No conscientious Christian would deny that there are difficulties attending the activity of prayer. These difficulties hinder progress in prayer, occasion frustration, and weaken believers. The resulting deficiency becomes especially apparent when fellowship with the Lord is not maintained in a consistent and sustained manner.

**The Practice of Prayer**

The Scriptures make it clear that the Christian is to be given to a life of prayer (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; and Luke 18:7). But constancy in prayer is not always maintained. It can and will be hindered.

Among the causes that hinder the practice of prayer are those distractions the Christian must contend with when getting before the Lord. The telephone may ring, the doorbell may sound, or someone in the house may call for attention. One may remember a task that has been overlooked that needs to be attended to. An article of interest in a newspaper or magazine may catch the eye and invite consideration. While innocuous in themselves, these things may deter and distract the Christian from doing what he knows to be his duty—engaging in the practice of prayer.

Hindrance to the practice of prayer may also come through wandering thoughts. It is not unusual for a Christian to discover, even as he engages in prayer, that his mind is quickly flooded with matters other than those about which he desires to talk to the Lord. A matter of business, a difficulty in the home, an incident that brought about some discord with a fellow believer—these, and a multitude of other matters, have the
undesirable effect of diverting the mind from a
definite, purposeful seeking of the Lord.

At times the exercise of prayer may be
impeded by a listless spirit. There may be no
satisfactory reason for the failure to pray other
than that we don’t feel like engaging in it. We
should not be surprised by this. Prayer is a
thoroughly spiritual exercise. Earnest and
regular prayer is not something that the flesh
wants to pursue. It will allow us to do many
other worthy things so long as we do not give
ourselves to heartfelt prayer.

Very often the Christian’s prayer life is
halted by discouragement. Because there is
not the desired response from God to the
petitions voiced, the petitioner loses heart,
ceases to pray, and leaves aside the practice
of praying.

One of the most common reasons alleged
for the arrest of the practice of prayer is the
“busyness” of the individual. The Christian
complains that there is not enough time
available in his hectic schedule for engaging
in prayer; therefore, daily, consistent prayer ceases.

In seeking to counteract these hindrances
to the practice of prayer, the Christian
would do well to seek out a private place and to set a
time each day when he may be apart from the
distractions that surround him. A prayer list
will be a great asset to him in combating
wandering thoughts, and it will ensure that
actual requests are brought to the Lord. As the
flesh fights against the call to prayer, let the
believer seek the Lord’s help to mortify this
carnal impulse (Romans 8:12–13).

The Christian should also remember that
the Lord’s delays are not denials. Think much
upon the circumstances of Abraham and Sarah
(Genesis 12:7; 17:21; Romans 4:19–21; Hebrews 11:11). Some twenty-four years
passed before there was an indication that
God’s word was about to be fulfilled to
Abraham! Consider the Lord’s teaching on
prayer from Luke 18:1–8. Think also of the
significance of the words spoken to Zacharias
in Luke 1:13–20: God has a set time for the
fulfilling of His word.

As for the notion that the believer is too
busy to pray, he must take a hard look at his
daily schedule and determine to prioritise his
tasks. The earnest Christian will make sure
that adequate time is apportioned to the vital
matter of maintaining communion with his
Father in heaven.

The Productivity of Prayer

It is evident from the Scriptures that God
promises to answer the prayers of His people.
This is clear from the assurances found in
Matthew 7:7. The Christian is to expect that
God will answer prayer. Great things may be
wrought in answer to prayer. God says that He
will do “great and mighty things” (Jeremiah
33:3). This ought not to surprise us since “He
is able to do exceeding abundantly above all
that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). There
are occasions, however, when God does not
answer as we hope, and we do not receive
what He is able to give. The reason for this lies
with us. There is something in us that hinders
the fruitful and productive exercise of prayer.

Scripture gives general reasons that
answers to our prayers may be withheld. These
may be grouped in two categories, each one
having to do with relationships.

In our relationship with God, a number of
things may be obstacles to success in
prayer. If there is sin in our lives (accepted
or approved of by us) then God will be
displeased and will refuse to hear us when
we pray: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the
Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18; cf.
Isaiah 59:1–2; Ezekiel 14:3).

Furthermore, the success of prayer is
obstructed when we ask something from the
Lord with an impure motive: “ Ye ask and
receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may
consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). The
petition itself may be proper, but our motive in
presenting it may not be so.

Our praying may also be hindered because of
problems in our relationships with one
another. We will find that our praying will fail
to have the answer we sought if we disregard
the needs of the poor when it is in our power
to assist them. While Proverbs 21:13 may
primarily mean that one who has no regard for
the poor will find in his own time of poverty
that there will be none to come to his aid,
there is undoubtedly another application. The
Lord Himself will not answer him when he
prays for relief from his material lack. The
important words of Psalm 41:1–3 ought to be
seriously considered by every Christian.

An improper relationship between hus-
bands and wives (especially when the greater
responsibility lies with the husband) adversely
affects the fruitfulness and power of prayer.
Scripture is clear on this matter in 1 Peter
3:1–7 because when Peter instructs husbands
to treat their wives properly he gives as the
reason, “that your prayers be not hindered.”
Both husbands and wives, however, must look
well to themselves and to the well-being of
each other if they desire effective prayer lives.

Not only should there be a good relation-
ship between husband and wife but between
Christians generally. The absence of a forgiving
spirit is a further reason for answers to prayer
being withheld. It is a matter for thanksgiving
that the sins of the Christian are forgiven by the
Lord in answer to prayer (1 John 1:9). But his
prayer will not be heard—even when he is
concerned about his sin—if he harbours
bitterness and an unforgiving spirit in his heart
towards another believer. Christ is adamant
about this (Mark 11:25). Christians are to
manifest a forgiving spirit to one another. We
are ever to maintain the unity of the spirit in
the bond of peace and to be kind and tender-
hearted, forgiving one another as the Lord has
given us (See Ephesians 4:3, 32).

The liberty to address almighty God is a
tremendous privilege extended to us. May we
give ourselves to the constant practice of prayer,
and may we witness the productivity of it that
God by His grace and power will reveal.

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