

Simon Peter – The Making of a Man of Faith

Book Review

The brief references to the disciple and apostle Simon Peter provide special insight into the ministry and person of Jesus Christ. Whenever Peter's name is mentioned, we can see that something was happening which moved him forward on his incredible journey of faith.

This book identifies what was happening in Peter's life which had such profound affect upon him, and of course, upon us also, as we meditate upon the teaching of Jesus and the life experiences brought to our attention.

This chapter is copied in its entirety as an example from this book

Chapter 6

“The Fig Tree You Cursed Has Withered!”

Peter's observation that the fig tree had withered demonstrates his 'miracle-consciousness' and opens the door to Jesus' definition of one of the most powerful principles of the universe – the Law of Faith.

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the

tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:11-25, NIV)

Introductory Comments

Before getting into the presentation, I want to make two points, to help interpret the story.

Firstly, the translation: I have problems with the NIV translation in verses 22-24, and the NIV completely omits verse 26. The King James is better in these respects. Let me explain. Verse 22 uses the words, “*Have faith in God.*” Actually, it should read ‘Have God faith.’ It could read, ‘Have the faith of God’ or ‘Have the same kind of faith which God has.’ The NIV, along with almost all translations, misguidedly tries to help the reader by including a word not in the original. That word is ‘in’, as “Have faith *in* God”.

But including that word, totally changes the meaning from the original. If we have faith *in* God, we're expecting God to do something for us when we ask Him. However, if it is we who have the faith *of* God, it is we who do it, and we do it by using the same faith which God has. That is hugely different, as we'll see later.

In verse 24, the NIV loses the impact of 'things which we desire'. A better translation, would read, as in the KJV: "*Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*"

To desire something indicates a mental process of deep commitment, not communicated in the NIV, but an essential ingredient.

Verse 26 is missing from the NIV. In the KJV it reads: "*But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*" I wonder if the uncompromising nature of the statement was too much for the translators. It's difficult to understand why this so important verse is omitted.

Secondly, the background story: While many have considered that the fig tree has some connection with Israel, and that Jesus is inferring it was cursed, I don't agree. Surely, Jesus wouldn't curse Israel, or the people of God. I believe the fig tree reference has nothing to do with the spiritual condition of Israel, but everything to do with the teaching about faith. The circumstances which surround the fig tree event are included in the text above, in verses 15-19, only to set the scene for the events of verses 22-24, which is the portion we're really interested in.

The background story is clearly significant in its own right, but does not form part of the journey of Peter we're following or the principle of faith which we will see explained.

Is This A Radical Statement?

“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” (Mark 11:24, NIV)

All you have to do is believe. That seems very straightforward. No one can argue with such a fundamental encouragement. We all heartily agree and confirm that we do indeed have faith in God. But perhaps we can see the difference between having faith in God and the possibility that we can use the faith OF God. It's obvious that many people have faith in God, or belief in God, without being people of faith at all. But to partake of the divine nature, by exercising God faith, is something quite different.

If we step back for a moment we need to think again about whether we have what Jesus is referring to. Clearly, His disciples – and particularly Peter, at that time – do not have what it takes. Peter did not have enough faith to walk on water, and Jesus rebuked him. Now Peter is found wondering about Jesus' words, “Have the faith of God.” What does that really mean?

Let me repeat, this is one of those scriptures some Christians say they believe, but probably do not. Perhaps what they do not believe is the possibility that they could actually have enough faith to get the results. We need to address that, because Jesus is teaching His disciples, particularly Peter, that they must expect success in prayer, so that they will be able to continue His work on earth after He has gone, destroying the works of Satan and living victorious lives. I believe the church is unaware of the possibilities, the power available and the calling by God to do what Jesus did, all in the power of the Holy Spirit. There's even hostility towards anyone stating that the sick will be healed, the dead raised, demons cast out and financial hardship dematerialised. When Peter speaks at the temple gates called Beautiful, after the crippled man is healed, he says:

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes

through him that has given this complete healing to him. (Acts 3:16, NIV)

Please notice that Jesus is the conduit through whom faith comes, and the power is in the name. Peter does not say that it was a result of the faith of Jesus, or of God. It wasn't either. Peter exercised his own faith.

