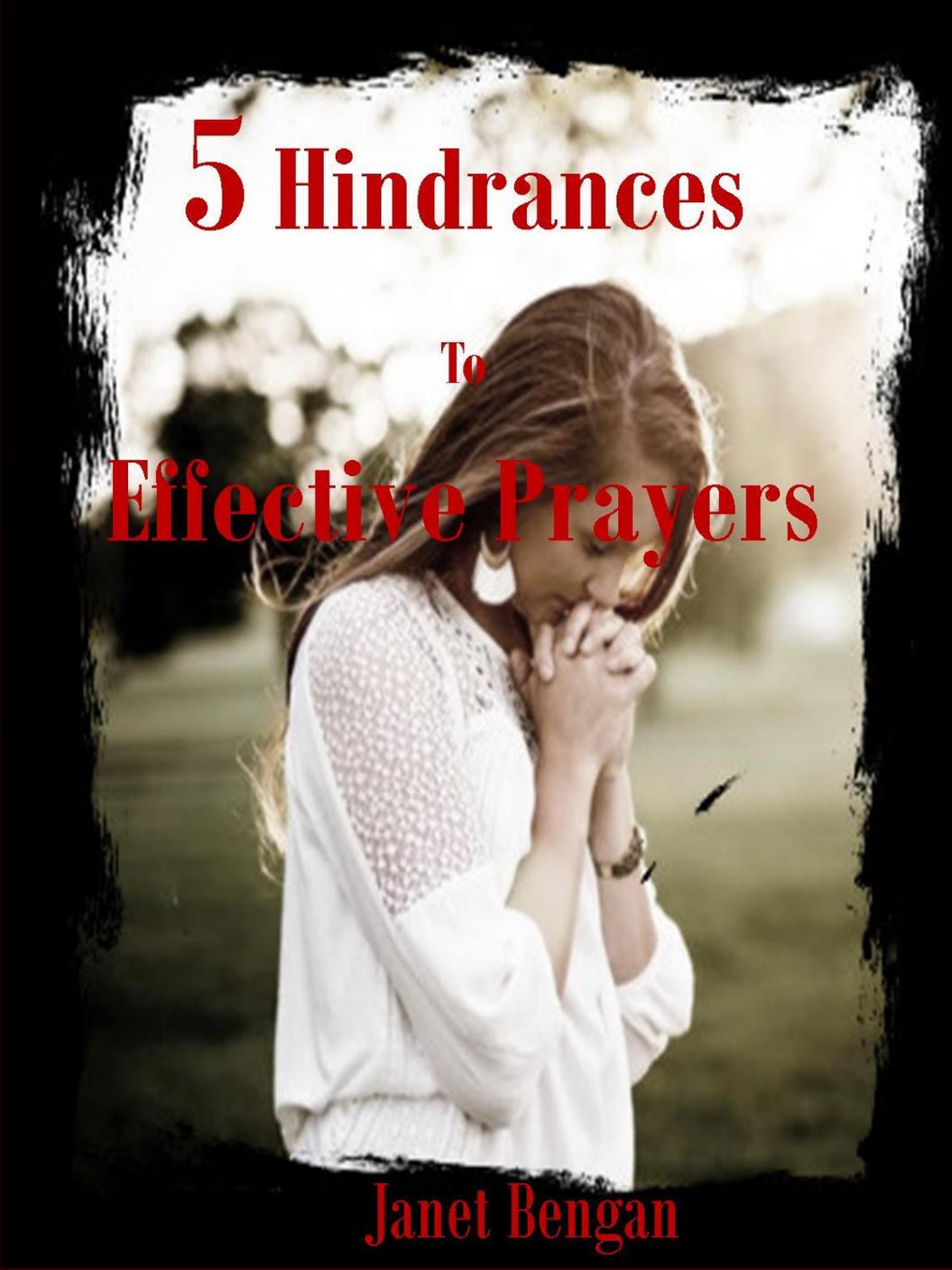


5 Hindrances to Effective Prayers

Janet Bengan

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white lace top, is shown in profile, looking down with her hands clasped in prayer. She is standing in a field with trees in the background. The entire scene is framed by a dark, textured border.

