

# So Your Prayers May Not Be Hindered (1 Peter 3:7-12)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

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## I. Background

- a. Peter's first letter focuses a great deal on suffering. He says we should not be surprised that we suffer in various trials. Throughout his letter, he touches on several different types of trials that Christians face.
  - i. We will be refined through trials; they can produce a positive end result.
  - ii. The life of Jesus consisted of suffering in His life, followed by glory. If we are following Him, we should expect to see the same.
- b. Peter talks about submission quite a bit in this letter.
  - i. Citizens need to honor the king and be subject to the governing authorities.
  - ii. Slaves need to be subject to their masters
  - iii. Wives need to be submissive to their husbands (which we discussed in the previous lesson).
    - 1. There Peter also addressed how Christian women are to reject outward adornment (gold, fancy hair arrangements, fine clothing) and instead make themselves beautiful with the inward adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit.
- c. Next, Peter addresses the husbands.

## II. Husbands, Be Understanding

- a. Read **1 Peter 3:7**.
  - i. "Husbands, likewise, *dwell with them with understanding*, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (**1 Peter 3:7**, NKJV)
- b. What Peter teaches here.
  - i. After addressing the wives (telling them to submit to their husbands and adorn themselves spiritually with a quiet and gentle spirit), he now turns his attention to the husbands.

- ii. The husband is to treat his wife with honor as the weaker vessel.
  - iii. He is to see her as a co-heir of the same eternal life (not being someone who is in any way inferior).
  - iv. If the husband does not treat his wife in this way, his prayers to God will be hindered.
- c. Some slightly different translations of the first part of this phrase include:
- i. "Likewise you husbands, *live considerately with your wives...*" (**1 Peter 3:7**, RSV)
  - ii. "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." (**1 Peter 3:7**, NIV)
  - iii. "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them *according to knowledge...*" (**1 Peter 3:7**, KJV 1900)
    - 1. This is the most literal rendering of the phrase. The American Standard Version, Young's Literal Translation and Douay-Rheims likewise all render it "*according to knowledge*".
    - 2. The Greek word here is the same one used as the sixth (of seven) characteristics of the Holy Spirit, in **Isaiah 11:2-3** where it says:
      - a. "The Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of *knowledge* and godliness. The Spirit of the fear of God shall fill Him." (**Isaiah 11:2-3**, LXX, OSB)
    - 3. Peter uses the same word in **2 Peter 1**:
      - a. "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue *knowledge*, to *knowledge* self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness." (**2 Peter 1:5-6**, NKJV)
    - 4. It is a common Greek word found throughout the text of the LXX and New Testament (lexical form = *gnosis*, γνῶσις ) that is generally translated *knowledge* or *cognizance*.
  - d. It seems to me that what Peter is saying here is that husbands need to treat their wives in a respectful way, out of their awareness (spiritual knowledge) that their wives are their spiritual equals in the sense that they will inherit

the same eternal salvation that they themselves will. Also, out of an awareness that their wives are “weaker vessels”.

- i. The word rendered here “weak” is used throughout the Bible. In several places in the New Testament, it is used to refer to a physical weakness or infirmity, such as someone who is enfeebled from an illness.
- ii. **Question:** In referring to wives as “weaker” here, for example, as a consequence of the Fall in **Genesis 3**, where as a result of Eve’s sin, she was told that her husband would “rule over” her (**Genesis 3:16**)? Or is he instead referring to women generally being physically weaker than their husbands?
  1. Actually, I’m not sure which kind of weakness (physical or spiritual) Peter has in mind here.
  2. However, it seems to me that in either case, the husband needs to treat his wife with more careful attention than he treats himself.
    - a. For example, I have ten fingers on my hands, all of which I care about. However, when doing construction work on the side of my house (reshingling), I occasionally accidentally smash one or two of my fingers in the course of hammering nails.
    - b. Whenever that happens, I take *special care* of the *weaker* fingers!
- e. Other, similar teachings on how husbands should treat their wives:
  - i. “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” (**Colossians 3:19**, NKJV)
  - ii. Read **Ephesians 5:17-32**.
    1. Paul says the husband/wife relationship is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church.
      - a. The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church.
    2. This brings a very high demand on the husbands. Husbands are to love their wives *as Christ loved the church*.
      - a. Jesus *laid down his life* and was willing to suffer for the salvation of the church.

