

# 10 Reasons Prayers Aren't Answered

by Shane Idleman

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*The sermon explores the reasons behind unanswered prayers and emphasizes the importance of patience, faith, and aligning our motives with God's will during delays.*

**Duration:** 49:29

**Scripture:** Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 59:2, Matthew 6:9-13, John 14:13-14, James 5:16, 1 Peter 3:7

**Topics:** "Prayer Life", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

This sermon on Acts 12 emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's sovereignty, especially in times of delay and unanswered prayers. It highlights the need for self-examination, repentance, and a right attitude in prayer. The sermon also points to the true God who answers prayers and the significance of praying in Jesus' name.

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## Transcript

Acts 12. We're beginning Acts 12, verse 1. I'm going to read from the New King James. Now, about that time, the time the church was sent relief that we talked about last week.

About that time, Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.

Now it was during the days of unleavened bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after the Passover. So here's the picture.

James was put in prison and James was killed, probably beheaded. Now Peter's in prison, scheduled to be killed. But as we'll read about, Peter gets to leave and James was killed.

And at first we might say, what's going on? Aren't James' prayers just as powerful? Why was he killed and Peter set free? And that, I'm going to skip right to point nine for that one. You have to trust in God's sovereignty. Now actually, who's in a better spot, James or Peter? James was immediately with his Savior.

James, he accomplished what God wanted him to accomplish. He was sent home and Peter still had to go through difficult seasons building the church. And one of the things we can get very frustrated on is we

think it's our sovereignty, not God's.

And why aren't things working out? And we begin to get frustrated. So I'm going to talk about those things this morning, hoping it helps. Number one, ten reasons why prayers are delayed.

Would that be a better title? Because we know that a lot of times they are answered. God's saying yes, no, or not yet. And it's in that not yet period that we sometimes get frustrated.

You have to realize that a delay is not a deny. When God delays something, it's not necessarily He's denying it. And I've found that answers are often delayed.

Haven't you found that as well? We know we don't pray and then the next day there's the answer. We pray and then the next day there's the church. We pray, there's the next day.

Answers to prayers are often delayed. That's actually the normal outworking of the Christian faith is there are delays in our prayer life. And I'm going to explain why as we go through this.

But waiting is praying and praying is waiting. As we wait, we are praying. And as we pray, we are waiting.

They go together. And the problem is we often quit before we really even begin. We say a quick prayer and that's it and good.

And then that delay comes in and we get very frustrated. Also under this point, we underestimate the waiting time. Our mind assumes that Peter was in jail overnight.

That's where my mind goes. Do you ever think of that? You've read the story before. Peter actually gets released by an angel.

And we think, oh, the next day he was released. But if you study it, we don't know how long Peter was in jail. It could have been a week that he was imprisoned.

And the jails back then were not like they are today. They didn't feed you. People had to bring you food.

They didn't clothe you. People had to bring you clothing. You slept on the dirt or whatever you had.

It was a very rough situation. So Peter is in this. Delay strengthens our faith.

Now when I say delay can do this, delay strengthens, the opposite effect is the negative. So delay, if you're focused in the right direction, can strengthen your faith. But if you let bitterness come in, it can really hurt your faith.

So you have to be careful what you do with delay. Have you heard the old saying, you become bitter or you become better? It's the same thing with delay. You become stronger and trusting in God and pressing forward or you become bitter and say, I'm out of here.

This is not working out like I thought. I'm leaving. And we get frustrated.

Psalm 106.13, they soon forgot His works, God's works. They did not wait for His counsel. They did not wait for God's counsel.

And later on in the sermon I talk about this, but I'm going to talk about this now. If you don't know what to do, more often than not, don't do anything. If you don't know, I don't know what to do, don't do anything.

Just wait. It's in that waiting time where you get direction and clarification and doors are open and answers. And I see many people, including me, right? I don't know what to do.

Well, I'll do this. Impulse. We do something.

Now, if there's a court case coming up you have to be at or work, I don't know, should I go to work tomorrow or not? I'm just going to have to wait. You know, we know those things, right? But there are other things where, Lord, I don't know what to do in this situation. And more often than not, we rush ahead.

Instead of waiting on what God wants us to do. But Psalm 106.13, They soon forgot His works, they did not wait for His counsel. It's this image of the children of Israel going into the promised land.

And they did not wait for God's counsel. Here's what happened. The Bible talks about leanness of soul.

They started to get no more vitality in their life. No more faith. It was hard to trust God.

And then second, they had a sense of entitlement. Be careful. That comes in.

Delay sits in. And we have a sense of entitlement. I'm entitled to this.

I can't believe God's doing this. I'm frustrated. And then it leads to worldliness.

