

The Essential Work of the Holy Spirit

by David Guzik

David Guzik emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing unanswered prayer in our spiritual lives.

Duration: 1:03:00

Scripture: Proverbs 28:9, Matthew 6:7, 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, 1 John 3:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Prayer Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a strong prayer life and experiencing answered prayers. He encourages listeners to be aware of the danger signals and to wake up to the fact that they should be living lives of exciting answers to prayer. The speaker shares a story about Hudson Taylor, a missionary, who fervently prayed for his pay to be given to him on a specific day. Despite facing disappointment when the doctor couldn't pay him, Hudson Taylor remained grateful and trusted in God's provision. The sermon concludes with a call for listeners to have a bigger vision for their prayer lives and to trust in God's faithfulness.

Transcript

I think we could say pretty readily that there's few more dangerous things in life than ignoring danger signals. If you're driving along and see in traffic that there's a particular sort of danger signal out there and it's a barricade or a flashing light and if you were just to ignore it and just make your way right on through and then end up in an accident, well, everybody would blame you and rightly so. You were warned there was a flashing light going on and you should have taken heed to it.

Well, you know, I think that there are certain danger signals in our Christian life that we find very easy to ignore and I feel that my heart and my mind was awakened to a danger signal in my own life yesterday and I want to talk to you about it tonight and I would imagine that in many or most, if not all of us, you'd be in somewhat of the same place I am when it comes to often ignoring this danger signal and the danger signal I want to talk to you about tonight is the danger signal of unanswered prayer. We may have never thought of it that way before. What kind of a danger signal could unanswered prayer be in the Christian life? Well, I want you to think just for a moment about some of the spectacular answers to prayer that you've heard about, you know, maybe in sermons, maybe you've read about them in books.

I mean, there are some pretty spectacular things. I mean, I recall stories from my own reading. I can think about events in the life of George Mueller.

Maybe you've heard the name of that man before as a mighty man in prayer. Lately I've been reading a lot about the life of a man named James Edwin or and about great answers to prayer in his life. One of my favorite stories concerns a man named Hudson Taylor, who was a great missionary and a man who founded what was known as the China Inland Mission.

Hudson Taylor was a great, mighty man of prayer. And when he was a young man, he determined that he would go as a missionary to China and that he would go purely on faith. This was in the day when there was not a lot of communication between the Western world and China.

So he knew that as a missionary in China, he would be totally out on his own and he couldn't depend on other people for help. So he said, I have to learn how to depend upon God alone. And he said, there's no sense in starting that when I go out in the mission field.

I'm going to start right now to learn how to depend on God alone. And so Hudson Taylor determined, for example, that he would never tell another person his needs. Never.

He would trust that God would tell that person his needs. And he would say, I'm going to tell God and God will tell that person. Now, he didn't say that everybody should do that or that was normal Christian living.

That was just a conviction on Hudson Taylor's heart. And he was a young man before going out on the mission field. He worked as an assistant to a doctor and he had determined before he started that job that as a test of his own faith, he would never ask the doctor for his salary.

Never. And so if the doctor gave it, he gave it. If he missed a payday, he missed a payday.

But he would never ask the doctor for his pay. Well, one day, his resources were down to almost nothing and the rent was due that night when he came back home to the house where he was living. He had to bring the rent or he was out on the street and the doctor was already overdue in paying him his paycheck by many, many days.

And just day after day, he slipped into day after day of the doctor forgetting. But Hudson Taylor said, I will not tell the doctor my need. I will not remind him.

The money was his by right, but he refused to tell the doctor his need. And so this man in his young 20s just prayed and prayed and prayed. Then towards the end of the day, this day when he so desperately needed the money, the doctor walked in and he said, young Hudson Taylor, he said, I am afraid that I have forgotten your pay.

I'm very sorry about that. And Hudson Taylor, oh, thank you, Lord. Oh, praise you, God.

You've answered my prayers. And then the doctor said, you know, it's too bad that I just made that bank deposit and they have all my money, all my cash. It won't do me any good to write you a check because it's the end of the day on Friday.

I guess I'll just have to pay you Monday. Sorry about that. Well, Monday was no good for Hudson Taylor.

And so he was absolutely crushed. You know, his every disappointment came flooding in upon him at that moment. And so he prayed and he prayed and he prayed and he said he was mixing some kind of potion for the doctor, you know, for use, some medicinal use.

And he said he was glad that he had to go from one room to another because tears were streaming down his face and he didn't want the doctor to see it. Well, he stayed around another hour or so. And then just before he went home and he had to work a little bit later there.

So it was getting seven, eight o'clock at night, getting late in the day. All of a sudden, there should come a knock at the door. And it was a messenger, a courier at the door.

And the doctor answered it and the courier gave him an envelope and he said a few words and then he left and the doctor turned to Hudson Taylor and he laughed and he said, isn't this funny? This envelope is from one of my wealthiest clients. And for some reason, he couldn't go to sleep at night tonight until he had brought me this money in cash. And it was more than enough to cover Hudson Taylor's need.

And he went home with the money. And of course, he fulfilled his obligations. Well, you hear an answer, a prayer like that.

And doesn't it get you excited? Oh, that's great. And friends, we could spend all night. I could tell you about great answers to prayer in the life of George Mueller and J. Edwin or and Hudson Taylor.

