

God's Key To Hearing Our Prayers

Introduction

Garth Brooks recorded one of his hit songs and it stayed # 1 on the charts for 30 weeks in 1990. It is still a popular song. The name of the song is *Unanswered Prayers*.

The song is set to a real circumstance that took place when Garth and his wife returned to his hometown and attended a football game. He saw one of his old girl friends and said to his wife, *I am glad God didn't answer that prayer!*

He and Larry Bastian were walking along discussing the song and Larry said as Garth was telling him the lyrics of the song that he had the theme of the song. The name of the song should be *Unanswered Prayers* because some of God's great gifts are unanswered prayers. Thus, the song was born.

The song may be a hit in the music world, but as a born-again believer, unanswered prayers should cause us great concern.

Dr. T. W. Hunt wrote his Study Course book for the Southern Baptist Convention and they published it in 1986. It was titled *The Doctrine of Prayer*. It was the study that would change my life forever. In chapter six, Dr. Hunt teaches on six subjects, *Hinderances To Effective Prayer*. He discusses each hindrance in detail. Those hindrances are: Prayerlessness; Wrong Motives; Lack of Faith; No Abiding In His Word; Rebellion and Sin; and Lack of Importunity. Any serious student of prayer will have this book close by.

Several years ago, Dr. Henry Blackaby introduced me to [Isaiah 59:1-2](#).

Indeed, the LORD's arm is not too weak to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear, (2) But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not listen.

These verses teach that any unconfessed sin is going to hinder my prayer from being heard by God and He will not answer.

This is important in every born-again believer's life because we are in constant need of talking and listening to God.

Knowing that sin is serious to God and He will not listen to my request, then I need to confess my sin and get forgiveness to be in right standing before God.

Dr. Gregory Frizzell has a great discussion on the sin that separates us from God's hearing in his book *How to Develop A powerful Prayer Life* in chapter 5.

In learning what the disciples learned when they ask Christ Jesus to teach the how to pray, there are five steps in developing a powerful prayer life.

First step in learning how to pray is learning how to PRAISE.

We pray to our God who created everything.
He is awesome
He is all powerful
He wants to shower us with His blessings.
He has an unconditional love for each of us.

Chapter Five is about step number two.

The First step is The CONFESSING and CLEANSING part.

When we are in the presence of our Holy and Pure God, we see ourselves as we really are.

Isaiah 6:6-7 is a wonderful example of one's reflection when he saw God in all of His splendor and holiness.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. (7) he touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed, and your sin is atoned for.

But let's back up a few verses and see what was happening in verse 3-5.

And one called to another: Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty; His glory fills the whole earth. (4) the foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the Temple was filled with smoke. (5) Then I said: woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the king, the LORD Almighty.

The Second Step is a time when we CONFESS our known sin to God.

But it is a time God also searches our hearts and convicts us of any sin we have tucked away that would hinder His hearing our prayer.

Step two is a time when God CORRECTS and ADJUSTS our life to His will.

Confession is how we grow and allow God to touch our life and our lips to conform us to the image of Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:29, ***For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son,***

Romans 12:1-2 ***Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true worship. (2) Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.***

We can add “so that you may know what is sin to God”

As a born-again believer, it is of the utmost importance that we get fully right with God **BEFORE** we start **our Third Step – Prayer of PETITION and INTERCESSION**

According to James 5:16, it is impossible to pray powerful, Spirit-led prayers if there is an unconfessed sin between you and God.

So the question is, How do we accomplish this confession and cleansing?
God provided us Scriptures for how to do this.

Psalms 139:23-24, ***Search me thoroughly, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts; (24) and see if there is any wicked, hateful, or hurtful way (words) in me, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.***

NLT – says (v24) ***Point out anything in me that is offensive to You.***

God calls for an in-depth through process – not a brief casual formality.

I like to call it open heart exploratory surgery.

We have learned thus far: that sin is serious, and any sin will block our prayers.

Then we get upset and cry out “God don’t You even care!” prayers.

Jeremiah 17:9-10, ***The human heart is most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked – who really knows how bad it is? (10) But the LORD, search all hearts and examine secrets motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what they deserve.***

NOTE – Many people have little prayer power because they fail to practice meaningful confession that leads to genuine forgiveness on a daily basis.

Normally we tend to rush through our confession time so we can quickly get to what we want to talk to God about or what we want Him to do for us.

We throw all our dirty sin laundry and say here it is God please forgive me of all this stuff.

What we really need to do is separate it, look at the stains and apply our confession stain remover on each spot through our confession to God.

Saying, Lord “**if**” there is anything wrong in my life, (probably not) let me know and I will put it in the laundry basket of sins to be washed.

