

LEARNING TO PRAY

The Lack of Prayer

PRIMARY TEXTS: 1 Samuel 12:23; Proverbs 15:8; 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

INTRODUCTION: **Jack Taylor said, "... no believer's spiritual life will ever rise to stay above the level of his or her praying.** Because this is true, we should begin to investigate at this point when there is failure in the church or in the individual Christian life. I am convinced that the failure of the church is the failure in prayer. Likewise, the failure of the Christian is the failure in prayer." ¹

Dr. Guthrie has said, "The first sign of true spiritual life is prayer, and it is also the means of maintaining spiritual life. Man can as well live physically without breathing, as spiritually without praying." ²

All of us who have been saved know that we ought to pray. The prophet Samuel said to the people, **"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you."** (1 Samuel 12:33) When we fail to pray, the Holy Spirit convicts us and we are often aware that our lack of prayer is displeasing to God.

What does it mean to have a lack of prayer in our lives?

Lack of prayer does not always imply a complete absence of prayer. In fact, we might define the lack of prayer as follows:

The Lack of Prayer

- **the failure to pray as much as God wants us to pray**
- **when God wants us to pray**
- **the way God wants us to pray.**

One might say, "That definition gets everyone!" And that is right. We all have experienced a lack of prayer in our lives sometime. Therefore, we all need to consider the Biblical truths dealing with that condition.

As we examine what the Bible says concerning the lack of prayer in our lives, we will do so not with the view of intensifying our guilt. We feel guilty when we do not pray as we ought, and we should feel guilty. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our lack of prayer. But feeling guilty does not solve the problem of lack of prayer. Our study will focus on how to deal with the problem of the lack of prayer in our lives. As we search for help with this pervasive problem, we will examine two areas: the lack of prayer as a sin and the lack of prayer as a stronghold. Pause right now and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to the truth of how to deal with a lack of prayer in your own life.

I. THE LACK OF PRAYER AS A SIN

“The whole force of Bible statement is to increase our faith in the doctrine that prayer effects God, secures favor from God, which can be secured in no other way, and which will not be bestowed if we do not pray (E.M. Bounds).³

A. More than a weakness

The lack of prayer is not just a weakness. It is a sin! This realization is important because it affects how we handle the problem. If the lack of prayer is simply a weakness, then we deal with it by trying to gain strength to pray. But if it is a sin, a different approach must be taken.

Why is the lack of prayer a sin?

1. The lack of prayer is a sin because God has commanded us to pray.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

When we disobey any command of God, we sin. Furthermore,

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

All of us know that praying more would be a good thing to do. When we do not do what we know is the right thing, we sin.

2. The lack of prayer is a sin because it robs God of joy.

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright *is* His delight.

God delights in our praying. That insight should not surprise us. Since creation God has desired fellowship with mankind. In the Garden of Eden, God talked with man. As earthly parents, we want to talk with our children usually more than they want to talk with us. The Heavenly Father wants to talk with His children also, even more (often much more) than they desire to talk to Him. The lack of prayer is a sin because it robs God of joy.

3. **The lack of prayer is a sin because it thwarts the purposes of God.**
We saw in our first lesson that **prayer is partnership with God. When we fail to enter into that partnership, we hinder the work of God, not because God cannot do it without us but because He has chosen not to do it without us.**

What can we do about this sin in our lives?

B. How to deal with this sin

Since the lack of prayer in our life is a sin, it must be dealt with as all sin. Simply resolving to pray more will not bring a permanent change. Sin needs forgiveness and cleansing. That requires confession and repentance.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Right now, would you pause and pray something like this:

Heavenly Father, I am guilty of not praying as You have told me to pray or as much as You want me to pray. I have disobeyed Your clear command, robbed You of joy that I could have brought You, and hindered some work You wanted to accomplish. Father, I repent of this sin and I am thankful that right now You are forgiving my failure and cleansing me of this unrighteousness.

II. THE LACK OF PRAYER AS A STRONGHOLD

A. What is a stronghold?

Have you ever found yourself in a pattern of committing sin, being convicted, confessing and repenting, receiving forgiveness only to find that soon you commit the same sin again and the pattern is repeated over and over? Sometimes the cycle continues for years. Have you been in such a cycle in your prayer life? Do you feel guilty about your lack of prayer, confess, start praying more and then return to the same habits that yield a lack of prayer again? Do you notice that each time, it is more difficult to confess and begin again because you doubt your own sincerity and commitment?

