

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER... what does the Bible tell us?

In Matthew 7:9 Jesus said, “What man is there among you, if his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone?”

The illustration of prayer that our Lord used here is one of a ‘good child’ who is asking for something good. However, many believers talk about prayer as if God hears us regardless of what our relationship is to Him... good or bad child. (cf. Matthew 5:45.) Is your relationship right with your spouse, your children, and your neighbors and coworkers? ...are you a ‘good child’ in those relationships? Or are you in fact saying to the Lord, “I have been irritable and cross, but I still want spiritual blessings”

However, the Bible clearly tells you that you cannot receive and you will have to do without them until you have the attitude of a “good child”. We mistake defiance for devotion; arguing with God instead of surrendering. We refuse to look at the evidence that clearly indicates that we were wrong.

Have you been asking God to give you money for something you want, while refusing to pay someone what you owe him or her? Have you been asking God for something while you are also withholding love or forgiveness from someone else in your life? Have you refused to forgive someone... have you been unkind to them?

- Have you been living as God’s child among your relatives and friends... doing unto others as you would have them do to you? (See Matthew 7:12)

Also, for many believers prayer simply becomes some trivial religious expression... it is a matter of emotion, a mystical communion with God. Spiritually we are all good at producing spiritual fog that blinds our sight. But if we search out and examine the evidence, we will see very clearly what is wrong—a broken friendship, an unpaid debt, an improper attitude, unforgiveness.

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

The Basis for Prayer is the Atoning Blood of Christ.

Acts 26:17b-18 **I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**

Scripture is very clear... the only basis for relationship to God is **Christ**. We have been separated from God by sin... we are born separated from God because of our ancestry in Adam. The break could not be repaired by us... Jesus came—he was God; he was man! He touches both... we are reconciled only through him... the blood of the cross is the basis for all prayer.

Only as we come to God through Jesus to get the sin score straightened... and only as we keep in sympathy with Jesus in the purpose of our life can we practice prayer.

- Are your prayers effective? ...are they being heard and answered? ...are they according to God’s Will? ...is there anything in your relationship with God that is blocking your prayers?
- Let’s open our Bibles and let God’s Word show us.

Here is a list of situations from the Bible that can hinder your prayers:

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| 1. | Wrong: Motives; relationships; hypocrisy | James 4:3; 1 Peter 3:7, Matthew 7:1-5; Mark 7:6-8 |
| 2. | Sin: Unconfessed, living in, holding on to | Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:1-2 |
| 3. | Idols in the heart; wickedness | Ezekiel 14:3; Proverbs 15:29; Isaiah 1:15-16 |
| 4. | Lack of: compassion; delight in the Lord | Proverbs 21:13, Isaiah 58:6,7,9; Psalm 37:4 |
| 5. | Unforgiveness towards others | Mark 11:25, Matthew 5:23-24, 6:14-15 |
| 6. | Lack of: faith; unity; not believing | James 1:5-7, Matthew 18:19, 21:22, Mk 11:24 |
| 7. | Pride; Meaningless repetition | Job 35:12-13; Matthew 6:7 |
| 8. | Lack of: repentance; perseverance | John 9:31, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 7:7-8 |
| 9. | Disobedience | Deuteronomy 1:45, 1 John 3:22 |
| 10. | Indifference/stubbornness/failure to abide | Proverbs 28:9, Zechariah 7:13; John 15:7 |
| 11. | Not God's will; Failure to pray | I John 5:14; Jeremiah 33:3 |

Let's examine the Scriptures in each of these prayer-hindering situations which we can so easily find ourselves in.

1. The hindrances from... Wrong Motives: (James 4:3) "You ask and you do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Relationship With spouse: (1 Peter 3:7) "Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them (wives) with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

Hypocrisy (Matthew 7:1-5) "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye".

(Mark 7:6-8) "He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men".

2. The hindrances from... Unconfessed sin, living in sin, holding on to sin

(Psalm 66:18) "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me."

(Isaiah 59:1-2) "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".