5 Hindrances

To

Effective Prayers

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Introduction

It is my belief that every sincere child of God would love to have an effective prayer life. They would love to talk to God and hear Him talk to them. They would love to see their prayers answered, and they would love to mature in their Christian walk as a result of an effective and consistent prayer life.

The importance of prayer in the life of the Christian cannot be overemphasized. A lot of our problems such as overt sin and a lifeless Christianity can be traced to a neglect of our fellowship with the Lord or difficulties in developing an effective prayer life.

The purpose of this work is not to talk about the different kinds of prayer, but to emphasize the fact that prayer, while it can and should be an enjoyable and a rewarding experience, when approached with misunderstandings and wrong attitudes, can turn into a fruitless, frustrating, burdensome, and boring experience.

The Christian whose problem is not laziness, neglect of fellowship with God, or distractions, but who still doesn't find prayer fulfilling, will find in these pages reason to see prayer from a different perspective.

It is my prayer that you will get to enjoy spending time with your Father in heaven, and seeing the fruits of that fellowship in every area of your life.

Chapter One

Misconceptions about the Purpose of Prayer

The simplest definition of prayer is talking with God.

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words (1985) the Greek word, **Proseuchomai**, rendered "prayer" in the Synoptic Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and some of Paul's letters as well as in Hebrews and Jude, is always used of prayer as directed to God.

Other words translated as "prayer" in our English versions can mean a wish, a desire, or a vow.

Misconceptions and wrong attitudes towards prayers usually arise from ignorance about the purpose of prayer. When you understand why there exists the need to pray, wrong attitudes and beliefs give way.

Wrong purposes for praying

1. To fulfill a biblical command (see explanation in chapter two)

2. To twist God's hand

Prayer is not a tool to get God to do what He is not inclined to do.

James 4:3 says if a request is amiss, it will not be granted, which means there are some requests that God will not honor even though He has called us to ask and receive (Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:24).

We need to persevere in prayer and not lose heart until we see the answer, but at the same time it is necessary to know if we are in the will of God in our asking in that particular situation.

When we have not ascertained His will in the matter, persevering in prayer or refusing to let go until God grants our demand is to believe that our prayer can cause God to do what He is not willing to do.

That is having more faith in our prayers and in our praying than the Word of God.

In God's word, we come to understand His will. Where He has clearly revealed His will, we can be patient and not give up until we see the desired result.

Disillusionment is bound to set in if we believe our prayers can get whatever we believe for and desire to have. This has caused some Christians to believe God is unfaithful and that the Word is not true.

What is the purpose of prayer? Why are we commanded to pray?

1. The purpose of prayer is fellowship with God.

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek – Psalm 27:8

The Lord Jesus spent a lot of time alone with the Father. It would be absurd to think He did that just because the Father demanded it.

In the early mornings or after the day's activities of preaching, teaching, and healing the sick, He would isolate Himself to pray, sometimes throughout the night.

Why? Because He knew He needed to have time with His Father and to be refreshed.

Jesus was God but also human. He needed that strengthening that only comes from spending time with the Father.

Christianity is relationship, and that relationship is kept fresh by consistent fellowship. The primary purpose of prayer is to have fellowship with our Father in heaven. Here, we might not need to make requests; just worship or visit with the Lord.

It is important to highlight that fellowship is not coming into the presence of the Lord and talking until you are through, then you leave. You can just sit and enjoy being with the Lord, saying nothing, and yet that is fellowship.

So we are commanded to pray because it is necessary for our relationship with the Lord and for our spiritual well-being.

Prayer is not the time to address devils.

