

## Overcoming the Hindrances to Prayer

Prayer is commanded by God, demonstrated by countless examples, taught and modeled in Scripture and thoroughly practiced by great saints throughout history.

Prayer is a deep level of communion with God in which we ask and receive answers that meet our needs.

E. M. Bounds has written,

“Men are continually looking for better methods and ways of doing things. God is looking for better men – men of prayer... Men are God’s methods.”

James says,

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16).

Why is it difficult to have an effective prayer life?

Externals: Place, Time, Words, & Posture.

The story is told of a certain man who could not find the right posture for prayer. He tried praying on his knees, but that was not comfortable; besides, it wrinkled his slacks. He tried praying standing, but soon his legs got tired. He tried praying seated but that did not seem reverent. Then one day as he was walking through a field, he fell headfirst into an open well. And did he ever pray!<sup>1</sup>

What is important for effective prayer are the internal attitudes of the heart.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus shows three aspects of prayer.

Matt. 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you;

seek, and you will find;

knock, and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives,

and he who seeks finds,

and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

Context:

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of A Godly Man*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 103.

- Vs. 1-6 Judging and criticizing others
- Vs. 9-11 Comparison of earthly fathers and the heavenly Father in giving good things to their children.
- Vs. 12 Treating others as we would want to be treated.

Jesus teaching on prayer is given in the context of relationships.

How does this teaching on prayer fit in the context of getting along with others?

Ron Dunn wrote,

“...prayer is much more than religious exercise. It is a human necessity.”<sup>2</sup>

Three parts of prayer:

Ask – Seek – knock

Three verbs -- Indicative active tense: present tense, continuous.

Lit. Keep on asking... seeking... knocking.

Prayer Promise-

Asking and receiving

Seeking and finding

Knocking and opening

### 1. Prayer is asking and receiving.

Ask, and it will be given to you...

For everyone who asks receives,

**Ask** – implies requesting assistance for a conscious need.

Humility – used by one approaching a superior.

The Open Bible says, “When you know the will of God regarding a need, whether it be material or spiritual, you can ask and receive. This is prayer according to the revealed will of God.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> The Open Bible: comments on Matt. 7:7-8.

First, we must ask according to His will.

“And this is the confidence which we have before 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 which we have asked from Him.” 1 Jn. 5:14-15

Second, we must ask according to the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps us pray, especially when we are weak.

“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26-27)

Third, we must ask with right motives.

James writes,

“You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (James 4:2b-3)

Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance:  
it is laying hold of His highest willingness.

Richard Chenevix, Archbishop Trench

## **2. Prayer is seeking and finding.**

seek, and you will find;

...and he who seeks finds

“When you do not know the will of God regarding a need, whether it be material or spiritual, then you are to seek His will in prayer concerning this need until you find it. This is prayer for knowledge of the unrevealed will of God in a specific need.” (Open Bible)

Kent Hughes in *Disciplines of a Godly Man* writes,

“Seek involves asking, but adds action.  
The idea is not just to express need,  
but to get up and look around for help.”<sup>4</sup>

- The beginning of seeking is to ask the Lord.

Thus says the Lord who made the earth,  
the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name,  
“Call to Me, and I will answer you,  
and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”  
Jer. 33:3

We first ask God to solve the problem or fill the need.

- Then ask and seek for wisdom.  
To understand as God does.  
To have steps of solution.  
To know what can be done?

James writes:

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all  
men generously and with reproach, and it will be given to him”  
(James 1:5).

“If you need wisdom, ask our generous God and he will give it to you. He  
will not rebuke you for asking.” NLT

There is a rebuke for not asking for God’s help.

Isaiah wrote, “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes,  
and prudent in their own sight” (Is. 5:21).

God knows the secrets of the heart, the root of every conflict; and He alone can  
change someone and open their eyes to the truth.

Prayer moves the Hand which moves the world.  
John A. Wallace

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of A Godly Man*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 100.

At this point in prayer our focus can be in seeking God's perspective, His solution, or specific steps of action for a solution or the best response.

### 3. Prayer is Knocking and Opening.

"knock, and it will be opened to you.  
...and to him who knocks it will be opened."

The 'knocking' phase of prayer is the persistent, strong faith of believing prayer.

"When you know the will of God, and yet you find a closed door, you are to knock, and keep on knocking until God opens the door. This is miracle-working prayer." (Open Bible)

When you think of the word picture, "Keep knocking," you see a closed door and someone who keeps pounding, who perseveres until the door opens. Knocking prayer perseveres until the impossible becomes the possible. This is tenacious prayer - prayer for mountain-moving faith.

#### Applications:

**\*\*Let anxiety be the signal to pray** (Vs. Why pray when you can worry?)

- Ask God's help in the cause of anxiety.
- Seek for wisdom in what to do.
- Knock until the door opens of peace.

"Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all comprehension shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"  
(Phil. 4:6-7).

**\*\*Beware of Business - the robber of spiritual riches.**

John Bunyan wrote, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed,  
but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."

"Hurry is the death of prayer." (Samuel Chadwick)

Take time to delight your soul in the Lord.

“...when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matt. 6:6).

Jesus was referring to secret prayer instead of showing off like the hypocrites, but one of the benefits of praying in secret is seclusion – quiet time with our Lord. It helps us to close the door to interruptions or distractions.

Effective prayer for others and the Kingdom of God results from an inner freedom from personal anxieties to receive God-given burdens for the needs of others.

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf...” (Eph. 6:18-19).

The function of prayer is to set God at the center of attention.

Albert Edward Day

**\*\*Keep prayer uncomplicated –**

Luther said, “A good prayer mustn’t be too long. Do not draw it out. Prayer ought to be frequent and fervent.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, p. 104.