- i. Husbands are called to do the same for their wives.
    - ii. Jesus is both the *head* and *savior* of the church. This exemplifies the role Christian husbands have in their marriages.
  - b. Christ loves the church as his own body.
    - i. Christian husbands are called to love their wives in the same way.
    - ii. Husbands are called to *nourish* and *cherish* their wives, demonstrating the same level of care that they show toward the flesh of their own physical bodies.
- f. This teaching is definitely countercultural in our society, and perhaps more so with each passing year. However, it is countercultural in pretty much *all societies*.
  - i. About 20 years ago, my wife Alison and I (along with our two children) spent a couple of years living in Albania. Albanian family culture (especially back then) was very different from anything I had seen in the U.S. In fact, some people considered Albania to be perhaps the last remaining true patriarchal culture in the West (in Europe).
    - 1. The Albanians definitely embraced the idea that husbands were the head of their wives and families. The fathers ruled the home and made all the major decisions.
    - 2. However, while they accepted the idea that the husband was head of the wife, they did NOT follow many of the other aspects of the Christian husband's role as described in the Scriptures.
    - 3. They saw the husband as the "boss" (in charge, making the major decisions), but this typically did *not* include laying down their lives for their wives and sacrificing the most to meet the physical and spiritual needs of their families.
    - 4. I recall in the poorer areas seeing a wife walking along the road carrying a heavy load of sticks on her shoulders (presumably for firewood), with the husband walking a few paces ahead but carrying nothing. When I asked my Albanian friends why the husband was not doing any of the hard work, they often replied, "He is doing *the thinking!*"

- g. The Biblical teaching on the role of the husband in marriage is distinctively different from both typical Western egalitarian/feminist culture and even from older patriarchal cultures (like we saw in Albania). Christians who follow the Bible are conforming to their own distinctive cultural framework that is different from the world around us, wherever we are.
  - i. A Christian husband is not simply the ruler of the household; he is called to be the one responsible for nourishing, cherishing, leading by example (including in hard work), and spiritually looking out for his wife and children like a truly *good shepherd*.
  - ii. If a wife has a question in a spiritual matter at church, Paul said she should *ask her husband* at home (**1 Corinthians 14:35**). Therefore, a Christian husband needs to be a man who understands the Word of God and can guide his wife in that way.
  - iii. A good Christian husband will give his wife *what she needs*, which is not always the same as what she wants! A Christian husband will strive to present his wife to Christ as a radiant bride, to help her make it to heaven. This requires wisdom, real love and insight from the Holy Spirit.
- h. The husband is the head of the wife.
  - i. This also is reminiscent of what Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 11** in the teaching on head covering (and uncovering):
    - 1. “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, *the head of woman is man*, and the head of Christ is God.” (**1 Corinthians 11:3**, NKJV)
  - i. So that nothing will hinder the husband’s prayers.
    - i. A Personal Story: Years ago, I started walking for an hour through the woods to catch a bus to work instead of walking 15 minutes to the nearby train train. My motivation for this change was to pray more.
      - 1. I would read the Bible at home in the morning before going on this walk.
      - 2. Note: It can be very ‘dangerous’ (in a good way, meaning powerful) to commit yourself to BOTH pray and read the Bible every day. Most people tend to focus on one, rather than both prayer and Bible study.
      - 3. One morning I left after having an argument with Alison, for my long ‘Mr. Spiritual’ prayer walk. I thought of this passage in **1 Peter**, which I had read recently, and quickly realized (from

this passage) that God was not interested in listening to my prayers. So I went back home to reconcile!

4. If you pray very little, this warning of Peter (that your prayers will be hindered) won't mean much to you!
- ii. This remains a great challenge for me. Even this past week (and knowing that I would be teaching on this subject), I struggled with this!
  1. I was respected as a quality control checker at my civil engineering job. They counted on me to tell them *what was wrong* with a design, before they sent it out for construction.
    - a. I even have Christian authors who ask me to review their drafts, since they appreciate my ability to find any errors in their manuscript, before it goes to publication.
    - b. As you can imagine, this 'strength', the ability to *find what is wrong* with something, is *not* such a welcome quality in marriage or parenting!
  2. Also, my own natural tendency is to be rather solitary, introverted, and impatient. Left to my own devices, I can be a hard person to live with.
    - a. Impatience, a gruff demeanor and even destructive anger all were problems in my family of origin, and "the apple did not fall far from the tree".
    - b. I need to strive continually and very hard to overcome this natural tendency, and to ask for God's help and ask forgiveness from others when I stumble!
  3. Of all the topics we have addressed in **1 Peter**, this one (from **1 Peter 3:7**, to live in a considerate way with our wives so that nothing will hinder our prayers, is *the most challenging for me, personally*.

### III. God's Ears are Open to Prayers of the Righteous

- a. Read **1 Peter 3:8-12**.
  - i. Peter explains here why the prayers of husbands who don't treat their wives well are hindered. It is based on a foundational principle explained in **Psalm 34** (designated **Psalm 33** in the LXX).
  - ii. God listens to the prayers of those who are living righteous lives. In contrast, He does not heed the prayers of the unrighteous.

