

## Introduction

As someone who loves to grow fruit trees, fruit bushes, and grape vines, I have always wondered why Jesus cursed the fig tree, especially when it was not the season for figs. I did not understand it or like it. I liked the parable in Luke 13:6-9 much better. There was no fruit on that fig tree and the owner told the vineyard-keeper to cut it down. The vineyard-keeper pleaded with the owner to allow him to fertilize it and give it another year. I like the vineyard-keeper's attitude to give it another chance. I like second chances, and I like to give grace to others. We all need second chances. But this was not the case in our passage today.

(Luke 13:6-9) "And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. {7} And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' {8} And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; {9} and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus was hungry and saw a fig tree in the distance. He went to it to find something to eat, and there was nothing on the fig tree but leaves. Mark records that it was not the season for figs. This was the week of Passover in the spring, and that is not when figs are ripe. Jesus spoke to the fig tree and said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Later on in the passage, Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, the fig tree You cursed has withered." Jesus had spoken a curse on that fig tree and it withered up. As I studied the passage this week, God taught me some things and helped me understand what this was all about. So, it was a good week of studying and learning God's word.

What is our passage about today? Not only do we have the cursing of the fig tree, but Jesus went into the temple and cleaned it out. He drove out those who were buying and selling, and He overturned the tables of the money changers. He ruffled some feathers, and the chief priests heard what He had done and began seeking how to destroy Him. I believe there are a number of lessons in our text, particularly about prayer. My outline is that we need to pray with faith. We need to pray with clean hands, and third, we need to pray with a pure heart. I will weave into that outline some of the other lessons about our passage that are very important.

## Three Lessons on Prayer

1. Pray in faith (v 12-14, 19-24)
2. Pray with clean hands (vs 15-18)
3. Pray with a pure heart (vs 25-26)

(Mark 11:12-26) "On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. {13} Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went *to see* if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. {14} He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening. {15} Then they \*came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; {16} and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. {17} And He *began* to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." {18} The chief priests

and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. {19} When evening came, they would go out of the city. {20} As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*. {21} Being reminded, Peter *said* to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." {22} And Jesus *answered* saying to them, "Have faith in God. {23} "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. {24} "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you. {25} "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. {26} ["But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."]

### 1. Pray with Faith (Mark 11:12-14, 19-24)

Our text begins with Jesus leaving Bethany on the next day. He had dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and He probably spent the night there also. The next day would be Monday according to most scholars. It would be Monday, April 11, 30 AD to be exact.

(Mark 11:12) "On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry."

We do not know the time that they left Bethany, only that He became hungry. Did they leave before breakfast? Did they leave later in the morning and is it now lunch time? We don't know the answers to those questions. We just know that Jesus became hungry and He saw a fig tree in the distance. So, Jesus went over to the fig tree to see if He would find anything to eat on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. I am not an expert on figs, but I have grown a fig tree. I have also helped take care of my mother and father's three fig trees. They have a Brown Turkey fig and the figs are delicious. They have another fig tree, but I do not know what kind it is. I ordered and planted a Tennessee Mountain Fig and it has not matured like the other figs, but it is still producing some figs. In the spring time, most trees put out beautiful flower blossoms. Then, they start putting out their leaves and then fruit appears. With the fig trees, the fruit forms and then the leaves form. When Jesus went to the fig tree, because it was not the season yet, there should have been some old remaining figs, or possibly some new figs that were not mature yet. The new figs would be edible, but not very soft and sweet. When Jesus came to the tree, He found nothing on it but leaves. If the tree was going to have fruit, Jesus would have seen the fruit, since the leaves come after the fruit.

(Mark 11:13) "Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went *to see* if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs."

Upon seeing that the fig tree had no fruit, Jesus cursed the tree, saying, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" I will get to the prayer application in a minute. I want to first address what the cursing of the fig tree is all about. The fig tree was representative of the Old Testament covenant. God made a covenant with Moses in Deuteronomy 27-28. He had Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people. "For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. They were blessed by their obedience and they were cursed for disobedience.

(Mark 11:14) “He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples were listening.”

(Deut 27:11-13) “Moses also charged the people on that day, saying, {12} “When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. {13} For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.”

The Jews had been disobedient and had brought a curse upon themselves. The fig tree represented this Old Covenant. It had the appearance of a healthy tree, but it had not born fruit. They appeared righteous; they had fig leaves that were visible, but there was no fruit. Jesus was putting an end to this legalistic, Pharisaical, and corrupt system, that only had an outward appearance of righteousness. Jesus was going to usher in a new covenant that would bring forth the fruit of righteousness.

