

The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

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THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER

One of the most common issues that pastors deal with is the problem of unanswered prayer. Let me give you some examples:

- You prayed for a nice promotion but it went to someone else; someone who was half your age but also had half your brains and experience. Right?
- You prayed for the man of your dreams and he turned out to be Freddy Krueger
- You prayed about your wife's depression. It got worse.

Many times, such prayers are coupled with a bit of a bargain: "God, if you will do what I want, then I will do what you want" (tithe, start to church, treat my neighbor better, etc.) I have even had people tell me that if God would do just this one thing, they would never ask Him for anything else as long as they live. They fail to realize that God doesn't want less communication with us, He wants more.

The woman who played Olivia Walton, the mother on the Walton's television show, told of how as a child she was taught by a priest that all of her prayers would be answered. She got so excited she began to pray for a bicycle for Christmas. When she got shoes instead the disappointment was so great she struggled the rest of her life with doubts.

- In Psalm 13:1-2 David prayed, "**How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart.**"
- In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet prayed, "**How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?**" (Habakkuk 1:2).

Unanswered prayer can truly be a crushing experience. The Bible records many such prayers of many such people who felt devastated when God did not grant them their requests. Could you be included in that number?

Now, before I get into the heart of this message, I want to point out that God does answer prayer. I believe in the Lord and in the power of prayer. I agree with Alfred Lord Tennyson who noted, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Numerous times in numerous ways, I have seen God respond to my pleas. Those have been good times; blessed times. I rejoice in them this morning. However, just to be honest, I've also seen earnest, desperate prayers go unanswered. There's no denying that unanswered prayer is a difficult problem. Today we are going to tackle this hard problem.

My first point is...

SOMETIMES GOD SAYS "NO."

Last week, I pointed out that God likens Himself to a Father – our Father. Therefore, it should not surprise us that he reserves unto Himself the right to say "no" at times.

Help me, please. When I mention the names, Peter, James, and John, whom do you immediately think of? (The three closest disciples to Jesus.) As you recall, one time they accompanied Jesus to the top of a high mountain. While there, God's full glory descended upon Jesus. The three disciples stood back in awe. They were speechless. Finally, they were able to make a request, "Jesus, please allow us to build three tents up here, and we'll just live up here on this mountain for the rest of our lives and just bask in your glory." How does that sound to you? Sounds good to me. I'm in. Nonetheless, Jesus responded by saying "No. The people are not up here on the mountain; they are down in the valley. We must go back to where the people are." In short, the answer was no. Wrong request.

One time James and John went to Jesus, and asked if they could make reservations for the best two seats in heaven. They said, "We'd like one directly on the left and right of your throne in heaven.

Could you arrange that for us? Do you remember the Lord's answer to that request? He said no. He denied their request.

Another time, Jesus and the disciples were not allowed to travel through a certain part of Samaria. That denial aggravated the disciples so much that they asked Jesus to destroy the entire region with fire from heaven. What was the Lord's reply? He simply said, "No, I didn't come to torch people; I came to transform people." Again, their prayer was turned down.

Do you see the point I'm making? The disciples were fully capable of making inappropriate requests of Jesus. And when the requests were wrong, Jesus said no.

Now I want to ask you a question. I want you to think before you attempt to answer it. Do you think that God ever said "no" to Jesus? Did He? Please remember, Jesus was the perfect Son of God. His prayers were perfect. His life was perfect. Everything about Him was perfect. Nevertheless, He was told no. He had a request denied.

Remember when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering pass from Him? It didn't. While He did not want the cup, He surrendered Himself to His Father's will and ended up drinking every last drop from it.

Jesus also prayed for Jerusalem, but the people there rejected Him anyway, and His prayer was not answered. He said, "I would, but you would not." Jesus did not always get His way. The Bible therefore records that He wept and experienced great sorrow. He too knew the frustration and the agony of unanswered prayer.

Let me take you to the Apostle Paul. Three times he prayed for the removal of his thorn in the flesh. The Lord responded by saying in 2 Corinthians 12:9 (*The Message*), "**My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.**"

- Moses pleaded with God to let him enter the Promised Land, but God refused to hear him, and he was not permitted to enter.
- David pleaded with God to let his child live, but the child died.
- Elijah, while battling a bout of depression, pleaded with God to take his life. Understandably, the Lord rejected the request.

