



WHEN GOD SAYS NO

Preaching and Teaching Resources

ADRIAN ROGERS





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When God Says No

SERMON REFERENCE: James 4:1-4

LWF SERMON NUMBER: #2134

Prayer is the Christian's greatest privilege, and it is often our greatest failure. There's no substitute for prayer. That is why it is crucial that we know how to pray.

In James 4, we are told of two major problems concerning prayer:

The problem of unasked prayer. "You have not because you've asked not."

The problem of unanswered prayer. "You ask and receive not."

God's response to our prayers may be direct, different, delayed or denied. Sometimes, the answer is no. But why does God say no?

We must remember this about prayer: We are to pray in Jesus' name, with His approval, for His acclaim, with His authority, in the Spirit, in the will of God.

Adrian Rogers says, "The prayer that gets to Heaven is the prayer that starts in Heaven. What we do is just close the circuit. You see, it is the will of God. Prayer is not some method by which man on earth gets his will done in Heaven. Prayer is a method where God in Heaven gets His will done on earth."

We are to pray in the will of God. A lot of times we pray with a covetous spirit, and we wonder why our prayers are not answered. It is because we prayed with the wrong intent.

We are to pray in obedience. It is a waste of time to pray if we have unconfessed sin in our hearts. If you want God to answer your prayer, get your heart clean before God.

We are to pray in fellowship. You cannot pray with a grudge in your heart toward somebody else.

We are to pray in faith. Faith is not positive thinking or wishing things into existence. Faith is hearing from God, believing God, and acting on what you hear and believe.

LIFE APPLICATION

How is your prayer life? Perhaps it needs some work. Today, repent of any unconfessed sin or selfish intent in your life that may hinder your conversation with God, and pray to Him. If you can, write out your prayers so that you might reflect on how God moves in your heart and shapes your life.



When God Says No

SERMON REFERENCE: James 4:1-4

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1) INTRODUCTION

- a) Prayer is the Christian's greatest privilege.
 - i) Prayer, too, is often our greatest failure.
 - (1) There is no substitute for prayer.
- b) We need to learn how to pray.
- c) James 4:1-4
 - i) In this passage, James tells us of two major problems concerning prayer:
 - (1) The problem of unasked prayer
 - (a) James 4:2
 - (b) Sometimes, we just don't pray.
 - (i) We have not because we ask not.
 - 1. God desires to bless us.
 - 2. Jeremiah 33:3
 - (2) The problem of unanswered prayer.
 - (a) James 4:3
 - (i) We have not because we ask amiss.
 - d) God answers our prayers in four basic ways:
 - i) The answer may be direct.
 - (1) God says, "Yes."
 - ii) The answer may be different.
 - (1) God says, "Better."
 - (2) If God does not give us what we ask, He may give us something far better than we ask.
 - (a) Romans 8:26
 - (b) Ephesians 3:20
 - iii) The answer may be delayed.
 - (1) God says, "Wait."
 - (2) Isaiah 30:18
 - (3) Matthew 7:7
 - (a) The Greek verb used in this Scripture means to keep on knocking and to keep on seeking.
 - (4) With God, timing is more important than time.
 - (a) James 1:4
 - (i) "Perfect" in this passage does not mean "without flaw;" it means "mature."
 - iv) The answer may be denied.
 - (1) God says, "No."
 - (2) James 4:3
 - (3) Sometimes prayers are not answered.



- (a) This does not mean that the promises of God have failed.
 - (i) If we turn on the light switch in our homes and the lights do not come on, we don't say that electricity has failed or that Thomas Edison was a fraud; we check the fuse box or make sure we paid the electric bill.
 - (b) When prayers go unanswered, we need to ask why.
 - e) In today's message, we will look at six principles and ask why God does answer our prayers, and then perhaps we'll see why sometimes He does not answer our prayers.
- 2) WE ARE TO PRAY IN HIS NAME (John 14:6)
 - a) When we go to God in prayer, we must go through the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i) John 14:13-14
 - ii) John 16:23-24
 - iii) Without Jesus, there is no way to the Father.
 - (1) Jesus doesn't just point us to the way; Jesus is the way.
 - b) To pray in Jesus' name means that you have received Him as your Lord, Savior and Master.
 - c) What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?
 - i) It means to pray with His approval.
 - (1) We cannot sign His name to something He does not approve.
 - ii) It means to pray for His acclaim.
 - (1) It is not for our glory but for His.
 - iii) It means to pray with His authority.
 - (1) We have signed His name to our prayer.
 - (2) We are saying that we are His representatives here on Earth, acting on the behalf of Jesus Christ in Heaven.
 - (a) We are praying with the power of attorney.
 - (3) Only if you are a child of God can you pray with His authority.
 - (a) Do not forge His name to an unauthorized prayer.
- 3) WE ARE TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT (Ephesians 6:18)
 - a) It isn't enough to be saved so that we can pray in His name; we must also be surrendered so that we can pray in the Spirit.
 - b) There are many commands in the Bible to pray in the Spirit.
 - i) Ephesians 6:18
 - ii) Jude 20
 - c) We are to pray in the Spirit because of our human weakness.
 - i) Romans 8:26
 - (1) The word "helpeth" in this passage means "to take hold of."
 - (a) This is a compound word; it's prefix means "together with" and "instead of."
 - (i) The Holy Spirit helps us - He does it instead of us, and He does it together with us.
 - (2) When we pray, the Holy Spirit is the one who guides, energizes and inspires our prayers.
 - (a) He is the one who puts power to our prayers.
 - (i) He does it instead of us, but He also does it together with us.