In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced a series of woes upon the scribes, Pharisees, and religious leaders. I just want to bring up one as an example. He told the scribes and Pharisees that they were hypocrites. They were like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. They appeared righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. This fig tree, like the Pharisees, had an outward appearance of a healthy fig tree that would produce fruit, but there was no fruit.

(Matt 23:27-28) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. {28} So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

God had sent many prophets trying to fertilize that fig tree. They had rejected those prophets. Jesus continued by saying that they were sons of those who murdered the prophets. It was time for the Old Covenant to end and for God to establish a New Covenant that would bear the fruit of righteousness. Jesus was going to establish a new covenant with the sacrifice of His own blood. This New Covenant would take out the hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh. This New Covenant would transform us from the inside, and God would put His Spirit inside us. This New Covenant would not give the appearance of righteousness, but it would bear the fruit of righteousness. The Old Covenant was being put to death. It was being cursed.

(Matt 23:29-31) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, {30} and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.' {31} So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.”

Jesus was on His way to cleanse the temple. They had made it a robber’s den, rather than a holy place to worship God. Jesus was cleaning it out and He was going to build a new temple, a spiritual household. That new temple is us. We are the temple of God. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 that we are a holy temple. The current temple was not holy, but this new temple was going to be a holy temple. We are to be that house of prayer. We are to be that place where prayer is offered up for the nations. We are to be that house of prayer that offers up spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. God was putting an end to this Old Covenant that

had the appearance of righteousness, but had not produced the fruit of righteousness. The fig tree and the cleansing of the temple are both related to what God was doing in this special Passover Feast. He was ending the Old Covenant and establishing a New and better Covenant with His people. When I understood what the fig tree represented, I was at peace with the passage.’

(1 Cor 3:16-17) “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? {17} If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

I want to skip down to Mark 11:19-24 for the prayer application. Jesus used the cursing of the fig tree to teach His disciples about praying in faith. That evening, after cleansing the temple, they were going out of the city to Bethany. They passed by the fig tree and it was withered from the roots up. Most trees wither from the top down, not from the roots up. This was an unnatural withering. At our house there are lots of pocket gophers. I waged war with them for seven years. I tried all kinds of methods of getting rid of them. Finally, I found these black boxes that worked great. I kept a spreadsheet of my battle successes with these enemies. These pocket gophers would tunnel underneath the ground and they would eat the roots of your plants, bushes, and trees. When the plant could not get water, they would begin to wither from the top down. This fig tree that Jesus cursed withered from the roots up.

(Mark 11:19-20) “When evening came, they would go out of the city. {20} As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*.”

As they passed by, Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” Jesus answered, “Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.” Jesus was taking the opportunity to teach the disciples to pray with faith. I believe that God can do anything He wants. He can tell a mountain to be taken up and cast into the sea. I have no doubt about that. But, I believe that Jesus is using a word picture to teach them. I believe the mountains represent big things in our lives that need to be dealt with. When we pray, we must pray with faith. We must believe that what we say is going to happen. Jesus ended by saying, “all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.”

(Mark 11:21-24) “Being reminded, Peter \*said to Him, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” {22} And Jesus \*answered saying to them, “Have faith in God. {23} “Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. {24} “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.”

There is a balance to this. I believe we cannot take one Scripture and build a doctrine around it that is not supported by the balance of Scripture. We must believe that we will receive the things we pray about. I believe that we must believe that this is God’s will in the matter. I want to take a quick look at a few other Scriptures. In 1 John 5:14-15, we have this confidence when we pray, “that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests we have asked from Him.” We can pray with confidence when we pray according to His will.

(1 John 5:14-15) “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”

One day Karen and I were taking a walk around our neighborhood. All at once we heard a man yelling out to us. We paused and waited while he came up to us. He asked if we remembered him. He had visited the church I was pastoring, and after the service he asked me if I believed in the name it and claim it doctrine. I told him that I believe that if we ask anything according to God’s will He hears us, and we will receive the request. This man disagreed with me and said it did not matter what you prayed for, if you believed it, you would receive it. Well, this man was greatly shaken up. After visiting our church, he discovered that his wife had cancer. He prayed, and he believed that God would heal her of this cancer. Unfortunately, his wife had died and he had a double loss. He lost his lifelong companion and he was grieving over that loss. He also lost confidence in his faith, because he had believed in her healing, and she did not get healed, she died. I don’t think that you get anything you ask for.