Are you capable of making wrong requests to God? I am. I do. I probably will in the future. Are you capable of making requests that are totally self-serving? Are you capable of making requests of God that are patently materialistic, convenience-oriented, shortsighted, and perhaps immature? I am. God loves us too much to say yes to wrong requests. If the request is wrong, God will answer the prayer, but His answer will be "No." And you wouldn't want God to do anything less.

By hindsight I can thank God for saying "No" to prayers I thought at the time were appropriate. Now by hindsight I say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you that you said no to me during that particular time."

There are many illustrations that come out of the Civil War, for both sides had many thousands of prayer warriors. Equally godly people were praying for victory for their side. The Confederate troops prayed on their knees with all the fervency that men can pray with before the battle of Sharpsburg. General Gordon was confident with such earnest prayer they would win and press on the Washington within a week. The next day the battle went against them and they were so discouraged with God. But years later General Gordon admitted it was a blessing for the country that they were defeated that day, for had they won and defeated the Union our nation would be among the weaker nations of the world. In other words, God could not answer their prayers for victory, because it was contrary to His

purpose in history. We need to keep this in mind when we pray. The very non-answer could be our greatest blessing.

Longfellow was right when he said, "What discord we should bring into the universe if all our prayers were answered! Then we should govern the world and not God. And do you think we should govern it better? It gives me pain to hear the long, wearisome petitions of men asking for they know not what."

Many a Christian can give testimony to the blessings of unanswered prayer. One couple pleaded with God for a certain home. They didn't get it. Later they learned that the new buyer was greatly distressed due to some severe structural problems in the place. We do not always know the good reasons why God does not answer our prayers, but we know that He knows. That is enough.

Country music star, Garth Brooks, recorded a song back in the early nineties entitled, *Unanswered Prayers*. The song tells about a man who discovers how God's plan doesn't necessarily include all our prayer requests. Notice the words with me:

Just the other night a hometown football game
My wife and I ran into my old high school flame
And as I introduced them the past came back to me
And I couldn't help but think of the way things used to be

She was the one that I'd wanted for all times
And each night I'd spend prayin' that God would make her mine
And if he'd only grant me this wish I wished back then
I'd never ask for anything again

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers

She wasn't quite the angel that I remembered in my dreams
And I could tell that time had changed me
Inn her eyes too it seemed
We tried to talk about the old days
There wasn't much we could recall
I guess the Lord knows what he's doin' after all

And as she walked away and I looked at my wife
And then and there I thanked the good Lord
For the gifts in my life

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he may not answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.

The song tells us to thank God for unanswered prayers.

So if you have been praying diligently about a matter, and if you have sensed resistance from heaven, do you know what I would challenge you to do? Review your request. Your request may be the problem.

- Maybe the request is a cop-out on your part, an unwillingness to face a real issue.
- Maybe the request is self-serving.

- Maybe the request is shortsighted.
- Maybe the request is too small, and God might have something better in mind – as with Garth Brooks -- and he's saying no to this one because he has a better plan for you in the future.

Jean Ingelow, a popular nineteenth-century poetess wrote: "I have lived to thank God that all my prayers have not been answered." Again, I have too.

Before I move on, I must give you two cute examples of unanswered prayer. One little boy prayed, "Lord, please let the vitamins be in pie and cake instead of spinach." I have serious doubts that he will have his prayer answered. Nor will the kid who prayed after taking a geography test, "Lord, please let Detroit be the capital of Illinois."

But, pastor, what about those times when we can't see the good in our unanswered prayer? When the "no" makes no sense whatsoever?

Faith Baldwin tells of the girl whose fiancée was killed as a pilot, and she said, "I went to church everyday and prayed. I prayed every night and almost every waking hour. But he was killed. I shall never pray again, nor enter a church."

I too know of similar situations where a person has turned completely away from God due to some great and divine disappointment. Answers to these cases are hard to come by. Each situation is so different; so unique.

