

JAMES 2 – Wisdom About Prayer
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Have you ever felt discouraged in your prayer life? It's like your prayers stop at your ceiling and do not reach God. Or maybe you pray, but you don't get the answers you want.

Did you know that the Bible gives us many reasons our prayers are not answered? I'll preach on that today in our second sermon in our study the book of James. The theme of this study is Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I am preaching on Wisdom about Prayer.

First, I want to do a brief recap of my first sermon on James. We saw that this book was written by James, the brother of Jesus. James was a skeptic who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah until the resurrection. Seeing Jesus alive after He died changed James to a follower of Christ, a leader in the church, and an apostle who authored the book of James.

James wrote to the believers who were scattered around the world because of persecution. That's why he said in James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James tells us to have joy when we face adversity. We can only do that when we know the purpose of our faith being tested. It develops perseverance – which requires waiting. You will never grow or change without patience. It takes time.

You must find the joy in waiting and the way you do that is to remind yourself that growth will not happen in us without tough times. And remember - the joy of the Lord is not something we DO, it's something we receive. Jesus said in John 16:24

Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

You will find joy when you ask Jesus for joy. And asking is the very next thing James tells us to do in verses 5-8.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

We see 3 keys to answered prayer here: Ask, believe, and be single-minded.

We all have times in life when we need wisdom to make a decision, to answer a problem, to help a relationship. And the key to wisdom is not just knowing something about some things – it's about knowing the One who knows everything about everything!

By the way – wisdom is more than knowledge, or information. A child can be wise and a highly educated person can be foolish. Wisdom is seeing things from God's perspective, and it results in knowing the right thing to do at the right time. So, when you are clueless about what to do - go to Jesus!
When you have questions no one can answer - go to Jesus!

The context here is asking for wisdom in times of adversity. We need wisdom in tough times to know if a particular trial is something God wants us to overcome by faith or to persevere in by faith.

So, if we need wisdom – and we all do – we need to ask God for it. This is something I pray for constantly. Wisdom in what to preach, in leading the church, in leading my family, in everything I do. James 4:2 says:

You do not have because you do not ask.

James says that when we ask, God will give us wisdom liberally and without reproach. Liberally means freely and abundantly – not holding back. Without reproach means that God will not find fault or scold us for needing wisdom. He knows we need His wisdom and He is willing to give it generously! So – we need to pray for wisdom. But James 1:6-7 says:

When you pray, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

You can pray 24/7 – but if you do not add faith to your prayers, you will not receive anything from God. ANYTHING! Prayer requires faith. When we pray, we are acknowledging that God is able to answer prayer. But at the same time, we submit to God and understand that He may or may not choose to answer the prayer the way we want Him to or when we want Him to. Nonetheless, we should pray believing that God can and will answer.

Whenever Jesus healed someone, He asked them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They would say I want to see or hear or walk. Then Jesus would answer their prayer and say, "Your faith has healed you."
What if the lame man only asked Jesus for a cane instead of healing?

What if the blind man only asked Jesus for a guide dog instead of sight?
 What if the deaf only asked Jesus for a hearing aid instead of hearing?
 What if the demon possessed only asked Jesus for a prescription drug instead of freedom? They would have all missed out on the supernatural power of God.

What are you missing out on because of small faith?
 So, when you pray, pray big prayers and pray in faith!
 When you don't pray in faith – you will be tossed around in life and you will not receive anything from the Lord. ANYTHING!

I did a study this week on reasons why prayers are not answered. This can be a sermon series all by itself. I don't have time to teach it today, but I do want to list some of the reasons I found.

By the way, we know from Daniel's example that Satan tries to hinder prayers. As a result, spiritual warfare should be an important part of prayer. But what I'm talking about today are things we do that hinder prayer.

1. Unrepentant Sin

Psalm 66:18 says:

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

None of us are sinless! This is not talking about believers who struggle with a recurring sin who regularly and humbly repent, but this is anyone who *willfully* harbors sin and refuses to repent. If we knowingly tolerate sin in our lives, our prayers are powerless. The good news is that when we confess sin, God forgives it.

Hindrance # 2. Idols in the Heart

In Ezekiel 14:3 God says:

These men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

Examine your own life to see if you are putting anything above God [career, possessions, family, ministry, or anything else). If you are unwilling to let it go, then that idol will hinder your prayers.

Hindrance # 3. Selfish Motives

James 4:3 says:

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Hindrance # 4. Unforgiveness

Mark 11:25 says:

When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

If you do not forgive, it will hinder you receiving from God.

Hindrance # 5. Lack of transparency with God and with others

James 5:16 says:

Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

Hiding your sin will hinder your healing!

Hindrance # 6. Lack of Persistence

Luke 18:1 says:

Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

We give up too soon because by nature we are impatient people. But sometimes we must pray for a long time to receive an answer. Just a word of caution. Don't keep asking for something that is not in God's will and call that persistence. No, that is *insistence* – adamantly wanting to get what we want and failing to submit to God's will.

Hindrance # 7. Refusing to Listen to or Obey God's Word

Proverbs 28:9 says:

If one turns away his ear from hearing God's law, even his prayer is an abomination.

If you don't hear God's Word, He won't hear your words of prayer.

Hindrance # 8. Mistreating Your Spouse

1 Peter 3:7 says:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Hindrance # 9. Neglecting the Poor

Proverbs 21:13 says:

Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.