I quote from Robert Collier (1926), *The Secret of the Ages*: Prayer is not a mere asking for favours. Prayer is not a paean of praise. Rather,

prayer is a realisation of the God-power within you – of your right of dominion over your own body, your environment, your business, your health, your prosperity. It is an understanding that you are “heir of God and co-heir with Christ.” And as such no evil has power over you, whereas you have all power for good.

Peter's amazing discovery of faith depends on these experiences of being with Jesus and assimilating the principles Jesus demonstrates and teaches. But not only was it for Peter then, it's for all disciples of Jesus, both then and now.

Setting The Scene

When Peter walked on water, Jesus wasn't teaching him, or any of us, by this example, the physical or even the spiritual principle of walking on water. That was ancillary to His message. So also with the fig tree; Jesus is *not* teaching how to destroy fig trees! This is ancillary to the main message, which is deep and awesome. The fig tree part of the story seems to be less iconic than walking on water, perhaps because it's less sensational and less suitable for converting into a form of ‘spiritualisation’ to catch the imagination. But we shall see that it is as strategic in the journey for us, as it is for Peter.

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. (Mark 11:12-14, NIV)

Why did Jesus curse that tree? Poor tree! It wasn't the tree's fault it had no figs – it wasn't the season for figs; the existence of leaves merely indicated that the tree was alive and healthy. Clearly, Jesus was demanding fruit unreasonably. We must conclude, therefore, that this is a contrived situation, through which Jesus has something to teach. He will have been delighted when Peter notices that the tree has withered.

Jesus does nothing on the spur of the moment, and this is an example. He premeditated this visual demonstration for the disciples to react to. The confrontation in the temple was also premeditated – Jesus had already *"looked around at everything"* in Jerusalem, and now He's on his way to take action.

It's now the next day:

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" (Mark 11:20-21, NIV)

Peter had heard what Jesus said, and now notices the consequences. The fig tree has withered *"from the roots"*. I'm not sure what would be visible to show that had withered from the roots, but they all see that it has.

Perhaps Peter is asking for an explanation. He seems to have no doubt that the bad condition of the fig tree is directly connected to the curse that Jesus had placed on it the day before. This perfectly sets the scene for what Jesus wants to teach them. Peter plays into His hands with what proves to be a very perceptive and enquiring statement or question.

There are a number of aspects to understanding the truth of what Jesus is teaching. Most particularly, there is the operation of faith and there is the power in the words. Both aspects are clearly seen in the words Jesus uses in verses 22-24, that whoever *“believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him”*.

Are These The Most Important Words Of Jesus – Ever?

Let us look at the three verses, Mark 11:22, 23 and 24.

In verse 22 we have the declaration that we need the God kind of faith. *“Have God faith”* Jesus answers.

In verse 23 we have an explanation of how the ‘law of faith’ works. You can have what you say if you do not doubt:

“I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

Verse 24 tells us how to apply that to our prayer life, so that our prayers are answered as we want them to be. *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”* (KJV).

If you were suffering from cancer, wouldn't you be excited to think that there is a way in which your prayer for healing will be answered as you want it to be? Of course. If you see people around you who are sick or financially in trouble or trying to give up addictions, would you not be excited to find out how your prayers for those people could be answered as you wish them to be answered? Yes you would. Then all you and I need is here in these three verses. Jesus spells it out so simply we cannot fail to understand.

However, I can't remember once in my life hearing a preacher tell me from these verses, with personal experience, “God says you can have what you say.” I've never heard anyone speak from these

verses, or from the other similar verses like this one in John's Gospel: *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12, NIV)*

Is this another scripture which many Christians don't believe? I have encountered resistance when I've preached these scriptures, because peoples' hearts are hardened. There's the view that this was for the early church but not for us. What a lie of the devil. "It is for you and your children," Peter says on the day of Pentecost - and three thousand people are saved!