- (ii) We cannot do it without Him, and He won't do it without us.
 - d) We are to pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.
 - e) The Holy Spirit also instructs our prayers.
 - i) There are so many things to pray for and many ways in which to pray for those things.
 - ii) The Holy Spirit takes our prayers and transforms them so that they are acceptable to God the Father.
 - (1) He does this, "with groanings that cannot be uttered."
 - (a) Romans 8:26
 - (b) The word "groanings" is often used to describe a woman in labor.
 - (c) There are things that we cannot articulate.
 - iii) Because of our human ignorance, we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.
 - f) If we want our prayers to be answered:
 - i) We need to be saved.
 - ii) We need to surrender to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to guide and energize our prayers.
- 4) WE ARE TO PRAY IN THE WILL OF GOD (1 John 5:14)
 - a) When we are saved and Spirit-filled, then we will pray in the will of God.
 - i) 1 John 5:14
 - ii) When we pray in the Spirit, we will be praying the will of God because the Holy Spirit will not guide us to pray for anything outside the will of God.
 - (1) If we do pray for something that is not the will of God, the Holy Spirit will say, "This is what he's asking, but this is what he needs."
 - b) Prayer is not an exercise to bend God's will to fit our will; prayer is finding the will of God and getting in on it.
 - i) To be willing to do the will of God means signing the contract at the bottom and asking the Lord to fill it in.
 - (1) It means desiring God's will anytime, any place, anywhere and at any cost.
 - ii) Romans 12:1-2
 - (1) God's will is good, acceptable and perfect.
 - (2) God wants for us what we would want for ourselves if we had sense enough to want it.
 - c) The prayer that gets to Heaven is the prayer that starts in Heaven.
 - i) Prayer is not some method by which man on Earth gets his will done in Heaven; prayer is a method where God in Heaven gets His will done on Earth.
 - (1) Matthew 6:10
 - d) Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, then putting that desire into our hearts because we're praying in the Spirit, and then sending that prayer back to Heaven in the power of the cross because we're praying in Jesus' name.
 - e) Oftentimes our prayers go unanswered because we're praying outside the will of God.
 - i) James 4:1-3
 - (1) The word "lusts" in this passage means "strong desire."
 - (2) The word "members" is referring to our eyes, hands, feet, heart, etc.
 - (3) We ask with the wrong intent.



- ii) We can ask for personal needs but not for selfish needs.
 - f) Psalm 37:4
 - i) Our delights determine our desires.
 - ii) We must delight in the Lord, not in the things of this world.
 - g) When our prayers go unanswered, it does not mean that God's promises have failed; it means we are selfish in our prayers.
 - i) Matthew 7:7
 - ii) Matthew 6:33
 - (1) This passage is the context for Matthew 7:7
 - h) The Bible gives us several instances where people came to Jesus asking for things, and the answer was no.
 - i) Luke 12:13-15
 - (1) The man in this passage had a covetous spirit.
 - ii) Matthew 20:20-22
 - (1) They had no understanding, and the mother was not asking in the will of God.
- 5) WE ARE TO PRAY IN OBEDIENCE (Psalm 66:18)
 - a) It is foolish to pray if we have unconfessed sin in our hearts and in our lives.
 - i) If God were to bless us and answer our prayers when we know we are not right with Him, then He would be reinforcing our sin nature and enabling us as sinners.
 - ii) Psalm 66:18
 - iii) Isaiah 1:15-16
 - iv) Isaiah 59:1-4
 - (1) This passage can apply to modern America.
 - (a) God will not necessarily answer our prayers if we choose leadership that is corrupt over a God who is holy.
 - v) 1 Samuel 8:18
 - (1) We cannot expect God to just overrule and override the consequences, either personally or nationally, when we pray in disobedience.
 - vi) Ezra 9:6
 - vii) James 5:16
 - viii) 1 John 3:22
 - ix) Joshua 7:10-11
 - (1) God told Joshua to deal with the sin in the camp if Joshua wanted God to hear his prayers.
 - b) There are not only sins of commission, but there are also sins of omission.
 - i) We sometimes think we are okay if we're not lying, cheating, stealing, etc.
 - ii) One of the great sins in America today is that we have failed to help the poor and needy.
 - (1) Proverbs 21:13
 - (a) This passage references a hard heart.
 - (2) Luke 6:38
 - (3) Philippians 4:16



