



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting

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COMING CLEAN WITH GOD

There was a little girl who loved to make mud pies. She labored over them, making them just the right size. She would then set them out in the sun to dry. One morning this little girl's father came home unexpectedly. She was up to her arms "baking." Her hands and arms were covered in mud. When she saw her father, she dropped everything and ran to him, waving her arms, which were dripping with mud. Her father looked at her with love and said speedily but gently, "Go wash your hands first, honey."

Your heavenly Father is saying the same thing to you. He loves you and wants you to enter His presence. He longs for you to come to Him and embrace Him through prayer. But, first, He wants you to be cleansed of your sin. He desires that you be washed from your unrighteousness. He lovingly but firmly says to you, "Go wash your hands first."

The Word of God says in **1 John 1:9**, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse is your spiritual washcloth that you must use daily. Before you can pray with power and effectiveness, you must come clean with God. God longs for you to pray. He wants to spend time with you, listening to you and speaking to you. Yet, you must confess and deal with your sin. He desires that you experience cleansing from sin so that you can have an intimate relationship with Him.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on prayer and sin. Your maturity in prayer will be determined by your willingness to confront and forsake your personal sin. Because of this, we will deal with how sin affects your praying. We will also examine how you can grow in your ability to confront your personal sin. This issue is dedicated to helping you come clean with God and experience ~~greater power and effectiveness in prayer.~~

How Does Sin Hinder Your Prayer Life?

Your personal sin will hinder your intimacy and communication with God. It will lessen your power in intercession and pleading. There are a variety of ways that sin affects your prayer life. *First, it wounds and insults your Father.* Prayer is speaking and listening to your Father, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (**Matthew 6:6**). Yet, your Father is the Holy God. He is pure and perfect. When you pray you are approaching the throne of God; you are encountering the holy God who is perfect and without sin. Your Father loves you. He longs to spend time with you. But, He is still holy and will not compromise that holiness. Sin wounds

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and insults Him. How can you expect your Father, the holy God, to hear and answer you, if you are complacent toward that which wounds and insults Him? Sin hinders your prayer life because it wounds and insults your Father—your Father to whom you are praying.

Second, sin cuts off your communication. The Word of God declares in **Psalm 66:18**, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” The word “regard” in this text means to cherish. If a believer cherishes and clings to sin, the Lord does not choose to listen to that believer. When you choose to cling to sin, your Father chooses not to listen to you. In **Psalm 66:20**, the Word of God says, “Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!” The psalmist praises God for not turning his prayer away. He did not cherish sin and the Lord received his prayer. If a believer cherishes sin, the Lord will turn his or her prayer away. Your Father will not compromise His holiness by answering you when you are complacent toward sin.

Next, unconfessed sin moves God to chastise you. Your Father loves you. He is going to correct you when you sin. He loves you too much to let your sin go unchecked. The Word of God makes this clear in **Hebrews 12:4**, “For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” He will act in a variety of ways to convict you and correct you when you sin against Him. One of God’s methods in chastising you is refusing to hear and answer prayer. This is why the Word of God declares in **Isaiah 59:2**, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” He shows you His displeasure with your sin by refusing to hear and answer. Sometimes God will chastise you by causing you to feel that He is far away. This is His way of teaching you that sin must be dealt with if you are going to seek Him and communicate with Him.

Sin hinders your praying because it grieves the Holy Spirit. In **Ephesians 4:25-29**, the apostle Paul discusses sins that Christians are to avoid and root out of their lives. He then makes this stunning statement in **Ephesians 4:30**, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Unconfessed sin

grieves the Spirit. When you allow sin to go unchecked, the Holy Spirit refuses to release His work and power in your life. He is the “Holy” Spirit. He will not work in powerful ways when sin is tolerated. This is particularly damaging to your prayer life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who enables you to pray, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (**Galatians 4:6**). When the Spirit of prayer is grieved by your sin, your ability to pray is significantly hindered.