And then it leads to complaining. And we all know that complaining is right up there with all the other sins, right? We sometimes think, complaining is no big deal. But the children of Israel were not allowed to go into the promised land because of bickering and complaining.

Because of murmuring and complaining. So it's interesting in this delay process, I believe if prayers are delayed, it can strengthen our faith. We can clean all this stuff out and we can look to God, and it can actually strengthen and encourage us.

Number two, delay can readjust your motives. Because we want to pray for certain things, right? And the longer it's taking, my motives begin to be more narrowly focused. And things that were important, aren't important.

Things that were selfish, I was praying for, now becomes in alignment with God's will. So delay, if we allow it to work, it can readjust our motives. Waiting is listening, but I want to see the answers.

Do you want to see the answers? If I can't see them, taste them, touch them, feel them, smell them, right? The five senses. I've got to see something, God. Where God says, just wait and listen.

And as I'm waiting, we have a lot of Scriptures that support this. Your motives. Why are you doing something? Do you know we often don't pray for the right things? Have you ever prayed with ulterior motives? Come on, raise some hands there.

Okay, there, thank you. Now the rest of you can raise your hands too. We've all prayed for ulterior motives.

That's why remembering, not my will, God, but Your will be done. Not my will, Lord, but Your will be done. Think about this for a minute.

I remember coaching baseball. I prayed, and I still do. I'll just submit it.

Lord, please help us win this game. Please help us win this game. And there's kids on the other team whose parents are praying the same thing, right? And I don't know if God really is into who's going to win the sports, you know, more character and things like that.

I don't know if, okay, White Sox, you're going to win. I'm not sure on that one, but I'm praying for this. The other person's praying for this.

Or I remember when we were going through a big drought. Do you remember that? That wasn't too long ago. Huge drought of just enormous proportion.

Big disaster for California. And then what happened? October, November, December. Mammoth, you know, more snow than it's gotten in years.

Mountain high. But I was praying. I remember I would pray, oh God, we need rain.

People would say, Shane, no, I need to work. I'm a construction worker. Like, wait a minute.

We need rain, but I need work. And then somebody else would be, don't pray, Shane, don't pray. We need, there's weddings in October.

Right? Don't pray. So wait a minute. I'm praying for this.

They're praying for this. What's going on here? Not my will, Lord, but Your will be done. Not my will, Lord, but Your will be done.

So as I'm in that delay process, it starts to adjust, readjust my motives. Now I'm like, Lord, what do You want? Do you ever get to that point? I'm done praying for this. Because I don't know where my motives are.

Lord, what do You want? I'm finally open now to what You want. The delay changed my motives. And it had me start praying and focusing on what God wants.

That's the wonderful thing about delay. Also, when you pray, though, be careful that you pray according to what God has gifted you for. I mean, I've prayed before.

Lord, let me be able to sing worship. It's not going to happen, right? I can keep praying. Lord, help me be this.

Let me be a Major League Baseball player. And you're like, oh gosh, that's never going to happen. So just be careful what you pray.

Make sure your motives are right and it's what God has gifted you to do. Because you don't want to try to do things that you're not gifted for. And our motives can be sometimes selfish because of things God has not gifted us for.

And we can waste a lot of time praying. I remember my wife said it would be a good sermon illustration, so I'll give it to you. I remember seeing a friend of mine, Steve, paints.

And it's on Facebook. He paints Mount Whitney, right? And the Sierra Mountains. And it's just gorgeous.

And a lake and a river. You know, if you've seen somebody who knows how to paint, right? It looks wonderful. Some of you in this room can paint.

So I said, it can't be that hard. I'm going to Michael's. I'm buying a canvas.

I'm buying a canvas. You don't want me to tell you this story, do you? I even got the little brushes, bigger brushes. I said, what's the best paint? And I was ready.

This can't be that hard, alright? Lord, I'd love to be a painter. Lord, help me with this painting. I had a picture next to me on the computer that I was going to copy.

Wow! Two and a half hours later. It was over two hours. You want to see what it looked like? Are you sure? Ready? I don't know.

Okay. Why are you laughing? That's an island with two trees on it. That's another island.

I don't know what these are. But it was, when I started right here, it was looking pretty good. And I kept going.

And my kids were laughing. I'm like, what is wrong? So I put on here, do what you're called to do. Nothing more, nothing less.

I just wasted two hours and \$50 at Michael's. But it reminds me of our prayer. Is that a good painting, Ray? No? No, it's not.

It's a terrible painting. My goodness. But it's a good reminder of to do what we're called to do.

Aren't you glad I'm transparent, right? It's a good reminder to do what we're called to do. Pray according to God's will. I could pray for the next year.