Because of our lack of true confession, many of our prayers are dry and powerless.

God will not hear us if there is any UNCONFESSED sin in our life!

Psalms 66:17-20, ***For I cried out to Him for help, praising Him as I spoke (18) if I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listen. (19) But God did listen! He paid attention o my prayer. (20) Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw His unfailing love from me.***

Our unconfessed sin keeps God from hearing it also will HURTS others.

In Joshua 7, God gives us a powerful picture of how one man’s sin defeated the whole army of the children of God.

Verse 10, ***The LORD said to Joshua, stand up! Why have you fallen face down? (11) Israel has sinned ... they have stolen, deceived, and put those things with their own belonging. (12) ...I will no longer be with you unless you remove from among you what is set apart.***

NOTE – God takes any sin – small or large – serious and sin separates us from God’s hearing and His helping.

Illustration - *The Great Shantung Revival*

One of the finest examples of thorough confession is the great revival that took place in the Shantung province of china. In the early 1900’s, a group of dedicated American missionaries had gone to a tough area of China. It was a hard ministry and the missionaries had sacrificed greatly by even going to such a tough region.

As they faithfully taught and preached God's Word, the Chinese people showed almost no interest and the missionaries redoubled their efforts. They prayed, witnessed and preached as hard as they knew how. They were putting out enormous efforts to love and minister to the Chinese people. Yet, there was very little response and it seemed as if the hearts of the people were made of stone.

After many months, the missionaries became disheartened and began to ask God what was wrong. Despite all their hard work and activities, why was there so little spiritual power? God's answer surprised them. In essence He said, "There is hidden unconfessed sin in your life, and you are not truly filled with the Holy Spirit." Frankly, it seems incredible to us that such dedicated, hardworking missionaries were not filled with the Holy Spirit, yet that is exactly what God told them.

The missionaries agreed to go separately to private prayer places and ask God to show them anything that might be quenching His Spirit. Each missionary took the Bible, and a pen to list their sins. They were then to fully confess and forsake each sin individually. One of the missionaries was Bertha Smith, who sincerely thought she was close to God and expected to find little to confess. She later stated when she allowed God to search her life, she saw many things she had previously assumed were small and unimportant. Yet, because of the "small" attitude, she begins to realize, she had lost the mighty fullness of the Holy Spirit. These "little" things were huge in the eyes of the Holy Spirit.

Each missionary had the same experience. After a significant time of spiritual searching, the missionaries came together and confessed several things to one another. They then prayed and asked God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. At once, something totally incredible began to happen.

First – God poured out His Spirit on the missionaries! They immediately sensed a joy and power they had never known. The reality of God's manifest presence was overwhelming. There was absolutely no doubt that God had filled and empowered them in a brand-new way.

Second – Their praying and preaching took on an awesome new power.

Third – God sent a flood of the Holy Spirit upon the entire region. Suddenly, the Chinese people who were so unresponsive before, now flooded into the Kingdom of God. Their cold hearts melted before the mighty conviction of God's Spirit.

Frequently the missionaries would be awakened in the middle of the night by people so under conviction they could not wait until morning to be saved!

Many of these missionaries were used to spread revival to countless thousands around the world.

How did God bring this glorious change in the missionaries and such awesome spiritual awakening to the whole region? It happens the same way as every great revival or movement of God does! God's people were genuinely cleansed through deep soul-searching confession and then God filled them with mountain-moving power. People, this is God's changeless pattern for every great revival and spiritual awakening in history. Furthermore, this is the only pattern for genuine spiritual fullness and power for our daily life!!!

If those totally dedicated missionaries were not truly filled with God's Spirit and needed thorough confession and cleansing, how much more do we?

Sad truth is, most born again believers (Shepherds included) have gotten so accustomed to living without God's fullness in their life or ministry.

We have actually forgotten what it is like to be biblically filled with God's Holy spirit.

Ephesians 5:18, ***Do not get drunk with wine, for that is wickedness – corruption and even stupidity – but be filled with the Holy Spirit of God which will constantly guide you.***

Like these dedicated missionaries, we toil in our vocation, we are totally saturated in our work for God ...

Yet we see so little happening in our life, our ministry, and our church.

We pray and pray for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit;

We earnestly pray for the anointing of the message and the messenger –
Yet it is the same old same old!

Dr. Frizzell hits the nail on the head when he writes (p56) *It is because we fail to make serious time to allow God to truly convict and cleanse us on a daily basis.*

Acts 6:4, ***But we will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and study of God's Word. ... (7) So the message of God's Word continued to spread. The number of new born-again believers greatly increased...***

How much time will be an adequate period of conviction, confession, and cleansing?