But you know what I have to say? Honestly, I don't know how many great stories of great, spectacular, dramatic answers to prayer I could give to you for my own life. And I'm not saying that there's none. Not that there's none.

Of course, we know God answers our prayer. But honestly, now, if we were to have a testimony meeting tonight of great answers to prayer in the last month among us, it might be a pretty short meeting, right? Maybe in the last year. Now, again, I don't want to imply for a moment that there's no great answered prayer among us.

Certainly there is. We have to admit there's something inside of us that says not very much. Now, the conviction that came to my heart yesterday.

Was it came upon me like like a wall crashing down upon me? Is that I think nothing of unanswered prayer. It doesn't seem to bother me at all. As if the idea is I take these prayers and I just kind of throw them up to heaven and what sticks sticks, what doesn't falls down, you know, hey, what can you do? I think sometimes when it comes to prayer, as it's evident in our heart, when unanswered prayer doesn't bother us at all, that we sort of have what you might call the slot machine idea of prayer.

You know what the slot machine idea of prayer is, is you just keep putting in the prayers and pulling the lever. But and you know, every once in a while you get a payout, right? But, you know, you don't put in a coin and expect to pay out every time, do you? You just keep putting it in and, you know, you'll get your payout from time to time. But you just understand that you don't get one on every coin or even on most coins.

Friends, I don't think that God ever wanted us to have a slot machine idea about prayer ever. Matter of fact, I believe that God wanted us to be concerned about unanswered prayer, and that's the first challenge I want to give to you tonight. How concerned are you about unanswered prayer? I think we have an amazing example of concern over unanswered prayer in the Scriptures.

That's what I want you to turn to tonight. First, Second Corinthians, chapter 12, verses seven through nine. Again, Second Corinthians, chapter 12, verses seven through nine.

I'll go ahead and start reading it, and I hope you can catch up quickly there in your Bible where we read. This is the Apostle Paul speaking. He says, And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Now, I want you to see what Paul says there in verse seven, that there came some kind of trial, some kind of tribulation into his life. I believe that if you take a look at the text carefully and weighing all the evidence, I believe that it was probably some kind of bodily infirmity that struck Paul. But I don't think it's important.

I think if it was important, God would have been very specific about it. I think God left Paul's problem deliberately vague enough so that we could identify with it no matter what our particular problem was. But I want you to see Paul had a problem.

And what did he do with it? Look at it there. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. So do you get the picture here? Paul's got a problem and he prays about it.

Lord, let this thing depart from me. Nothing happens. Lord, let this thing depart from me.

Nothing happens. A third time, Lord, let this thing depart from me. By the third time with no answer, it bothered Paul.

It bothered him that he sought God for something a little deeper about this, and that's where we come to the next verse. And he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. You see, this is what I want you to grab from this. The point is simply this, that unanswered prayer seemed to bother the apostle Paul.

He didn't pray three times about it and go, well, oh, well, who cares? I guess it won't be a jackpot on this one. No, he said, I've got to seek God deeper for this. And God showed him an answer to the prayer, but not in the way Paul was expecting.

Or we might even say not even the way Paul was hoping for. But here was a real answer to the prayer. No, Paul, I'm not going to do this, but I'm going to do this and bring a surpassing glory through the situation.

I want the point to be this in your heart and my heart. Friends, I read that and got convicted because most of the time, unanswered prayer doesn't even bother me. Maybe it doesn't even bother you, either.

You don't even think twice about it. It bothered Paul, I think it should bother us. Let me ask you another question here.

How much unanswered prayer do you think there was in the life of Jesus? None. Not a single prayer was unanswered. Every prayer of Jesus's was answered, and wasn't Jesus's prayer life an example to us, it should be an example, as now I know what you think of, you think, well, yes, Jesus's prayer life is an example of me, you know, our father who art in heaven, all of that business.

And he's an example of prayer. Friends, I think he's an example, not just in the performance of prayer, but an example in the answering of prayer. We should expect answers to our prayers, and it should bother us when our prayers are not answered.

Now. Why does prayer go unanswered before I answer that question, I have to give two cautions, two things to caution you about, or your mind might be set off in completely the wrong direction when we talk about these specific reasons why prayer may not be answered. The first caution is this, we understand that prayer is more than asking for things.

I know that's what we're focusing on tonight, but I just need to say it. So we're all on the same page. Prayer is more, much more than asking for things.

I don't want to act like the whole matter of prayer is rushing into God's presence. You know, here's the God's to do list and you lay it on his throne. OK, God, do all this and you should expect an answer to all of that.

That's not the point. Friends, prayer is more, much more. We might even say that the minority portion of prayer is asking for things.

Nevertheless, an important part of prayer is asking for things. And when we do ask, we should ask with expectancy. Or why are we asking at all? Are we doing the thing of just throwing up wishes to heaven and seeing what sticks? Now, that's the first caution.

Second, I think it's very important that we take a caution and understand what we mean and what we don't mean by unanswered prayer. We don't mean by answered prayer that God does everything that I want him to do. That's not what I mean by answered prayer.

You see, God can answer prayer in several ways. He can give a yes answer where God says yes to your prayer. That's what we all want, right? Well, next, God can give you another kind of answer.