Prayer is not the time for griping and complaining.

Prayer is not the time to get mad at God for our bad circumstances.

It is the time to pour out our hearts to the Father. And to listen to Him speak to us.

2. The purpose of prayer is to stay alert in the spirit.

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving – Colossians 4:2

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man – Luke 21:36

Prayer and watchfulness or being alert go together. Alertness that comes through prayerfulness allows the spirit man to dominate the flesh. This helps us to be able to effectively resist temptations. - **Ephesians 6:18**

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak –
Matthew 26:41

It is an undisputed saying that overt, gross sin is a sign of a neglected closet.

Being alert also carries with it the impression of being in-tune with God. There are things God communicates or wants to communicate with our spirits, but if we are too much out in the flesh, never having time to be spiritual, we can miss out on what God intends to reveal to us.

We don't have to always consult another Christian whom we consider spiritual, to know what God has for us. We don't have to go great lengths to meet a prophet to know the will of God. God can speak through others, but that is not the norm.

In the New Testament era, the Lord Jesus has opened access to the Father's presence to all.

Every child of God can and should learn to hear His voice for themselves. He wants fellowship with each of His children.

3. To make our requests known to God

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus –
Philippians 4:6-7

The Lord knows our requests even before we ask Him, yet He wants us to exercise our faith in asking.

One purpose of prayer is to make demands on our relationship with Him through asking and receiving –
Matthew 7:7, Luke 18:1

Ponder This!

1. Am I satisfied with my prayer experience? Why? Why not?

Chapter Two

Wrong Attitude: Making prayer a mere formality

A prayer-less life is an abnormality for a Christian. Prayer, even constant prayer, is a biblical command.

Pray without ceasing- 1 Thessalonians 5:17

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; – Luke 18:1

If the Christian is expected to be prayerful, there is a need to see prayer as a necessity for a successful Christian walk.

Praying simply because you want to obey a biblical command becomes a wrong attitude when the obedience is done without regard to the purpose of the command and without expectation of the answer.

With the encouragement to prayerfulness and denunciation of a prayer-less life, there is a flip side temptation to engage in the activity just to fulfill the obligation, and not necessarily because of love for it or for its benefits.

When prayer is seen as a duty to be fulfilled simply for the sake of it, without the conscious expectation of benefits, it has turned into a mere formality.

This can manifest in individual or group prayers. Words are heaped up to heaven without attention to what is being said; and they are as quickly forgotten as they are spoken. The conscience is salved, but the benefits are not reaped.

Earnest praying

Earnest praying is that which focuses on the desired result and expectantly waits to see the manifestation of God's faithfulness to His word. Like Elijah's prayer, it gets rewarded (James 5:17-18).

When the bible gives the command and encouragement to pray, it doesn't expect a mechanical response.

Let's look at the parable in Luke chapter 18.

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

² *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

³ *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? - Luke 18:1-8

First, it is important to note here that the Lord is not saying that until we pester our heavenly Father He won't listen to us. The Lord is making a contrast (verses 6, 7) between a 'good' unrighteous man and a loving righteous God.

The lesson of this parable is that results from earnest praying are a motivation to pray. The Lord is not just saying "pray". He's actually saying, "pray effective prayers; pray to get results. Pray because you know God will listen and answer".

The widow's petition to the judge was an earnest plea, not mere words: it needed and looked forward to the answer, and that was the reason its request was granted.

Imagine the widow coming before the judge and saying, "vindicate me against my adversary", and before he could get to understand what her petition was all about, she would be gone, feeling satisfied for having fulfilled the obligation of simply issuing the request.

That kind of petitioning will never see its demands granted because it doesn't show proof of its sincerity and need.

Is it necessary to actually pray about it?

There is another manifestation of formality in prayer, which is closely linked to a lack of earnestness, but clearly different and subtle. The Christian prays given the circumstances he is facing, but after prayer, he worries and tries to come up with the solution on his own as he would have done even without praying.

