

# Hindrances to Prayer

by Chad Thompson

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*Chad Thompson's sermon discusses the various hindrances to prayer, emphasizing the importance of obedience and confession for effective communication with God.*

**Duration:** 1:20:32

**Scripture:** Proverbs 21:13, Luke 6:37-38, Philippians 2:4, 1 John 1:8

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Luke 6:37-38, which teaches about not judging or condemning others, and the importance of forgiveness. The preacher emphasizes that if we are stingy with others, we cannot expect God to be generous with us in prayer. He warns against spiritual laziness and urges Christians to stay vigilant and not be weighed down by worldly cares. The preacher also highlights the need for prayer and references the disciples' failure to stay awake and pray with Jesus before his betrayal.

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## Transcript

Again, if we could just open in prayer. Scott, would you pray? I'm afraid that you and me don't so often remember at once. I'm afraid that you would just be teaching us these things as we can, or in a way.

So, I just pray that they are helpful in understanding. I started looking at what I was going to share for this week and realized you probably didn't get two messages in one. Because I had planned on giving two messages on kind of emphases in the Lord Jesus' teaching that we hadn't really looked at yet.

And the two emphases were, one, perseverance in prayer. And two, the different assurances the Lord gives us that the Father loves us and will hear our prayers. And what I realized is that even though kind of in my own mind I had these two different things to share, the way that Jesus teaches about perseverance and helps us is by assuring us that God is our Father, He loves us, and He will hear our prayers.

Even if it looks like He doesn't hear them. Which is exactly what I shared last week. So, there really wasn't the message to give that I had planned.

And so, we're just going to move right on and speak this morning about hindrances to prayer. And, you know, other weeks that I talked, I had given portions of the message were kind of set apart as kind of practical helps. And there won't be that today.

Mainly because I feel like the whole message is kind of a, it's a real practical helps kind of message. When you think of hindrances to prayer, it all applies. It's all needful.

It's all helpful to know. And so, that's kind of the nature of the message. Today, again, I just want to talk about this subject of hindrances to prayer.

Now, we've been considering prayer or praying for quite a while. And as we've gone, I've tried to kind of give us a kind of a practical theology of prayer. And I think that because of that, most of us would feel, I hope rightly so, that we've got a pretty good handle on prayer.

And I really hope that's the case for all of us, that we do have a good handle on it. But today, I just want to begin by asking everybody a question. And it's not a question I want you to answer out loud.

But I do want you to answer it just before the Lord in your own heart, very honestly. And it may be a question you haven't really thought to ask yourself. But the idea of a message on hindrances to prayer assumes this question.

It assumes that we're asking this question and that we want help and answers in this area. And the question is this, and I'll ask it several different ways. Are your prayers working? Are your prayers working? I'm not asking, you know, if we understand theologically that prayer, you know, that God listens to prayer and He can answer prayer.

I'm asking you to ask yourself, are your prayers working? The prayers that you pray to God, does He answer them or does He not, you know? Sit down and ask yourself, what are the things I've been praying for the last month, year? Has God answered those things or hasn't He? Are you aware of the specific ways that God has been working in the lives and hearts of others and even yourself as a result of your specific prayers? What are the results? Do you routinely see God answering your prayer or are you surprised when He actually answers something that you've asked? Hindrances to prayer. Now, I'm not assuming a negative answer for any of you on that. I think very likely we can, most of us can say yes on very many occasions and very many instances that the Lord answers our prayers.

But I can tell you that without taking anything at all away from the need for perseverance in prayer, I can tell you from my own personal walk with the Lord and from just reading the Scriptures that sometimes, if an answer does not come to something that we've asked God for in prayer, if we will just ask the Lord to do some heart searching, many times we'll find that we ourselves are the reason that the Lord hasn't answered the prayer, that we've hindered the answer. And so I want to set some of these hindrances before us today so that we can be aware of them because they're important. And my point in doing that is kind of twofold.

First of all, I want your prayers to be answered and you want your prayers to be answered. So we want to know what things might hinder them to get those things out of the way so that prayers would be answered. So that's one.

But the second reason, and this one's almost bigger, is that I want to keep you from losing faith in God. That's maybe the big reason. And it's a big one.

Particularly, I want you to not lose faith in His promises to answer the prayers of His people. I don't want you to lose faith in Him. Very often people, I mean you've talked to people like this, I'm sure you have, they're kind of disillusioned with the biblical view of prayer.

They're disillusioned with what God says about His willingness and His ability to answer prayer. And they're disillusioned because a lot of times they forget that they're dealing with a sovereign and righteous creator. And that God is that way.

He's not some genie or some force to be manipulated and controlled. He's a sovereign and a righteous God and He has standards. And we can forget that.

I'll say it this way. There are some prayers that God will not ever answer. And there are some people that God will not hear.

And it may sound shocking, but even as Christians we can fall into at times either one of those camps. We can get into the situation where we're praying prayers that God will not answer. Or we can find ourselves that because of sin, because of uncleanness, God is not hearing us.

And we're not one of the people that He'll hear at that time. In spite of being a Christian. And so that's a real danger.

And so even as Christians, again, we can find ourselves in either of those groups if we do not watch our lives closely and carefully. And there's one other thing I want to say about these hindrances before we begin to look at them and begin to open the Scripture and begin to look at the text. And the idea is this.

That the idea of hindrances to prayer assumes a certain theology of prayer. If I were to say, well, let's talk about hindrances to prayer, that assumes something. What does it assume? It assumes that the normal routine in Christian experience and in Christian prayer is that God gives us the things that we ask for.

In other words, we would expect that God gives us the answer. And when we don't, we think, well, we ask the question, well, what's hindering it? So it assumes that normally God answers. It assumes that the normal life of prayer is one of contact with God.

We actually get through. It's one that we receive from him, not only the things that we ask for, but even his assurances that we've been heard. It assumes those things.

Otherwise, we would not be talking about, we wouldn't have a message dealing with hindrances to prayer or this idea that things that aren't usually there that are in the way, that can kind of creep in and keep your prayers from being heard, muffle your prayers to God. Instead, we'd be talking about something else. Something like this.

Those rare people who have actually prayed something that God answered. Or those rare, even rarer instances where God actually has answered a prayer. And what we'd be doing is trying to figure out what their secret is and how did they do it? How is it possible that they did such a thing as that? So we'd be talking about secrets to effectual prayer rather than hindrances to prayer.

And these hindrances, of course, will keep our prayers from being heard and answered by God as they should be. So it assumes a certain theology of prayer. So what I want to say is that the idea of hindrances to prayer, I also want to say this, that that's not something unknown to the Bible.

