

Six Ways to Hinder Your Prayers

It is the Lord's delight to give us what we ask of Him in prayer. Like David, we should all pray, "O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth" (Psalm 54:2). If Christians did not believe in the efficacy of prayer, there would be no reason for us to ask anything of God.

He is the one who tells us that we can have confidence that our prayers ascend to Him. "And this is the confidence that we have toward 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 that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14,15). While as Christians we pay lip-service to the superlatives in that sentence ("whatever" and "anything"), how often do we really believe it?

The fact is that our prayers are often hindered. There are times when it feels like our prayers are reaching the ceiling and going no further; times when we are lying face- down on the floor and feel that our prayers are rising no higher than the fibers of the carpet. While we can be sure that God does hear our prayers, there are times when He chooses not to heed or answer them.

In this brief article we'll go over six reasons God may not heed our prayers. This list is incomplete, for there may be other ways our prayers are hindered, but it contains the most likely and significant ways.

It is important to know from the outset that I am the only one who can hinder my prayers. You are the only one who can hinder your prayers.

I cannot hinder your prayers anymore than you can hinder mine. And while we may have done much to hinder our prayers, we are not necessarily even aware of this. So let's look at these as six warnings from Scripture.

(1) Selfish Motives

All humans are selfish. It is part of our human nature that we naturally regard our own interests ahead of the interests of others. And sadly, we often regard our own interests ahead of God's.

In the passage we read above, 1 John 5:14 and 15, the apostle tells us that our confidence comes from asking "according to his [God's] will." James similarly exhorts "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3).

So the first hindrance to our prayer is our motives. We must ask in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Bible. We must ask only for things that are consistent with the character and nature of God. We must ask for things that are for the spiritual benefit of ourselves or for the person on whose behalf we pray. God will not answer our self-centered, self-serving prayers.

(2) Turning Away From Scripture

If we are not spending time immersing ourselves in Scripture and are not obeying what we have learned, we should not expect God to answer our prayers. Our defiance in ignoring the life-giving Words of the Bible may hinder us from having our prayers answered.

Solomon goes so far as to suggest that prayers made from such a hardened heart are an abomination to God. "If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

We pray best and most effectively when we are saturated in the Word of God. When we read the Words of Scripture, we ask and encourage God to speak to us.

He provides the understanding we need to live lives that bring glory to Him—lives that are increasingly consistent with His standards of grace and holiness.

If we thumb our nose at the importance of this discipline and if we disobey what He teaches, He will not answer our prayers.

Without submitting ourselves to Scripture, we may not even know what and how to pray. We pray best and most effectively when we are saturated in the Word of God.

(3) Unforgiving Hearts

The Christian has been forgiven for the greatest of offenses. He has been forgiven for knowingly, purposely and unrepentantly transgressing the Law of God. And yet we are often slow to forgive our fellow man for the smallest of transgressions.

Even the biggest of the sins committed against us are as nothing compared to how we sinned against God. God does not honor this attitude. In Mark 11:25 Jesus says, “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Our ongoing assurance of pardon before the Father is in some way dependent on our willingness to forgive others. We must be attentive to our hearts, to ensure that we are not harboring hatred and resentment towards others. If we have this attitude we should expect our prayers to be hindered.

(4) Family Discord

It is God's will that families live together in peace and harmony. It is, of course, impossible for us to live in perfect peace, but God demands that we maintain close relationships and that we seek harmony in our family relationships.

It is foremost the responsibility of the father, as the head of the household, to ensure that there is not discord within the family. When this discord exists, especially in the relationship of a husband to his wife, his prayers may well be hindered. The apostle Peter, a married man himself, exhorted husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, being sensitive to their needs, "showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).

The relationship between a husband and a wife is to reflect that of Christ to His church. It is to be a relationship of absolute love, adoration and sacrifice. If Christ gave His life for the church, how can a husband do any less for his wife?

This is, of course, impossible when the relationship is strained or broken. Thus a man should examine his relationship with his wife to ensure this is not a hindrance to his prayers (and to hers).

(5) Unconfessed Sin

Just as unforgiveness can hinder our prayers, so can sin in our lives that we have refused to confess before God. “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18), says the Psalmist.

Before we conclude that God has simply not heard our prayers or that it is not His will to give us what we ask, we need to examine our hearts to see if unconfessed sin stands as a barrier between ourselves and God.

While we need to continually examine our hearts, we need also to ask God to reveal our sin to us. We should ask those closest to us what they have observed in our lives.

While God most often reveals sin through the reading of and meditating upon His Word, we should realize that if we do not learn our lesson from Scripture, He may have to resort to harsher tactics where our sin is revealed before others, even publicly.

While this may be difficult and humiliating, He does so because He loves us and does not wish for this sin to continue to corrupt us and to stand as a barrier between Himself and us.

(6) Doubt

God wants us to have confidence in His ability and willingness to provide what is necessary for us to attain to godliness. He wants us to believe that He can and will do what He says.

Thus when we doubt—when we ask expecting rejection and when we ask almost hoping for rejection—we will hinder our prayers. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:5-7).

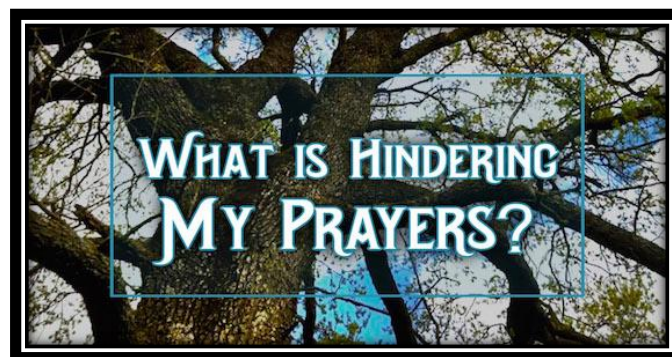
Our prayers cannot be separated from our faith. Our prayers cannot be separated from our faith. If we are to ask God, we must ask with expectancy, believing in our heart of hearts that God can and will give what we desire, provided that what we desire is really what we need and what will bring glory to Him! We are to ask with confidence and expectancy, praying out of the faith He has given us.

Conclusion

The eighteenth chapter of Luke is premised with the following words: “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Jesus goes on to share the parable of the persistent widow.

It is a parable designed to teach the importance of persisting in prayer. It is God’s desire that we persist in our petitions before Him. When we ask and do not receive, we need to examine ourselves and question why our prayers are being hindered.

Are we asking selfishly? Have we turned away from God, harbored unforgiveness in our hearts or ignored sin in our lives? Or have we allowed discord to creep into our families? These questions can lead us back to the Word of God, guide us to an examination of our hearts, and lead us back to sweet communion with the Lord.



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