I could pray, Lord, make me a painter. Make me a painter. Lord, I want to paint.

Why? To impress. Lord, I want to sing worship. Why? To impress.

I want to preach. Lord, I want to be a preacher. Why? Mom, I want this job.

Why? Careful. Denying or delay can help us really refocus and get our motives straight. And then verse 5, Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

Constant prayer. Pray without ceasing. That's what that means.

People think, gosh, I have to go to work, Shane. I have things to do. How can I pray without ceasing? It's a lifestyle of prayer.

You don't not go to work and just sit at home and sing kumbaya and pray all day long. I mean, that would be wonderful if you could schedule a day sometimes like that. But it's this lifestyle of prayer.

And the church was in constant prayer for Peter. And when Herod was about to bring him out, so Herod was going to kill him. Herod said, go get Peter.

We're going to probably behead him. That night, Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers, and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison.

And he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, arise quickly. And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said, gird yourself and tie on your sandals.

So he did. And he said to him, put on your garment and follow me. So he went out and followed him and did not know what was done by the angel.

He did not know it was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard post, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord. And they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

Wow. He came into the prison, unleashed the chains, removed the shackles, the soldiers were sleeping, and he took Peter out of the prison. It's amazing.

Again, God's sovereignty. He didn't do it for James. He did it for Peter.

But the third point I want to talk about. Delay can increase boldness. As things are being delayed, it can increase boldness.

We contend. We don't quit. They offered up constant prayer.

And it wasn't a few hours. He could have been in prison days. God, I'm trusting in You.

This delay is causing a boldness in me. But be careful, because delay can also cause us to quit. Many people, as they're just beginning to pray, just beginning to ask God, begin to quit.

I've seen this in marriage counseling a lot. When marriages are falling apart, one spouse is doing good, they're praying and they're contending, and it's not happening quick enough. I'm quitting.

I'm done with this. Be careful what you allow delay to do. Here's what faith is.

Hebrews 11 Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. So faith delay increases boldness if you point it in the right direction. Because as I'm waiting, I'm getting bolder.

As I'm waiting, it's strengthening me and encouraging me. Hell was rejoicing. Herod was saying, okay, I'm about ready to bring Peter.

Let's kill him. Hell was rejoicing. But God has other plans.

It's not what it looks like. It's what God is going to do. So you have to refocus on that bold type of prayer.

Number four, delay can increase faith and fervency. Delay can increase faith and fervency. If you look throughout the Bible, these are the prayers that God answers.

A prayer of faith, this side, and a prayer of fervency on this side. What's the difference? I'm glad you asked. Faith is what we just read.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. God, I know this is according to Your will. I'm praying for this.

You fill in the blank. If you know it's according to God's will, what He desires, I'm praying for this area. I have the faith.

The example I gave, first service, I'll give again, is when we were praying about starting the church, and we were going to start on a Saturday night, the negative comments that came in were just debilitating almost, enough to make you not want to do it. You can't start a church on Saturdays. You don't even have a building.

Or you don't have this. Or you don't have this. So faith is you're stepping out onto it.

Lord, I know this is according to Your will. You've called us to do this. I'm stepping out on that faith.

God answers those prayers because you're trusting in Him. But it's a lot different to say, Lord, tomorrow morning, you're going to park a nice big Mercedes in the front driveway. What? But you could argue, right? It's faith.

I'm believing God. But see, that's not faith according to God's will. That's not faith.

I'd probably pay, Lord, I pray it's going to be the Dodge 3500 diesel Cummings mega cab in the driveway tomorrow paid off. Faith, right? No, that's not faith. That's presumption.

That's where the name it and claim it comes from. Have you heard that before? The name it and claim it movement? It's not biblical whatsoever, but they take pieces of Scripture. Brother, you name it, you claim it, and it's yours.

No, that's Tony Robbins positive thinking seminars. Put a Corvette on your refrigerator long enough, you'll own one. So what they do is they take, Jesus says, ask anything in my name, and you will receive it.

See, just name it, name what you want, but no, see, read that whole Scripture in context. It's talking about aligning with God's will, being part, having a heart of Christ with the father. And as you're, as you're, as you're set on Lord, what is your will? Because when you say, Lord, what is your will? Then he'll answer my prayers.

Oh, you want to do this in a church. You want to start this ministry. You want my kids to seek you.

You want me to be united in marriage and working things out. You start to pray according to God's will so the prayers are answered because the heart of the father is praying through you. That's not name it and claim it.

That's not even biblical. Because then God is a butler, not a sovereign king. He's a genie in a bottle, not the Lord Jesus Christ.