It's clear Jesus has a vision that His disciples will go on to do greater things than He has been doing. The reason is because He was going to the Father and will be sending the Holy Spirit. He tells them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:7, NIV). We all know that it's what happens and we know the outcome. How is it that we don't believe it's for us and our children?

Or perhaps we do believe that it's for us and our children, but we don't know how it will happen. Many of us thought we had the whole thing understood and fully taught to us, but somehow the words which we read in the Bible never actually satisfy us and we can't explain why. To try to accept that we are supposed to do greater miracles than Jesus, rattles the cage of prejudiced belief. We look around us and can't see it happening, so we wonder what Jesus was saying? Too many believing Christians have no answer, because they do not know how. Hosea 4:6 says: "... *my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.*"

Have The Faith Of God

As I've said, *this is the core of everything*. While there are many scriptures and principles in the word of God which we hold dear, I suggest that this passage is the most significant. Why? Because

nothing happens without faith. It is impossible to please God if we do not exercise faith (Hebrews 11:6). We do not receive salvation unless we have faith. We cannot understand the truth of God, or come to trust in Him without exercising faith.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things that are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:3, KJV)

Jesus is in the business of increasing the disciples' faith, to make it effective. Many times He expresses despair over their lack of faith. Here's an example:

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. (Mark 16:14, KJV)

Their hearts were hardened to the truth. At the centre of this condition is the deception of Satan, persuading us to only accept as truth what can be rationalised and scientifically proven. This is the greatest threat to faith. To the unbeliever, 'seeing is believing.' "Unless I see," says Thomas, "I will not believe". Jesus answers him "Blessed is he that has believed and has not seen."

The word Jesus speaks in answer to Peter is "Have the faith of God." Let me put it in my words: "Peter, what you must have is the kind of faith which God has, so that you can do the things which God himself does." By implication, Jesus is also saying, "Don't expect God to do stuff for you when He has given you His kind of faith to do it for yourself!"

Jesus Himself is the example. He is making disciples who will be commissioned to go and do the same. He will be saying to them, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28:18, KJV). "You go into all the world and preach the gospel. You go. You do it. You heal the sick. You cast out devils. You

raise the dead. You speak in other tongues (cf. Mark 16:15-18). I'm giving you the power which has been given to me, for you to destroy the works of Satan and live victorious lives of joy and fulfilment."

"In my name shall they cast out devils" (Mark 16:17, KJV). The name of Jesus is mighty to save. It will work for those who exercise faith and it will work every time. He has given us authority to use it. Peter uses that name at the Gate Beautiful. To the cripple he shouts out,

"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6, KJV)

Do we think there was any change in the man? Do we think there was a slow recovery while he convalesced? Do we think he had to learn to walk because he never had walked? Let us clearly understand that in the name of Jesus, at that moment, every spirit of infirmity is knocked senseless. The prison he has lived in all his wretched life breaks open. The shackles of incapacity and destitution are smashed. An inability to praise God is transformed into uncontrollable rejoicing. He is set free. Hallelujah! All in the name of Jesus. Note - Peter doesn't heal the man; through Peter's exercise of faith in the name of Jesus, God steps in and does it. But it isn't God's faith which triggers His involvement, it's Peter's. God promises His power and enabling to those who exercise faith (Mark 16:17). It's that very moment that Jesus has in mind when he says to Peter, "You have the faith of God."

What Is Faith?

First of all, let's be clear what true faith ('God faith') is not. True faith is not the seriously diluted sense in which we think of people as having different faiths. I'm a Christian, another may be a Buddhist, another a Hindu. These are called 'faiths' but are just

belief systems. Nor is true faith synonymous with the word used in Christian circles to indicate a strong commitment to a particular interpretation or application of theology, as in “I have faith in the ordinance of baptism” or “I have faith in Calvinism.” Often, these are called Articles of Faith.