The Bible talks to us about this and teaches us about hindrances to prayer. It's not something that men who are self-deceived and foolishly optimistic have kind of invented in order to maintain their faith in a higher power, in a benevolent power that somehow is for us. And you'll hear that kind of talk from atheists

and things like that.

Oh, you just kind of persuaded yourself that there's a good power and you like that because he looks after us and things. But that's not at all what we're talking about. Just the opposite.

God has, in Scripture, revealed something very clear about Himself. And He's done it clearly in His Word that there are certain conditions for prayer that must be met. And also He's told us certain things that will hinder our prayers.

And so when I talk to you about things that can hinder your prayers, the reason that I do it is the same reason that God talks about it in Scripture. And the reason God does it is this. Not to put a blindfold on you and to keep you foolish and ignorant.

It's not to put your head in a bunch of sand and convince us in that way that God really does care for us after all, despite all the evidence and all the facts. The reason is so that He would dispel the darkness. The reason is so that the light of His truth would shine upon us in that area, that we might all live before Him more freely, more joyfully in the Christian life.

He says that we're going to ask Him of things and He'll give us what we ask and our joy is going to be full. So that's why I would teach on this thing of hindrances to prayer. And what we'll see is that almost all hindrances to prayer come from an ignorance in us, either of what the Bible says about God's very serious desire that we as Christians live holy lives, or we'll see that very often hindrances to prayer have to do with an unwillingness in us to commit fully and wholly to Him.

Those are very often the hindrances to prayer. You can kind of categorize them that way. Either an ignorance about what the Bible says about holiness or an unwillingness to commit to a holy life.

And so what I've done today is to sort of categorize some of the various scriptures that deal with this issue. Not under those categories, but just I've kind of grouped them a little bit. And I won't have you turn to many of them, but maybe, I don't know, a half dozen or so that we'll turn to.

We'll look at, I think, at least one scripture on every category. And so I've just listed out some hindrances that I think are helpful because they're kind of big ones. And so we'll just begin to go through them.

The first one I want to look at is the hindrance of disobedience. Hindrances to prayer. Disobedience is the first one.

If you turn with me to John chapter 15. John chapter 15 and verse 7. That's a very familiar passage to us, but a remarkable one nonetheless. John 15 and verse 7. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

Just listen to those words. If you abide in me. And we can give the same condition again.

And if my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. Notice the condition. If you ask whatever you wish, it's going to be done for you, provided you meet these conditions.

It's remarkable. So what are the conditions? The first one, abiding in Christ. Well, what is it? What does that mean? Well, I suppose a great many people have tried to give different definitions of it.

But if I had to boil or describe it in different ways. But if I had to boil it down, I don't think we can get around the fact that it at least includes faith and trust in Christ. It includes a living and a loving relationship with Him.

Abiding in Him. It includes what we talked about a few weeks ago when we considered what Paul meant when he said to pray continually. To just live 24-7 in the light of His presence and just to live there before Him.

That's what it means, abiding in Christ. Now, what is this thing of Christ's words abiding in us if my words abide in you? What does that mean? Well, for this, I just can't believe that it means anything other than that His words, namely His commands and His teachings, that they find a welcome home in our heart. That they become the foundation of our lives.

We build our lives upon His words. That we are, in a habit of life, we are habitually obedient to all the things that He spoke. His words abide in us.

They find a home in our lives. That His words are a source of continual meditation for us. Of pondering through all our days.

David said in Psalm 119.11, I have stored up Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You. I've stored it up in my heart. It abides there.

That's where it is. Jeremiah 15.16 says it this way, Listen to this, Your words were found, and I ate them. And Your words became to me a joy and a delight of my heart.

For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. I ate Your words and they became for me a joy and a delight. That sounds like words abiding in somebody.

Paul says in Colossians 3.16, He commands us, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Let it dwell in you richly. That's something of this abiding.

In John's 2nd epistle, he says, That the truth abides in us and will be with us forever. It abides in us. And so the words of Christ are to abide in the believer.

And there is a real sense in which receiving from God, whatever we ask in prayer, is dependent upon our meeting this condition. You cannot pray the promise and not consider the condition for it. You cannot say, I want to claim that promise, and then not be willing to meet the condition.

And so if we're going to take the words of Christ seriously, and if we want to pray, then we're going to have to live in such a way that the words of Christ abide in us. That they flourish in our lives. And that means meditation.

It means memorization. It means faith and trust. And if that faith counts for anything, it's going to have to mean obedience.

It's going to have to mean walking it out. Proverbs 28 and verse 9 says, If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. We're talking about hindrances to prayer, and I'm saying disobedience is a hindrance to prayer.

Proverbs 28 verse 9 says, If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. That sounds like a pretty big hindrance. So don't turn away your ear from hearing the law.

Don't disregard the law. Don't disregard the words of Christ. Don't disregard it.

Zechariah 7 and verse 13 says it this way, As I called and they would not hear. So here's the Lord and He says, I'm calling to them. And in context, basically He's calling them to repentance.

I'm calling to them and they did not hear. So also they called and I would not hear. Says the Lord.

Hindrances to prayer. Disobedience. The next one is unconfessed sin.

The next hindrance to prayer. Unconfessed sin. And this one is certainly well known.

Psalms 66 and verse 18. Let's turn there. Psalm 66 and verse 18.

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. I'll say it this way.

If I intend to commit some sin, not yet committed, but I'm intending, I've got plans to commit it. Or if I've not confessed some sin that's upon my conscience and I'm holding on to it. Or if my brother has something against me and I know it's not been made right.

Or if I'm not willing to abandon all known sin and to be holy before God, then God would not have listened. That's what David says. God wouldn't have listened.

If I'm still trying to cover up my sin and hide it from God and pretend that it doesn't exist. Now listen to this. David knew all about this.

He knew it from experience. Take it from this man who'd spent months trying to keep up righteous appearance as the king of Israel. Take it from him.

When he'd committed those sins against God with Bathsheba and Uriah. And he's telling us here. Actually, he's speaking here at this passage to God.

He's crying out to God. But he's saying it in our hearing. And he's saying this.

On another occasion, basically, God, I know that if I'd clung to sin, if I had been purposing in my heart to keep sin concealed and to persist in my wickedness, that You would not hear me. I know it. I know it because I've experienced that.

I know that. I would have been shut out and left all alone if that is what had happened. And he goes on, verse 19, but truly God has listened.

