

***“Obstacles That Block Our Prayers”*** By E A Terry Delivered 8/5/2018  
Isaiah 59: 1- 8; Matthew 6:5 – 15; James 5: 13 – 18; **James 4: 1 - 10 (Sermon)**

We devoted the month of July to studying Jesus’ instructions on praying.

If you want your prayers to be more effective then you need to know what Jesus taught His disciples about praying.

I would suggest that you go to our church’s web site and review all of the July sermons on prayer.

In addition if you want your prayers to be more effective then you need to know the obstacles that block our prayers.

So this morning we are going to look at ten obstacles that block our prayers.

The dictionary defines an obstacle as any thing that is in the way, a hindrance, or anything that slows down or stops something from progressing.

The first obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in James 4:3.

***“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*** (James 4:3)

A selfish purpose blocks our prayers.

If we pray for something to make us look good or for our pleasure we are asking for selfish reasons.

We may pray for something that is God’s will to grant however, if our prayer is for a selfish motive, God will not honor that prayer.

For example a church may pray for more members.

More people worshipping and working for The Lord is pleasing to God and more people coming to Christ is certainly in God’s will.

However, if the reason we pray for more members is to meet the budget or to give a glowing report to the Presbytery, that is a selfish prayer.

The correct motive in prayer is for God to be glorified in the answer (John 14:13).

The second obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in Isaiah 59.

***“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear”*** (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Sin separates us from God and unconfessed sin puts a stop to us receiving what we are asking God for.

Psalm 66:18 warns us, ***“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”***

God loves us like we are however God loves us too much to leave us like we are.

God's desire is for us to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

When God gave us His indwelling Holy Spirit, God gave us power over temptation and sin.

But we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit's efforts to change us.

We all need to pray like King David did in Psalm 139:23-24.

***“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”***

We need to be truly sorry for our sinful attitudes and acts, we all need to confess our sins, and we all need to ask for forgiveness as well as the desire not to repeat our sinful acts and /or our sinful attitude.

Unconfused sin in our life blocks our prayers.

The third obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in Ezekiel 14:3.

***“Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?”***

Today most people don't have carved figures but anything that we give a higher priority to over God is our idol.

Anything that comes between you and God is an idol.

Notice Ezekiel says; “...***set up idols in their hearts ...***”

So your car, your house, your family, your job, and / or your pleasure can become an idol.

God alone is to be first in your life.

Idols are prohibited by the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. (Exodus 20:3)

We will be talking more about idols next week.

If we really want power in our prayers God must be first in our life.

The fourth obstacle that blocks our prayers is in Proverbs 21:13.

***“Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.”***

God freely gives to us so that we can freely give to Him and so we can freely give to people in need.

1<sup>st</sup> John 3:17-18 says, ***“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”***

Remember Jesus words in Luke 6:38.

***“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”***

Jesus also said; ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*** (Matthew 22:39)

We will be looking at loving our neighbor on August 19<sup>th</sup>

The generous person is a mighty prayer warrior where as a stingy person’s prayers are powerless.

The fifth obstacle that blocks our prayers is a lack of faith.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that ***“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”***

Our hope is in the promises of God.

I read somewhere that there are over 7,000 promises in the Bible.

An important part of effective praying is knowing God’s promises and claiming God’s promises.

In Mark 11:22-25, Jesus tells us that we must believe in the power of God and trust in Him.

We cannot expect God to move the mountains in our life if we have any doubt in our heart.

We are told to ***“walk by faith and not by sight”*** (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:7).

When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not heal a demon possessed boy Jesus replied, ***“Because you have so little faith”***.

Then Jesus said ***“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*** (Matthew 17:20 - 21)

In John 14:12 Jesus tells us plainly anyone who has faith will be doing the work Jesus did while He was on earth.

That work is reconciling people to God and bringing reconciliation between the people around us.

If you noticed, the title of our lesson from James listed in your pew Bible was ***“The Prayer of Faith”***.

James 1:5-7 says, ***“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”***

Our prayers are hindered by our lack of faith.

God demands that we completely trust Him.

How can we expect God to give us something He promised in His Word if we really don't expect to receive it?

To me, one of the saddest verses in the Bible is Matthew 13:58.

***“And he (Jesus) did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.”***

The sixth obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in Mark 11:24 - 25.

***“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”***

Here we see that an unforgiving spirit will short-circuit the power of prayer.

God forgives us for Christ's sake.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, ***“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”*** (Matthew 6:12) Jesus freely forgives all who ask Him.

However, Jesus expects us to freely forgive because we have been forgiven.

Jesus said, ***“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”*** (Matthew 5:23-24).

Our failure to forgive others is an obstacle that blocks our prayers.

The seventh obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7.

***“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”***

God created us marriage so that a husband and wife will help, support, encourage, and complete each other.

Marriage is partnership.

Marriage was ordained by God, blessed by Jesus, and is sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Marriage is the sacred union between one man and one woman.

Marriage is to be a picture of the relationship of Jesus Christ and His church.

In Ephesians 5 we learn that husbands are commanded to ***“love their wives as Christ loved the church”***.

And as you know, Jesus loves us unconditionally and Jesus willingly sacrificed His life for us.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:1 wives are commanded to be submissive to their husbands.

But Ephesians 5:21 tells us husbands and wives to ***“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”***

So I believe verse 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 7 applies equally for wives and husbands.

God’s word is clear our prayers will not be effective if our marriage relationship is strained.

The eighth obstacle that blocks our prayers is found in Colossians 3: 1 – 2.

***“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earth things.”***

We are spiritual beings and we often put a higher value on God’s physical blessings than we do on God’s spiritual blessings.

We often forget we are only on this earth for a short time but we will be in heaven for eternity.

Jesus said; ***“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*** (Matthew 6:33)

The ninth obstacle that blocks our prayers is praying for our will to be done instead of praying for God’s will to be done in our life.

Just before Jesus was arrested, condemned to death, and crucified Jesus prayed; ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** (Matthew 26:39)

And every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we say; ***Thy will be done***” but if we are honest we will admit that most of our prayer time is spent trying to convince God to do what we want.

The tenth obstacle that blocks our prayers is not praying in Jesus’ name.

Jesus said; ***“Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*** (John 16:23 & 24)

Jesus gives us the authority to come before Almighty God.

Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:5)

Our prayers are only wishful thinking if we do not pray in Jesus’ name.

The secret to powerful, effective prayer is a close personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But perhaps the greatest obstacle is that our sinful nature discourages us from praying.

Our pride prevents us from admitting our dependence upon God.

The pressures of our daily life often crowd out our prayer time.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8 warns us; ***“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.”***

The Devil will do all that he can to prevent us from praying.

Remember the words in James 4: 2 ***“you have not because you ask not.”*** (James 4:2)

However, in spite of all of our shortcomings God continues to invites us to pray.

You see God wants to be a real part of our life and God delights in miraculously interceding in the day to day events of our lives. God is waiting and God wants to richly bless each one of you.

When you have a personal relationship with The Lord, obey His commandments, give up your selfish desires, and focus on doing what Jesus has called you to do, you will be overwhelmed with the enormous blessings God has in store for you.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians we have this wonderful promise ***“no eye has seen, no ear heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him”*** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:9)

**AMEN**