

TEXT SERMONS

**WHY UNANSWERED PRAYERS?**

**“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” (Isaiah 59:1)**

Unanswered prayer should be the exception – not the rule in a believer’s life. However, unanswered prayer seems to be normal for the average Christian. Why is this? It is not because of God’s reluctance to answer but because of our refusal to pray scripturally. It is not because God does not want to answer our prayers. It is not because God is deaf. God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God. (Isaiah 59:1 and 65:2)

Why then are prayers not answered? I have heard Christians say, “I have gone to God repeatedly and prayed and nothing happened. Why?” There are reasons why some never get answers to prayer. Some of the biblical reasons are:

**(1) BECAUSE OF IMPATIENCE IN OUR APPROACH.**

A television commercial promises “Service on Demand” for its customers. We Americans have been programmed to expect instant responses to our wants. This attitude has been carried over into the area of prayer by untaught believers.

Repeatedly God’s Word instructs us to approach God in a submissive spirit and unhurried spirit:

- Psalm 27:14- “Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!”
- Psalm 37:7 - “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way....”
- Isaiah 40:31 - “But those who wait on 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.”
- Luke 18:1 “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.”

We need to realize that God does not always answer immediately. He does not always say “no” and neither does He always say “yes.” Many times God says “wait.” Sometimes God’s silence is the answer. So, we need to be patient in our praying.

**(2) BECAUSE OF INIQUITY IN OUR HEARTS.**

When Israel had seen the walls of Jericho fall, they moved on to possess the land of Canaan but they experienced a setback at Ai. The reason? One man, Achan, had sinned: “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan ..... took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.” (Joshua 7:1)

The leader, Joshua, fell upon his face before the Lord and prayed but God stopped him from praying! “So the LORD said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has

sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put *it* among their own stuff.” (Joshua 7:10-11)

Sin blocked the way forward for Israel and sin clogged up Joshua’s prayer line to God. To pray when there is sin in a life is wasted time, breath and energy! The only prayer God will hear that comes from a dirty heart is a prayer of confession. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18)

“Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” (Isa. 59:1-2)

Some Christians pray for years and never have an answer to their prayers. They conclude, therefore, that “prayer doesn’t work” as a man said to me. If your prayers are not getting through to God, something is interrupting the signal between the sender and the Receiver! That “something” is sin.

Illust. In a church prayer meeting people were kneeling around the altar praying. John always prayed the same prayer: “Lord, clean the cob-webs of sin out of my life!”; “O Lord, clean the cob-webs of sin out of my life!” A saintly man kneeling beside him had heard enough of that kind of praying and so interrupted John and prayed, “O God, don’t do it! Kill the spider in John’s life that is making the cob-webs!” We need more “spider killing” praying in our personal lives and in the church’s life as well!

### **(3) BECAUSE OF OUR INERTIA IN A CRISIS.**

The disciples were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He wrestled in soul-agonizing prayer and they slept!

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. Then He came the third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” (Mark 14:38-41)

“Inertia” means, “The tendency to remain at rest; the disinclination to act.” There are multitudes of churches and Christians individually, that are asleep in the midst of crises! They need to do as Paul said in Ephesians 5:14 - “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” Pray till the light breaks through!

*Did you pray till the answer came,  
Did you plead in the Savior’s Name?  
Have you prayed all night till the morning light,  
Did you pray till the answer came?*

### **(4) BECAUSE OF INSTABILITY OF OUR FAITH.**

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:6-8)

#### **(5) BECAUSE OF THE IMPURITY OF OUR MOTIVES.**

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (James 4:3 nasb) He continues: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8)

When we go to prayer, we need to be keenly aware of why we are praying and careful of that for which we are praying. Are we praying to satisfy some selfish desire or are we praying in the vein in which Jesus taught us to pray when He said, “Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'”(Matthew 6:9-10)

In 1540 Martin Luther’s friend Friedrich Myconius was very ill and was on, what many thought was his deathbed. Friedrich wrote Luther a farewell letter. Luther immediately sent a reply saying, “I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying because I seek only to glorify the name of God.”

