

## Mark 11:22-25 — How can I pray to make a difference?

**January 26, 2020**

Do you struggle to pray? Do you ever feel like prayer isn't worth the time and energy because when you pray, nothing changes? Most people won't admit it, but they feel that way. If people didn't feel that way, they would be more committed to prayer.

Today, Jesus is going to give us a little lesson on prayer and how to pray in a way that makes a difference. "How can I pray to make a difference?" This is a question all of us want answered.

Turn to Mark 11. We will be in verses 22 to 25. To understand these verses, we need to back up a little to last week's verses to get the flow of the text. Last week, Jesus cursed a fig tree because it was nothing but leaves when it should have had fruit. Immediately afterward, Jesus cleansed the temple by driving the sellers of animals and money changers out of the Courtyard of the Gentiles. Just like the fig tree, the temple was also nothing but leaves. It looked good but was not producing spiritual fruit. The Courtyard of the Gentiles was the only place in the world set aside as a place for the Gentiles to worship God and learn about God, but the temple leaders turned it into a shopping mall that was like the Clay County Fair. Nobody could pray and seek God in that place. The cursing of the fig tree because it looked good but was unfruitful and Jesus judging the temple worship because it also looked good but was also unfruitful were the same thing. Both were previews of the coming judgment of God on the temple and the nation of Israel. Forty years later, that judgment was carried out by the Romans in 70 A.D. when the Roman General Titus Vespian sacked

Jerusalem and destroyed the temple it took 84 years to build, leaving not one stone on another.

Last week, from that text, we learned about the importance of being fruitful, of not just looking good for God but actually doing good for God.

As the story of the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus throwing the crooked animal sellers and money changers out of the temple drew to a close, Jesus took this situation and moved it in a different direction. He used it as an opportunity to teach a lesson on prayer — how to pray effectively so our prayers make a difference. Let's begin reading in Mark 11:20.

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11:20–25 (ESV)

Let's just admit up front that this seems like a bit of an awkward transition. Doesn't it? We go from Peter's comment of the cursed fig tree that is now dead to... Boom! Have faith in God and a discussion on prayer. What is the connection? I really wrestled with that this week.

I think the answer comes by looking at the parallel account of the same incident that is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Mark was extremely terse in his account of what Jesus did. Matthew was lengthier and typically provided more detail. In this situation, Matthew's extra details are helpful. Matthew told us

one extra line spoken between Jesus and the disciples after they saw the fig tree withered. It is a question they asked of Jesus.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” Matthew 21:20 (ESV)

This is not a question about how the tree died biologically. They were asking how did this kind of power from Jesus work? How did Jesus have access to the kind of power that when he curses a fig tree, it instantly withers and dies to the roots? Notice it says the disciples were marveling at what Jesus had done by killing the fig tree. Prior to this, the disciples had only seen constructive miracles of healing. Those were impressive, but this destructive miracle of instantly killing a tree amazed them so much that it pushed them to ask Jesus the pointed questions, “Jesus, do you do these miraculous things? How are you able to pull the powers of heaven to earth?”

Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God,” which is where the Gospel of Mark picks up the story. In other words, all the miracles of Jesus, be they constructive miracles or destructive miracles, come from his relationship with God the Father. Jesus then began to tell his disciples, and he also tells us, how we can gain access to God’s power.

He told us access to God’s power comes through prayer. Jesus spelled out two essentials for effective prayer that allowed the disciples to access God’s power in their lives and will allow us to access God’s power in our lives. They are the importance of *faith* and *forgiveness*.

**Effective prayer starts with faith in God.**

And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.” Mark 11:22 (ESV)

Jesus told them to have a greater awareness of God and that faith in God is the only way they could participate in the power and authority of God in their lives. One commentator made a helpful comment on what it means to live with faith in God. He said that in the Gospel of Mark, Mark didn't present faith in God as an abstract belief that you just have on Sunday. The Gospel of Mark presents faith in God as complete awareness of and dependence on God in every situation in daily life. That means awareness that God is involved in the moment-by-moment decisions of our business days and taking the time to talk to God throughout the day in prayer.

