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## How to Pray! Part X

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### Beware of the Barriers of Prayer

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:18; James 4:8

Have you ever wondered that if God gave you whatever you wanted, what bearing or what impact it would have on your life and faith? Would it be a hindrance? Perhaps we need to think through our dreams and wishes to their logical conclusion and impact from God's perspective. At best, what we may want may be not best for us, and at worst, it may be totally detrimental and even fatal. Prayer has some strings to it. Obviously, we need to be saved in Him, but He also requests that we trust and obey Him. His answers to our prayers are conditioned upon our abiding in Him and His will (John 15:7; James 4:3; 1 John 5:14-15)! How sad it is that so many Christians never enjoy God's favor simply because they do not ask or ask for the wrong things!

If we would have an effective prayer life, we have to recognize and remove the barriers that hinder our prayers. Yes, God is Omnipotent and Omniscience, but our prayers will be ignored if we are not right with Him as well as with one another! The first and main barrier is *not forgiving one another*, for either trivial or big things. If we sin or do something we are not supposed to do to another person, God is aware and so are we! Our pride may cause us to rationalize it is OK, but it is not OK. We must seek forgiveness when we realize we have done wrong and God brings it to our attention. The power and veracity in prayer happens when we are right with Him! Forgive others for their "minor" transgression (everything is minor compared to what God has done for us!) because He has forgiven us for the massive sin barrier we had that we could never have paid by ourselves (Matthew 5:23-24; Mark 11:24-25; 1 John 2:9-11).

The second hindrance to our prayers being heard is *how we are living our lives*. Are we living as we say we are, as we are supposed to be? We will not be perfect; forgiven, yes, but we still have the responsibility to have character and integrity as His children and representatives. Therefore, the sins we commit toward others need to be addressed before God. We live the Christian life through forgiveness and grace, but it also includes character and responsibility. We are not righteous, but we are called to live and treat others as His children, to the best of our efforts. We are not to be good or slightly better than the others we know. We are to set our hearts and minds on Him and live our lives in response to His promises and work and with gratitude for what he has done for us. The key is to realize that He is indeed trustworthy. We can demonstrate real, authentic faith by being obedient; we can do this when we are faithful and trusting in Christ. To honor God, we have to live for Him within His precepts and model His Fruit and love. If this is not happening, then we are not being acceptable to Him, rather pretenders in the faith. Why, then, would God answer us (John 9:31; 15:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:20; Heb. 11:6; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:22-23)?

The third reason our prayers become "air balls" in His court is because we are not taking hold of what He is calling us to do. If we are complacent, doing nothing with our faith and only using Him as a divine vending machine, we are exhibiting reckless

and disrespectful behaviors. We all are given gifts, abilities, and a call to pursue the Christian life for His glory. We all are special, uniquely called and gifted to serve Him. We can be bold in our faith and take our trust and faithfulness to the next level. This is all about being devoted to Christ as our LORD and responding with our trust to who He is all aspects and concerns of our lives. This means being committed—not weakly or halfheartedly or when it is convenient, but fully and wholly in Him. Thus, we must examine our lives and behaviors carefully. Are we being hypocritical or inconsistent? What about pride and humbleness? Which ones come from you? (I know I have to check myself all of the time.) If we are not being humble, or if we have a problem with pride, what are we going to do about it? Being obedient is not just a call; it is a necessity from our respect for His Sovereignty and our response of faith in Him (2 Chronicles 7:14; Heb. 4:16).

Do you need any other reason why you should pray or why your prayers should be a foundational aspect of who and what you are and do? The best reason is because Jesus did! God calls us to seek His presence both individually and as a body of believers with one mind and voice. So, why don't we?

Are you having trouble spending more than 10 minutes a day in prayer as I do at times? Here are some tips that are timeless and work. First, we need to desire and be ready for it so we can focus on Him. Whatever it is—in a classroom, with a friend, or with God—we have to focus our attention without distractions or preoccupations with other thoughts. We must get our minds off the clutter of life and on Christ as Savior and LORD. Slow down and be quiet so that thoughts and desires are in neutral. Start to remember how God has helped and answered you in the past. Use a pattern such as the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15; use each stanza as a template and then insert your own intercessions, requests, and supplications. Remember to confess sins and seek forgiveness, have gratitude for all that He has done (what you see and what you do not see), and give Him praise and glory. Our goal in prayer is the practice of being in His presence, which is what we will be doing in eternity. Let us go before Him with our active faith and humbleness in conjunction with our fervency and perseverance. Do not leave your home and engage the world without first feeding your soul with prayer and His Word (Matt. 6:33; 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 3:17; 1 John 5:14).

I write this not as an expert but as a learner who struggles. Prayer takes practice and work; it does not come quickly in the night. It takes many days and nights to begin and a lifetime to pursue. It is not about getting what we want, manipulating, or being selfish. It is all about surrendering ourselves to Him. It is a journey, it is an integral and essential part of our faith, and it is to be a continual pursuit (Psalm 71:1-8; Phil. 4:6-7; James 4:8)!

## Questions to Ponder

### Read James 4:8

1. What do you think the best reason to pray is? How does the fact that Jesus did help you?
2. Do you struggle with which direction in life to go? How will prayer help you from now on?
3. Have you realized that Jesus is indeed trustworthy? How will this affect your prayer life?
4. If God asked you if you are resisting Him or resisting the devil, what would you say? Do you fight Him or do you glorify Him? How will you know?
5. How does this passage point us to honoring God and relating to people?
6. What does it mean to you to, *Draw near to God*?
7. How does being humble before God help us resist the devil at the same time? How does this affect your prayer life?
8. Why can't we serve both our desires and God's will? Why do so many Christians try with all of their might? What will this double mindedness give them?
9. When we draw near to God, the devil is pushed further away; if we draw near to the devil, then God is pushed further away. How has this been so in your life?
10. What has been the pattern in your life with your closeness with God? Consider times when you pray a lot and times you neglect prayer.
11. The signpost is clear where we are to go; the direction we choose is up to us. So what does the signpost say to you?
12. What do you need to do to allow Christ to be your only Lord and direction?
13. How can the fact that He will lift us up beyond our desires and plans to a much greater plan and purpose in life give you the confidence and passion to do it?
14. How does humbleness produce our right attitudes and motives in prayer?
15. What can you do to stop combating with God, stop fighting within ourselves and stop hostility with one another? So, what will you do?
16. What do you need to do to recognize and remove the barriers that hinder your prayers?

17. How can you submit to and surrender to God? What would this mean? What would it look like? How will you go about it?
18. Are you living as you say we are, as you are supposed to be? What are you going to do about it? How does this affect your prayer life?
19. Do you need any other reason why you should pray or why your prayers should be a foundational aspect of who and what you are and do?
20. Real effectual prayer is a journey, it is an integral and essential part of our faith development, so what can you do to enjoy your time with God more?