True faith is clearly defined in Hebrews 11:1: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1, KJV)*

If it can be seen, it doesn't require faith. Something may be hoped for, but that does not constitute faith. Hope is without substance, if there is no faith to support it. I explained this in an earlier chapter, relating to God's creation. At each stage of the creation God says what He is going to do before He does it. He would say, for instance, “*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.*” Initially He hopes for the end product of man, in His own image and likeness. He doesn't float the idea of natural selection, He describes exactly what He hopes for. However, before expressing the hope, it says, “*God said, 'Let us make ...'*” Every time GOD SAID “Let us make,” or “Let there be,” or “Let the earth,” the inevitable outcome was creation. Those words are the demonstration of God's kind of faith, which gives substance to the hope He has expressed.

God could not see those created things with the eye, or rationalise them with any of the senses before they came into existence. He believes they will come into existence the moment He speaks, “Let there be,” or “Let us make.” Hebrews 11:3 tells us that these things God made and which are seen, were not made from things which do appear. He believes in what He cannot see, such that it materialises into what He can see.

Hebrews 11:3 speaks of God creating things by His words. It is what He *says* that brings everything into being. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of the Son of God upholding all things by “*the word of his*

power”. God speaks. It’s what God says that frames the worlds. God speaks and it happens. What could not be seen, materialises.

The acid test of faith, then, is, “Can I see it or not?” Bearing in mind that it’s impossible to please God in any way apart from having the God kind of faith – in what we cannot see – perhaps many of us are not very pleasing to God. This is not easy, and that’s why Jesus takes time to teach it.

I often wonder at scientists who explore the wonders of creation, as if the more they discover convinces many of them that there is an alternative to God as Creator. But the believing Christian rejoices in the further evidence they produce because it confirms that it is only God who could do such a thing “*by the word of his power*”. Furthermore, when more evidence is discovered, the believing Christian is able to say, “I’ve always believed that God made those things by the word of His power, because He said it in His word, and now we have the evidence.”

Peter and the disciples have much to learn. The Gate Beautiful, and the preaching to thousands on the day of Pentecost, are for days to come. But they are now ready to hear and learn, and the principles Jesus teaches are a vital part of that spiritual development.

Without Doubt

Assuredly, 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 also if you say to this mountain, “Be removed and cast into the sea” it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.
(Matthew 21:21-22, NKJV)

There are words of emphasis here: ‘Assuredly’ and ‘I say unto you’. These emphases are for us, too. God is drawing our attention to the fundamental significance of what is being said. We can imagine the hush falling upon the disciples when Jesus fixes them with His eye, and gets their concentration with these words. “I am

going to say something now which will be the heart of your understanding about you being people of ‘world-overcoming faith’. Don’t miss a word I say.”

Jesus is saying here that if you do not doubt about receiving what you ask for, you will have it. What you say is what you have. That is incredibly radical and takes a moment to assimilate. And we must be satisfied that we really do believe it. We must not miss a word Jesus says. ... *and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.*

It’s those things which we say that shall come to pass. How is it that people say so much critical and negative stuff without realising that they will get exactly what they’re saying, and they will have to answer for every idle word they say? (idle words are words which are not working positively in accordance with the word of God.)

If You Have Faith You Will Say.....

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20)

The force of this amazing statement is that *saying* is important. It’s not just marginally important. It isn’t just a good idea. It’s *crucial*. Whatever passes out of your mouth determines exactly what happens. If you have faith, even an insignificant amount, you will say... It’s not that you will think, or you’ll write, or you will agree with someone about it, or you’ll silently pray about it. Jesus says, “You will say.” If you do not say, it will not happen. Maybe we have to rethink what we’ve been taught. We often internalise our requests or rely on others to act for us in some way. Don’t. Instead, we must give voice to our statements of faith ourselves.

Maybe we fall down here because we think the spirit world knows our thoughts. It does not. Only God knows our thoughts. Angels

play an integral part in what God will do for us. They are “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Hebrews 1:14, KJV). This means that they need to *hear* what our statement of faith is so that they can minister correctly. The angels are waiting to hear what we believe when it is in accordance with God’s word. We must speak it. Angels don’t know what we’re thinking, but they hear our words. If our words fit into God’s word, they minister on our behalf to make it happen. Psalm 91 tells us what angels do for us as God commands them on our behalf. They keep us from all harm; we will never face a disaster of any kind; we are guarded and kept at all times by them; wherever we go they are there with us; they carry us in their hands when there is the possibility that we might trip up in our lives; we will trample Satan (the serpent) under our feet. This is an impressive list from this one place in the Bible about what the angels will do for us.

