

**The Memoirs of Peter**  
**Faith to Move Mountains**  
**Mark 11:19-26**  
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I want to begin tonight, as we return to our study of the Gospel of Mark, by asking you just a couple of questions, two questions. I want you to think. I want you to really ask yourself honestly before the Lord these two questions.

Question 1 is: do I regularly pray and ask God to intervene in my world? Do I regularly pray and ask God to intervene in the events of my world and life?

Question 2: if I do pray, do I really believe that God can or will answer my prayer? Do I really believe that God can or will answer my prayer? I don't want you to raise your hands, but I want you to really answer those questions in your own heart and mind because they really go to the heart of the passage that we'll look at tonight.

Jesus takes up the very issue of believing prayer. Turn with me to Mark 11, and let me read for you this really interesting text. Mark 11, beginning in verse 19.

When evening came, they [that is Jesus and the twelve] would go out of the city [of Jerusalem and go back to Bethany where they were staying].

As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. ["But

if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.”]

In this paragraph, Jesus teaches His disciples and us how to cultivate complete confidence in God’s power to answer prayer. Let me give you just an outline so you kind of see how we’re going to work our way through this passage.

We’re going to start by looking at the occasion that warranted this discussion.

Secondly, Jesus’ exhortation to the disciples in verse 22.

Thirdly, Jesus’ application of that exhortation in verses 23 and 24, and then in verses 25 and 26 the limitations on what Jesus describes in this passage about prayer.

So, with that outline in mind, let’s begin to sort of work our way through it. Let’s start with the occasion for this teaching opportunity. Just to remind you, because it’s been a while since we’ve been in the Gospel of Mark, throughout this summer of course taking a break to study Bible study. So, with chapter 11 of Mark’s Gospel, we come to the second half of the story of the life of Jesus. And the second half centers in the events of the Passion Week. Mark spends ten chapters on the three and a half years of Jesus’ ministry, but he spends the last six chapters of his Gospel on one crucial week. Clearly, that week defines the heart of our Lord’s ministry and why He came.

It was on Friday, one week before His crucifixion, that Jesus arrived in Bethany, just over the hill from Jerusalem (about 2 miles) to stay in the house of His dear friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Since Sabbath began at sundown on Friday, it’s likely that He and the twelve arrived before dark that Friday, on that Friday evening. Then, of course, on Saturday they rested. They probably went to synagogue, because it was the Sabbath. When the Sabbath ended at sunset, apparently, based on the chronology we can put together, there was a feast given in Jesus’ honor at the home of Simon the leper. That’s when Mary anointed Him for His burial. That would have been on Saturday night after the end of Sabbath.

That brings us to Sunday, the beginning of the Passion Week. On Sunday, it began with the triumphal entry, when Jesus made His ride into the city and made an unequivocal claim to be

Israel's Messiah. Then He went to the temple, and there He healed; and there He prophesied, and wept over the destruction of the city. And He cursed the temple; He looked all around at everything that was happening for preparation for what would happen the next day. And then on Sunday evening, Jesus and the twelve went back to Bethany for the night.

On Monday of the Passion Week, there were only three events that take place. There's the cursing of a fig tree; there's a second cleansing of the temple, and John records the request some Greeks made of Jesus. Mark only records the first two of these events on Monday: the object lesson of the fig tree and the object lesson of the second cleansing of the temple. Notice how the object lesson of the fig tree begins in verse 12. Just to remind you, to get you up to speed, on the next day, this would have been Monday morning, when they had left Bethany, Jesus became hungry.

Now, just to remind you of sort of the location of all of these things, the Mount of Olives is circled there in the middle, and then you can see the arrow pointing to the Temple Mount. There's a valley, the Kidron Valley, between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount. On the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, toward the Dead Sea, are these two cities, Bethany and Bethphage. Bethany is where Jesus was staying. The road to the Temple Mount wove around through or near Bethphage, which means "House of Figs." Somewhere along that route they came to a lone fig tree. The walk was about two miles; they left early that Monday morning the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and Jesus recognized that He was hungry.