The way to get prayers answered is to submit, God, what is your will? For my job, for my career, for this. What is, give me the heart of Christ in this and you start praying. And God answers those prayers because they're being, they're being prayed according to faith.

Now don't forget about fervency. You know what fervency is? Like fire, passion, desire. Okay, so I can have the faith, but what about if I said, okay Lord, this morning I'm really in a hurry.

You know everything I'm praying for. Just answer those things. Is that going to fly? Come on, we all know that is, you might as well just have went to the dentist.

Got a root canal. It's right up there with those kind of things, right? That's why you have faith, but fervency shows how much you're really desiring. Have you ever seen somebody beg for something? God, please take me back.

Right, please my job. Please, you're begging with God, you're fervent, Lord, I'm going to sit here all morning. I've got two hours.

I'm not going on Facebook. I'm not going on the news reports. I'm not going to get all caught up in this.

I'm going to seek You. I'm fervently desiring. Scriptures come to mind.

Those who seek Him will find Him. If you seek Me with all of your heart, you will find Me. Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

This fervency, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man or woman availeth much. It's Elisha. That prayer is talking about Elisha.

He said he was a man just like we are, and he prayed the effectual fervent prayer. A prayer on fire for God. A prayer with boldness and authority.

And you're saying, I'm fervent. I'm passionate about this God, and I have the faith to believe it. Those are the prayers he answers.

So as the denial is happening, as you're being denied, see, you know, look at this. The more you're denied food, the more you want it, right? I don't know, Shane. Is that true? Yeah, just go the rest of the day without food, and you tell me how you feel tomorrow morning.

That denial increased your hunger. So as God sometimes is denying the prayers, if you point your delay in the right direction, you will build up a spiritual hunger. There's a fervency, and there's a faith.

Thomas Brooks was a Puritan. I think it was 1500, 1600s. He said, a man full of hope will be a man full of action.

When you're full of hope, you're full of action. And the fifth point, delay can cause spiritual growth. That's why I said can, right? Remember, these are not absolutes.

Because I could say, delay can cause spiritual immaturity. It's what you do with that delay. Here's the interesting thing about spiritual growth.

In the Christian community, as Christians, it doesn't really matter how old you are. I mean, that helps, right? Five- to six-year-old versus 16. But spiritual growth, you can have somebody who's known Christ for six months be more spiritually mature than someone who's known Christ 16 years.

If that delay is pushing them towards maturity, and they're growing in their faith, here's the growth process. 2 Peter 1. Add to your faith virtue, which is holiness. It's right living before God.

You hear the virtuous woman. Have you heard of that, right? Proverbs 31. You read books about it maybe. Virtue is this purity, this holiness. So you add to your faith holiness. You add to virtue knowledge. Knowledge is God's Word. You add to knowledge self-control. You add to self-control perseverance. See, you're persevering. You're growing spiritually. How do you grow muscles? For some of us, it's too late, right? Mine are going down now.

I think your peak age is 30. Once you start, now you start to die, right? You're growing, you're growing, and then you hit an age where you're declining. But if you're a younger adult, here's how you grow muscles.

You start with the 20 pounds, right? And then the 25 a couple weeks later, and then the 30, 40. I mean, there is a cap there because your muscle cell receptor sites can only handle so much, and we won't worry about that right now. But there's a process of growth.

Same thing spiritually. You're flexing those spiritual muscles, and you're growing spiritually. Now, we pray these things.

Lord, give me patience. Give me perseverance. Give me self-control.

Thank you, Lord. And then nothing happens. Lord, give me patience.

Take away this anger. Take away this lust. Take away this.

I want all these things that 1 Peter Shane just talked about. I'm leaving here today filled with all of these things. Praise God.

Well, that's true. You submit to the work of the Holy Spirit. But it says here, add to your faith holiness, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, to godliness, brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness, love.

For if these things are yours and abound, you will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The more you put on these things, the closer you draw to Christ. So spiritual maturity is interesting.

Because we don't want to say it's all me. Right? I'm going to grow spiritually. It's all Shane.

And I don't want to say, okay, Lord, change me. I'm just going to sit at home. Right? Watch TV.

Eat donuts. And watch Drudge Report and Fox News and CNN and Facebook and Twitter and all these things. I'm going to do that, so Lord, grow me.

See, you submit to the work of the Holy Spirit. It's His work, but you have to put on certain things. Put on the armor of God.

Remove things that are pulling you down so you add to your life these things. So when it says add self-control, what areas do you need self-control in? Donuts? Caffeine? Junk food? TV? He says exercise self-control. See, we can't say the devil made me do it and I'm hopeless because there's another Scripture that says no temptation has overtaken you, but it's common to all men that God is faithful.