James tells us that if we ask with the wrong motives we may not get what we prayed for. We might have faith, but if we ask with wrong motives, it may not happen. It is not just praying with faith, it is also praying according to the will of God, and with right motives.

(James 4:3) “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”

In Matthew 18:19, Jesus said, “if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them. I don’t think this is a blank check good for anything in the store. I believe this is two or more agreeing that this is the will of God in this matter. I can’t go get my friend James and say, “James, agree with me that I will win the lottery this week.” James can agree with me all day long, but if it is not God’s will it is not going to happen.

(Matt 18:19) “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”

The same is true about asking in Jesus’ name. In John 14, Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” So, I get James to come over and agree with me in prayer for the lottery and we agree together and we even pray in the name of Jesus. Does this mean that the lottery is included in “whatever” and “anything?” The name of Jesus means on behalf of Jesus. It means that we are His representatives doing His business here on earth. We are carrying out His will and His plans and purposes. When we ask things that are according to His will and for His purposes, we can be assured that we will have those prayers answered.

(John 14:13-14) “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. {14} If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.”

(John 16:23-24) “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. {24} “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

This week one of my daughters had the hiccups. Little Kera prayed with faith that these hiccups would be gone. She prayed in the name of Jesus I tell these hiccups to go away. She did not worry about getting someone to agree with her that this was God's will. She did not worry about all those things; she just prayed with faith, and those hiccups went away immediately. Earlier that day, Kera had prayed that Sarah's jeep would sell. It had been on the market and not many people had called. But, after Kera prayed, that same day a lady from Farmington called and said she wanted to buy the Jeep. She drove down and paid Sarah cash. Kera did not get bogged down about whether this was according to God's will, or if her motives were right; she just prayed with faith, and God answered her prayers.

I said that there is a balance. We must have faith when we pray. We need that childlike faith, or Kera-like faith. At the same time, we need to pray according to God will, and with the right motives. That was the lesson of the fig tree that was cursed.

## 2. Pray with Clean Hands (Mark 11:15-18)

The second lesson on prayer is the cleansing of the temple. When Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem, still hungry I might add, Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. If you remember last week I mentioned that one historical document in 40 AD, ten years after this, that said 260,000 lambs were slaughtered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. I mentioned that if we said that each lamb would be used for ten people, and that is a conservative estimate, then there would have been 2,600,000 people there for the Feast. So, all of these people did not travel from all over the world with their sheep and doves. They brought cash and bought these animals at the temple. There was a whole lot of money changing and buying and selling. For many at the temple this was big business. This was the balloon fiesta in Albuquerque, where all the hotels are full and business make a lot of money from the tourists. This was fiesta week in Jerusalem and lots of people were there, and they all wanted tickets to the Lamb Fiesta, and they bought their Lamb and Dove tickets at the temple.

(Mark 11:15-16) "Then they \*came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; { 16 } and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple."

The Passover Feast was not about buying and selling. It was about how God had killed all the first-borns in Egypt, but had passed over the dwelling places of His people. We find the account in Exodus 12. God commanded His people to take an unblemished lamb and slaughter it at twilight and put some of the blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses. When God would see the blood of the lambs on the doorposts, He would pass over that house. Therefore, this was the Feast of Passover.

(Ex 12:1-13) "Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, { 2 } This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. { 3 } Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. { 4 } 'Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to

what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. {5} 'Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. {6} 'You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. {7} 'Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. {8} 'They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. {9} 'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails. {10} 'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. {11} 'Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover. {12} 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. {13} 'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.”

When Jesus was baptized, John the Baptist declared that he was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus was going to be the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7) that was sacrificed on our behalf so that God would pass over our sins. He sacrificed His firstborn on our behalf so that we might live. The Passover was a prophetic picture of what Jesus was going to do. The Jews missed all of this. It had become a Lamb Fiesta where they made a lot of money buying and selling. Jesus wanted nothing to do with this and He cleansed the temple. This was not the first time that He cleansed the temple. Right after the first public miracle at the wedding in Cana, where Jesus turned the water into wine, He went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. He made a scourge of cords, and drove them out of the temple. He told them to stop making “My Father’s house a place for business.” When they questioned His authority to do this, He told them that if they destroy this temple, He would raise it up in three days. Jesus was prophetically telling them what would happen at the Feast of Passover. He would be sacrificed and be raised up on the third day.