Look at verse 13, "Seeing ... a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it...." Matthew tells us this was a lone fig tree by the road. This is what fig trees in that area look like, this is one near Jerusalem. Ripe figs for the winter crop would come in another 30 to 60 days, so Jesus knew there were no ripe figs, but green or unripe figs would begin to appear in February. This is what they looked like, just a tender little bud, "pageem" in Hebrew. They were both edible and often were eaten. By early April, the time Jesus is here, it would have been normal to find these little, green figs. And that expectation would have been particularly true in the case of this tree because it was in leaf, and usually the little, baby, green fig buds appeared before the leaves did. So, if there were leaves, there should be some green figs.

But notice verse 13 says, "... when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs." So, there were neither ripe figs; there were no "pageem," just leaves. By its leaves, this tree had promised that it would at least have those little, baby, green figs. But it had nothing. So, in verse 14, Jesus said to this tree, "'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!' And His disciples were listening."

Now, as we discovered when we studied this, now many weeks ago, the fig tree was an object lesson. It was an object lesson that represented the nation, Israel. God had every right to expect fruit from Israel. And in her temple worship, and in all of her rituals, she appeared to have the fruit of genuine worship and love for God. But when Jesus went to the Temple Mount, as He will do in just a moment in the next event in this story, He finds nothing but leaves. The religion of the people was all appearance and no reality.

And that brings us to the second object lesson, and it makes exactly the same point as the cursing of the fig tree. The fig tree is like an analogy of what Jesus will find at the temple when He gets there. A lot of outward show, a lot of leaves, looks pretty, but no fruit. Remember that those businesses that He ransacks there in the Court of the Gentiles - they either personally belonged to the leaders of the nation, or they were franchises that they personally benefitted from. Jesus chased them out. And then He says, in response to all of that, that the leaders of the nation had perverted the divine purpose of the temple; they were thieves stealing from God's people; they had made God's house, what was supposed to be a house of prayer, a cave in which they as robbers could hide. Not a way to win friends and influence people. That brings us to the end of Monday.

Now, verse 19 says, "When evening came, they would go out of the city." The tense of the Greek verb makes it clear that this was Jesus' practice throughout the week until Thursday night. He would be in the city during the day, go out to Bethany at night. Now Mark picks up the story of what happens the next morning. Look at verse 20, "As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*." It's now Tuesday morning. They went back out to Bethany on Monday night; they spent the night there; and now they're making their way back that same route I showed you, to the Temple Mount, the two miles to Jerusalem, on Tuesday morning.

And it's early Tuesday morning. We know that, because Luke tells us in Luke 21:38 that all the people would get up early in the morning to come to Jesus in the temple to listen to Him. So, before a lot of the people got there, Jesus would show up and His disciples would gather, and others who had interest would gather, while there was still lots of room for Him to teach. And so, it's early; they're on their way to the temple. This Tuesday would be the busiest day of the Passion Week. In Mark's Gospel the events that took place just on Tuesday alone run from 11:20 (where we are now) all the way to 14:2. That's just Tuesday, a very, very busy day.

So, Jesus and the disciples are taking the same route from the home of their friends in Bethany two miles back to Jerusalem; and they pass that same fig tree, that lone fig tree standing by the road that Jesus had seen the previous morning and had hoped to get some green figs from. But on Tuesday morning, twenty-four hours later, it had completely shriveled up. And all the disciples notice it, and they're talking about it. Matthew says this, in Matthew 21:20, "And at once the fig tree withered. Seeing *this*, the disciples were amazed and asked, 'How did the fig tree wither *all* at once?'" What Matthew does here, by the way, is sort of telescope the incident, so that at first glance it appears to have happened in an instant. But Mark makes it clear, that, in fact, it was the next morning that they noticed that it had shriveled.

The disciples are all shocked at what's happened to this fig tree. I mean, healthy, adult, thriving trees don't completely dry up in 24 hours. And usually, as we've unfortunately seen too much of this summer here in Texas, when a tree is unhealthy the signs begin where? At its extremities. But this fig tree had withered from the roots up, and in 24 hours it had gone from being a healthy tree covered with leaves, to being completely dead and completely lifeless. Verse 21, "Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'"

By the way, in this verse (I love this), it's just a little hint that Mark is writing his Gospel in very close association with Peter, because Mark tells us what Peter was thinking. He was reminded of what had happened the day before. And now, he calls it to Jesus' attention. And Peter's statement (by the way), is really an implied question. You know, there are questions that aren't questions, like when your wife says, "you're not going to wear that out, are you?" Guys that's not a question, that's a statement. There are also statements that are questions, and this is a question. It was the same question the rest of the apostles were voicing.

