

Hindrances to Answered Prayers

James 4:3 (New American Standard Bible)

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with **the wrong motives**, so that you may spend what you request on your **pleasures**.*

Psalms 66:18 (New American Standard Bible)

*If I regard **wickedness** in my heart,
The Lord will not hear;*

James 1:6-8 (New American Standard Bible)

*⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who **doubts** is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Introduction

One thing we all practice in our faith is prayer. From the first day in the church, we are encouraged to pray to our Heavenly Father for our needs. So, we start praying. We say the Lord's Prayer, too.

Here's a question for you: how do you understand prayer and how do you practice it? Generally, we understand prayer as the spiritual activity to make our wishes known to God. Often, though, we don't know how to pray or what we ought to pray for, but we start praying anyway. We also learn that at the end of our prayers we say "*in the name of Jesus. Amen*" because Jesus promised, "*If you ask Me anything **in My name**, I will do it*" (John 14:14).

I am sure you all are familiar with prayers in your own ways. We have moments of ecstasy when our prayers are answered. We also have moments of disappointment with the unanswered prayers. In order for us to have a better understanding on prayer, for the next four Sundays, I am going to do a sermon series on prayer: prayers never answered, prayers that take time, keys to answered prayers, and Jesus' prayer for us. Today is #1: prayers that are never answered. Yes, the prayers that God never grants us no matter how hard we try.

Content

Even though Christ promises that if we believe we will receive *whatever we ask for* in prayer (Matthew 21:22), our experience tells otherwise. It is not *whatever* we ask, is it? In other words, there are certain prayer wishes God never grants us. Not that He is incapable nor not wanting, but that some prayers never make it because they fail to meet God's conditions for the answered prayers. We need to know what those standards are so that we won't waste our time and efforts.

Peter the Apostle exhorts us to ensure that nothing will hinder our prayers (1 Peter 3:7). That means, there are things that hinder our prayers, right? Unless we are careful, we may end up doing things that cause our prayers not to be heard by God: things that keep our prayers from reaching to God's ears.

God's Word identifies three hindrances to our answered prayers.

They are: **Wrong Motives, Sins, and Doubts**. Let's check them out one by one, shall we?

Prayers Offered Amiss

God never answers our prayers when we pray in the following ways:

When we *put Him to the test*. E.g. One man jumps from a building praying that God will send His angels to protect him from harm. This is not a prayer. It is a test of God. Such a thing God never answers. Don't do it.

When we ask for something with *selfish motives*. E.g. Simon the Sorcerer wanted to *buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money* (Acts 8:9-24) so that he could put the Spirit at his disposal. You cannot buy God's gift with money!

When we ask with *evil intentions* (morally wrong). E.g. "I wish so and so were dead!" The bottom-line is this: God never allows you something that would hurt others and yourself in the end. E.g. A child is asking for a knife. A youth asks for drug money. No parent would grant such wishes. Neither will our Heavenly Father.

When we pray with *frivolous (pleasure loving) motives*. God doesn't grant our wishes when we ask for something to indulge in "desires—*ηδοναις* (pronounced: 'hey-do-na-i-s')" (James 4:3)—translated as 'lusts, concupiscences, passions, pleasures, and sensual pleasures.'

Never pray amiss.

Prayers with Sins Unresolved

We often blame God for not answering our prayers while forgetting our own sins that block our prayers.

Isaiah 59:2 says this: *Your sins have hidden God's face from you so that He will not hear.*—E.g. Imagine a guy blocks your access to God's throne room. That guy is sin.

Psalms 66:18 says: *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;...*

John 9:31 says, “We know that God does not listen to sinners; but if someone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him.”

In these three verses, we clearly see a connection between sin and prayers. Sin blocks our prayers. It must be repented before our prayers are heard. Unresolved sin brings forth no answer to our prayers.

Now, here’s another lesson from Jesus: “When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, *forgive* him, so that your Father in heaven may *forgive* you your sins” (Mark 11:25). Did you hear ‘pray’, ‘forgive’, ‘forgive’? Unless we forgive those who trespass against us first, our Father in Heaven will not forgive our sins. When our sins remain unforgiven by God, our prayers will never make it into our Heavenly Father’s heart. Forgiveness, Sin resolved, Answered Prayers and vice versa. Remember the sequence.

By the way, if you desire divine healing and want to stay healthy afterwards, your sins must be dealt with before you ask for His favor: E.g. A man who had been ill for 38 years was healed by Jesus. To him, Jesus says, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you” (John 5:14).

Prayers with Doubts (with No Faith)

In today’s text, James talks about folks who pray with doubting. They are “double-minded,” he says, like the restless sea stirred up by the wind and the waves (James 1:6-8).

Do you want your prayers answered? Then, learn to pray with an undivided heart, that is, with no doubts. E.g. Once I offered my prayer for a sister in Christ, she responded to me saying, “*as if prayer works?*” I prayed for her anyway. However, I believe, my prayer for her that day was wasted due to her unbelief.

When you ask anything from God, *in no uncertain terms, believe in the fulfillment of prayers*. Listen to John the Apostle. “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-**whatever** we ask-we know that **we have** what we asked of him*” (1 John 5:14). Do you see how confident John is here? *Whatever* we ask according to His will, He hears! *We have* what we asked of Him when He hears! I bet John the Apostle has received many prayer requests due to his faith. We can do the same, folks. In fact, Jesus promises us, “*If you have faith and do not doubt, ... if you believe, you’ll receive **whatever** you ask for in prayer*” (Matthew 21:21-22). Amen!

E.g. Twice I asked in prayer with unwavering faith on the fulfillment of my prayers. Both times my requests were granted. Beyond my imagination!

Conclusion

As for closing, I would say this: remove three hindrances to answered prayers. Don't ask for God's favor with wrong motives. Repent of sins before you ask. A simple acronym for prayers: **A.C.T.S:** Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Confess your sins before you ask. Finally, pray with no doubts, or the doubts will sink your prayers as they did Peter the Apostle (Matthew 14:31).

Amen.