

Hindrances To Prayer

Series: *How Do I Pray?*

2 Chronicles 7:14

August 26, 2018

It's wonderful to be in worship together today.

There are many aspects of the Christian life that most of us wish we were better at.

- I'm sure there are some in this room who wish they read their Bible more.
- I'm sure there are some in this room who wish they gave more.
- I'm sure there are some in this room who wish they served more.
- I'm sure there are some in this room who wish they witnessed more.
- And I'm sure there are some in this room who wish they prayed more.

I believe prayer is THE essential spiritual discipline, yet most of us wish we had a better prayer life.

We are in the midst of a series entitled, "How Do I Pray?" We are learning what prayer is all about. Think of this series as a time that will help your spiritual life and Christian witness grow tremendously. This will be like a taking a single pill and losing all your unwanted weight.

I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin.

One thing we have to remember today as we talk about prayer is this – I invite you to write this down: God always answers prayer with yes, no, or later.

We like it when God answers a prayer with "yes." A friend or a loved one is healed, a situation is miraculously resolved, a child turns from a life of sin to a new life in Christ. It is awesome to see God answering prayer with a wonderful "yes."

It takes a great deal more faith and discernment when the answer is "later." It might mean that we have to wait until God's perfect timing, or that a loved one is ultimately healed from the pain and suffering of life through death and entrance into heaven. But the waiting is what is so difficult; we're not always sure during the wait what God is doing.

Then there are the times when God says, "No." There may be prayers we pray that might be against the will of God, ones He would of course deny.

But sometimes, the "No" has nothing to do with being against the will of God, and everything to do with us. These are the Hindrances to Prayer.

We can rationally see the hindrances of, for example, not playing NFL football: too slow, too small, no talent. Or the hindrances of singing on "America's Got Talent: can't sing a note, or remember the words, or have an annoying voice.

Or there could be a dream, a goal, that you might have, that you want to accomplish, but has a number of things that hinder you from doing that. There were a whole list of things that hindered me from getting my pilot's license: learn how to control the airplane, learn how to aviate, navigate, and communicate, and of course, take-off and land, because take-off is optional, but landing is mandatory. I took on all of those hindrances and overcame them to accomplish the goal of learning to fly an airplane. I now have 620 take-offs and landings and 336.9 hours of flight time. I overcame the hindrances.

My friends, there are hindrances to prayer, and children of God should always know the things which hinder their prayers. When they are avoided, more of our prayers would be answered.

I want to share with you 7 factors that contribute to an unanswered prayer by God, 7 hindrances:

First, Lack Of Humility.

One of the most famous passages on prayer in Scripture comes from the Old Testament book 2 Chronicles 7:14. Let me read it to you:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.¹

This passage is God speaking to King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem and He promises that He will hear the peoples' prayers and act, but if the people do 3 things. The first one is to be humble.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves...

Humility is key here. This is where solving our prayer problems begins. Pride causes so much trouble, which is why it is listed among the 7 deadly sins. It was Satan's problem, and the emphasis on "self-esteem" in our day says we still have the problem. Pride is often behind any "rights" movement. Pride will keep one from confessing own sins and ultimately following Satan to his ultimate destination.

Dwight L. Moody once said, "Be humble or you'll stumble." A lack of humility is the first hindrance to prayer.

Second, Forsaking God.

God told Solomon:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face..."

What does it mean to seek God's face? It means to pursue God, His will, His character, His Lordship for one's life.

The problem is that not many folks are seeking God today. You can tell this by where they go on Sunday: to the stadium, not to the sanctuary. In our church alone, we have 93 members – 37% of our membership, who have not been to our church in over a year, many for several years. Now, there are some on that list who are going to other churches and have not moved their membership, but the majority are either mad at someone – you, me, everyone – or have forsaken God. They once promised, as Doris and Katie did this morning, to "faithfully participate in [the church's] ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness?"

Unfortunately, in our society, few are interested in God and therefore do not seek Him through His Word or prayer. But problems will not stop when we do not show any interest in God.²

God says in 2 Chronicles 15:2:

"Listen to me... The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you."³

A third hindrance to prayer is Wickedness.

¹ 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

² Analytical Bible Expositor - Analytical Bible Expositor, 2 Chronicles 7:14

³ 2 Chronicles 15:2 (NIV)

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways...⁴

This means to turn from the evil that has brought about judgment. Turning from our wicked ways does not mean to legalize evil by making laws to allow evil conduct to exist without arrest in society. It does not mean to excuse our sins because everyone else is doing it. Nor does it mean to belittle the seriousness of evil. Turning from our wicked ways means to stop doing evil. All the confessing in the world will not do any good if you do not stop your evil conduct.⁵

The psalmist wrote:

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;⁶

The prophet Isaiah said:

Listen! The LORD's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call. It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.⁷

Sin offends our holy God and separates us from Him. Because God is holy, He cannot ignore, excuse, or tolerate sin as though it didn't matter. Sin cuts people off from Him, forming a wall to isolate God from the people He loves.

