager for God to bless anyone and any church—including both those with which we disagree doctrinally and those with which we compete.

If Elijah had been a slave to his human nature, he would have asked God to send fire from heaven "so these people will know that I'm one powerful prophet!" Instead, he prayed, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (1 Kings 18:37).

Those words prove that Elijah had overcome the fierce enemy of selfishness. As a result, "the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!'" (1 Kings 18:38–39).

God gave Israel the revival that Elijah had prayed for and expected. And we can pray expectantly, too—but only when personal pride has been nailed to Jesus' cross and all of our desire is for the glory of our Lord.

Expect the Lord to Require Perseverance in Prayer

Shortly after the contest on Mount Carmel, Elijah told Israel's King Ahab:

> "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.
>
> "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

> "There is nothing there," he said.
>
> Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."
>
> The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."
>
> So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"
>
> Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:41–45)

The New Testament looks back on this event and says of Elijah, "He prayed, and the heavens gave rain" (James 5:18). For three and a half years the clouds hadn't yielded a drop. Famine had swept over the land of Israel as a judgment for the people's apostasy. But they had just confessed with their mouths, "The LORD—he is God!" (1 Kings 18:39). So now the blessing could flow.

Earlier in this book of 1 Kings, Solomon anticipated this circumstance. He prayed, "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin . . . then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel . . . and send rain on the land" (1 Kings 8:35–36). That prayer gave Elijah the right to ask for rain because Israel had fulfilled the conditions.

But even then the Lord didn't answer immediately, and Elijah had to persevere. While crouched in prayer, the prophet was positive that dark clouds would be forming, so he sent his servant to look for them. But there was no sign of a coming rain. Six times Elijah said, "Look out over the sea," and six times his servant replied, "There isn't a cloud in the sky." Finally, on the seventh try, the servant discovered a tiny cloud, and soon the rain was pouring down.

We don't know how long Elijah cried out to God each time before he

sent his servant back to look again. The entire process might have taken hours, but the prophet persevered in prayer, for he prayed seven times.

Roy M. Pearson writes, "Sometimes God delays the answer to our prayer in final form until we have time to build up the strength, accumulate the knowledge, or fashion the character that would make it possible for him to say yes to what we ask."[1]

Genuine faith can wait for God. Jacob didn't receive his blessing until he wrestled all night with the Lord (Gen. 32:24–26). George Müller endured in prayer for sixty-three years for a friend's conversion. That friend finally gave his heart to Christ at Müller's funeral.

God may delay granting your prayer requests for the salvation of a family member, freedom from an alcohol or drug addiction for someone you know, the healing of a broken marriage, or reconciliation between two feuding Christians. Perhaps you've begged God to step in and act in these or similar situations, but so far he has been silent.

Charles Spurgeon has an encouraging comment here:

> If you are sure it is a right thing for which you are asking, plead now, plead at noon, plead at night, plead on. With cries and tears spread out your case. Order your arguments. Back up your pleas with reasons. Urge the precious blood of Jesus. Set the wounds of Christ before the Father's eyes. Bring out the atoning sacrifice. Point to Calvary. Enlist the crowned Prince, the Priest who stands at the right hand of God. And resolve in your very soul that if souls be not saved, if your family be not blessed, if your own zeal be not revived, yet you will die with the plea on your lips, and with the importunate wish on your spirits.[2]

If even the mighty prayer warrior Elijah had to persevere in prayer, we can be sure that the heavenly Father will require steadfast endurance of us as we appeal to him.

Expect the Lord to Deny Some of Your Requests

Elijah's final prayer in Scripture is pitiful. The wicked Queen Jezebel wanted him dead, not alive, so she placed a bounty on his head. You'd think that such a threat wouldn't faze a man who had just called down fire from heaven. We'd expect Elijah to march into Jezebel's palace and say with a wide grin, "Now we'll see who's going to die!"

Instead, he ran into the desert in fear for his life. "He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life'" (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah fled from Jezebel because he didn't want to die, but then he prayed that God would let him die. Obviously, his depression affected his ability to reason, and in love God denied his request.

Little did the prophet realize that God was going to send a chariot of fire to escort him straight from earth into heaven without his dying. If God had granted Elijah's last recorded prayer request, the prophet would have missed out on an experience that is unparalleled in Scripture. This was surely one petition that he later thanked God for refusing.

Never was I more frightened of a teacher than I was of Miss Stolberg in the fourth grade. She kept me after school for long periods of time every day because I wasn't finishing my math assignments. My problem was that I didn't understand them, but Miss Stolberg didn't listen to excuses.

