

## Lesson Seven: Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayers?

The questions keep coming. I trust you are finding this study helpful.

We have talked about:

- How can we be sure we are saved?
- How can we overcome temptation?
- How can I get off the worry wheel?
- How can I find forgiveness?
- Is Jesus really the only way to God?
- Why Do Christians have so many problems?

Christianity 101 is made up of several disciplines that are essential for any Christian to grow. At the top of the list are: 1) Bible Intake [through reading meditation, hearing it preached and taught etc.] 2) Prayer [talking to God]. There are other habits of a disciple but until we hear God's speaking through His Word and He hears us responding in prayer we don't have much a relationship at all and there will certainly be very little growth.

Okay then Pastor Phil that is great. If God wants me to pray so much why doesn't he ever want to answer me when I do pray?

So why doesn't God answer my prayers? You know we are not the first people to ask that question. In fact the Bible records many great people who asked the same thing.

- *Hab 1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear?*
- *La 3:8 Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.*
- *Job 31:35 Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, That my Prosecutor had written a book!*
- *Ps 22:2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.*

Even in the New Testament when asking Jesus (praying to Jesus- praying is asking or petitioning) He did not always give the person what they asked for at the time.

- Matt 10.20-23 - James and John and their mother asked to sit by the Lord in his kingdom. He said you don't know what you are asking.
- Lk 10-38-42 – Martha asked Jesus to make Mary help her with the chores. He wouldn't do it saying right now she is doing what she needed to do.
- Luke 8.39 – Jesus refused the request of a new convert who had been delivered from demon possession to go with him. He was sent home to tell everyone what happened to Him.

Obviously, one of the reasons that God doesn't answer our prayers is, like the people in the Bible, we don't know what is best for us at the moment.

God may say **no**, not **now** or even **never** to the requests we make in prayer. But that doesn't mean we should stop praying. *Lk 18:1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart...*

So if it is not for the reason that God simply knows our request is not good for us then what other reason might prevent our prayers from being answered?

**Unconfessed Sin** hinders having our prayers answered.

*Ps 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*

1. **Everyone** sins. The person that says he doesn't sin is multiplying sin because he is lying about it (1 John 1.8,10).
2. If a person refuses to admit and confess sin it is not the *fact* of their sin but the **love** of their sin that is the issue.
3. John Bunyan said, "Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to **cease** from prayer." This sin problem in our prayer life is not limited to Ps 66.18
  - *Pr 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*
  - *Pr 28:9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*
  - *Is 59:1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

- *1 Pe 3:12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."*

Walking with God requires that we constantly deal with our sin; don't let it pile up and don't let it become a hindrance to our fellowship with God. *1 Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

**Unbelieving minds** hinders having our prayers answered.

*Jas 1:6 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.*

*Mk 11:23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*

God is a heart inspector; he knows if we believe or not. Without faith it is impossible to please God; he rewards those who believe he exists and that he answers prayer (paraphrase of Heb 11.6). *1 Jn 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, 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 the petitions that we have asked of Him.* We ask with Confidence but always according to the Lord's will. Also - James 4.15

When we pray it should never be: 'Lord, Thy will be **changed**,' rather 'Lord, They will be **done**.'

**Unrighteous motives** hinder having our prayers answered.

*James 4.3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

What is the real motive of our prayer? Even Pastors have to deal with this.

Here is a really good prayer strategy. *Ps 37.4 Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.* When we are God focused and desirous of pleasing Him first and foremost that love and devotion to Him He will control the desires of my heart. I will desire what God wants me to have. We are supposed to delight in the giver more than the gift. Sometime we ask *amiss*. We have the wrong motives in mind.

### **Unresolved conflict** hinders having our prayers answered.

Now we get down to it. We said unconfessed sin will hinder our prayers. Here is a very specific unconfessed sin – unresolved conflict. We can't pray or worship honestly if we are harboring anger or bitterness against someone or if someone is hurt because we have offended them.

*Mk 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.* If you have something against someone else and are reminded of it at the time of prayer – go and forgive him – tell him/her and then you can pray.

*Mt 5:23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* The if someone has something against you, it is you duty to go and reconcile with your brother/sister. Someone might say what about the other person? It seems like I am the only one doing all the going and making it right. That is what we do when the Holy Spirit convicts us. What the other person does with it is their affair.

No one is right with God who is wrong with His other children.

### **Uncompassionate Hearts** hinder having our prayers answered.

Here is one we don't think about much. God has a hard time showering blessings on self-interested people who never notice the plight of the poor or hurting.

*Pr 21:13 Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.*

That was a short proverb on the subject but let's actually turn to 1 John 3.17-22.

- Most of us have more than we need.
- If we can do something for a needy brother and we shut down our compassion it calls our love for God into account.
- Love is not demonstrated by words only.
- When we actually show love in deed and in truth it does something for us as well as the person we serve; it assures our hearts and gives us confidence that God is pleased and we can now more boldly approach his throne of grace with our own requests.

I think the major point in 1 John 3 is that we be compassionate toward the people we know and meet. The Good Samaritan helped someone on his own personal journey. Hard-heartedness will **shut** heaven's doors of blessing.

**Unhealthy Marriages** hinder having our prayers answered.

Let me look at a very enlightening verse with you.

*1 Pe 3:7 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.*

The chapter deals with family relationships and Peter has already spoken to wives about their responsibilities to respect and build up their husbands. But now he speaks to the husbands saying: get to know your wife [understand her]; honor her place as your mate and completer; recognize her weak points with a view of protecting her; see her as God does – as co-heir with you of the grace of God [inheritance]. You can't fight with your mate and then run off to a prayer meeting.

**Unoffered Prayers** will never be answered.

Above all of the previous reasons for unanswered prayers this is the biggest reason that people do not enjoy close fellowship with God and receive nothing from God beyond the common grace that all men receive. There is **atheism** in prayerlessness.

The basic elements of the Christian faith are Bible Intake and prayer. Few take time to read the Bible; far less take time to pray. In 1 Chronicles chapter 4 Moses gave us a list of the descendants of Judah. One right after another is listed with only that fact of their existence being shown. Then we come to one man who stood out – Jabez. Why did he stand out above the rest? Let the passage tell the story...

1 Ch 4:9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." 10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested.

Why did God instruct Moses to pull aside and tell us that Jabez was nobler than the rest? He prayed.

- Prayer **honors** God.
- Prayerlessness **dishonors** God. It is that simple.

*Jas 4:2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

How can I begin a prayer life? You can do it by beginning to do it.

Bill Hybels gives us an idea of how God may answer. I think it is very biblical.

- If the request is wrong, God says: **No**
- IF the timing is wrong, God says: **Slow**
- If you are wrong, God says: **Grow**
- If the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says: **Go!**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not To Pray* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 74