

# WEEK 7: How does faith relate to prayer?



This week, we explore the relationship between faith in God and an effective and thriving prayer life. Do I *need* to have faith to pray? And does the amount and depth of my faith have any impact on the effectiveness of prayer?



This week's main reading is an often-overlooked section of Mark that is almost an aside. However, it shows that not everyone saw Jesus for who he was—indeed, some of those who knew him best failed to perceive who Jesus really was.

## **Mark 6.1-6**

**Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.**

**“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offence at him.**

**Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour except in his town, among his relatives and in his own home.” He could not do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.**

Possible supplementary readings for Sunday worship service are Hebrews 11.1-6 (the great heroes of the faith) or Daniel 6.10-23 (Daniel in the Lion’s Den)



## Key Themes and Lessons

Mark 6:1-6 narrates Jesus' return to His hometown, Nazareth, where He experiences rejection from His own community. The people of Nazareth knew Jesus from His childhood and found it hard to reconcile the familiar carpenter with the wisdom and miracles He was now demonstrating.

In verses 5 and 6, we see a unique situation in which Jesus "*could do no mighty work*" except for healing "a few" sick people. The text suggests this inability was not due to a lack of power on Jesus' part but rather the people's "lack of faith." Their unbelief somehow limited the manifestation of His power.

This passage suggests that faith and prayer are intimately connected. Our faith influences how we pray and can strengthen our faith. It also highlights the importance of humility and surrender in prayer. We are called to approach God with a humble heart, acknowledging our need for His mercy and love.

Theologically, this passage underscores the importance of faith in Jesus's divine workings. It suggests that faith is not just a passive acceptance but an active force that can influence the flow of divine power. The incident in Nazareth serves as a stark reminder of the devastating effect of established prejudice and unbelief.

From a preaching perspective, this passage invites us to examine our faith. Just like the people of Nazareth, we may *think* we know Jesus, but our preconceived notions and lack of faith can prevent us from truly experiencing His power. This passage challenges us to move beyond familiarity and to approach Jesus with a faith that recognises Him as the Son of God, the miracle worker, and our compassionate Provider.

In conclusion, Mark 6:1-6 serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of faith in our relationship with Jesus. It calls us to trust in His divine power and not let familiarity or unbelief hinder His work.

## Practical Application

The practical outworking of Mark 6:1-6 can be seen in various aspects of our daily lives:

- **Faith in Action:** This passage encourages us to put our faith into action. It reminds us that faith is not just about believing in God but also about trusting in His power and authority. We are called to live out our faith daily, trusting in God's power even when we don't fully understand His ways.
- **Overcoming Prejudice:** The people of Nazareth allowed their familiarity with Jesus to cloud their judgment and hinder their faith. This serves as a reminder to overcome our prejudices and preconceived notions. We should strive to see people and situations from God's perspective rather than relying on our limited human understanding.
- **Openness to God's Work:** The lack of faith among the people of Nazareth limited Jesus' ability to perform miracles. This teaches us to be open to God's work in our lives. We should not let our doubts or unbelief hinder God's power. Instead, we should remain open and receptive to His divine workings.
- **Importance of Community Faith:** This passage also highlights the importance of community faith. The Nazarenes' unbelief affected the entire community, limiting Jesus' miracles. This reminds us that our faith (or lack thereof) can impact those around us.



## Online resources

The importance of faith for prayer

<https://www.lancehahn.com/devotional/the-importance-of-faith-in-prayer/>

What does it mean to pray with faith?

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/what-does-it-mean-to-pray-with-faith.html>

Can an unbeliever pray?

<https://www.compellingtruth.org/unbeliever-prayer.html>

Does God hear the prayers of people with no faith?