Matthew tells us that the disciples were amazed and were asking how? How did the fig tree wither? Understand here, they're not questioning Jesus' power to perform this miracle. They have now witnessed Jesus do many far more powerful things in His ministry. Their question was how? How was it accomplished? You say, why were they asking that question? Well, do you remember what Jesus said to the fig tree? Look back at verse 14, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Matthew records it like this, "No longer shall there be any fruit from you."

What did Jesus not say in His curse? Jesus' curse of the tree was that it would never bear fruit in the future, but His curse didn't predict the death of the tree. It could have survived and His curse still be fulfilled. So, apparently, the disciples are surprised to see this fig tree, that 24 hours earlier had been filled with green leaves, now completely dead with no signs of life. That's the occasion of what Jesus wants to teach them and us.

That brings us, secondly, to Jesus' exhortation. In response to Peter's statement and question, notice what Jesus says, verse 22. In response to this withered fig tree, "... Jesus answered saying to them, 'Have faith in God.'" By the way, this is similar isn't it to what we saw back in Mark 9? Go back to Mark 9, the statement Jesus made to the man with the demon-possessed son, Mark 9:23. Remember he said to Jesus, in verse 22, "... if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Verse 23, "... Jesus said to him, 'If you can? All things are possible to him who believes.'" Here, Jesus says, have faith in God. Sadly, these two verses have been abused by many for every imaginable excess, particularly in the Word Faith movement, in the fringes of the Charismatic movement. Faith healers love these verses, because if someone doesn't play along with their little game and doesn't temporarily demonstrate some kind of physical relief, often under the power of suggestion, they fall back on these verses – 'See? The problem wasn't me; the problem was you. You didn't have sufficient faith. I couldn't heal you because you didn't have enough faith.'

Unfortunately, both of these verses are often explained in a way that emphasizes the power of faith. Listen carefully to me, write this in your notes, underscore this, it is so important to understand: Faith has no power. Let me say that again: faith has no power. My faith can't do anything, because faith isn't a power, faith isn't a force. Faith is simply believing. Believing doesn't have any power to act. The focus of Jesus' statements in both of these cases is not that

faith is powerful; instead, it is that God is powerful and that there is absolutely no limit to God's power to act. That means that where there is true faith in God, He is able to do anything.

But what exactly is faith? Well again, just to remind you, when we worked our way through chapter 9, we saw that there are two primary expressions of faith. When we talk about faith, this is what we mean:

First of all, we mean confidence in God's clear, biblical promises to me. That's faith. And I say that very deliberately, I say those biblical promises that are addressed to me, or to you, because not all the biblical promises in Scripture are addressed to us. Remember last time I made the point that, you know the biggest overstatement in Christian history is every promise in the Book is mine. That's not true; there are promises made to individuals, and they're not made to you. But there are many promises in the scripture that are made to all believers. Faith is having confidence that God will do those things.

The second expression of faith goes beyond what the Scripture itself promises us directly. Faith also has confidence that God has the capacity to do whatever I ask of Him *if*, and this is a big *if*, He decides that it's best for me. Those are the two expressions of faith. Somebody has faith it means:

- a) They have confidence in God's clear biblical promises to them, and
- b) They have confidence in God's power to do whatever it is I ask Him to do *if* He decides that's what is best for me, what fits His great eternal plan.

For example, faith is not convincing yourself that God will heal your family member. There's no promise in the Word of God where God promises to heal a particular person. But faith is being convinced that God can heal that family member if He chooses to do so. You see the difference? One is certain, if there are clear biblical promises made to me, then I can be certain of those. Beyond that, I simply am certain in God's power to act. He can do whatever it is He determines is best to do. That's faith. Look at Hebrews 11. The writer of Hebrews puts it like this, the great hall of faith chapter. Verse 1, a sort of definition of sorts of faith, "... faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Literally, we could say it this way: faith is the title deed of the things that I hope for, expect, it is the evidence of things I can't see. In the end it comes down to trusting God and His Word. It goes on to talk about people who trusted God's Word. Notice verse 2, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God...." Why is that faith? We have confidence that what God said to us in His Word is true; He told us how it happened, so we have confidence in that. And on and on, the litany goes, the list goes.

