

"UNOFFERED AND UNANSWERED PRAYER"

James 4:2-3

"Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

What deafens the ears of God? What substance congests the open channel between your life and God. Why is prayer unanswered. The Scripture gives many reasons that can be found in our private lives. But today's text, gives several reasons for unanswered prayer. That are directly related even to our worship.

We direct our attention to the vital subject of prayer. The text of the message here in the 4th chapter of James, makes two statements. Ye have not, because ye ask not.

Second, you ask and receive not, because you ask amiss. And that you may consume it upon your lusts. There are two things that are outstanding here. The first thing is, we do not pray enough. You have not because you ask not.

The second thing is, an explanation for unanswered prayer. Ye ask and ye receive not, because you ask amiss. That you may consume it upon your lusts.

These two sentences challenge our attention to unoffered prayer and unanswered prayer.

X
Dr. Hyman Appleman said when I was a student in the seminary, one of my professors one day came into chapel and told a story, of his own experience. He told how one winter time his seven year (old girl) contracted pneumonia, and was brought to the point of death. He told of the Doctors and the specialists and the nurses, and of the medicine that was secured in a hopeless effort to save the child's life. He told how one after noon the family physician came in the room, and putting his arm around the father, told him that the child would not live. The father went into the bedroom and sat down by the side of the bed. His wife was on the other side. Her face had reddened eyes from watching and weeping. The minutes moved along, the child with the disease traveling to her heart, began to twist and turn. To push and to pull at the covers. The father realizing that death had set in, turned to his wife and told her what the Doctor had said. The mother began to cry but the father said this is no time for tears. He said, this is time for prayer. Let us pray, God is merciful and he will save our child. The pair knelt by the bed of their child, and the mother began to pray but broke down in strong weeping. The father lifted his voice in prayer. The professor repeated that prayer - never so long as I live, he said, will I forget the heartthrob of that cry. Lord, he prayed, our hope is in thee. The Doctors can do no more, we can do no more, our faith and confidence are in thee. Lord, you can take every penny we have in the world. You can take every bit of property we have on earth, you can take me, you can take my wife, you can take both of us - only spare our child. God heard and answered that prayer. The child is alive today, married to a preacher, with precious children of her own. Think of it. If that child would have died by the word of God, by the blood of Christ, she would have gone to glory. Only its body and its little life were at stake. The father and the mother offered all they were, and all they had, for that child. All about us are men and women whose souls are perishing. Should we be willing to give all that we have to save them, from that condition.

V. 12 Our text says, we do not pray enough. Ye have not because ye ask not.

There is no mistake about the meaning of this sentence. It plainly tells us that you have not because you ask not we talk much about unanswered prayer, but this sentence reminds us of unoffered prayer. It tells us that blessings are denied us just because we do not ask for them.

Let me ask you a pointed personal question. How much do you pray? What must your answer be. How much have you prayed today. How much time and thought have you given to prayer. A real and vital experience has been in your prayer life. Do you know what it is - like Daniel to have a fixed time and a place for prayer. Do you know what it is to live in the atmosphere of prayer. To carry out the Bible command to pray without ceasing.

It is not just at this point that we fail, and fail as we do. But I must say, that this is perhaps no other point that is more important. Some Christians were discussing this point. The problems and the peril. And one suggested that they must ever be on their guard. How much do you pray. Every Christian felt conscience stricken. As he searched his own heart with that question. We say that we are busy here and there. We say that we have this or the other, to tend too. We have endless asks. And not a person in the group had made enough of prayer. What is your answer to the question -- how much do you pray?

Think of what Jesus said - that thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy father which is in secret, and thy father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Do you have the daily habit of secret prayer. You cannot afford to neglect such

a habit. Such neglect cannot be atoned for. Whatever else you may do or not do, the question before you is has the closet with the closed door been neglected. Are you guilty of unoffered prayer. The closet with the closed door is the place of power. The men and women who go in their come out with shining faces. With visions that inspire and power that can really shake the world. We need to keep that path warm to the closet, and close the door, and pray - and get into the divine presence of God.

Everywhere in the Bible, we are urged to pray more. It is like a golden thread threw the wonderful book of God. It calls to mankind, call unto me, and I will answer. And will show great and mighty things which you do not know about.

