



PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

May 26, 2019

Focused Prayer

by Frank Himmel

Miriam and Aaron once spoke against their brother Moses. Their complaint was ostensibly that he had married a Cushite woman, but jealousy of his leadership position was the real issue. God struck Miriam with leprosy as punishment. Aaron pled with Moses on her behalf, and Moses prayed for her. "Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O God, heal her, I pray'" (Numbers 12:13). If Moses' prayer included anything else, the text does not record it.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream. He wanted to know its meaning. His wise men responded that if he would tell them the dream they would interpret it. The king refused: whether he could not remember it or simply would not reveal it is uncertain. When the wise men began stalling, Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to kill them all. That would have included Daniel and his Hebrew friends. Daniel asked for time, then turned to his friends and urged them to pray that God would reveal this mystery (Daniel 2:17-18). Their lives were on the line! Doubtless their prayers were urgent and squarely focused on the matter at hand.

Nehemiah was King Artaxerxes' cupbearer. He learned from his brother that despite a remnant

returning to Jerusalem decades ago, the city was still in shambles. Nehemiah wanted to lead an effort to rebuild it. He was looking for just the right opportunity to ask leave of the King. One day Artaxerxes noticed that Nehemiah looked sad and asked what was wrong. Nehemiah explained that the problem was Jerusalem's condition. "Then the king said to me, 'What would you request?' (Nehemiah 2:4a). Now was the time! This was the critical moment! "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (v. 4b). Surely this was a brief, targeted, intense prayer!

These three examples—and there are numerous others—teach the valuable lesson that effective prayer is often brief: brief, and directly to the point. When the occasion calls for a specific thanksgiving or request, make it. You need not say anything else.

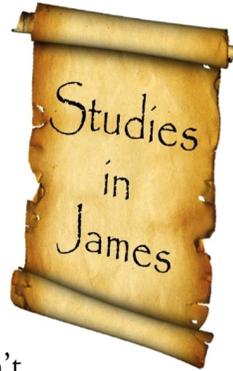
Should not a prayer at the beginning of Bible study be focused on that study? Should not a dismissal prayer be just that: asking the Lord's blessing on us as we leave, rather than largely a repetition of what has already been prayed? The prayers at the Lord's table are to give thanks for the bread and the fruit of the vine; they are most effective when we say that but do not venture off into other areas.

Remember this principle when praying with others at hospitals, at nursing homes, in Bible studies, in problem-solving conversations, in various kinds of meetings, even in your home. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). ■



An Untamed Tongue

by Frank Himmel



James bluntly observed, “But no one can tame the tongue” (James 3:8a). That does not mean we don’t need to even try! On the contrary, it means we must work even harder at it. To understand why, consider James’s seven-fold description of an untamed tongue.

And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison (3:6-8).

An untamed tongue...

Is a fire. Fire can be beneficial, but James is thinking of its destructive force: “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!” (v. 5b). A forest fire can destroy in minutes a home that took months to build and years to pay for. Out-of-control tongues scorch just as efficiently.

Is the very world of iniquity, “the embodiment of all wrong” (Lenski). It expresses every wrong thought,

motive, feeling, intent, and action, and it often camouflages these evils in innocent-sounding or even commendatory terms.

Defiles the entire body. It is like a cancer that spreads throughout the body. In reality an uncontrolled tongue is but a spokesman for an uncontrolled heart (see Matthew 15:18-20).

Sets on fire the course of our life. This expression, literally “the wheel of genesis,” evidently refers to the whole of our existence, whether thought of chronologically, from birth to death, or as affecting every aspect of life and its interaction with others.

Is set on fire by hell. The word *hell* refers to the place of eternal punishment, which the Bible often depicts as a place of burning. Thus, the flames of hell inflame the tongue’s fire, and hell awaits those who let it rage out of control. James may well be using *hell* by metonymy for Satan, for whom hell is especially prepared (Matthew 25:41).

Is a restless evil. The word *restless* here is the same as *unstable* in 1:8. The tongue is always anxious to act and often acts in inconsistent ways.

Is full of deadly poison. Would a brother or sister turn a rattlesnake loose in church? That would be more memorable than the day the mouse hurriedly visited our adult Bible class. We wouldn’t dream of it! James’s point is that those who turn venomous tongues loose are every bit as lethal. ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Howard Moore	John Baucom
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	Ian Brown
OPENING PRAYER	Adam Wilson	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Bruce Hollander	
CUP	Clifton Lefort	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Stephen Lefort	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Josh Baucom
CLOSING PRAYER	Chris Brooks	Albert Harrison Sr