He has attended to the voice of my prayer. He's saying if I had done those things, God wouldn't have listened. But he hadn't done those things, so God was listening.

But he knows from experience what it is to go through this. And I'd say it this way. Listen, I've seen this same thing.

I've seen it in my own life at times. Now we're talking again about hindrances to prayer. Haven't you ever been praying to God and you feel like it's of no use at all because He's not even hearing your prayer? Have you ever gone to God in prayer and had your conscience pricked by the Holy Spirit about some sin? And what do you do about it? Well, I'm telling you, if you don't get it right right then, God doesn't hear your prayers.

You can't just let this thing slide. You've got to deal with it. And this is true because God's a good Father.

I mean, I can't give Jonas all the rewards and the loving affection that I would normally if he's in disobedience. I don't help him at all. I can't go on with him as if nothing's wrong.

And if I do, then I'm teaching him that sin's not serious, that it's not important for him to obey me or to be kind to others or whatever the particular sin might have been. I don't help him at all if I just let things go. And beloved, there are some here in this room who I know have known this, have known it in the past.

I know it. And when the sin's repented of, what can you say but that it's good to be walking in obedience with the Lord? It's good. How good it is to be living under an open heaven once again.

And you know this from experience. You've felt it. To know that you once again have true and open fellowship with God in prayer again.

What a blessing it is. But it's a fact. Unconfessed sin will keep you from God in prayer.

It's not that you stop being His child, but that as a loving Father, He withdraws His listening and His sympathizing ear. He just pulls it away. And God seems far off.

Because He is far off. Because you've not dealt with sin. And until you come clean with Him and purpose to walk in obedience once again, He doesn't return that listening ear.

Albert Barnes said it this way, If there is still the love of evil in his heart, if he has some cherished purpose of iniquity which he is not willing to abandon, if there is any one sin, however small or unimportant it may seem to be, which he is not willing to forsake, he cannot hope that God will hear his prayer. He may be assured that He will not. All prayer to be acceptable to God must be connected with the purpose to forsake all sin.

All prayer to be acceptable to God must be connected with the purpose to forsake all sin. You can't have God and sin both. He won't tolerate a pet sin.

I'll say it this way, and listen carefully to this, no sin is too small to hinder prayer. No sin is too small to hinder prayer. Don't fall into that trap and think, well, this thing is not really a big deal.

You know, it's insignificant. I know it wasn't right, but it's really just no big deal. That's not the way it is.

No sin is too small to hinder prayer. I don't mean that only perfect people will have their prayers answered. If that was the case, the Lord Jesus Christ could have just told us, I'm not going to bother to teach you anything about prayer.

You'll never have a prayer answered in this life. That's not what He did. He taught us about prayer.

Our prayers can be answered. But we cannot expect God to hear our prayers if we have known sin that we have not repented of before Him. Again, very often we're tempted to say, well, such and such a thing is, you know, it really wasn't a good thing that we did, but it's really no big deal.

And so we never come before God in tearful repentance and get it right. And that thing, I say, hinders our prayers. It's there.

God's not forgotten it. Now, He's not going to send us to hell for it, but it matters to Him. And as a father, He's going to make sure we deal with it because He wants us to be holy and righteous as He is holy.

That's His desire. What I'm saying is that those little things are exactly the kind of things that hinder prayer. That's happened so much.

You can't just let those things go. Those are the kinds of things that kill prayer and keep your words weak and unable to penetrate the ceiling above your closet. That's why.

Little, little things like that. Little sins. May we learn not to excuse our sin, beloved.

Not to excuse it. Not to treat it as a small thing, because God doesn't. It's a big, big thing.

We've not learned this practice of excusing our little sins from God. That's not where we've learned it. And it needs to be repented of and forsaken.

Now, the other thing, under this heading of unconfessed sin, it's a little bit different, but it's very similar, is this thing of a guilty conscience will hinder your prayers. A guilty conscience. Now, you only have a guilty conscience because you've got unconfessed sin.

But I just want to treat it a little bit. Proverbs 28 and verse 13 says, Proverbs 28 and verse 13 says, Are we concealing our sins before a holy God? Are we trying to keep the secret sins, a secret from Him who knows the every desire and intention of our heart? Are we trying to keep it secret even from Him? Oh, may we be a people who are not defiled by an evil conscience. It is a provision in Christ.

Think of this. It's one of the things He purchased and He died on the cross to give us. It's a remarkable provision to be able to walk up before God, to come before Him with a conscience absolutely free of sin and defilement and shame.

He's purchased that for us. That's a privilege that we have in Christ. Free from all sin.

Free from defilement. But you cannot know that. You cannot experience it and enjoy it unless you have come clean with God about your sin.

You can't experience that. It's a far off. It's something you read about.

It's a dead letter on a page unless you come totally clean with God about sin. You're not meant to be far off. We can't know this unless we've purposed in our hearts to make things right with God and make things right with others.

Now, God has said it. And this wise man here in Proverbs is relating it to us. It's simply a fact, beloved.

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper. But he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Confession before the Lord.

So there's no way we're going to obtain the mercy we seek in prayer. I mean, what do you pray about when you pray to God? Don't you very often ask for mercy? Ask for grace? You ask for help? You ask the Lord for yourself and others? There's no way you're going to obtain it. He says, He who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

So confess them. Forsake them. It's got to be let go.

There's no way we're going to obtain the mercy we seek in prayer if at the same time we're unwilling to confess our sin before our God. Turn with me to 1 John 3. Again, still dealing with this very same thing of a guilty conscience. 1 John 3, verses 21 and 22.

Remarkable words. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him.

If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive. If our hearts do not condemn us.

How can we come before God if our own hearts condemn us? Honestly, how can we come before God? Before the most holy and the righteous God of heaven and pretend that we have no sin when our own hearts tell us otherwise. If we cannot deal honestly with God about our sins, then God will not accept us. That's just what He says.

And you can say all you want to that as Christians, you're standing before God is not determined by your having confessed every sin in your life. You can say that all you want to, but I'll tell you what. That's not what the Bible says.

I mean, it's true in a sense. If you're a Christian, you aren't going to lose your standing before God every time you commit a sin until you confess it. You're not in danger of going to hell until you confess your sin.

But I'll tell you something else. If our heart is nagging us about some wrong thing that we've done, if God's Spirit is convicting us of sin, but if in the face of that, in spite of what is happening there, in spite of our own conviction, in spite of our own heart condemning us, if that's all happening and in the very face of that, we continue on and we talk with God as if there's no sin, as if there's nothing wrong, then we're only deceiving ourselves to think that God accepts us anyway. We're simply deceiving ourselves.

