

Six Reasons Prayers Are Not Answered



David Wilkerson November 1, 1981

The devil's final strategy in deceiving believers is to make them doubt the faithfulness of God in answering prayer. Satan would have us believe God has shut His ears to our cry and left us to work things out for ourselves.

I believe the greatest tragedy in the church of Jesus Christ today is that so few now believe in the power and effectiveness of prayer. Without meaning to blaspheme, multitudes of God's people can now be heard complaining, "I pray, but I get no answers. I've prayed so long, so hard, without any results. All I want is to see a little evidence of God changing things. Things go on as usual - nothing happens. How long must I wait?" They no longer visit the secret closet because they are convinced that their petitions, born in prayer, are somewhere miscarried at the throne. Others are convinced that only Daniel, David, and Elijah types can get their prayers through to God.

In all honesty, many saints of God struggle with these thoughts - "If God's ear is open to my prayer, and I pray diligently, why is there such little evidence of His answering?" Is there one certain prayer you have been praying for such a long time, and as yet it has not been answered? Have even years gone by and still you wait, hoping, yet wondering?

Let us be careful not to charge God, as did Job, with being slothful; and unconcerned about our needs and petitions. Job complained, "I cry unto thee and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and though regardest me not" (Job 30:20).

His vision of God's faithfulness was clouded by his present difficulties, and he ended up accusing God of forgetting him. God rebuked him soundly for it.

It's time we Christians took an honest look at the reasons why our prayers are aborted. We can be guilty of charging God with neglect, when all along our own behavior is responsible. Let me name six, of many reasons why our prayers are not answered.

Reason One: Our Prayers Are Aborted When They Are Not According to God's Will.

We are not at liberty to pray at random for whatever our selfish minds conceive. We are not permitted to come into his presence and vent our silly notions and mindless ramblings. If God signed all our petitions without discretion, He would end up giving His glory away.

There is a law of prayer! It is a law meant to weed out beggarly, self-centered prayers - while, at the same time, making it possible for honest seekers to ask in confidence. In other words, we can pray for whatsoever we will, as long as it is his will.

"If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

The disciples were not praying according to God's will when they prayed with vindictiveness and revenge. They petitioned God thusly, "Shall we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus answered, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of" (Luke 9:54, 55).

Job, in his sorrow, begged God to take his life away. What if God had answered such a prayer? Such praying was contrary to the will of God. The Word warns, "Let not thy lip be hasty to utter a matter before the Lord."

Daniel prayed the right way. First, he went to the Scriptures and searched out the mind of God. Having gotten clear direction, and sure of God's will, he runs to God's throne with a mighty assurance. "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer" (Daniel 9:3).

We know too much about what we want and too little about what He wants.

Reason Two: Our Prayers Can Be Aborted When They Are Designed to Fulfill an Inner Lust, Dreams, or Illusions.

"Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lust" (James 4:3).

God will answer no prayer that would add to our honor or assist our temptations. In the first place, God answers no prayer of a person who harbors lust in his or her heart. All answers are dependent on upon the plucking out of our hearts the evil, the lust, and the besetting sins.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

The test of knowing whether or not our request is based on lust is very simple. How we handle delays and denials is the clue. Prayers founded on lust demand hasty answers. If the lusting heart does not get the thing desired, quickly, it whimpers and cries, it swoons and faints - or it breaks out in a spell of murmuring and complaining, finally accusing God of deafness.

Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not" (Isaiah 58:3).

The lustful heart cannot see God's glory in His denials and delays. Yet did God not get more glory by denying Christ's prayer to save His life, if possible, from death? Shudder to think of where we would be today had God not denied that request.

God, in His justice, is obligated to delay or deny our prayers until they are purged of all selfishness and lust.

Could it be there is one simple reason why most of our prayers are hindered? Could it be a result of our ongoing flirtation with a lust or besetting sin? Have we forgotten that only those with clean hands and pure hearts can set their feet on His holy hill? Only a total forsaking of a pet sin will throw open the gates of heaven and unclog the blessings.

Instead of yielding, we run from counselor to counselor - trying to find help to cope with despair, emptiness, and restlessness. Yet, it is all in vain because sin and lust have not yet been plucked out. Sin is the root of all our problems. Peace comes only when we surrender and forsake all lust and secret sin.

Reason Three: Our Prayers Can Be Denied When We Show No Diligence to Assist God in the Answer.

We go to God as if He were a kind of rich relative who will support us and give us all we beg for, while we lift not even a hand to help. We lift our hands to God in prayer, then put them in our pockets.

We expect our prayers to get God to working for us, while we sit idly by, thinking to ourselves, "He has all the power; I have none, so I will simply stand still and let him do the work."

It sounds like good theology, but it is not. God will have no idle beggars at His door. God won't even allow us to be charitable to those who on earth refuse to work.

