

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. – James 5:13-16

Tomorrow I head to northern MI to the Memorial Service for my mom who passed away last summer. So this week I have been reflecting on some aspects of her life and ministry. Today I want to share a story about one of my most profound memories of Mom.

In fourth grade, as I've shared before, I had an incident with an older student. That's what they call it today, but in 1980 we just called it getting picked on. I always walked home from school for lunch (about a 7 minute walk) and always envied the kids who got to stay. And on this particular day, I had the privilege of staying for lunch and *wait for it* Buying a School Lunch! I was so excited. This was a huge treat for me. But at recess after lunch, I was bullied by a random 5th grader, and never having experienced this kind of threat before, I had no way of dealing with it. It terrified me.

In the days that followed, my anxiety around this birthed a series of events that left me home from school for 2 weeks. Ask and I can tell you about it sometime, but it's too long a story for this venue. Toward the end of my 2 weeks, as I faced the prospect of returning to school and The Bully, my mom noticed a deeper change in me. So she asked me what was going on. I sat on the step between my kitchen and living room and told her that I was afraid to go back to school because a boy was picking on me. She sat for a minute quietly, and then asked me if I'd like to pray about it. And I did. But she did the praying, and after she finished, I found a peace that had alluded me for weeks.

"The prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective." I learned this from my mom that day. Not that I wasn't afraid anymore – I've been dealing with anxiety ever since. Not that everything happened my way – that's not how prayer works. But the peace this prayer brought, even to a 4th grader afraid, was truly powerful and effective. Mom wasn't one to tell us about her daily prayer life. She wasn't one for praying when others were listening. She didn't even pray much within our family. But mom was a woman of prayer, at least that day, and her prayer changed me.

I work hard at my prayer life. This is not bragging because what it means is that prayer doesn't come easily to me, so I have to work at it. And I fail to pray more often than I'd like. But I truly believe that prayer changes things. Not usually our circumstances, or outcomes. Prayer isn't about getting what we want, about controlling God's actions in this world. No, prayer doesn't change God, or the world; it changes us. Prayer connects us with God, His will, and His plans. It helps us to let go of our need for control or self-protection or self-promotion and instead gives us a trust in God's will, in God's protection, and in God's love for us. And with that, we can find the peace we are always seeking.

What does your prayer life look like? Do you pray on a fixed schedule, randomly, constantly? Do you pray mostly for what you want, in praise of God, or in thanksgiving? Is your prayer an ongoing conversation with a loved one or an occasional letter to a wealthy uncle? How might you settle in to your conversations with God without making them a duty, a burden, but instead an ongoing conversation?