(John 2:13-19) “The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. {14} And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. {15} And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; {16} and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." {17} His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." {18} The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" {19} Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

This time, after cleansing the temple, Jesus began to teach and quoted Isaiah 56:7, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” They were not using the temple for its purposes; they had made it a place of business.

(Mark 11:17) “And He *began* to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.”

(Is 56:7) “Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

I want to go back to Isaiah 56 and look at verse six. We find some attributes of a house of prayer. First, we see that it is a place for foreigners to join themselves to the Lord. Another word for join is to connect. It is a place for people to connect with God. We are the Connection Church. We are a place of prayer. We are a place for people to join or connect themselves with God. Second, we see that a house of prayer is a place for people to minister to the Lord. The word minister means to serve. A house of prayer is a place where people not only join themselves to the Lord, but they serve Him. Third, a house of prayer is a place where people love the name of the Lord. We call that worship. A house of prayer is a place of worship, where the name of the Lord is lifted up and exalted. Fourth, a house of prayer is a place that honors the Sabbath. We are not under the law, but there is a principle of Sabbath. God rested on the Sabbath, and God’s people need to rest on the Sabbath. A house of prayer is a place where God’s laws and His word are taught and kept. Finally, a house of prayer is a place where people hold fast to their covenant with God. One of the reminders that God has given us is the Lord’s Supper. This is where Jesus said that His blood represented a new covenant that He was establishing, and we were to do this in remembrance of Him. The early church was devoted to celebrating the Lord’s Supper, and that is something that the Connection Church of Albuquerque also celebrates every week.

(Isaiah 56:6) "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant;"

(1 Cor 11:23-25) “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; {24} and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." {25} In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.”

Then, He quoted Jeremiah 7:11, which stated, “has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?” The word used for den means a cave. It was a place where animals, creatures, insects, and sometimes men, used to dwell in. The temple had become a dwelling place for robbers. God’s purpose for the temple is to be the dwelling place for Him. People were to come to into the presence of God at His temple. We find in the New Testament that we are the temple; we are the spiritual dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Paul repeated this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. He wanted us to know that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The temple in Jerusalem had become a dwelling place of robbers, not the Lord. A robber is one who takes what does not belong to him. These robbers had stolen God’s dwelling place and made it their dwelling place.

(Jer 7:11) “Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it*," declares the LORD.”

(1 Cor 3:16) “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

(1 Cor 6:19-20) “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? {20} For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Jesus did not finish the rest of Jeremiah 7:11, but the scribes and Pharisees would have known the rest, which said, “Behold, I, even I, have seen it, declares the Lord.” Jesus was telling them that He was God and that He has seen that God’s house was not being used for its intended purposes. It was being used to take advantage of people during this Lamb Fiesta and make money. It had become a robber’s den. It was not being used as a place where prayer would be made on behalf of all nations. It was not a place of prayer and worship.

In my outline I said that we need to pray with clean hands. Jesus cleansed the temple of all the things that they were doing. Our hands are symbolic of the things that we do. If we are going to be temples that are holy and we are the house of prayer for all nations, we cannot be turning it into a moneychanger’s place of business. We have to have clean hands so that our houses are not guilty of the same sin.

About the second year of planting the East Mountain Vineyard Church, we had a guest minister come to preach. He set up coffee displays in our facility to sell His coffee. The profits would support the mission work in Southeast Asia. My son, Chad, was about eleven years old at the time, and he confronted this minister, and asked him if he had permission to sell coffee at our church. The man was quite taken back by this young boy asking him that question. We had chickens at that time. Karen liked fresh eggs and so she about twenty-five hens. We had more eggs than our family could eat, so Chad would sell some of the eggs. When the church was first getting started and was meeting at our house, I instructed Chad that he could not sell eggs. Our church plant was a house of prayer, not a farmer’s market to sell eggs or other goods. So, Chad did not sell any more eggs at a church service, and he remembered my instructions. Now, this minister came in and he was selling coffee. This was a double standard. It was confusing to Chad, so he asked the man if he had received permission. We have tried to be careful about becoming a market place. We want to be a house of prayer for all nations, and we want to keep our hands clean.

After teaching them that His house was to be a house of prayer for all nations, the scribes and Pharisees sought to destroy Him, but they were afraid of Jesus, because the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. They were going to tear down that temple, just as He told them three years earlier, and he was going to prove His authority by rising from the dead in three days.

(Mark 11:18) “The chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.”

