

Fruitful Prayer

Mark 11:24-26

Do you want the kind of prayer life where you know you are being a part of God's unfolding plans right here in Lillooet and around the world? Do you want to experience God's mercy and freedom from bitterness? Then you're in the right place this morning. If you're hoping for the fountain of youth and the secret to a big bank account...this will be a good attitude adjustment.

Last week we looked again at God's warning to Jerusalem. Jesus entered the temple to the sounds of business with livestock, not to the sounds of people doing business with God in prayer. Jesus used the searing words of Jerimiah's...calling them to Repent and have faith in God.

But the next morning the disciples were more interested in how Jesus caused the fruitless fig tree to die. So Jesus turned their interest in miracles as an object lesson challenging them to have faith in God. Where do we go to build our faith God?

Firm Grip Illustration: listen, read, study, memorize, meditate

What spiritual fruit was Jesus looking for in the temple? Prayer. Prayer is fellowship with God. Some would say it's the holiest work we can do. Today we will focus on that sacred invitation

to bring our thoughts and dreams into the presence of God.

PRAYER

Fruitful prayer has **two conditions:** The first is belief.

Read v24 Believing Prayer

Is this a license to treat God like a Genie. Ask whatever you wish and it will be granted. It's not whatever you wish, it's whatever you ask God in prayer. Prayer is fellowship with God. It is aligning ourselves with God. If your desire is to please God, then you can ask for what you wish.

Now let's talk about belief. The Bible says *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. Heb 11:1

The KJV 'substance of things hoped for' captures the sense of the Greek word *hypostasis* well. The hope is so real it is called substance. *Hypostasis* is also used in Heb 1:3 to describe Jesus as the exact representation of God's being and nature. Jesus is God's 'substance'. Faith has that quality of assurance...without seeing, we can count on it.

What could possibly give us this strong of a conviction?

By knowing God's will. How? From God's Word and confirmed by His Spirit and His church. We can pray with confidence in God's will. A hope

so thick that it's substance. Jesus is urging us to show our faith in God by the way we approach Him in prayer. Counting on God as we ask. Asking in doubt is just pretending. Like the fig tree pretending to have fruit by showing it's leaves.

Obj #1 Promise only for the twelve?

I'm just a 21st century believer in a little town called Lillooet.

Parts of the New Testament just describes God's activity. Not meant for duplication today (description not prescription). For example: Believers used to get all their understanding about Jesus, salvation and the church from the Apostles. Now we have it in writing. We don't need Peter or Paul present to understand. We can gather anywhere, anytime.

Another example: In the first days of the church, new believers were given a visible sign: speaking in tongues. It was necessary for the first church in Jerusalem to be given a clear sign that God was setting aside His people based on belief in Christ. And it was effective. For when God gave that same sign of tongues to the Gentile believers, Peter and the Jewish leaders could no longer hold onto their prejudice against Gentiles. Why doesn't every new believer burst out in tongues today? Because we have the New Testament. We know God's church is for all nations.

So there are some instances where we adjust our expectations about applying what has happened in the 1st century.

Is Jesus' prayer challenging for all believers and for all time?

This challenge and promise is for anyone (v23) who has faith in God.

Objection 2 My faith is too small

If our faith begins with us, it begins in the wrong place. I think the bigger question is, "Do we trust God's way is best?" That was Eve's problem. Is God withholding good things from us? That's what Satan loves to trip us with. Let's look briefly at the Lord's model prayer in Matt 6.

Belief is at the core of the Lord's Prayer. It begins with intimacy. Prayer is with *our Father in heaven*. Abba Father, who loves His children: giving up His Son for them. But Abba Father is also to be worshipped the Lord Almighty...*hallowed by Your name*.

John saw a vision of worship in heaven. The twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, thousands upon thousands of angels, and then every living creature in heaven and earth: Their voices ringing, "Worthy!" (Rev 4-5). The next line of the model prayer takes great faith to say: *Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. (Matt 6:10)

But how many times do we just say those words not from our heart.

Perhaps even fearful that if God delivers, our lives will be turned upside down. It pushes us to let go of attachments to this world. Praying in faith goes hand in hand with loyalty to God. Don't worry about your life, running after the same things unbelievers do (even important things like food, drink and clothing). Your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:25-33)

Why does Jesus demand so much faith from us?

Because He knows better. Jesus has lived in the flesh and in the Spirit. And He knows what we are capable of. And He knows living by faith is worth it. God rewards faith. He even lays down a deposit when we first believe. To prove believers have eternal life. God gives His Holy Spirit....Who Comforts, Counsels, Convicts, and Helps us apply God's word. God does not see us as faithless wretches. God loves us. He has great plans for us. And He's coming to bring us home. New bodies in heaven with God forever. That's grace. Pleasing God takes everyday faith. We don't naturally want God's refining and discipline. Even if we know it's good for us. When our kids were at home I use to announce we were going on a family walk. No one wanted

to go. But they gave in...by my authority and they wanted to stay in my good books. But every time we got out there...it wasn't long before everyone was experiencing the benefits of exercise, being out in God's creation and social interaction.

The Bible says struggle with sin and hardship is to be taken as discipline from our heavenly Father (Heb 12:4-7). And when we learn our lessons, we respect Him for refining us. He does it so that we may share in His Holiness and bring forth a harvest of righteousness (Heb 12:10-11). A lottery jackpot does not bring forth a harvest of righteousness. People who overcome adversity through Christ do. Because the testing of our faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so we might be fully mature and complete, not lacking anything (Ja 1:3-4). In the end, a mature and content person brings God glory. God wants us to bear fruit for eternity.

