

Right Prayer & Pray-er
January 5, 2014

As we begin a new year, there are changes we want to make as a church. There are changes we want to make to the building. This room looks different than it did last Sunday, and not just that the holiday decorations are gone. The changes reflect something we started working on last year. There are other building changes scheduled for this year. The inside of the west wing needs painting. We'll be taking that on this winter and spring.

It isn't just the building that needs changing. There are policy changes in the works for the care of children in the church. And hopefully there will be changes to our ministry and outreach efforts as new opportunities present themselves. The nursing home will open next door and new houses will be built across the street.

Maybe there are changes you are hoping to make in your life and family this year. Maybe you have made resolutions to change old habits or start new ones that will result in a new you, a new and better life. Maybe you are hoping, even praying, for your circumstances to improve, for problems to disappear, for all those bothersome people in your life to change.

Well if any of this sounds familiar to you, then I have good news. I plan to present ways to improve your life. I will be preaching on things that will bring about positive change in your life if you adopt them.

So let's get started. Look at the Bible letter of James with me. This morning I want to connect you to the power of real change in your life.

James 5:16 (NIV) The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Prayer connects you to the real power for change. Prayer connects you to God. The simplest definition of prayer is this. Prayer is talking to God. Prayer itself is not hard. Prayer is simply talking to God.

But what kind of prayers should I speak to God with? Will any prayer of a righteous man be powerful and effective? No. And James would be the first to agree. In fact, if we look back a bit in this letter, we see him agree.

James 4:3 (NIV) When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

So in chapter 5, verse 16, he doesn't negate what he said in the previous chapter. He doesn't mean that just any prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. There are good prayers and bad prayers. There are the right things to say to God and the wrong things to say to God. So let me summarize the two statements of James, this way.

The right kind of prayer from the right kind of person will bring about change.

The right kind of prayers are explained all through the Bible. The right kind of prayers involve more than your words. They are backed up by your actions. The right kind of prayers involve your heart, your mind, your soul or will, and your behavior. Let me give you an example of this teaching. In the following passage, God is speaking to King Solomon of Israel. Notice that prayer is connected to actions.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 (NIV) "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

I've heard others make the mistake of trying to apply this promise to America. It doesn't fit. God did not make this promise to American Christians about America. He made it to the Israelites of, for, and about ancient Israel. It only applied to the Israelites and only at a certain time in their history. It does not apply to Israel today.

So why, you might ask, did I have us read this passage? The reason is because the kind of prayers God is looking for here are the same kind of prayers God is ALWAYS looking for from His people in every age and place. **The right kind of prayer reflects humility in the pray-er, seeks a relationship with God, and repents of all sin.**

Your prayers and actions must be in agreement. Remember that James spoke, in chapter four, of your motives in prayer. Your motives are revealed in your actions if your actions agree with your prayers. So your motives, your prayers, and your actions are in agreement. The right kind of prayers involve your heart, your mind, your will, and your behavior.

Note also that one of the motives is a relationship with God. The phrase "seek my face" is a figure of speech for a relationship. The person praying the right kind of prayer is seeking more than just God's blessings. The person praying the right kind of prayer is seeking a relationship with God. This person seeks God Himself, seeks to be admitted to God's presence.

If prayer were only about asking God for stuff you want, you could email your requests. That wouldn't be any more effective than mailing them to Santa at the North Pole, but that is how some people view prayer. That is how some people pray. They don't want a relationship with God. They just want to throw up some requests and hope against hope that God says yes.

The right kind of prayer that God is looking for is about relationships with God. And that relationships must be on God's terms. It must be the right kind of relationship. This leads us to the second part of today's main point.

James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. The prayer of a righteous woman is powerful and effective. **The word righteous may be translated as right relationship or correct relationship.** The person who hopes to see God's face, experience God's presence, has to be on correct terms with God. Being on correct terms with God is what righteousness is all about.

The correct start for that relationship is to humble yourself and repent of all sin. As you begin looking at sin in yourself, you will find a lot. We don't often think of ourselves as great sinners, because we don't look at our sin much. We're too busy looking at other things. But if you stop long enough to examine yourself for sin, you'll find a lot of it. You will find more than you think you have. You'll become uncomfortable looking at your sin. You will realize there is too much sin in you. There is too much sin in your life. There is too much sin for you to be acceptable to God. You have failed miserably at making yourself presentable to God. You have already gone too far. You can never, at this point, turn things around and become good enough for a right relationship with God. You have no hope of becoming the right kind of person.

Even if you could start praying the right kind of prayers, you owe a debt of sin to God that is too large to overcome.

So what are you to do? How can you be the right kind of person to pray the right kind of prayers? The answer is revealed in the good news of Jesus. Look with me at one of the foundational truths of the Christian faith.

Romans 3:21-22 (NIV) But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Note this righteousness is not one you earn. This righteousness comes from God. It is not earned, but is a gift from God. It is apart from law. This refers to the Law of Moses, the commandments of God. You don't get this righteousness by your obedience to God's commands, which you have already failed at so miserably. Instead this righteousness is given to you upon your faith in Jesus Christ.

Right now you may not feel very righteous. That is because you are not. But you can leave here a new person. Right now you can admit that God has every right to strike you dead and send you to hell. That is what your sin deserves. But God has made you a promise. God has promised to forgive your sins and give you eternal life if you will trust in Jesus' blood for you. God sent Jesus to die in your place. If you can and will accept that, and turn your life over to Jesus, you will be forgiven and covered with the righteousness of Jesus. You can leave here with all the righteousness you need to be the right kind of pray-er.

Now you know the secret to praying the right kind of prayers and being the right kind of person. The right kind of prayer, from the right kind of person, is powerful and effective. This prayer moves God to make changes in your life. But what kind of changes will He make?

Prayer, even the right prayer by the right person, doesn't change other people for you. Don't expect God to change other people for you. God isn't in the habit of doing that. He gave everyone else the same free will He gave you. He doesn't change your boss to suit you anymore than He changes you to suit your boss. So don't bother asking Him to change others, not your boss, your teacher, your spouse, your kids, your parents, or your neighbor.

While God won't change others, He might change your circumstances. God can give you a job. God can improve your understanding so you can better grades. That means don't pray to pass the test if you didn't study. I know from experience that that doesn't work. God can keep you healthy. God can protect your computer.

So what changes can you expect God to make? If the right kind of prayer from the right kind of person is powerful and effective, what changes? The answer is that you do.

God will change you if you seek to pray the right kind of prayers in the righteousness of Jesus.

Praising and Thanking God always changes... you.

Confessing your sins honestly, humbly, to God always changes... you

Seeking to know and live out God's will for you always changes... you.

The greatest beneficiary of prayer is always the one doing the praying. So pray.

Make it your aim to spend more time learning about prayer this year, and praying. Seek to grow in prayer. Humble yourself, and pray, and seek God's face, and turn from all known sin.

Put your faith fully in Jesus to give you His righteousness so you can meet God... and He will. He will forgive you of all your sins. He will give you eternal life. He will reveal Himself to you. He will change your life by changing you.