

**WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?**  
**Part 4: The Power of Prayer**  
**James 5:**

**Preached by Eric Park on the weekend of September 30<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>**

There are some teachings in Scripture that have generated much debate among scholars and studiers of the Bible because those teachings are open to different interpretations. But tonight, we find a teaching in the New Testament book of James that is so clearly worded and so disarmingly straightforward that it has generated very little debate over the years. The teaching is this: “The prayer of righteous people is powerful and effective.”

My personal conviction is that this is the foundational biblical teaching concerning the purpose and the urgency of prayer. It is a teaching that makes clear to us that prayer is the God-ordained conduit through which the transforming power of God makes its way into human lives and human circumstances.

John Wesley, the founder of United Methodism, once made the comment that God does nothing except in response to prayer. That may be overstating the case. But what I like about Wesley’s comment is the way in which it takes seriously the fact that prayer is the sacred partnership that God has allowed us to experience with the Holy Spirit. What are we doing when we pray? We are partnering with God in such a way that our prayers become the conduits through which God accomplishes the things that God wants to accomplish. Therefore, says tonight’s Scripture, the prayer of righteous people is powerful and effective.

But...be careful with this teaching. Resist the temptation to make the scripture say something that it doesn’t say. The scripture, for example, does not tell us that we will always receive exactly the thing for which we pray. In fact, one of the things that we discover very quickly in the life of faith is that, sometimes, our prayers don’t produce our intended result. Sometimes we pray hard for someone to make it through a surgery, and the person still dies on the operating table. Sometimes we pray that someone is delivered from cancer, and the cancer still wins out over the chemotherapy. Sometimes we pray for the restoration of a marriage, and the relationship still spirals out of control.

Let’s be honest and clear about this. Sometimes our prayers don’t produce our intended result. But when that happens, there is nothing in Scripture that would lead us to believe that the reason for that is that we didn’t pray well enough or with the right vocabulary. Rather, when we don’t receive our intended result, all that Scripture permits us to believe is that God is responding to our prayer in a way that we do not yet understand. It may even be the case that God is utilizing our prayers to bring about a result that is far more glorious in the scheme of eternity than the result for which we had been praying.

That, you see, is the beauty of praying to a God who operates with an eternal perspective, a God who sees the big picture that we cannot see. Sometimes this God will take our prayers and redirect them, thereby utilizing our prayers to bring about a result that is far

more redemptive than the thing for which we had been praying. This means, of course, that no prayer that we ever pray is wasted, even when we don't seem to be receiving our intended result.

"The prayer of righteous people," says tonight's scripture, "is powerful and effective."

It is a biblical teaching that affords to us another response to the important question that we have been pondering in recent weeks: What is a disciple? Well, this evening's scripture maintains, a disciple is a person of who is faithful in prayer; a person who loves Jesus enough to maintain communication with him throughout the day and throughout the week; a person for whom conversation with God is as natural as breathing and every bit as urgent; a person who speaks to God and listens for God, even in the seemingly routine happenings of everyday life.

Disciples, in other words, are people for whom prayer is not simply a set-apart activity but a way of life.

Therefore, instead of simply talking about prayer tonight during worship, I am going to suggest that we actually pray. In our remaining time together, I am inviting you to look upon this evening's worship service as an extended time of guided prayer.

For some of you, this will be the most praying that you have been asked to do in a long time, perhaps ever. And if you are not accustomed to spending time in meditative prayer, what I am asking you to do might be inconvenient or awkward for you. But it's worth the awkwardness and inconvenience, don't you think, if indeed the prayer of righteous people is powerful and effective?

There is no FOLD tonight for our younger children, although the nursery is still available for infants who may be in need of such a ministry. We are hoping that our younger children will remain in the sanctuary tonight so that they too might experience the ministry of prayer. Let's be brutally honest: keeping our young children in the sanctuary might be inconvenient for some of us, since children can be fidgety and noisy. But it's worth it to have the children among us, don't you think, if indeed the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective? How can we afford to send our children away from our prayer time?

I will guide us in prayer throughout the remainder of worship. There will be time for silence and there will be time for music. There will be time for offering, and there will be time for receiving. There will be time for acknowledging our spiritual hunger, and there will be time for sharing the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper.

My suggestion to you is this: Do whatever it takes in our remaining time together to make yourself more attentive to the presence of God, provided that it does not become a distraction to those who are praying around you. If you are led to stand at any point throughout the service, go ahead and stand. If you are led to raise your hands to God at any point throughout the service as an expression of your praise and gratitude, go ahead

and raise your hands. If you are led to come forward to kneel at the altar at any point throughout the service, go ahead and come to the altar. Or if you are simply led to kneel in the aisle beside your pew, feel the freedom to do that as well.

“The prayer of righteous people,” proclaims Scripture, “is powerful and effective.” I wonder, how is God going to be powerfully and effectively at work tonight when we, as a congregation, enter into the depths of prayer? Let’s find out, shall we? And let’s find out together.

As we prepare our heart and mind for prayer, I invite you to join me in the singing of those prayerful words that Jesus taught his disciples a long time ago....