If that becomes a pattern in your life so that you could say that it's how you live, then you aren't a Christian at all. That's how dangerous this thing is. I mean, isn't that what John says in 1 John 1.8? Let's just turn a page over.

1 John 1.8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If that's the way you live, the truth isn't in you. Christians keep short records with God and we come before Him and we confess our sin and we get things right.

And many times, if you persist in this and you haven't been doing it, the reason God's not hearing your prayers is for this very reason. Part of what it is to be a Christian is to come quickly before the Lord and restore the relationship that's been damaged by sin. That's part of what it is.

If you have an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ and if you have any kind of love for Him in your heart at all, if you get any enjoyment and satisfaction at all out of your relationship with Him, then you simply...

Don't you? You've just got to get things right before Him. You've got to come to Him. I mean, it's that way in other relationships.

You just can't stand for things to be bad between you. You've got to come and make it right. And this is the way it is for the Christian.

Don't think that you can get by telling God that you don't have anything to confess. You can't. If your own heart condemns you, you cannot.

God will separate from you. He'll pull back His blessing of joy and blessing of gladness. David knew it.

And David said in Psalm 32, listen to this, for when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. He's groaning. He's praying all day long.

He's wasting away. He says, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. That's all there together.

It's like he's wasting away and then he says, I can't stand it anymore. I'm just going to confess. And God just forgave him.

And there was access again. And he could come before the Lord. So restoration is only as far away as our confession and as our honesty before God.

If you feel far off, just confess before Him. Come before Him and deal honestly with your sin. 1 John 1.9, the very next verse says what? If we confess our sins, He's faithful.

He's just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So just come. Beloved, if your prayers are not effectual, if you cannot say that God's answering your prayers, this may well be the one reason.

And I'll just remind you of the passage again in 1 John 3.21-22. We just had read it. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God in whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him. So unconfessed sin and a guilty conscience hinder prayers.

We've got to come clean with God. Now another thing. Poor relationships.

Poor relationships will hinder your prayers with God. And I've kind of got three headings here. The first one is selfishness, then unforgiveness, and then the last one is strife in the home.

Selfishness, unforgiveness, and strife in the home. Poor relationships will hinder your prayers. Now I mentioned this thing about selfishness when we looked at the subject of intercession and kind of what I said, and not really all I want to say about it again is just this.

That we cannot expect God to care for us and to move on our behalf if we ourselves are not moved by the needs of others. If you're the kind of person that you can look upon people who need help and you're not moved and you're just selfish, you cannot expect that God will look upon you and be moved by your needs

and the fact that you need help. Selfishness is one of the biggest reasons prayers go unanswered.

In Proverbs 21 and verse 13 we read this. And you can turn there if you want, but I have another one that I particularly want us to turn to. But Proverbs 21, 13 we read this.

Whoever, whoever, and you're one of the whoever's. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call and not be answered. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call and not be answered.

Selfishness. A lack of love will hinder our prayers. And in Philippians 2, 4 we read this.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. I mean, you're commanded to be looking out for other people's interests. To be concerned with them and not to be selfish.

Okay, well turn with me to Luke chapter 6. Luke chapter 6, verses 37 and 38. A remarkable, remarkable passage. Luke 6, 37 and 38.

Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Now look at verse 38. Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be forgiven.

You put into your lap, for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Now I'll say it this way. In light of verse 38, you cannot possibly think, if you take His words just for what they say, that God will measure out generously to you in prayer if you're stingy with everyone else when they ask for things from you.

If you're stingy, you cannot think that God's going to pour out an abundant measure with you. He just says, for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. So you can't be a selfish person who hoards things to yourself and wants everything for yourself and you're not willing to give to others and to be generous and to measure out to others and still think God's going to measure out and give to you.

Selfishness will hinder your prayers. It will hinder God answering your prayers. And one of the reasons for this, of course, again, is that God wants us to be generous and compassionate people just like He is.

And because He wants that for us, He seeks to make us that way. He seeks to make us generous people and compassionate people and tender people. And He does it a couple different ways.

The first way that He does it is He simply allows us to experience it. He lavishes His grace and His kindness upon us. He pours out His blessings on us and His favor.

As Christians, we can all say that we bask in the light of His grace, that we swim in an ocean of the love of God. That's a fact for us as Christians. But in some cases, the Lord will shut off the flow of blessings.

He will shut it off. Why? In order to get us to realize that we've not been generous like He's been with us. We realize, what is wrong? Why aren't we receiving these things from the Lord? And we read it in this text.

It says, well, with the measure that you use, it's going to be given to you. And so we repent. And we come to Him seeking what went wrong.

And He puts His finger on our own self-centeredness and our own selfishness. And He says, repent. Be like your father.

And He's got us in discipline. And so that happens. Well, then also, unforgiveness.

In this same passage that we're looking at, also speaks to us of this thing of unforgiveness. It says, forgive and you will be forgiven. In verse 37.

Was there ever a more searching text than that? Forgive and you will be forgiven. Do you realize? Let me just put this in strong language. I don't think any stronger than what's there, but just say it this way.

Do you realize that God tells us here that a refusal to forgive someone else for something they have done amounts to forfeiting your claim to His forgiveness? The refusal to forgive someone else for that little petty thing that's no big deal. For the big thing that most people in the world would say you should never forgive someone for that. Whatever it is, your refusal to forgive them amounts to you forfeiting your claim to God's forgiveness.

That's what it amounts to. And we could ask it this way. Are you really so willing to hold on to that grudge? So unwilling that that person should experience your pardon? That you would forfeit God's pardon of your soul and go to hell for eternity? Just so that you would withhold forgiveness from them? Are you that bitter? You may remember two passages in Matthew that deal with this.

The first one is Matthew 6.15 where Jesus tells us that if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you yours. The second one is in Matthew 18. At the end of the parable of the unforgiving servant, that unforgiving servant, who was he? Because he was unforgiving, he was delivered over, it says, to the torturers until all his debt was paid.

He was forgiven much. He was unforgiving. He was delivered over to the torturers until all his debt was paid.

And Jesus says this, So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you who do not forgive your brother from your heart. Strong, strong words. And they're only strong because of what it costs God to forgive us.

Because forgiveness is a big deal. And you don't withhold it if you've received it. You can mark it down.

If you're refusing to forgive someone and you know it, your prayers about other things are merely a waste of your breath. You must forgive. And you must forgive from your heart.