He can give you a no answer to your prayer, right? He can say no to your prayer. What I want you to see is no is still an answer, isn't it? God can say, wait, he can give you the weight answer to your prayer. The caution I want to give you here is that no and weight are still answers to prayer.

I'm talking about something different here, friends. I'm not talking about a yes answer. I'm not talking about a no answer.

I'm not talking about a weight answer. I'm talking about an unanswered prayer. You see, Paul received a no answer to his prayer in 2nd Corinthians chapter 12, right? Lord, take this from me.

And God told him, no, I'm not going to take it from you. I'm going to give you my triumphant grace so that you can triumph in this infirmity rather than triumphing over this infirmity. His prayer was answered after deeper seeking.

So when we talk about the danger of unanswered prayer, we're not talking about God saying yes to every prayer, no or weight answers are fine. And listen, when it's in our best for God to say no, or when it's in our best for God to say, wait, we want him to say that. Right.

I bet we could stand and have a great testimony meeting tonight about all the no answers to prayer that we thank God for immensely. Amen. Now, our problem isn't no answers.

Our problem isn't weight answers. It's unanswered prayer. Where you just kind of pray and nothing comes back.

And so you stop praying. You put the quarter in the slot machine, you pull the lever. Well, nothing there.

Let's move on. You threw the wish up to heaven, it fell back down. Well, you know, there's a lot of fish in the sea.

Let's move on to something else. I think that there's something wrong with that. Now, let me give you an example of unanswered prayer and a way that I have found myself in my own life making excuses for unanswered prayer.

You see, I think one area where we see a lot of unanswered prayer is in our prayers for other people. We often pray for God's work in other people, don't you? I certainly do. You want God to work in other people.

Those are good prayers to pray. But you see, how many of those prayers do you really see answered? How many of the prayers that you pray for God to do a work in somebody else, do you really see come to pass? Now, I find that in that I see a lot of excuses in myself. It might not be bold enough to say probably in you also.

A lot of excuses for unanswered prayer. Well, you know, I can pray, but it's really just up to that person whether or not they respond to God's work. I can pray, but, you know, I mean, it's really up to them.

Listen, we need to expose that kind of thinking for what it is. It's an excuse. Do you know why it's an excuse? Because the Bible clearly tells us that God can change the heart of man.

We understand that, don't we? God isn't powerless in the heavens saying, well, you know, my child prayed to me and I could change this person's heart, but but I'm not going to. Can I read you Proverbs twenty one one? The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water. He turns it wherever he wishes.

Now, God can do that with the heart of a king. He can do that with the heart of anybody. Or how about this? Proverbs sixteen nine.

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. Do we understand that? God is able to change. Well, listen, do I need to give you any more evidence than holding up a mirror right in front of your face? God has changed your heart, hasn't he? And I bet for many or most, if not all of us here, God changed our hearts in response to prayer from somebody else.

Were there people praying for you before you came to Jesus or before? There was a radical change, perhaps in your Christian life. People were praying for you. Well, you old hard hearted, cold hearted sinner.

How did God ever get through to you? Well, he did, didn't he? And he did it oftentimes through the prayers of other people. I also like Ezra chapter seven, where Ezra thanks God for working on a king's heart. Ezra chapter seven, verse twenty seven says, Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who's put such a thing in the king's heart to beautify the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes.

So I was encouraged at the hand of the Lord. My God was upon me and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me as we're thanking God, because God, in response to his prayer, changed the heart of a king now. Seeing that God can change hearts.

Why is it that I or you or maybe I should say we see so few hearts changed by our prayers. Well, we could say perhaps that the problem is with God. It's it's God's fault.

You know, God just doesn't want to change these people. I mean, he could if he wanted to, but he doesn't want to. Is the problem with God, my friends? Of course not.

God wants to do a work in those people. Well, is the problem perhaps with the person that we're talking about, maybe the problems with them, you know, they're just too hard for God to get through to. Oh, God can get through to some people, but he can't get through to them.

Well, of course not. God can change them. Well, what's the problem then? Again, I think we have to say that the problem is with us.

Now we're getting down to business. It's time to slough off the excuses. And to say unanswered prayer is not God's problem.

It's not that person's problem. It's my problem. Now, again, let me take pains to point out.

I'm not talking about no answers to prayer and I'm not talking about weight answers to prayer. We recognize those readily and we thank God for them. We're going to see tonight where when somebody was listening to the Lord, God told them no in a specific situation.

God told them, don't pray for this person any longer. I'm not going to do a work in them. Well, that's an answer to prayer, isn't it? You see, I'm not saying that God does everything we want him to.

I'm not saying that we figure out the to do list and just lay it before God. No, please don't anybody think that for a moment. But I think that if we're diligent in prayer and if we're sensitive to the Lord and if we're passionate about the things he's passionate about, first of all, he's going to guide us in our prayers.

Secondly, when he doesn't intend to move in a certain area, he'll tell you. And you'll listen. So, friends, let's get back down to it.

What are some of the reasons for unanswered prayer? Now, you might be surprised to find that the Bible gives a bunch of reasons for unanswered prayer. I guess the first thing I want to say before we embark on this list together, don't let the size of this list intimidate you. You know what? If you're not convicted by this tonight.

