1. **Intro:** Good morning, thank you, please follow along…

There should be no question of the importance of prayer in the lives of God’s people Christ not only commands it, **(Lk 18:1)** *“man ought always to pray,”* but we see repeatedly throughout the scriptures example upon examples of prayer in the lives of the righteous. During some of our previous lessons we’ve addressed the importance of having a strong prayer life. We addressed how prayer is an important blessing afforded to us in which we’re able to have fellowship with God, offering us a means of communicating our praise and delivering our petitions to the Creator. Sadly though, many Christians, myself included, struggle at times with their prayer life and may even have felt as if their prayers were not being heard or answered. This reminds me of a song by country artist Garth Brooks called “Unanswered Prayers”. Whether or not you listen to country music, chances are that you know who Garth Brooks is and there’s a high probability that you’ve heard this song. For those who don’t know of the song it tells a story of how a man reflects on the happiness of his marriage after seeing an old girlfriend of his youth that in times past he had prayed to God to be able to marry. Now years later, as he is looks at his family and life, he thanks God for has & what he classifies as “unanswered prayers”.

Although this is a beautiful song overall, every time I hear it, I can’t help but think about a major fallacy it paints. Despite understanding what the song is trying to say, the message that seems to be offered up is that sometimes when God doesn’t answer our prayers, it’s a good thing. Some might see some truth in this opinion saying, *“if God answered every one of my past prayers, I’d probably have a whole lot of regrets because the fulfillment of those prayers would have changed/destroyed a lot of the things I’ve been blessed with now”.* Although I understand those sentiments, as God’s people, is this the attitude we should have towards prayer & God’s response to it? I don’t believe so… **(1 Jn 5:13-15)**

*“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* ***14*** *This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will,* ***He hears us****.* ***15*** *And* ***if we know that He hears*** *us in whatever we ask,* ***we know that we have the requests*** *which we have asked from Him.”*

According to John, God’s people should take confidence not only that He hears us, but that He will grant us our petitions. IOW there shouldn’t be unanswered prayers. So, this means that God hears and answers every prayer, right??? Wrong! Some may be thinking, “wait a minute, didn’t you say there were no unanswered prayers? No, what I said is that we shouldn’t adopt an attitude that sees nothing wrong with or even feel that it may be beneficial when God does not answer our prayers. Truthfully speaking, the scriptures do point share instances where God refused to hear/answer a person’s prayers but when this occurs, it’s most definitely highlighting a problem that needs to be corrected. The title of today’s lesson is, “Unanswered Prayers”, and I would like to answer one specific question… “What are some reasons God may reject our prayers?”

To do this, let’s look at five essential principles surrounding prayer that if missed or not maintained will be not only hindered our prayers but most likely lead to their rejection by God.

1. **Body:**
2. Five Fundamental Principles Essential to Prayer
   1. **In Right Relationship** – There must be no confusion about this; God does NOT hear the prayers of those He does not have a relationship with or those who are not diligently seeking after Him.
      1. **Those in Christ -** look again at what John states in the verses we just read **(1 Jn 5:13-15)**

* John specifies that the ones who stand assured in the both eternal life and in the answering of our supplications are… *“****(13)*** *those who believe in the name of the Son of God.”* IOW those who are righteous in His sight/God’s people. This has always been the case as just as David tells us in… ***(Ps 34:15)*** *“the eyes of the Lord are towards the righteous and His ear are open to their cry.”*

***(1 Jn 3:22)*** *“… whatever we ask we receive from Him, b/c we keep His commandments & do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”*

* + 1. **Those Seeking Him -** In **(Acts 10:1-4)** we read of the centurion and Gentile Cornelius who is describes as a *“devout man one who feared God who both gave alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually”…* **(4)** he is told by an angel in a vision *“Your prayers and alms (deeds) have ascended as a memorial before God”*

