

When the Door Stays Shut

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Not praying	3
Praying, but doing so while ignoring sin in our lives.....	4
Praying, but doing so while mistreating our wives.....	4
Praying, but outside of God's timing.....	4
Conclusion	5

TEXT - *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)*

THEME - When it seems God is not answering prayer, we need to examine our lives and see whether we are hindering His willingness to answer.

Introduction

We recently talked about how to spend an hour in prayer. Hopefully that lesson provided some practical advice from scripture about how we should pray, and how to structure our prayers. Prayer is important, and we all want to succeed at it. This morning, let's examine prayer from another perspective. Let me make a couple of observations to set the stage for our study.

We are taught to pray.

BRAINSTORMING - What verses come to mind that teach this truth, that God wants you to pray? (Record answers on whiteboard)

We are promised answers to prayer.

BRAINSTORMING - What verses come to mind? (Record answers on whiteboard)

ILLUS - In my personal life, I can testify to a long dry spell when it comes to prayer. I freely admit that it is probably my perception, and that my experience does not negate the promises of God. If God says He answers prayer, then He does. Period. And if my experience is otherwise then no doubt the problem is with me. Nonetheless, for a couple of years now, it has "felt" to me... "seemed" to me, like my prayers were totally ineffective. In recent days the Lord has provided some wonderful answers to prayer, so perhaps I've passed through that desert journey, but it was puzzling, nonetheless.

Beth and I have discussed this often. Why is it that sometimes God seems to be silent? God promises answers. Our text promises answers in response to our asking... found treasure in response to our seeking... and an open door in response to our knocking.

DISCUSSION - Why is it that we sometimes do not see answers to prayer? (Record answers on whiteboard)

Just as the Bible teaches us to pray, and promises answer to prayer, it also provides understanding as to why our prayer lives are sometimes dry and fruitless. Let's look at a few reasons why our prayers go unanswered sometimes.

Not praying

OK, I can hear your thoughts as I write this one on the whiteboard. "Duh!" Obviously, God won't answer prayers that aren't even prayed. But it's interesting how many times I've found myself wondering about God's silence, only to sense Him gently reminding me that I haven't talked to Him about it in a long long time.

READ - *James 4:1-4*

DISCUSSION - What reasons for lack of success in prayer are taught in this passage?

Remembering to ask is a key ingredient to seeing the promise in our text fulfilled. "*ASK and ye shall receive...*" So often we fail right here.

DISCUSSION - Does this mean we should ask once and stop? Or does it mean we should pray over and over?

The grammatic construction of *Matthew 7:7* provides some understanding about this. The word "ask" in the Greek manuscripts literally means "keep asking." "Knock" means "keep knocking" and "seek" means "keep seeking." There are other verses that teach we should not give up in prayer after one request:

And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten' sake. (Genesis 18:32) - Abraham asked over and over - fearing he might be pushing his luck - but God did not tire of it and answered him each time.

I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. (Genesis 32:26) - Jacob would not give up until God blessed him - answered his prayer.

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; (Ephesians 6:18)

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; (Romans 12:12)

ILLUS - Little kids understand this. Have you ever seen a small child trying to get his / her parent's attention? Coming up beside the parent and plucking repeatedly at the pant leg or skirt? "Dad... dad... dad... dad... hey dad..." "Mom... mommy... mommy I wanna ask you somethin... mom... mom..."

Perhaps we just need to ask more when it seems like there is no answer.

Praying, but doing so while ignoring sin in our lives.

This is a killer. Don't go running to God expecting answer to prayer if you are ignoring what He has already told you He wants from you.

DISCUSSION - Any verses come to your mind to support this thought?

BIBLE STUDY - *Deuteronomy 1:45; 1 Samuel 14:37; 28:6; Proverbs 1:28; 28:9; Isaiah 1:15; 59:2*

Most of those verses seem to discuss overt, outward sin... sin that is obvious to others. Sometimes, though, we nurture sin in our lives of a secret kind... and that is just as much a detriment to successful prayer.

READ - *Psalms 66:18*

In our study on "How to Spend an Hour in Prayer" we noted that we should have a plan for prayer - structure to our prayer time. Part of that structure needs to be CONFESSON. Do not harbor sin in your life, Christian - get it right with God or there's no sense going any further with your prayer.

Praying, but doing so while mistreating our wives.

This is just another example of sin, so I could have included this verse in the previous point. It is so important, though, that I thought I should pull it out separately.

READ - *1 Peter 3:7*

Men, if you treat your wives poorly, don't expect God to answer your prayers. It could not be more clearly stated than it is in this verse.

Praying, but outside of God's timing.

Remember when you were a child, and you wanted to drive so badly? You were not of legal age yet, but you just knew you could handle the car? How many of you asked your parents to let you drive before you were of age? Just in the driveway or

a parking lot or in the yard? You were just SURE you could handle it, and it didn't matter whether the law said it was time or not.

ILLUS - The rolling volkwagon.

DISCUSSION - Do we sometimes do that with prayer? Any examples?

There is a story in scripture which illustrates how important it is for us to wait for God's timing. For sake of time we will not read it this morning. It is familiar anyway, and you probably know it - the story of the Prodigal Son in *Luke 15*. Two verses from this story will suffice to make our point this morning - *A certain man had two sons: "And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. (Luke 15:11-12)*

The prodigal made a lot of stupid decisions and unwise choices. However, one of the things that got him into trouble was that he wanted something from the father before he was ready to have it. The father in the story gave it to him. Our heavenly Father is wiser than that, and often withholds answers to prayer simply because we are not ready for them yet.

Conclusion

Does it sometimes seem like the answers to prayer are few - maybe even zero? Do you sometimes feel like our text verse (*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)*) must apply to everybody in the world but you? Do you struggle to remember the last time God answered prayer in your life?

Do this:

Examine yourself in the areas we have discussed:

1. Are you asking enough? Are you "continuing instant in prayer?" If not - get busy at it. Wear out the throne room of God with your repeated requests. Bombard Him. You may get tired of the sound of your voice, but God never does. He never grows weary and never gets annoyed at your persistence.
2. Is there sin in your life - even secret sin that nobody knows about? Then before you do another thing - before you ask another question of God - before you read another Bible verse - before you sing another hymn - before you breathe another breath - CONFESS YOUR SINS AND GET THINGS RIGHT WITH GOD. (And that includes forsaking them, by the way - stop doing the sin!)
3. Are you mistreating your wives, men? Here is how to make sure you are ok in this area - treat her like a queen - like the most important human being on this earth - like the absolute love of your life - passionately, honestly, openly, and everlastingly LOVE HER - in words, in thought, and in deed. To do less is to jeopardize your prayer life.
4. Are you ignoring the fact that God knows best? Maybe it's just not time for this prayer to be answered? Trust Him. He loves you more than you can imagine. He knows everything about you, past, present and future, and He will always give you what is best for you - and He will do that at the perfect and best time. Trust Him.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

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