Example: Open heart surgery can take up to 10-12 hours. This will be followed up by

visits only that will take 30-60 minutes.

When we begin this soul searching, soul cleansing journey it may take a while as God points out the problems of sin in our life. Sometimes He must convince us it is a sin. But once you are convicted of the sin and your have confessed it --- God has forgiven you and He has forgotten that sin because He has removed it as far as the East is from the West. He has forgiven and forgotten the sin.
(1 John 1:9)

This is the reason I meet with my LORD each day – it is my daily check up on my heart condition.

Each day I ask God to do that examination. (Psalms 139:23-24)

This will take more than a couple of minutes of praying.

There are at least five basic areas in our life that are potential sources of sin.

A daily examination of each of these five areas is a must for any prayer warrior - Christian.

FIRST – OUR SINS OF OUR THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES

These sins always begin in our mind.

James 1:14-15, ***But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and entice. (15) then, when desire is conceived in the mind, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.***

Sin begins in the realm of our spiritual thoughts and attitudes.

Listen to Christ Jesus as He teaches on this from Matthew 15:19-20, ***For from the heart comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thief, false testimonies, slander. (20) These things are what defiles you ...***

Questions for Reflection

As you do personal examination of your thoughts and attitudes, here are some questions you should answer:

- Are there unclean or lustful thoughts, thoughts that are consuming my earthly pursuits?
- Are there thoughts of anger and bitterness, unloving thoughts, thoughts captured by fear or doubt?
- Is there an attitude of pride or prejudice?

- Is there an attitude of luke-warmness toward God, His Word, His church?

Pause and Pray

As you carefully reflect on each of these questions ... ask God to reveal any pattern of attitude or thoughts He considers as sinful.

Nothing is off limits to God and one desiring to be a prayer warrior.

Now stop and immediately go to God and confess and ask Him to heal you and help you forsake these sins that you have hidden in your heart. Ask Him to strengthen your weakness in these areas.

SECOND – IS OUR SIN OF SPEECH

One of our main ways we communicate is through our speaking.

God has a lot to say about how we use our words

Mark 12:32, *Jesus is teaching and says, **I tell you on the day of Judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.***

One scholar said about verse 33, *Your words reflect your spiritual condition.* I agree.

James 3:10, ***Out of the mouth come both blessings and cursing. These things, my brother and sisters, should not be this way, for we have a moral obligation to speak in a manner that reflects our faith and fear of God.***

Matthew 15:18, ***But whatever words come out of the mouth comes from the heart and this is what defiles and dishonors the man of God.***

James wrote about blessings and cursing coming from the same lips as it is a problem.

I wonder if this is what our friend Isaiah was writing about in chapter 6 when he says, ***I am a man of unclean lips, living among people who have a filthy mouth?***

Illustration – Think before you speak.

For many this means to think about what you are going to say so that you can get your point across clearly.

However, as a born-again believer it takes on a different meaning all together. Think before you speak means think about what you are going to say and how you say it that is going to affect the one you are speaking to. The Word of God says that if we cause someone to stumble (to sin) then we are the one that is in the wrong and we need to confess to God and to the person.

Example: I grew up in a home where we were not allowed to use curse words. They were not cute then and they are not cute now. My mom use to tell us that she would wash our mouth out with soap if we said words like that.

But we can use “bad words” and never use profanity.

Deuteronomy 5:11, ***You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain – that is, irreverently, in false affirmation or in ways that impugn the character of God; for the LORD will not hold guiltless nor leave unpunished the one who takes His name in vain – disregarding its reverence and its power.***

Search me O LORD – examine my mouth – show me the sins of my mouth.

Here are some potential ways we sin against God with our speech.

- Using course, harsh, or profaning words.
- Spreading gossip, slander, unkind or unloving words toward or about others.
- Using speech that is overly critical.
- Using words that exaggerated or are untrue.
- Speaking words when we should be quiet.
- Words that tear down rather than build up.

Think about this very carefully – any sin – big or small – a word or a speech – any word is sin and has put a wedge between you and God’s ear.

Pause and Pray

1 Thessalonians 5:11, ***Therefore encourage and comfort one another and build up one another, just as you are doing.***

In your prayer life, each one should be specific in our confessing the sins of our speech.

This kind of praying will cause you to become sensitive to others and seek God’s direction as to whether an apology is required.

THE THIRD IS OUR RELATIONSHIP SINS.

This is generally where we struggle the most.

Relationship sins generally fall into five major categories according to Dr. Frizzell (pp 57-66)

In each of these five categories you must be willing to take specific actions of repentance and reconciliation as soon as possible.