He says. It's a necessity. And this applies not just to grave offenses, but to the little and the petty things.

And I mention little and petty things. Why? Not because they're hard to forgive, but here's why. Because what happens is we think, well, it's no big deal.

It bothers us in our heart and we hold it against them, but we just convince ourselves, well, it's just a little thing. I don't need to bring it up. Well, those little things mount up.

They mount up. And they become a mountain. That's what happens.

All those little molehills you've got become a mountain. That's the problem. And so carelessly, we let these things mount up until we're bitter, until we're cold toward this person.

And there's a great lack of love. And again, our loving Heavenly Father will not let us slide in this. He will pull back not only His presence, but also the felt and the enjoyed blessing of His presence.

And He does so so that we'll stop and realize that we've not got things right and we need to get things right. So that we realize that we're not just holding a grudge against our brother, but that we are in fact living contrary to Christ. He insists we repent.

Unforgiveness will hinder prayer. Also, strife in the home will hinder prayer. Let's just turn there.

1 Peter 3.7 The very famous text on this. Strife in the home will hinder prayer. 1 Peter 3.7 says, Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Say it this way, a man who refuses to live with his wife in this way forfeits his right to regular answers in prayer. He forfeits the right. How can you live harshly and coldly with your wife and then expect God to be tender and compassionate with you as His bride? How can you do that? How can you not treat your wife in a way that accounts for her weaker frame as the weaker vessel and require more of her than is right for her to bear, or to treat her as though she should be able to do anything you can do, and then turn her right around and ask God to remember that your frame is but dust and you therefore need Him to give you special consideration and treatment? You can't.

It's a disconnect. You've got to be able to live with your wife as the weaker vessel and treat her as such and understand her as such if you want God to do that with you. It's a test, men, if you're married.

It's a test of Christlikeness. And God makes it an issue of whether He'll answer your prayer or not, whether you're being made like Him in this way. How can a Christian wife refuse to submit to the headship of her husband and to receive of His care and of His wisdom, and then turn right around and ask Christ to give her of His care and of His wisdom? All the while, He's commanded her to love and to submit to her imperfect husband and to seek to follow insofar as is godly His lead and His example.

It's an impossibility. God won't answer those prayers. How can we as parents seek the gracious and tender hand of our Heavenly Father if we ourselves exasperate and provoke our children with either a strictness or a severity or even an absentee kind of carelessness or a real lack of diligence? How can we seek anything from Him? Well, may God help us to ask ourselves these kinds of questions.

Whether it be with our spouses or with our children or other family members, strife in the home will hinder prayer. Strife in the home will hinder prayer. Now another thing I want to talk about.

Pride hinders prayer. Pride hinders prayer. Luke chapter 18.

Maybe not a text you think of when you think of pride. Probably a text you think of when you think of legalism. But it's not about legalism.

Luke chapter 18, verse 9 and following. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Who is He speaking this parable to? Those who

trust in themselves that they are righteous.

Not those who trust in themselves that they have made themselves righteous. And we'll see that in a minute. But those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.

And because of that, they hold others in contempt. They think of others as lower than themselves. That's what He means.

So you remember this story. Two men who went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee and the tax collector.

Just listen to this. Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. Or since he's praying by himself, you could say, or even like that tax collector standing over there on the other side. I'm over here by myself, okay? That's him.

Now this guy's not a legalist. You think, what? He thanked God for the difference between them. I thank You, Father, that I'm not like other people.

It's amazing. He's not a legalist. He's just full of pride and contempt because of his pride.

He trusted in himself that he was righteous. He was so proud of the difference that existed between himself and the other man. So proud, in fact, that he lost sight of his own situation before God.

And he's there praying. He's not asking for mercy. He's trusting that he's righteous.

He doesn't need to deal with anything. He's not like those other people. I'm so thankful, Lord, that I'm not like they are.

Thank You that I'm not. He knew who made the difference, but his pride blinded him to his own need. He was caught in pride and because of it, his prayer was not heard.

His pride blinded him to his real need. And he went without what he needed. Without what he needed most because of his pride.

God did not hear him or accept his prayer of thanks. Now think of that. He came offering God a prayer of thanks.

Thanks, God. He just wanted to say thank you. But God didn't even hear his prayer.

This other sinner, it says, what's it say? But the tax collector, verse 13, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. The other guy thought he was righteous.

And he went to thank God for it. And his pride killed him. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Pride will kill prayer. Isaiah 57, verse 15 says it this way, For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, and whose name is holy, what's he say? I dwell in the high and holy place and also

with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit. Why does he dwell there? To revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

James 4, verse 6 says it this way, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. He opposes proud people. He doesn't answer their prayers.

They don't walk away justified. He opposes them. He sets his face against them to work actively against them.

He opposes them and what they do. Mark it down. If you want the grace of God in your life, you're going to have to slay your pride, you're going to have to humble yourself before Him, and He will exalt you.

Pride will hinder prayer. Luke chapter 21. A new heading here.

Luke chapter 21, verses 34 to 36. I want to talk about spiritual laziness or dissipation. Spiritual laziness or just dissipation.

Luke chapter 21, verses 34 through 36. But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man. Spiritual laziness or dissipation.

We'll get to this in a second. We'll get to how this text deals with this very clearly in just a moment. I'll say it this way.

Lack of time to pray. Spiritual laziness. You just don't set time apart for prayer.

If we wait until we have leisure time to give to prayer, you'll never pray. If you're a serious Christian and you wait to pray until you have leisure time, you will not pray. And the reason is there's simply too much to be done in the Christian life to ever stop working.

That's why. There's too much to be done to ever stop working. There's always something next that needs to be done.

Something more that can be done if you have time. There's simply too much to be done in the Christian life to ever stop working. But to think that we would put off prayer until our table is kind of all cleared off and there's no more responsibilities and obligation.

It's putting the cart before the horse. It's putting the cart before the horse. Prayer is the vital channel by which we seek the help and the blessing of God.

By which we seek His direction and His guidance. By which we seek the strength and the attitude of Christ Jesus without whom we can do nothing. We've got to pray first if we're going to do anything in obedience.

If we're going to do anything and have the fragrance of Christ upon us, we've got to have spent time in prayer. Work will keep us away. Dissipation.

Giving to too many things. That's one possible definition. I don't think it's what it means here, but it's a possible definition.

Also, of the many things that we're commanded to do as part of our Christian duty, if you just think of prayer even just as a duty, prayer is part of it. It's one of the things we're commanded to do. Very often it's spiritual laziness that keeps our prayer superficial or even non-existent.

