

## **BIBLICAL PRAYER (33)**

**Prerequisite #2** - A believer must be willing to examine his motives . **James 4:3**

Here is another critical factor concerning prayer. We must make certain that what we are praying for is not something stemming from wrong motives. For example, if we are praying for something in order to gratify some self-centered ambition, God will not answer.

It is absolutely true that God has promised to meet all of our needs (**Luke 12:28-30**). It is also true that God wants us to pray concerning all of our anxieties (**Philippians 4:6**). But, as J. Oswald Sanders writes, “God nowhere binds Himself to answer self-centered or selfish prayers” (*Prayer Power Unlimited*, p. 111).

Dr. O. Hallesby, a theologian and preacher from Northern Europe in the early 1900s, said that there is a natural tendency in the believer that is more or less conscious which basically asks, “How can I, in the best way, make use of God for my own personal advantage? How can I make Him serve me best now, in the future and throughout all eternity? How can I make use of prayer to the greatest possible advantage for myself? This is the reason why the natural man seldom finds that it pays to pray regularly to God. It requires too much effort, takes too much time and is on the whole impractical” (*Prayer*, p. 119).

If we are not careful, we can begin to think that prayer is designed to get anything for us that our self-centered nature desires. James makes it very clear that self-centered, selfish motive prayers will not be answered.

Again J. Oswald Sanders is very helpful when he says, “In prayer for temporal things, we should carefully examine our motivation and ask, “Is this petition for God’s glory, for my good and for the good of others, or is it merely to gratify my own selfish desires” (*Ibid.*, pp. 111-112)?

A very wise thing to do is to ask whether I am praying this for God’s glory or self glory.

**Prerequisite #3** - A believer must be willing to examine his relationships .  
**Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26**

In this age of Grace, we do not forgive to be forgiven, we forgive because we have been forgiven (**Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13**). The cross of Jesus Christ has changed everything. But the principle is when we are going to pray it is imperative that we are not harboring an unforgiving spirit, especially if one has asked for our forgiveness. If we were to fail to forgive someone who tried to make things right with us, God would not listen to us if we were trying to make things right with Him.

## BIBLICAL PRAYER (34)

Dr. H. A. Ironside once told a remarkable story of a man he had known for years who gave this testimony:

“For years I prayed for the conversion of an erring son, but all the time he seemed to go from bad to worse. During those years I had a bitter feeling in my heart towards a brother, who I felt had grievously wronged me. I insisted upon reparation which he refused to make. Feeling my cause was just, I held this against him and would not overlook it.

At last I realized that this was hindering prayer, I judged it before God and freely forgave. O the liberty as I then turned to God about my son! Soon I heard with joy of his conversion. Though far from home, he was brought under the power of the gospel and led to Christ. An unforgiving spirit explains why thousands of petitions go apparently unheeded” (H. A. Ironside, *Serving and Waiting*, p. 385).

There are times when judicial decisions are to be made in the church. This principle is not a principle of total toleration. There are times when total separation is demanded because of a wrong that has been done (**Romans 16:17; I Corinthians 5:11-13; II Thessalonians 3:14**). The Apostle Paul, in his last letter, named several people who had wronged him, who would be held highly accountable (**II Timothy 1:15; 2:17-18; 4:10, 14-15**). It is certainly very Biblical, at times, to point out those who are wrong and stand ground against them.

The idea here is that when we pray, we should not be holding grudges against those we should have forgiven (i.e. **Matthew 18:15-22**). If we are guilty of this, we will not see answers to our prayers.

**Prerequisite #4** - A believer must be willing to deal with sin. **Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:1-2; Jeremiah 11:10-11; I John 1:6, 9**

Closely related to obeying the Scriptures is facing and dealing with sin. It is obvious that praying to God, while refusing to face one’s own sin is not only hypocritical, but it is an “effort in futility.” Sanders said it well when he wrote: “If we are to expect an answer to our prayers, we must make a clean break with sin” (*Ibid.*, p. 111).

A good illustration of this is a telephone line. For the most part, we can pick up our telephone and speak to just about any person in just about any location. However, if our phone line is cut, all communication is broken. When it comes to prayer, sin cuts the communication lines that run to the Holy God. Until those lines are fixed by confession, the line is broken.

If we are praying and nothing is happening, one very legitimate question to ask God is to search us and show us if any sin in our life is the reason why He is not answering our prayers. It seems from **I John 3:21-22** that our own individual hearts and consciences are capable of exposing a personal sin problem. God’s Spirit works in the heart and conscience and if our heart or conscience does condemn us, then it becomes our immediate responsibility to deal with the sin and get it right with God and with others. At that time, the prayer circuit will once again be open and God will answer the prayers.