Hindrance # 10. Praying to be seen by others

Matthew 6:5 says:

When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Many more hindrances could be added to this list. We don't have to be perfect to receive answers to our prayers, but if we have these issues in our lives, they will hinder our prayers until we go to God asking for forgiveness and for help in overcoming these hindrances.

What we are covering today is **Hindrance #11 – Lack of faith.**

James 1:6-8 says:

When he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Lack of faith has an incredibly negative impact on a Christian's life. Without faith, prayer has no power. Without faith you will receive nothing from God!

Matthew 13:58 says that even Jesus could not do many miracles in His hometown because of their lack of faith. Prayer always requires faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says:

Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

Again, James 1:6-8 says:

When you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Unbelief causes us to be tossed around like a wave in the wind. It causes us to be in a constant state of agitation - rising in hope and then sinking in despair - rising in faith then sinking in doubt.

The word translated doubt here means to be at variance with oneself, to hesitate, to waver. To be double minded is to vacillate back and forth between faith and doubt. Now - all of us do that sometimes. All of us can grow in faith and all of us must overcome doubt.

But James is not addressing people who have momentary doubts. He is addressing people who live their lives constantly vacillating between faith and doubt. They believe - then they don't. They're in church - then they're gone. In and out of church and in and out of faith. That kind of double mindedness will never be blessed! The double minded will receive nothing from God! The word double-minded literally means two-souls or two minds. One mind is set on heaven, and one is set on the world.

One mind is set on Jesus and one is set on self.

By the way, the man who said to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief was not double-minded. He wanted to believe, and he declared his belief. His faith was weak, but it wasn’t double-minded doubt.

Being double minded speaks of being emotionally divided and spiritually divided and having a divided allegiance or loyalty. An example of this is seen in 1 Kings 18 when Elijah had his showdown with the prophets of the false God Baal.

Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!”

Elijah was dealing with double mindedness in the people of God. That condition makes a person unstable and incapable of hearing from God or receiving from God. Instead, our example should be Abraham in Romans 4:20-21.

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. He was fully persuaded that God is able to do what He promises.

Double mindedness develops when you are partially persuaded rather than fully persuaded. Partially committed rather than fully committed. Being half-hearted in your commitment to God will result in you being unstable in all your ways and your prayers not getting answered. The way to change that is to be fully committed to God and His ways. To follow Jesus full-time, not part-time.

This James’ passage started with asking for wisdom. You cannot ask God for wisdom and then just do whatever you want if you don’t like what He says. We cannot settle for anything less than full devotion to Christ! We remove hindrances to answered prayer by repenting of any unbelief and placing our faith in God and God alone! James 4:8 says:

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The NLT says: *...your loyalty is divided between God and the world.*

So – I encourage you to repent of doublemindedness and single-mindedly focus on Jesus! Count it all joy when you go through trials and pray in faith for the wisdom you need in any area of life!

Lack of prayer results in lack. Lack of faith results in receiving nothing from God. God hears the prayer of faith and God answers the prayer of faith! God does not answer double-minded prayers.

An area where some believers show doublemindedness is when it comes to supernatural things like spiritual gifts and miracles. Many Christians say they are open to them, but they do not really believe for them to happen. It always amazes me when people leave a Spirit-filled church and go to a non-Spirit-filled church. When I talk to them – I ask them, “Do you believe that miracles and the gifts of the spirit are for today?” They say, “Yes.” So I ask, “Then how can you be part of a church that doesn’t believe that.” And they usually respond by saying, “Well, they’re open to it.”

I want to say, “Bust out in tongues sometime and see how open they are! But what I want you to see today is that being open to something does not carry a lot of weight with God. Being open to God’s power is better than being closed to God’s power. It’s a step in the right direction - but it is not yet faith. A person who is just “open” is a person who does not yet believe.

For instance, a non-Christian can be open to the possibility that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. But if they do not repent of sin and place their faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross – they will die and go to hell open to truth – but never truly believing.

Being open to something does not count for much! If you took your life savings to a bank and asked, “Can you keep my money safe” – and they responded “we’re open to it” – would you leave your money with them? NO! You want someone you can believe in to keep your money safe.

If you are going to marry someone and when it comes to the wedding vows where the minister asks them, “Will you be faithful as long as you both shall live?” and they respond, “I’m open to it” – will you marry them? I hope not! Only marry someone you trust and believe in.

Are you getting my point? It’s the same way with God. Saying you are open to the things of God will not get you much from God! You need to go beyond openness to faith.

The Bible does not tell us to just be open to salvation – but to repent and believe and be saved!

The Bible does not tell us to just be open to the power of the Spirit – but it commands us to be filled with the Spirit!

The Bible does not tell us to be just open to the gifts of the Spirit – but it commands us to believe in them and pursue them diligently!

Jesus never said, “According to your openness be it unto you” but “according to your faith be it unto you.”

Jesus never said, “If you have openness the size of a mustard seed you will move mountains” but if you have faith the size of a mustard seed you will move mountains!

The Bible never says, "If you are open to God you will receive from God."

NO! It says that God responds to faith, not openness.

God responds to faith, not unbelief!

God responds to those who are single-minded toward Him, not double-minded!

So, let's set our hearts on God and refuse to waver through unbelief!

Let's not dig up in doubt what we sow in faith!

Let's not destroy in doubt what we build in faith.

No matter what we see, feel or experience, we will believe and not doubt.

We will not be tossed around like a wave of the sea, but we will be single-minded, stable in all we do, and when we pray in faith, we will receive answers from the Lord!