Nonetheless, let me point out three possibilities:

1. God answers all prayer.
2. God answers no prayer.
3. God answers some prayers, and does not answer some prayers.

The first two are the only two that people want to believe because that gives them control.

- If God answers all prayer, then God is nothing more than a servant who can be manipulated through prayer. We have a magic genie that is patiently waiting for us to make our request.
- The unbeliever and atheist go for number two, for if God answers no prayer, He is of no use, and so for all practical purposes does not exist.
- The third alternative is the most difficult of the three. Why? Because it leaves control in the hands of God. He is free to choose to answer or not to answer, to move or not to move. It takes Him out of our hands altogether, and it leaves us at His mercy. Like it or not, that is the way it is. God is free, and He is sovereign.

Again, I have seen Him answer prayer; I have had Him not answer prayer. What is my response to that? Simply this: Blessed be the name of the Lord! Job, when he was in the midst of his ordeal, put it this way, **"Though he slay me yet will I trust Him."**

A. W. Tozer wrote: "Every single thing that happens to the Christian expresses God's love and furthers God's purpose for him. Even when he cannot see the why and wherefore of God's dealings, he knows that there is love in and behind them."

A few minutes ago I told you about Faith Baldwin's story of the girl whose fiancée was killed as a pilot and of her disappointment with God. Again, she felt that her prayers had gone unanswered.

In contrast, I want to share with you some thoughts from Lisa Beamer. As you may recall, Lisa's husband, Todd, was on United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001 that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Lisa is a mother of three. She wrote in her book entitled *It Is Well With My Soul*, "Do you ever feel as if what was right has now gone terribly wrong? Perhaps you're crying out the questions of your heart and mind right now: God, you could have prevented this tragedy if you had wanted to! Why didn't you? Don't you love me? This isn't the way things are supposed to be!

You want immediate answers, and yet God seems silent. More questions flood your mind. Could God have changed the course of what happened? Absolutely, because He is God. Why didn't He? We may never know the answer, at least as long as we live on this earth. But we must trust that our Creator had His reasons for allowing things to follow their natural course.

As you wrestle with your whys, remember this: This only way to find peace of mind is to make a conscious decision to stop questioning God... and start trusting Him."

The one lady's unanswered prayers drove her away from God whereas Lisa was driven to hold on to Him all the more. What made the difference? Trust.

Who knows what James 5:14-16 says? It is a very important verse to those of us who believe in divine healing. It says, **"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up."** How many of you believe that? I do.

Now, how about this passage in Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, **"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...."** Does the one verse supersede the other? Is one right and the other one wrong? What gives?

Please understand, while the Lord heals and delights in healing, nonetheless, the death rate on Planet Earth is 100%. Death happens. It happens regardless. I know and believe that prayer can stay death's hand for a while. Hezekiah in the Old Testament, for instance, was given an additional fifteen years to live after his near brush with the grim reaper. God healed him. However, the brother did eventually pass on to his great reward.

You see, God has set certain laws – natural laws – in place. One of those laws is, **"It is appointed unto man once to die."** Period.

- Jesus died.
- Peter died.
- David died.
- Todd Beamer died.

Get the point?

At some point in time, God is going to say "no" to your request for someone's healing. He will have something better for that individual, something eternal.

Edward B. Pusey said:

"What have we to expect?
Anything.
What have we to hope for?
Everything.
What have we to fear?
Nothing.

Nelia Gardner White, novelist and early twentieth century pastor's daughter wrote: Some people just don't seem to realize, when they're moaning about not getting prayers answered, that no is the answer.

THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER

Part 2

This morning we are going to continue on with my message on unanswered prayer. Let me give you a brief review of last Sunday's sermon. One of the most common issues that pastors deal with is the problem of unanswered prayer.

In Psalm 13:1-2 David prayed, "**How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart.**" Habakkuk the prophet likewise prayed, "**How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?**" (Habakkuk 1:2).

Unanswered prayer can truly be a crushing experience. The Bible records many such prayers of many such people who felt devastated when God did not grant them their requests. Could you be included in that number?

Now, before I get into the heart of this message, I also want to point out that God does answer prayer. How many of you can say by an uplifted hand that God has answered a specific prayer for you:

- A prayer for forgiveness
- A prayer for healing
- A prayer for encouragement

I would dare say that nearly every one of us could testify to God's faithfulness in this area.