First – Can you think of a person or people you may have **HURT** or **OFFENDED** in some manner?

God has Scriptural instructions on how to handle this sin.

Matthew 5:23-24, ***So, brother or sister, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and while there you remember that you have a person that has something – such as a grievance or legitimate complaint – against you, (24) Leave your offering there at the altar and go to them. First reconcile and make peace with your brother or sister and then come and present your offering which will be acceptable to God now.***

These two verses are pretty clear about the sin in our relationship with other people.

Don't approach God in our vertical relationship until we have made peace (or have attempted) with others which is our horizontal relationship.

Let me give you a bit of an insight on these verses. The responsibility to seek out this person is on the one who wants to be right with God. They are the one at the altar. There they sense that someone is not right with them. They try to determine what they have done but come up blank. So they go and say to this person, I want to ask you to forgive me because I might have said or done something that cause you to judge me. I ask for your forgiveness. (even though you are not the one that committed the known offense, you are the one to seek forgiveness. The Scriptures are just the opposite of the way we think. We would reason that if someone said something to us, they are the one who needs to seek us out and ask for forgiveness. However, Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us that God doesn't think like us. We are the ones that need to seek the person out and go to them and ask forgiveness. Why? Because we may have said or done something to cause the problem the person has with us. Again, referring the Text, we go and ask for forgiveness and we are made right with God. Not the person we talked to. That is between he and God. We are made right in the eyes of our LORD and our gift is acceptable. The Scripture is about us not them!

Illustration

Personal example. When I became a born-again believer, God forgave me of all my sins that I have ever committed. What mercy. As I studied these verses it became evident that God was convicting me of the hurt and problems that I had caused others in my life of rebellion. I began to seek God and ask Him what He wanted me to do about it. He was faithful and began to put these people in my mind. This was His way of telling me that now is the time to seek out this person and ask them to forgive me for how I had hurt them in the past. This was not an easy task but it was God's testimony of how I would never be right with Him if I did not attempt to be right with others. It not only was a hard task but it was a long task as well. Each person God put on my heart got a personal apology from me either in person or a letter. God led me each step of the way and we accomplished the task He has put before me.

NOTE – As a prayer warrior – this relationship building, or rebuilding is not going to be easy but if we want our prayer life and our prayers to be heard it is necessary.

Let's take a few minutes and consider those that you may have offended by your words, attitude, or action.

When God places these people on your heart – He is saying this needs to be resolved – seek their forgiveness.

Whether they forgive or not you have made yourself right before God and head to your prayer closet – God is waiting there to answer your prayers.

This is where our sin nature tries to take over.

We want to justify our attitudes and defend our actions.

This will put God's finger in His ears – you are going to be talking to the hand!

Again, keep in mind Isaiah 59:1-2: “**any**” sin (big or small) will keep God from hearing our prayers.

This is especially true in the health of the church.

Churches commit sin as well. We as a church have a trail of wounded believers that were hurt by friendly fire.

People are quick to tell me about the time they were hurt by fellow members of the church. I have experienced this hurt and so have you.

We must understand that these so-called “little” rifts between Christians can easily quench God's Spirit for the whole church.

Example: It is said that the Evangelist Billy Sunday would go up to a stranger and ask *Is it you? Are you the one God is waiting on to get saved before Christ returns?*

Let's put it another way, is it your little rift sin that is unconfessed and unresolved that is quenching the outpouring of God's Spirit on this church?

God takes sin (any sin big or small) serious!

God wants us to take our relationship with Him serious and just as serious is our relationship with others.

Second category – Are you BITTER or HOLDING GRUDGES against people who have offended you?

Christ Jesus has Scriptural instructions on this as well.

Matthew 6:14-15, ***For if you forgive others their trespasses – that is their reckless and willful sins – your heavenly father will also forgive you – for doing the same thing. (15) But if you do not forgive others – choosing to nurture your hurt and hate and dangerously allowing it to fester so that it interferes with your relationship with God – then your Father will not forgive your same sins.***

Many prayers that are uttered don't make it to the ceiling because one holds inner resentment or bitterness against another person in your heart.

Isn't it time for heart surgery again – Psalms 139:23-24?

Jesus teaches that we must forgive people from our hearts.

Christ has Scriptural instructions on this as well.

Matthew 18:35, ***So also My Heavenly father will do to you unless every one of you (bother brothers and sisters) confess and rid your heart of these sins.***

Forgiveness is easy to say from the head but in our heart there is still bitterness and refusal.

This is called “**secret bitterness**”.

This bitterness can be focused on:

Other party positions.

Rival sports teams.

Entertainers who attach our values.

Media who report false news and half truths.

There is nothing wrong with standing for strong truths.