You're either dead or why don't you come on up and we'll pray for you to get saved, because as we go through this list, I think that every one of these convicted me in some way or another. And so this is going to be a very challenging list. Friends, I'm speaking to you very plainly tonight and I'm setting up the bar high.

But I hope that maybe we'll get a little bit tired of setting the bar low in our Christian life. And we want to say, well, Lord, let's see what great things you might be able to do through us, so let's take a look at some of these reasons for unanswered prayer, understanding that God wants to draw you into a fruitful, effective prayer life. Friends, these obstacles can be put out of the way as we walk in the Lord and diligently pursue him.

OK, what's the first obstacle? By the way, these are in no apparent order. Like I say, the Lord gave me most of these just well, actually, during prayer meeting, God brought both of these to my mind. And so it's

in no particular order.

Maybe if I taught this study on another time, I'd come up with another order. So the first reason for unanswered prayer I want to talk to you about is not abiding in Jesus. Let me read you John chapter 15, verse seven.

Listen to this from Jesus. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you. Now, that's one of those passages that we like to piously quote.

But if we really believe it, it's going to bother us, right? If you really believe it, you're going to say, oh, if there's not a lot of answered prayer in my life, I must not be abiding in Jesus as close as I thought I was. Or maybe there's another problem in my prayer life. But you get the point here.

Friends, if you're not abiding in Jesus, if your life isn't found in him, if Jesus isn't on your heart and in your mind, then friends, you're not going to see much answer to prayer. You see, unanswered prayer isn't a matter of something that just didn't happen to click. You know, the coin didn't click through that time when you pulled the lever on the slot machine, unanswered prayer might be God's way of telling you you're not abiding in Jesus the way you thought you were take a look at that in your life.

All right, what's another possible reason for unanswered prayer? Well, plainly put, we could say it's unbelief. That's Matthew chapter 17, verse 20 and 21. So Jesus said to them, because of your unbelief, the disciples were asking why they could not cast the demon out, why their prayers were ineffective in delivering a man who was possessed by demons, Jesus says, because of your unbelief, for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you'll say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.

However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. Do you get the point here? Jesus says because of your unbelief, you pray, but you don't really believe. Friends, I don't know about you, but that is convicting to me.

I find myself again sometimes in that posture of just sort of casting up words to heaven without real faith behind them, without real grounds from a promise or principle in God's word saying, Lord, this is what you said. Now, please come fulfill your word. I believe, God, I believe in your promise.

You know what? Maybe if I was really filled with faith, it would make me pray less. Because I wouldn't pray for as many things, because I would think clearly, do I have reason to trust God for this instead of saying, well, God, do this, do this, do this, do this. Well, women, do you have a ground of faith? Do you have a promise or a principle from God's word that relates to this situation? Maybe greater faith in our prayers would make us pray for fewer things, but see far, far greater results done.

We can't duck it, friends. Sometimes prayer is not answered because simply we have unbelief in our life. Might I say one other thing, too, and I'll speak very boldly on this point.

Friend, your unbelief is a sin. It's especially a sin for a child of God. Now, I believe unbelief is a sin in the heart of somebody who doesn't know Jesus.

Of course it is. But if you're his child, how much more should you trust? How much more should you have received of his mercies? I love what Charles Spurgeon says in some of his most eloquent sermons. He says, you know, the problem is, is that you've been trying to trust God.

The Bible says nowhere to try and trust God. It just says, trust him. Stop trying to trust him.

Matter of fact, by saying you've been trying to trust God, but you find it very difficult, it's as if you're saying to God, well, I'm trying to believe that you're truthful, but I'm having an awfully hard time believing it, God. You know, I want to give you the benefit of the doubt, God. But, you know, you're just going to have to perform a little bit better before I can really trust you.

God forbid. We need to recognize unbelief for what it is, it's sin. We need to confess it before God and ask him to cleanse us from the blackness of unbelief upon our hearts.

Well, this same passage brings us to another potential reason for unanswered prayer, and we could say that it's a failure to fast. Did you see it there in Matthew chapter 17, verse 21? Jesus said, however, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. Well, friends, if you're not fasting for something, perhaps that's the reason why your prayer wasn't answered.

You say, well, what am I supposed to do? Fast about every little thing. Well, no, friends, I guess there's sort of a progression on this, right? If there's a spiritual problem or a spiritual dilemma that seems especially tough, especially difficult to challenge, then maybe it is time to say, God, I'm going to dedicate a time of fasting and prayer to this issue. This person's soul is so important to me that I'm going to fast and pray for them.

This man or this woman who's caught up in the blackness of sin, they're a believer, God, but they're backslidden and their heart is hard. I care about them so much, God, that I am going to dedicate a time of fasting and prayer so that they can be delivered from that darkness. Now, you see, maybe that's not the first prayer you pray for them.

But it belongs somewhere along the progression, doesn't it? If you care for them. So, friends, a failure to fast can be a reason for unanswered prayer. Here's another one.

If we're not convicted enough already. First, Peter, chapter three, verse seven. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them, meaning your wives, with understanding, giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel, as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Friends, that is a reason for unanswered prayer. You have a bad marriage relationship. I don't know how to cut it any more sweetly than that.