Listen to James, if any man of you lack wisdom, surely that is what we all lack. Let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally, and abraideth not and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like the waves of the sea. Driven with the wind and tossed.

And listen to this exhortation from Jesus. And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

Jesus goes on to make an argument for prayer. In these (appealing) words, if a son shall ask bread of any of you, that is a father, will he give him a stone. Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent. Or if he ask an egg,

will he offer him a scorpion. If you then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give to the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

We need to remember that prayer is far more than just a privilege. It is a priceless privilege that is one of the highest allowed us. And it has with it an obligation. It becomes a duty.

Jesus puts it, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." Think about that word ought. That means duty. That means obligation. Neglect of prayer is neglect of duty. A duty that is important. Prayer brings results and prayer wins victories and achieves. Paul says, ye also, helping together for prayer for us. This is a way whereby we may help everybody. And perhaps the best way is to pray for them. Thus may we help people at any time and at any place. It is no wonder therefore, that Paul said, I exhort therefore that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

It is this that we neglect to pray for people, for all of them, for any of them. And that is why the words of the old prophet Samuel are always to truthful. Moreover, as for me, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Do not I pray you - deal with the great question of prayer. As wicked men dealt with it in Job's day. And they ask him with content, what profit shall we have if we pray unto him? That was the text we used last Sunday night. It is such a question, that we need to think about. There is profit in prayer. It is worthwhile to call upon God. If someone suggests to you that prayer is not profitable, that it interferes

with the law of God, prayer is not only reasonable. But our very nature demands it. It was not strange that a very wicked man said to a preacher, when his child layed ill at death's door (if you know how to pray. For God sake, pray for my child. Prayer is reasonable, it is necessary, it is a privilege, it is a duty.

There are many people who say that today we need a lot of conservation in this economy in which we have. This doctrine is being emphasized everywhere. We are being told and properly so, that our water supply needs to be preserved, and that the other things need to be conserved such as oil and gas. And other products. The whole land has this message and this doctrine. Now this doctrine ought to appeal to us in prayer. You have not, because you ask not. How different things might be or have been, if we had prayed more.

Here is an illustration of a young man, in a city who committed a crime and broke his parents heart. And he will give them sorrow to their grave. A pastor in the community went to see the parents and when he knew of their sorrow, as best he could, he tried to comfort them. At last the sorrowing mother said, "oh sir, if I had prayed as I ought, this tragedy would not have been," The pastor begged her not to think of herself in such terms. For her sorrow was deep enough, without such self-reproach. But the mother protested, "I used to pray every morning, noon, and night for this boy - but that was in the other years. In recent years, my feet have been caught in the mesh of worldliness. And the things of religion have been given no practical place in my life. I have (forsaken) the church and (neglected) to pray Oh sir, I am to blame for my boy's downfall. It would not have come if I had remembered to be faithful in prayer. (Will you say that she did not speak the truth.) How different things might have been if she had prayed. But think of your own life, if you had prayed.

One of the keenest regrets of a noble preacher was that I have not prayed more. And when one of the mightiest preachers of God was told that he had an hour left on earth, he said - let me spend that hour in prayer. Let me pray more. Let us pray more. The effectual, fervent prayer, of a righteous man availeth much. We can trace that truth to the case of Elijah. He prayed as no other man prayed in his lifetime. Prayer is a great agency to promote spiritual undertaking. Because prayer links us with God. Without me, you can do nothing. I can do all things through Christ that strengthenth me. I will break down these difficulties and open the closed doors. It will call forth workers, pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into the harvest. It releases energy for the spread of the kingdom of God. And brings victory in the hour of crisis. This has been illustrated in Abraham, Elijah, David, Paul, Livingston, Luther. These men all believed in prayer. The world today all needs intercessory prayer. Every hour there is some big destiny being decided. On every side there are people who are saying, what shall be done tomorrow. Their hearts are failing them and they are ready to faint. Let us pray more. There is no voice to satisfy but the voice of God.

Our sins are as scarlet, and our vices are red like crimson. We need prophets to turn the nation to God who will abundantly pardon. Let us pray more. And let us seek today and everyday to help other people by prayer. Ye have not, because ye ask not.