**>> Also told of those whom God will not hear such as…**

* Those separated from God by sin **(Jn 9:31)** – blind man from birth who was healed by Christ on the Sabbath after he spat on the ground, applied to man’s eyes, and told to wash in pool of Siloam. After healing man interrogated by Pharisees and refusing to believe in Christ’s miraculous healing call Him a sinner to which the man replies in **(31)**…

*“We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing & does His will, He hears him.”*

* + Includes God’s people who have separated themselves from God **(Is 59:1-2)**

A truth that pertains to even all including the “people of God” as Isaiah states while referring to the Israelites where he reminds then that the Lord can save anyone and hear all but he says…

*“2…your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His*

*face from you so that He does not hear.”*

* 1. **Ask with Persistence** – with having right relationship; must also be willing to ask with persistance…
* Although it should be obvious to all; truth is some fail to do one of the most basic pieces of prayer which is to ASK! James pointed to this being one of the problems with why they had not had their supplications fulfilled **(Jas 4:2b)** where he states *“you do not have because you do not ask”* some take position “well if God knows all my needs, why ask?”
* Our asking is not for God’s knowledge; but for our benefit **(Phil 4:6,7)**. Just as we saw in our scriptural reading, by lifting our prayers to God it aids us in releasing the burden of anxiety because we know that… God has it!

**In addition to asking, we must also be persistent… (Turn to Lk 11:1-12)**

* Christ after praying asked how to pray; gives what some term as the “Model Prayer”.
* Many tend to go to **Matt 6:9ff** - Sermon on the Mount for full prayer but…
* Notice in Luke’s account Christ continues with a Parable; friend asking for food @ midnight. Why?
* Highlights how those praying to God are to be just as persistent in asking because it shows our need/dependance/faith that only God can accomplish
* Notice in **(9)** where Christ relates the parable to us saying Ask, Seek, and Knock. I believe the NLT provides a better translation to this passage as it say…

*“And so I tell you,* ***keep on asking****, and you will receive what you ask for.* ***Keep on seeking****, and you will find.* ***Keep on knocking****, and the door will be opened to you.”* – Not one and done!

* Doesn’t mean answer will always be yes, it may be yes but not now or yes but not that way or simply no! And we can draw peace with however he responds b/c always in our best interest.
* Should be no surprise as the bible frequently instructs Christians to…

*“pray without ceasing* **(1 Thes 5:17)** and *“with all prayer and petition pray at all times”* **(Eph 6:18)**

* 1. **Be Sincere/Genuine**

In addition to relationship and asking with persistence… The third essential aspect to our prayers is our sincerity/genuineness in them; **(turn to Matt 6:5-7) -** In this passage Christ centers on ones sincerity for which they do all things for God. IOT their true intentions…

***5*** *“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.* ***6*** *But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* ***7*** *“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.*

Here Christ speaks to those who used prayer to promote a religious/pious appearance to those looking on, calling them “hypocrites or pretender”. He says they were using repetition to lengthen their prayers (**Example of Scribes who Christ rebuked in {Mk 12:40}** focused on **appearance** *= cloaking true intention*, they would lengthen their prayers to look better in the eyes of those viewing them.) And what was their reward for this? It wasn’t God’s approval or the answering of prayers but instead the vain approval from others they were seeking. James also speaks tohow having **Incorrect Motives can also hinder our prayers – (Jas 4:3)** as he rebukes…

* **Incorrect Motives – (Jas 4:3)** …Christians for their quarrels and conflicts resulting from their focus on their own desires and then states that they not only failed to bring their requests to God but when they did those requests were not fulfilled because they were asked with wicked/improper or wrong motives centered only on fulfilling their own pleasures.
* ***What are we praying for?*** Merely seeking to impress or gain stuff for our own pleasures? That’s not to say we shouldn’t ask God to provide for our daily needs, but is that all we seek? Is God to be seen as our personal genie? Remember; prayers must be in accordance with God’s will to be answered; just as we have already read in **(1 Jn 3:14)**.
* Remember God cannot be fooled. He knows our hearts/true motives, whether we are coming before His thrown in sincerity with praise & supplication or like hypocrites seeking worldly pleasure.
  1. **Grounded in Faith (Elijah’s Example Jas 5:15-18)**

