

**Read Mark 11:22-26** (\*for the context see below)

In this reading Jesus highlights 4 things associated with having faith in God when praying:

1. Jesus teaches the disciples to “say” to the mountain “*go throw yourself in the sea*” in order for it to be removed (v23). Do you think our spoken prayers (i.e. audible) carry any more authority than unspoken ones (i.e. prayed silently in our minds) or does God treat them the same?
2. Jesus says that when praying, His followers should not doubt in their heart but believe that what they say will happen (v23) and that they have received what they are praying for (v24).
  - i. When you pray do you have this type of confidence? If so, what has helped you to develop it? If not, how could you develop it?
  - ii. What can we do to diminish our doubts when we are praying?
3. Jesus added a fourth, and maybe surprising, area connected with prayer – forgiveness! (v25).
  - a. Jesus said that when we are praying, we should forgive **anyone** who we hold something against.
    - i. Why might unforgiveness hinder our prayers?
    - ii. Why might we find it really difficult to forgive some people?
  - b. Jesus also said to forgive **anything** that you hold against anyone (v25). How would you answer someone who says that their unforgiveness is justified because there are some things that can never be forgiven?
4. Having mentioned all of these things associated with prayer Jesus ends v25 saying “*so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins*”. This suggests that our being forgiven of our sins is dependent on our works – i.e. on us forgiving others. The Apostle Paul, however, said that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus “*and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast*”. (Ephesians 2:8-9). How do you therefore understand Jesus’ words here and square them up with Paul’s teaching?
5. Following on from question 4, note that v26 is missing from most translations. The footnotes however often state that some manuscripts end this verse with the words “*But if you refuse to forgive, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins*” or link it with similar words spoken by Jesus’ in Matthew 6:15.
  - i. Read **Matthew 6:9-15**
  - ii. Jesus only expands one aspect of His prayer in v 14-15 - and that is in the area of forgiveness. Why might Jesus have chosen to provide this extra commentary on forgiveness?
6. From what we have read so far how would you summarize Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness?
7. In the previous chapter of Matthew, Jesus also speaks about reconciliation – again presented within the context of offering worship to God.
  - i. Read **Matthew 5:21-24**
    - a. How might the phrase “*be reconciled*” (v24) be worked out in practice?
    - b. Jesus uses the phrase ‘*brother and sister*’ 3 times in these verses indicating that He is referring to their relationship with fellow disciples. Should our approach to reconciliation with non-believers be the same?
    - c. What should we do if the person we have offended refuses to be reconciled with us?
    - d. Verse 23 begins with the word “*Therefore*” or “*So*” which means it is connected with the previous verse. With that in mind, looking at verse 22, what will happen if we refuse to be reconciled with someone we have offended?
    - e. In what circumstances might seeking reconciliation be difficult or impossible? In such situations what can we/should we do?

*\*Context: After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem Jesus cursed a fig tree for not bearing fruit (possibly a symbolic message towards the Jewish people for not accepting Him). Later (Mark 11:20-21) the disciples saw it withered and drew attention to it. This reading (Mark 11:22-26) provides Jesus’ reply to them.*