But while these are lovely thoughts, they will be of no value to us if we don’t ‘know’ they are the truth and affirm it by the words we say. The words of scripture are great. They are amazing truth. But they will not bring us what they promise unless we believe them for ourselves. We all have the truth in our Bibles. But if they are closed books under the aspidistra of religious prejudices of unbelief, they remain ineffective for you and me. “Yes,” Jesus says, “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). But His full statement is:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32, KJV)

Note, it is the continuing in His word and knowledge of the truth that brings freedom. We cannot believe beyond our knowledge. But knowing the truth of the word of God means we believe it in our hearts. Jesus talks about “continuing in his word”. When

waiting angels hear us say words like, “I thank God that my illness is not God’s will for me, and that no harm will befall me. I believe that He is bringing healing to my body, because when Jesus died for me He died for my physical wellbeing, ‘by His stripes I have been healed’ I believe this, in the name of Jesus,” those angels will make it happen.

Speak To The Mountain

Are we praying right? What does Jesus tell us to do? “... *whosoever shall say unto this mountain... (Mark 11:23, KJV).*

Many are surprised that we’re told we should talk to inanimate objects. I’m sure Peter didn’t expect that, and nor do we because we haven’t been brought up to consider that possibility. What does Jesus mean? He means *we* should address the *problem* and command it to obey. The problem is the mountain; the eventual outcome planned is that it shall be removed and dumped in the sea. If you’re praying in faith, believing that the result will be as you command, it will happen. You do not ask God to do it for you; because you have the faith of God, you must do it yourself.

If we pray to God to remove the problem, not only do we demonstrate a lack of faith, but, in the process, we demonstrate far greater faith in the problem than in God to solve it. And, as Jesus says, in that case you have what you say – more of the problem! This is very much the power of positive thought, expressed in a negative way. This is the principle of the ‘law of faith’ in verse 23. It works both ways.

Whoever And Whatever

We may feel that there are limitations on who can ask and what they can ask for. This comes from a feeling of unworthiness perhaps, or a sense that it’s not a worthy claim to make on God’s grace. Or perhaps we might say, “Only Jesus could do such a thing, because Jesus was special.” There is an ingrained problem

we could face here. Knowing what we know about the Lord Jesus, and our sinful natures, we're led to disbelieve what God has done for us in Christ and perhaps we don't understand that we're redeemed people.

Firstly, Jesus is clearly teaching that He wants us to do these things. He uses the word 'whosoever'. That means that if you or I say to this mountain, "Go throw yourself into the sea," it's perfectly alright. Any of us can do this successfully. It isn't only for special people. We can imagine that Peter might say, "Only Jesus could do such a thing." Actually, the human nature in all of us would agree with Peter, if that is what he might have said. This is because something tells us that we're not anointed, empowered, sufficiently full of faith or close enough to the Lord to be able to do this. We have a tendency to hold people in awe who have position, popularity, eloquence, fame, wealth and 'presence'. We think these are the people who will 'do the business'. But Jesus doesn't accept those external indicators. He says you and I will be heard when we pray - if we pray in faith.

And then, what are we asking for? Perhaps we're asking for things which are obviously important to God - like Mrs Jones' bad back, the success of the young people's outing to Alton Towers and the new mother and toddlers group. But while those issues are vital to me, what's causing me to be particularly anxious is the credit card bill I can't get under control, and that my son is making friends with youngsters who are not 'nice'. There are also those trivial items such as 'Where did I put my car key,' or 'Will there be a parking space at the hospital when I take Granny on Friday morning.' Surely, I am thinking, those aren't issues that I can pray about, are they? When we think again about it, we all know that they are indeed what we should be praying about. But somehow we don't believe that God is interested in some of those things, or not interested as much in those things.