- (a) This verse provides context for Philippians 4:19.
- (b) God will not supply our need if we are selfish.
- (c) Many of us have all that God can trust us with financially.
 - (i) Luke 6:38
 - 1. We shovel out, and God shovels in; God has a much bigger shovel than we do.

6) WE ARE TO PRAY IN FELLOWSHIP (Mark 11:25-26)

- a) We cannot expect God to answer our prayers if we are harboring a grudge in our heart toward someone else.
 - i) Mark 11:25-26
 - ii) If we have hate in our heart, then we cannot expect God to hear our prayers.
 - iii) Is the grudge worth not having your prayers answered?
- b) Sometimes the grudge is between husband and wife.
 - i) 1 Peter 3:7

7) WE ARE TO PRAY IN FAITH (Matthew 21:22)

- a) Hebrews 11:6
 - i) Pray and believe, you'll receive; pray in doubt, you'll do without.
 - ii) We cannot please God without faith.
- b) The emphasis should not be as much upon our faith as it is upon the God of our faith.
- c) Faith is not positive thinking or wishing to make something so. Faith is hearing from God, believing God and acting upon what we hear and believe.
- d) If we give our hearts to Jesus and abide by the first five steps outlined in this message, then we will find that faith will be automatic.
 - i) We will find it easier to pray, believe and receive from God what we need and want.

8) CONCLUSION

- a) It all begins with praying in the name of Jesus.
 - i) John 16:24
- b) We cannot pray in the name of Jesus if we haven't first received Him into our hearts as Lord and Savior.
 - i) Being a member of a church or denomination does not save us.
 - ii) Have you surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?
- c) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.
- d) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
 - i) Romans 3:23
 - ii) Romans 10:9-10
 - iii) Romans 10:13
 - iv) Acts 16:31
 - v) John 3:16



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SERMON REFERENCE: James 4:1-4

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Be finding the book of James. It's back toward the back of the New Testament. And turn to chapter 4. I remind you of what you ought to already know: that prayer is the Christian's greatest privilege. And alas, alas, it is so often our greatest failure. Now there's no substitute for prayer. You can substitute many things, but there's no substitute for prayer, not energy, not enthusiasm, not intellect, not intent. There is no substitute for prayer. And we need to learn how to pray.

James talks to us today about some prayer problems. Look if you will in chapter 4 as we read verses 1 through 4, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Now let me just stop right here before we read the rest of this and say that there are two major problems that James mentions in these few verses that we're going to read, the first four verses; two major problems concerning prayer, more than that, but two major ones. And I want you to see if you can spot them while I read. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts, that war in your members? Ye lust and have not, ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain, ye fight and war, yet ye have not because you ask not. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Now what are the two great problems that James mentions in that passage of Scripture? First of all, there is the problem of unasked prayer. Sometimes we just don't pray. "You have not." Why? "Because you ask not." God wants to load you with benefits, God wants to bless you. Read Jeremiah 33 verse 3 where God has invited you, "Call upon Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that you know not," but James says, "You don't have because you don't ask." So there is the problem of unasked prayer.

But there's another problem here, and that's the problem of unanswered prayer. It is that people ask, but he says, "You ask and receive not." So, which is the greater problem? Well, either one of them causes our prayers not to be answered.

You see, God responds to our prayers in about four basic ways, and all of this is by introduction. Sometimes the answer to prayer may be direct. God just says, "Yes." We ask God for something, and God just says, "All right, my child, you ask, here it is," and God gives us exactly, precisely, immediately what we ask. I love to pray that way. I love just to say, "Lord, I need so-and-so," and He says, "All right, here it is, My child." And I think we've all, if we've walked with the Lord for many days, we've seen that kind of an answer to prayer. I mean beyond coincidence, beyond any happenstance, we say, "Yes, this has the hallmark of God; it has the stamp of God upon it." So first of all, the answer may be direct, and God says yes.