It's just a pretty blunt point right there, isn't it? Now, I know that in first Peter, chapter three, verse seven, he's referring just to husbands. I might take a little bit of exegetical liberty and say that if a wife is similarly misbehaving in her marriage and not doing what she needs to do in her marriage, I think that's another reason for God not to answer prayer. But even if we were just to take it towards husbands, husbands, is there any question that the scriptures are very clear on this? If you're not being what you should be as a husband, if you're not doing what you should do as a husband, your prayers are hindered.

See what I said about a danger signal. You're driving along. The lights are flashing at you.

Your prayers aren't answered. Very few of them are. You seem to have very little power with God to use an old expression in prayer.

Friends, that's a warning sign to you. You should start going through your mind and saying, wait a minute, is something amiss in my life? This is a warning sign. Maybe, maybe my marriage isn't what I think it is.

Maybe I'm not as good as a husband as I thought I was. You see how you need to give diligent attention to this. And so a bad marriage relationship can be a reason for unanswered prayer.

Well, let's keep going on here. We'll take a look at the book of James, chapter four, verse two, for another reason for unanswered prayer. It's simply put, you don't ask.

Well, friends, you say, well, wait a minute, I mean, I pray about this and this and the other thing. Well, do you ask God to do anything? Do you realize and I hear this a lot in prayer meetings, I hear it a lot where people will go on and on about a situation as if they're informing God about the situation, but they're never asking him to do anything. Well, friends, as it says here in James, chapter four, verse two, you lust and you do not have you murder and covet and cannot obtain.

You fight in war, yet you do not have because you do not ask. Get down to asking. Ask God to do something.

Isn't it funny when we think about it now, maybe we look down at our prayer life and we say, well, no wonder there's not much answered prayer, I'm so rarely asking God to do anything. And friends, you know what? Oftentimes not asking God is a manifestation of unbelief. There's been a gradual lowering of your sights in your Christian life.

You say, well, you know, I want to put God on the spot. You know, maybe he doesn't want to answer this. And so why ask? I'll just tell God about it and he can decide to do whatever he wants.

Well, friends, that's not prayer. That's not going before the throne of God in intercession. Be a little more bold now, base your boldness upon the confidence of God's word.

If you're going to ask, ask scripturally. In other words, you're praying for somebody else's salvation. Come to the Lord and say, Lord, you say in your word that you do not delight in the death of the wicked and that it's your desire that no man perish, but that all come to salvation in Jesus Christ, Lord, I know this is your heart.

So I pray that you would bring salvation to this person. You see, you're asking God to do something, but you're asking based on a promise. So, friends, this is very important to get down to asking in prayer.

You know, when we pray together, especially in a prayer meeting, please watch those informational prayers, maybe we should call them info prayers like infomercials. You know, I read about a prayer meeting once where a guy was going on and on and on in this, and finally there was a Scottish man who was leading the meeting and he just couldn't take it anymore. And he called out to the man who was going on and on and on.

He said, open your eyes, man, you're preaching again because he had stopped praying a long time ago. He was preaching a sermon instead of lifting up a prayer. Well, that's another reason for unanswered prayer, not asking.

Now, what about another reason? Well, you can just look to the next verse in the book of James for that one. James chapter four, verse three, where we read, you ask and you do not receive because you ask a

miss that you may spend it on your pleasures. Verse selfish praying oftentimes is a reason why our prayers go unanswered.

Friends, let's be honest about this. Oftentimes, our prayers are infected with selfishness. Here's a wife crying out to God for the soul of her husband, and she's pleading with God, God, save my husband, God, save my husband.

But in her heart, the real motivation for God to save her husband is selfish. Save my husband, so he'll treat me better. Save my husband, you know, for my sake, God.

Well, friends at root, that can be a selfish prayer. Why not ask God to break your heart with a concern for the soul and the eternal destiny of that man and pray the prayer for the right reason? Isn't it funny how we can pray for totally the right thing out of a selfish motive? Oh, Lord, you know, you're out of work and God provide work, provide work, provide work, and the real reason why you want God to provide work is so you don't have to trust him day to day. It's not to be obedient, it's not to say, Lord, you say in your word that a man should make his living by the work of his hands.

And so I want to be available. I want to fulfill your word. No, but there's a gentle little twisting of the compass point right there and you're a few degrees off, but those few degrees off make you pointed towards self instead of pointed towards the glory of the Lord.

Friends, selfish praying is a reason for unanswered prayer. You know, I guess it just doesn't take a whole lot of interpretation, does it? Does anybody need any great interpretation on James four three? You ask and you do not receive because you ask a miss that you may spend it on your pleasures. It's all about you in your prayers.

Your heart isn't for the glory of God. Now, let me talk about another reason, friends, I need to tell you, I don't even think I'm halfway through this list, take a deep breath, ask the Lord to be gentle with you on these things, but yet to speak clearly to your hearts. I don't want anybody under a cloud of condemnation, but I do hope that there is plenty of conviction of the Holy Spirit going on here.

The next reason for unanswered prayer is disobedience. You could turn in your Bibles to First John, chapter three, verse twenty two. Let me read this to you.

And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. That's a promise, isn't it? Whatever we ask, we receive. That's answered prayer, isn't it? Friends, that's George Mueller style answered prayer.

That's Hudson Taylor style answered prayer. That's J. Edwin Orr style answered prayer. Whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Well, maybe you're not keeping his commandments. Now, friends, listen, I know what you and I say. I've been saying this to myself for a long time.

