Recently when 5 police officers were gunned down in Dallas, and 3 more in Louisiana, I heard the common and clichéd phrase by the TV newscasters, “Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families.” Whenever that is said, I am thinking, I wonder if this newscaster has a prayer life, or is just saying this, to try and bring comfort to the survivors of a tragedy.

In the United States of America, where Christianity is being systematically demolished, there still seems to be a desire to pray on the part of people when there is trouble. It’s as if each one of us has this inborn need to cry out to someone or something greater than us when we face tragedy and strife. We want there to be a reason for hope and the possibility of help in our time of need.

When you, your friends, people you know, your country, are in trouble, the writer James tells us: pray. When you are happy with all the blessings you have received from God. Pray. And finally, pray when you are sick. We aren't told to do this just because it's the right thing to do (which it is). We aren't encouraged to do this just to make us feel better (although it will). We aren't instructed to do this just so that God is honored (which he will be). No, we are told to pray...because prayer changes things. Prayer works.

Do you want to see the power of Prayer? Remember how a prophet named Elijah wanted God to show that Baal, a false God of crops and fertility, was an idol. He asked God to shut the heavens for 3 years with no rain. Guess what? It didn’t rain for 3 years. Then Elijah prayed for rain to God, and God turned the switch on and it rained. Prayer works. Even can change the climate or weather.

Most of the time we are not concerned about the weather and talking to God about it. However, when we really want to talk with him, is when someone is sick. Look at the promise in our text. **And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.** “Pray to me, and I WILL answer. Pray to me and I WILL help you.” God makes prayer powerful because he ties himself to it. When we pray, God acts.

But what about those moments when you asked for something, and you didn't get it? What about when I prayed often for my mother to be healed of her cancer, but she still died? What about the countless mothers and fathers that have prayed for their children to be spared, only to watch them leave this life? James spoke of prayer being offered in faith; does this mean that my faith wasn't strong enough for my mom to be healed? He also talked about the prayer of a righteous man; does that mean that he will only grant your requests when you have been good enough?

Well, that all depends on what you think of those two big words: faith and righteous. Is your idea of faith simply how strongly you believe in something? Is your idea of being righteous all about how good of a person you are? Then your prayers are going to be worthless, because they aren't really being offered to God, but rather to yourself. But if you understand that being righteous is something that we can never
become on our own because we are born and steeped in sin; if you understand that faith is a gift of God that trusts that Jesus has made us righteous through his life, death, and resurrection; then your prayers are priceless, because they are tied to the God of all mercy and might, the God of all power and love.

Those who have this faith, and through it have this righteousness, understand that everything rests in God's gracious hands. So even though we don't immediately receive what we asked for, that doesn't mean that our prayers didn't work. No, we trust in what the Word of the Lord has said, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” We understand that the God of all grace heard us and acted.

So the healing for my mother did not come in this life, but did come to her in heavenly glory. Those Christian mothers and fathers who mourn the loss of their children will see them pain-free in paradise. Whatever troubles you face now may not immediately disappear, but will evaporate completely in paradise. And let's not forget that on many a glorious occasion, God does give just what we asked for, right at that very moment. Look at the members of our congregation who are now cancer free!

James tells us that when we have sick people in our congregation, we should have the elders pray for these people. That the elders should anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord. At Open Bible, we haven’t been using oil. Are we not following God’s advice? Please explain this oil business.

When the Christians used oil, it was used for one of two purposes. It could have been an attention getting device. When Jesus wanted to focus on the miraculous nature of God’s power to heal, he once used mud and spit on a blind man. Jesus was not saying to us, if you want to get a blind man healed, get some mud and spit and put it into the guy’s eyes. No, he was just getting our attention. In other words, “Hey, Look at this blind man. God will heal him!” Or putting oil on a wound or sores brought relief to someone who was hurting. Remember in the story of the Good Samaritan. He used oil and wine to dress the wounds of the Jewish man who was hurt. So, oil is not needed today, when we pray to heal someone. Rather, James’ point would be to use prayer along with regular medical procedures when a brother or sister is sick. The emphasis is on the bold prayer of a Christian to God. God will hear and answer our prayers.

Another important aspect of the healing mentioned by James is the spiritual aspect. When people are burdened with a load of guilt, they can become sick. When people are consumed with bitterness or anger or hatred, they can become physically sick. James urges us to pray for these angry and bitter people to repent of their sins and be assured of God’s forgiveness in Christ. He urges us to assure the guilt laden that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin. As we pray for people in the spiritual realm, they will find healing from the poison of guilt, hatred and anger.

Sometimes, don’t we have the attitude about prayer: It’s not really going to matter, is it? As we get close to the 2nd coming of Christ, the world is going into a downward spiral. How can we hope to change anything? Do you know who whispers
“why bother” into your ear, every time you think about praying? It’s the Devil. CS Lewis is a famous writer – maybe some of you have heard of him. He wrote a book called the “Screwtape Letters” – it’s a series of letters from one of Satan’s demons named “Screwtape.” The demon was writing to the other demons, and he wrote, “Prayer is lethal to our cause.” I can picture that demon saying, “We need to do everything we can to stop the Christians from praying. We need to tell them that it doesn’t matter if they pray or not.”

Often times, you and I are guilty of listening to that voice that says, “Why bother.” God tells us to be bold, to pray to him often. To never give up. And we say, “Why bother.” That’s is our sin. But what’s amazing, is that God forgives us of that sin. “I forgive you,” God says, “And now, I invite you to be bold, and to pray to me.”

So why would a holy God listen to any of our prayers? Why would he pay any heed to our cries for mercy? Why would he pay any attention to our pleas to save us from our ourselves? Because of his Son. Because of Christ. Jesus came to this earth to be the perfect “pray-er” in our place. Jesus always spoke to his Father about anything and everything. He always trusted God's will for his life and was willing to accept whatever was planned for him. Jesus was the righteous man that none of us could ever be, and that perfect life he gave to you and me. Even more than that, he was the perfect sacrifice for you and me. So all of our failures to pray were nailed to his cross; all of our neglect of his gifts was washed away by his blood. Through his death we are now clean. We are pure, perfect and righteous children of God.

This is why prayer works. This is why your prayers work. Because they are raised up to the one who has loved us, has redeemed us, has saved us from hell itself. He has promised to make our prayers powerful and effective; and we know that he will never let us down. Through Jesus the Father will hear us. Thus, We will go to him with all our worries and concerns.

The story is told of a Scottish preacher who prayed in the morning service, while the sun was shining, that it would rain in the afternoon for the farmers. As he went to church in the afternoon, his little daughter said, “Here is your umbrella, Papa.” “What do we need that for,” he asked. “You prayed for rain this morning, his daughter said. “Don’t you expect God to send it?” And so they carried the umbrella on that sun-shiny afternoon to church, and when they came home they were glad they had it, because a storm popped up out of nowhere and drenched the area with a hard rain.

The point is, God is listening to you, and God promises to answer you. Someone once said, and I think it’s true, that “the church has many organizers, but few agonizers, many who pay, but few who pray, many resters, but few wrestlers, many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding.” Let us be bold. Let us be confident. Pray, Christian, pray. Amen.