Sometimes the answer may be different and God says, "Better." Now if God doesn't give you what you ask, He may give you something far better than you ask, and so the answer may not be direct. It may be different. You ask one thing, and God gives you something else. For the Bible says in Romans



8:26, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us." And so sometimes the Holy Spirit says, "Adrian is asking this, Father, but this is what he needs, and give him not what he asks, but give him something better than he asks." And He is able to do, "Exceedingly above all that we can ask or think," that's what the Bible says and you can find that in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 20.

So thank God sometimes that the answer is direct, sometimes the answer is different, and then sometimes the answer is delayed. Isn't that true? I mean, the Bible says in Isaiah 30 verse 18, "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you." And then in Matthew chapter seven verse 7 the Bible says, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." The Greek verb is "keep on asking, keep on knocking, keep on seeking, keep on keeping on," because the Bible says, "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you." With God, timing is more important than time. The Bible says in James chapter 1 verse 4, "You have need of patience that you may be perfect." That doesn't mean without any flaw. It means mature, and so if you want to be mature, sometimes God makes you wait. It's like a child waiting for Christmas, their Christmas may be all the better.

All right now sometimes the answer is direct. God says, "Yes." Sometimes the answer is different and God says, "Better." Sometimes the answer is delayed and God says, "Wait." But sometimes the answer's "No." The prayer is denied. It's not direct, it is not different, it is not delayed, it is denied. God says, "No!" "We ask and receive not." That's what James says.

Now why would God say no to prayer? Well that's what we want to think about today, and what I have to say to you is not necessarily new. I'm not gonna say anything that I've not said from this pulpit before at one time or another. I'm not here to create truth, I'm here to reinforce truth and to remind us of things that I need to be reminded of and you need to be reminded of on and on and on.

Sometimes prayers are not answered. Well, if we pray and the prayer is not answered, would we say that the promises of God are wrong? Would we say that God is not a prayer-answering God? Well I want to ask you a question. If you went into your house this afternoon and turned the light switch, and the lights did not come on would you say electricity has failed? Would you say that Thomas Edison is a fraud, or would you say, "There must be some problem. Sweetheart, did we pay the bill?" Go out and check the fuse box. See what has happened. You would not say that electricity has failed. You would say there is something wrong because we have turned the light switch and the lights did not come on.

Now we need to ask ourselves this question. When we pray sometimes and the answer is not direct, it is not different, it is not delayed, it is denied, then why? Why does God say no? I want you to get some paper and jot some Scriptures down because I'm gonna give you a lot of Scripture, you won't even have time to turn to them, you're just gonna have to trust me, you can turn to them if you're fast. If you're a little boy or girl, you can probably find them. If you're an adult, you'd just better write them down. Let me just turn the thing around and say not only why God does not answer our prayers, but let's say why God does answer our prayers, and then we'll see why perhaps He didn't



answer our prayers. Let me give you six principles.

Principle number one: we are to pray in His name. We are to pray in His name. Now put these Scriptures down, John chapter 14 and verse 6. We all know that one. "Jesus saith, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.'" Now when you're coming to God in prayer, you have to come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then in John 14 verses 13 and 14, here's what Jesus said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it."

And then put down John chapter 16 verses 23 and 24, "In that day you shall ask Me nothing. Verily I say unto you, but whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto if you ask nothing in My name, ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full." Show me somebody getting his prayers answered, and I'll show you a joyful Christian.

You see, without Jesus there is no way to the Father. And so, say you were lost in a neighborhood and you stop and you ask an individual, you're walking around there and you say, "Can you tell me how to get to thus and such a spot?" That individual says to you, "Well, it's quite complicated. I'll try to explain it to you, but you don't have any way to get there." "Well," you say, "I'll walk." He says, "It's too far." He says, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You get in my car, and I'll take you there." Now he's not just pointing to the way, he then becomes the way. Jesus doesn't just point us to the way, Jesus is the way. He says, "You can't come unless I take you to the Father." Now therefore, to pray in Jesus' name means that you have received Him as your Lord and as your Savior and as your Master.