Let me just be transparent and open before you. I've been saying this to myself for too long. Well, you know, nobody's perfect.

We all have our weakness, don't we? We all fall short. So what's the big deal? You know, yeah, look, yeah, I know I'm not totally obedient in this area, but, you know, I have my thing and you have yours. No.

No, by God's grace, no longer. Now, not for a moment do I deceive myself into thinking that I'm sinlessly perfect. Believe me, every moment of every day reminds me that I'm not.

Yet, friends, don't you want to live knowing that there is no known area of compromise in your life? That to your knowledge, your life is lived in full surrender. Friends, there are plenty of sins of omission in our lives that we have to deal with, but first we can deal with the sins of commission. I'm just not going to do those things anymore.

By the power of God's grace, I'm going to carry on the battle against those things. Again, I think one of the things that the Lord is just saying to us, and this is let's raise our sights a little bit here. Maybe not just a little bit, but say, listen, friends, this is something we need to get serious about.

Stop making excuses about a disobedient walk. And when the Holy Spirit convicts you of something, deal with it. Don't make excuses about it.

Respond to the spirit's conviction and do it immediately. So what about that sin of the flesh in your life? What about the Internet pornography that you look at all the time? What about the drunkenness in your life? What about the difficulties that you have? What about the broken vows that you have? Oh, you've made many, many promises to God, haven't you? You've broken those promises and you've never said you're sorry to God for those broken promises. Maybe the promises were foolish and you must laugh them off.

Friends, they're not foolish to God. They're broken vows and you need to ask him to forgive you. God is open and ready to forgive.

He's ready to cleanse you, but confess your sin to him. You've been committing the sin of gossip or criticism or backbiting. Call it for what it is, it's sin and it needs to be confessed and it needs to be forsaken.

These things hinder your prayer life. Stop making excuses. Listen to this from Isaiah, chapter one, when you spread out your hands.

Now, friends, that was the posture of prayer. It's as if Isaiah is saying, when you fold your hands and close your eyes. When you spread out your hands, God says, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean.

Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Isn't that heavy? God says, you're praying, my fingers are in my ears.

I'm not listening to your prayers because there's sin and compromise and disobedience in your life. Do you see the danger signal flashing? There's been years of this. You've been driving right through the danger signals.

Friends, you and I, and it's been convicting to my heart. I haven't even cared. I think nothing of it.

Some prayers are answered, some prayers aren't. Friends, a lot of unanswered prayer in our life. Should make us turn to God.

Let's say, why? What is it, God? Now, if you do turn, the Lord is so rich, I stopped off reading in that passage from Isaiah. Let me read you the very next verse that comes where I left off. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they're red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Well, friends, isn't God the best? He's so firm with us.

We're saying you've got to get real about your sin. You've got to deal with it. And then he says, and I'll wash it all away.

I'll forgive you. Friends, the point of it isn't to make you feel horrible and to make you walk around under this cloud of depression and condemnation. The goal of it is liberty and cleansing and freedom in your relationship with the Lord.

That's the point of it. But until you see it, you can't reach it. All right, let me deal with another reason for unanswered prayer.

Well, I don't know. It seems like the list gets longer instead of shorter. The more I go through it.

Another reason for unanswered prayer is not praying in God's will. First, John, chapter five, verses 14 and 15, say this. Now, this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us and we know that if he and if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we've asked of him.

Isn't that great? You know, sometimes while your prayers are unanswered, you're not praying in God's will. You think that the goal of prayer is to get your will done. That's not the goal of prayer.

The goal of prayer is to get God's will done. And you say, well, if God, if it's God's will, then why does he need me at all to pray? Because you are a co-laborer with Jesus Christ. He wants to draw your heart into his heart.

He wants to draw you into his work. And there are things that God waits to do until you come and join with him in prayer. It's that simple.

The friends, the goal is to get God's work done, pray according to God's will. Here's another passage that describes why our prayers can be unanswered. And it's James, chapter five, verse 16.

A reason for unanswered prayer is unconfessed sin. Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

What's the prayer that avails much prayer that comes after the confession of sin? And sometimes that's what we need to do, we need to confess our sin. And might I remind you of some important words about confession. I believe the circle of your confession should be the circle of your sin.

If it's private, secret sin, then you don't need to make a public confession of it. You may need to make a public declaration of your need. You may need to say to some other people, you know what, I'm bound up in secret sin.

I ask God to forgive me of it, will you pray for me, too? You don't need to reveal the details of it. You shouldn't. Then again.

If your sin has been against the body of Christ, if your sin has been public, then perhaps a public confession is in order. God has done great things through such brokenness in people's hearts before. But a lack of confession of sin is one reason why prayer is not answered.

Friends, here's another reason again from James chapter five, and that's because prayer may be unanswered if it is cold and passionless. Here, James says, confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced it through. Friends, that's power and prayer.

What did he do? He prayed earnestly. Friends, honestly, can you say that you pray earnestly? I'm convicted on this point, aren't you? You're just putting the coins in the slot machine. Sometimes people put more coins into a slot machine with more feeling than we pray.

Sometimes at least then they're really rooting for a payoff. And sometimes with us, it's just sort of casting the wishes towards heaven. And what sticks, sticks.