So in my childhood faith I begged God and my parents to transfer me into another fourth-grade room. My parents saw the stress I was undergoing and asked the principal to give me a different teacher. Rather than grant it, the principal informed Miss Stolberg of my anxiety and fear. From then on, she went out of her way to help me personally in class. Soon I was learning again! And that year I grew to love Miss Stolberg.

The Lord answered my prayer the tough way—not by giving me an

escape from my problem but by transforming my problem into a dear friend. By the end of that year, I was overflowing with thanks to God for saying no to my prayer request. And many times since then he has taught me that same lesson.

Ron Dunn explains why God denies some of our prayer requests: "For us the words *good* and *blessing* signify comfort and convenience and happy circumstances. But to God the same words may signify character and virtue and integrity. We think in physical and material terms. God thinks in spiritual terms. To him, holiness is better than happiness, character more desirable than comfort."[3]

Scripture says, "We do not know what we ought to pray for" (Rom. 8:26). So we must expect the Lord to deny some of our requests. Even the powerful prophet Elijah didn't get everything for which he prayed—and all because God was good.

Action Steps

Scripture says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). The verse that follows cites Elijah as a case in point. We tend to think of him as a superman who was unlike us, but to the contrary, "Elijah was a man just like us" (James 5:17). Yet when he prayed, extraordinary things happened.

James said that the secret to Elijah's effective prayer life was that he was "righteous." That's what you are if you're trusting in Jesus. So follow Elijah's example in two ways.

First, *practice making specific prayer requests of God.* Often I hear Christians voice prayer requests like this:

> Dear Lord, I pray for Joe in the hospital. And bless Susan's marriage. And I pray for Linda's son.

That prayer is too vague. Made specific, it might sound like this:

> Dear Lord, fill Joe's heart with peace as he anticipates his surgery tomorrow. Grant Susan an enduring spirit while she waits for her husband to come to Christ. And give Linda's son the courage to say no to the boys at school who are trying to sell him drugs.

Tell God exactly what's on your mind and heart. This is hard work, but it makes it easier to spot God's answers when he sends them.

A second way to follow Elijah's example is to *pray that God would raise people you know from spiritual death to newness of life in Christ.* In the following spaces, write the names of several people you know who need Jesus.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Remember that God loves these people far more than you do. He has invested in their lives far more than you have, for Jesus poured out his life for them on a cross. So pray with confidence that God can change their minds even if they're determined to resist Christ. "Stretch" yourself in prayer for these people, as Elijah did.

I have to admit that some people for whom we intercede never become Christians, but that's between them and God. Our responsibility is to show confidence in prayer that God can raise them from spiritual death. What I can promise you is that God will show you *some* result from your prayers. Even if the other person doesn't come to Christ, God may

- break your heart for lost people
- teach you how to show love
- teach you patience
- draw you closer to himself
- humble you
- open your spiritual eyes to see the world as he sees it

If Elijah's prayer life teaches us anything, it's that we can expect to see these kinds of results from our living, loving, and almighty Lord.

Study Guide

1. In 1 Kings 17:19–24, Elijah asked God to bring a boy back from death. At that point in history, no one had ever returned from the dead. What humanly impossible request are you presenting to God in prayer?
2. While praying, Elijah "stretched himself" (1 Kings 17:21). What practical steps can you take to stretch yourself in prayer?
3. Read 1 Kings 18:36–39. Why did Elijah have such confidence that God would grant his prayer request and send the fire on his sacrifice? The answer is found in verse 36. What principle can you apply to your prayer life from this truth?
4. Elijah prayed for fire from heaven so the people would no longer worship Baal but give their entire devotion to God. What "Baal" most competes with God for your worship?
5. Review in this chapter the seven signs of a church in need of revival. Which of those signs is most evident in your life? What can you do to improve in that area?
6. Share a prayer request that you made of God to which he delayed his answer. Why do you think he did that?
7. Share a prayer request of yours that God denied. Why do you think that God refused to give you what you requested?

8. Share a specific prayer request of yours that God granted. Why do you think that God gave you what you requested?
9. In each of the following verses, what is the hindrance to answered prayer?

   - Psalm 66:18
   - Proverbs 28:9
   - Isaiah 59:2
   - Mark 11:25
   - James 1:5–8
   - James 4:3
   - 1 Peter 3:7

10. Read James 5:16. How do you define a "powerful and effective" prayer?
11. Again from James 5:16, how do you define "a righteous" person?