



Prayer Hindrances

We often blame external reasons when our prayer lives aren't what they should be. *I don't have a quiet place. I don't have enough time.* But did you know you could be hindering your own prayers?

God gave us prayer to worship, confess, seek His will, and ask for necessities and desires. In the Old Testament King James translation, the Hebrew word "pray" is often translated as "ask."

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden. After their sin, God spoke through prophets, specially chosen people, and even a donkey. Few of God's people talked to Him directly in the Old Testament.

By the time Jesus came, the Jews had come to rely so heavily on the religious leaders that He had to teach them how to approach God in prayer themselves. Today, people change doctrines and churches to find the right fit. **Many people depend on religious leaders instead of following a shepherd who follows Christ, searching the Scriptures for themselves, and changing their hearts to agree with God's revealed truth.**

The first time "pray" is mentioned in the New Testament is in Matthew 5:44. Here, Jesus told the disciples to pray for their enemies, but it was more for the disciples' sake than their enemies' sake.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:43-48, NIV.)

This confused the disciples because a short while later, they asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and His response became known as the Lord's prayer. (Read Matthew 6:9-13.)

The Bible contains many examples of people who prayed, when they prayed, how they prayed, why they prayed, and more. However, the Bible doesn't show us the prayer lives of others, so we can compare ourselves with them. I'm not saying we shouldn't observe people praying to learn how to pray, but I am saying that **God made us unique; therefore, our prayers and our manner of praying should be unique.** Observe people who pray, especially if this is all new to you, but don't compare.

What should you do when you feel hindrances to your prayers? If the hindrances are external, such as Daniel's (Read Daniel 9-10), keep praying! Daniel waited twenty-one days for his answer. I've known people who have waited much longer. **Waiting doesn't mean God has abandoned you.** God has promised many times He will never leave us nor forsake us.

On the other hand, if you are willing to admit that the hindrances to your prayers might be internal, something needs to change within you, then this Bible study may help.

Here are five ways we might hinder our prayers through the choices we make or attitudes we carry:

1. PRAYERS CAN BE HINDERED BY SIN.

"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. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things." (Isaiah 59:1-3, NIV)



"I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; But God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!" (Psalm 66:17-20, NIV)

If we are arrogant about our knowledge of God and think we are better than others, God may choose not to hear us. Failure to repent for sin can affect God's attention to our prayers. Effective prayer cannot come from a place of sin. Repent daily.

2. PRAYERS CAN BE HINDERED BY UNFORGIVENESS.

Because God shows mercy towards us for our sins, we must show mercy toward others for their sin against us, acknowledged or not. Remember, we forgive others for our own sake so God can forgive us. For this reason, it does not matter if others ask for forgiveness from us; we still forgive them. If we sin against God, we must confess and repent. We become bitter when others sin against us, and we do not forgive them. **Bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.** Unforgiveness will corrupt our souls.

Jesus taught in Mark 11:25, *“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

After you forgive someone, pray for their souls. Do you know how often you have sinned against someone and didn't repent because you didn't know or had forgotten about it? It was a pebble to you, but it might be a stumbling block for someone else.

3. PRAYERS CAN BE HINDERED BY DEALING HARSHLY WITH OTHERS.

The Golden Rule is not biblical per se, but it is rooted in Scripture. It is the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated. The Bible teaches us how to treat others.

Proverbs 15:1, NIV: *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

Proverbs 20:3, NIV: *“It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.”*

Ephesians 4:2-3, NIV: *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

I Peter 3:9, NIV: *“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”*

We should always strive to see others as God sees them—as souls in need of a Savior—and treat them accordingly.

4. PRAYERS CAN BE HINDERED BY DOUBT.

If we are confident that our prayers are not hindered by sin, unforgiveness, or how we are treating others, it could be because our faith is weak.

While Matthew 21:18-22 is often used to encourage us to be fruitful, there is also a message about faith.

“Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked.

Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.’” (Matthew 21:18-22, NIV.)

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV).



Oh, that we would have faith like Abraham: *“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised”* (Romans 4:20-21, NIV).

What should we do if we lack faith? Follow the apostles’ example in Luke 17:5 and ask God to “Increase our faith!”

5. PRAYERS CAN BE HINDERED WHEN THEY ARE NOT GOD’S WILL.

Prayers outside God’s will may be the most common reason for unanswered prayer.

I John 5:14-15 (NIV) declares, *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”*

Maybe a new job, house, or relationship isn’t God’s will for us. How can we know God’s will? As always, search the Scriptures for the answer.

In a letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul writes, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”* (Romans 12:1-2, NIV).

Even Jesus submitted Himself to the will of God. Luke records the prayer of Jesus before His crucifixion: *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”* (Luke 22:42, NIV).

Jesus talked about surrendering His will to the Father while teaching His disciples long before His time on earth ended: *“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me”* (John 5:30, NIV).

Don’t ask God for something or to do something contrary to the principles taught in Scripture. Make sure what you are praying for aligns with God’s Word.

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