Notice verse 6, without this kind of confidence in God it is impossible to please God. That is a key verse. If you lack either confidence in God's clear biblical promises to you, or confidence that God has the capacity to do whatever it is you ask Him to do, if He decides that's what's best, then it's impossible for you to please Him. "... for he who comes to God [verse 6] must believe that He is, [that is He's everything that He's revealed Himself to be] and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." It honors God to believe His Word. It honors God to believe His power. So, that's faith - confidence in God's clear biblical promises to me, confidence that God has the capacity to do whatever it is I ask of Him, if He decides that's best.

So, Jesus says, in verse 22, back in Mark 11, Keep on having faith in God's promises and in His power. The tense of the Greek verb translated *have* there is present tense. We could translate it like this: keep on having faith in God. It's an abiding, continuing faith, faith in God's character and faith in God's Word. That's Jesus' exhortation. Have faith in God. Now, notice how He applies it, Jesus' application. Jesus begins in verses 23 and 24 with His characteristic, "Truly I am saying to you...." It's an expression that He often used to introduce profound, solemn statements of truth. Notice what He says in verse 23, "'Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him.'"

Matthew puts it a little differently. Matthew 21:21 "... Jesus answered and said to them, 'Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, it will happen.'" Now let me immediately warn you from jumping to the wrong conclusion. There is no record that either Jesus or His apostles ever performed a miracle like this one. Not that He couldn't have, but there's no record that He did. Instead, Jesus is using figurative language from His time. When



the rabbis of Jesus' time wanted to speak about something being extremely difficult or being impossible, they would talk about moving mountains. We still do that occasionally, don't we? We use that expression. That's what's going on here.

At this point, Jesus and His disciples are on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, near Bethphage, probably. So, "this mountain" is probably a reference to the Mount of Olives. And from the eastern side of the Mount of Olives you can see the Dead Sea. If you look here in this picture, you see Bethany, the Mount of Olives, is sort of in the foreground in this picture, then you see Bethany just over the hill, we're looking east here. And you can see how from Bethany you can see the Dead Sea. So probably Jesus was using an illustration as they walked along the road, you know we're coming up on the Mount of Olives, it was looming there in front of them, and He says, you could take this mountain and cast it into that sea.

So, Jesus is saying then, if one of His disciples were to say to the Mount of Olives, be moved the ten miles between where you are and the Dead Sea and down four thousand feet in elevation, verse 23, "... and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him." Now the word for "doubt" speaks of being of a divided mind. It pictures a kind of internal debate in which the person swings from one side to the other. You ever have those discussions in your mind? Where you take one side and you argue that really well, and then you think well, but wait a minute, then there's this other side, then. That's what's going on in this person's mind.

It's like James 1, where you have to ask for wisdom in faith, not doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind here and then there, here and then there. Instead, Jesus says, instead of doubting, being back and forth in your mind on whether or not God can do this, you must believe that what you are speaking, literally the text says, is going to happen or is happening. Verse 23, notice, is worded very generically. Notice, whoever, his heart, he, him. But in verse 24, Jesus applies this general principle directly to His apostles. Notice verse 24, "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you."

Now this verse makes it clear that what Jesus is talking about is having faith in God when it comes to prayer, when it comes to asking God for the things we need. Matthew makes that clear.

Matthew 21:22, “... all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Now it doesn’t say that God will answer your prayer immediately. The Greek tense here in this verse is present tense, it could be translated like this, all things for which you continue to pray and continue to ask. So, this pictures ongoing prayer for these things, so don’t expect you pray one prayer, and this happens, it’s faithful, ongoing prayer.

Now, notice verse 24 begins “therefore.” Because verse 23 is true, I’m saying to you my followers, all things for which you pray, not only a prayer for something miraculous like the Mount of Olives ending up in the Dead Sea, but for anything and everything you pray about and ask God for, believe that you have received it. Here, Jesus is borrowing from something that’s very Hebrew. In the Hebrew grammar of the Old Testament when a prophet wrote about a future event that was so absolutely certain because God had promised it, he wrote about it as if it had already happened. So, if you were reading the Hebrew of some text in the Old Testament looking forward and prophesying, it would talk about it as a past event, as if it had already happened. And that’s God’s way of saying this is so sure, I can talk as if it’s already happened. That’s what Jesus is saying here.