Someone once wrote: "One might estimate the weight of the world, tell the size of the celestial city, count the stars of heaven, measure the speed of lightning, and tell the time of the rising and the setting of the sun--but you cannot estimate prayer power. Prayer is as vast as God because He is behind it. Prayer is as mighty as God because He has committed Himself to answer it."

I believe in the Lord and in the power of prayer.

Having said that, I must admit that I have heard some pretty funny prayers in my day. Some of them you wouldn't believe. Evidently some screenwriters have shared some of my experiences in this regard. I want you to notice two very funny prayers from two different movies.

The first one comes from an older movie named *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*. It starred Chevy Chase. I want to take you to a particular scene where the family is sitting down for a large Christmas dinner. An 80-year-old aunt is asked to say the blessing. Listen with me, please. Play DVD clip (*National Lampoons Christmas Vacation*, DVD chapter 19.) Do you think that the lady had had much experience praying? I doubt it.

The next clip is from a movie that came out in the year 2000. It starred Robert De Niro and Ben Stiller and it is called *Meet the Parents*. Again it contains a humorous dinner scene that also involves returning thanks for the food. Ben Stiller is the one who was asked to pray. Let's give a listen.... Play DVD clip (*Meet the Parents*, DVD chapter 5. Play until De Niro says "Thank you Greg.") Something about that prayer just didn't ring true. Do you know what I mean?

Prayer can be troublesome at times. Particularly in those instances when it seems as if our prayers are not rising above the ceiling. So again, why aren't all of our prayers answered? As I noted last week, **SOMETIMES GOD SAYS "NO."** As a father reserves the right to refuse a child's request for any number of reasons, so it is that our Heavenly Father reserves the same right unto Himself. He said no to Jesus, to the Apostle Paul, to David, to Moses, to Elijah and so on.

NEXT, GOD MAY WELL SAY, "NOT NOW."

I love John 11 in the New Testament. It contains the story of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. The odd thing about this story is, Jesus let the brother die. John 11:6 points out, "**when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, HE STAYED WHERE HE WAS TWO MORE DAYS.**" At this particular

time, Jesus was in Perea, perhaps some twenty or thirty miles away from Bethany. Such a distance would require at least one maybe two days travel time and yet **“HE STAYED WHERE HE WAS TWO MORE DAYS.”**

The disciples were greatly perplexed by both the Lord’s words as well as His actions.

- **First** of all, if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He permit him to get sick in the first place?
- **Then too**, these men had to wonder why was the Lord delaying His return?
- **Third**, if He was so busy, why didn’t He simply send the healing Word as He had in the past?

Hey these are not odd or unusual questions. Probably each of us has asked them in one way or another through the years. But Jesus had His reasons. He went to be with his friends when His visit would be the most fruitful; when it would result in the greatest possible good and glory.

Mary and Martha, like the disciples, were limited in their understanding. The only possible good that they could see in this situation was for Lazarus to be healed. That was it! That was the only option that was available. Lord, please come and hurry! Lord, please answer our prayer and now. Yet verse 6 points out that He waited on purpose. His answer was, **“not yet.”**

Please understand this. Sometimes clocks run slow, planes run slow, and even computers run slow. God, though, is never slow. I preached on John 11 shortly after I became your pastor. I titled that short series of messages, “Late For A Healing; On Time For a Miracle.” Again, the Lord’s timing was perfect. For shortly after Jesus arrived at that tomb, He called his friend back to life again. Why did He wait?

Well, a healing was one thing, however Jesus wanted to do something bigger, better; He wanted to raise a man back to life who had been in the grave for four “stinking” days. He wanted to blow their socks off! He wanted to do something so spectacular that preachers would still be preaching about it 2000 years later!

Like Mary and Martha, maybe you too have had to deal with some divine delay.

- When will Jesus come?
- When will Jesus answer the prayer?
- When will Jesus respond to the need?
- When, oh God, will you move on our behalf? When?

As a rule, we are not given the time, we are simply given the grace to be patient. If we could hear the Father during these periods, I dare say that He would be saying to us, “Not quite yet. Trust me. I know what I’m doing. Just wait; you’ll see.”