II. ASK YOURSELF WHY YOU DO NOT PRAY?

Shall Kennedy once standing by a giant sergeant, who was crying out, Oh God, keep me safe. Oh God, keep me safe, while orders were given out. Somebody said to him, why that man is saying his prayers. And Kennedy replied, no he is not saying his prayers because there was none of Christ's spirit in them. They are selfish prayers. They are

prayers for himself. If he prays only when he is in trouble, as some people call it fox hole praying. As an escape.

Some people pray as a kind of atonement. To make them feel that they ought to punish themselves when they do wrong. So they automatically come in and do a little praying. And they use religion to capitolize on their conscience and troubles. There are some of them who repeat prayers over and over again. Others who pay money or do penitence. There are those who even fast. But what do such prayers accomplish. They do not make the person better. They actually make him weaker.

Christ, however discouraged such kind of praying.

There are others who pray to get God to perform some magic for them. They think that a miracle ought to be in order for them everytime there is some trouble that besets them.

There are others who pray as a means of warding off evil. Here is a person in great trouble. And he is asking God to prevent these things.

Third, there are others who pray - somewhat like a slot machine. As Ralph Scottman said, in a prayer a few years ago. A man comes in and swaps a few prayers for the love, the protection, and help that he might get from God. And so he puts his prayers into a slot machine. And expects to hit the jackpot.

There are others like the old man who was praying - and somebody criticized him for not praying loudly enough to be heard. When he led in public prayer. He replied "I wasn't talking to you," that is not without point.

There are others who perhaps have cut their prayers down to perhaps just reading prayers. That they are not very sincere. Which is just as practical as a man who purposes marriage to a woman. And he reads it to her. Now God does not require great language. You might take the Lord's prayer. And use that.

And there are others who say that prayer is just telling God exactly what you want. Phil. 4:6-7, don't worry over anything whatever, tell God every detail of your needs, and in earnest and thankful prayer.

Many times we ask for things that we do not want. We even ask for things that we really do not need.

Dr. Ted Adams tells of a little boy who explained to a preacher once, as to why he did not say his prayers every night. "Because 'some nights, I don't want anything.'" Is that not like us adults too, we want something, but we don't want anything which would especially interest God. And we want it our way.

Douglas Steep told the story of a man who promised his pastor never to drink again. Later that man returned to say, he must have a drink or die. The wise pastor told him to go home and die. The next morning, the man came back and said, I died last night. He did die, his childish self died, and he became a new person in Christ.

That is when prayer becomes what it ought to become, with us.

III. YE ASK AMISS

v.3
We come to give our attention now to the (last) part of this sentence of unoffered and unanswered prayer. You ask that you may consume this upon your own lusts. Or your pleasure. In that one sentence, it is clear as to why prayer is often unanswered. It proceeds from a wrong motive. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss. The (point) is plain. The motive is wrong. God looks over the motive in all of our thoughts and prayers. He does not see as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. The motive in life, is everything. Now if the motive in prayer and the reason for prayer is wrong, then that explains. And we need to (think) about this question right now.

1-
First, a wrong spirit. This is an explanation as to why we have unanswered prayer. And we think about this today. We come in the wrong spirit - with the wrong motive. And here are men and women who are hindered in their religious lives, in their praying, in every good way toward the wrong spirit of others.

(Jesus) in the model prayer, gives for the guidance of his disciples, the same point when he says this - forgive us our sins as we forgive. As we have already forgiven those who have already sinned against us. (Are) you wrong in your spirit toward others. Do you have malice, ill-will, resentment, unforgiveness in your heart toward others.

If so, your unanswered prayers are at once explained. A man said, once, why

cannot I get right with God. He had once been a joyful, victorious Christian. But now he is very unhappy. He has been clipped of his spiritual power, and prayer no longer blesses him in his experience. Why cannot I get right with God. Before the conversation was ended - he got one sentence that indicated the depth of his ill-will toward another. The reason why he was not right with God, was at once very clear and plain. Our lives are most intimately bound up with the lives of our fellows. Those about us. Our relationships to our fellows cannot be escaped. They cannot be ignored.

When we pray for our daily bread, we are to include others. Give us this day, our daily bread. If we are wrong in our hearts toward someone else - we need not to expect an answer to our prayers. These words of Jesus search us. And when ye stand praying, forgive. If ye have ought against any. That your father also, who is in Heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your father who is in Heaven, forgive you of your trespasses.

