

Prayer (Part 4)

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[0:00] I have, of course, given you notes where the blank is filled in up to where we're going to be tonight.

! So, pay attention. You can't just say, I've got them now, I can go home.! Yeah. And I believe we're ready for number four. Is that correct?

Yes. Number four, under, I think, hindrances or obstacles to answered prayer. We've looked at a number. Well, we've looked at three already.

Obstacles or hindrances to answered prayer. And here's number four. Selfish and wrong motives. Did you have some money?

I won. And you won. I've come in the last week. The thing I've noticed about Tom, he likes to anticipate my points in my sermon. He's trying to guess my alliterations.

[1:16] He's probably right most of the time because they're pretty logical. Anyway, selfish and wrong motives. I'm trying to think what else would it be. Now, Jonathan, what did you guess?

Oh, for bad or evil. Well, any of those would work, of course. James 4.1. Where do wars and fights come from among you?

Do they not come from your desires for pleasure, that war in your members you lust and do not have? You murder and covet and cannot obtain? I hope you're not doing that, by the way.

You fight and war, yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss or with wrong motives, that you may spend it on your pleasure.

You ask yourself, you ought to ask yourself this question. What are the motives behind your prayers?

[2:14] That's not a question you can answer at this very moment, but it's something you can reflect upon next time you pray. Or maybe even reflect upon some of the things you've been praying for.

And think about what are my motives here. Are they selfish to some degree? Now, I would maintain that because we're just fallen creatures, that we can't ever really completely, totally distance ourselves, separate ourselves from wrong motives or self-centeredness.

We try, we want to, and it's just hardly ever happens. It's not in a pure sense. There's always some mixture, it seems. But when you think about your prayers, you know, have you ever tried to persuade God in your prayers by carefully constructing your sentences?

I mean, the same way you probably did when you were a teenager and you really wanted something bad or wanted to go somewhere really bad and, you know, you need permission from mom and dad.

And so you are asking, and I've noticed this from our own son, Jonathan. Good thing he's not in here. But I'm not going to give you a real life example anyway. Because I'm sure that would get back to him.

[3:39] But, you know, it's just almost comical, isn't it? Sometimes parents, how your kids will broach an issue, a question, and they'll try to word it, construct it just right so that you know, you know what I'm talking about.

Ever done that with God? Well, probably not. I'm looking at you. He knows our hearts. You know, there is, yeah, well, and that's exactly right.

But we don't always think of that. You know, that, you know, obviously you're not going to be able to deceive God. We can't deceive him. We can't, can't hornswoggle God.

I'm not sure where that expression comes from. You can do a study on that. Or have you ever tried to present an argument for why you need a certain thing from God?

You know, just kind of, you know, kind of building a case. And that's all kind of part of the same thing. You're constructing it just right. And sometimes if you're, you know, when this begins to happen, if you will stop yourself, you'll realize that you're really kind of talking with yourself, you know, in this thing.

[4:47] And how silly of us to think that God, I just wonder if God's his son. Yeah, okay. All right.

You foolish kid. But anyway, answers to prayer are hindered by wrong motives and selfish motives. Number five, lack of domestic harmony. Lack of domestic harmony. First Peter 3, 7.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them. Of course, it's a reference to wives, your wives. Husbands, dwell with your wives with understanding. Or dwell with them in an understanding way.

Giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel. Ladies, don't throw anything at me. The weaker vessel.

[5:50] I didn't say that. God did. And as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. And the implication, of course, I mean, there are all kinds of different implications here.

Not only what's explicitly being taught in this passage, but implied. So a number of scenarios come into play here. And the basic principle is that when a husband and wife are at odds with one another, there's disharmony in their relationship.

Whatever the reason, no matter how great the divide might be, or maybe better put, how small the divide might be, it will always hinder our prayers.

And so what's the answer to that? It's to make the relationship right. And the principle is taught in other places related to other personal, other relationships.

Where someone has a lot against us, or we have sinned against another, or whatever. We need to go make that right and then bring our offering to God. So the same applies there. We've already dealt with that passage in Matthew.