The need may be specific and sincere but the Christian will not wait for God to grant the answer nor will he wait to hear what He would say about the situation.

God tells us He knows our requests even before we utter them. That means He also knows our hearts, He knows whether we have faith enough to wait for an answer from Him or we are just going through the motions, mere formality, all the while figuring out what to do ourselves even without His assistance.

Look at the way The Living Bible renders **Colossians 4:2**:

"Don't be weary in prayer; keep at it; watch for God's answers, and remember to be thankful when they come"

Hallelujah!

Burdensome

Prayer was never meant to be an obligation. Obligatory praying is a burdensome activity. The body naturally hates prayer and the hatred is increased with praying out of formality.

Even if out of legalistic motivations the body is made to submit, the activity is joyless and strenuous.

Making prayer a formality, a duty to be performed simply to obey a biblical command, is one of the reasons for failing to pray since the place of prayer becomes less appealing.

Ponder This!

1. Do I feel guilty when I am prayer-less, when I miss my scheduled prayer time, or don't attend church prayer meeting? If yes, why?
2. Do I pay attention to what I say in prayer? Am I conscious, after prayer, of any requests I might have made to God, expecting the answer to come?
3. Do unanswered prayers bother me? Do answers surprise me?
4. Do I worry even after making my requests known to God? If yes, why?

Chapter Three

Wrong Attitude: Time-consciousness during prayer

Focus on time rather than on praying is indicative of a faulty relationship with God or ignorance about the purpose of prayer.

It also gets you distracted.

I used an alarm as a discipline for my body so I could spend longer times than what my body wanted to endure, but along the way, I stopped because of the above reason. I became more conscious of the time and I would check the phone to see how far I still had to go, and I would feel relieved when the sound finally came.

I had to reason out that five minutes of conscious fellowship with God is better than an hour of being distracted and wishing the alarm should ring.

My flesh could feel good after the ordeal, but the spiritual impact was minimal. More importantly, God is not glorified with that kind of divided attention or praying in order to keep a rule and please a legalistic conscience.

I do encourage the spending of ample time with the Lord in praise, worship, or just visiting, or seeking Him for specific direction and guidance when needed. This strengthens us spiritually and weakens the pull of carnality.

How long you spend alone with God is not as important as your focus and the benefit of praying.

We must learn to come before God with a willing heart and a desire to spend time with Him. That way, we can spend more time without taking note of it. The closet becomes enjoyable!

You hinder what God wants to do

Prayer is a two-way communication. If you are time-conscious, you may miss out on hearing from God's side of the spiritual telephone.

Sometimes your spirit may still be longing for the fellowship to continue, but if you stay in prayer just long enough to register for the day, you can miss out on the opportunity of having a wonderful time with the Lord.

It's burdensome

The clock seems to tick more slowly during prayer. Five minutes seem like half an hour! That's why our bodies dread the hour of prayer.

My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, LORD, I am coming. - **Psalm 27:8** New Living Translation.

This verse makes it clear that God enjoys the time we spend with Him.

Our bodies may love to do something else, but we can let the heart (the spirit man) take the upper hand and respond with delight to God's invitation, not putting limits on how much time we are willing to give Him. Sooner or later, the body would be trained to let go of its constant resistance and submit during the hour of prayer.

Ponder This!

1. Do I feel guilty for not praying a certain length of time per day?
2. Is lengthy praying correct? Important? How?

Chapter Four

Wrong Attitude: Seeking an emotional experience

Prayer can be emotionally satisfying but that experience is not always guaranteed.

Prayer is an activity done in faith. We believe that God, who is invisible, actually hears us and answers us, regardless of how we feel.

Emotions are unreliable. They depend on environment and circumstances. The presence or absence of emotional sensation is not an indication of the presence or absence of God.