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2019/03/god-hear-non-christians-pray/>

*"For many non-believers, it is an automatic response to a crisis: "Please, God." So perhaps it should not be surprising that a new survey has found that one in five adults pray despite saying they are not religious.*

*Among the non-religious, personal crisis or tragedy is the most common reason for praying, with one in four saying they pray to gain comfort or feel less lonely.*

*Henry, 64, said he prays every night, kneeling by his bed, despite not being religious. "I worry about it quite a lot – is it some kind of insurance policy, superstition, or something more real?"*

*Asked if he believed in God, he said: "I don't know, but I would describe myself at the sceptical end of agnosticism. I certainly wouldn't classify myself as religious."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/half-of-non-believers-pray-says-poll>

*"Do atheists and agnostics pray? Yes, indeed. Quite a bit, it turns out. Studies show that 6% of them pray daily, the Pew Research Centre tells us. And 11% pray weekly or monthly. If no one is there, you might ask, who are they praying to? Let me guess.*

*The air. The universe. The self, maybe.*

*Theirs might be the kind of prayer that doesn't need a recipient. They could be a feeling of awe, a sense of the numinous, an upwelling of peace brought on by nature, a moment of transcendence in the presence of music or art, or simply a moment of felt stillness.*

*Their prayers might also be an overflowing of gratitude. A shout of joy brought on by being alive. A moment of connection with another human's pain.*

*Or, of course, they could also cry for help from people who can't help but cry out even though they don't think anyone hears. Trees falling in the forest. The proverbial atheists in foxholes. Or just screamers who voice their pain because they must and give it meaning because that's what humans do."*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pray-me/201309/do-atheists-pray>

"One in five "non-believers" said they still pray at least once a month. Researchers found that more than half of those engaged in prayer said they are most likely to pray in a crisis. The next most popular reasons cited were a belief in God (39%) or a belief that prayer makes a difference in daily life (32%)."

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/8389/can-i-pray-if-i-don-t-believe-new-research-suggests-thousands-do>



God's part is to put forth power; our part is to put forth faith —Andrew Bonar.

"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." — Corrie Ten Boom.

"Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens." *J.R.R Tolkien (The Fellowship of the Ring)*

Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right." (*Max Lucado*)

"None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward because we trust. Because we have faith." *Paulo Coelho*

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible. —*Thomas Aquinas*

Faith and prayer are the vitamins of the soul; man cannot live in health without them. — *Mahalia Jackson, musician*

In faith, there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't. — *Blaise Pascal*

All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard and receive what they have asked and desired. *Martin Luther*



There are multiple ways to address this topic, but here is a potential sermon outline that I hope will be helpful.

## I. Introduction

Hook: Begin with a relatable story or anecdote about the power of prayer.

Scripture Reading: Read Mark 6:5-6 aloud to set the context.

Thesis Statement: Introduce the theme—faith and prayer are interconnected. We'll explore how faith impacts our prayers and vice versa.

## II. Points Amplifying the Theme

***The Limitations of Unbelief*** (Mark 6:5) Jesus visited His hometown, but the people's lack of faith hindered His ability to perform miracles.

Challenge: Reflect on areas of unbelief in our lives. Are there prayers we've stopped praying because we doubt God's power?

- Example 1: Share the story of a woman who prayed for her prodigal son for years, even when he seemed unreachable. Eventually, he returned to faith.
- Example 2: Highlight testimonies of healing or breakthroughs when someone persisted in prayer despite initial doubts.

### ***Faith as the Key to Effective Prayer (Mark 6:5-6)***

Despite the unbelief around Him, Jesus still healed a few sick individuals.

Application: Share the story of the paralysed man whose friends lowered him through the roof to reach Jesus (Mark 2:1-12). Their faith led to healing.

- Example 1: Discuss answered prayers in your congregation—when faith-filled prayers led to breakthroughs.
- Example 2: Encourage congregants to pray boldly for specific needs, trusting that God hears and responds.

### ***Practical Steps to Cultivate Faith in Prayer***

- Study God's Promises: Regularly immerse ourselves in Scripture to build faith. Share how meditating on God's promises (e.g., Psalm 23, Jeremiah 29:11) strengthens faith.
- Pray Boldly: Pray with confidence, knowing that God hears and responds. Share a personal testimony of a time when bold prayers led to unexpected blessings.
- Community of Faith: We should surround ourselves with believers who encourage and strengthen our faith. We should highlight the importance of small groups, prayer partners, and accountability.

### ***Conclusion and Challenge***

Summarise the main points. Invite the congregation to reignite their prayer lives and commit to consistent, fervent prayer. Encourage sharing answered prayers within the church community.

Closing Prayer: Pray for increased faith, renewed prayer lives, and a deeper reliance on God's power.

