

Praying in Faith (II)
Mark 11:24

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Last week we talked about the importance of exercising faith when we pray. This morning we will continue with that subject. In Mark 11:22-24 Jesus instructs the disciples on the issue of praying in faith; He says, *"Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."*

We take our theme from verse 24, "...when you pray, believe that you receive...."

What is needed in order for me to pray that way?

I. I need more than just my natural resources.

I cannot walk in the flesh and get the results of the Spirit.¹ In Romans 8 Paul makes the distinction between walking or living according to the impulses of the flesh verses walking in the Spirit. He is talking to Christians. It is God's will that His people would live their lives under the direction of the Holy Spirit—that they would follow the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit. But it is also possible for people to be born again, but live carnal, self-centered lives. Paul explains this difference in Rom 8:5 *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."* A carnal Christian is preoccupied with the desires of his own flesh. That's where his mind is; that's where he spends his time and money; that's where his priorities are.

If I am thinking carnally and living carnally, I cannot make the principles of the kingdom work the way they are designed to work. I can do the surface mechanical things like "saying prayers" and "confessing victory" but that will not determine my reality. If I sow according to the flesh,² I will reap according to the flesh—even if on the surface I am doing the same steps as someone who is from the heart serving God. So last week we talked about the problems experienced 80's and 90's when people were going to faith seminars and trying to find formulas that would get them what they want. I won't go back over all that. I am going to deal with some of the principles taught in those seminars, because they are valid biblical principles. But we must first understand that walking in those principles is much more of a heart issue than a mechanical issue. Proverbs 4:23 tells us that everything in life flows out of the condition of our heart—that innermost part of us that includes the will. Let me give you that verse in a couple of translations. NIV *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."* Today's New International Version *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."* God is not mocked. No one can get spiritual results by carnal means. In the end, we will need more than ten steps and a good confession.

So what is required for praying in faith?

II. I need to take God at His word.

¹ Galatians 6:7-8 declares the law of sowing and reaping. The reaping/results will be of the same nature as what was sown/invested. If we only operate with natural resources we will only get natural results.

² We often think of flesh as terrible, wicked things; but flesh includes natural reasoning, taking care of number one, etc.

I need to know what He has said in Scripture. I need to know those words were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I need to know God Himself spoke those words through chosen vessels. And when I read a promise in the Bible I embrace it as true and reliable—more reliable than anything else.³ More reliable than what society tells me. Even more reliable than what my own five senses tell me. That is the bedrock we stand on. Like the old hymn says, “Standing on the promises I cannot fall, Listening every moment to the Spirit’s call Resting in my Savior as my all in all, Standing on the promises of God.” Are you standing on the promises of God today? Can’t rely on our feelings; we rely on God’s word. Take for example God’s promise in 1 John 1:9 “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” Do you believe that promise is true and reliable? Do you believe it is for you? When we take God at His word, we don’t have to have a special feeling to receive that forgiveness. We confess the sin out of a sincere heart. Then based upon the promise, we receive the forgiveness—free and clear. The sin is cast from us as far as the east is from the west. We are no longer under its condemnation.⁴ The prayer of faith receives the forgiveness based on the raw word of God and moves on with God accordingly. 1 John 5:14-15 “*Now this is the confidence [we’re talking about faith] that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will [primary source of knowing that is the Word of God], He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*” Amplified says, “...we also know [with a settled and absolute knowledge] that we have [granted us as our present possession] the requests made of Him.”

The prayer of faith simply takes God at His word.

In the prayer of faith,

III. I need to exercise the faith I have.

How do I do that?