Let me tell you, let me give you just three A's as to what it means to pray in Jesus' name. Number one, it means to pray with His approval. You can't sign His name to something that He doesn't approve. You can't just rattle off a list of things that you want and say, "In Jesus' name," some little pet phrase to get your prayers answered. To pray in His name means with His approval.

And then it means to pray for His acclaim, for His glory, not for your glory, but for His glory.

And then it means to pray with His authority. You have signed His name to your prayer and you can say, "Satan, in the name of Jesus, leave me alone." You can pray with His authority because when you pray in His name, do you know what you're saying? "I am His agent, I am His agent. I am here on earth, acting on behalf of Jesus Christ in Heaven, and I am praying with the power of attorney, I am praying with the authority of Jesus Christ. I'm signing His name to this prayer." And friend you can't do that if you're not a child of God. Don't forge His name to an unauthorized prayer.

All right, number one, we must pray in His name. Number two, we are to pray in the Spirit. We're to pray in the Spirit. Now it's not enough to be saved so you can pray in His name; you must also be surrendered so you can pray in the Spirit. Now there're many commands in the Bible to pray in the Spirit. Let me give you two of them: Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 18, "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." And then in Jude verse 20, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." Now when the Bible says "Holy Spirit" or "Holy Ghost," that's the same thing. When we talk about a ghost, we're not talking about some specter. It



means a spirit, an invisible spirit. So we're to pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Now why must you pray in the Spirit? Well obviously because of your human weakness. Put this verse down, Romans 8 verse 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." Now the word helpeth is a Greek word which means "to take hold of." If you're trying to put a bale of cotton on a truck, you're on one side, you're trying to put it on the truck, somebody on the other side is helping you, together you "take hold of."

Now this word is a compound word. It has a prefix which means "together with" and "instead of." It's a double prefix. It's a very wonderful word. He helps us, and He does it instead of us, and He does it together with us. Now what does that mean? Well it means when we pray, He is the one who guides, energizes, inspires our prayers. He is the one who puts power in our prayer. He does it instead of us, but He does it together with us. What does that mean in plain English? We can't do it without Him and He won't do it without us.

We are to pray in the Spirit. We pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. And you see, the Spirit, He's the one who energizes our prayer; He's the one who instructs our prayer. The Bible says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." There are so many things to pray for, and so many ways to pray for those things. So the Holy Spirit of God is sort of the divine transformer; He takes our prayer energy and He transforms it so it is acceptable to God the Father. We're praying in the Spirit.

The Bible says He does that, "With groanings that can't be uttered." There're things that we cannot articulate. The word groanings is a word that is used for a woman in labor, when she's about to bring forth a child, and the Holy Spirit of God is there when we pray, this almost wordless praying. He is there to energize our prayer, to make our prayer acceptable into Heaven. Because of our human weakness, He helps our infirmities. Because of our human ignorance, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought," the dear, blessed Holy Spirit of God is the one who energizes our prayers. He inspires our prayers, He guides our prayers, He energizes our praying, He sustains our praying.

So if you want your prayers answered, you know what my suggestion to you is? Number one, you get saved. Number two, you be surrendered and you say, "Here, dear Holy Spirit of God, You are the Spirit of grace; You are the Spirit of supplications, pray in me, through me, with me. Guide, energize my prayers."

Number three, we are to pray in the will of God. We are to pray in the will of God. Now when you're saved and when you're Spirit-filled, then you're going to be praying in the will of God. First John chapter 5 and verse 14, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him. If we ask Him anything according to His will, He heareth us." You see, when we pray in the Spirit, we'll be praying in the will of God, because the Holy Spirit of God is not going to guide you to pray for anything that is not the will of God, and if you pray for something in the Spirit that is not the will of God, the Holy Spirit says, "This is what he's asking, but this is what he needs." So it's very important. These things track one upon another.

Now do you want the will of God in your life? If you don't want the will of God in your life, why



should you pray? Prayer is not some exercise where you bend God's will to fit your will. Prayer is finding the will of God and getting in on it.

Let me ask you a question. Do you want your prayers answered? "Yes sir, Pastor, I want my prayers answered." Second question: are you willing to do the will of God? You say, "Well, I think so, what is it?" No, you're not willing, you're not willing. You don't say, "Lord, show me and I'll make up my mind." You say, "Lord, I have signed the contract at the bottom. You fill it in. You fill it in. I want Your will. Anytime, anyplace, anywhere, any cost, I want Your will." When you want His will that way, you'll know His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, if we ask Him anything according to His will, He hears us." "Well," you say, "what if He wants me to do something I don't want to do?" Do you think God's gonna trap you? Do you think God is not a good God?