It means talking to God in a brief prayer before an important business meeting or lunch appointment and asking for his wisdom. It means talking with God in the car on your way to work. It means talking with God when you are trying to solve a tough problem at work and talking to God, asking for energy when you have almost no emotional energy left at work. Having faith in God is being aware of God's involvement in every aspect of daily life and asking for his help and wisdom in all parts of life.

The other thing to notice is that Jesus is not focusing on the strength of our faith being the source of God's power. He is focusing on God being the source of that power. It is not the strength of our faith that is the issue. It is the character of God that is the issue. An effective prayer life begins with trusting in God's character, his love, and his purposes. We have to begin by trusting that God is involved in our lives and he knows better than we do how to order our lives.

## Effective prayer believes God can do the impossible.

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Mark 11:23 (ESV)

This verse seems too much, too outlandish, too over-the-top, and too big to be true. Let’s see what it means.

Jesus said, “whoever says to this mountain.” This is not a mountain but *this* mountain. Jesus was talking about a specific mountain. Which mountain was he talking about? Some people think he was talking about the Mount of Olives that was near Bethany and overlooked Jerusalem. Some people think Jesus was talking about the temple mount because Jesus just drove a bunch of money changers and animal sellers from the temple mount. When it comes to the sea, the Dead Sea was something they could visually see in the distance so that is the sea that likely “comes to mind.”

Personally, I don’t think it matters which mountain he was talking about. The point is the same. Picking up a mountain and throwing it into the sea is something that is humanly impossible.

People have tried for the last 2,000 years to throw mountains into the sea by faith but it has never worked. I tried when I was a teenager. It didn’t work. What is going on here? Is Jesus untruthful? Why doesn’t this promise from Jesus work?

As I thought about it this week, I realized this saying is a figure of speech. It is hyperbole for something that is impossible for man to do but it is possible for God to accomplish.

Jesus using figures of speech like this should not shock us. We use figures of speech like this all the time. They also used figures of speech in biblical days. Today, when people make a big issue over a small problem we say they are making a mountain out of a mole hill. We don't mean that literally. We mean that figuratively. That is the same thing was happening here. Jesus does not expect people to be literally throwing mountains into the sea by faith. It is a way of saying God can do the impossible when we pray to him in faith.

Jesus referred to this same theme earlier in the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Mark 10:27 (ESV)

Jesus promised that if they would just be confident in God's ability and in his love for them, God would respond to their prayers, even doing things that are humanly impossible in response to their prayers.

Jesus' simple point is that when we are confronted with overwhelming issues with no apparent human solution, don't doubt and freak out. Pray. We have access to the power of God, just like Jesus did. Have faith in God that he can and will respond. Have faith that he can even do the miraculous. God can do things that are humanly impossible, and he does them in response to our prayers.

When we think about this, it makes sense. While as a teenager, I was not able to throw any mountains into the seas by faith, as an adult I can look back at times God has responded to prayers with humanly impossible solutions.

I know I have used this illustration before, but it is the most pointed one that comes to my mind. Some of you know that approximately 13 years ago —

before we moved to Spirit Lake — Cindy, my wife, was battling an autoimmune disease. As part of that, two of her fingers had turned black and shriveled down to black flesh and bone. The doctor caring for her decided to schedule an amputation of her fingers before the disfiguration entered her palm.

On the final doctor appointment, when the amputation was to be scheduled the doctor measured the rot on her finger and noticed it had begun to recede. The doctor checked her charts and scratched her head. She had never seen that happen. It was impossible. Over the next two months, the flesh regrew up Cindy's fingers, to the doctor's amazement. She told us many times she had never seen that before. She had no explanation for what happened. With tears of joy in her eyes, Cindy kept telling Dr. Key, "I don't know why, but God is answering our prayers." God moved a mountain. He did what was humanly impossible in response to the prayers of his people. This is the kind of thing Jesus was talking about in this passage.

There is a qualification Jesus gives for mountain-moving kind of prayer. We must pray in faith and not doubt. This means we must believe God cares about us, loves us, and has the ability to respond, and even do the miraculous. Doubting faith is faith that believes God responds to prayer one day, but the next day feels prayer is not worth it. It is faith that does not consistently turn to God or trust in God.

James, Jesus' brother, talks about the ineffectiveness of doubting faith.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:6–8 (ESV)

Do we have faith in the power of God, the goodness of God, the wisdom of God or do we doubt God's nature and power? If we doubt him, we should not expect a powerful response from him.