No more of that for us, friends. If this is God's will, if we believe that this is what God wants, then we can be passionate about it in prayer. Let me go on to another one.

And, you know, each one of these reasons could be a sermon in itself. But I don't think we could take a 20 part series on reasons for unanswered prayer. Here's the next reason.

The reason for unanswered prayer is prayerlessness and a lack of persistence in prayer. You remember the parable that Jesus spoke about the widow who would not give up before the judge? And she kept bugging the judge and bugging the judge until the judge answered. Now, God says, Jesus says to us, it's not that God is like an unjust judge.

It's that if it worked with an unjust judge, how much more will it work with a loving father in heaven? Be persistent in prayer. One of the reasons why we see so few prayers answered is we're just prayerless or we lack persistence in prayer. We don't stick with praying for something.

You know, we pray and we pray a couple of times and if nothing happens, well, then we just give up and it's an unanswered prayer. You didn't hear a yes. You didn't hear a no.

You didn't hear a wait. You didn't hear anything. You just gave up.

Maybe it's time to say, no, I'm going to God, I'm going to keep praying for this. I'm going to pray for this regularly. God, I'm going to set the little signal thing on my watch.

And when it beats every hour, I'm going to pray for that thing. I'm going to lift it up before you, God. Maybe you'll pray with that heart that David spoke about in Psalm fifty five, seventeen, where it says evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud and he shall hear my voice.

He's going to pray all through the day. It's not going to be it's going to be prayer and prayer and prayer. You know how it is when you have a family member, maybe a child who's very sick.

All day long, you're thinking about it, aren't you? All day long, the sick child is on your mind. You can't get away from that thought. And that's how we need to be burdened with something in prayer and to see God do something great through.

Let me bring up some other ones quickly. Time is getting away from us. Matthew chapter five, verse 23 and 24 describe another reason why prayer may not be answered, and it's because we sin against others.

Jesus said, therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there, remember that your brother has something against you. Leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

Well, you're coming to the altar of prayer, aren't you? But the problem is, is that there's something between you and your brother. Now, I'm not saying that everybody likes you. That's not necessary for prayer.

Jesus didn't say why your prayers aren't answered if somebody doesn't like you. But remember what Paul said in the book of Romans. He says, as much as it's within your power, you live at peace with all men.

Can you say that you're doing that? If you've done wrong, have you confessed it? Have you asked that person for forgiveness? Maybe they didn't receive it. Well, then that's up to them. But if you ask for it, have you tried to set it right? Have you done what you could? See, friends, if you can't, that can be a reason why your prayers aren't answered.

Matthew chapter 18 gives us another reason why our prayers may not be answered, and that's because of a lack of unity. He says again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. We agree together.

So if there's a lack of unity in prayer, that can mean that your prayers will not be answered. Here's another one. Oh, I think this next one is very important.

Psalms 32, eight. A reason why your prayers may not be answered is because you're not listening to God. Maybe God's trying to tell, you know, maybe God's trying to tell you, wait, and the only thing you're looking for is, yes, the only thing you're looking for is the thing to be done and God's trying to answer your prayer by guiding you into a no answer or a wait answer, but you're not listening to him.

Again, I want to emphasize that when I say unanswered prayer, I'm not talking about getting every prayer answered. Yes, before God. But I think that if we abide in the Lord and follow after him, he'll give us a sense in our spirit about what he wants to do and things.

Let me read you two very convicting passages from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, chapter seven, verse 16. God told Jeremiah this.

Therefore, do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or a prayer for them, nor make intercession to me, for I will not hear you. Well, that's an answer to prayer, isn't it? God's saying don't pray anymore. All right.

You answered me, God. Very similar thing in Jeremiah 11, 14. So do not pray for this people or lift up a cry or a prayer for them.

I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to me because of their trouble. Do you get the point there? If we listen to God, he can guide us into the answer of the prayer. Let's go quickly through a few more.

Another reason for unanswered prayer is that you're not praying in the name of Jesus. John, chapter 14, verse 13 and 14. And whatever you ask in my name that I will do that the father may be glorified in the son, if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Well, what does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? Surely it means just to tack on in Jesus name at the end of every request, right? No. Praying in the name of Jesus means two things. First of all, you're praying on Jesus's authority and standing, not your own.

You're coming on Jesus's account, on Jesus's merits, not your own. You're not saying, Lord, I'm so righteous, answer my prayers. No, you're saying, look, I'm found in the righteousness of Jesus.

I'm coming in his name, not my own. But the second thing that it means to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray as Jesus would have you pray. To pray as his emissary, to pray as his representative, so to speak.

If you don't pray in the name of Jesus, your prayers may not be answered. Well, we could go on several more. I'll just speak quickly about pride.

Of course, we know how pride can be a reason for unanswered prayer. We know that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. We know that lying and deceitfulness can be a reason for unanswered prayer.

Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry. Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips. If there's lying and deceitfulness in your life, it can be a reason for unanswered prayer.

Let me conclude with two more, one of them you may have never heard before. I have to say, I can never remember hearing this verse of scripture before. Of course, I've read the Bible through several times.

I don't ever remember hearing this verse before. Isn't it wonderful when you find a verse that you never knew was in there? And it's a reason for unanswered prayer. Proverbs 28, 9 describes a reason for unanswered prayer, lack of Bible reading and Bible teaching.