Listen, Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God," the God who died for you, "by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." I don't know what God's will is for you, but I know three things about it. It's good, it's acceptable, and it's perfect. God wants for you what you'd want for yourself if you had enough sense to want it. I'm telling you, don't ever say, "Oh, I have to do the will of God." You can say, "Bless God! I get to do the will of the One who loves me so much that He died for me."

I've learned a lesson about prayer. The prayer that gets to Heaven is the prayer that starts in Heaven. What we do is just close the circuit. You see, it is the will of God. Prayer is not some method by which man on earth gets his will done in Heaven. Prayer is a method where God in Heaven gets His will done on earth, and in Matthew 6 verse 10 Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

You know what prayer is? Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, then putting that desire into our heart because we're praying in the Spirit, and then sending it back to Heaven in the power of the cross because we're praying in Jesus' name. We're praying in the will of God. Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, putting that desire into our hearts because we are in the Spirit, and then sending it back to Heaven in the power of the cross because we're saved and under the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we are to pray in the will of God.

Now that's the reason so many of our prayers are not answered. James tells us clearly that we have not because we're praying out of the will of God. Look at this, "From whence come," chapter 4 verses 1 through 3, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts," the word lusts here means strong desire, "that war in your members?" He's talking about your eyes, your hands, your feet, your heart. "Ye lust and have not, ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain. Yet ye have not because ye ask not, and then you ask and receive not because you ask amiss." That is, you're asking with the wrong intent.

You say, "Well, Pastor, can't I ask God for what I need?" Of course. You can ask God for personal needs, but you cannot ask God for selfish needs. Some people take a verse like this one, Psalm 37



and verse 4, that says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart." You say, "Oh, man, that's wonderful. I've always wanted Reagan's ranch in California. I'm gonna buy it." I'll just have the desire of my heart." No. Listen to what God is saying. "Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desire of your heart."

Do you know what determines your desires? Your delights. You desire what you delight in. Now he doesn't say if you delight in the things of this world, God will give them to you. No, you delight yourself in the Lord and you will have the desire of your heart.

You know sometimes people think, "Well, the promises of God have failed," the promises of God have not failed. These people are just selfish in their prayers. For example, I quoted Matthew 7:7, where Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." And a person says, "Well I've asked, I didn't get; I sought, I didn't get; I knocked, it wasn't opened unto me." Well, listen. A text without a context is a pretext. That's Matthew 7:7. Just go back to Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, where Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

We come with a laundry list, a shopping list of things that we want, ta, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da. Have we sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Are we delighting in the Lord? No, absolutely not. We have the lust of our flesh, our carnal desires, we think of God as some sort of a glorified bellhop, to give us whatever our carnal natures want, and then we wonder why our prayers are not answered. No, friend. We are to pray in the will of God.

There're several instances in the Bible where people came to Jesus when He was here on earth, and they asked Him for things, and the answer was no. Put these down in your margin, Luke 12 verses 13 through 15, "And one of the company said unto Him, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.'" Now evidently the father had died, and they're trying to adjudicate the will, and one brother was not dividing with the other brother. "And He said unto him," Jesus said to him, "'Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?' And He said unto them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.'" Here is a man who came to Jesus with a prayer. He said, "Jesus! You step in. You judge this matter. I want you to be the executor of this estate." Jesus said, "That's not my job. Who made Me a judge or a divider among you?" Then Jesus said, "You've got a covetous spirit." A lot of times we pray with a covetous spirit, and we wonder why our prayers are not answered.

Let me give you another example of the same thing. Here's another prayer that was asked of Jesus. Matthew chapter 20 verses 20 to 22, "Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him." Now who were the sons of Zebedee? James and John. "And desiring a certain thing of Him." In other words, she's praying. "And He said unto her, 'What, what wilt thou?'" What do you want? "She saith unto Him, 'Grant that these, my two sons, may sit, one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left in Thy kingdom.'"

Now here, she's saying, "Lord, look, I've got two fine boys here, and I know You're the Messiah, and I know You're going to rule in place of authority. I'd like James over here on Your right hand, and I'd like John over here on Your left hand. That'd be all right, Lord?" Here's what the Lord says to her.



Listen to this in Matthew 20 verse 22, “Jesus answered and said, ‘You know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They saith unto Him, ‘Oh, yeah, we’re able.’” They didn’t have a clue, did not have a clue! Here was a woman who was praying to the Lord! But she was not praying in the will of God!