While I think most of us will not theoretically doubt God's power and ability to intervene, the problem is we often practically doubt God's power and his desires to respond to our prayers.

How much time do we take to pray? How often do we ask God to intervene or do we try to take care of everything ourselves? The busyness of our lives makes it hard to find time for pray. It is hard for us to be alone to seek God's wisdom and ask for the power of God to be brought from heaven to earth. How can we find time to pray?

Earlier in this Gospel, we learned that Jesus' prayer time was in the morning. He would wake up early before everyone else. He went away to lonely places to pray. Before making important decisions, such as selecting the disciples, Jesus prayed for an entire night. My purpose is not to guilt us to getting up before dawn and having all-night prayer meetings but to simply highlight the importance of fighting for time to pray in the busyness of life. When we pray, God will respond. His power will be manifested. Praying in faith that God hears and can even respond miraculously is the only way to bring the power of heaven to earth.

**Effective prayer is confident God will respond to our requests.**

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24 (ESV)

This sounds like a charismatic's dream come true. It is too unqualified. Jesus said if we would just ask and believe, we will receive. This reads like a blank check.

Personally, I think this is another example of hyperbolic language. It is the language of exaggeration to make a point. We know that this cannot be literally true. Jesus prayed to avoid the cross in the Garden of Gethsemene but God the Father didn't answer that prayer in the affirmative. We know this can't always be true.

There is a principle Jesus was making. The principle is that God the Father is more than willing to respond to our prayers. He is eager to respond to our prayers for everything, if we would just take the time to ask!

If you are taking notes, circle the word ask. That is the key point. Many times we don't have answers to prayer because we haven't asked for God to intervene by prayer. We haven't seen the power of heaven brought to earth because we haven't asked the powers of heaven to intervene on earth.

This reminds me of another time Jesus taught on prayer and he forcefully drove home the idea that God is more than willing to respond to our prayers, if we would just ask him for things in prayer.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7–11 (ESV)

Jesus tells us to pray to God with our daily needs and expect God the Father will respond. He will respond by giving us a good gift, as a father would always do for his children. If we know how to give good things to our children, we can trust God the Father that he knows how to give good things to us.

It is here where we need to make a little transition. As parents, do you give your children every gift they ask for? Absolutely not! You love them. You know some things they ask for are not good for them so you don't answer their requests. You know some things they ask for are good for them but it is not the right time to give them what they want. Of course, our children don't understand why we won't give them all they want so when they ask for things that are not good for them, you don't grant their requests, not because you hate them but because you love them.

As a parent, you are grateful to hear your children's wants and needs. If they never told you what they wanted and needed you wouldn't be able to respond. When you respond, you don't always give them all they want and need because you respond wisely, like a good parent.

God responds to us in the same way. He wants to hear our needs so he can respond to our needs but he always responds like a good and wise parent. He doesn't give us things that are bad for us, and he always gives us things in the right timing for us.

### **What about all the times God doesn't answer our prayers?**

**God promises to answer prayers to help us bring him honor. He doesn't promise to answer prayers to give ourselves more glory.**

Let's look at the model prayer Jesus gave his disciples to pray.

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Matthew 6:9–13 (ESV)

Jesus told us the focus of our prayers should be God and his glory. We are to pray that God’s name would be honored on earth and God’s kingdom would grow on earth. Our prayer should be, “God, whatever honors your name and advances your kingdom, and accomplishes your will, that is what I pray.” The truth is that most of the time, our prayers are focused on advancing our own kingdom. Our prayers are asking God to have our will and way.

This doesn’t mean that we can’t pray for what we want. We can pray for those things but we need to realize that God is primarily committed to his own honor and the spread of his kingdom, not committed to our honor and the advance of our kingdom. Since God’s kingdom comes before our kingdom, God may not answer prayers for our comfort and success the way we want.

The banner over all our prayers should be, “God, not my will be done in my life but your will done in my life. Whatever will advance your name and your kingdom through my life and my church is what I want first of all and most of all.”