It's a lot easier. You can be spiritually lazy and be about a lot of work. You can be doing a lot of things for the kingdom and still be spiritually lazy.

That can happen. It's labor. I mean, prayer is called labor and work for a reason.

You can't be lazy spiritually and be given to prayer. We're tempted to think the opposite. We're tempted to think... And if you've read the story of Praying Hyde, people accuse him again that he's just lazy.

He just prays all day. You get in a room and pray with him and you wore out in ten minutes and that guy's praying all day. It's remarkable.

Well, prayer's work. Spiritual laziness many times keeps us from prayer. We're to be vigilant, not sleepy, not weak.

And again, notice in this passage that dissipation is set in stark contrast to staying awake and praying. He says in verse 34, But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. So that's one option.

Your hearts... Be careful. Watch. Watch.

Yourselves. Keep watch on yourself. What? Lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.

That can happen. That's one possibility. One avenue that you as a Christian can go down that avenue if you don't watch yourself.

He says, And what will happen if that happens is the day will come upon you suddenly like a trap because it's going to come upon all who dwell in the face of the whole earth. Now, but you stay awake at all times. Watch.

So how do you watch? You stay awake and you're praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man. So there's kind of two avenues. There's one, dissipation.

The other is prayer. Watchful prayer. And so that's what I mean by dissipation will keep you from praying because there's kind of two avenues you can go down.

One is dissipation. One is prayer. Well, what is this thing of dissipation? Well, dissipation is what? It's overindulgence.

And overindulgence of this world will keep you from praying like you should. Overindulgence in the world. It will distract you from kingdom purposes.

It will remove from your heart the hopeful anticipation of Christ's return. It will stop you from praying about His coming. Overindulgence in the world.

I'll say it another way. The constant impulse to satisfy your every craving. The constant impulse to satisfy your desires of your flesh.

That impulse will, if you allow it to reign, it will tear from you right out of your heart, right out of your soul, the desire for Christ to return. What was I just reading about? We eagerly are awaiting this return Are we hopeful? Are we expectant? It will tear the hope of eternal life from your heart and from your soul. And I mentioned heart and soul, or I mentioned that kind of thing because overindulgence in the world, that kind of thing, it's quite content to leave the hope of the resurrection in your head.

It's quite content to do that. But it's going to rip it right out of your heart. You're not going to feel it.

You're not going to long for it. You're not going to work for it. Just be this doctrine, this thing, this truth that you know.

You'll find that the cares of this world have choked out the Word of God and that the desires of the flesh are winning the war against your soul. Dissipation is a great hindrance to prayer. Now I say many times, men and women are unable to pray because they do not have strong desires for God, even Christians.

They have begun to wane because of dissipation. If real prayer is a lifting up of your soul to God in hot, white-hot, zealous desires for holiness and for godliness and for kingdom advancement in this world, if that's what prayer is, then whatever takes away from those desires is going to hinder your prayers. Everything that doesn't help you run is going to hinder your prayers.

If it doesn't stir you with godly affections, it's going to hinder your prayer life. It's going to make it difficult. You're going to crow in the closet and find that you just can't work up in your heart to pray to God.

You can't get through it. Why? Because there's so little hunger there. There's so little desire.

There's no fire in the bones. That's what's wrong. You're cold.

And the reason for coldness is because of dissipation. Overindulgence in the world. Overindulgence with the world.

If that's you, you need not remain in that state. You're not stuck there. You're not stuck with pretended and half-hearted prayers.

Confess your sin before the Lord. Seek His help. Seek His forgiveness.

And then cast those sins away from you that easily entangle you. Cast them away. And run the race.

Run. Just pursue Him. Don't concern yourself with civilian affairs.

You're a soldier of Christ. Purpose it. Now, another thing that hinders prayer is wrong motives.

Wrong motives hinders prayer. And there are so many of these. What are the possible wrong motives you could have in prayer? We could talk about a million, I'm sure.

I hope we don't have a million. But they're there. And I just want to remind you of a couple.

And we're not going to necessarily turn to any passage of Scripture on this. Matthew 6. We can pray to God to be seen by others. We can pray to God to be praised by men.

To be esteemed by them. And when we do that, I'd say we're forgetting all the while that prayer is a matter between us and God alone. It's not something you do for your glory.

You don't pray for your glory. You pray for His glory. And so praying with wrong motives will hinder prayer.

Selfishness. Again, we already kind of mentioned selfishness. Well, here that same selfishness comes in another way.

What do I mean? You remember what James says in James 4? You ask and do not receive. Why? Now, he said you do not have because you don't ask. But then he says, and you ask and do not receive.

Why? Remember? You ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You're just out for yourself. That's why you don't get anything you ask for.

That's amazing. I mean, it's a remarkable thing that he says. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

And that one covers a lot of things, doesn't it? Let me ask it this way. Why do you want that promotion at work? Why do you want that job? Why are you after that? Why do you want that land? Or why do you want that car? Or whatever else you seek. Why are you hungering for a wider ministry? Why should God bless you and answer your request so you can spend it on yourself? That's not what he's about.

That's not what he came to do. That's not abundant life. Are you planning on serving Him with what He gives you in answer to your request? I'll tell you this, you want to be sure of it.

You want to be sure that you're coming to Him that way. Usually, if you're not praying in this way and with this motive, God will just be silent. But every once in a while, and this is why you want to be real sure, this is why you're praying, God will give you the answer anyway.

Don't be like those Hebrew children. You remember them? There they are in the wilderness crying out to God for food to eat, crying out for something that had nothing at all to do with God, but only for their own selfish cravings. And what did God do? Well, He answered their persistent prayer.

They persevered in this prayer. They persisted. Yeah, and He answered.

But what? He sent leanness to their soul. They got what they wanted, but they got leanness and soul. Motives are a big deal.

Usually, God will keep silent. But sometimes, He'll just grant it anyway. May we be careful.

May God help us to ask only for those things that we want for His sake, not for ours. Psalm 37 and verse 4 says what? Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. That's why motives are a big deal.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and He'll give you the desires of your heart. You want answered prayer? Just begin to delight yourself more and more in the Lord, and you'll find prayers are answered. He gives you the desires of your heart.

It wouldn't hurt us any if ever we're unsure about something we want to ask for for God. To ask God to make it clear to us what our motives are. And if they're impure, that He would make them pure.

That He'd make them right. And it isn't easy to know whether your motives are right and pure. That's a hard thing to know.

Proverbs 16, 2 says, all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. That's why it's real hard to know whether your motive's right. Because everything that you do is right in your own sight.

