

Date:

*The hard sayings of Jesus*

**PRAY** Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me! (Psalm 66:20).

**READ** John 14:1–14

**REFLECT**

*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.* Over the years I've heard two reactions to the puzzling statement Jesus made about prayer in this passage (14:14).

*'Name it and claim it!'* According to this view, we should pray for very specific things, like a new car, a big house or a fat bank account. Isn't that what Jesus said? A friend of mine once commented how odd it was that churches who preached this prosperity gospel often have car parks full of the most dilapidated bangers!

*'It ain't necessarily so!'* According to this view, we shouldn't pray for specific things. Often, people who feel this way claim they've 'tried prayer' in the past, but it 'didn't work'.

The problem with both views is they focus exclusively on earthly things, and that's misunderstanding what Jesus meant.

Our passage today is part of a final coaching session Jesus had with his disciples. They've been with him for three years but now they're worried because he's talking about leaving (14:1–5). The disciples need some reassurance and Jesus gives it to them in two ways:

*Eventually, they will be with him.* Someday Jesus will return for all those who have put their faith in him as the way to God and take them to a place prepared for them (14:3,6).

*In the meantime, they can ask for his help.* That promise (14:12–14) applies to you and me as well.

But the key to unlocking the mystery of Jesus' 'prayer guarantee' lies in two phrases that are easy to overlook. The first is 'in my name'. When we pray, we should ask for things that are consistent with what Jesus taught and did. That narrows down my prayer list. The second is 'bring glory to the Father'. When we pray, our focus should be on things that help more people understand who God really is. Those are the kind of prayers that get results.

**APPLY** How has prayer changed you?

**PRAY** Can you pray about something right now that will bring glory to the Father – that is, that demonstrates real trust in him and his character?

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**PRAY** Begin your time with God today by praying the Lord's Prayer slowly, phrase by phrase.

**READ** Matthew 18:15–35

**REFLECT**

*This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.* Forgiveness is one of the toughest aspects of maintaining healthy relationships. Just ask someone who's married! But forgiveness was essential to Jesus' message and mission and it's the theme of this passage.

Jesus begins by explaining a very practical method for resolving conflict (18:15–20). First, talk to the person... privately; then go with others; and then involve the church. As a last resort, the relationship must be put on hold, remembering that Jesus was always willing to accept sinners who repented.

Sadly, not many people have ever followed Jesus' advice. Counsellors today talk about 'triangulation'; that's when we talk to a third party instead of directly to the person who's offended us. It can be just a fancy name for gossip and it's deadly in a church.

In response to Jesus' forgiveness formula, Peter asks a question (18:21) that might be put something like this: 'Lord, when is it okay to hate my brother and get revenge?' What Peter is fishing for is a time limit on when he can stop forgiving. I can just imagine Jesus shaking his head and chuckling, 'You know, Peter, if you have to ask how many times you should forgive, you just don't get it.' When we really come to understand how much God has forgiven us, there's no question: we must *always* be willing to forgive those who offend us.

But all that sets up one of the most challenging statements Jesus ever made (18:35). Could it really be that God gets angry with us if we don't forgive? Apparently so. Those who have been forgiven a large debt should be the most generous towards others. That's the whole point of the parable (18:23–34). What Jesus is saying is that our heavenly Father is serious about forgiveness and we must be too.

**APPLY** How can you make receiving the forgiveness that Jesus offers an ongoing experience in your life?

**PRAY** Bring to mind one person with whom you have a broken or strained relationship. Ask God to show you what he wants you to do in order to make things better.