As in the case of Lazarus, if God delays an answer, it is because He has His reasons. It may just well be that He has sometime bigger and better in store for you too than you ever dreamed of.

David Roper wrote in his excellent book, *Psalm 23: The Song of the Passionate Heart*, “The world intensifies our restlessness. Advertisements entice us to buy this, spend that, and to borrow against tomorrow so we can have what we want today. Generous incentives, rebates, mark-downs, sales packages, and good deals urge us on, creating desires that we never knew we had.”

CardWeb.com reports these statistics:

- Nationally, consumers owed \$750.9 billion in credit card debt at the end of 2002.
- The average consumer carries about \$8,000 in credit card debt each year.

Why do we have this awful weight of debt upon our shoulders? Again, we simply don’t want to wait until we have the needed cash saved up. We want everything and we want it now! That spirit carries over to our relationship with God as well.

- Psalm 27:14 therefore states, **“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart.”**
- Psalm 130:6 says, **“My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.”**
- Isaiah 40:31 also tells us, **“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”**

Again, I can't tell you how many times I thought my prayers were going unanswered only to find out later that God was saying, “Not yet.” He truly had something bigger and better in mind – as in the case with Lazarus -- than I had the faith to believe for in the beginning.

THEN, AGAIN, GOD MAY SAY, “NOT AS YOU ARE”

Let me give you a short pop quiz. I have up on the screen the words of an old traditional song entitled *Standing in the Need of Prayer*:

It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer,
 It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.
 Not my mother, not my father, but it's me oh Lord,...
 Not my preacher, not the sinner, but it's me oh Lord,...
 Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me oh Lord,...
 I've been down so long, know right and wrong,...
 It's a mighty rough road, to carry my load,...
 Help me thru th' night, show me which way is right,...
 Standing in the Need of Prayer

Which group recorded that number back in 1963?

- Peter, Paul & Mary
- Elvis Presley and the Jordanaries
- Jerry Garcia with the Wildwood Boys
- The Singing Nun

The answer is Jerry Garcia and the Wildwood Boys. Garcia who went on to fame with the Grateful Dead was a banjo pickin' bluegrass musician back then. Only the old “Deadheads” in the crowd could have gotten that one right.

Anyway, one of the things that we must do if we hope to have our prayers heard and answered is to realize that it may well be that we are the ones who are standing in the need of prayer. Not my brother or my sister, my mother or my father, not even the preacher. I am the one standing in the need of prayer.

Anytime we fail to receive a favorable answer, we need to stop to investigate whether our own actions may have caused the negative outcome.

The Bible gives us ten specific things that can keep our prayers from being answered. Let's look at them...

1. **Double Mindedness**

James, the Lord's brother, warns against double-mindedness. The term speaks of a "person with two souls or two minds inside him." One mind believes God; the other disbelieves. The person is a walking/talking civil war in which faith and doubt wage a continual battle. James 1:7 says, **“Let not that man think he will receive anything from the Lord.”**

2. **To Be Seen and Heard By Other People**

In Matthew 6:5 Jesus warned against insincere prayers that are meant only to impress and please the ears of man. Prayer is meant to be a means of communication between God and us. When that great purpose is compromised, then it ceases to carry any clout with the Lord.

3. **Wrong Motives**

James 4:3 notes, **“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”**

What is it that you are currently praying for? What is it? Why do you want it? What is the motive that powers your prayer? How will it affect your relationship with God and others? James is condemning a “not **THY WILL**, but **MY WILL** be done” type of prayer.

I am absolutely convinced that that the bulk of our prayers are requests for things that make us happy rather than for things that would make us better.

4. **Discord Between Brother and Sisters in the Body of Christ**

Without a doubt, an unforgiving spirit renders prayer totally ineffective. R. A. Torrey, a great preacher of yesterday and a contemporary of D. L. Moody, wrote, “All of God’s answering our prayers is upon the basis of God’s dealing with us as forgiven sinners, and God cannot deal with us as forgiven sinners while we are not forgiving those who have wronged us.”