### **3. Pray with a Pure Heart (Mark 11:25-26)**

Jesus’ third point about praying was to pray with a clean heart. He has just cleansed the temple of the things they were doing. Now, He addresses our hearts. He said, “whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive your transgressions.” He also added, “if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” We cannot be harboring unforgiveness and bitterness when we pray. We must ask God to forgive us of our sins, and we must also forgive others that have sinned against us.

(Mark 11:25-26) “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. {26} [“But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.”]

That verse is in brackets, which means that they have found a few early manuscripts that did not contain this verse. Some scholars believe that it was added by some of the monks or scribes that made handwritten copies. The NIV and ESV do not include the verse, but have a footnote where the verse is given. The NASB and KJV both include the verse, but have a footnote that states that some early manuscripts do not contain the verse. The exact same verse is given in Matthew 6:15 and 18:35, so the principle is clearly stated in other places.

In Luke 11, the disciples were amazed at Jesus’ prayer life and they asked Him to teach them how to pray. He gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer. It is really an outline to help us in our prayer. In this Model Prayer, we are taught to ask God to forgive us of our sins, and then to also forgive other. If we want to pray effectively, we must pray with a clean heart.

(Matt 6:12) “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

(Luke 11:4) “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus added a section about getting reconciled with our brothers. He said if we are presenting our offerings at the altar and remember that our brother has something against us, we should leave our offerings and go get reconciled to our brother. Then, we are to come present our offerings. Our prayers are offerings. We may be offering up prayers of thanksgivings. We may be offering up prayers of praise. We may be offering up prayers and petitions for others. When we are praying, we need to have pure hearts. We need to ask for forgiveness or give forgiveness so that our prayers are not hindered.

(Matt 5:23-24) “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

In Peter’s first letter he gave instructions to husbands and wives. In 1 Peter 3:7, he told husbands to live with their wives in an understanding manner, and to show her honor, so that our prayers are not hindered. Our relationships with our wives are one of the most holy things we have. If we want our prayers to be effective, we have to be in right relationship with our spouse. If we need to forgive or ask for forgiveness, we need to make it a priority so that our prayers are not hindered.

On a personal note, I spend more time thanking and praising God in my prayer times. Then, I spend time interceding for people. I don’t save up my penitent prayers for my prayer times. When I become aware of a sin in my life, I immediately ask God to forgive me and to cleanse me of that sin. When I detect a wrong attitude about someone, I forgive them and pray for them, and I also pray about my own heart. So, don’t wait until Friday or Sunday confessionals to ask for forgiveness. Live with a pure heart and pray without ceasing.

Having said that, Jesus included this section of prayer for a reason. I believe we should allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts. I believe that in our prayer times we should confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. We should forgive others that have sinned against us and we should bless them.

### **Conclusion and Applications**

Jesus gave us three simple lessons on prayer. We need to pray in faith, believing that He will answer our prayer. We need to be Kera-like in our prayers. Second, we need to pray with clean hands. We are temples of the Holy Spirit and we cannot be caught up in the things of the world. Third, we need to pray with pure hearts.

How is your prayer life? How is your faith? Are you praying with childlike faith, believing and trusting God to move the mountains in your life? Are you praying about those mountains, and telling them to be cast into the sea? How is your temple doing? Is it full of the hustling and bustling of the world, or have you cleaned it out and sanctified it as a place of prayer? Do you have clean hands when you pray? Finally, are you praying with a pure heart? Have you asked God to forgive you? Have you forgiven those who have trespassed against you? These are three simple truths about prayer.

Father God, I ask You to help us in our prayer lives. Forgive us for the times that we have not been a house of prayer for all nations. Help us to grow in this area. Father, help us to clear out the things in our temples that detract and distract us from Your purposes in our lives. Father, help us to pray with clean hands and with clean hearts. We want to be effective in our prayers.

Q & A

**Introduction** (Luke 13:6-9, Mark 11:12-26)

- 1. Pray with Faith** (Mark 11:12-14, 19-24, Deut 27:11-13, Matt 23:27-31, 1 Cor 3:16-17, 1 John 5:14-15, James 4:3, Matt 18:19, John 14:13-14, 16:23-24)
  
- 2. Pray with Clean Hands** (Mark 11:15-18, Ex 12:1-13, John 1:29, 1 Cor 5:7, John 2:13-19, Jer 7:11, Is 56:6-7, 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19-20)
  
- 3. Pray with a Pure Heart** (Mark 11:25-26, Matt 6:12, Luke 11:4, Matt 5:23-24, 1 Pet 3:7)

**Conclusion and Applications**