You say, what? Let me read it to you. Perhaps you should turn their Proverbs chapter 28, verse nine. One who turns his ear away from hearing the law.

Even his prayer is an abomination. That's heavy, isn't it? Now, why do I say Bible reading and Bible teaching? Because hearing the word in the ancient world signified two things. That's how they would read, because they would always read aloud in the ancient world.

But it also means hearing, teaching of God's word. If you don't give yourself the Bible reading and put yourself under Bible teaching, that could be a reason for unanswered prayer. I never saw that one before.

Isn't that remarkable? Then finally, one more that I must bring up before we conclude. Matthew, chapter six, verse seven, a final reason for unanswered prayer. And by the way, I can't say with any kind of certainty whatsoever that this is an exhaustive list.

And isn't that depressing? Friends, think about it. I mean, this has been an overwhelming list, hasn't it? I've almost deliberately made it that way so that we would see that there are many things that we need to give

attention to when we see that danger signal of unanswered prayer. But look, a final reason why our prayers may not be answered is because we're trusting in the length or the form of our prayer.

Matthew, chapter six, verse seven. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. You know what, friends, it's not the length of your prayer that determines it'll be answered.

It's not the form. It's not using King James English. It's not speaking at a certain volume.

But it is heart. It is passion. It is a warmth in your heart about prayer.

It is faith. It is belief. But it's not a particular length and it's not a particular form.

You trust in those things. And that may be a reason why your prayer is not answered. All right, so what do we do about this? I've.

Raised up the bed of the dump truck on you and just. Flooded you with this tonight. Think how I felt in my study yesterday morning when the Lord was convicting me of all of this.

Now, I hope you feel some of it, too. So what do you do? Well, friends, I think the first thing that we need to do is that we need to take heed to the danger signals. Start waking up to this fact.

That we should be living lives of exciting answer to prayer. What greater testimony can you give to somebody who doesn't know the Lord than that of answered prayer that you won't believe what happened? And you explain the situation. And it's absolutely miraculous answer to prayer.

What can they say to that? They're absolutely astounded. What a great testimony that is. Would to God that our lives would be filled with those testimonies.

What a great work of God that would be innocent among us. The second thing I would say to you is to get a bigger vision for what your prayer life can be. I am convicted of this, my friends, that there's been, might I say, a lowering of the sites.

Well, you know, a lot of prayer just doesn't get answered. I guess that's how it is. No, I want to take it more seriously and be more discerning and say, if prayer is the ability to influence heaven, if it's the ability to move the hand of God, then I need to take it seriously.

And I need to labor in prayer. And I need to think very seriously, Lord, what do you want to do and how can I help pray it into being? How can I help pray it into action? God, you can do great things through prayer. Not through me, but through prayer.

It's the hand of God doing the work. But friends, prayer can move the hand of God. Third, I think we need to resolutely refuse to make excuses.

Friends, can we agree on doing that together, that we're just going to refuse to make excuses for unanswered prayer? We're just like, well, that's the way it is. That's the way it has to be. No.

Now, we're not going to be afraid of no answers. We're not going to be afraid of wait answers. Those come from the loving hand of God.

But friends, we need to have a heart for prayer and not make excuses for our prayer life or for unanswered prayer. Next, I think we need to honestly confess our sin. Look, where you've been in sin in this, confess it, clear it away, be washed white as snow.

What does the Bible say? We know that if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I want that, don't you? Why do you think I'm transparent before you telling you my own failings in this? Oh, it's not just because I'm such a great guy. And, you know, Mr. Personable up here, friends, I do it because I want to be clean.

I want to confess my sin before the Lord and before you. So that I can be clean and so that I so that I can have more power in prayer. Finally, I think the key for us to do something about this is to walk forward very confident in Jesus.

Friends, God is excited when we pray. God wants this in your life even more than you do. Oh, how he wants his people to be awakened to the vitality and the glory of what he can do in and through prayer.

The friends walk confidently. God is with you as you do this. God is for you.

He wants to do great things in and through you. If your heart is for this, your heart is totally in God's will. You can know confidently that he wants to accomplish this.

So. I would suggest to you. That you think through the things that we've talked tonight, there's things that you need to confess, there's things that you need to get right, get them right.

But let's say, Lord, keep working through us till we become people of answered prayer. Stop ignoring the danger signals. I'm going to pray right now, if the worship team will come up, we'll we'll have a song together and maybe in between a couple of songs, we'll leave it open for some prayer.

Father, we do thank you for your word, even when it brings a strong message to us. So, God. Do not leave us in the place of conviction.

We are thankful for conviction of your Holy Spirit, Lord, but we ask that you would give us the strength and the grace to set these things right before you and to walk free in the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. Lord, make us a people of answered prayer. Father, I think what you did through 120 people who had their prayers answered on the day of Pentecost, we touched the whole world.

Lord, make us a people of prayer. Lord, you could absolutely rock this world to the answered prayer of these people in this room. Lord, flashing through my mind right now are so many things that I think I should have said or maybe I went on too long about or or I forgot to say something about this.

Lord, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be diligent to make up all that's lacking. And that you'd guide us into these things. Thank you, Lord, for your presence tonight.

In Jesus name. Amen.

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