Simply put, we cannot be wrong with man and right with God. No exceptions in God’s family! Matthew 5:23-24 warns that if there are private wars going on between people, if there are broken friendships, it cuts us off from close fellowship with God. He continues in that passage by saying, **“Drop everything and attempt to reconcile those relationships. Then go back to the altar and worship and pray.”**

5. **Disobedience to God and His Word**

Proverbs 28:9 (*The Message*) says, **“God has no use for the prayers of the people who won’t listen to him.”** Some requests are just plain contrary to His will. Sometimes they are like the man before the firing squad who was asked for his last request, and he asked for a bulletproof vest. It was, of course, refused. And so it is with many things we ask that have no place in God’s plan.

I once had a lady tell me that it was God’s will for her to leave her husband and children and go live with another man. She wanted my prayers and blessings. That is crazy! God will never violate His Word. Save your breath. Don’t even ask.

6. **Selfishness**

Proverbs 21:13 says very clearly, **“If a man shuts his ear to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.”**

Let me again quote R. A. Torrey. “There is perhaps no greater hindrance to prayer than stinginess, the lack of liberality toward the poor and toward God’s work.”

We can quickly back up what he says with Scripture: **“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”**

It’s really a simple principle. God measures out to us the same measure as we give out to others. Some give a teaspoon measure, other a dump truck measure. God, according to the Scripture, uses our measure in measuring His blessings back to us!

7. **Willful Sin**

Isaiah 59:1-2 (*New Living Translation*) notes: **“Listen! The LORD is not too weak to save you, and he is not becoming deaf. He can hear you when you call. But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.”**

The emphasis is plain: God is able; God is willing; God is God. But sin can and does hinder one's relationship with the Father as well as one's prayers.

The extent of the hindrance is seen especially in two words of the text: **"Cut you off."** This means, "To sever, divide." Sin severs; it divides one from an effective hearing from God. **"Listen."** The word "Listen" speaks of an effective hearing. To pay attention, understand, answer prayer. Sin cause causes God to "put His hands over His ears" when we pray.

Proverbs 28:9 backs this up as it notes, **"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."** Somewhere along the line, people have gotten the idea that the way we pray is unrelated to the way we live; that there is no connection between life and lip. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Sin hinders answered prayer. It must! A person under the sway of sin is not likely to pray according to the "will", nor according to the "word" of God! His desires will be fleshly, carnal, and selfish; thus he is unlikely to "seek first the Kingdom of God."

In Micah 3:4 we read, **"Then they will cry out to the Lord, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done."** Psalm 66:18 (*New King James Version*) adds, **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear."**

8. **Marital Conflict**

In I Peter 3:7 we read, **"Husbands..., be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect..., so that nothing will hinder your prayers."**

Neglect in this area causes problems in the prayer closet. Either you will not pray at all, or if you do, you will pray with an angry, unsettled spirit. Ladies, gentlemen, I didn't write these guidelines. Peter did under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They make up God's order for the home. When these orders are disobeyed or ignored, problems arise, discord develops, prayer is hindered! I've seen it happen, haven't you?

9. **Lack of Faith**

Matthew 13:58 states, **"And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."** God cannot work where there is unbelief. Unbelief shuts God out; it pushes Him away and refuses to let God's love and power work.

Without faith, one cannot receive Christ. Without faith, one cannot live victoriously. Without faith, one cannot please God. Without faith, one cannot pray effectively!

On the other hand, prayer coupled with faith moves God to share His power on our behalf; His riches; His blessings; His healing; His salvation.

The poet wrote:

"It is strange that we trust each other,
And only doubt our Lord.
We take the words of mortals,
And yet distrust His Word.
But oh, what light and glory
Would shine over all our days,
If we always would remember
God means just what He says."

10. **A Failure to Ask**

James 4:2 confirms, **“You do not have, because you do not ask God.”**

This could also be called the sin of prayerlessness. It might seem rather strange classifying “a failure to ask” under the heading of a hindrance, but it is a fact that many people have difficulty with their prayer life because they have no prayer life.

Someone has observed that, “God has all that we need, and there is nothing that He would rather do than impart to us His gifts. But we do not ask. We do not have time, we say. Or we forget to pray. The result is that we go about like dwarfs, stunted and deficient with scarcely enough strength to stand on our own feet, not to speak of fighting against sin and serving the Lord.”