[7:01] But domestic harmony is a hindrance, or disharmony, rather, is a hindrance. Number six, lack of faith. Lack of faith.

James 1.6, but let him ask in faith, with not doubting. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. Let, and I like the way James writes this, it's so pointed.

For let not that man, or woman, suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all of his ways. And so we ask, but we don't really believe God will answer, or even can answer, or wants to answer.

Whatever it is. We don't believe in a God who is able to do abundantly above all that we should ever ask or think. So a lack of faith is a major hindrance.

Number seven, unforgiving spirit. In fact, this is one I was just quoting a moment ago. I thought we'd already covered it. Number seven, unforgiving spirit. I put down there Matthew 18.21, and I didn't give you the entire passage because it's rather lengthy.

[8:19] So, if you'd like to turn to it, Matthew 18, verse 21. And as soon as I start reading it, you'll recognize this.

Peter said to him, came to him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me? And I forgive him. Up to seven times.

Which, by the way, was kind of the legal standard of the day. And Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times.

And, by the way, that number is the highest number in the Greek language. Seventy times seven. And it means infinitely. Just whenever.

You know, all the time. No limit. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents, which was quite a bit.

[9:23] But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. The servant, therefore, fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all.

And the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, forgave him the debt. Forgave him the debt that he could never possibly pay. Okay, and that's key to understanding the parable.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe.

So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay you all. Sound very familiar. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt.

Not sure how he was able to pay the debt while he was in prison. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done.

[10:23] Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I have pity on you?

And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. I'm not sure how he was able to do that either, but this is a parable, okay? You don't have to understand every part of it.

So, my Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses. See the correlation between an unforgiving spirit and the forgiveness of God in prayer, which is a major element of our prayer life.

And really, it affects the whole of the prayer life. Because when there is unforgiving sin, sin that God has not let you loose of, the implication, of course, for us is not our salvation, but it is our fellowship. And so, someone owes us and, you know, or has done something to us and we're not forgiving, then our prayers are hindered.

[11:40] God will not forgive us. God will not forgive us. And the truth applies the other way as well. And I did give you that passage, Matthew 5, 23. So, the issue is reversed here.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you. So, you're the offender. In the first case, the brother is the offender and you're to forgive.

In this case, you're the offender. And therefore, remember that your brother has something against you. You leave the gift there before the altar and go your way.

First, you'll be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Now, this whole gift to the altar, the reference to that in the passage, is if it can only be a reference to prayer and communion with God.

That is the altar. Not talking about, you know, coming to church and you've got your tithe, you know. And don't give that tithe. Go first. That's not the issue here, though there may be some implications to that.

[12:49] The issue is prayer. Communion with God. And if you come to that time that you have set aside for prayer and communion, and at that very moment you remember that a brother or sister in Christ has something against you because you've offended or you've sinned, they have something against you, then leave your offering, that's your prayer, and go to the brother or the sister in Christ and seek to make your relationship right.

That's the biblical principle. And then you come back and offer your prayer. Now, that doesn't mean, well, you know, I guess I'll just have to go several months without praying.

No, you go do that right then, all right? Or as soon as you can. And let's say, you know, you think of all kinds of scenarios. Say that person lives, you know, in another state.

Well, we have this wonderful thing called a telephone. And, you know, we still do use telephones. At least some people do in our society or if you use that.

I'm not sure yet if God would allow an email and this kind of thing. I mean, maybe, you know, maybe you need to call person to person, have a voice, and if you can go to the person, you need to go to the person.

[14:06] And, you know, regardless of whether the infractions on that side or the infractions on your side, the principle still holds the same.

You should, you know, sorry ladies, man up and take the initiative to take care of the issue, take care of this broken relationship.

And so you go to the brother or sister to seek to make the relationship right. Now, you don't go to set them straight. You know, I remember that.

You go to seek forgiveness or go to forgive, whichever the case may be. Number eight, failure to ask according to God's will. Now, that, I guess, should go without saying.

1 John 5, 14, now this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked for him.

[15 : 14] That's a pretty clear, almost repetition. I mean, it's kind of saying the same thing this way and then that way and then this way again. But it's a clear principle.