As with praise and worship in church, we can mistake the emotional satisfaction derived from wonderful melodies and sound accompaniment for the move of the Spirit, and we sometimes would feel like "**the Spirit is not moving**" when the music or song doesn't move our emotions.

And as relates to personal prayer, if we seek an emotional satisfaction, an emotional experience, we will feel as not having prayed well if we don't feel good about the prayer.

There are times that happy feelings just escape us: times of grief, sickness, loss of a job, etc. If we only enjoy prayer or choose to pray when it feels good, then during moments of being emotionally down, negative feelings will prevent us from having fellowship with God.

Prayer is not primarily for our enjoyment

Prayer [including praise and worship] is not primarily about us, though we do get to enjoy being a part of it. This enjoyment should come in the form of joy and refreshment as a result of being in the presence of God, not as some tingling or funny sensation which gives us a false satisfaction.

There are many assurances from the Word of God, including the truth that those who seek Him diligently will find Him, and that He will answer those who call on Him. These benefits can only be experienced as a result of trusting in the faithfulness of Him who has promised.

How we feel during and after prayer is inconsequential if we believe the promises of God. If we ask amiss, it doesn't matter how good we feel about the prayer, the request will not be granted.

Prayer is not meant to give us an emotional encounter with God. It can be laborious trying to get an emotional high during prayer.

As an aside: It is my opinion that when we dwell much in the carnal realm, with the many distractions that abound around us, and then we come to the closet, there is always that tendency to want to contact God through the emotions.

This is because our minds are distracted and can't easily be brought to pay attention. We long for an emotion that will convince us that God is close and that we are connected with Him.

But if we will cultivate the habit of dwelling in the presence of the Lord throughout the day as we go about our activities, if we will not let ungodliness fill our minds and get our attention, during the moments we set aside to be alone with the Lord it won't be hard to plug right into fellowship.

Ponder This!

1. Am I bothered if I don't feel emotionally satisfied during and after praying?
2. What can I do to help my faith if I still have fear, worry, or doubts after praying?
3. What attitudes can I adopt in my day-to-day activities that will make my personal time with the Lord less laborious or boring?

Chapter Five

Misconception: There are special hours in which to pray

As a young and immature believer, I was taught that a Christian should not let the Muslim call to prayer precede their morning prayers because the Muslim would collect the blessings God releases for the day, and the Christian's prayer after that is useless.

God alone knows how that mentality hindered me. Because I couldn't always keep to the time, I would not pray because of guilt, and I would feel condemned.

I have heard people talk about midnight, 2:00 a.m. etc. and the impression is that prayers at certain hours are most powerful.

God lives in eternity

In Scripture there is no special hour when God answers prayers. Time is for our sake, not God's.

It is better to pray and spend time with the Lord in the morning because we are starting a new day and the best way to start is with God.

But what exact hour of the morning is the right one? Does God release blessings against each day that anyone irrespective of what they worship can collect? The answer is no.

The remedy for this misconception would be to come back again to the purpose of prayer, the purpose of spending time with God.

The reason why the early morning hours are better for meditation is that our bodies have rested in the night and our minds more attentive. During the day we may be busy, and in the evenings we may be tired.

Some people work jobs in the night and they have free time during the day. For them, that is the best time to spend with the Lord.

Ponder This!

1. Does praying at a particular time of day have an effect on my prayers; does it give better results? How?

Conclusion

Prayer – whatever kind – can be effective: fruitful and rewarding. A Christian should be prayerful, but it is as important to have the right attitude and beliefs about prayer.

True biblical prayer is that which is directed to God in faith with an expectation of His response in the provision of the answer.

Knowledge of the Word of God, through which we understand the will of God, is paramount if we are to avoid praying hindered prayers or devoting our prayer life to things we shouldn't be praying about.

The best way to measure our prayer life is in the results we get from praying.

May the Lord grant you a fruitful experience in fellowship with Him!

God bless.

Janet.

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