Fruitful Prayer Requests

We have some clues about what to ask from God.

1. God wants us to be mature and complete. It takes faith to asking for maturity because it comes at a price. It means traveling down the road of refinement and self-denial.
2. Wisdom is also a great request because the Bible says it comes

from God (Prov 2:6). James says God gives wisdom generously without finding fault. But don't be doubting when you ask (Ja 1:6-8).

A person who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. Doubt is like fear. It is unbelief. A doubter or a skeptic can find something wrong with just about anything. No assurance. No peace. Would we rather be a skeptic stuck going nowhere, or trust God and bear fruit for eternity? Here's what will be displayed in our lives if we trust God instead: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Gal 5:22-23
Notice health and wealth are not on the list.

3. Another fruitful prayer area: the church, God's bride. One of my go-to passages on God's will for the church is Romans 12. When we pray for the growth and unity of our church, it is not a prayer for everyone to be more like us.

God is not a cookie cutter. He is pleased to have diversity in the church. We need His grace to love and accept one another. It's not natural. It's not easy. God gives His people a diversity of spiritual gifts...all for the edification of His church, the body of

Christ. One person could be spiritually motivated to declare the will of God, another to serve practically, another to teach the Bible, another to lead and organize, another to encourage spiritual growth, another to share materially, another to provide compassionate support.

Great prayers of faith connect back to seeking and knowing God's will. Jesus' beloved disciple John, wrote: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.* 1 Jn 5:14-15

When it comes to prayers of faith, I find it helpful to remember the day I first believed. I found out about God's love to save sinners like me...and that He sent Jesus to give his life as a ransom on the cross. He paid the penalty of death I deserved. That day I prayed to God for the first time...confessing my sins and receiving Jesus as my Savior. I knew it happened because I had peace and purpose. I was spiritually born again. It was a prayer of faith I have never forgotten.

v25a Prayer Posture

Back in Jesus' day, Jews prayed standing up. And some did it to show off how religious they were. That's

why Jesus said do the opposite. Pray privately and directly...not to be heard by others and not to seek some hypnotic experience like the pagans who repeat words over and over. God already knows what we need before we even ask (Matt 6:5-8). Christ is addressing our attitude in prayer. The posture of our hearts. We are to be completely focused on our Father in heaven. Like a dependent child. Even earthly fathers often know their child's need. But they still like to hear it for themselves. To get a sense of their child's attitude. God is turned off by formality and public display. Prayer is far from pride. In short, it is intimate. Between you and God.

The first condition for fruitful prayers is belief. Our confidence comes from knowing God's will. The second condition is forgiveness. Remembering we are servants who have received God's mercy.

v25b Remember God's Mercy

There are barriers to fruitful prayer. Unconfessed sin is one. Lacking in mercy is another. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, Jesus told him to multiply his idea (seven) by eleven. Then He told the parable about the servant who was forgiven a huge debt to the king. One he could not have paid back in many lifetimes. Instead of paying forward

the king's mercy, he went straight to the person who owed him money (Matt 18:21ff) and had him thrown into prison. When this servant's master found out, he was handed over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. Jesus ended this discussion with Peter by warning that this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you (disciples) unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart.

God's mercy on us hinges on our mercy toward others. We don't like to talk about this condition, but it's right in the Lord's model prayer. *And forgive us our debts, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN our debtors* (NIV).

The grudges have already been cleared before asking from God. This was not new information for the disciples. David lived one thousand years before Christ. His prayer song was recorded in scripture: *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Ps 139:23-24

This is a prayer to guard the heart. To just stop and wait upon the Lord for conviction and encouragement. The more often we do it...the better. It gives God control.

Jesus teaches that if want to have a fruitful prayer life, we need to be free

of any offensive way in us...especially holding grudges. Forgiveness is the choice to let go of animosity no matter how much we feel justified about continuing in anger. It actually frees us from being eaten up on the inside and becoming bitter. Memory may come again or that person may reoffend but we continue to meet this with mercy and leave the final judgement to God (Rom 12:19-21).

If we keep bringing it up we haven't forgiven. *Forget not all His benefits – who forgives all your sins (v3). He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities (v10)...for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him (v11), as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Ps 103)

How much good would it do for you...if I spent the week dwelling on bad memories to give you some juicy examples? None. It would just show I have grudges. We have enough examples from God's Word.

Another fruitful prayer would be to ask for a greater capacity to love, especially in the family of God. Sometimes I pray for the Lord to help me see others more like He does. God answers me time and time again by reminding me of His love...all the way

to the the cross. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9). How? We have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 Jn 2:1).

Now we come to our final verse but many will only have a footnote. That's because this verse was not found in the earliest writings discovered. It's a miracle how God has preserved His word, despite the fallibility of man. Because this is still the words of Jesus from Matt 6:15 and fits the context, I have chosen to use the NASB.

v26 Unfruitful Prayer

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

We should take it on faith that forgiveness is an essential quality of God's nature. If we approach God with a faith request but ignore the condition of our heart (like the grudges we hold) then we are ignoring who God is. It is fair and true that a relationship of love and trust be built on mercy. Mercy from God to us and mercy from us to others. Fruitful prayer comes from a heart that has given up the right to bear a grudge and prays full of faith in God.