James addressed self-focused prayer and that many times God does not choose to answer those kinds of prayers in the affirmative.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4:3 (ESV)

Does this mean we can never ask God for things we want? No. We can pray for those things. We must know that the focus of our prayers and of our lives needs to be the fame of God’s name and the advancement of God’s glory. When

those things are the focus of our prayers, God is committed to answering those kinds of requests.

**We know God will answer prayers in line with his revealed will. We don't know if he will answer prayers for his unrevealed will.**

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 1 John 5:14–15 (ESV)

God's revealed will is what God tells us about his will clearly from the Scriptures. His unrevealed will are things God doesn't reveal in the Bible.

Let's say you have the winter blues. You find yourself crabby around the family and just generally being an irritant because of the cold. You know you shouldn't be that way but there is little joy when there is never-ending snow and cold. What does God's Bible say about our attitude?

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)

This is God's revealed will. In spite of the cold, God wants us to be people that are thankful. He clearly tells us that is his will. We can be confident that when we memorize this verse and pray over this verse and ask Jesus to help us apply this verse to our lives, he will answer our prayers. He will help us to be more thankful all winter long. God always answers prayers in line with his revealed will. Are there going to be times we still struggle with thankfulness? Of course! We know God will answer our prayers and make us more thankful people.

Let's say you are depressed over the winter cold but you start praying for a different solution to the winter blues. You pray that God will provide an all-expense paid winter vacation in Florida that won't have you back in town until

late April. I can't guarantee God will answer that prayer. There is no promise in the Bible that when we pray for a trip to Florida, God guarantees us a trip to Florida. God may answer that prayer, but there is not a place in the Bible that guarantees us God will answer that prayer in the affirmative.

**When we ask God for our will, we must still submit to God's will.**

And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Mark 14:36 (ESV)

Jesus himself is probably the best example of this in the Garden of Gethsemane. The agony of becoming sin for us and the horror of the cross lay in front of him. Jesus asked God the Father that if possible, God the Father would remove the cross from him, but Jesus still submitted to God the Father's will even as he spoke the request. There was nothing wrong with telling God the Father that he was not looking forward to the next 72 hours of death, but yet he submitted his will to God the Father's will.

The same is true for us. We will go through hard seasons in life. There are times when marriage is difficult, singleness is difficult, when supervisors make life difficult. There are health trials we face. There are loved ones in our families that rebel. We can pray for God to intervene. We should pray for God to intervene. We must believe God will intervene, but we must also submit our will to what is God's will for the moment.

*We must remember that if God doesn't remove us from adversity, it is because he has a better plan by taking us through adversity.* The better plan for Jesus was the salvation of our souls. That is why God the Father did not remove the cross from Jesus. There was a better plan that would save us and bring more

glory to God at the end by bring Jesus through that adversity, not taking him out of that adversity..

Another example of this is found in the book of Philippians. Paul was in a Roman jail. A Roman jail was a horrifying place, not a happy place. I am sure he prayed many times for a quick release that did not happen.

When we look at the book of Philippians we read the following:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12–14 (ESV)

Look what Paul found was happening. Instead of the gospel being contained when he was in prison, it was being advanced when he was in prison. He had a chance to tell the entire imperial guard about Jesus. Now people were becoming Christians on the inside of the Roman government while before this Christ was just spread with the people on the street.

Paul's life was not getting easier in jail but he could see a little bit of the reason why God hadn't answered his prayer to be released from jail. He was in jail so the gospel would now spread inside of the Roman government.

There was another reason God did not answer Paul's request for a quick release from that Roman prison. While in prison, Paul wrote what are known as the prison epistles: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Before jail, he was too busy running around that he didn't have time to sit down and write these letters. God forced Paul to sit in prison and write these letters that God planned to make crucial parts of the Bible. If Paul was not in a Roman jail, he may never have written those letters. We wouldn't have them in our Bible. It

turns out more people were brought to Christ by God not answering Paul's prayer for an early release from prison than would have been brought to Christ if he was given an early release.

The same is true for you and me. There are times we will face adversity and difficulty. Should we pray for release from those times of trial? Yes, we should. If God does not release us from those trials it is because he has a better plan for our lives that will bring more glory to him by carrying us through adversity rather than releasing us from adversity.

This is why we must have faith in God and be confident that God's answers to our prayers are always better and wiser than what we request.