Let's pray according to God's will. Number nine, a critical spirit and wrong attitudes. We'll use the word wrong again.

Let's change that. We'll change that to evil attitudes or bad attitudes. No, it doesn't matter. Matthew 7, 1 to 5.

Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye?

Do not consider the plank in your own eye. Or how can you say to your brother, let me remove the speck from your eye. And look, a plank is in your own eye. Hypocrite.

[16 : 11] First, remove the plank from your own eye. And then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. It's a tremendous lesson on judging.

You know, the Bible never says that there is no place for judgment. We are to judge. We're to judge the right way.

And this is the wrong way where we are judging others for the very same things that we are doing ourselves. Or, if not exactly the same, we have the sin already in our own eye.

We're not willing to apply the same judgment to ourselves that we're applying to someone else. And so we put ourselves in a place where we have no right to be, no authority, and judge others.

And we're critical and we have wrong attitudes. And it's a hindrance to sin. Number 10, satanic opposition. Which is a very real thing.

[17 : 19] What was that? Satanic, satanic opposition. Ephesians 6.12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness and heavenly places.

We, though we may not always know it, probably seldom would perceive it, but there is satanic opposition.

And really, I guess it could be said, it has been said, and I believe it's right, that the battleground against Satan is in prayer.

It is in earth. It's where we do battle with Satan. It's in prayer. So there's opposition. And it can be an obstacle prayer, but not one that cannot be defeated, of course.

All right, so these are ten obstacles to prayer. And then we'll conclude. Hold on. Way early here. I decided I was going to finish this up and not start on fasting, so we'll get done a little early here.

[18 : 31] Three broad categories of hindrances to prayer. This kind of broadens the whole thing, and all of these others kind of fit under these in some way or another.

But it's good maybe to look at it in this sense. Three broad categories. Personal sin. No denying that. Kind of like somebody's at the door.

Is there a knock on the door? Personal sin. How do you deal with that? Confession.

Confession. Repentance. Deal with sin. We've kind of touched on this at a number of junctures in the study.

With mighty, I think, it would be safe to say that this is the number one hindrance to prayer, to our communion with God, to our fellowship with God.

[19 : 32] It's always sin. Sin, by the way, that's undealt with. We never, ever be free of all sin. Personally, I don't think that there's a...

It's possible for you to even go a moment without sin. And just as soon as you think that you can, then you've sinned. Okay. We're not talking about being absolutely free of indwelling sin, but free of...

Excuse me. Not free of it, but to the point where you've not allowed an act of sin or acts of sin to go undealt with in the scriptural way, through confession in repentance.

Confession, of course, agreeing with God. We've covered that. Disagreeing with God that it is sin.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, identifies the sin, and we agree that it is.

And we don't have to think long and hard about it, usually. We know right away. And we confess it for what it is. It's sin. It's sin. Sin against God. It's sin that's something that separates us, keeps us

from fellowship with God.

[20:48] It's ugly. It is serious. And if we allow sin to persist, whether it's some habitual sin, some pattern of sin that's begun to develop, if we allow it to persist and not deal with it scripturally, then we're in big trouble with God.

We really are. Not risking our salvation, because I don't believe that's possible. For a true believer. But we are damaging our communion with Him.

We're offending Him. And that then continues, goes out from us to affect all other relationships. And we need to deal with it right away.

But that is the number one hindrance to prayer under these three broad categories. Personal sin. So we deal with it. Take it to the cross.

Number two, satanic opposition is another broad category. And it's a very real thing. And then third, divine purpose.

[22:04] You might be thinking, maybe not, because we have covered this a little bit. I discussed this, I think, last time or maybe a couple of weeks ago. You might be thinking, you know, this doesn't seem to fit in here.

But divine purpose is a hindrance to answered prayer. Not to praying. Let's make sure that's clear. But hindrance to getting answers to prayer.

God sometimes delays answers to our prayers in order to work His purposes in our lives and beyond us. And also to display His glory.

Have you ever thought of that? You've asked for a certain thing and you certainly believe that it's in line with who God is and His word and His will.

