

LESSON FIVE

Third Encounter “An Avalanche of Excuses”

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Dual Dangers . . .

- Prayer _____ to overcome
- Prayer _____ to avoid

Timeless Insights

“One of the greatest sins we commit against ourselves and those around us is the sin of not praying.... Our prayerless lives are the sin that keeps the world from knowing Jesus! They are the sin that keeps us from knowing Him!”

—Hope MacDonald

Foundational Scripture

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Galatians 5:7 (NIV)

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 (NKJV)

Timeless Insights

“How little time the average Christian spends in prayer! We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little.... The power of God is lacking in our lives and in our work. We have not because we ask not.”

—R. A. Torrey

Two Cautions for Our Journey

Caution One:

Overcoming Prayer _____

Scripture:

...the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask for it. And even when you do ask, you don't get because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

James 4:2b, 3 (NLT)

Seven Hindrances to Effective Prayer

Timeless Insights

“The neglect of prayer is a grand hindrance to holiness.”

—John Wesley

Hindrance One: _____

Scripture:

I was so swamped by guilt I couldn't see my way clear. More guilt in my heart than hair on my head, so heavy the guilt that my heart gave out. Soften up, God, and intervene; hurry and get me some help...

Psalms 40:12-13 (MSG)

Hindrance Two: _____

Scripture:

Some of the leaders of Israel approached me and sat down with me. God’s Message came to me: “Son of Man, these people have installed idols in their hearts. They have embraced the wickedness that will ruin them. Why should I even bother with their prayers?”

Ezekiel 14:1-3 (MSG)

Hindrance Three: _____

Scripture:

But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.

Mark 11:25 (NLT)

Hindrance Four: _____

Scripture:

If you don’t know what you’re doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You’ll get his help, and won’t be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who “worry their prayers” are like wind-whipped waves.

James 1:5-7 (MSG)

Hindrance Five: _____

Scripture:

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 John 3:21-22 (NIV)

Timeless Insights

“You can organize until you are exhausted; you can plan, program, subsidize all your plans. But if you fail to pray, it is a waste of time. Prayer is not optional for us. It is mandatory. Not to pray is to disobey God.”

—Richard Halverson

Hindrance Six: Cherished _____

Scripture:

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

Psalm 66:18 (NIV)

Hindrance Seven: Marital _____

Scripture:

The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

1 Peter 3:7 (MSG)

Caution Two:

Avoiding Prayer _____

Scripture:

“Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don't enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don't be naive. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire.” He then went back and prayed the same prayer. Returning, he again found them sound asleep. They simply couldn't keep their eyes open, and they didn't have a plausible excuse.

Mark 14:38-40 (MSG)

Timeless Insights

“A child of God can grieve Jesus in no worse way than to neglect prayer.”

—O. Hallesby

Five Excuses That Weaken Prayer

Excuse One: _____

Scripture:

A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty your permanent houseguest!

Proverbs 6:10-11 (MSG)

Excuse Two: _____

Scripture:

Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’”

Luke 14:16-20 (NIV)

Timeless Insights

“Beware the barrenness of a busy life.”

—Corrie Ten Boom

Excuse Three: _____

Scripture:

The lazy person claims, “There’s a lion on the road! Yes, I’m sure there’s a lion out there!”... Lazy people take food in their hand but don’t even lift it to their mouth. Lazy people consider themselves smarter than seven wise counselors.

Proverbs 26:13, 15-16 (NLT)

Excuse Four: _____

Scripture:

Saul died because he was unfaithful and disobeyed the LORD. He even asked advice from a woman who talked to spirits of the dead, instead of asking the LORD. So the LORD had Saul killed and gave his kingdom to David, the son of Jesse.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (CEV)

Timeless Insights

“If you sow in prayerlessness, you will reap powerlessness, peacelessness, joylessness, fruitlessness, and backslidenness.”

—Raymond Kwong

Excuse Five: _____

Scripture:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)

AFTERTHOUGHTS... PONDER AND PRAY

Ponder Points:

Discuss (or ponder) which of the hindrances to effective prayer on our list sometimes hinders your prayer effectiveness. Can you think of any additional excuses for not praying that are missing from our list?

Personal Afterthoughts:

Prayer Points:

Take time in prayer to confess those hindrances to prayer that have affected you from time to time. Also, ask God to help you overcome any excuses that might weaken your prayer life. Be specific as you pray.