Sin enters when we harbor hatred against those who disagree with us.

We begin to hate the person rather than hate the sin.
We must remember that the news anchor, the corrupt politician, are all made in the image of God.

Also, it is possible to hold bitterness against God.
He doesn't do something when we want.
He has abandoned us in a critical time in our life.
He doesn't give us what we want when we want it.

Illustration: I have been Angry with God.

My dad worked every day of his life. As he approached retirement, I took some time and went to help him get everything done so he could finally enjoy life. I wanted the best for my dad because he worked so hard. However, a month after he retired, he was diagnosed with cancer in his throat. Dad passed away three months later. I was angry. I am a preacher; I was preaching every week and God did this to me! I had prayed for my dad to have the best and what did he get a 3 by 6 hole in the ground. Needless to say God and I were not on speaking terms. I continue to preach each Sunday, but my anger kept burning in my mind of what God had done to me. I didn't talk to God and I didn't want to talk to Him. That rocked on for another 3 months. I remember I was setting in my study one Saturday afternoon trying to throw something together for Sunday. Suddenly I felt God's presence and I heard His voice say to me, why are you so angry at me? I only did what you ask Me to do. What, I didn't ask You to take my dad. God responded. You ask for him to have the best – I AM THE BEST. I only did what you ask me to do and gave your dad the best retirement ever. I bowed my head and begged God to forgive me for how I had been acting and ask Him to fill me with His Holy Spirit and renew a right Spirit in my heart. God was not angry at me for being angry at Him. He loved me and continued to care about me. I was taught a very difficult lesson during these six months. It is ok to be angry with God but don't miss the lessons He wants to teach us.

Questions for Reflections.

- Is there anyone that you harbor the slightest bitterness or resentment toward?
- Is there any secret resentment toward God for allowing some painful situation in your life?
- Have you slacked off in your commitment to be faithful to God and His church because He or His church has disappointed you in some manner?

Be honest with yourself and fully confess these sins to the God who forgives all bitterness.

Bitterness – anger – hatred only holds you captive and it will affect not only your horizontal relationship with people but your vertical relationship with God.

Pause and Pray

Dr. Frizzell (p59) reminds us, *Forgiveness is a choice - not a feeling.*

Third step is this – are you involved in any **IMPROPER RELATIONSHIPS?**

This improper relationship could be anything from adultery and fornication to simply being inappropriately close to someone.

Examples:

A young person may be emotionally involved with someone too old or vice versa.

A husband may be too emotionally close to a female friend or co-worker.

A wife may be too emotionally involved with a male friend or co-worker.

Husband and wife may be sharing things with others that should only be shared with their mate.

Spouses may spend too much time with friends to the neglect of their marriage mate.

Parents can be too involved in the lives of their married children or married children too dependent on their parents.

“Oh, we are just friends” but you know it has become more than just friendship”.

Don't try to defend, make excuses, or rationalize a relationship that God has said is improper.

The devil has the key to that door. He wants to unlock and open it for you.

Improper relationships are more than physical immorality.

We as Christians find it easy to rationalize this sin.

The cure for healing and forgiveness is to allow God to search your heart!

Ask God to reveal any relationship that is improper or out of balance.

He will do that.

Galatians 6:1, ***Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any sin, you who are***

spiritual, that is, you who are responsive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you are to restore such a person in a Spirit of gentleness – not judgmental, not with a sense of superiority or self-righteousness – I’m better than you attitude – keeping a watchful eye on yourself, so that you are not tempted as well.

If you sense you are going down this road now – it is vital that you stop it now – don’t let it get any worse!!!

Be honest with God – be honest with yourself!!!

God cares about you and He will give you the strength to change.

Step Four is this – Are You neglecting **REGULAR FELLOWSHIP** and **MEANINGFUL SERVICE** through your church?

You must remember --- **CHURCH IS GOD’S IDEA**. Man didn’t come up with it.

Matthew 16:18, ***Now I say to you that you are Peter – the Rock – and upon this confession of faith, I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it not destroy it.***

God writes in His letter of Hebrews about a major sin that will separate God’s ear from our voice.

Hebrews 10:23-25, ***Let us seize and hold tightly to confession of our faith and hope without wavering, for God’s promises are reliable, trustworthy and faithful to His Word; (24) and let us thoroughly consider how we may encourage one another to love God and His people and to do good deeds, (25) not forsaking our meeting together – as some who profess they are believers are doing – but we meet together as born-again believers to meet to worship God and be encouraged through the instructions of His Holy Word. By this we are encouraging one another; and becoming faithful as we see the day of Christ Jesus approaching.***

No doubt, God’s Word strongly emphasizes the importance of staying closely connected to a local church.