But Jesus says, "Whatever you desire". God is interested in

whatever you desire. I like the force of the word ‘desire’ because it communicates a sense of longing, which comes from the heart. It may well be insignificant to others, but very significant to us. God is not constrained by a mould of our making, apart from ‘what is our desire?’ *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4, NIV)*

To further illustrate this point, in the last chapter we considered walking on water and, in this chapter, cursing fig trees and moving mountains. Our religious minds tell us to spiritualise these issues in some way by drawing some deeper meaning out of them, as if they’re the subject matter of ‘children’s talks’ on Sunday morning. But Jesus uses these bizarre pictures to make the fundamental point that – provided it doesn’t break any of God’s commandments - it does not matter how ‘stupid’ your desire is; if it’s your desire, it’s God’s desire for you.

When You Pray

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

This is the third principle Jesus explains to the disciples. Let me recap:

- The first principle is that we need to have the ‘God kind of faith’.
- The second principle is the understanding of what faith is. It is “speak to the issue and tell it the result you believe for it.” (Remember, prayer needs faith in order to work, but faith will work without prayer. Faith is a law of God’s creation – you can have what you say. That will always work. Those who tell you about their aches and pains will always have them. Those who tell you how well they are, find they don’t get ill. That is scientifically proven. Some will call it, ‘the law of attraction’ or ‘the secret’. (Now we have the third

principle:

- Pray your desires, believing you have the answer, before it materialises.

We all want to know about Prayer. There are probably more books on this subject than on any other, and many points of view. The obstacle we have to face is that our prayers are often not being answered as we would wish. There are many different types of prayer, and we may well be perfectly happy with many, particularly where we're keeping a good relationship with the Lord and sharing our lives with Jesus, as we know He wants us to.

But in this chapter, we're considering *petition*. We want to pray and know that what we ask for will actually come to pass. I've spent too much of my life praying without an answer and not knowing why there is no answer. The prayers for healing all too often don't result in healing, and I know the person needing healing would be better healed than not. Surely God knows they should be healed. Why aren't they? We all understand that frustration and disappointment.

How do we know if we're praying properly? We could consider our success rate. If our praying is bringing the desires we are saying, then we should keep on doing it that way. However, I've spent fifty years praying like everyone else, and largely without results. My comfort has been that we're all in the same boat, thinking and behaving as if we're dealing with a God who is unwilling to respond. An unbelieving world laughs at us or is mystified by our behaviour and understandably decides that what we say we have, is not valid. We tend to deny this in a way which prevents us from re-examining what we believe. We've always done it like this so it must be correct! Then I discovered that Mark 11:24 tells me every prayer will be answered as I ask it. The criterion for that result is nothing to do with my worthiness, but His. And it is everything to do with faith. God is looking for faith.

We cannot please him without it. No prayers will be answered without it. And the results are always YES.

The prayer that Jesus has in mind is the conversation which we have, in Jesus' name, with the desire of our hearts. This 'desire of our hearts' may be an inanimate object, situation or hope for the future. We tell that desire what the end result must be. If it's financial need, we might say, "I command you, debts and liabilities, to be paid in full and I thank you, God, for your abundance and my prosperity, which is poured upon me, in Jesus name." If it's ill health, we might say, when we pray in Jesus' name, "I forbid any illness to come upon this body of mine, and I forbid any malfunction and malformation to exist in my body, because I am redeemed from the curse of the law, in Jesus' name, and I thank you God for bringing healing and freedom from pain."

This is what Jesus says we should do. "Whatever you ask in my name I will do it" (John 14:14). The way to petition God in prayer, is to speak to *your* mountain in *Jesus'* name.

Believe You Have Received

If you say "thank you" for what you have not yet received, it demonstrates your faith in God. It may sound irrational to the unbeliever, because they would say that it cannot be seen, and therefore cannot be believed. However, the eye of faith in you has already seen the outcome. You have believed that what you have asked will happen. God's promise is that it will happen because it is the desire of your heart. You see that, so you give thanks to God for keeping His covenant.