Finally, sin creates a guilty conscience in you. It is difficult, even impossible to pray in power when you have a guilty conscience. When you are not right with God, you will struggle to speak with Him and listen to Him. That is why the promise of **1 John 1:9** is precious and vital. When you confess sin, your conscience is clear. It will enable you to speak with God in confidence and certainty. Yet, when you do not deal with sin, your guilty conscience will interfere with your praying to your Father.

Dealing With Sin

Since sin hinders and interferes with your praying, it is essential to deal with sin. Yet, how does a believer deal with sin? You must realize that if you do not deal with sin, it will deal with you. You must be faithful and aggressive in confronting your personal sin. This is not an area where you can be complacent or soft. Dealing with sin involves the following:

- **A desire to honor the holiness of God.** The Bible reveals that God is holy, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (**Isaiah 6:3**). Dealing with sin is rooted in a desire to honor that holiness. This is its foundation or beginning point. God hates sin. It is an abomination to Him. Since you love and seek God, there should be a desire to deal with your personal sin that God despises. You honor and exalt His holiness by confronting your personal sin.
- **Openness to the Spirit’s conviction.** The Holy Spirit has come to convict you of your sin (**John 16:7**). He reveals to you what is sinful to God.

He is the One who teaches you what is not right in the sight of your Father. Dealing with sin requires openness to His convicting work. As a believer, you must labor to become more sensitive to His convicting work. You must guard against developing a hardened heart to His conviction.

➤ **Confess your sins to God.** In 1 John 1:9, God promises to forgive and cleanse you of sin if you *confess* your sin. The word “confess” means “to say the same thing as.” It is saying the same thing about your sin that God says about it. It is coming in agreement with God about your personal sin. It is not making excuses or attempting to justify your sin. It is coming clean with God—admitting your guilt and accepting your responsibility. For this reason, your confession of sin should be specific. It should be “Father, I lied,” “Father, I lusted,” or “Father, I spoke hurtful words.” Declare your guilt and accept your responsibility for your sin.

➤ **Repent of your sin.** Confession and repentance are intimately connected, “He who covers his sin will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). True confession leads to forsaking the sin. When you declare your guilt and accept responsibility for sin, it stirs you to forsake the sin. You long to get rid of the sin that has done damage in your life and in your relationship to God. When you confess sin, labor to get rid of the sin from your life. Keep in mind that some sins may be more deeply rooted in your life. There are some sins that get entrenched in your life. You will root these sins out only after much confession and repentance.

➤ **Strive to grow in godly character.** God desires that you root out the sin in your life. Yet, He also desires that you replace it with godly character. Dealing with sin is not just confessing and repenting of the sin. It is also replacing it with the godly character that your Father desires.

Obstacles To Dealing With Sin



As a believer, you will have to overcome a

variety of obstacles in dealing with your sin. These obstacles can prevent you from being aggressive in your pursuit to confront and root out the sin in your life. As you read through these, plead with the Spirit to show you any obstacles that are keeping you from dealing with your personal sin.



Obstacle #1: Complacency Toward Sin

This obstacle can stagger your prayer life and your growth in holiness. Complacency toward sin means that you are indifferent toward your personal sin. You may go through the motions of confession, but you are not grieved in heart over your sin and are not willing to deal with it.



Obstacle #2: Spiritual Laziness

This obstacle is erected when you do not take the time to submit to the Holy Spirit’s searching. You are too busy to listen to the Spirit and confront anything in your life that is not right with God. You go through the motions of confession with the well-worn cliché, “Father, forgive me of my many sins.” You are content to let this stand as your confrontation of your sin.



Obstacle #3: Hardness Of Heart

A believer can develop a hardened heart to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, you are not sensitive to His conviction of your sin. Your heart and conscience are not tender and you do not immediately confess and forsake sin. How does a believer develop a hardened heart? Some of the ways that this can happen:

- (1) Ignoring the conviction of the Spirit;
- (2) Going through the motions of worship, prayer, and Bible reading;
- (3) Excusing his or her sin;
- (4) Going through the motions of confession with no intention of forsaking the sin.



