

8 Things That Hinder Prayer

Prayer is perhaps the greatest tool that God has given us. No circumstance puts prayer out of your reach. You constantly have access to communicate with the One true God, the Creator of the Universe. That matters! You'll simply decide to pray, or you won't. What you believe about prayer will likely determine if you pray, when you pray, and how you pray.

The Bible says to, ***"pray without ceasing"***, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Does God expect us to never stop praying? Verses like this refer to being in constant communication with the Lord, all throughout your day. Prayer is both talking and listening, and specifically, it's the listening portion of prayer that should never cease. We should always be available to hear from the Spirit; to be prompted and quickened by Him. This sort of constant listening is referred to in Colossians 4:2, ***"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."*** The idea of staying on the alert means that you're always available to be directed by the Lord. Does He have permission to interrupt your day? It's important to learn to discern the Spirit's leading and prompting. This happens as we set our minds to let Him govern our choices, seek Him daily, study His Word, and always take things to the Lord in prayer.

It's a wonderful thing that the Lord invites us to know Him and talk to Him. Jeremiah 33:3, ***"Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things which you do not know."*** Psalm 32:8, ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you."***

The Lord gives us assurance that our praying is effective. He considers our prayer. 1 John 5:14-15, ***"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 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."***

So why do so many people struggle to pray? I suspect that it's due to several reasons. First, we've prayed before and we didn't get the answer we'd asked for. I can recall inmates praying before they go to court and the judge not giving them the sentence they'd prayed for. Later, some of these same inmates tell me that, *"prayer didn't work."* When God is treated like a genie, and He doesn't perform for us as we wish, then we wrongly accuse prayer of being ineffective.

Another reason we pray far too seldom, is that we don't like to wait. We tend to expect an immediate this-for-that type of transaction when we pray; I pray and God should respond shortly thereafter. Consider this illustration. Let's say you get a job working at a restaurant. The manager says, *"I'll give you \$10 an hour and forty hours a week."* You agree. After the first week, you get a check for \$400, which was what you agreed upon. This continues for a month or two. You're happy and the boss is happy. You've established a this-for-that type of relationship. Now, let's say the boss comes to you and says, *"From now on, I want you to continue to work for me at forty hours a week. However, instead of a paycheck at the end of the week, I'm going to pay you what I think you need, and whenever I think you need it."* Will you take that deal? You'd likely not take that deal at all. Several things would enter your mind, like, *"How will my boss know what my needs are?"* Or, *"Even if he knows what my needs are, and has the money to meet those needs, what if he's in a bad mood and resents me and withholds money from me out of spite?"* This type of example illustrates how God expects us to pray. God expects us to pray continually, and He'll give us the answer that's best for us in the timing that's right for us. Our job is simply to trust Him and continue to serve Him faithfully, and continue to pray continuously. Too often we don't like this type of relationship though because we're impulsive and impatient people. However, we can trust God in this type of scenario because God is loving, He has our best interest in mind, He's fully capable of meeting our needs, and He sees the beginning from the end, so we know He's not going to be making a bad judgment call.

All of this is meant to say that we can pray in confidence. However, there are things that we do that hinder our prayer.

According to the Bible, our prayers can be hindered, meaning that they can be rendered ineffective. But I know this truth – I AM THE ONLY ONE THAT CAN HINDER MY PRAYERS! This means that I can change and do what's needed in order to have a powerful and fruitful prayer life. Here are eight things that hinder prayer.

1. Selfish Motives

A key to effective prayer is saying, *"Lord, not my will, but Your will be done!"* 1 John 5:14-15, ***"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 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."*** Additionally, James 4:3 says, ***"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."***

2. Not Listening to Scripture

Proverbs 28:9, ***"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."*** The Bible is clear about God's absolute moral and ethical standards. When we ignore these things, and pray otherwise, it will be in vain.

3. Unforgiving Hearts

God forgives the worst of us! Yet, we're slow to forgive others. Mark 11:25-26, ***"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."*** If you've been forgiven, be a forgiver. If you've been shown mercy, be merciful. If you've been given grace, be gracious. If you've been blessed, be a blessing. Living otherwise will hinder your prayers.

4. Not Considering My Spouse

1 Peter 3:7, ***"You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."*** As a husband, I'm always to consider my wife; listen to her, respect her opinion. When I dismiss her and take some unrighteous position of superiority, then God will not listen to my petitions.

5. Unconfessed Sin

Just like unforgiveness hinders prayer, so does sin! Psalm 66:18-19, ***"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; but certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer."*** Here, the Psalmist makes clear that when we regard wickedness, the Lord turns away from our prayers. To regard wickedness is to know that sin is in your heart, and either to encourage it or pretend it's not there. However, here, the Psalmist rejoices because he was honest with himself and did confess his sin, therefore he notes that because of this obedience, the Lord heard his prayer! Ask God to reveal your sin to you, Psalm 139:23-24, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."***

6. Doubt

Believe that He can and will do what is in His will! When we doubt, we pray expecting rejection. James 5:1-7, ***"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord."***

7. Unfit Minds

1 Peter 4:7, ***“The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”***
Having sound judgment and a sober spirit means to give serious thoughtful consideration to be in control of yourself and over all you possess. Be cautious to watch against all occasions of sin. In doing so you’ll embrace all proper opportunities for prayer.

8. Lack of Perseverance

In Luke 18:1-7, Jesus gives a parable of persistent widow that nagged the ungodly judge until he gave in. ***“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?”*** If the ungodly judge will grant requests due to persistence, how much greater a righteous judge?