Hi,

I hope you are doing well today and have settled into some sort of routine. Both my Monday class and my Tuesday class met on-line this week, and both went really well, though I know some of you had problems finding the right Facebook page . . . so here are some links you may want to bookmark:

* [My Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle) -- this is where you go to participate in the classes.
* [My Youtube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChtwqaUcpZbwyTWnkp6INwQ) -- I’ve uploaded the Monday and Tuesday class video to my Youtube channel so you can view at your leisure. I’ve got to do some work on the channel, but you should be able to view the videos now.
* [My podcast page](https://scottengle.podbean.com/) --You can always listen here, if you don’t have the Podbean app or the Apple Podcast app. This is audio only of the Monday and Tuesday classes.
* [St. Andrew’s Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/pg/StAndrewUnitedMethodistChurch/posts/?ref=page_internal) -- On-line worship services are broadcast on this page via Facebook Live, as well as the church’s webpage. So far, Facebook Live is the better option -- it is still running smoothly.

I imagine that there is a lot of praying going on right now. But do our prayers really make a difference? Read on.

***Genesis 18:22-26, 32-33 (NRSV)***

[After Abraham hosts what he thinks are three men but are actually God and two angels, God decides to reveal to Abraham the coming destruction of the city of Sodom. After all, God has chosen Abraham to be the patriarch of the people of God. Abraham proves himself up to the task, as he negotiates with God over the future of the city.]

**22So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 23Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” 26And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.”**

**32 Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” 33 And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.**

***James 5:13-18 (NRSV)***

**13Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. 17Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.**

Why do we pray? We pray because Jesus told us to. That is certainly a good reason. We pray because it makes us feel better; we find peace and comfort as we are reminded of our joys and unburden ourselves of our concerns. But do we pray because we believe that our prayers really make a difference in what God does or doesn’t do?

*A surprising God*

A young woman, very active in our congregation, once came to talk to me about prayer. She told me that of all the things we profess as Christians, the most difficult for her to believe is that God really hears her prayers, one little person in the midst of the entire cosmos. Not the virgin birth. Not the resurrection. But that God actually listens to her . . . and to you . . . and to me.

But past the question of whether God listens, lies an even bigger question. Do our prayers really affect what God will or won’t do? Doesn’t God know everything? Doesn’t God always know what is best anyway? I don’t know how a philosopher would answer these questions, but there are several great OT stories that ought to reassure us.

*Abraham, Moses, and God*

Genesis 18 tells the story of a negotiation between Abraham and the Lord God. God is about to destroy the wicked city of Sodom, but Abraham asks God whether it is right to sweep away the righteous with the wicked. What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will God then spare the city? How about forty-five righteous people? Forty? Thirty? . . . the negotiations go on . . . Twenty? What if there are only ten? God finally replies, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” In the end, ten can’t be found, though Abraham’s nephew, Lot, and his family are allowed to escape the city.

Consider the story of Moses and God at Mt. Sinai. God has rescued the people from slavery in Egypt and led them to the mountain. There, Moses ascends the mountain and is given God’s covenant instruction for the people. Yet, while Moses is on the mountain, the people begin to whine and moan, fearing that Moses won’t return. They even build a golden calf and worship it, praising it for delivering them from Egypt. God is so angered by the people’s betrayal that he tells Abraham, “Let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation” (Exodus 32:10). God is going to start all over again! Yet, Moses intercedes with God. He reminds God of the promise that God had made to Abraham. “And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on the people” (32:14).

Changed his mind. . . . This may not square with some of your conceptions about God, but the biblical revelation of God is of a loving parent who cares, who listens, who suffers, who desires a relationship with each of us, and respects us far more than we often do ourselves. This is what is unchangeable about God.

James, Jesus’ half-brother, urges believers to pray in all things. When we are cheerful and when we are suffering. If we are sick, we are to pray for healing. Elijah prayed for drought and got drought. He prayed for rain and got rain. As James puts it, “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

*Does prayer make any difference?*

In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard writes

“God’s response to our prayers is not a charade. He does not pretend that he is answering our prayer when he is only doing what he was going to do anyway. Our requests really do make a difference in what God does and does not do. The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best. And of course God doesn’t respond to this. You wouldn’t either.”

At the risk of piling on the biblical stories, here’s another one (see 2 Kings 20:1-11). Hezekiah, king of Judah, was one of the few good kings of either Israel or Judah. Hezekiah fell ill and was near death when Isaiah, God’s prophet, told him that the Lord had said Hezekiah would not recover. It was time for the king to get his house in order. In his sorrow, the king wept bitterly and prayed to the Lord, reminding God that he had always been faithful to God and done what is good in God’s sight. Before Isaiah had even gotten out of the building, the Lord told him to go back to the king and tell him that he would be healed and would live another fifteen years. . . . Quite a story. Quite a God.

*Of course our prayers make a difference.*

*We can influence those who love us, even God.*

*A site to check out*

N. T. Wright has been monumentally influential in my life and many others. [This site is a collection of articles, videos, and more by Wright](https://ntwrightpage.com/). There is a lot here!

*Movie recommendation*

Many of you have heard me talk about the move *About a Boy*. If you haven’t seen it, I highly recommend it. It is free on Starz and Spectrum and costs a few dollars to rent on Amazon Prime Video.

*Book Recommendation*

Our daughter-in-law, Savannah, is a voracious reader, so I asked her for a few recommendations from the past year. Here is one: *Tangerine* by Christine Mangan.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott