

# God Breaks Down the Barriers Between Us

James 4:3, 5:16

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

If prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective then why do so people go day after day, month after month, year after year asking, seeking and knocking and yet do not receive an answer to their prayers? Even knowing that we are looking through the specks of sinful eyes and carnal hearts with impure motives, it is still extremely difficult to hear the word “NO” from our heavenly Father. If hearing “NO” was not difficult enough to accept what about all those times when one prays for those things that will bring glory to God or help one spiritually grow and yet all one receives is silence? During these long “draughts” of speech from God one can’t help but wonder what is keeping God from fulfilling His promise to work for the good of those who love Him! Upon closer examination of our lives it is very humbling to find out that the barriers that keep one’s prayers from being answered were constructed by “ME.” How humbling it is to find out that my prayerlessness, my unconfessed sin, my unresolved relational conflict, my selfishness, my uncaring attitude and my inadequate faith are the barriers that keep “ME” from hearing from God! Today’s sermon is going to review these barriers and what to do when we are going through a prayerless season in our life.

## Barrier #1: Not Hearing the Word “NO”

When I was growing up I remember watching a circus show on TV. The host and hostess were good looking, charismatic and in my opinion well dressed. I was so impressed with their charisma that I began to think, “if only I could look like the male host then maybe I would be as popular!” The host wore a black top hat, a red jacket with sparkles with a tail in the back and tight pants. My mother was an exceptional seamstress that had made many impressive clothes, so one day I asked her if she would make me an exact replica this outfit! To my surprise she said “NO.” I explained to her that with such a glorious outfit, like a circus ringmaster I would be able to command the respect of my fellow students. I begged and pleaded every time we watched the show and yet the answer was still “NO.” She told me that the outfit would invite ridicule not popularity and that there were more sensible things I could wear. To this day I am so very thankful that my mother had the wisdom to tell this young foolish boy “NO” for I am sure it saved me many hours of grief and therapy!



No matter much we beg for a “YES,” inappropriate prayer requests will always receive a “NO” response.<sup>1</sup> No matter how many times one asks God to make one rich, do not be surprised when God says “NO,” true riches are not earthly ones in which moths and vermin destroy

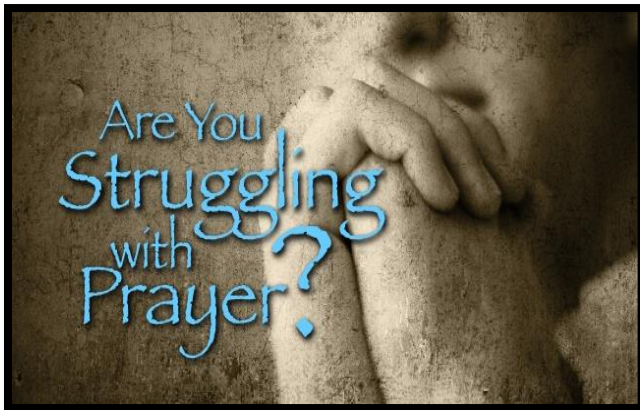


(Mathew 6:19-21) but crowns of righteousness that are eternal (2 Timothy 4:8). No matter how many times one asks God to smite down one’s enemies, do not be surprised to be like James and John and hear the word “NO,” justice will come but for now grace is to be given (Luke 9:51-58). No matter how many times one asks God to make one either a pastor, prophet, teacher or evangelist (Ephesians 4:11-13); do not be surprised when God says “NO,” I did not give you the spiritual gifts needed to be effective in that role! It is not that God

never makes people rich, smites down their enemies or support them in a desired ministry but merely that selfish requests intended to gratify one’s desires receive a “NO” answer because they are not focused on bringing glory to God the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16; James 4:1-3). Also, any request that does not align with the will of God will receive an answer “NO” (1 John 5:14). “NO” is a prayer barrier because we often refuse to hear this response from God and therefore conclude He went silent, which in turn decreases our desire to pray!

## Barrier #2: Prayerlessness

The second barrier to not receiving answers to prayers is simply not praying!<sup>2</sup> Have you had someone tell you the “gut wrenching” details of a problem they are facing, and you instantly



tell them you are going to pray for them, but you never do? Ever go to counselling, self-help books, claim Biblical promises or seek advice from a friend for a problem that you are facing and then wonder why you never find a solution?<sup>3</sup> How do you think it makes God feel when you only talk to Him when all else fails? And how many Christians simply give up praying because they received in their minds one too many “NO’s” or “NOT YET’s” and as a result either don’t believe God is listening or they don’t believe He cares for them?

James tells us that we do not get what we want because we do not ask God! While the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit “intercedes for us in wordless groans” (Romans 8:26), this does not negate

<sup>1</sup> Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* (IVP Books: 2008), 86.

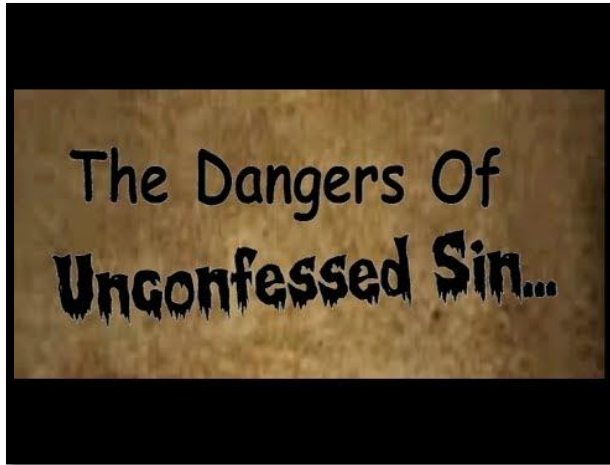
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the command for us personally to make our petitions known to God (Philippians 4:6) through prayer without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16)! How much time one spends in prayer usually affects how often one gets answered!

### **Barrier #3: Unconfessed Sin**

The third barrier to receiving answered prayers is unconfessed sin because it drives a wedge between us and a holy God. We are told in Scripture that cherishing sin in our hearts will



not only lead to God not listening (Psalms 66:18; Isaiah 59:2) but also in God viewing such prayers as detestable (Proverbs 28:9)! He who has bought us at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20) demands we be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16)! Since we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) does this mean that all people are incapable of praying and being heard? No. Praise be to God that we have an advocate Jesus Christ the righteous One who has atoned for all our sins; past, present and future. If one's prayers are not being heard and/or are being detested by God, the remedy is confession for the moment we confess our sins we are

forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)! While no created being can be sinless all can be righteous!

### **Barrier #4: Unresolved Relational Conflict**



The fourth barrier to receiving answered prayers is unresolved conflict with others. Matthew 5:23-24 says that if anyone has anything against you then you should leave your gift at the altar, go and be reconciled. Husbands are told if they do not treat their wives with respect and as those who share the same spiritual rights as equals then their poor attitude will hinder their prayers.<sup>4</sup> Jesus intensified the sixth commandment, "thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13) by saying that the real sin to be avoided is anger towards a brother or sister (Matthew 5:21-22). Those

<sup>4</sup> Norman Hillyer, [1 and 2 Peter, Jude](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 97.

who “claim to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in darkness (1 John 2:9). The Greek word for Hate **μισέω** means “to have a strong feeling of displeasure and antagonism towards another.”<sup>5</sup> Until we make every effort to seek reconciliation and peace (Romans 12:18) through direct one on one conversations (Matthew 18:15-20) of grace and forgiveness given and received (Ephesians 4:32), there is little point in going to He who does not forgive those who refuse to forgive others (Matthew 6:15)!<sup>6</sup>