And how could you ever argue that this thing is not needed or couldn't be a part of God's will. And yet God has not answered it. And maybe it's been for a long time. Maybe it's the prayer for someone to be saved or to be healed.

[23:09] Or, you know, you're having a struggle, a battle in your personal life. And you're asking God to give you victory. And you're just not getting the victory.

We could think of a number of things. You've experienced that, surely. Where there's just seemingly is no answer from God. And no blessing from God as a result of our prayers.

And God just sometimes says no for now. And He delays answer, delays what we need. And He does so to work some purpose in our life.

That purpose might be to strengthen our character. Strengthen our faith. Test our faith. To see what sort it is.

And not because God doesn't know what sort it is. So that we'll know. And it's almost as if God says, see, there. Here's something that is weak in your life.

[24:13] And so, He does it for His purpose. And we could not exhaust the list of possible purposes for God's delay of prayer.

And not only that, but also to display His glory. He waits. And then He answers. Because when He answers, it is a time that will bring Him, and a way that will bring Him the most glory.

And, you know, a good example is Lazarus. Did I give that to you? John 11, 1-15. Now a certain man was sick.

And by the way, I don't have all of those verses there. But just the person in parts. Now a certain man was sick. Lazarus of Bethany. And you know this story. Therefore the sisters.

That's Mary and Martha. Said to Jesus, say, Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick. And Jesus did love Lazarus. Dearly.

[25:15] I mean, Jesus had some special friends. We could even say He had some favorites. In His humanity. And Lazarus and Mary and Martha were very, very, very dear to Him.

He spent a lot of time with them in their home. And so forth. And they, of course, also ministered to Him in many different ways. And so, it's true. Lord, the one you love.

Especially love is sick. And when Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death. But what? For the glory of God. That the Son of God may be glorified through it.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus. So, when He heard that He was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. It's just baffling to Him.

You're lucky, but. Yeah. I'm not sure how things would go for a pastor if he waited two days to visit someone in the hospital who's on their deathbed.

[26:21] He'd be looking for a new church, probably. But, I'm not. If you'd be raising from the dead, He wouldn't be. Yeah. Well, now. It's just not probably going to happen. I could call up Benny Henn.

He might not be able to help me out. I don't know. Anyway, He stayed there two more days. And then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead. Of course, I'm skipping some things.

But you know the story. And he's dead. All right. And I'm glad. That's what Jesus said. That's what He said.

I'm glad. Well, that's not the whole sentence, of course. I'm glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.

And Jesus is setting all of this up. I mean, it's not just happening and Jesus is deciding what He's going to do, how He's going to do. He's not thinking, well, good.

[27:18] This might be a good opportunity to do such a thing. He set all this up. He knew exactly what was going to happen, knew what He was going to do, and why. And so He said, I'm glad that He's now dead, and we weren't there, that you may believe.

And not just His disciples, many others that would be there. So by the time Jesus got there, of course, it had been four days, which made it past the kind of the legal time period for the Jews, where they could not argue that He just had fainted.

He was really dead. That was kind of the litmus test for that. And so it was a bona fide miracle, a resurrection, and He delayed answering Mary and Martha's prayer and allowing them to go those four days in utter agony.

First agony over their sick brother, and then agony over his death, and thinking that, you know, what's going on here?

And I think there are a lot of God's people, probably all of us at some point or another, maybe not a scenario that's quite as severe as this, or maybe just like this.

[28:35] And we're wondering what? God, do you not care about me? God is waiting. Now, He doesn't raise from the dead.

You know, we've had dead loved ones, and we prayed that they would get well, and they didn't, and they died, and God didn't raise them from the dead.

We weren't expecting Him to. And yet God still worked His glory and worked His purposes, and those purposes continue to be worked in our lives even after that period of time where we thought God wasn't listening or God didn't care.

So those are three broad categories, and the first one is easy to see, easy to understand. The second one is something that maybe you've not considered.

And the third one is certainly one that we don't always consider. God is just always up to something. He's always working.

[29:41] And so we need to trust Him even when the answers to our prayers are delayed. Thank you.