Just as there are results of praying, there are results of not praying. The noted expert on prayer, E. M. Bounds, noted: “Failure to pray is failure along the whole line of life. It is failure of duty, service, and spiritual progress. God desires to help man by prayer. He, who does not pray, therefore, robs himself of God’s help and places God where He cannot help man.”

Luke 11:9 promises, **“And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you. . .”**

Yes, friends, if we are going to move our prayers forward, then we might just have to go to an altar and say, **“It’s me, it’s me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.”**

MY FINAL POINT IS, “WHAT IF...?”

What if you don’t get an answer or the answer you do get is not the one that you necessarily wanted? What then?

Do you remember the legend of King Midas? He prayed that all he touched would turn to gold, and he was just delighted as he began to touch things and increase his fortune. But then he touched his daughter, and he lost a treasure that gold could not buy as she became a statue of gold. Experience has taught me to be thankful that God does not grant every whim and wish of His people. In the light of this we should often thank God for unanswered prayers.

I like this quote by Mother Teresa: “More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones.”

NONETHELESS, AS STRANGE AS IT MIGHT SOUND, IF YOUR PRAYERS SEEMINGLY AREN’T BEING HEARD THEN PRAY.

Psalm 88 contains the prayer of a devout believer named Heman. He had been through a lot. In fact, at the time that he wrote this particular Psalm, he was at the bottom of the barrel looking up. He felt as if he could not take any more. His frustrations are compounded because God doesn’t seem to care. Heman says, **“My soul is full of trouble... I am like a man without strength... You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.... I call to you, O Lord, every day... I cry to you for help, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? ... You have taken my companions and friends from me; the darkness is my closest friend”**

Heman’s problem was unanswered prayer. Every day he prayed and everyday it seemed as if things only got worse. So what does the brother do? He prayed. Isn’t that odd? If you’re frustrated that God won’t answer your prayers, why pray to him about those unanswered prayers? Why not stop talking to God altogether if it doesn’t do any good? Well, strange as it seems to pray about unanswered prayer, it’s important to bring your struggle to God and to talk to him about it. Heman does exactly that.

James 1:5 states, **“If any of you needs wisdom to know what you should do, you should ask God, and he will give it to you. God is generous to everyone and doesn’t find fault with them.”**

NEXT, MAYBE GOD HAS ANSWERED AND YOU JUST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE THE ANSWER.

I like this well known prayer that was supposedly found on the body of a fatally wounded Confederate soldier during the Civil War:

I asked God for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for help that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.
Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered.
I among all men am most richly blessed.

THIRD, ASK YOURSELF, ARE YOU PRAYING OR ARE YOU BARTERING?

God is not running an auction, granting favors to the highest bidder. I once had a farmer ask me to pray with him for rain. He then proceeded to tell me that if he had a good year with his crops, he would buy me a brand new vehicle. Well, in case you are wondering, I never got the car.

I recently read a terrific book entitled *Control Freak*. Les Parrot wrote it. I recommend it highly. You can get it through any Christian book distributor. Anyway, I strongly believe that the brother was trying his best to control and manipulate God. Maybe I should use the word bribe.

Hey, friends, God is not hard up. He doesn't need us; we need Him. Instead of trying to twist God's arm in prayer, why not just use the humble approach and bow in his presence and submit your all to Him. Make your requests known and then quietly wait for His answer.

Psalm 116:1-2 adds, **"I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I SHALL CALL UPON HIM as long as I live."**

Why do we call? He answers. God loves to answer our prayers. Let's make sure that we are in a position where he can do just that.

The famous evangelist of yesteryear, George Mueller wrote: "I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk, when I lie down, and when I rise. And the answers are always coming. Tens of thousands of times have my prayers been answered. When once I am persuaded that a thing is right, I go on praying for it.

The great point is never to give up until the answer comes. The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it."

As C. S. Lewis said, "Every war, every famine or plague, almost every deathbed – is the monument to a petition that was not granted." However, I am convinced that if the prayer is right, if the timing is right, and if we are right, we are not going to have to worry all that much about the problem of unanswered prayer.