**When we ask for things, we must trust God's timing on the answers.**

...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16 (ESV)

I love the way this verse ends, "...as it is working". James reminded us that God does answer our prayers, but often times not in a microwavable container. Many times the answer to our prayers takes months or years. Years later we find out that when we began praying, God put the answer to our prayer in motion but we didn't see that answer until much later.

Maybe you are praying for a spouse but right now but God still has not answered that prayer. Maybe the reason that prayer is not answered is because the person God wants as your spouse is not the right person for you right now. God is still bringing him or her through trials and maturing experiences that are preparing him or her to be the right person for you. If you were to meet that

person today, he or she would be a terrible fit for you, and that is the reason God is still in the process of changing him or her.

As you pray that prayer for a spouse, God is in the process of answering it by maturing you to be prepared for him or her. Maybe right now, as a single person, you are far too selfish to be married.

Can God answer prayers instantly? Of course he can! He usually answers prayers over months and even years. It is with hindsight that we can look back and see God's hand at work answering those prayers we were praying for weeks, months, and even years before.

So how do we access the incredible power of God? We access it by faith in God and prayer to God. We do not doubt that God hears and responds. We know God hears and promises to respond to our prayers. He can even do things in response to our prayers that are not humanly possible.

When we pray, we pray, for what will bring God glory, not what will bring ourselves glory. The focus of our lives should be bringing glory to God not comfort to ourselves.

When we pray, we submit to God's will and God's wisdom in the answer. We can be confident God loves us and will answer our prayers in a good way but maybe not the easy way. We often don't know the fullness of God's plan and all God has in store. His will may be that we go through a season of adversity to better bring glory to him. That happened with Jesus and the cross. It happened with Paul and prison. It will happen to us.

When we pray, we trust God's timing on the answer. God's answers often work themselves out over time. They usually don't come in microwavable containers.

**Effective prayer happens when we forgive others completely, like we have been forgiven.**

*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”  
Mark 11:25 (ESV) (But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses Mark 11:26 — ESV Footnote)*

After faith, a forgiving heart is essential for effective prayer. Jesus told us that if we have anything against anyone, we must forgive. The consequences of persistent unforgiveness are that God may not forgive your sin. These words are very unsettling.

Some later manuscripts add verse 26 which says if you don't forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive. It says in the ESV footnotes it was most likely not in the original. We know a later copyist added it so a few copies of ancient Mark manuscripts have that verse. While that verse was not originally in Mark, we know Jesus did say it. All the copyist did was write from memory exactly what Jesus said in Matthew's account of the same incident. So while verse 26 was not in the original manuscript of Mark, since it is in Matthew, we know Jesus said it.

The point is that if we have unforgiveness against anyone and we refuse to forgive, it destroys the effectiveness of our prayers. Persistent unforgiveness of others can go so far as to nullify our forgiveness from God.

Why did Jesus say forgiveness is so important to the effectiveness of our prayers and even spiritual life itself?

Forgiveness is intimately linked to the gospel. Since we are completely forgiven of our sins by God, like God, we must be completely forgiving of other people's sin. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. Christians are all about forgiveness. Just as God has forgiven us completely, we must be willing to forgive others completely.

The best way to see the kind of generous forgiveness Jesus was talking about comes from Matthew 18.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21–22 (ESV)

Peter came out and asked, "How often should we forgive someone who sins against us?" Peter suggested seven times. In that day, rabbis thought forgiving somebody three times was a lot. Peter upped it to seven and thought he was being generous. Jesus said, "No way. Try seventy-seven times." Some translations have seventy times seven. That is a lot of forgiveness. This is Jesus' point — *if you are counting strikes, you are not forgiving. You are just delaying revenge.* Jesus' point to Peter was that he must forgive people every time they sinned against him because God forgave Peter every time he sinned against God.

To drive the point home, Jesus told a story.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. Matthew 18:23–27 (ESV)

The key to understanding this is to understand how much money is 10,000 talents. One talent is the equivalent of 6,000 denarii. One denarii was the wage for a day laborer. One denarii was the minimum wage at that time. This man owed the king an absurd amount of money. Ten thousand talents with each talent equal to 6,000 day's wages. The man in this parable was in debt to the king somewhere between \$2.5 billion to \$6 billion. There was absolutely no way this man could pay the king back, no matter how much time he was given. Amazingly, this king was so kind. He decided to forgive all of this man's debt.