In addition to right relationship, asking w/persistence, and our sincerity/genuineness, we must also ensure our prayers are grounded in Faith. Throughout the book of James, the writer emphasizes the importance of faith in the spiritual lives of a Christian to include prayer. In **(Jas 1:5-8)** James states that if we lack wisdom we are to ask of God but it is to be done in faith **(6-7)** without doubting b/c a double-minded man who asks *“ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord”.*

* In **(Jas 5:13-18)** James adds to this understanding as he states…

***13*** *Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.* ***14*** *Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;* ***15*** *and the* ***prayer offered in faith will restore*** *the one who is sick…****16*** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The* ***effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much****.*

* + Suffering/sick - pray & prayers of elders b/c **(15)** prayers offered *“IN FAITH* ***WILL*** *RESTORE (save) one who is sick…* and **(16)** *they can do so much*”. James assured of the power & effectiveness of God’s response; shouldn’t we have the same faith when we pray?
  + Mustn’t limit Father to what we think He MIGHT be able to do/accomplish…. how insulting! We ask God for help only to doubt He hears or even accomplish what we asked.
  + This fails to acknowledge/honor God; creator of all w/authority over heaven & earth. Nothing God cannot accomplish! No prayer too BIG or too HARD for Him!

James highlights when he presents the **Example of Elijah (17-18)** who although “with a nature like ours” *…prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.”*

If God can do this, can He not accomplish all we ask? Again, that’s not to say that He will answer our prayers in the manner we expect or desire, but He will answer. Let’s not Limit God but instead ***PRAY BIG PRAYERS*** in Faith!

* 1. **Always with Gratitude**

Finally, just as we must maintain a right relationship, bringing our prayers in persistence, sincerity /genuineness, and grounded in Faith, we must also approach all prayer with gratitude and humility.

* Just as we have already read in **Phil 4:6** where we are told to bring…

*“everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving in your hearts”*

* **Col 4:2** Paul also instructs us to…

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving”*

* It almost seems like Paul is offering a warning here. I believe this is exactly what Paul is doing. But why? Because failure to retain an attitude of thanksgiving/gratitude toward God leads us to a state of arrogance and sin. In **Rom 1:21** Paul when speaking about the Gentiles & how there was no excuse for their ignorance in God as creation plainly proclaimed Him to all, goes on to say that even though they knew God they failed to *“honor Him or give thanks”* leading to arrogance in their own wisdom/abilities = sin. **(Refer to Pharisee vs. Tax Collector Prayers - Lk 18:9-14)**
* We normally see the error of the Pharisee here to be a lack of humility and that indeed is the product of the real problem that Jesus was addressing. Look at **(9)** where we are told that Christ tells this parable b/c there were *“some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous*”.
* They felt they were the blessing to God instead of being blessed by God leading to haughtiness and ingratitude for what God was/could do for them b/c self-reliant. The tax collector on the other hand understands his spiritual poverty and therefore humbly appeals to God for mercy.

***Ps 8:3*** *When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?*

* + There should never be an instance where we lack gratitude in our prayers… Thankful for the fact that the Creator of all things is faithful, compassionate and merciful, not only hearing our countless petitions/prayers but also as a loving father, answers each of them for our good.

1. **Conclusion:**

Does God hear and answer all prayers? Yes, but as we have seen that is so long as we always maintain a right relationship, willingness to ask w/persistence, sincerity, faith and gratitude… What a wonderfully loving Father we have… There is One last element that although we touched on needs to be highlighted again as the one factor that makes all this possible, that is that… our communication with God would not even possible without going through Christ. Christ said in **(Jn 16:23)**

*“… Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.”*

What a blessing! But, again this privilege is only afforded to those in Christ…***Have you come to Him?***