God will not allow you to go through something that you cannot bear. With that bearing, He will make a way of escape that you may be able to bear that pressure. So we work alongside the Holy Spirit changing us.

And then we read that when Peter had come to himself, let me summarize everything because there's quite a bit to read. He came to the house that they were praying for him. He's knocking on the door.

And they say, who is it? He says, it's Peter. And she's like, her name's Rhoda. And Rhoda says, oh my goodness, it's Peter! I hear his voice.

Instead of opening the door, she runs to where the people are. And he's knocking. She says, Peter's here.

No, no, you're beside yourself. And we laugh, but don't we do the same thing? That's not God answering my prayer. God couldn't be answering my prayer.

I mean, I just heard from the first service three incredible stories of people being healed that we prayed for. One was a little baby. There's no more issues now.

One guy was going in for heart surgery. They're going to put a stent and open up the blood clot. He just came back and they said, there's no blood clot.

Your arteries are clean. No, no, that's not God. Right? Well, it must have been a coincidence.

Really? How did that happen? It's God! It's God! We shouldn't be surprised. But that's what happens. Even the doubt comes into the strongest believer.

And we begin to doubt, is that really God? Is that really God? And so they finally answered the door. First they said it was his angel. They answered the door.

They let him in. He's like, shh, shh, shh, shh. I don't want people to know I'm here because then I'm going back in jail.

So let me in. And he kept knocking. And so finally they let him in.

The soldiers wake up and the Bible says there was no small stir. You know what a stir is, right? Stirring the pot. The soldier's like, what happened? Did the king give the soldiers a vacation because they let him go? You guys need to take a vacation.

No, what happened to the soldiers? The sword, beheaded, killed. Because they let the prisoner go. It confounded Herod.

The soldiers were amazed. And when God moves, it will confound unbelievers. Don't look to them to support what God is doing in your life.

Because they're often less speechless. I can't believe it. I don't know.

And then the excuses come up. Oh, it must be my favorite of all time. It must be coincidence.

Right? I mean, you would look. Well, look at what does atheism say about how we got here. Just all happened.

Yep, just all happened. Random mutation. You give it enough time, and it all just happened.

Frogs and bananas and apples and people and monkeys and just all happened. Coincidence. But when God starts to move, be careful because you can start to doubt and say, oh, it's just a coincidence.

My worker's probably going to call me anyway, and they're going to pay that off. And we start to justify, because doubt comes in. Doubt comes into all of our lives.

What you do with doubt is very easy. Doubt will either consume you and take you captive, take you prisoner, or you take that doubt captive. The Bible says take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

And you say, Lord, I'm not doubting. I don't believe in coincidence. Now you can say you pulled up and the light was red, not green.

Okay, I mean, but I'm talking about major issues. I'm talking about even little issues. I believe God is sovereign in all things.

I have no clue how that completely works. But God does. So He's asking.

He asks us to trust in His sovereignty without delay, without deny. Number six, delay can subdue the flesh. Delay can subdue the flesh.

Okay, here's a good one. You guys are going to like these next few. What happens in our flesh? Right? Does your flesh want to pray? No, the flesh does not want to pray.

So the more it's delayed, the more my knees hit the ground. The lower things aren't happening the way I want, the more I pray, the more I press in. The flesh then has to submit.

Can you imagine how selfish we would be? I mean, it just makes me sick sometimes if God just answered the prayer. Prayer, prayer, prayer. We would be so weak spiritually.

Our flesh would be in control of everything. We'd just be getting in our way. So it brings the flesh into submission.

Here's how many of us pray, if we're not careful. We don't say these things, but this is what the underlying message is. Ray Stedman gave us an example of a self-focused prayer.

Dear Father, I don't want to disobey You, but I must have my own way at all costs. For I love what You do not love and I want what You do not want. So please be a good God and deny Yourself.

Move off Your throne and let me take over. If You don't like this, then I'll ask that You bite Your lip and say or do nothing that will spoil my plans and let me enjoy myself. That is the prayer of most people, many people.

Not those exact words, right? Who would dare say that? But that's often how we pray. We pray knowing something isn't God's will. So delay as you're seeking God.

Here's what I mean by when delay happens, you press in more. You seek God more. That will subdue the flesh.

Number seven, delay can lead to exposure. Delay can lead to exposing our sin. Oh, you thought I was going to miss this point, didn't you? Thought I'd skip right over the most important point.

Many times, prayers are not answered because of besetting sin. The Bible is so clear on this that I would not be doing you a favor by avoiding it. Many Scriptures come to mind, but one that really does is Isaiah.

The people were praying. They were asking God to save them from their enemies and God was not answering. Isaiah said, the Lord said this, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear.

