

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER
Prayer and Intercession
Resource Ministries
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Prayer is a vital link of communication and fellowship between us and our Heavenly Father. In our relationship with God, as in our human relationships, it takes real effort and commitment to maintain good, open communication.

Healthy communication in relationships can be hindered by a number of factors. In this study we want to explore some of the things that can hinder effective prayer and healthy, open communication with God.

1. Asking with wrong motives.

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4)

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 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 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:5-8)

- We should examine our motives and see if we are being selfish or self-centered in what we are asking for.
- When we find wrong motives we can repent and ask God to cleanse our hearts and give us His motives.

2. Pride

Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. (Psalm 138:6)

- Pride hinders prayer because it makes us think we are self-sufficient and don't need God's help, provision, or wisdom.
- We can humble ourselves and acknowledge our need of God and His good gifts.

3. Iniquity / Sin in our lives.

15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; 16 the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 34:15-16)

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; (Psalm 66:18)

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. (John 9:31)

- Sin not only hinders us from praying because it makes us uncomfortable in approaching God, it also weakens our faith because we feel (perhaps rightly so) that God won't hear us.
- One prayer God always responds to is a prayer of repentance and confession. If we confess our sins He forgives, cleanses, and restores us to fellowship with Him. I John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 NIV)

4. An unforgiving spirit.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (Matthew 6:14)

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35)

- When we don't forgive others for their offences against us, we close the door on being able to receive God's forgiveness for our sins against Him.
- When we forgive others, we are free to approach God's Throne of Grace with confident assurance.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16 NIV)

5. Bitterness.

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:14-15)

- Bitterness is a result of long-term unforgiveness. It becomes like a cancer of the soul, making us resentful, fearful, and unbelieving
- To rid ourselves of long-standing bitterness may require the assistance and intervention of mature Christian brothers and sisters. Repentance and prayer in the authority of Jesus' Name can break the power of bitterness in one's life.

6. Heart idols (covetousness).

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 enquire of me at all? 4 Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling-block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. 5 I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.' 6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices! 7 "'When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from me and sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling-block before his face and then goes to a prophet to enquire of me, I the LORD will answer him myself. 8 I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 14:3-8)

- Anytime we put something ahead of God and time with Him, we are setting up idols in our hearts.
- We must be sure that God is first in our relationships and first in our time commitments.

7. Stinginess / Selfishness.

If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered. (Proverbs 21:13)

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. (Acts 10:4)

- Prayer is essentially coming to God and asking Him to give us what we need. If we are aware of needs in other people's lives and haven't responded to help them, we will not be able to ask in faith.
- We need to be compassionate and generous concerning the needs of others. We need to give, serve, and care whenever we have opportunity.

8. Doubts or unbelief.

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matthew 21:22)

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)

5 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. 6 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. (James 1:5-6)

- Doubts cause us to question God's love, God's care, and even God's ability to meet our needs.
- We need to read and meditate on God's Word; his promises; His faithfulness; so that faith will rise up within us and drive out doubts and fears.

9. Wrong or unhealthy relationships.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

- When we allow important relationships to suffer due to abuse, unfaithfulness, unkindness, it hinders our relationship with God.
- We need to examine our behavior towards all those we are in key relationship with and correct any unkindness or abuse.

10. Being too busy

- Busyness is a hindrance to our spiritual lives as well as to relationships.
- Setting proper priorities in our lives and disciplining ourselves to put first first is one way to make sure we do the important things.

11. Lack of Discipline

- Prayer is a spiritual discipline. We are not always motivated by inspiration so if we have not developed disciplines, our prayer life can be inconsistent.
- Find a "Prayer Pattern" that works well for you and just do it.

12. Ignorance...not recognizing the significance. *James 5:16*

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16 NIV)

- Not seeing that time spent with the Lord in prayer is necessary to our growth as a Christian.
- We must know what the Bible says about the importance of prayer; we must see prayer as important in the life of Jesus and other people in the Bible; and we need to see prayer as important and effective in the lives of other Christian believers.

13. Disappointment or discouragement through unanswered prayer.

- When we have prayed about matters that are important to us and have not seen the answer come through it can cause us to develop a "What's the use?" attitude about prayer.

- We must understand that the answer is in God's hand. Prayers are answered in God's time and according to God's will. God can and must be trusted to answer as He sees best.
14. Too narrow a concept. Praying small, selfish, petty prayers.
- Perhaps too "me" focused, not seeing the big picture.
 - Allow God to give us His heart of concern for the whole world. "For God so loved the World.."