In studying the personalities of people, one will find that 85% of the congregation work well in the background.

They do their job and don’t like public attention.

Most people join large churches so they can get lost in the crowd.

These individuals come and are blessed then return home without any real fellowship with other believers.

Then there are those who seek a church that will *give them* and will not ask anything in return or sign them up to serve.

These are the “hitchhikers” Christians. They are along for the ride but don’t expect them to put gas in the car. If you ask them to contribute, they will find another church going their way and hitchhike with them for a while.

These folks want a good pastor, so they put a dollar in the offering plate. They want a strong youth program that will parent their teenager, so they put a dollar in the plate. They want a great preschool/children’s ministry, so they hitchhike with this church.

DO YOU GET THE PICTURE?

These folks want a church with the most benefits with the least demand or cost to them.

Then there is the sin of church SHOPPING.

The problem most churches are facing during their declining days is that many want to sit and be served – but few want to step up and serve.

In seeking a church, our primary prayer should not be, *what can this church do for me – but LORD Jesus what can You do through me in this church.*

Dr. Frizzell (p61) reminds us, *It is a major sin not to be involved in consistent giving and serving through a local body of believers.*

Then there is the sin of Church HOPPING.

Another common form of neglecting regular fellowship is the tendency to drift from church to church.

When doing this one becomes a regular visitor. They do not form deep biblical fellowship with other believers.

These folks attempt to avoid any personal responsibility and spiritual service.

These folks are **SPECTATORS** and not **PARTICIPATORS**.

This sin prevents any spiritual growth or seeking and walking with God.
Satan had convinced these guys that God should be glad and satisfied by their coming to church in the first place.

NOTE – each one of us need to be in serious prayer asking God to search our life and reveal ways we neglect consistent fellowship and substantial place of serving God and through the local body of born-again believers.

Questions:

- Are you more of a spectator rather than a participator in God's work?
- Do you want more from the church than you are willing to give?
- Are you more of a permanent visitor and never plug into the church to serve God through His local body?

This is a sin that needs both conviction and confession so you can be right with God.

It is important to God that each born-again believer be obedient to God in their commitment and obedience to God.

Pause and Pray

The Fifth sin is – How is your FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS?

Are they consistent with the Word of God?

Fellowship both in the church and family common places we lose power of God's holy Spirit.

Remember the horizontal and vertical relationships apply to your family as well.

No one who is wrong with others can be truly right with God.

God has provided teachings in His Word that serve as a "Plumb line" for husbands, wives, parents, children relationships.

We find these Scriptural foundations in the book of Ephesians.

God begins with a special word for the husbands and dads.

Ephesians 5:23, ***For the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of His church, Himself being the savior of the body.***

We see in God's Word that He has called and give the responsibility to the husband to be the spiritual leader in the home.

His responsibility is to give spiritual guidance and loving nurture to his entire family.

This responsibility is not to be delegated to any other person or organization.

Ephesians 5:25, ***Husbands, love your wife – always seek the highest good for her and surround her with caring unselfish love, just as Christ set the example with His unconditional love for His church and give Himself up for His bride.***

Husbands, we are commanded to do the same.

We are to love our bride with a powerful, compassionate, self-sacrificing love.

Notice God says he is to ***give himself*** to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of his bride.

This means he places her needs and welfare above his own.

1 Peter 3:7, ***In the same way, you husbands live with your wife in and understanding way, with great gentleness and very tactful, and with an intelligent regard for your marriage relationship, as with someone physically weaker, since she is a woman. Show her honor and respect as a fellow heir of the Grace of God --- so your prayers will not be hindered or ineffective.***

We see it is God's intention for the husband to be very caring and sensitive to the needs his wife has.

So, any husband that is uncaring, inconsiderate, demeaning or has an insensitive attitude toward his wife will lack the ability to pray effectively.

Husbands – dads – we did not attend a *husband/dad* 101 class on learning how to be one.

So God gives us His Master Level Course through the study of His Holy Word on what God expects of a godly husband/dad to be.

I pray a prayer like this for myself: *LORD lead me to be the kind of husband and dad you want for my wife and children.*

Husbands are to seek God's guidance on how to meet these unique needs that include physical, emotional, mental, financial, and spiritual of his wife and children.

Next God gives us His word for how we treat our children.

Ephesians 6:4, ***Fathers/dads, do not provoke your children to anger, do not exasperate them to the point of resentment with trivial demands or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive, nor by showing favoritism or indifference to any of your children, but bring them up tenderly and lovingly in the spiritual disciplines and instructions of Christ Jesus.***

Fathers/dads are commanded to relate to his children in a loving scriptural and spiritual guidance way.