In other words, Isaiah's saying God's hand is not short. I can't reach you. I'm sorry.

My hand's too short. God can save. God can redeem.

God can set free. His hand's not too short. He can do whatever He wants.

And His ear's not heavy. What? My ear's too heavy. I can't hear what you're saying.

I don't know what you're saying. It says, I can hear your prayers. I can heal.

I can save. I can set free. I can reach down.

But, your iniquities have separated you and me. Your sins have hid my face from you so that I cannot hear. Now, do you want to just grab some scissors and find that verse and cut it out? That one sure doesn't apply anymore.

Thank God we're not in the Old Testament. But the principle still applies. Here's what it looks like.

I'm holding on to this sin. God says, get rid of it. I say, nope.

Nope. What I love. I love my one little vice, right? Lord, I know You want me to get rid of this.

I know You want me to deal with this. I'm not going to. And I'm still going to come to the throne room and I'm going to pray.

I'm going to pray and delay. It's not happening. Well, I don't want to get rid of this.

I can't hear. I can't answer that. I can't do what You want me to do because this sin, this iniquity has done what? It has blocked.

It has blocked. In James, it actually talks about people becoming sick and dying because of sin. Read the end of James.

If there's a sin leading to death, if there's unconfessed sin and a person's sick and the reason they're sick is because of sin. Oh, here's another controversial topic. See, some sickness is directly resolved to sin.

Some is not, of course. But in the same way, some prayers are not answered because of sin. So how do you know, Shane? Well, do an inventory check.

Spend an hour with God and open His Word and say, Lord, reveal to me. He will reveal. He will show.

He's not saying, no, not today. You need to wait until Monday. They're not going to reveal to you.

I'm not going to show you. God will answer that prayer. He will show you if there's something.

You take the water hose, right? You kink it. What happens? Nothing wrong with the flow. The water's on full pressure.

But that blockage is blocking God hearing the prayer. You know God wants to do something in your life. You know God is wanting you to do something.

You can feel it. It's right there. But something is blocking.

Blocking. Did you know that the Bible even says that your prayers will be hindered if you don't treat your wife right? Oh, gosh, you can hear a pin drop. Let's try it out.

Not that kind of pin. But it's true. Ian Bound said, men do not pray well because they do not live well.

Wow, that could have preached its own sermon. Think about that. Men do not pray well because they do not live well.

If you live well, you pray well. They're connected. If you're caught in sin, you're caught in a worldly lifestyle, do you think you like to pray? The Ray Stedman type of prayers, bless me in this ungodly work I'm in.

Bless me in this relationship I shouldn't be in. Bless me in all these things. But if you're really set on pleasing God and you're being holy and set apart, you will pray well.

So he's absolutely right. Men do not pray well because they do not live well. So it begs the question, is there a break in the line of communication? Is there a kink in the hose this morning? Is there something, there's a delay.

Lord, there's a delay. I can't get through this delay. Have you ever prayed and it seems like heaven is brass, right? They talk about the brass ceiling.

My prayers are going nowhere. I'm just walking through life like a robot. I mean, this isn't happening.

The passion's gone. The prayers aren't being answered. You might want to do some self-examination.

And here's a big one we often forget about. What about unforgiveness? Or bitterness? Or anger? And we hold on to all these wrong attitudes. We're holding on to wrong attitudes.

Pride. Pride arrogance. We have this puffiness, this hideyness about us.

You know that word cocky? You know where it comes from? The chickens. Walking around the rooster thing. Oh, with his head up.

Cocky. And we walk around like that and we think God's going to answer our prayers? Let me just tell you boldly and loudly, no. He wants us to humble ourselves and say, Lord, remove that wrong attitude out of me.

Remove that unforgiveness and that bitterness. Lord, this pride is a stench to me. When have you ever prayed that prayer? Lord, this pride and this arrogance is a stench in my nostrils.

I can't imagine what it is in yours. Lord, would you please help me remove it? I need to humble myself. What do you want me to do, Lord? I'll clean the toilets.

I'll do this. I'll serve my family. Lord, I have to remove this pride.

The block is removed. But what do we do? I'm not prideful. No, I'm not.

I have to act that way. I have to act that way to survive. I have to hold in that unforgiveness to protect myself.

Lord says, no, I want you to release. I just prayed with a couple. They prayed for unforgiveness.

It's been holding them back from so many things and they're shedding tears over this because they know. And I reminded them that forgiving isn't saying the other person's right and you're wrong. Forgiveness is, Lord, I can't hold this anymore.

I'm releasing it. I'm not going to let this cancer consume me anymore. I'm not going to be caught in this cycle of unforgiveness and bitterness and anger and having no joy of the Lord.