(1) Ask! Do you have enough faith to ask? Then begin there. James says, “*You have not because you ask not....*” Well, let’s get that one out of the way. Let’s be an asking people—a praying people. Often that involves some persistence as we have taught in previous messages. But Jesus said, “*Ask and it will be given unto you....*”

(2) Acknowledge God’s promises in His word. While we’re asking, we’re relying on what God has said—to the best of our ability. That means, mentally we are affirming that what God has said in His word applies to us. It’s not enough to acknowledge the word is true in general. We must know that God is no respecter of persons.⁵ If we meet the conditions stated in the word, then the promise is ours as much as it is anybody’s. In his book, *The Power of Prayer*, R.A. Torrey talks about the frustrations he experience trying to make himself believe. He says, the problem was that “it was only ‘make-believe’ and I did not really believe it at all”. His prayers were not getting answered. Then he realized that he needed some basis or grounds for his faith. He realized that “...*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). So he changed his approach. When he had a need, instead of just trying to believe, he would search scriptures and understand what God had said about the matter. Then he would go to God and plead the Lord’s own promise.⁶

³ 2 Peter 1:19-21; Matt. 5:18; Ps 119:80, 105; 138:2; Isa. 55:8-11

⁴ Psalm 103:12; Romans 3:24; 8:1

⁵ Acts 10:34. Search the word “whosoever” and see how often God reinforces this truth, for example John 3:15-16.

⁶ R. A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) p. 124.

I could sit on the couch tomorrow and imagine that my rich uncle had given me \$ 100,000. It might be fun to do that. I might even get some brief emotional excitement doing that. But I am a sane, reasonable person. It wouldn't take long for me to lose faith in that fancied possibility. In contrast, what if I'm on that same couch and the mailman brings me a certified letter. I open the envelope and find a check in it for \$ 100,000 signed by my rich uncle. I know my uncle really likes me and I know that he is so wealthy that giving me \$ 100,000 is easy for him to do. Faith is a whole lot easier when we have some grounds for believing. In the first scenario I am making myself believe something without any real warrant for believing it. In the second scenario, I have abundant warrant for believing that I have received the gift. I can look at that check and know with confidence that I am receiving \$ 100,000 from my rich uncle. Praying in faith is not magic. It is not make believe. It is not psyching yourself up. It is looking at what God has written through His prophets and relying on the specific promises He has made to us. *"...faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."*

So I set my mind to rely on what God has said. I rely upon it more than what my five senses are telling me. God gave Abraham a promise that he would be the father of many nations. Everything in the natural told him that it simply was not going to happen. He was getting old. Sara was way past childbearing age. Paul uses Abraham's example to teach us about faith in Romans 4. I'm going to read from the NIV because it's probably more accurate than the KJV.⁷ Speaking of Abraham verse 18 says, *"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Abraham did three things that were important in his stance of faith. (1) He did not allow the circumstances (what he could perceive with his natural senses) to stop him from taking God at His word. Verse 19 *"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead..."* So he faced the facts as they were in the natural. But he did not let those facts dictate his confidence. He trusted God's word to him, more than he trusted the other evidences. Sometimes well-meaning Christians get faith and denial mixed up. That's one reason I like the NIV on this verse. He *faced the fact that his body was as good as dead*. He did not go around confessing that he was young and vibrant. No, he and Sara are both too old to have kids. But—that is not the only reality we're dealing with here. God has given Abraham a promise; and that reality is more real than the other reality! Abraham faced the facts; but he did not allow those facts to destroy his confidence in God's promise. (2) Verse 21 says he was *"fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* Could God do it, even though Sara was past childbearing age? Abraham was *"fully persuaded"* that God could and God would do what He said He would do. That persuasion begins in our mind, in our thinking. If time permits we will talk about how the Holy Spirit deepens that persuasion.

(3) He kept praising God and giving Him glory through the whole process. That comes out more clearly in the Amplified version. Verse 20 says *"he grew strong and was empowered by*

⁷ The best manuscripts do not have the Greek word for not (*ou*) in verse 19. See Rom 4:16-25 (from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press), Vincent, and others. Abraham was not in denial. He faced the circumstances as they were; but He had more faith in God's promise than in what his five senses told him. I agree with Donald Gray Barnhouse's commentary (Vol. II, p. 337): the message communicated in the context is the same regardless of whether the *ou* is in the original text.

faith as he gave praise and glory to God.” Israel did the opposite of that when they were in the wilderness. Instead of giving glory to God, they murmured and complained. The Bible talks about their unbelief and what it cost them. Here we see Abraham’s faith and how it pleased God. In verse 20 we see how praising God and strengthening our faith goes hand-in-hand.

