

## Classics

# Four Hindrances To Answered Prayer

## How to keep your prayer life from being weak and unproductive

By A.B. Simpson



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What are some of the causes of unanswered prayer and the reasons why God's people fail to enter into the fullness of blessing they seek?

**Selfishness and earthly desire hinder prayer.** "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3). God cannot give us all the things that our carnal nature clamors for anymore than we would give our child the gleaming knife he or she sees on the kitchen counter. These things would often be more dangerous to us than the keen edge of the knife would be to the child.

Many "good" things can be desired from an earthly and selfish motive and in a carnal spirit. Many people seek forgiveness to escape the remorse of a guilty conscience—and so that they may continue on in their godless selfishness. Most people who have no true sense of honor are quite willing to be accepted as candidates for Heaven if God will let them enjoy the pleasures of the world on their way. Prayer for healing may be simply an expression of the desire to get free from pain and be able to enjoy the pleasures of life.

Things that God in other circumstances would be quite willing to give us, He often has to refuse us because they would separate us from Him. . . .

**Strife and bitterness are a hindrance to prayer.** "When you stand praying," our Savior said to His disciples, "if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him" (Mark 11:25). . . .

The spirit of prayer is essentially a spirit of love. Frequently when we are at some crisis of prayer and much is hanging upon God's answer—perhaps life itself or something more precious than life—we find ourselves confronted with just such a test as this. Someone will be remembered whom we once were at odds with, and somehow we just could not forgive that one. Let us remember in that hour that we cannot hurt another by our irritation or retaliation as much as we can deeply wound ourselves and hinder the blessing of God. In the presence of infinite love, no breath of hate can live one moment. . . .

Is this hindering your prayers? Can you think of any person from whom you are wrongly

estranged—some person whom you treat with studied harshness, neglect, disdain, injury, or injustice? Is there some word you have spoken against another that you should not have spoken, even if true? Have you heard some word against your brother to which you should not have listened? May God help you to discover and deal with any such cause of unanswered prayer! . . .

**Ignoring God's will hinders prayer.** It is not necessary for actual sin to be present in our lives to hinder prayer; it may simply be plain disobedience to the Spirit's voice in some definite leading to service or testimony. I have known many people who did not receive the full answers to their prayers . . . until they had obeyed the voice of God in some particular where they had been shrinking or hesitating. . . . Others lost out by failing to take some step of faith to which the Holy Spirit was calling. It was not until months and even years of striving with God that they learned the lesson. Then after prompt and thorough obedience, they received perfect deliverance and wonderful blessing. . . .

It is a serious matter for those who are walking in the Spirit to trifle with God's voice or to be disobedient to His commands. Such disobedience may interrupt all communion with Him and hinder all prayer. . . .

**Ignorance of the Holy Spirit is a great hindrance.** For many Christians, prayer is little more than a cry for help in a time of despair or pain. It is like the cry of a suffering brute or the wail of an unconscious infant. True, God hears the faithless cry of human misery, but that is not prayer. The voice that continually reaches the Father's ear is that of His trusting child who prays with the breath and power of the Holy Spirit Himself. True prayer should be by His prompting, and it is because most people know Him so little and walk with Him at such a distance that they are comparative strangers to the language of heavenly communion.

The life of prayer is an interior life, a spiritual life. Many people do not realize this, and many actually do not want it. It holds too constant a check on the heart. It requires too completely that they walk with our God. People like to be their own masters. The habit of walking step by step with God, submitting every thought and desire to an inward Monitor, is intolerable to their imperious will. At the least, it is unfamiliar to their experience. . . .

If you possess the Holy Spirit in your heart, you have a private connection to the throne of God. At any moment, day or night, you can open and maintain direct communications with Heaven, bringing all its help, if need be, to your immediate aid! Surely it is worth your while to yield yourself to a consecrated life and allow your loving Lord to make your heart His temple and His throne. Then prayer will ever be the familiar and unbroken line of a happy child with the Father who is always at hand!

*Adapted from The Life of Prayer by A.B. Simpson. (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1989). Used with permission.*

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A. B. SIMPSON (1843–1919) was a pastor, evangelist to the urban masses of New York City, and a missionary statesman. He is best known as one of the leading evangelicals involved in social work at the turn of the century and for founding The Christian and Missionary Alliance.