Remember, faith and prayer go hand in hand. As we cultivate faith, our prayers become more powerful, and our relationship with God grows stronger. May this sermon inspire hearts to embrace faith and prayer as inseparable partners in our spiritual journey.





## Suggested Hymns and Songs

STF H&P

645	689	Will your anchor hold?
51	66	Great is thy faithfulness
548	668	Blessed Assurance
628		Faithful one, so unchanging
440	215	Amazing Grace
	683	My faith looks up to thee
434	273	Rock of Ages
	466	Have faith in God, my heart
736	678	In heavenly love abiding
	687	Trust and obey

## Call to Worship

Come, let us gather together in faith and reverence.

**We come, seeking the presence of God in our midst.**

Let us lift our hearts and voices in praise,

**Our faith is our foundation, and we find our strength in God.**

Leader: In this sacred space, let us celebrate the journey of faith,

**Blessed be the name of the Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.**

## Prayers of Approach

Gracious and Eternal Creator, as we gather in this sacred space, we come with hearts open to Your divine presence. We acknowledge Your sovereignty over all things and humbly bow before Your greatness. Grant us the grace to deepen our faith and trust in Your guiding hand even in moments of uncertainty. Let Your light illuminate our minds, and Your love fill our souls as we embark on this faith journey together.

**Amen.**

Loving God, in the quiet of this moment, we approach Your throne of grace with reverence and awe. You are the source of all faith; we find our strength and courage in You. As we draw near to You, may our doubts be dispelled and our hearts be filled with unwavering trust in Your promises. Help us to walk boldly in the path of faith, knowing that You are always with us, guiding and sustaining us through every trial and triumph. In Your holy name, we pray.

**Amen.**

# Penitence

We come before You now with humble hearts, acknowledging our shortcomings and the times when our faith has faltered. Forgive us, O Lord, when we have allowed doubt to overshadow trust and fear to overcome belief.

We confess that there have been moments when we have strayed from the path of faith, relying on our own understanding instead of leaning on Your wisdom.

Grant us the strength to walk in faith daily, anchored in the certainty of Your promises. Renew our spirits, O God, and fill us with steadfast confidence in Your presence, even amid life's storms.

In Your boundless grace, cleanse us from all unbelief and empower us to live as people of faith, shining Your light into the world. **Amen.**

# Collect

Gracious God,  
Who strengthens our faith and steadies our hearts,  
Guide us in trust and confidence,  
That we may walk faithfully in Your ways,  
And bear witness to Your love in all we do.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
**Amen.**

# Intercessions

## *For the World*

Almighty and Compassionate God, we lift our voices in intercession for the world, praying to You to bring peace where there is conflict, hope where there is despair, and healing where there is suffering. We pray for nations torn apart by strife, leaders burdened with the weight of decision-making, and communities facing hardships beyond measure. Inspire all people to work together for the common good, to seek justice for the oppressed, and to strive for reconciliation in the face of division. Grant wisdom to those in positions of power so that they may govern with integrity and compassion. May Your love encompass the whole earth, bringing light to the darkest corners and hope to those in need.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

## *For the Church*

Heavenly Father, we pray for Your Church scattered throughout the world, that it may be a beacon of faith, hope, and love in a world often shrouded in darkness. Strengthen Your servants in their ministries, grant wisdom to those who lead Your people, and ignite a genuine passion for Your kingdom within each member. Unite us in purpose and vision so we may proclaim Your gospel boldly and faithfully and live out Your commandments. Guide us in our worship, witness, and service to others so that Your name may be glorified in all we do.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**



### *For the Sick*

Merciful God, we bring before You all who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit, asking for Your healing touch to rest upon them. Comfort those in pain, strengthen those who are weak, and bring hope to those who are discouraged. Grant skill and compassion to all who care for the sick so that they may be instruments of Your healing grace. Be present with those who feel abandoned or alone in their illness, reminding them of Your abiding love and presence.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

### *For the Bereaved*

Loving God, we pray that all who mourn the loss of loved ones may find comfort and solace in Your abiding presence. Surround them with Your peace, and uphold them with Your strength as they journey through the valley of grief. Give them the assurance of Your promise of eternal life, and help them to entrust their departed loved ones into Your loving care. May the memories of those they have lost be a source of blessing and inspiration, and may the knowledge of Your resurrection power bring them hope in sorrow.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