We’re to pray in the name. We’re to pray in the Spirit. We’re to pray in the will of God. And then next, we are to pray in obedience. This is very important. Not only are we to pray in the will of God, but we’re to pray in obedience. That is, it is absolutely, totally foolish to pray, a waste of time to pray, if we have unconfessed sin in our hearts and in our lives. So many times our prayers are, “God, I know I’m not right, but just bless me anyhow.” Did you know that if God were to just “bless you anyhow,” that what He would be doing is reinforcing your sin nature? He would be reinforcing, He would be enabling you as a sinner. Now you ought to know better than that.

Let me give you some people in the Bible who knew better than that. Jot these Scriptures down. King David knew better than that because he said in Psalm 66 and verse 18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Now he didn’t say, “If I have sinned the Lord will not hear me.” Let my Bible just represent sin. It tells about sin. And let’s just say I have a little pet sin right down here in my heart, [kiss, kiss, kiss] nice fellow there [pat, pat, pat, pat, pat] “Now Lord,” [kiss, kiss, kiss] “Now Lord, here’s what I want You to do for me.” Isn’t that ridiculous? Is that not ridiculous, to regard iniquity in our heart! And then have the audacity to come to God while we fling our sin in His face and ask Him to answer prayer?

Isaiah knew better than this. Listen to Isaiah chapter 1 verses 15 and 16, “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you. Yea when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes. Cease to do evil.” We can pray for God’s blessing on America and keep killing babies, friend, and our prayers are not gonna be answered. He says, “Your hands are full of blood.”

Isaiah picks up this theme back now in the last part of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 59 verses 1 through 4, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not short, that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that He cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear. Your hands are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity, your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness, none calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.” That, my friend, is modern America. And we wonder why God is not hearing our prayer for America. Now God will let us have the kind of national leadership we want, but God will not necessarily answer our prayers if we choose leadership that is corrupt over a God who is holy.

First Samuel chapter 8 and verse 18, God says, “And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which you have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.” You’ll cry out because of your king that you’ve chosen you! But I won’t hear you. I’m telling you, friend, when we pray in disobedience, when we live lies, nationally or personally, and expect God just to overrule and override, He will not.

Ezra knew better. Ezra chapter 9 and verse 6, and he said, “Oh, my God, I’m ashamed and



blushed, to lift up my face unto Thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head and our trespass is grown up unto the Heavens." Ezra said, "Oh God, I can't even look You in the face because of the sin of this nation."

James knew that we must pray in obedience. James said in James chapter 5 verse 16, "Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The apostle John knew better. First John chapter 3 and verse 22, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight."

What are all of these things saying to us? What is David saying, what is Isaiah saying, what is James saying, what is John saying, what is the Bible saying over and over again? We must pray in obedience! You want your prayers answered. Get your heart clean before God.

Ancient Israel was in trouble. The armies of Israel had been defeated. Joshua, the commander-in-chief, was on his face, and he's praying. And God says to Joshua in Joshua 7 verses 10 and 11, "Why liest thou upon thy face? Get thee up. Israel hath sinned." That is, "Josh, you deal with the sin in the camp if you want Me to hear your prayers."

Now folks, it's clear, it's plain: we must pray in obedience. Not only sometimes the sins of commission, but the sins of omission. Sometimes we think that we're all right because we're not lying, stealing, cheating, committing adultery. You know one of the great sins in America today? We've failed to help the poor and the needy. Did you know that? We stuff ourselves full of bread and giggle about being overweight. And there're people, they're walking the streets of our cities who have need.

Proverbs 21 verse 13, "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself but will not be heard." And he's not talking here about committing adultery. He's just talking about a hard heart. You know, our Lord says in Luke chapter 6 and verse 38, "Give and it shall be given unto you. What measure you meet will be measured to you again."

You know, one of the favorite verses most people like to quote, Philippians 4 verse 19, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory." Now that is a truth, but it's like the other truth that I was talking about over there in Matthew 7:7. It comes in a context. "My God will supply all of your need." But that's in chapter 4 verse 19, but in chapter 4 verse 16, he says, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." What's he saying? He's saying, "I was here, a missionary, and what did you do over and over and over again? You met my need." And he said, "I'll tell you something else, and God's gonna supply your need."

Many times we think, well, you know, I can just get it all for myself and I don't want to be pouring out God's blessing, I don't want to be a conduit, I just want to be a reservoir. And I just want to quote and put it on my refrigerator, "My God shall supply all of my need." My God is not gonna supply any of your need, my dear friend, if you're selfish, if you're selfish. We have to pray in obedience.

