

This is How to Hinder a Prayer

This message is meant to be an encouragement to prayer, not a discouragement from prayer. This is not meant to be some simple checklist, like if we do this then God must answer our prayers or that if you can't check these things off God won't answer your prayers at all. It also doesn't mean that if your prayers are being answered that you have nothing to work on, prayer should become deeper as you grow in God's grace. This is not about comparing yourself to anyone else; it is about examining your own prayer life, and desiring to please God. This is about convicting you and convincing you concerning prayer. We have done many sermons and teachings on prayer (cf. Prayer & the Christian) – because of the number of texts we will be looking at it will only be skimming the surface and our comments will necessarily be brief. The goal of the message is to draw us near to God by learning how we have drawn away from Him.

Deuteronomy 1:42-45 – disobedience / delayed obedience (retelling of how they were ashamed at not believing (Numbers 14 / only Joshua and Caleb did), and went into battle presumptuously. Sometimes when we fail to do the right thing at the right time we will suffer loss even as we try and get back to doing right; it is one way God tests our repentance.

Psalms 66:18 – we are cherishing sin in our hearts. Yes God answers prayer, even when we are in sin, because in some fashion, we always are. But when we are harboring intentional, willful, deceitful desires and we plot to do them, we cherish and relish them, then it affects our prayer life, there is no doubting that fact. Who is the authority in the conversations between you and God? Obviously it is God, and so if we are cherishing some sin, God is trying to tell us to stop that and He wants us to get rid of our sin more than we want what we are praying for. Sometimes before you will see fruit in your other prayers you will have to yield in that area you are hiding and hindering God's work in. What you're holding back is what's holding you back.

Proverbs 1:20-33 (28) – indifference to wise counsel – read Psalm 1: the biblical pattern is clear; deny what God has clearly revealed and the next steps degenerate to being a scoffer.

Proverbs 21:13 – neglect of the needy

Proverbs 28:9 – we are not abiding in the Word – this isn't "just add Bible"; that can be done without any relationship, just to make the scriptures a means to an end. The less worth God's Word has to you the less worth your prayers will have to God. You need to work your soil and keep planting the seeds of God's kingdom in your heart. *Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty* (Proverbs 28:19). For many, the reason they are in such spiritual poverty is that they have been tending another garden, outside the Word of God, outside the will of God, outside the walls of God's design, and the fruit is ripe to cause destruction in your life (Galatians 6:7-8). This is about having a hard heart. We might accept these things in our heads, and deny them in our hearts. If you seek to please God in all things, whatever the outcome you come to, it will be the best outcome possible. If you seek yourself and your own goals, whatever outcome you receive, will be pointless and empty, fading, and pregnant with poverty. People profess to be a Christian but they choke out any real influence of Christianity in their lives, and then they wonder why God doesn't seem to help them, and they even start to blame God (Proverbs 19:3). Remember, He values your words as you value His.

Isaiah 1:15-17 (29:13) – going through motions, but neglecting righteousness (Matthew 15:7-9)

Isaiah 59:1-2 – we do not confess our sin

Ezekiel 14:1-12 – idolatry (we will only hear what we want), what God are you praying to?

Covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5 / Colossians 3:5) / Matthew 6:19-34 – if we will first seek to order our spiritual lives right, then God will address our physical needs

Micah 3:4 – we are committing sin against God's people

Zechariah 7:13 – stubbornness – fasting but not sanctified in heart (vs.5), failing to show mercy

Matthew 6:5-6 – being hypocritical

Matthew 6:7-8 – being superstitious

Matthew 6:14-15 – known unforgiveness. It is obvious that it is important (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus was not giving some requirement for salvation. He was saying that those who are forgiven become forgiving people themselves (cf. Colossians 3:13). Holding onto known unforgiveness hinders our prayer life and our fellowship with God. Don't misunderstand; this text certainly isn't teaching that we must find all our past unforgiveness, even those we don't know about, which is supposedly blocking our prayers, and if we don't find that missing person and say the magic formula then we will never enjoy life. That is just being superstitious. No, what this text is talking about is currently, knowingly holding someone in contempt. If we do not forgive we lose fellowship with our Heavenly Father, and we become resentful, of other people, of life, and of God. It lends itself to hollow prayer. Matthew 5:23-24 – make it right to make it real.

Luke 11:5-13 (Luke 18:1) – we give up (cf. Mark 4:26-29) – We are to keep on asking, seeking, knocking, in a sense it is a progression, don't just ask, but seek and knock, keep bringing it up, keep looking for it to happen, keep causing a stir. We can prevail in prayer because the Father will indeed answer all our prayers, not according to our desires but according to His goodness. He gives us not what we want, but what we need. He will answer our prayer as if we prayed it knowing what He knows. His goodness gives us a "no" sometimes. He knows better than us and helps us out by giving us what we really need even if we don't think it is right then.

James 1:5-8 – we don't trust God – we doubt God or His ability to work through us or our circumstances – but the truth is that our fruitfulness gives Him glory, and we can expect that He will answer, there is no reason to doubt, just check our own motives and vision.

James 4:2-3 – we don't ask, or we ask selfishly (1 John 5:14-15)

1 Peter 3:7 – we fail to be unified with our wife (family discord, improper relationships)

1 Peter 3:8-12 – we seek vengeance (Psalm 34:12-16) (Romans 12:17-21 / 1 Thessalonians 5:15)

Psalm 50:16 – when we aren't born again. First you must call on the Lord (Romans 10:9-13).

Again, this message is meant to be an encouragement to prayer, not a discouragement from prayer. When get down on ourselves because we don't see the results we want. Yet we need to keep praying. God may be dealing with us in a certain area that we have been heard hearted, but take heart, if we will truly seek God we will find that He delights in answering our prayers, because being fruitful is how He is glorified (John 15:7-8). Now, having heard about how we can be drawn away from God, let us draw near, with full confidence that He wants to heal us. Don't let anything hinder you from coming to God (James 4:8); He is waiting to hear from you right now concerning these things (Psalm 139:23-24). Let's all pray.

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