2
Second, a wrong life. There is another point that we need to explain here as to unoffered and unanswered prayer. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. The Psalmist said. Indeed, he cannot afford to answer our prayers. If we willingly harbor sin in our lives. That would be a compromise of God. The one thing that separates between God and us is sin. He himself so tells us, the one thing which God hates is sin. Our attitude toward sin must be in harmony with his attitude. It is the prayer of a righteous man - not an unrighteous man that availeth much. The Bible teaches us that we may expect him to hear and to answer our prayers when we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Is your life right in God's sight. Are you right with him in the secrecy of your

own heart. If you are holding on to some wrong in your life, although others may not know about it, yet in fact - you have the explanation right there of unanswered prayer.

Listen to the man of God, delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give ye the desires of thine heart. "You can't miss the point. Delight yourself in the Lord and listen to Jesus. If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.

Face the question - is my heart right with God.

3- Third, lack of earnestness. May be another point to consider. If we dream or sleep over our prayers, it is to be certain. They will not be accepted. Men of the Bible who prayed, were earnest men.

Moses, the leader of Israel prayed on this people have sinned a great sin, and they have made them gods of gold - yet now if thou wilt, forgive their sins, blot me, I pray thee out of the book. How terribly earnest Moses was as he prayed.

Paul pleaded, I say the truth, in Christ I lie not. My conscience also bearing witness to the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and great sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself would accurse from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. When a man feels like that, he is willing to be cut off from Christ, that people about him may be saved, no wonder.

His prayers were answered.

Jacob, at the brook, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. It is not surprising that God later told him, thy name shall be called no more Jacob. For as a prince thou has power with God and with men. And hath prevailed. Listen to John Knox praying for Scotland. Oh God, give me Scotland or I die.

No wonder the Queen Mary said, I fear the prayers of John Knox. More than I fear the army of 10,000 men.

A wrong life, my friends, may be the reason for your unanswered prayers.

Dr. William Stidger told the story of a school teacher in Illinois. She had an unusual group of mischievous boys. One was an exception. And as the school year drew to a close, the teacher became discouraged, and felt that he had been a failure. Because of that particular boy. He turned his resignation in, and he found on his desk an envelope addressed in familiar handwriting. It was from that very boy.

Dear Mr. Jones. (I'm sorry that I have given you all the trouble that I have this year. It hurts me because you are going away and not coming back. But when I get to be a man, I want to be just like you.) Signed, Jim -

It is important that your life be right. And that boy looked forward to someday

being like that man. He had chosen him as an ideal. There are other people looking at you - and they may be waiting until it is too late - because you are not teaching the proper lesson.

Paul says (watch ye, stand fast in faith, quit ye like men - be strong.)
Make a man of yourself. The Greek text says. Be useful in your church is what he is saying. Have faith and pray - and (stand up and be counted.)

Fourth, a lack of faith. Your prayers are not answered because you do not expect them to be. You lack faith - faith is taking God at his word. Often, we do not take him at his word. We halt, we wait, we refuse to accept Jesus according to his faith. Be it unto you. And again Jesus said, if thou canst believe all things are possible to him that believeth. Again, he said, the two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask. And it shall be done for them of my father which is in Heaven. And that is marvelous united prayer.

Dr. Truitt was preaching in a Southern city one morning, on the text, but without faith it is impossible to please him. At the close of the service, an elderly woman came and said - preacher, do you believe what you have preached today. He said, indeed I do, for I have proclaimed God's word. Which word I surely believe. Very well, she said, I am glad that you believe it. I am looking for someone who believes it. You quoted in your sermon the promise in your sermon - if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything - if they shall ask, it shall be done. For them of my father who is in Heaven.