Lord, I'm releasing this. I'm forgiving. You forgave me in Christ Jesus when I was still in my sin.

Surely, I can forgive others. And when that takes place, the release takes place. And what happens after that? Joy.

The joy of my salvation returns. And my prayer life is now fervent and passionate. It's not some five minute little thing I can barely put together.

Now I'm broken before God and praying. My heart has been set free. I've been cleansed of pride and arrogance and unforgiveness and bitterness and murmuring and complaining.

You think that's a sin? Oh, my goodness. I would love to do a whole sermon just on that. The children of Israel were judged very harshly for their murmuring.

Murmuring. I don't think there's going to be too many M's. They're complaining.

Let's say that, right? It's a strong complaining. Have you ever met those people? I've been that person. Everything.

Oh, God. You're like the Grinch who stole Christmas. You have this and murmuring and complaining.

Oh, God. My prayer life. And there's just nothing there.

I believe that we take some serious self-examination if we want a powerful prayer life. Because powerful prayer flows through men and women who are emptied of themselves. Sin hasn't got a stronghold.

It's been released. It's not the kink in the hose. It's the water flowing freely.

Just sit with God for an hour. Pen and paper. You'll be amazed at the junk that comes out.

Really? I forgot. I didn't know that was bad. How do I do that? And He'll just begin to show you these things of avoiding certain people you shouldn't be avoiding and having these attitudes.

And God will just cleanse the heart. So be careful. Delay can lead to exposure and then repentance takes place.

That's one of the reasons we do communion. And do communion this way. Get your heart right first.

Have you truly repented of your sin? Have you cleaned out? Examine our hearts. Is there anything in me? Because what we don't want to do in communion is carry the sin that we've been to love. I'm carrying the sin around.

I don't care what God's Word says about it. I'm going to come up here. I'm going to take the bread that was broken for my sin.

I'm going to drink and remember the blood that she had for my sin. But I'm going to keep it here with me and not give it up and not repent of it. That's why Paul said examine yourself.

Remove that thing. Don't take the Lord's cup in a worthy manner. And let me just offer a little encouragement.

I'm not talking about coming up here and grabbing this when you're perfect. Or nobody could take communion, could they? Maybe somebody would attempt it. Then they need to repent of pride.

But it's about getting the heart right before we take communion. Delay can readjust our attitudes. Thomas Watson, our murmuring is the devil's music.

And I think God uses delay like a sculptor uses the knife or the chisel and the hammer. Oh, now you're ready to listen. Oh, now you don't want that job as bad, do you? Oh, now you'll start being nice to your spouse.

Delay, delay, it's like that vice. You know those vices, you see a big vice in a workshop? The tighter you do that vice, the more it pushes on that object. So that delay, well, okay, my attitude needs to change.

Something needs to change. Delay can readjust our attitudes. 1 Peter, husbands, likewise dwell with your wives with an understanding attitude, giving honor to the wife as the weaker vessel and being heirs together of the grace of life that your prayers may not be hindered.

Did it just say what I think it said? My prayers are hindered based on how I treat my spouse? Of course. Can you imagine God answering powerfully the prayers of a man who is the opposite of all these things? Not dwelling in an understanding way. That just means seek to listen.

Just listen. I'm preaching myself right here. Morgan's saying, amen, brother, preach it.

They seek to listen. They value. They value their opinion.

See, you seek to listen. I value your opinion. I treat you not like a weaker, like weak, that we think of the word weak, but more fragile, like something's going to break easy.

You listen, seek to understand, seek their counsel, treat them fragilely, gently, and then God will answer that prayer. Because it's coming with the right attitude. Not of an attitude from a man who rules their home with a rod of iron and has disregard for their family and walks over them and tramples on them and these things.

And God says, I won't even hear that prayer. Your prayers are hindered. Start at home.

Self-examination. Number nine, delay can point us back to his sovereignty. We already talked about this.

Who is ultimately in control? Who is ultimately in control? So delay, as things are being delayed, it points me back to God's sovereignty. God, you're in control, I'm not. Whatever's going to happen, it's going to happen.

You know I'm trusting in you. I'm bringing my thoughts back to you. I'm thoughts of doubt, thoughts of giving up.

Lord, I'm bringing them back to you. I was reminded of a story I read quite a while ago in a book. I think it was, I mean, stories like this happen all the time.

But it was about 100 years ago when they had horses and carriages. Remember those times? No, nobody lived in those times, I don't think. There was a few people.

But a lady was trying to catch a train, to catch another train to be at her grandfather's house for his birthday in the evening with their little son. And she got into the carriage. This man was old.

He was just talking and kind of didn't care about, he didn't have Facebook. Didn't have a cell phone or a clock, unless you looked somewhere, or had a little pocket watch. Pocket clock, whatever they would call those things.

