

Prayer and relationships

There were times when I've been around people who weren't getting along with each other. The tension between them was almost tangible. Although I didn't have a problem with either side, and vice versa, the situation made it difficult for me to have a free, open and relaxed relationship with any of them. Whether we like it or not our relationships affect other people. That includes our relationship with God. If we have strained relationships with people around us then we will have a strained relationship with God. Life isn't just about us and God. It's about us and God and everyone around us.

Matthew 5: 21 – 24 You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

1) Our relationship with God and others

- Life is made up of relationships with our relationship with God as the root of all other relationships.
 - If the root is bad the fruit will be bad.
 - Bad relationships stem from bad roots.
 - In the garden of Eden after Adam broke relationship with God by his rebellion he accused Eve.
 - Their children, Cain and Abel, had a bad relationship ending in Cain killing Abel, although they were both religious. They both gave offerings to God.
- We can be religious doing religious things yet still not be pleasing to God.
 - Before Adam and Eve sinned God would walk with them in the cool of the day.
 - Prayer was a natural relationship with God.
 - It was talking to him as your Father, creator and friend.
 - After Adam sinned prayer was reduced to a ritual to appease our consciences rather than to communicate with our God.
- We can religiously pray thinking that God hears us when he doesn't if our hearts aren't right before him.
 - We create altars of humanism that we bow down to.
 - We set standards according to our own perceptions of right and wrong rather than accepting God's standards of what is right and wrong.
 - We then ask God to bless our lives when we live contrary to his will and morality.
 - His blessings are found in him, not apart from him.
- So often we have unresolved relationship issues with family or friends yet carry on life as normal.
 - We have the attitude that our relationships with others doesn't affect our relationship with God.
 - 1 John 4: 19 – 21 We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.
 - There is an integral relationship between our love for God and our love for others.

2) Hindrances to prayer

- Sin in general
- Unreconciled relationships
- Jesus spoke about if someone has something against you leave your gift at the altar and first be reconciled with them before offering your gift.
 - This was a Jewish scenario at the Temple where people would take their sacrificial animal to the altar for the priest to sacrifice it on their behalf. The sacrifice was about forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - Therefore, to go ahead with the sacrifice while there's a relationship problem is contrary to the meaning of the sacrifice and hypocritical.
- In Christ we no longer need the physical altar at the Temple as he is the fulfilment of all temple worship.
 - He was the sacrifice that was offered for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God.
 - It is through his blood on the cross that the veil into the presence of God was torn and we enter into his presence in prayer.
 - Unreconciled relationships go contrary to everything that Jesus did for us on the cross.
 - He therefore demands that we reconcile with those who have something against us before coming to him in prayer.
- Unreconciled relationships can be due to a specific incident with a specific person. However, it could also be an ongoing negative attitude towards other races, other genders, language groups, etc.
 - We can determine our attitudes by the way we think and speak about them.
- Matthew 5: 21 – 22 You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.
 - Angry with your brother
 - Raca – a term of contempt. Worthless, good for nothing
 - Fool - stupid
- If such attitudes would cause us to be in danger of judgment and hell, then we are sure that God isn't going to be accepting our prayers until we repent from them

3) Reconciliation and prayer

- Jesus didn't say that we should quickly offer our sacrifices then go and reconcile with the person.
 - He said first go and reconcile with the person then offer you sacrifice.
- Reconciliation is not an optional extra for Jesus. It's an imperative. It's a requirement.
 - He gave everything so that we can be reconciled with the Father through himself.
 - He expects us to give everything we have to be reconciled with someone we have issues with.
 - He expects us to repent of ungodly attitudes towards other races, language groups, and genders.
- Forgiveness is a vital element of reconciliation.
- When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he said:
 - Matthew 6: 12 – 15 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Do you have unreconciled relationships that you need to deal with?

Maybe that's why your prayers aren't being answered. Leave prayer to after you've dealt with those relationships.

It's possible that the other person refuses to reconcile. God knows that you've taken all the necessary steps to reconcile from your side.