When you pray and ask God for what you need, have such a confidence in God’s promises, if He’s promised you this in the Scripture, and in God’s power, if He hasn’t, that in your mind, it’s as if you’ve already received it while you’re praying for it, if in fact that’s what He designs to do. William Hendricksen writes, “No task in harmony with God’s will is impossible to be performed by those who believe and do not doubt.” This is God’s consistent promise. We’ll see it in Matthew 7:7, when Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.” In Luke 17:6, “... the Lord said, ‘If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would obey you.’” Wow, that is huge.

But we’re not done with this passage yet. Because there’s some important limitations Jesus adds. This passage is not like a heavenly credit card with no spending limits. There are limitations our Lord places on this amazing promise regarding prayer. There are two limitations placed on this promise right here in this very passage. The first limitation we already looked at: You’ve got to

have faith in God, in His faithfulness to keep His promises, or in His power to do what He hasn't promised to do.

But there's another limitation in verse 25. Look at verse 25; you must have a spirit of forgiveness toward others. "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." Whenever you're praying, whenever you're asking God to do things on your behalf. By the way, notice Jesus says whenever you stand praying. It's interesting, if you go back and study the posture of prayer in the Old Testament there's a variety of postures. In special times of ceremony or trouble, the Jews would either kneel, like Solomon at the dedication of the temple, or they would literally prostrate themselves with their faces to the ground. But by far the most common posture of prayer in the Old Testament is standing. And by the way, it's still true for the Jews to this day.

So, Jesus says, when you stand praying, we must forgive. Notice He says forgive if there's anything against anyone. If you have anything against anyone. Wow, that's comprehensive. Anything. Might be a clear-cut sin, might be something you just don't like that they did that offended you; anything against anyone. Might be a believer, brother or sister in Christ, might be an unbeliever. Anything, anyone, you must forgive. Why? Notice what He says, for this purpose, "... so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." We must forgive those who have sinned against us. In fact, our forgiveness of others is a condition of God's forgiving us. That's what the Lord's Prayer says as well in Matthew 6:12. "... forgive us our debts, [what?] as we have forgiven our debtors."

There's another warning here, and that is that those who don't forgive as a pattern of life have not been forgiven. The person who claims to be a Christian, but continually, as a habit of life, refuses to forgive someone else has never really experienced God's forgiveness. That's verse 25. Now notice verse in 26, if you have an *NAS*, it's in brackets. You see that? And you'll notice there's a footnote. If you look over in the margin you see that early manuscripts of the New Testament do not contain this verse. What the verse says is true; what it says appears elsewhere in Matthew 6 in conjunction with the Lord's Prayer, but probably it didn't occur here originally.

So, why does Jesus add this caveat in verse 25? Understand, this isn't arbitrary. Listen to one commentator. Allen Cole writes, we have no inherent right to be heard by God. You realize that?

We don't have an inherent right to be heard. All is His grace and undeserved favor. But unless we forgive others freely, it shows that we have no consciousness of the grace that we ourselves have received and need, and so it shows (listen to this). If we don't forgive others, it shows that we don't understand the grace we need, and that we are expecting God to hear us, based not on grace but on our merits. That's a very interesting observation. Which, of course, we have no right to be heard. So, the refusal to forgive others says I don't understand grace, and therefore I'm coming to God thinking that I have a right to be heard. And so, God says, don't expect to be heard, no one has merit to be heard before Me, except My Son.

Those are limitations - so there are limitations on this promise. Amazing promise that Jesus made to us about prayer, believing prayer, but there are limitations on God's answering believing prayer.

The first is: have faith in God.

The second is: have a spirit of forgiveness toward others.

If those things aren't true, then the promise is not going to be fulfilled in your life. There are other limitations that are added in other passages. It's not my purpose tonight to study them. Let me just give you a little list, okay? Look at these passages.

You've got to ask. That seems pretty basic but it's still true. You see that in Matthew 7, you see it in James 4. "You do not have because you do not ask."

Another limitation is you can't ask with the wrong motives simply to consume it on your pleasure. James 4:3 makes that point, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives so that you ... [may] spend it on your pleasures." Sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers because it's all about us, the wrong motives, our pleasure.

There's another limitation that's added, a fifth one. And, that's that we have to ask in Jesus' name. John 14:13 and 14 says,

"Whatever you ask in My name, [Jesus said to the disciples] that will I do, [so] that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask ... anything in My name, I will do *it*."

What does that mean? I like what William Hendricksen writes. He says, when you ask in harmony with all that Jesus has revealed concerning Himself and the prayer rests on His merits alone. So, the prayer is in harmony with what He's revealed about Himself and His cause, and it's made solely resting on His merits to be heard. That's to ask in Jesus' name.

