

# Faithful prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. Today we are continuing on our theme of prayer and I've been asked to talk about faithful prayer.

But before I begin, let's just bow our heads and pray together. Lord, we thank you for the amazing gift of prayer. And Father, amazing though that gift is, sometimes it feels really confusing to us because our prayers are not apparently answered in the way we want.

And so Lord, we pray today that you would teach us from your word, that we might truly understand afresh what it means to pray faithfully. And we ask this in your son's name. Amen.

Mark chapter 11, Jesus says these words, have faith in God.

Have faith in God. In the year of my birth, 1949, a remarkable intervention of God happened on some islands north of Scotland called the Hebrides.

[ 1 : 21 ] An elderly couple of women who were sisters, Christine and Peggy Smith, have been praying together for a very long time, based on a verse in Isaiah chapter 64, which inspired them to pray week in, week out.

And this is the verse. The Lord says, Meeting together, praying around this promise of God in Isaiah.

At the same time, a group of men had been meeting in a barn on the Hebrides, not far away, and they'd been praying faithfully. That God would intervene. That he would bring about what theologians call revival.

That is something only God can do. One of the men who was a minister, in somewhat despair, said one night, he said, I think we're wasting our time praying.

He said, because it says in Psalm 24, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? In other words, who will come into the Lord's presence?

[ 3 : 02 ] He who has clean hands and a pure heart. I think, he said, we're wasting our time praying that God will intervene in our islands, unless we seek forgiveness of our sin.

That night, at 2 a.m. in the morning, God broke through. All over the island, in the cottages, the cross as they call them up there, lights went on.

And people were found in the streets of the Orkneys, repenting and seeking God. That's what revival is.

It's an intervention of God. And only God can intervene. We're thinking today about faithful prayer. What a challenging idea that is for many of us. I want today just to say three things. I've been told my time is limited.

[ 4 : 09 ] I mean, I don't mean I'm going to die. Anything's possible. What I mean is that during the summer months, we kind of abbreviate the services a bit.

So three things. The first thing is have faith in God. Very interesting. You will realize that Jesus spoke the language of Aramaic, which is a kind of variation of Hebrew.

The New Testament in its original form was written in Greek, and then it's been translated into English. So by the time we get it, it has been slightly mangled, maybe.

But one thing that's very clear is from the Greek grammar of that sentence, the emphasis on that sentence is on the word God.

And I say that because I think many of us place the emphasis, a lot of preachers do this, place the emphasis on the word faith. So we all go home feeling terrible, thinking our faith is not big enough, whereas in fact, what Jesus was saying to his people is, look, put the emphasis, when you pray, think about God, not about the size of your faith.

[ 5 : 31 ] You remember that elsewhere, Jesus says, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you'll be able to say to that mountain, go throw yourself into the sea, and it will happen.

You know how big a mustard seed is? It's tiny. Jesus said, even if you have a tiny bit of faith, amazing things could happen.

Have faith in God. Nowhere in the Bible does it encourage people like us to have faith in faith.

I think there are some people who think like that, but that's never what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches not how big is your faith, but how big is your God.

When you read sentences in Scripture like, without God, with God all things are possible, do you believe it?

[ 6 : 34 ] Don't put your hands up. Do you believe it? So the first thing is, if we're going to pray faithfully, our focus needs to be on God, and we need, in our minds, in our souls, in our hearts, to imagine that this God can do anything.

The second thing about faithful prayer is that people who pray faithfully, like the old girls in the Hebrides, pray persistently.

in Luke chapter 11, the disciples come to Jesus and they say to Him, Lord, teach us how to pray.

And Jesus gives them the Lord's prayer for starters.

And then He says, a curious little parable, He says, what about if you're lying in bed one night and somebody comes and hammers on your door at midnight, and you shout out of the window, and here I'm paraphrasing, clear off, it's midnight and I've already locked up.

Come back tomorrow. And the friend keeps on hammering on the door. And eventually, says Jesus, the owner of the home will go downstairs and open the door.

[ 7 : 50 ] Why? Because persistence pays off. There is a danger, another danger, which Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount, where He actually says, don't babble like the pagans do.

But persistence is a very big New Testament word. We need to learn what it is to pray persistently.

Like Peggy and Christine, like those men meeting in a barn, we need not to give up. Which will be a challenge for some of you because you've never got started.

Be persistent in prayer. The third thing is, and this may be the most challenging and most important thought of all, it's this.

In that passage we read from Mark's Gospel, again, in the Greek, it's full of conjunctions. It is joined up thinking.

[ 9 : 02 ] There's a flow of thought here. Jesus says this, look, have faith in God. When you pray, believe that what you pray for might happen and it will be done.

And the third thing is, when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, go and seek their forgiveness.

Wow. I could weigh my hands in the air and shout hallelujah for the first two, but going to seek forgiveness from other people? That is really hard yards, isn't it?

The faithful prayers understand that our horizontal relationships, one with another, will have an impact on our vertical relationship praying to God.

I wonder if there's anybody in the house who needs to pick up a phone and make a call, get a pen out or write a letter, get a computer out and do an email.

[ 10 : 15 ] and just say, I'm sorry. Because if you want to be a faithful prayer, you really need to keep a guard on your horizontal relationships, says Jesus.

When you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone. The Bible is even more challenging than that. In that, it says, if you have something against your brother, you go and put it right.

And the second thing is, it says, if your brother has something against you, you still go and put it right. Have faith in God, be persistent in your praying, and be sure that your praying will be regulated by your willingness to forgive others.

God's God's peace. I wonder if there's any other soul in this church who is troubled as I am by the way the world is going in the West.

I wonder if there's anybody else in the house who wonders what can be done here. We've heard politicians leap up making wild promises just to attract our votes.

[ 11 : 37 ] We're looking around this society in which we live, and we're wondering to ourselves, has the Western world lost its moral compass? We're looking at institutions which are broken, sometimes beyond repair.

Does it ever, ever, ever cross your mind that maybe only God can sort this out? Listen, friends, this may be a wake-up call for you, but today I think we need to commit ourselves to praying for revival in our time.

Some of you do that already, I know that. May God bless your persistence in prayer. I cannot myself see a way out of these intransigent problems that we have in our culture without the mighty intervention of God.

And if you agree with me, and I can't make you agree with me, prayer, I think we need to think very carefully about this faithful prayer.

I think we need to think very carefully about whether we commit ourselves to praying faithfully, persistently, with an eye to our horizontal relationships, for God to visit our land.

[ 13 : 02 ] Come down, oh love divine, come down. And who knows what might happen. That revival in the Hebrides lasted over a three-year period.

Interestingly, the biggest town in the Hebrides, Stornoway, was not impacted at all. Why? Because the ministers in that town were sceptical.

Good Lord, deliver us from our scepticism. Good Lord, rekindle our faith in the God with whom all things are possible.

Good Lord, send your fire upon your church that we truly might pray faithfully and God might visit us afresh and bring us alive in the power of His Holy Spirit.

And people in this town, in other towns, in any town where there is no cynicism will be saved. And the world will become a different place. Come down, oh love divine.

[ 14 : 22 ] Fill thou the soul of mine and visit it. With thine own ardour glowing, oh comforter, draw near. Within my heart appear and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

In the name of our amazing God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the people who agreed, said together, singing, Amen. Amen. Amen. mnie chodzi o