Again, I want to tell you, prayer is not just some way that God is going to bless you as His little darling where you can live a life of selfishness and lust and desire to have and fight and war. One reason you have not is you ask not. Another reason you have not is because you ask amiss. Many of



us, you know, we have about all that God can trust us with financially. Let me tell you something. God says, "Give and it'll be given to you." You shovel out, and God shovels in. But God's got a much bigger shovel than you have. Listen, we need to pray in obedience.

Now here's the fifth thing. We're to pray in fellowship. We're to pray in fellowship. Now what does that mean? It means that if you have a grudge in your heart toward somebody else, don't expect God to hear your prayers. Mark 11 verses 25 and 26, "And when you stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against any that your Father which is in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye forgive not, neither will your Father which is in Heaven forgive your trespasses." That's plain. If your heart is headquarters for hate, if you're harboring grudges, don't expect God to hear your prayer. And let me ask a question: is that grudge that you have in your heart, is it worth not having your prayers answered?

A little girl was mad at her mother. Mother took, put her to bed and said, "Now say your prayers." The little girl prayed, and prayed for her father, prayed for her brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and all of her cousins, and then looked at her mother and said, "I guess you noticed you weren't in it." I doubt that little prayer was heard that night.

Sometimes the grudge is between husband and wife. Listen to this verse, married people. First Peter 3 verse 7, "Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them," that is, your wives, "according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." You fight like cats and dogs in the house, you're not getting along domestically, you're not praying in fellowship, your prayer is hindered.

Now I want to mention the last thing here. We're just saying, why does God say no? Why does God say no? Last of all, we must pray in faith, we must pray in faith. We're to pray in faith. Matthew chapter 21 and verse 22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Hebrews 11 and verse 6, but, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Pray and believe and you'll receive. Pray in doubt, you do without. You cannot please God without faith.

George Mueller, a man of another generation, was a man greatly used of God in answered prayer. As a matter of fact, he kept a prayer journal, and he had twenty-five thousand, twenty-five thousand recorded answers of specific prayer. Somebody asked George Mueller, "What is the secret of your answered prayer?" You know what he said? "Have faith in God, have faith in God." Simple answer. Now I don't think he said, "Have faith in God," I think he said, "Have faith in God." The emphasis was not so much upon his faith as it was the God that made his faith the great faith that it is.

Now, what is faith? Faith is not working yourself up into a frenzy, faith is not positive thinking, faith is not saying, "I'll name it and claim it," faith is not wishing to make it so. Faith is hearing from God, believing God, and acting on what you hear and believe, and laying hold of that. Pray in faith.

Now you say, "Pastor, how can I have this faith?" Well, let me tell you something. I've mentioned six things, and if you'll do the first five, you'll find faith will be automatic. You will find faith will be automatic. You give your heart to Jesus Christ. You be filled with the Spirit of God. You begin to pray in obedience, and all of these other things, and you're gonna find out that it's so much easier to pray



and believe and receive from God what you need and what you want.

Now beloved friend, listen to me. It all begins with praying in the name of Jesus. Jesus said in the Gospel of John chapter 16 verse 24, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name. Ask and ye shall receive." You begin by praying in the name of Jesus. And you cannot, listen to me, you can't pray in the name of Jesus if you haven't received Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior. That's hypocrisy, that's hypocrisy. Have you given your heart to Jesus? I mean are you saved? I didn't ask if you were a Baptist or Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic. Are you saved? I didn't ask if you were religious, I didn't ask if you were moral; I'm asking, are you saved? Jesus will save you this morning, and He will save you this moment if you'll trust Him.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. If you're already saved, would you begin to pray for those you know who may not be saved? Let me pray for you today if you're not a Christian. If you haven't been born again, if you're not truly a child of God. I'm not asking if you're religious. If you're not truly saved, let me just pray for you right now. Father God, I pray in the name of Jesus that Your Spirit will move in this place today. And oh, Holy Spirit, that You will open hearts. Lord, that You would grant faith, that You would draw men, women, boys and girls to Jesus Christ.

Now while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, why don't you pray this way? "Lord Jesus, I need You. I'm a sinner and my sin deserves judgment, but I need You and I want You. You promised to save me if I would trust You. Thank You for paying for my sin with Your blood on the cross. I believe that You are the Son of God. I believe that You were raised from the dead, and I receive You now, today, right this moment, right now, as my Lord and Savior. I turn from my sin to You, Lord Jesus, and I trust You to save me. Begin now to make me what You want me to be, and help me never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray, Amen.



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