And he's driving the carriage, and she's getting irritated. And they finally get there, and the train had already left. So it was like a three-hour wait.

Got to the next train station. Another four or five-hour wait. Finally got to the grandparents the next day.

Missed his birthday. She was so upset. But then she found out that the train she would have been on derailed, and many people died in the accident.

And they're still recovering bodies. So see, her anger turned quickly to joy. And that's a good way to view God's sovereignty.

See, we don't always see the train derailing. But if we trust in Him and we look to His sovereignty, we can rest in it. I mean, who are you resting in right now anyway? Your own sovereignty? That's dangerous.

That scares the life out of me. I'm trusting in what I can accomplish. I don't even know if I can make it home.

Right? Something happens. Your car goes off. You're trusting in God's sovereignty.

So the longer, sometimes when prayers aren't being answered, they're being delayed. Lord, I'm trusting in Your sovereignty. And you build that relationship with God.

And then the final point, delay can point us to the true God. This is actually for those who don't know God. Most religions pray, but only the true God answers prayers.

That's one thing you can say about Christianity. I can name just about every religion I know people, their prayers aren't answered. They live life, my good deeds outweighing my bad deeds, and I'll pray, I'll chant,

I'll do things, but nothing's really answered.

It's the one true living God who answers prayers. So as prayers are being delayed or sometimes answered, people realize I need the true living God. I need the real God, the God who answers prayers.

We sing about it. We know that God. But we also have to remember that Jesus said, Pray in my name.

People sometimes miss that, but that's according, you're agreeing with whoever calls upon the lame and Lord shall be saved, but you're also agreeing with in Jesus' name. Because you can't pray in Jesus' name unless you believe in Christ and believe in who He says He is, that He is God, He is the Son of God. So as we pray, we pray in Jesus' name, not some fictitious God, not in God, not where I'm avoiding Jesus.

I don't want to pray in that name. I mean, that's why, right? There's the power in that name. That validates who we're praying to.

I remember when I prayed down, I've told you a few of you this. I'm having tongue-tied this morning, my goodness. When Mike Antonovich's office, they had me go down there to pray, and at the city council in Los Angeles, and it's right before I'm going to pray, and the guy said, oh yeah, just not in Jesus' name.

Like, do you research who you ask to pray? I mean, asking me not to pray in Jesus' name, that's not going to happen. You know, so obviously I've never been invited back there again, and I heard that they weren't real happy with what I prayed and did. But what's the point of praying then? What's the point of praying? Oh, something out there, would you hear me? If the sky and the trees and the God, there's gods, there's billions of gods in the Hindu religion, and you bow to a cat, you bow to a cow, and you bow to a snake, you better have the one true and living God.

He's the only God that can bring peace, healing, and hope. The one true and living God. So if your prayers are being delayed, ask yourself, do I know Him? Do I truly know Him, or do I only know about Him? Am I praying to some mystical God and some cosmic ball of love and to some doting grandfather who controls the universe and works like a clock maker? Is this the true God? That's the only God that will answer prayers.

I'm going to read just a quick thing from this book, Waiting on God. You'd have to get it from a rare Christian bookstore. It's out of print.

But it's a lot of Andrew Murray, Oswald Chambers, just quick chapters on what they think it means to wait on God. And this was great. This helped me this week.

It was written in 1928. Examining your prayer life. Has my prayer life been powerless because of some besetting sin? Has my prayer life been hindered by haste and irregularity, indifference, insufficient preparation, unbelief, or neglect of Bible study? Has my prayer life been fruitless? Have I had no power with God? Has my prayer life been restricted to short, stated seasons of prayer? Has my prayer life been starved? Has my prayer life been joyless? Do I love to pray? Ask yourself this question.

Do you love to pray or is prayer a duty instead of a delight? That really hit home with me this week. I've got to pray. Think about it.

It should be a delight. We're communicating with God. But are we bored? Oh, I'm tired.

I don't want to pray. I knew she would be in a hurry to be in a long sermon, but I wasn't prepared for this. And the flesh just doesn't want to pray.

Has my prayer life been growing or has it been declining? Has my prayer life been sacrificial? Has it cost me anything? Has my prayer life cost me anything? See, true prayer will cost you. True prayer will cost you sleep. True prayer will cost you friends.

True prayer will cost you what you watch on television, what you do. You can't just have powerful, lasting, meaningful, fervent, faith-filled prayer and be engaged in the things of the world. You can't.

Something has to be given up. True prayer will cost you. Are you willing to pay the price? And then they ended by saying, Lord, teach us to pray.

Lord, teach us to pray.

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