Is there any wickedness in your life that you have not turned away from? Have you confessed your sin to God, allowing Him to remove it? The Lord can save you if you turn to Him.⁸

A fourth hindrance to prayer is Hard-Heartedness.

Look at Zechariah 7:12-13:

They made their hearts as hard as flint [other translations use the word "stone"] and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry. "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the LORD Almighty.⁹

Hard-Heartedness is a terrible thing to have. It hinders forgiveness and destroys relationships. It is a roadblock to accomplishments and agreements. It is the thing that makes the Terrible Twos so terrible.

And when we are hard-hearted, we are in opposition to the nature of God. Nine times, the Bible says something like this:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.¹⁰

God is not hard-hearted, and therefore will not listen to any prayer from a hard-hearted person.

The fifth hindrance to prayer is similar: a Lack of Love.

God is a God of love, but a person without love is a person that is against God. Proverbs 21:13 says:

⁴ 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

⁵ Analytical Bible Expositor - Analytical Bible Expositor, 2 Chronicles 7:14

⁶ Psalm 66:18 (NIV)

⁷ Isaiah 59:1-2 (NLT2)

⁸ Life Application Study Bible, Isaiah 59:1-2

⁹ Zechariah 7:12-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ Psalm 103:8 (NIV)

*Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need.*¹¹

This is a simple but very sensible truth. If you show charity to the needy, you will be helped when in need. The miserly soul will experience miserliness when he or she is in need.¹²

Folks, we have to deal with this all the time. What do you do when you must come to a stoplight right beside a person with a sign asking for help? There may be reasons for not giving that person money, but that doesn't stop us from loving that person, or anyone else who is different from us.

The Christian response is always love. 1 John says:

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?... If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*¹³

The Christian response is always love, but where there is a lack of love, there is a lack of answered prayer.

The sixth hindrance to prayer is the Wrong Motive.

James 4 talks about prayer. The 3rd verse reads:

*And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*¹⁴

It's easy for us to do this. We might pray for that new shiny car, or big screen TV, or that the bank will make an undiscovered error of a \$1 million in our account, when Jesus said:

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*¹⁵

Unless we are careful, our prayers can be full of things that are lustful and centered on wrong motives, and that will hinder prayer.

A final hindrance to prayer is Unbelief.

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness Monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat at least a hundred feet into the air. It then opened it's mouth waiting below to swallow them both. As the man sailed head over heels and started to fall towards the open jaws of the ferocious beast he cried out, "Oh, my God! Help me!"

Suddenly, the scene froze in place and as the atheist hung in midair a booming voice came out of the clouds and said, "I thought you didn't believe in Me!"

"God, come on, give me a break!" the man pleaded, "Just seconds ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness Monster either!"

"Well," said God, "now that you believe I exist, you must understand that I won't work miracles to snatch you from certain death in the jaws of the monster, but I can change hearts. What would you have me do?"

¹¹ Proverbs 21:13, NLT2

¹² Analytical Bible Expositor - Analytical Bible Expositor, Proverbs 21:13

¹³ 1 John 4:16-17, 20 (NIV)

¹⁴ James 4:3, NLT2

¹⁵ Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

The atheist thinks for a minute then says, "God, please have the Loch Ness Monster believe in You also.

"God replies, "So be it."

The scene starts in motion again with the atheist falling towards the ravenous jaws of the monster. The Loch Ness Monster folds his claws together and says, "Lord, bless this food You have so graciously provided . . ."

Again, James tells us about prayer:

But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.¹⁶

Evil lusts do not ask for things God will grant. Scripture says,

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.¹⁷

If we delight ourselves in the Lord, the desires of our heart will be purified so that what we ask will be what God will be pleased to grant. The one that delights himself in the Lord does not ask from evil passions.

Unbelief always results in unanswered prayer.

A Lutheran bishop told the story of visiting a parish church in California and finding a stirring red and orange banner on the wall. "Come Holy Spirit. Hallelujah!" it declared in words printed under a picture of a fire burning. It stirred him to thinking that the church, by putting up that banner, was truly praying for the Holy Spirit to come. The bishop then looked and was interested in the sign directly underneath the banner, which said: "Fire extinguisher." So much for that church's commitment to spiritual renewal.

Are there things that you are praying for that seem to find no answer?

Remember, God always answers prayer with yes, no, or later. Could the no's you are receiving be a result of hindrances in your life to prayer. I would suggest you get rid of anything that keeps you from being so connected to God that every one of your prayers are like Jesus' prayers: answered.

¹⁶ James 1:6-7 (NLT2)

¹⁷ Psalm 37:4 (NIV)