The father's number one responsibility is not to make a living but to make a life for the spiritual guidance of his family.

The father's greatest priority when it comes to his family is to spiritually nurture and godly train for his family.

Questions for Reflection

- Husbands, have you taken responsibility to lead your family in devotionals and prayer?
- Are you setting a loving atmosphere within your home for your family?
- Are you putting your wife's needs and desires ahead of your own?
- Are you seeking God in ways your can be the husband God wants for your wife and father He wants for your children?
- Are you setting a godly example before your family in the finances and stewardship for the security of your family?
- Are you leading and guiding (by example) your family, especially your children in their spiritual growth and training in applying their trust and faith in God.

Pause and Pray

There is great value in constant and consistent talking with your children in their everyday life issues.

Guys don't be discouraged – we all fall short of where God desires us to be as a husband and a daddy to our family. We have sinned against God in not seeking His leadership in our roles as the man of the house.

But don't despair! God can still help – if you honestly confess your failure as a husband/dad, God will guide you and give you the power to start anew and to build a strong spiritual relationship with your family.

God also has special words for the wife.

Ephesians 5:22,24, 33 ***Wives, be subject (respecting the responsibility of his position and his accountability to God) to your own husbands, as your commitment to the LROD. (v24) But as the church is subject to Christ Jesus, so also wives should be subject to their husbands in everything (respecting both their roles and their positions as protector and provider and their responsibility to God as head of the house).***

Paul then puts an exclamation mark on the point he has been teaching when he

writes verse 33. ***However, each man among you without exception, is to love his wife as his very own self – with behavior worthy of respect and esteem, always seeking the best for her with an attitude of loving kindness – and the wife must see to it that she respects and delights in her husband – that she notices him and prefers him and treats him with living concern, treasuring him, honoring him and holding him dear.***

The submission of the wife does not mean the husband can be a harsh master or her boss!

Illustration – God did not take woman from Adam's feet – that he might walk on her. God did not take Eve from Adam's head so she might dominate him. But God took woman from Adam's side so she could be his equal partner in a godly family life.

The husband and wife are equal partner established by the grace of God.

The wife's submission is the loving and willing submission seen with Christ and His church.

This godly wife will display through her life a beautiful spirit of humility, loving and honor toward her husband and her goal should always be to have a gentle and quiet spirit within the family.

First Peter 3:4 speaks of this type of gentle spirit.

But let it be – the inner beauty of – the hidden person of the

heart, with the imperishable qualities and unfading charm of a gentle and peaceful spirit, one that is calm and self-controlled, not overanxious, but serene and spiritual mature – which is very precious in the sight of God.

Questions for Reflection.

- Wives, do you ever treat your husband with dishonor or lack of respect?
- Wives do you point out his problems – his weaknesses or his faults?
- Wives do you patiently forgive and treat him kindly despite his mistakes?
- Wives do you ignore him, his needs and his desires?
- Wives have you grown careless with your health, appearance, and affection?
- Wives do you have a defiant or rebellious spirit toward your husband?
- Wives have you done all you can to bring your attitude in line with the pattern God has set forth in His Holy Word?
- Wives is your attitude one of thanksgiving and love or complaining, nagging, griping or anger?

Wives, will you join your husband in praying and asking God to make you into the wife and mother God wants for your husband and children?

Pause and Pray

Illustration - My first year of marriage was very turbulent. We had lots of problems. I kept pleading with God to change her. But I saw no difference. I realized that if things didn't change divorce was going to be considered. I kept praying and nothing was happening. I was reaching my wits end. Our marriage was not what a pastor's home life was supposed to be. I knew that divorce was going to affect the ministry I had with God. Then it happen! Things turn around. What was the difference? God spoke some very difficult words to me. Do you want to know what He said to me? He said, *Why don't you change so she will want to change?*

All along I was complaining and thinking that it was her fault. God pointed out my sinful flaw. That is what turned our marriage around and now for almost a half of a century we have been married.

You don't like the way your spouse acts or his attitude. You might want to check with God and see what He has to say about it. He could say to you, *Why don't you change so they will have a desire too?*

The greatest way to see God change your spouse, your children is to bring yourself under the pattern God has set for a born-again believer as a partner and a parent.

Don't give up on yourself – don't make excuse why it can never happen.
If you, as a couple, will honestly surrender to God's authority and the pattern He has set forth – you will experience a miracle in your home.

There is a great song titled, *God will make a way when there seems to be no way.*

We want to see if there is any unconfessed sin in our parenting skills.

God has a special word for parents.

Matthew 18:6, *whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a huge stone were hung on his neck, and he was drowned in the sea.*

Children begin learning long before they ever begin to read!