Fredriech, who had already lost the ability to speak, did soon recover and lived an additional six more years but then did die - two months after Luther himself had died! Luther’s motive was “For this I am praying because I seek only to glorify the name of God.”

#### **(6) BECAUSE OF INSENSITIVITY TO OUR SPOUSES.**

This is one reason why many prayers are not answered and here is an area that is seldom addressed when talking about answerless praying.

Peter writes: “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (I Peter 3:7)

If husbands and wives do not get along and, in some cases do not communicate with each other, how do they expect to successfully communicate with God?

Jesus said, “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:19)

What a blessed privilege it is to have a spouse with whom one can pray, sharing the prayer burdens and concerns about family, church and community!

#### **(7) BECAUSE OF INSINCERITY IN OUR PRAYING.**

Many of the prayers that are thought or spoken are offered more out of habit than necessity.

While praying is a good habit to cultivate, just saying words to fulfill a sense of obligation or to be engaged in a ritual is not true praying. If our heart is not into our praying, the exercise is ineffective. If our prayers do not move us, they will not move God!

James states: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16) The word “fervent” in the Greek is “energeō” from “energēs” meaning “powerful, energetic.” It is not listless, indifferent, cold, lifeless praying with no vitality or power of the Spirit in it. It is not lukewarm, formal praying or praying in an ordinary, customary manner. But it is praying that is earnest, sincere, energetic and persevering.

James uses Elijah’s prayer as a model of sincere praying. He writes, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (James 5:17-18) He prayed energetically from the heart and he prayed repeatedly.

There is a New Testament model for praying seen in Epaphras. In Colossians 4:12 Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse that “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

The word translated “fervently” in some translations and “earnestly” in others is the Greek word “agōnizomai” and means, “to struggle, to fight, to strive.” From this Greek word we get the English word “agonize.” Elijah’s prayer model and Epaphras’ prayer model challenge us to be sincere, energetic and persevering in our praying.

Illust. In one of evangelist Billy Sunday’s meetings, a young ministerial student was asked to pray prior to the evangelist’s message. The young minister began his prayer in an affected, and pious ministerial tone of voice, displaying his oratorical ability. The more he prayed the more of a showman he became. Finally, the evangelist arose and, walking up behind the young man, he yanked on the fellow’s coat-tail and said, “Young Man, remember where God found you!” The evangelist returned to his seat and the young man, after pausing to regain his composure, began praying again and this time his prayer came from a heart filled to overflowing with gratitude for God’s mercy. Prayer that is all head and no heart does not move the heart of God.

### **ONCLUSION:**

Prayer is conversation with God. If we converse with God our Father, and there is no response, there is a reason or reasons. Which of these 7 hindrances or combination of them is keeping us from getting answers to our prayers?

One prayer that God will always answer is the prayer of confession. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Illust. As a young teen-ager, I remember hearing Dr. Robert T. Ketcham tell about his mother and an experience she had in their two-story farm home. He said that his mother had the

habit of placing items on the stair-steps that were to be taken, eventually, upstairs. Instead of going up the steep stairway every time she had something that belonged upstairs, she would lay whatever it was on the steps saying, "I'll take it up the next time I ascend the stairway."

He said he had a baby brother who was in a bassinette up on the second floor of the home and one day while the family was downstairs, the baby fell out of the bassinette. Everyone heard him hit the floor followed by his wailing cry. Dr. Ketcham said that his mother raced for the stairs and started up, but could not get up the stairs because of the clutter of things she had laid on the stairway. She had to clear the steps before she could ascend to take care of the baby while all the time the cries of the infant rang in her ears and she was imagining all sorts of injuries the baby had sustained. She finally got to the baby who was not seriously injured. He said that thereafter, his mother kept the stairway clear of any obstacle that would impede her climb upward.

Dr. Ketcham then added, "We need to keep the stairway of prayer open by keeping short accounts with God and confessing anything that would prohibit us making a rapid ascent to the throne God. If we are not getting through to God it is because there is some sin on the stairway to heaven!"

**"O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come."**

Isaiah 65:2

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