## **BIBLICAL PRAYER (35)**

If we discover that we seem to sense some guilt or condemnation and we cannot identify the source of the problem and have asked God to show us, we must realize that Satan may be using an accusing tactic, trying to keep the believer from prayer (**Revelation 12:10**). Satan knows the power of prayer (**Ephesians 6:11, 18**), and he will try to stop it. Wise is the believer who asks God to show him sin areas so he may be more powerful in moving God through prayer.

**Prerequisite #5** - A believer must be willing to judge any Pharisaism .  
**Matthew 6:5-8; Luke 18:9-14**

There are some individuals who do religious things, including prayer, trying to impress other people. If this form of Pharisaism is the motivation for the prayer, it will not be answered. God is not impressed with one's public projection, but He is impressed with private communication.

God will hide Himself from one who is out to make a public impression, but He will hurry Himself to one who is interested in private communication. There have always been those who can publicly pray with fluency and eloquence. However, the real issue is not what the person prays publicly but what the person prays privately.

There is a place for public prayer in the church (i.e. **I Thessalonians 5:17**). There is no question that public prayer is a critical part of church life (**I Corinthians 11:4**). However, we may assume that one reason why some do not receive answers to their prayers is because, in some instances, the prayers are made to impress others, not to tap into the heart of God. God will not answer such prayers.

The believer must be willing to quickly judge any form of Pharisaism, including that form that would creep into the prayer life of the believer.

**Prerequisite #6** - A believer must be willing to examine the marriage . **I Peter 3:1-7**

J. Oswald Sanders says, "When a husband and wife are one in heart and purpose, mutually recognizing the place assigned to each in Scripture and practicing the law of love, prayer is easy and confident. But when there is a lack of mutuality, when there is a selfishness in intimate things of the marriage relationship, the prayer life of the couple becomes the first casualty" (*Prayer Power Unlimited*, p. 114).

One mate or the other or both can hinder God from answering prayer. Specifically, a wife who does not keep a proper attitude of her husband, will not see God answer too many of her prayers. By the same token, a husband who does not keep a proper attitude toward his wife will not see God answer too many prayers.

Peter is very careful to explain the type of wife who will be powerful in prayer and the type of husband who will be powerful in prayer:

## BIBLICAL PRAYER (36)

The wife is to be in subjection to her husband. This point is stressed time and time again in the N.T. (**I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; I Peter 3:1**).

The wife is to develop in purity and is to develop in both a healthy respect for both God and her husband (**I Peter 3:2**).

If a wife wants to be powerful in the sight of God, she must put a greater emphasis on the internal part of her more than just the external part of her (**I Peter 3:3-4**).

A godly woman, who will see God powerfully answer her prayers, is one who will be developing a gentle and quiet spirit, not a harsh and loud spirit (**I Peter 3:4**).

Any woman who chooses to become this type of woman is guaranteed by God to:

- 1) Influence her husband - **I Peter 3:1**
- 2) To be of great value in the sight of God - **I Peter 3:4**
- 3) See God answer many of her prayers - **I Peter 3:7**

The husband is to live with his wife in accordance to knowledge (**I Peter 3:7a**). This means he is to live with his wife in accordance with knowledge of the Word of God. He is to give her understanding of God's Word and will. Also, he is to give honor to his wife as a weaker vessel (**I Peter 3:7b**). The words of Rev. B. H. Spalink are powerful on this point:

“What Peter has particularly in mind is suggested by the tender expression by which he refers to the woman as “the weaker vessel.” We have in our homes vessels made of rough earthenware, which can stand rough handling. But we have also vases of fine porcelain, which must be handled with the utmost care, lest they should break in our hands. So the woman is pictured here by Peter as being a weaker vessel, referring not so much to physical weakness, but more to the psychological make-up of woman. God has gifted the woman with a more tender disposition than that of man, which is revealed in her delicate sense of feeling and emotion and her ready susceptibility to all kinds of impressions (**I Timothy 3:6**).

There are men who disregard this fact altogether, sometimes through ignorance and lack of understanding, and sometimes through selfish indifference. Such men will often grieve their wives by bitter words and unsympathetic treatment, stepping rough-shod over tender natures. There are homes which fly the banner of Christ, where husband and wife do not live as joint heirs of the grace of life, but on the contrary, there is unkindness, bitter quarreling, sharpness of speech, and ungovernable temper. And in these cases, many a man does not give honor to his wife as the weaker vessel. In such cases, many a man does not dwell with his wife “according to knowledge,” with proper considerateness. A treatment which will leave a man more or less unmoved, will hurt a woman in the depths of her soul. And that will hinder prayer, especially joint prayer, which may be in the mind of Peter as he writes these words. Joint prayer cannot be successful with unforgiven injuries. The very first place where our Christianity is put to a test is the home. But there also our prayers are put to the test” (*The Incense of Prayer*, pp. 95-97).