"We command you that, if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

There is nothing unscriptural about adding sweat to our tears. Take, for example, the matter of praying for victory over a secret lust that lingers in the heart. Do you simply ask God to take it away miraculously, then sit by, hoping it will die on its own? No sin has ever been slain in the heart without the cooperation of man's own hand, as in the case of Joshua. All night long, he lay prostrated and mourning over Israel's defeat. God set him on his feet saying, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned. Up, sanctify the people..." (Joshua 7:10-13).

God has every right to rouse us from our knees and say, "Why sit around lazily, waiting for a miracle? Have I not commanded you to flee from the very appearance of evil? You are to do more than simply pray against your lust, but you are commanded also to run from it. You cannot rest until you have done all that is commanded."

We cannot go about all day long giving in to our lust and evil desires, then run into the secret closet at night to pray for a miracle of deliverance.

Secret sin causes us to lose ground with God in prayer, because unyielded sin is actually siding with the devil. One of God's names is "Revealer of Secrets" (Daniel 2:47). He must bring to light the hidden secrets of darkness, no matter how saintly the one who tries to hide it. The more pains one goes to in hiding sin, the surer God is to expose it. The coast is never clear to secret sin.

"Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 90:8).

God will protect his own honor above the reputation of those who sin in secret. God exposed David's sin in order to keep His own honor before ungodly men. And David, who was so jealous of his own good name and reputation, even today stands before our eyes exposed and still confessing - every time we read about him in the Scripture.

No - God will not allow us to drink from stolen waters, then attempt to drink at His holy fountain. Not only will our secret sin find us out, it will deny us God's best and bring on a flood of despair, doubt, and fear.

Don't blame God for not listening to your prayers if you're not listening to His call to obedience. You will end up blaspheming God and accusing Him of negligence, while all along you'll be the culprit.

Reason Four: Our Prayers Can Be Aborted By a Secret Grudge Lodged in the Heart Against Another.

Christ will not deal with anyone with a wrathful and unforgiving spirit. We are commanded to "lay aside all malice, envy, and evil speaking, and as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Peter 2:1, 2).

Christ will not even communicate with a wrangling, jangling, unforgiving person. God's law of prayer is clear on this matter, "Lift up pure hands without wrath or doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8). By not forgiving the sins committed against us, we make it impossible for God to forgive and bless us. He instructed us to pray, "Forgive us, as we forgive others."

Is there a grudge smoldering in your heart against another? Don't look upon it as something you have a right to indulge in. God takes such things very seriously. All the wranglings and disputing among Christian brothers and sisters must grieve His heart more than all the sins of the ungodly. No wonder our prayers are hindered - we have become so obsessed with our own hurt feelings and so concerned about our mistreatment from others.

There is also a malignant mistrust rising up in religious circles. Jealousies, uncharitableness, bitterness - and a spirit of revenge, all in God's name. We should not wonder if God shuts the very gates of heaven on us, until we learn to love and forgive. Yes, even those who have hurt us the most. Get this Jonah off your ship and the storm will settle.

Reason Five: Our Prayers Can Be Aborted by Not Expecting Much to Come of Them.

He who expects little from prayer will not have much power and authority in prayer. When we question the power of prayer, we lose it. The devil is trying to rob us of hope by making it appear that prayer is no longer effective.

How clever Satan is, as he tries to deceive us with lies and unnecessary fears. When Israel was brought the false news that Joseph had been killed, it sickened him to despair, even though it was a lie. Joseph was alive and prospering, while all this time his father grieved in sorrow - having believed the lie. So Satan is trying to deceive us today with lies.

Unbelieving fears rob the believer of joy and confidence in God. God does not hear all prayer - He hears only believing prayer. Prayer is the only weapon we have against all the fiery darkness of the enemy. That weapon must be used in great confidence, or else we have no other defense against Satan's lies. God's reputation is at stake.

Our lack of patience is proof enough we don't expect much from prayer. We leave the secret closet of prayer, ready to go on muddling our way through - and we would even be shocked if God did answer.

We think God has not heard us because we see no evidence of an answer. But of this you can be sure - the longer a prayer is delayed, the more perfect it will come forth at last. Also, the deeper the silence, the louder the answer.

Abraham prayed for a child, and God answered. Yet, how many years went by before he held that child in his arms? Every faithful prayer is heard the moment it is prayed, but God chooses to answer in His own way and in His own time. Meanwhile, God expects us to rejoice in the naked promises and feast on hope while we wait for the fulfillment. Also, he wraps His denials in the sweet package of love, to prevent us from falling into despair.

Reason Six: Our Prayers Are Aborted When We Ourselves Attempt to Prescribe How God Should Answer.

The only person we lay down terms to is the one we don't trust. Those we trust we leave to themselves to do what is right. It all boils down to a lack of trust.

The believing soul, after he has unburdened his heart in prayer to the Lord, resigns himself to the faithfulness, goodness, and wisdom of God. The true believer will leave the shaping of the answer to God's mercy. Whatever way God chooses to answer, the believer will welcome it.

David prayed diligently for his household, and then committed all to God's covenant - "Though my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me a covenant" (2 Samuel 23:5).