If you're unable to thank God before the thing you have asked for materialises, you're opening the door to unbelief. Your heart is not part of the process, only your intellect.

God sees the prayer answered, before you receive. You also must believe the prayer to have been answered before that answer is

received. Giving thanks for it is one way of engaging the heart. It demonstrates to God that you are operating in faith. That pleases Him, and gets the angels active on your behalf.

This process is like sowing seed. Mark chapter 4 tells us that the seed is the word of God. When we sow the seed, we accept the truth of God's promises in his word. We take Him at His word, because it is He who said it, not us. We don't reap a harvest immediately; we need to wait until the seed has grown. This will take time and nurture and, eventually, we will reap. After we sow the seed we thank God for the harvest expected, and the environment where there can and will be that harvest.

We recognise with thanksgiving that it is God who gives the harvest, in good time. What we do *not* do is expect an instant crop; we don't dig up the seed and declare, "This doesn't work for me" and we don't complain to God about not answering our requests.

Imagine George Müller, giving thanks for breakfast at his orphanage in Bristol with literally hundreds of children sitting at tables, and not a scrap of food before them to eat. What a graphic illustration of Mark 11 that is! What a declaration of faith was that thanksgiving! It wasn't in the human he believed; it was in the spiritual, and that is where it matters. This is where we "do not doubt in our hearts but believe that what we say, will happen". I'm sure that George Müller would have been assailed in his mind with every doubt imaginable. The devil does that. But what he spoke out were words of faith in a provider God. "Thank you, Lord, for giving us the food which we will eat today for breakfast." Those were the words of authority that had the angels busy touching people's hearts to provide, as they did, in abundance. Those were the words of trust in God's faithfulness that opened the windows of heaven to pour out the provision needed. George Müller believed in what he could not see – food for breakfast. He spoke to the problem and commanded it to get into line with God's promises, and he thanked God for providing food before it materialised. That

pleased God, because God wants to be trusted by those who are acting in faith.

George Müller was well experienced in faith. We need to be well experienced also. That is the lesson for Simon Peter. The seed needs to develop and grow, but it is for us all to develop in our exercise of faith.

If you've never heard of George Müller before, I recommend one of the many biographical books available on his life.

Summary

Simon Peter is presented with a visual demonstration of the teaching. The fig tree dies but the teaching is very much alive and life changing. The exercise of faith, which is at the core of this teaching, is for all people as well as for Peter.

The wonderful thing is the 'whosoever' and the 'whatsoever'. This faith is not exclusive to the super-spiritual. Actually, the super-spiritual can struggle with their often overblown intellect, spiritual pride and the unrealistic expectations placed on them. That was the situation in Jesus' time with the Pharisees. No, this faith is for all those who simply take God at His word. "If God said it, I accept it." And the more we speak out what God said, the more we will line up our spirit, our intellect and our soul with God's word, His promises and His spiritual laws. Our spirit, soul and intellect will unite to agree that God is right in all His ways, and heaven will burst open upon us. The flood of His blessings will be unstoppable – rushing ahead of us to fill the place in our destiny where we lodged our thanksgiving and our desires. They wait God's time for us to catch up in the natural, to experience the tangible evidence of His grace and mercy.

Forgive, And You Will Be Forgiven

This is one of God's laws. There's no room for compromise here,

no dilution of this requirement. If we want our petitions answered as we wish, there must be no unforgiveness. There doesn't need to be a reason for not forgiving. There doesn't need to be a delay. There doesn't need to be a level of significance, above which we are excused. No. There cannot be any failure to forgive.

So if your prayers aren't being answered 'Yes', check your spirit on forgiveness. Make sure you hold absolutely no grudges. Make sure you have washed your memory of all wrongs done to you. Make sure you never bring a past wrong back to mind or conversation. Make sure you have put down no one without repenting, and making restitution if appropriate. Make sure you have *sincerely* prayed God's blessing over every person you feel has wronged you.

If Jesus could pray, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" then not one of us can dare to hold anything against another person. Jesus freely forgave. We must freely forgive. We can't expect God to give us what we ask for if we don't forgive those who have wronged us. Because He won't.