To summarize this, let me just read the passage from the Amplified Bible. Romans 4: 18 “[*For Abraham, human reason for*] *hope being gone, hoped in faith that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been promised, So [numberless] shall your descendants be. [Gen. 15:5.]* 19 *He did not weaken in faith when he considered the [utter] impotence of his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or [when he considered] the barrenness of Sarah's [deadened] womb. [Gen. 17:17; 18:11.]* 20 *No unbelief or distrust made him waver (doubtingly question) concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong and was empowered by faith as he gave praise and glory to God, 21 Fully satisfied and assured that God was able and mighty to keep His word and to do what He had promised.* 22 *That is why his faith was credited to him as righteousness (right standing with God).”*

How do we exercise the faith we have?

1. We ask!
2. We acknowledge the validity of God’s promises to us in His word.

3. Assert verbally the truth as God has spoken it.

The confession of our mouth should be consistent with the promises we are believing. The Greek word translated confess, in Romans 10:9, is *homologeō*. That verse tells us how faith works, “*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*” Notice how important confession is in your personal salvation.

The Greek word translated confess, *homologeō*, is a combination of two Greek words: *Homos* meaning “same”. We get English words like homosexual, homogeneous, and homonym from that prefix. Then the second half of the word comes from *logos* “meaning word or something said.” So *homologeō* essentially means “to say the same thing.”⁸

I need to be saying the same thing God has said. I don’t have to be weird about it or real religious. But my words need to line up with God’s words. I can acknowledge the problems--natural realities; but there are realities more real than those.

I have been helped by a very simple thing I heard Joyce Myer say. She said that when she was hit with bad news or a bunch of difficult problems, the first thing she would say is ‘God is at work.’ That immediately puts everything in perspective. It doesn’t deny the problem. But it reminds us that the problem is not the final word.

We understand the importance of words when we study Israel’s experience in the wilderness.⁹ God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. It was their’s for the taking. Instead of affirming that promise when they hit problems, they denied the faithfulness of God. They magnified the problem and did not give glory to God. They murmured when there was nothing to eat. They complained when there was no water. When they spied out the land, they came back talking about how insurmountable the problems were, and said nothing about the promises God had made them. They literally talked themselves out of the blessings God was

⁸ NT:3670 (from Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by Biblsoft)

⁹ 1 Cor. 10:10-11; Num. 14:26-30

trying to give them.¹⁰ Rom 10:8 "...*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*" (that is, the word of faith which we preach)."

We don't use our words as magical incantations. We know that confession needs to happen in conjunction with belief in the heart. But words are important.¹¹ God spoke the universe into existence. Words are powerful. Jesus said we would give account for every idle word. Matt. 12:37 "*For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*"

What can we do? We can (3) Assert verbally (out loud) the truth of God's word as it applies to the case.

(4) I need to Act according to my professed belief.

Our actions need to be consistent with what we're believing for. Praying in faith involves our whole being.

James makes this point in his epistle. A faith that does not express itself in our actions is a dead faith. James 2:18 "*But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?'"* or complete.

As I said last week, real faith has to be rooted in the heart. It can't just be surface stuff. But if it is real faith, then our actions will line up with it. If I say I really believe that "*God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*"¹² yet I won't give one dime to make it happen; I won't witness to the person who works next to me; I don't tell the good news to others; then something is defective about the faith I claim to have. James says it is dead, lifeless, worthless faith.

So we exercise the faith we have in at least four ways. (1) We ASK; we pray (2) We ACKNOWLEDGE God's word as the overriding reality (3) We ASSERT the promises of God by what we say (4) We ACT consistent with the professed faith.