### *For Ourselves*

Gracious Lord, as we bring our needs before You, we ask for Your guidance, provision, and protection in all aspects of our lives. Grant us wisdom to discern Your will, courage to follow where You lead, and strength to persevere in times of trial. Help us to grow in faith, to deepen our relationship with You, and to live as faithful witnesses to Your love and grace. Heal our brokenness, O God, so we may reflect Your image more fully in the world.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

## Sending Prayers (Benediction)

### Closing Blessing

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. May His light shine upon you, guiding your steps and illuminating your path. May His love surround you, comforting you in times of trouble and filling you with joy. May you go forth from this place, strengthened in faith, grounded in hope, and overflowing with love, to serve and glorify God in all you do.

**Amen.**

### Sending Prayer

Gracious God, as we depart from this time of worship, we carry with us the blessings of Your presence and the assurance of Your love. Be with us as we go our separate ways, guiding us with Your wisdom, protecting us with Your strength, and filling us with Your peace. Help us live as faithful disciples, reflecting Your light in the world and sharing Your love with all we encounter. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's love, and the Holy Spirit's fellowship be with us all now and always.

**Amen.**





## Prayer Activity: Testimony

Here are instructions for a 15-20-minute concise yet meaningful opportunity for a group or congregation to share how prayer has impacted their faith. This can be adapted for use either in a Local Arrangement service or a midweek prayer or Bible study group.

### Step 1. Introduction (2 minutes)

Briefly introduce the goal: to share a quick testimony of prayer's impact on faith and pray for one another. Say a short prayer inviting God's presence and blessing over the session.

### Step 2. Testimony Sharing (10-12 minutes)

Encourage participants to share a concise testimony (1-2 minutes each) about a specific instance where prayer influenced their faith. Emphasise that they should keep it short and focused due to time constraints.

Start with a quick example testimony to set the tone and model brevity. Allow 3-5 participants to share their brief testimonies.

### Step 3. Quick Reflection and Intercessory Prayer (4-5 minutes)

Ask participants to identify a key prayer need or a point of thanksgiving related to their testimony. Quickly note these on a whiteboard or mention them aloud.

Lead a brief group prayer, addressing the key points shared. Focus on thanking God for His faithfulness in prayer and asking for continued support and guidance. Allow a brief moment for silent personal prayer or reflection.

### Step 4. Conclusion (1-2 minutes)

Briefly encourage participants to continue reflecting on how prayer impacts their faith daily. End with a short prayer of thanks and a blessing for the group.

### Top Tips

**Keep it Focused:** Maintain a clear focus on the theme to avoid time overruns.

**Facilitate Efficiently:** Gently but firmly keep track of time for each section.

**Create Comfort:** Encourage openness but remind participants of the time limit to ensure everyone can share.

This ensures that the session remains impactful and engaging, fitting within a short timeframe while still allowing for meaningful testimony and prayer.

# Prayer Activity: Movement

Here is something a little different for a prayer activity! Engage in physical movements or simple yoga poses while praying, allowing your body to express your devotion and connecting your physical and spiritual selves.

Print out the following instructions for people to try at home during the week. If you feel brave, you could adapt them for a midweek prayer group or fellowship meeting.

## Prayer Movement

**Objective:** To engage the body, mind, and spirit in a holistic prayer experience through movement, enhancing spiritual awareness and connection with God.

### Materials Needed

*A yoga mat or a soft surface for comfort.*

*Comfortable clothing that allows for free movement.*

*A quiet, open space free from distractions.*

*(Optional) Gentle instrumental music or nature sounds to create a serene atmosphere.*

## Step-by-Step Guide

### 1. Preparation

**Select the Space:** Choose a quiet, comfortable area to move freely. Ensure the space is free of obstacles to avoid interruptions and facilitate a smooth flow of movement.

- **Set Up Your Mat:** Place your yoga mat or a soft blanket on the floor. This provides a physical boundary and a comfortable surface for your practice.
- **Find Stillness:** Stand, sit, or kneel comfortably on your mat. Close your eyes if that helps you focus.
- **Deep Breaths:** Begin by taking slow, deep breaths. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs completely, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, releasing all tension. Repeat this for several breaths.
- **Quiet the Mind:** With each exhale, imagine letting go of distractions, worries, or stress. Allow your mind to become quiet and present, centring your thoughts on God's presence.