It's not until you come before the Lord and honestly ask Him, search me, that you find out if there's anything wrong. Now then, another thing that's a hindrance to prayer. There's a couple more of these.

Praying outside of the will of God. Well, that's obvious. Praying outside of the will of God.

Which happens, we find ourselves praying outside of His will because we fail to renew our mind. And the reason that's true, and we've talked about this already when we talked about what it is to pray inside the will of God, that when Scripture talks about praying in the will of God, it's not talking about trying to divine the secrets of God's hidden decrees. I'm trying to figure out what providence kind of has in store and pray that.

We're trying to open our Bibles to know the character of God that is revealed there. To believe the things He's told us. To take to heart the things He's told us to pray for.

And to pray accordingly in that revealed will. And if we will pray in that way, He will answer our request. Again, I say again and again, this thing of praying in the will of God is not meant to limit your praying, but to give you vast avenues to pray many things.

I mean, it's meant to stir your creative minds and hearts with regard to all kinds of possibilities with prayer. As long as it's in His will, He'll give it. And His will isn't this narrow thing that you won't really want.

It's this glorious thing that is wonderful and we ought to seek. It's a wide thing. so when we pray in the will of God, we are wanting our prayers to line up with His revealed will.

We want to be praying for things that His Word indicates will receive an answer. And so learning to pray in the will of God involves being renewed in our thinking. It involves a change in our emotional responses to things.

It involves the total transformation of our desires. And as we repent, and as we mature, and as we grow and become more and more like Christ, we ought to find that our prayers are being answered more frequently. I'll say it again.

As we repent, as we mature, as we grow in Christ, as we become more and more like Christ, we ought to find as we're growing as a Christian, that our prayers are being answered more frequently. And the reason for that is not because we've somehow figured out how to manipulate God in experience, but rather, that our desires, our emotions, our assessments of situations and circumstances and the needs of others, all of those things are more in tune with the will of God. And so we are naturally in our own heart praying those things that accord with His will because we ourselves are more in accord with His will.

We're renewed. We're more like Christ. And so, so many of the prayers that men make to God are never going to be answered by Him because they're completely outside of His will.

And if we want answers as Christians, we had better learn to bend our thoughts to His Word and to think His thoughts after Him. That's the way to answer prayer. And so praying outside of the will of God will certainly hinder our prayers.

We've read this passage already, but it applies here as well. Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart. If you are set on God, trust me, the desires of your heart are going to be right things.

You're going to be renewed and transformed. And the things you pray about to God are going to be things that are in His will. That's going to happen.

Doubt. We're almost to the end. Doubt.

Or unbelief. It's another great hindrance to prayer. We've already spent an entire week on this one at another time, so I'll just read the passage and just quickly move on.

James 1, 5 and 6 says what? If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given him. That's a promise. Here's the condition.

But let him ask in faith with no doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the wind. I didn't quote the rest of it, but he says here, verse 7, for that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

He's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Which means this. Doubt and unbelief is a big hindrance to prayer.

We could say it this way. The man who prays to God for something and then who doubts Him as to whether He will give it is a double-minded man. At the same time, he asks God for something.

He also doubts His goodness and His ability to give it. And that man, says James, must not suppose, literally must not even imagine that God will give him anything. It's an amazing hindrance to prayer.

You're not permitted to even imagine that God will give you anything if that's the way you pray. You come to Him and ask Him for it, but the whole while in your heart you doubt whether He'll ever give it or not. You doubt whether He's good enough to give it.

You doubt whether He's able to give it. That's not what we're permitted to do if we want answered prayer. Now there are just three more hindrances to prayer that I want to mention and these are a little bit different than others and they'll go quite quickly.

They're a little bit different because they don't necessarily have to do with sin. But they're just things that we ought to be aware of if you're thinking of, man, I'm not getting through in prayer like I wish I was. These are possible reasons.

They're not necessarily sin, but they're possible reasons. First of all, sleepiness. Sleepiness.

When are you praying? Are you praying when you can't hardly keep your eyes open? You know, you're falling asleep watching some movie and you stop it off and you think, oh, I'm going to go pray. Give it up. Forget about it.

Think of this. In Matthew 26, 40-43, and you don't need to turn there, but you remember the disciples? On the night the Lord was betrayed? You remember? They kept falling asleep. All of them were willing to watch with Him and to pray with Him, but they were just too tired.

And here was Jesus several times warning them that what lie ahead of them was extremely dangerous, that they themselves needed to be praying, not just with Him, but for themselves too, that they not enter into temptation, and that they not fall prey to the circumstances that they were about to face. This is a big deal. I mean, if I came before you and you somehow knew that I knew what was going to happen tomorrow, and I said, listen, you need to be praying because in a few short hours there's things that are going to come upon you that are going to test you severely.

Pray, pray, pray. And you just start falling asleep? That's crazy. If I said those things, you would be as stirred, and if you knew that I was right, and as moved to pray as you'd ever been in your life.

But sleepiness can conquer even that. Sleepiness can conquer even that. And that's amazing.

Because you think, well, I would pray. I mean, I would have been praying. Nuh-uh.

Not if you're tired enough, you won't be. Sleepiness. And all I want to say on this is that prayer is something best done when you've got some energy.

You ought to try and fit prayer into your day when you are most alert and when you're most ready. So very often, this can be a source of hindrance to prayer. I've known it, and I think many of you have known it as well.

Another hindrance to prayer that doesn't necessarily have to do with sin, but it's there. It's just rushing through. I don't know of any other way to say it, but just rushing through prayer.

You ought not just rush through your prayers before God. Prayer is called labor for a reason. And it's a wrestling with God for a reason.

If we're truly going to lift our souls to the Lord and to unload all our burdens before Him and talk with Him about what our needs are, then it's going to take more than just a few brief minutes. You can't just rush through. You've got to give some time to it.

That can be a hindrance to prayer. And then the last one that I'll mention, and this one I think is a real help, generality or vagueness in praying. Vagueness in praying.

Here's what I mean with this one. I don't mean to say that a vague prayer will go unanswered, but I mean to say this. How do you know if it went unanswered or answered? How do you know? If you wake up this morning and say, Lord, just help me through this day, does it mean that He answered your prayer if you're still breathing at night? But you cussed out somebody because they cut you off or something? Is that an answer to prayer? Is it an answer to prayer if you just were bitter all through the day, but you're still breathing at night? It's just a vague kind of thing.

Lord, just help me today. What do you want? You see, it's so vague that you can't know whether it's answered or not. And so when you answer in a vague way, it keeps you from being able to gauge whether there are other hindrances.