Next, we find the guy who was just forgiven almost \$6 billion dollars roughing up his friend who owe him a much smaller amount.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Matthew 18:28–31 (ESV)

Does this make sense? What is wrong with this picture? If you were just forgiven a debt of \$6 billion dollars, how could you throw your friend in prison for a debt that is equal to \$6,000? If you have been forgiven much, you must be forgiving much. Whatever we forgive other people of is nothing compared to what God has forgiven us of.

Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Matthew 18:32–35 (ESV)

Harboring resentment and unforgiveness toward other people doesn't just destroy the effectiveness of our prayer lives. It can even go so far as to destroy our spiritual lives.

Be quick to forgive. Let me tell you what forgiveness looks like. When you forgive your spouse, it means you don't keep bringing up the sins of their past in a future fight. If you keep bringing up the sins of their past in a future fight, you are not forgiving them. You were just delaying revenge on them. Jesus forgives us completely and fully. He does not throw the sins of our past in our faces. In the same way, when we forgive others we must forgive them completely and fully. We must not throw the sins of their past in their faces.

Paul summed it up this way.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

I know some of you agree with the Scriptures in principle on this, but you don't think it works in real life. If you were hurt deeply by someone, you don't think it is possible to totally forgive that person. If that is you, I have one more story.

Do you may remember the book and the movie Unbroken? It is the story of Louis Zamperini. He competed as a runner in the 1936 Olympic Games. He served in World War II, and after his plane was downed in the ocean he became a Japanese prisoner of war. He was brutally tortured by the Japanese. After the war was over, he was so emotionally traumatized he couldn't sleep. He was eventually brought to a Billy Graham crusade where he gave his life to Christ. From that point forward he knew he needed to do the most difficult thing —

forgive the Japanese captors that tortured him. In 1948, he returned to Japan and went to the Sugamo Prison where 850 guards and prison-camp personnel were detained, most awaiting execution. Some of them were the guards that had tortured him.

The prisoners were assembled for Louis. Instead of telling them about his hatred and anger for the years of their brutality, he told each of them he forgave them and offered each of them a Bible. Then two years later, in 1950, Louis returned to Japan to be a missionary to the very people who had abused and tortured him. Louis even reached out to the cruelest Japanese guard, Mr. Watanabe. He sent him a letter where he admitted that because of what Mr. Watanabe had done to him, his post-war life had become a living nightmare, but thanks to a confrontation with God, he committed his life to Christ. His hate for Mr. Watanabe was now replaced by love and he was forgiven.

Jesus made it clear that as we have been forgiven by God, we must be forgiving to others. However costly it is for us to forgive someone else, it is nothing compared to the cost Jesus paid to forgive us. The way people know we are a forgiven people is when we live as a forgiving people.

### **Applications**

How can we have an effective prayer life that calls down the power of heaven to earth? There were two big lessons this text gives us.

**Effective prayer happens when we pray with confidence that God hears and responds.** Know God hears us, loves us and promises to respond to our prayers. He can even do the impossible when we pray. When we pray, we must not doubt God's love for us and desire to respond to us. He is a father who

offers his children good gifts in response to their requests. But when we pray, we must still submit to God's will, trust God's wisdom, and accept God's timing on the answer.

**Effective prayer happens when we are forgiving of others like God has forgiven us.** Any time we refuse to forgive, we make a mockery of the costly forgiveness we have received from God through Jesus. Unforgiveness shuts down the effectiveness of our prayer lives. If we persist in unforgiveness, it can even shut down our relationship with God.

### Actions

This means each of us have two action steps to take this week.

1. **Forgive the people that hurt you deeply.** That may be your spouse, your child, your parents, someone in the office, or someone at church. Refuse to keep thinking about the hurt. Focus on the great debt of sin we had to God and the exorbitant cost Jesus paid to forgive us, then extend forgiveness for the much smaller sins others have done against us.
2. **Pray about everything with confidence that God hears and is eager to respond.** God loves you. He promises that he is eager to respond to our prayers if we would only ask. This week, may we pray about everything in our lives, looking for the powers of heaven to come to earth and intervene.



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