If the above describes your experience, the lack of prayer has become more than a sin in your life. It has become a stronghold. **A stronghold is a place where the forces of Satan have gained a position of influence in your life.** A

stronghold does not mean demon possession, but it does mean that there is an area where Satan has gained such a position of strength that he deals out defeat in that area time and time again. From that stronghold, Satan can affect habits, personality traits, physical characteristics, emotions, and desires.

In all honesty, if you are repeatedly defeated in trying to pray as you know you ought, it is probably because the devil has made your lack of prayer into a stronghold. He makes it seem that you do not have time to pray. When you do plan to pray, he interrupts it and decreases your desire to pray. As long as he has that stronghold in your life, you will be defeated in your attempts to improve your prayer life.

B. How can we overcome a stronghold?

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,* ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Strongholds are evidence of the truth of **Ephesians 6:12** that “...**we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers...**” Winning this battle requires spiritual warfare on our part. We must use the weapons God has given us to pull down the stronghold.

What are those weapons? (Ephesians 6:14-17)

The girdle of truth

The breastplate of righteousness

The preparation of the gospel

The shield of faith

The helmet of salvation

The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God)

More weapons in Revelation 12:11 *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

The blood of Christ

The name of Jesus

The testimony of faith

The commitment of loyalty

These weapons will destroy any stronghold Satan has built in your life. Consider the testimony of Jack Taylor.

“Well that night in Southeast Asia on my knees, God revealed to me that the enemy had built up a stronghold in my life. The words of Paul came to me, having become precious to me previously, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). I realized that though I had been to God many times with the confession of my prayerlessness, I had never faced the problem as one of a stronghold.”

“I saw that the stronghold involved my thought processes, my body metabolism, my preferences, and my decision making faculties. I brought myself to the Lord on such a plane as I had never been conscious before for whatever divine operation He desired to perform in me. As I understood the weapons of this warfare, I employed them in Jesus’ name against the stronghold I had allowed the enemy to build up in my life.”

“As I stood against the stronghold, by faith I counted the transaction done! I accepted my deliverance from the limitations that had been imposed by my disobedience and maintained by the power of the enemy. I testify to you that it happened. I have not been the same since. I am not testifying that it has been a matter of perfection but it has been decidedly different. The first thing that happened was that my mind was clear to decide to make prayer vital in my own life and schedule. The next thing that happened was that I awakened the next morning early and unhindered to spend time with the Lord. This may be of help to you. You may have been struggling for years with the problem and have almost given up in disgust and disappointment. God is still mighty to the pulling down of strongholds!”

“Notice what else happens as the strongholds fall. Imaginations are cast down. High things are put down. Every thought is brought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine that! If that could happen to your life right now, you would be prepared to pray.”⁴

Would you pray right now, something like this?

Heavenly Father, You know I have struggled with the lack of prayer. Many times I have confessed my sin and received Your forgiveness only to sin

again. I have allowed Satan to build a stronghold in my life from which he repeatedly attacks my prayer life.

But now dear Jesus, I ask You to pull down that stronghold. I gird myself with the truth that You are mighty and able to destroy it. I put on the breastplate of righteousness which is mine by faith in Christ Jesus. I walk in the preparation of the gospel of peace. I pick up the shield of faith and say by faith I believe this stronghold is falling right now! I put on my head the helmet of salvation knowing Your saving and keeping power.

My Lord Jesus, by the power of Your blood shed on Calvary and by Your name which is above every name, cast down every imagination, take captive every thought. I commit my life to You, Lord, even unto death. These things I ask by faith for the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Conclusion: If you have prayed from your heart that your sin of lack of prayer be forgiven and that the stronghold of lack of prayer be cast down, it is done! Now take time to make a commitment to the Lord concerning your prayer life next week. Write down what you promise the Lord you will do.

¹ Jack Taylor, Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach, p. 34.

² John McArthur, Jr., An Uncompromising Life, p. 86.

³ E.M. Bounds as quoted in A Treasury of Prayer by Leonard Ravenhill, p. 23.

⁴ Jack Taylor, p. 38-39.