Our children learn by looking.

Children are incredibly perceptive, and they usually pick up more from the way their parents act than what they say.

Without realizing it, parents are modeling values and habits that have tragic effects on their children's development.

Training up a child in the way they should go is more about daily life examples than occasionally sharing religious words.

Questions for reflection.

- Parents, are you modeling excitement and joy in your worshipping God?
- As parents, are you consistent in expressing your love for Christ and His church or are you constantly complaining or griping about something going on at the church?
- Does your child express a negative attitude toward God or His church?
- What attitudes or actions have they seen in their parents?
- Parents, are you setting a positive example by a constant loving conversation with one another?
- Parents, are you intentionally making time to spend with your children and talking with them about things they want to talk about?
- Parents, in your discipline, do you respond with love, encouragement, and understanding or out of anger, embarrassment, and disappointment.
- Parents, are you modeling moral purity by the things you talk about?
- Parents, have you demonstrated holiness by the things you watch or read?

- Parents, are you consistently communicating God’s standards concerning sex and marriage to your children? And demonstrating how to handle temptation and struggles?
- Parents, are consistently modeling honesty and respect for others? Remember children are watching you speed, do your taxes, give your offerings. They are paying attention to what you do when you mess up.

Pause and Pray

Parents if you sense your children are pulling away from you – ask God to reveal ways you may have cause the rift – the drift between you and your children.

The old attitude of “Do what I say do and don’t worry about what I do!”

Children are influenced by their PARENTS and their PEERS.

The devil likes to remind you of your failures as a parent.

He wants you to accept total responsibility when your kids mess up.

Many of us parents have unconfessed sin in our life because of our parenting skills.

Asking God to search us and convict us, will lead us to confess and seek His forgiveness and cleansing.

Now God gives a special word for our children and youth.

Ephesians 6:1-3, ***Children, obey your parents in the LORD, that is – accept their guidance and discipline as the LORD’s representative in your life – for this is the right thing to do. Being obedient will teach you with wisdom and self-discipline. (2) Honor your father and mother, hold them in high esteem and value each one by showing respect – this is the first commandment that includes a promise. (3) so it may go well with you, and that you may have a long life on the earth.***

The Old Testament Law was strict on the respect children were to give their parents.

We are all aware that if there was the same enforcement now our preteen/teen population would be a lot fewer.

It is sad that our society has such an impact on our parenting that disrespect has sky-rocked between youth and adults.

Questions for reflection.

- Children or teenagers, so you disobey your parents or other adults?
- Do you ignore their guidance?
- Are you disrespectful toward your parents? God looks at this sin very serious because it is a sin against not just your parents but against God and His Word. You can never be right with God if you are constantly disrespecting your parents.

Pause and Pray

Adult children, this respect applies to us the same as it does to our children.

THE FOURTH STEP IN OUR CONFESSING AND CLEANSING IS THE SINS OF COMMISSION AND TRANSGRESSION.

These are the sins of “doing” something wrong and knowing it is wrong when we are doing it.

James 4:17, ***So any person who knows what is the right thing to do but he does not do it, to him it is sin.***

These sins include adultery, stealing, be dishonest, assaulting someone, going to sin infested places, watching adult rated movies, destructive habits that destroy the Temple of the Holy Spirit, putting recreation, sports events or teams ahead of God, idolatry.

If we are honest with God, he will reveal things that He wants to change in our life.

And see if there is ANY THING that is displeasing to You!

When God reveals these unconfessed sins, and He will, then get into your prayer room and follow 1 John 1:9 guidelines for seeking God’s forgiveness and cleansing from all unrighteousness.

THE FIFTH AND FINAL STEP IS THE SINS OF OMISSION.

Again, go with me to James 4:17, ***If one choses to ignore God’s leading – that is an unconfessed sin.***

Here are some serious sins of omission.

Neglecting reading the Word of God.

Neglecting a time of prayer.

1 Samuel 12:23, ***Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you...***

Neglecting our witnessing.

Neglecting our worship.
Neglecting our work or service to God and His people.
Neglecting our Spiritual Gift/s.

Pause and Pray

CONCLUSION

Maybe you are overwhelmed like I am when I study these five categories of areas where I have unconfessed sin.

So, where do we start in this long list of unconfessed sins that anyone will hinder God's hearing our prayers.

For me, I begin to deal with one sin at a time and ask God to reveal the sin that I needed to confess to Him and receive His forgiveness and forgetfulness. The cleansing from all unrighteousness.

It is a daily time of confession which is God's primary way of conforming us into His image.

We are to be holy as He is holy!

This is going to require us to spend more than five minutes in prayer with God.