Obstacle #4: Using Clichés For Confession

There is no doubt that God will hear and respond to the earnest cry, “Father, forgive me of my many sins.” Yet, how many times is that a cliché that we use to get us through confession? How many times is that a way of escaping our responsibility to confess our guilt and accept our responsibility?

God longs for honest confession of sin. He yearns for His people to claim their sin and plead for His mercy and cleansing. Only those who will admit their sins honestly and take responsibility for their sinful words, thoughts, or actions experience the blessings of cleansing and restoration.

Growing In Your Ability To Deal With Sin

I realize that this may seem to be an odd heading. You may be wondering, "Why should I grow in my ability to deal with sin?" The Word of God declares in **Hebrews 12:14**, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." The believer is to pursue peace and holiness. The word "pursue" means an all-out, intense, out of breath, dogged pursuit. It is expending all your strength and energy in the pursuit of. God desires that you pursue holiness, dealing with your personal sin. He longs that you pursue this with all your heart and strength. You will never be perfect in this life. But, God longs for you to pursue holiness. He longs for you to strive with all your being against the sin in your life. The issue is pursuit not perfection. This requires growing and maturing in confronting your sin.

Another reason for growing in your ability to deal with sin is the deceitfulness of sin. When you came to Christ, you realized your sinfulness. Yet, you only scratched the surface of just how sinful you are. You have much to face and conquer. At the same time, sin works into and gets entrenched in your life in a variety of ways. You can get ensnared by sin through different means. Because of sin's deceitfulness, you must grow in your ability to discern and take action against sin.

The following are some practical steps that you can take to grow in your ability to deal with sin. You can use these or develop your own from them. You are given a variety of steps so that you can pick and choose those that will best fit you and your situation.

□ *Ask God to grant you a hatred of sin (Proverbs 6:16-19).* Plead with God to create in you His attitude concerning your sin. Call on Him to create within you a despising of everything that is evil in His sight.

- *Pray for the destruction of any complacency toward sin.* Ask God to destroy any complacency that you have toward sin. Seek Him for the obliteration of any toleration that you have of sin.
- *Plead with God to increase your love for Him (Proverbs 8:13).* The more you love God, the more you will hate sin. Call on Him to deepen your love for Him. Pray that your love for God will mature and grow stronger so that you will love what He loves and hate what He hates.
- *Immerse yourself in the Word of God.* The primary tool that the Holy Spirit uses to convict you of sin is the Word of God. Be diligent in hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the Word of God.
- *Pray for greater sensitivity to the Spirit's conviction.* The role of the Holy Spirit is to convict you of your sin. Plead that you will grow in your ability to discern His conviction in your life. Ask that you sense and discern His conviction immediately.
- *Confess your sin diligently.* Do not put off the confession of sin. When you experience His conviction, bring your sin before God. Claim your sin and guilt. Accept your responsibility for the sin. Do not delay in answering the Spirit's conviction.
- *Be on your guard against those things that dull your hatred of sin.* Examine what you watch, read, and listen to. Do these things lessen the sinfulness of sin? Do these things weaken your hatred of what is not right in God's sight? Ask yourself questions like, "Do the television shows I watch sensitize me to sin?" or "Does the music I listen to weaken hatred of sin?" Pay close attention to what you see, hear, read, and listen to. If these things lessen your hatred and aggressiveness in dealing with sin, you must take action to change them.
- *Read and meditate on 1 John 1:5-10.* I went through a period of time when I had developed a strong complacency to my personal sin. My heart grieved over this and I read and meditated on **1 John 1:5-10** for one month. I read these verses over and over again for 30 days. I paid particular attention to verse 9. I began substituting for the word "sins". I put in its place words like "defiance," "rebellion," "disregard," "contempt," and "indifference."