

Hindrances to Prayer

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, July 18, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a relatively short amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

Last Sunday we explored the biblical underpinnings of the classic Christian adage: “God answers every prayer with yes, no or not yet.” Though I try to avoid cliché from this pulpit, I noted the wisdom of this statement. Those who seek to engage in the discipline of prayer must learn to properly navigate this three-fold response of the Lord...

KEY – Please feel free to listen to this sermon or download the accompanying notes at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

This morning I would like to delve deeper on the topic of prayer. Specifically, I would like to explore hindrances to effective prayer (i.e., those elements that keep our prayers from being positively heard and/or answered). If it is our desire to experience the “YES” of God in relation to our requests, we do well to consider the following...

1) UNREPENTANT SIN

Firstly, prayer can be hindered by the presence of unrepentant sin.

Isaiah 1:15 (NIV)

15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I hide my eyes from you;
even when you offer many prayers,
I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!

Isaiah 59:1–4, 7–9a

1 Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to
save, nor his ear too dull to hear.
2 But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear.
3 For your hands are stained with blood,
your fingers with guilt.
Your lips have spoken falsely,
and your tongue mutters wicked things.
4 No one calls for justice;
no one pleads a case with integrity.

They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies;
they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.
7 Their feet rush into sin;
they are swift to shed innocent blood.
They pursue evil schemes;
acts of violence mark their ways.
8 The way of peace they do not know;
there is no justice in their paths.
They have turned them into crooked roads;
no one who walks along them will know peace.
9 So justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us.

Psalms 66:18

18 If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened . . .

Proverbs 28:9

9 If anyone turns a deaf ear to [scriptural] instruction,
even their prayers are detestable (cf. Isa. 1:15 above).

QUOTE – “When we harbor sin in our hearts, no matter how public or hidden, the impact it has on our connection to our Creator cannot be denied.” If prayer is likened unto a telephone connection with the Lord, sin is needless, diminishing static in the line (i.e., making communication unnecessarily difficult).

KEY 1 – However, God delights in hearing and granting the requests of the righteous...

Proverbs 15:8

The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him [i.e., “is His delight”].

1 John 3:21–22

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

James 5:16b

16 . . . The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Q. Does this mean we have to be “perfect” for the Lord to hear and/or answer us?

A. By no means! Christians do fail at times—requiring divine mercy and pardon (1 John 1:8–9). However, the Christian life is to be characterized by ever-increasing degrees of faith and corresponding obedience to the Lord (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; James 2:14–26). Therefore, there is simply no room for tolerated, habitual, unchecked and flagrant sinfulness! Scripture draws a distinction between “sinning in life” and “living in sin” (1 John 3:6).

KEY 2 – Do not forget the teaching of Christ concerning sin in the life of the believer...

Matthew 5:29

29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

2) WRONG/SELF-CENTERED MOTIVES

Secondly and similarly, prayer can be hindered by wrong and/or self-centered motives.

James 4:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, that you may spend what you get on your **pleasures**.

Matthew 6:5–8

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

KEY 1 – The Christian life is founded upon humility, selflessness and self-sacrifice (i.e., per the example of Jesus Christ Himself). Therefore, it should be no surprise that prideful, selfish and self-centered prayers go unheard and unanswered by those who call upon the Father in Jesus' Name! Let every facet of our lives be marked by the spirit Christ demonstrated in His life, ministry and death...

Philippians 2:5b–8

5 . . . have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

KEY 2 – Be wary of selfishness, as it shuts your eyes, ears and heart to the genuine needs of those around you! Few things in life will choke out your prayer life and repel the "YES" of the Lord like a self-centeredness that allows for no concern but your own pursuits and pleasures...

Proverbs 21:13

13 Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered.

Thus said...

3) INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Thirdly, prayer can be hindered by fractured interpersonal relationships and the presence of conflict.

Matthew 22:36–40

36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ [Deut. 6:5] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [Lev. 19:18] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

NOTE 1 – Christianity places tremendous emphasis upon both our vertical and horizontal relationships. In fact, they are so intrinsically linked, I posit that you cannot know health in one and utter dysfunction in the other concurrently. This is why I am deeply suspicious of people who boast of their connection with God while being severed from and/or at odds with others!

Q. What if the reality of our relationship with God is evidenced in how we treat others?

John 13:35

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

1 John 4:20

20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

NOTE 2 – Thus, it should be no surprise that our ‘prayer life’ with the Lord is affected by how we treat others...

1 Peter 3:1–7 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Wives . . . submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. 4 Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. 5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, 6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, **so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

Matthew 5:23–24

23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

Mark 11:25

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

4) DOUBT

Fourthly, prayer can be hindered by the presence of doubt.

NOTE 1 – We must operate from the following biblical premise or foundational truth...

Hebrews 11:1, 6 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. . . . 6 And without faith it is **impossible** to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

NOTE 2 – Every aspect of Christian living is to be predicated upon faith (including prayer)...

Q. What happens when a spirit of doubt begins to infect our prayers?

James 1:2–8 (Emphasis Mine)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should **not expect to receive anything from the Lord**. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

NOTE 3 – The following account demonstrates the power of faith v. the peril of doubt...

Matthew 14:22–31

22 . . . Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29 “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

5) ASKING AMISS

Lastly, prayer can be hindered by asking amiss (i.e., offering requests beyond the will of the Lord).

1 John 5:14–15 (Emphasis Mine)

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything **according to his will**, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Q. How do we discern what is according to His will?

A1. We can discern His general will through the written Word of the Lord...

2 Timothy 3:16–17

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

A2. We can discern His specific/particular will through the leading of His Holy Spirit...

Acts 16:6–10

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

A3. We can learn to submit each-and-every prayer request unto His good purpose and plan...

Matthew 26:36–43

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

SUMMATIONS

Q. Do you want to pray effectively and unhindered?

Q. Do you want to experience the divine “YES” of God?

- 1)** Deal with Unconfessed and Unrepentant Sin
- 2)** Reject Wrong, Selfish and Self-Centered Motives
- 3)** Work to Restore Broken Relationships and Conflict
- 4)** Eliminate Doubt and Pursue the Lord in a Sp. of Faith
- 5)** Seek the Lord According to His Perfect Will & Purpose

CONCLUSION

KEY – Thank you for joining us today!

NOTE 1 – Those who wish to give online may do so at www.NewLifeBarre.org. Those who wish to give in person can utilize the offering boxes located throughout the church facility. Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the work of the Lord!

NOTE 2 – Sunday School is set to resume on August 1. We are coordinating a Family Fun Day for July 31 (Aug. 1 rain date) and a Church Picnic after service on the final Sunday of August. Church ministries like the C.Y.C. and the M.M. resume in September.

NOTE 3 – Those who wish to linger in this sanctuary may feel free to do so. This is to be a house of prayer, so those who feel the need to pray may do so as they please. Moreover, I would be more than happy to pray with those who have need(s).

Numbers 6:24–26

- 24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;
- 25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
- 26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.