Another limitation of this promise in prayer is: you have to abide in Jesus and have His words abiding in you. John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, [they remain, they stay in you, they direct you] ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Delight yourself in God. Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart." Listen, if you delight in the Lord, you're not going to be asking for all of those things that you want to consume on your own pleasure. You're going to be in step with what matters to Him, so you're going to be asking for the right things and this promise of believing prayer will be fulfilled.

Another limitation is: you have to ask according to God's revealed Word. His will, in His Word. 1 John 5:14-15,

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And ... we know that [if] He hears us in whatever we ask, we ... have the requests which we have asked from Him."

And finally, another limitation is: you have to ask in line with God's sovereign will. Like Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, you remember? He prayed, Father if You are willing remove this cup from Me, yet not My will but Yours be done. May Your sovereign purpose be accomplished in My life. Those are the limitations to this magnificent promise. But the promise stands.

So, let me ask you, do you pray? Do you have enough confidence in God to believe that He truly answers prayer? Do you? I mean really, do you? To whatever extent we don't pray, we don't truly believe that God can or will intervene. Let me say that again: To whatever extent we don't pray, we betray that we don't really believe that God can or will intervene. Because if we really believed, and I say this for myself as well, if we really believed that God both can and will intervene for our good, then don't you think we would ask? A failure to ask betrays what we

really believe. As my professors used to say so often in seminary, “behavior always betrays belief.”

Let me ask you another question. If you pray, do you really believe that God will keep His clear, biblical promises to you, the ones He’s made to you? Do you really believe that God will enable you to keep His commands? He said He would. Do you believe that God will enable you to see a diminishing pattern of sin in your life and an increasing pattern of obedience? God said He would accomplish that in the lives of believers. Do you believe that? Or do you have the sort of “woe is me; I’m just dominated by my sin?” Paul says in Romans 6 the power of sin in our lives is broken. We no longer have to sin. John in 1 John 2:1 says, “... I ... [write] these things to you so that you may not sin. [But if you sin] ... we have an Advocate with the Father....” Do you really believe that God will enable you to love your spouse as He commanded you to love them? Do you believe that God has the capacity and power, where it’s your desire and where you cut sin out of your life, to keep you pure? Do you believe that?

Do you believe that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able? Do you ask Him to do it? It’s promised. Do you believe God will give you the wisdom you need in the middle of trials? What does He say in James? If you find yourself in the middle of a trial, and you lack wisdom, ask of God who gives to all, what? Liberally, freely. It’s God’s promise to you. Have you ever asked Him for wisdom in the middle of a trial, believing that He’ll give you the wisdom you need?

Do you believe that God can cause the fruit of the Spirit to be increased in your life, that you can see an increase in love, and joy, and peace, and all the things the Spirit produces? Listen, God’s promised that if the Spirit’s in your life, He will produce that fruit. Have you ever prayed for Him to produce that fruit in your life? Do you believe He’ll do it? He said He would.

If you pray, do you really believe that God is able to do whatever you ask of Him, if He chooses to do it, even if it’s not a promise He’s made in His Word? Do you believe God can provide a job for you if you’re out of work? Do you believe God can provide a spouse if you’re hoping someday to be married? Do you believe God can grant you favor with those in authority over you in the workplace, or whatever environment you find yourself? Do you believe that God can grant you the capacity to grow in your skills as you work hard in the gifts He’s given you? Do

you believe that God can heal a family member or friend? Do you believe that God can grant you wisdom as a parent to shepherd your children? Do you believe that God can grant you wisdom and discipline to become a better student if you're a student?

Listen, here's Jesus' exhortation to us all when it comes to God and prayer: have faith in God.

Let's pray together.

Father, forgive us. Forgive us for having You and having Your faithful promises; having Your power and doubting You. Father, forgive us for showing that we doubt You by our failure to pray about everything.

Father, I pray that You would take this text, take this exhortation from our Lord, and burn it into our hearts. Lord, help us to keep on having faith in You, to keep on having confidence that You will do what You've promised You will do in our lives. And Lord, help us to have confidence that when we come to You with requests for things that You didn't promise, that if You determine it's best for us, You have the power to do it. Father, forgive us for doubting You. And make us those who come to You with everything because we keep on having faith in You.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.