Those who prescribe to God how and when to answer actually limit the Holy one of Israel. Since God will not bring the answer in the front door, they are not aware of His coming in the back. They trust only in conclusions and not promises. But God will not be bound up to time, manner, or means of answering. He will forever do exceedingly, abundantly more than we ask or think of asking. He will answer with health, or grace that is better than health. He will send love, or something beyond it. He will deliver, or do something even greater.

He desires that we simply leave our requests lodged in His powerful arms, cast all our care upon Him, and go forth with peace and serenity to wait His relief. How tragic to have so great a God and so little faith in Him.

No more of "Is He able?" Away with such blasphemy! How that must grate on the ears of our almighty God. "Can He pardon? Can He heal? Can He work a work for me?" Away with such unbelief! Come, rather, to him "as unto a faithful Creator." When Hannah prayed through in faith, she "rose from her knees to eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

A Few Encouragements and Warnings Concerning Prayer.

- When You Are Down, and Satan Whispers In Your Ear That God Has Forgotten You, Stop His Mouth With This:

"Devil - it is not God who has forgotten, but it is me. I've forgotten all His past blessings, or else I could not now be questioning his faithfulness."

You see, faith should have a good memory. Our rash and hasty words are results of our forgetting His past benefits. With David, we should pray:

"This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High, I will remember the works of the Lord, surely I will remember Thy wonders of old." (Psalm 77:10,11).

- Reject That Secret Whisper In The Soul That Says, "The Answer Will Be So Long Delayed, I Will Not Enjoy It Should It Come."

You can be guilty of spiritual mutiny by not trusting God to answer at the most opportune time. You can be sure that when the answer comes, it will come in a way and in a time it will be most enjoyed. If what you prayed for is not worth the waiting, it is not worth the asking.

- Stop Fretting About Receiving, and Learn to Rely.

God never groans or complains about the power of His enemies, but rather the impatience of His own people. How unbelief does break His heart, with so many wondering whether to love Him or leave Him.

God wants us to rely on His love. Love is the principle He constantly acts from, and from this He never swerves. When He frowns with His brow, rebukes with His lips, or strikes with His hand, even in all this, His heart burns with love and all His thoughts toward us are of peace and goodness.

All hypocrisy lies in distrust, and the soul that cannot rely on God cannot long be true to God. When once we begin to question His faithfulness, we begin to live by our own wits and care for ourselves. Like the backslidden children of Israel, we are saying, "Up, make us gods...We know not what has become of Moses..." (Exodus 32:1).

You are no company to God unless you rely on Him.

- When You Are Down, You Are Allowed To Groan, But Not To Grumble.

How can love for God be preserved in the heart that grumbles? The Word calls it 'contending with God'. What a foolish person to dare find fault with God - He will challenge such a person to lay his hand upon his mouth or else be consumed with bitterness.

The Holy Spirit within us groans, with that unutterable language of heaven that prays according to the perfect will of God. But the fleshly grumble that proceeds out of the heart of the disenchanted believer is poison. Grumbling kept an entire nation out of the Promised Land, and it is today keeping multitudes from the blessings of the Lord. Groan if you must, but God forbid that you should grumble.

- Those Who Ask in Faith Go Forth Praising in Hope.

"His words are pure as silver tried seven times in a furnace" (Psalm 12:6).

God will not permit a liar or covenant-breaker to enter His presence or set foot on His holy hill. How then can we conceive that such a holy God can ever break His word to us? God has made himself, a name on earth - a name of 'Everlasting Faithfulness'. The more we believe that, the less troubled our souls will be. In the same proportion that there is faith in the heart, there is peace also.

"In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

God's promises are like the ice on a frozen lake - which He says will hold us. The believer ventures out on it with boldness; the unbeliever with fear, lest it should break under him and leave him floundering.

- Never, Never Question Because You Don't Hear From God Presently.

If God is delaying, it simply means your request is gaining interest in God's bank of blessings. So assured were the saints of God that He was faithful to His promises, they rejoiced before even seeing any conclusions. They went on merrily, as if they had already received. God wants us to pay in praises before we receive the promises.

The Holy Ghost assists us in prayer - and is He not welcome at the throne? Will the Father deny the Spirit? Never! That groaning in your soul is no less than God Himself - and God will not deny Himself.

Conclusion

Saints of God - we alone are the losers if we do not get back to watching and praying. We become cold, sensuous, and playful when we avoid the secret closet of prayer. What a sad awakening there will be for those who carelessly harbor secret grudges against the Lord for not answering their prayers, when all along they have been slothful. We have not been effectual and fervent. We have not shut ourselves in with Him. We have not put aside our besetting sins. We have asked mostly to consume it on our own lust. We have been materialistic, lazy, unbelieving, doubtful - and then we wonder why our prayers are not answered.

When Christ returns, He will not find faith on the earth, unless we get back into the secret closet, shut in with Christ

and His Word.

Time is short; the day of the Lord is at hand. Should we not then be watching and praying?

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