She said, my husband is and has long been a captain of a boat that sails the river. He never goes to church. He is wicked and now he is growing old. If you will promise to join me in pleading this promise about two agreeing, we shall claim him for God and salvation in Heaven. Will you join me. And there stood the man of God - did I really believe that promise. Was I willing to plead it then and there. Just the name of Jesus. And he said while I was standing there - a plainly dressed man, a blacksmith, came up and said "Auntie, I will join you in pleading that promise." And there he walked over to her and humbly said - let us plead it now. They knelt in prayer and he began to pray. It was as simply as a little child talking to its mother. He reminded the good Saviour of the promise that he had made, he reminded him that two were kneeling and accepting that promise, and claiming it - and they were pleading and asking that He save the aged, sinful sailor. In a few moments, it was over. The people were dismissed. The day passed, and at the evening service, the preacher stood again to preach. And there before him came the lady just described, and with her, a white-haired old man. At the close of the sermon, the preacher said those desiring to be Christians, come to the front pew for council and prayer. While the people sang. The old man was on his feet immediately and coming forward. He was talked with and prayed for that night. And it all seemed utter darkness to him. Over there to the left sat the aged wife and the old blacksmith. Their faces were shining. They had a secret that the rest did not have. They pleaded and were claiming the promise of Jesus. The service was ended and the people went out. And the old man went out into the darkness of the night. His soul darker even than the night. The next morning came, and the people gathered. And the preacher was alone in his study behind the pulpit. Trying to get ready for the service. And there was a knock. The door was opened. And there stood the old man. He said, sir, I can't wait for your sermon this morning. Tell me now, if you know how I can be saved. And there in that study before the service, he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. And at the morning service, an hour later, he gave his testimony of Christ. The sweetness and the glory of which will outlast the stars.

What is there remarkable about this. Nothing at all, when you remember that two of the friends of Jesus honestly, and (actually pleaded) the promise and claim of Jesus.

Why are we so feeble as professors to have feeble faith. May God forgive us even this night with our miserable unbelief.

5
Fifth, Lack of submission. This is all we have time to think about concerning unoffered and unanswered prayer. Unanswered may be because there is a lack of submission to the will of God. Thy will be done - must be in every way acceptable to our prayers. His will is always righteous and best. And it is in harmony with his will that we should pray. Above all else, we should pray - nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.

In the middle of the 19th century religious life was on the decline. Slavery was a question. Financial and commercial prosperity was everywhere. Gold was discovered in California. Many people lost faith in spiritual things. And many religious people were frustrated. William Miller in 1843 deceived many, that they sold their belongings, and climbed on the hilltops. On April 23rd, the date he had set, for the return of our Lord to this earth. They sold their goods, they became infidels. And there was panic in the land everywhere. Their was greed on every corner.

But there started a man by the name of Jeremiah Lanphier, who started a noontday prayer meeting in 1857, and he gave out a handbill. How often shall I pray?

As often as the language of prayer is in my heart. As often as I see my need of help. As often as I feel the power of temptation. As often as I am made sensible of any spiritual decline. Or feel the aggression of the world. In prayer, we leave the business of time, for that of eternity. And we have intercourse with God as we leave the intercourse with men.

A (day prayer) meeting was held every Wednesday from 12:00 to 1:00. And this meeting is intended to give merchants, clerks, strangers, businessmen the opportunity to call upon God. It was designated at they would come at their own convenience. Accordingly the meeting was scheduled at 12:00 - and no one was there. At 12:30 a step was heard on the stairs. Until finally, six people came, that first meeting. Then 20 the next week. And 40 the next. And six months later, 10,000 businessmen were gathering for daily prayer in New York. And within two years, a million converts were added to the churches.

At the turn of the New Year in 1856, the city of New York was by no means irreligious, it had churches of all denominations. But there was the note that the hour of prayer was a turning point.

Even (Barton's Theatre) became a place of prayer. And half an hour appointed for the service, it was packed, in every corner to the roof.

Cuyler led the services one day. Three days later, Beecher led the service. And there were 3,000 people that had gathered in that theatre.

And on one given day, at least - March 26 there were 6,110 people in the prayer meetings. Before long 10,000 New Yorkers had been converted to God. And were in the care of the churches. And many good authorities say, that shortly 50,000 were won to Christ.

There was no fanatical nature about these prayer meetings. They were simply prayer meetings scheduled and they moved all the way to the West - in which tremendous numbers of converts were registerd. In Kalamazoo, Michigan, a prayer meeting was held. The first praying meeting - a request was read. A praying wife, requests the prayers of this meeting for her unconverted husband. And once a berlie man arose and said, I am that man. I have a praying wife. And this request must be for me. I want you to pray for me. Soon as he was seated, another man arose in sobs and in tears to say, I am that man. I have a praying wife. And she prays for me. And now, she asks you to pray for me. I am sure that I am that man, and I want you to pray for me.

Five other convicted husbands requested prayer. And the power of God fell upon the assembly.

Have Ask -
Ask again
now
Time