### 2. Choosing Movements

**Select Poses or Movements:** Choose a series of physical movements or yoga poses that feel natural and comfortable. These could include:

- **Stretching:** Gentle stretches like reaching arms upward or bending forward.
- **Simple Yoga Poses:** Basic poses like Child's Pose, Downward Dog, or Mountain Pose.
- **Free Movement:** Flowing movements like swaying, gentle twists, or circular motions of the arms and torso.

Consider aligning movements with specific prayer intentions or themes. For example:

- **Gratitude:** Open-arm stretches symbolising openness and thankfulness.
- **Surrender:** Bowing or kneeling poses reflecting humility and submission to God.
- **Renewal:** Twisting or stretching poses symbolising the release of old burdens and embracing new life.

### 3. Offering Prayers (3-4 minutes)

- **Silent Prayers:** As you move, offer silent prayers or intentions. Focus on different aspects of your relationship with God, such as praise, gratitude, confession, or intercession.
- **Verbal Prayers:** If you feel comfortable, speak your prayers aloud. This can be as simple as whispering a word of thanks or voicing a need for guidance.

Prayer Themes:

- **Thankfulness:** "Thank you, Lord, for your blessings and grace."
- **Guidance:** "Guide me, O God, in your wisdom and love."
- **Healing:** "Heal my heart and body, Lord, with your loving presence."

**Closing Prayer:** Conclude with a brief prayer of gratitude, thanking God for this time of physical and spiritual connection.

**Silent Moment:** Take a final deep breath, letting go of any remaining tension, and sit quietly for a moment, resting in the presence of God.

*This method of integrating prayer with movement allows you to engage your whole being in worship, deepening your connection with God in a dynamic and meaningful way.*

## Icebreaker Questions

*Choose ONE of these icebreaker questions to get your group chatting about the theme of Prayer and Faith.*

- **Miracle Mixer:** Imagine you just found a "Faith-o-Meter" that can measure the strength of your faith. How would you rate your faith on a scale from a mustard seed to a mountain, and how do you think prayer influences that rating?

*or*

- **Prayer Paradox:** If you were in a situation where you could either double your faith or have one prayer instantly answered, which would you choose and why? How does this choice illustrate the relationship between prayer and faith for you?

*or*

- **Heavenly Customer Service:** If God had a customer service line for faith issues, what would be your most common request? How does this illustrate your understanding of how prayer and faith interact?

## Discussion Questions

Here are the group discussion questions for this theme, with some specifically relating to Mark 6:1-6 and the rest addressing the broader relationship between faith and prayer:

- In Mark 6, Jesus could not perform many miracles because of the people's lack of faith. How do you interpret this passage in relation to the effectiveness of prayer today?
- 2. Can you share a time when a specific prayer significantly strengthened your faith?
- 3. Reflecting on Mark 6:1-6, have you ever felt that a lack of faith affected the outcome of your prayers? How did that experience shape your understanding of faith?
- 4. How does the community's collective faith impact our prayers, considering that Jesus' hometown's lack of faith hindered His ability to perform miracles in Mark 6:1-6?
- 5. Do you believe that the strength of your faith affects the effectiveness of your prayers? Why or why not?
- 6. In the bible passage, the people's lack of faith limited Jesus' ability to perform miracles. How can we cultivate a faith that fully allows us to experience God's power through prayer?
- 7. How do you think praying for others influences your faith compared to praying for yourself?
- 8. How do you handle situations where you feel your prayers are not aligned with your faith? Does Mark 6:1-6 offer any insights into this?
- 9. What role does gratitude play in the relationship between faith and prayer, and how can this help us avoid the disbelief seen in Jesus' hometown in Mark 6:1-6?

*These questions balance specific insights from Mark 6:1-6 with broader reflections on the relationship between faith and prayer.*

## Interactive Bible Study

*On the next page are six "statements" about prayer. They are selected from the quotes provided in this week's resources. Print out a copy for each person in your group or fellowship.*

*For each statement, consider the extent to which you disagree or agree. Rate your view on a scale of 1 through 10 — where one means you string disagree, and ten means you fully agree. Circle a number as you think is appropriate.*

You can then discuss as a full group—or, alternatively, if you have a larger group, you can split people into twos or threes.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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