Don't just pray, Lord, help me make it through. I mean, what does that look like? Pray specifically. When you pray for other people, Lord, just kind of help them get through.

No, specifically. What are you asking God for? Ask Him specifically. I think a lot of times we don't ask specifically because we're afraid, well, what if He doesn't answer? Then it looks like He didn't answer my prayer.

If I have this big swath, you know, like anything that could possibly happen would be an answer to prayer. It's like, well, that's not what we're after, right? You're not saying, God, do anything that could possibly happen. That's not what you want.

Ask specifically. You're asking God to do something that might not be done otherwise. God, intervene and help in this way specifically.

So be specific in prayer. Don't be general. Because it's going to keep you from knowing whether God answers prayer.

It's going to keep you from being confident that the Lord hears you. Somebody asks you about, well, tell me when God's answered your prayers. And you say something that's like, well, that could just be... And you really can't argue with it because you haven't asked anything specifically.

You've not asked great things of God. Now then, I just want to close with a word of caution and warning here. Three things very, very quickly.

The first one is this. We're not dealing with an angry God. As we talk about this thing of hindrances to prayer, and as we've talked about other things throughout this series that need to be there in prayer, it can have the effect of making you think, man, when I go to pray, every T's got to be crossed, every I's got to be dotted, or God's not going to listen.

And that's not true. We're not dealing with an angry God who insists that we do things a certain and a specific way, and that our every approach to Him must be with the right words and the right phrases and with the right inflection. That's not what we're talking about.

And that's not what prayer is. We are not, as Christians, to be bound up with rules and obligations in prayer. I've not given you a list today of do's and don'ts.

You are to have freedom in the presence of Christ and in the presence of your Father. And I wouldn't want anything I do to hinder that. You are meant to have that freedom.

You're meant to have boldness when you come before Him. Not fear. You've been given the spirit of adoption.

He's called you His son and His daughter. But there are times, it might be rare, but there are times when the answer will not come because of something that we've done. That's true.

All these Scriptures present it very clearly. And so just remember, He's not seeking a legalistic prayer who thinks He's got a right to answers because He's met all the rules. But just as surely, He's after truth in the inner man.

Just as surely, He's after a humble walk with Him. Just as surely, He's after justice and mercy in our dealings with other people. And He insists upon it.

Now one other warning and caution here. We're not praying to Baal or to a God like Baal. What do I mean? You remember the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal? They had this big confrontation.

Here they were trying everything to get their God to act. They would shout and scream and dance and cut themselves even. Everything.

Anything. Whatever necessary to get God to listen. Anything if it might work.

Well, our God's not like that false God who does not answer. And then because He does not answer, ever, we just have to go on and on and on and on trying anything until just circumstances alone convince us that we've arrived at the right procedure and now we know how to manipulate Him. That's not what God's like.

That's not what He's like. We are dealing with the living God. The risen Christ.

The words of life. The Holy Spirit. This is not like Baal.

We deal with the living God who hears from heaven and who loves His children and who delights to answer their prayers. We have to deal with the risen Christ who has made a way for us to come boldly before the throne and who Himself has given us so much help and teaching in the area of prayer. Do you know how much He's said to us about prayer? How much in all this series have we been just stuck in the Gospels because He says so much to us about prayer? Christ wants us to come.

He's made a way for us to come. He's taught us all about it. We have the words of life in which we're given example after example of answered prayer.

In which we have teaching about God and teaching about prayer and teaching about every issue of life and godliness. We have so much help for us in the Word. We're meant to come.

We have to deal with the Holy Spirit who is a great help to us in prayer. Who is diligently and faithfully working in us all that's necessary to bring us to God. God's willing to help us in this thing.

We're not left to ourselves to take care of all the hindrances ourselves. He's willing to help us. It's right to come before Him and to ask Him, is there something I've done? You've been praying for this thing and nothing's happening.

Lord, is there something I've done? It's right to come before Him and ask Him that. Have I done something wrong? And by His Holy Spirit, He will make it known to you. Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24 say this, and I've already alluded to the passage.

Psalm 139, verses 23 to 24. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

That's a right prayer. It's a right thing to ask God to do when prayers aren't answered. To see if there's something in you.

Well, may God help us. And I trust these things will be a help to you. And once more, just for review, let me just list off the various hindrances we've considered just so you've kind of got them all.

Disobedience. Unconfessed sin or a guilty conscience. Poor relationships.

Pride. Spiritual laziness or dissipation. Wrong motives.

Praying outside the will of God. Doubt. Sleepiness.

Rushing through your times in prayer. And then just generality or vagueness in praying. So those are some hindrances.

There's kind of a lot. I understand that. But I wanted to do it all at once.

I didn't want to drag this out for a couple weeks. Let's go ahead and close in prayer and then we'll get ready for our meal together. Father, we are thankful for these words to us.

And I'm thankful, Lord, particularly because I know myself have been guilty of these things at times and I've wondered. I can remember sitting down, Lord, asking counsel from other men as to what was wrong, why I couldn't pray through. And just by your grace, they were able to lead me right through and find there were things that were wrong in my own heart.

Lord, and it brought restoration and peace and joy and an open heaven. And I'm thankful for it, Lord. And it's my desire that if that be the case with any that are here today, that you put your finger upon what's wrong, Lord, and you make them deal with it.

Lord, it's my desire that these things that were said here today would find a home in our hearts and that we would in the days and the months and the years to come and just the time that we have on this earth as we walk with you, that these things would come to mind when we find our prayers frustrated, things that we asked for that we thought surely you would do that you've not done, Lord, that we ask ourselves these questions and that we receive help, Lord. We know where to persist in prayer, but we know also where to be mindful and keep watch on ourselves. And we want to do that.

We want to do both faithfully. We don't want to lose heart. We want to go on praying.

And yet we don't want to ask for the wrong things and persist in the wrong way. So help us to walk this narrow line of truth, Lord. We're thankful for your Spirit, and we ask Him to come and to press these words upon us.

May they find a home in our hearts. I want to receive the word implanted. Be with us in the rest of our time today.

Help us to provoke one another to eternal things. Help us to talk about eternal realities and be people about your purposes here, even as we talk amongst ourselves. Help us not to waste away the time with trivialities, Lord, but even as we talk about the affairs and the issues of our life that we will be bringing to bear your truth upon it.

Help us to learn to think godly. Help us to slay every thought and lofty speculation that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We want to slay these things.

We want to be fully obedient to you. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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