(1 Peter 3:12) "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil".

3. The hindrances from...

Idols In The Heart (Ezekiel 14:3) "Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?"

Wickedness (Isaiah 1:15-16) "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong..."

4. The hindrances from Lack of Compassion

(Proverbs 21:13) "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and will not be heard."

(Isaiah 58:6,7,9). "This is the fast that I have chosen... share your bread with the hungry, bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked cover him... Then you shall call and the Lord will answer".

Failure to Delight in the Lord (Psalms 37:4) "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart."

5. The hindrances related to forgiving

Failing to Forgive: (Mark 11:25) "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins".

Lack of Forgiveness (Matthew 5:23,24) "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift"

(Matthew 6:14-15) "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins".

6. The hindrances from...

Lack of Faith: (James 1:5-7) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord."

Lack of unity:

(Matthew 18:19) "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven".

Failure to believe: (Matthew 21:22) "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer". (Mark 11:24) "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours".

7. The hindrances from...

Pride (Job 35:12,13) "There they will cry out, but He does not answer, because of the pride of evil men. God will not listen to empty talk, nor will the Almighty regard it."

Meaningless repetition (Matthew 6:7) "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."

8. The hindrances in not turning from sin and to God—repentance

(John 9:31) "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth".

(2 Chronicles 7:14) "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land".

Lack of perseverance (Matthew 7:7-8) "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened".

9. The hindrances from Disobedience

(Deuteronomy 1:45) “You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you”.

(1 John 3:22) “...and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him”.

10. The hindrances related to...

Indifference: (Proverbs 28:9) “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable”.

Stubbornness (Zechariah 7:13) “When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,” says the LORD Almighty”.

Failure to abide (John 15:7) “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”.

11. The hindrances from...

Not God’s Will (1 John 5:14) “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”.

Failure to pray (Jeremiah 33:3) “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know”.

The basis for prayer is right relationship with God

Scripture gives the process whereby the man, with sin stained into the fiber of his nature and will, may come into such relationship with God as to claim, without reservation, the great and precious promises of God. The presence of Jesus in our life, in true fellowship, in oneness of heart and mind with him... vital relationship—this is the power of prayer—answered prayer.

Scripture is very clear... the only basis for relationship to God is **Christ**.

- We have been separated from God by sin... we are born separated from God because of our ancestry in Adam.
- We could not repair the break... Jesus came—he was God; he was man!
- He touches both... we are reconciled only through him... the atoning blood of the cross is the basis for all prayer.

Only as we come to God through Jesus to get the sin score straightened... and only as we keep in sympathy with Jesus in the purpose of our life can we practice prayer.

Disciples of Christ and prayer

We see in Matthew 16:24... “*Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.’*”

These words should be written in our hearts... Jesus never spoke sharper words. Note that he was speaking to his disciples... so they were meant only for those who will live their lives by these razor-edged words... to those whose heart burns for power in prayer... rock-solid commitment to Christ, and in sympathy with his purpose and plan.

Here are six of the eight sweeping statements of Christ on prayer... the six promises in Christ’s own words:

Matthew 18:19-20 “*Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them*”.

Mark 11:22-24 *“Have faith in God”, Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”.*

John 14:13-14 *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it”.*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples”.*

John 15:16 *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

John 16:23-24 *“I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete”.*

Our relationship with God in Christ is the foundation for prayer. The purpose, which must control our every action in every matter, is to “please him”. The roots of prayer lay in oneness of purpose... God up in the heavens, his Victor-Son by his side, and man down here on earth,

- You and I in such sympathetic touch that God can think his thoughts over in his mind, and have his desires repeated on earth as we pray.
- Prayers uttered by those of us whose heart burns for power in prayer... those of us with rock-solid commitment to and in sympathy with the Lord’s purpose and plan.

Our Lord told his disciples, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* (John 15:7-8)

S. D. Gordon in his book titled “Quiet Talks on Prayer” says that the Bible clearly shows us that, “Our prayers enable God to do what he otherwise could not do”.