

DEADLY PRAYER HINDRANCES

Why God May Not Answer Our Prayers

Los Angeles Times staff writer Dick Roraback summed up the spirit of our age: The computer people are fond of telling us that this is the Age of Communication. Sure. Children can't communicate with parents, parents can't communicate with *their* parents, and hardly anybody, it seems, can get through to God, even after 6 p.m. (*Los Angeles Times*, 19 December 1984). Do you sometimes feel as if your prayers rise no higher than the ceiling? To liberate your prayers and give them wings, it is necessary to remove all hindrances. Consider the following common hindrances that plague many Christians.

1. *Unconfessed 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” (Isa. 59:1, 2; Ps. 66:18). If you go before God in prayer and there is blatant sin in your life, the first thing the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind is that sin. If you should ignore his conviction, and try to pray about other things, that specific sin will haunt you until you deal with it. The Holy Spirit will speak with great clarity: “Confess that sin and deal with it, then we can move on and listen to these other requests and concerns you have.”

2. *Prayerlessness*—James writes bluntly, “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2b). Let me ask you, what I asked a friend of mine once after he grumbled about God's apparent silence in the midst of a crisis: “Have you *really* prayed? I mean, have you come before God and told him specifically what your request is? And have you done that over a period of time, expecting an answer?” My friend admitted he hadn't. Often I don't either. After all, why should I pray when I can worry or doubt or murmur? How often do we think of praying, want to pray, plan to pray, but never actually get down on our knees and pray? Perhaps, we do not have, because we do not ask.

3. *Wrong Motives*—“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:3). If you are praying for anything with a demanding spirit, for example, that is a good indication that you have wrong motives. The Bible exhorts us to ask, seek and knock, with zeal, fervency and urgency, but we cross the line when we begin demanding that God's will conform to ours. A godly man was asked how he dealt with unanswered prayer. He replied, “When I am in the presence of God, it seems uniquely unbecoming to demand anything.” If you're demanding in prayer, your motive is your pleasure and not God's glory, which is the ultimate motive for prayer. So desire much, pray much, but be careful to demand nothing.

4. *Unreconciled 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 Pet. 3:7). This applies not only marriage, but to all of our relationships. How do you parents feel when two of your children are feuding? Grieved? That's how God feels about His children. Reconciliation is so important to God, it takes precedence over worship and prayer (Matt. 5:23, 24; Mk. 11:25). First go and be reconciled; then offer your prayer.

5. *Inadequate Faith*—“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” (James 1:6, 7). While we want to be careful of giving the false impression that every unanswered prayer is the result of inadequate faith, we must honestly reckon with numerous passages that connect answered prayer with faith (Matt. 8:13; 9:29; Mk. 10:52; 11:22-24; James 5:15). Grow in your knowledge of God and His will, and your faith will naturally increase, as will the number of answers to your prayers.

6. *Uncaring Attitude*—“If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be heard” (Pro. 21:13). It's a sobering thought that our treatment of the poor and needy will influence God's treatment of us. If we ignore the cry of those around us who need help, God may ignore our cry for help. The next time a genuine need comes your way, ponder this proverb before you quickly mention that you're too busy to help.

These are not the only hindrances to answered prayer, of course, but they are among the most common. Bring each one before the Lord and be willing to take the appropriate steps as the Spirit leads. See if your prayers do not begin to soar.

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Website: www.foxlakechurch.org Email: wchristensen@foxlakechurch.org 847-587-1331