Now I want to pull all this together by one final comment concerning the prayer of faith. To pray in faith,

IV. I need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, Romans 8:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit does help us to pray. That verse goes on to talk about how the Holy Spirit leads us in prayer and energizes our prayers. For the sake of time, we will not go there right now.

Instead turn with me to 1 Cor. 2.

Look at verse 14, "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*"

Our first point this morning was what? If I am to pray in faith, I need something more than my natural resources. There are things I can do; and I should do what I can do. But I must always remember that I am utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit to make this stuff work. I step out

¹⁰ Psalm 106; 1 Cor. 10; Heb. 3-4

¹¹ Proverbs 18:21; Mark 11:23(says to this mountain)

¹² 2 Peter 3:9

in faith based upon the promises of the word of God. As I do that I am relying upon the Holy Spirit to come along beside me and enable me to do what ought to be done.

Revelation from the Holy Spirit is the catalyst that makes faith work. If I am limited to my natural, sensual, carnal capacity—I cannot receive the things of God—I cannot discern them—I cannot understand them enough to cooperate with God’s plan. Only revelation by the Holy Spirit can ignite the word of faith in me so that my faith is alive and effectual. Follow with me as we read 1 Cor 2:9-12.

“But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit....”

Stop there for a moment. The natural eye can’t see it, it can’t really get into our hearts by natural means alone; the carnal mind can’t discern it or lay hold of it without supernatural help.

“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit....”

What is “them” referring to in verse 10? Answer: *“The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”* So we’re talking about the things God has prepared for you. You need revelation of that so that faith is ignited in your heart, not just in your head.

“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit....”

How does God do that?

Continue in verse 10 *“For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

The Holy Spirit searches out the plans of God. You are in there somewhere. I heard one person liken this to a Google search.¹³ When I do a Google search, I am looking for specific information that I need. If Google gave me all the data, it wouldn’t help me; it would overwhelm me and confuse me. But I type in my search and the search engine does the work for me. It sorts through billions of pieces of information. Then it “reveals” to me the things that are mine—the information I need to know. Now I can proceed with that.

The Holy Spirit searches—verse 10 says, *“all things, yes, the deep things of God.”* He’s able to do that because He is divine. He knows what the Father has in mind because He is in the Trinity. And this wonderful Holy Spirit has come into your life and my life to do what according to 1 Cor. 2:12? *“...that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

So let’s say a young lady is praying for a husband. She is doing the things we discussed earlier. She is using the faith she has. She is (1) Asking in prayer (2) Acknowledging the promises of God. For example, Ps 84:11 *“...No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.”* And it is not good for man to be alone. God sets the solitary in families.¹⁴ So she is acknowledging the word and standing on the promises God has made in His word. She is (3) Asserting the promises of God in her conversations and prayer declarations and she is (4) Acting in accordance with her confidence in God. She is learning how to cook and how to maintain her own house. She might even have a hope chest that she is filling up.

¹³ I think T.D. Jakes made this analogy in one of his messages.

¹⁴ Gen. 2:18; Psalm 68:6

She is doing all that with the faith she has in the promises of God in His word. But then one day something marvelous happens. One day the Holy Spirit whispers in her heart, “This year you will meet your husband.” That one word from God ignites a faith in her heart that she could have never generated in her own will power. Now it is easy to pray in faith. The Holy Spirit helps her weaknesses. Now she knows without a doubt that God has heard her prayer and the answer is a done deal.

I once saw a Batman movie. Batman is driving his Batmobile along at a nice, gentle pace. Then he hits his supercharger and the Batmobile flashes forward at the speed of light. That’s what happens when the Holy Spirit drops revelation in your spirit—your faith is suddenly on steroids. You know that you know! Why? because the Holy Spirit has searched the things of God and has found it for you. He reveals to you that thing that God has prepared for you.

We are not able to “make” that happen. This is something the Holy Spirit does for us by grace. But we can position ourselves to receive it. We can use the faith we have and rely upon Him in the process.

Pray!