### **Barrier #5: Selfishness**

The fifth barrier to receiving answers to prayers is having a selfish attitude. The Gospels contain many promises about prayer (Matthew. 7:7–11; 17:20; Mark 11:23–24; Luke 18:1–10; John 14:13), but each of them makes a central assumption, namely, that the petitioner’s heart is



in tune with God’s.<sup>7</sup> When we ask with the motive of gratifying our own pleasure instead of bringing glory to God the Father, our prayers will be answered but with a resounding “NO!”<sup>8</sup> Contained within the words of our prayers is there not “confusion between wants and needs, rights and favors, justice and grace and convenience and conformity to Christ?”<sup>9</sup> Do we consider it pure joy when facing the tribulations of life because we know that the testing of our faith produces perseverance and spiritual maturity or do

we selfishly ask God to remove anything that keeps us from living a problem free life? There is nothing wrong with asking God for aid if it aligns to His will for one’s life!

### **Barrier #6: Uncaring Attitudes**

The sixth barrier to receiving answered prayers is having an uncaring attitude. The command to love one another is not fulfilled with words alone but also with deeds (1 John 3:17-18). They who hide their eyes and close their ears to the poor will receive many a curse and will not be answered when they cry out to God in prayer (Proverbs 21:13. 28:27). While God has

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<sup>5</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 760.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hybels, 102.

<sup>7</sup> Peter H. Davids, [James](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 99.

<sup>8</sup> Donald W. Burdick, [“James,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 193.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Hybels, 103.





given us the freedom to do most anything we want, not all things are beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12). One can pray to God day in and day out but if one's heart is focused on oneself while neglecting or exploiting the poor of this world then one's efforts will not lead to a closer walk with God but wrath from He who promises to deliver the needy and afflicted who cry out (Psalms 72:12-14).<sup>10</sup> We are to give with a cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 9:7) knowing full well whatever we do for the least in the kingdom we are doing for God Himself

(Matthew 25:35-40)! God hears a generous person's prayer because He is committed to developing those who emulate His character in this world.<sup>11</sup>

### Barrier #7: Lack of Faith

The final barrier to receiving answered prayers is a lack of faith. James tells us that those who allow their faith to be blown around like the waves of a sea should not expect to receive anything from the Lord (1:1-8). Most Christians believe prayer led to Israel being freed from



slavery (Exodus 2:23), Moses getting a glimpse of God's glory (Exodus 33:18), the vast Assyrian army being defeated (1 Kings 19:20), Elisha's servant seeing a vast heavenly army protecting them (2 Kings 6:16), Hannah becoming pregnant (1 Samuel 1:11), Jairus' daughter being healed (Mark 5:23), Peter being freed from prison (Acts 12:5) ... While it is relatively easy to believe God answered prayers in the Bible it is much more difficult to believe He answers prayers today and for ME! We must not forget that we who have been purchased at a price (1

Corinthians 6:20) are deeply loved (John 3:16) and as His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and royal priests (1 Peter 2:9) have been promised that He will do good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). If we are praying in the will of God, then no mountain is too big for our God to cast into the sea (Mark 11:23)! "While faith can move mountains, doubt can create them."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 325.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Hybels, 104.

<sup>12</sup> Taken from the following website: <http://www.quotesvalley.com/faith-can-move-mountains-11/>

## **A Season of Prayerlessness**

This sermon explained how to overcome seven barriers that keep us from receiving answered prayers. To keep from getting frustrated when hearing “NO” repeatedly, learn to pray in the will of God. To overcome prayerlessness, learn to pray without ceasing. To help get the “right attitude” for humble, holy prayer one is to confess one’s sins, resolve conflict with others when possible, stop being selfish by considering others better than oneself by giving to the poor and finally remember to have faith that God loves you and will perform the same miracles for you as He did for those we read about in the Bible! Everyone goes through a season of prayerlessness not only due to one of these barriers but especially when life has become good! If you are on the mountaintop of blessings don’t forget how you got here and to whom you owe your very life! Let’s praise His wonderful name always and remember the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective if asked with the right attitude and with the goal of glorifying God.