1. **Possible Objection:** But aren't we all *unrighteous*, based on what Paul said? Aren't all our 'righteous deeds' like filthy rags?
  2. **Response:** David clearly says that the Lord hears the prayers of the righteous. Peter understood that to apply to people. That does not mean we are flawless and never sin. However, the Lord speaks of people as being righteous throughout the Scriptures (Abel, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Zechariah, etc.)
- b. Read **Psalm 34** (designated **Psalm 33** in the LXX).
- i. This is the longest quote (of many) from the Old Testament used by Peter in his letter. Consider how many things Peter speaks of in his letter that are touched on by this psalm.
  - ii. This psalm is a real gem and often my favorite among all the psalms.
  - iii. David here (like Peter in his first letter) highlights the importance of the *fear of the Lord*.
    1. Those who fear the Lord are protected. "The Angel of the Lord shall *encamp around those who fear Him*, and He will deliver them." (v. 8)
    2. "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for *there is no want for those who fear Him*." (v. 10)
    3. The section quoted by Peter is introduced by the statement. "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you *the fear of the Lord*..." (v. 12)
  - iv. David here makes it clear that the righteous will face many afflictions in this life. This is no "prosperity gospel"! That is the main theme of Peter's letter.
    1. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but He [*the Lord*] will deliver them from them all." (v. 20)
    2. This realistic assessment completely contradicts the popular modern so-called 'prosperity gospel'!
  - v. God listens to the prayers of the righteous (those who shun evil, including with their speech, and do good instead).
  - vi. This psalm also includes a wonderful prophecy about Jesus, that none of his bones would be broken.

1. Also recalls the instructions regarding the Passover Lamb: do not break any of its bones (while eating the lamb's meat at the Passover dinner), as explained in **Exodus 12**.
  2. Also recalls the contrast between Daniel and his opponents in the lion's den, in **Daniel 6**. The lions broke the bones of the wicked men before they reached the floor of the lions' den (**Daniel 6:25**), in contrast to what happened to Daniel when he was cast into the same pit.
  3. The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in the account of the crucifixion of Jesus in **John 19:31-37**.
- c. The **Book of Tobit** is among the Apocryphal or Deuterocanonical books (included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, and also was included in the King James Version up until the late 1800s or early 1900s). Those who have read the Anabaptist classic, *Martyr's Mirror* (published 1660) may recall that the Apocryphal books were referenced alongside Bible books we are more familiar with. This should not be surprising, since these additional books were included in the Bibles back then.
- i. In **Tobit**, there is an interesting interaction between Tobias (the son of Tobit) and an angel. The two go on an adventure together, during which Tobias gains a wife. Before the angel departs, he gives Tobias some advice regarding prayer.
  - ii. Read **Tobit 12:8-10**.
  - iii. This angel said he was one of the ones who brought prayers before the Lord, so it might be good to consider what he has to say on the subject of effective prayer.
    1. In this account, the angel said that prayer is good (more effective) if it is accompanied with:
      - a. Fasting,
      - b. Almsgiving and
      - c. Righteousness.
    2. The angel also says, "A few prayers with righteousness is better than many with wrongdoing".
      - a. It is better to focus on repenting of your sins before praying, so that you are approaching the Lord after turning away from your sins.



- b. This is consistent with what Peter is saying to husbands, and to everyone else, backed up by **Psalm 34**. The Lord *listens to the prayers of the righteous*. If we want to have effective prayers, live righteous lives.
- d. Being righteous is not just a matter of avoiding doing bad things. It also involves *doing good things*.
  - i. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (**James 1:27**, NKJV)
  - ii. Read **Isaiah 58:1-10**, a notable discourse on righteous fasting.
    - 1. Notice the connection again between effective prayer and righteousness, fasting with helping the poor.
    - 2. If we turn away from evil and practice doing good toward the poor, the Lord will respond immediately to our petitions.
  - iii. Consider also the structure of Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5-6**.
    - 1. First, in **Matthew 5**, Jesus calls His followers to a higher standard of righteousness.
    - 2. Then in **Matthew 6** Jesus addresses three (related) things, one after the other:
      - a. When you *pray*;
      - b. When you *fast*; and
      - c. When you *give alms to the poor*.
    - 3. For all three of these practices:
      - a. You must do them in secret;
      - b. And you will be rewarded in secret.
  - iv. **Question:** Will giving alms have a positive impact on how our prayers are received?
    - 1. Consider the story of the conversion of Cornelius, in **Acts 10**.
    - 2. “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an

angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God." (**Acts 10:1-4**, NKJV)

3. "So Cornelius said, 'Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.'"" (**Acts 10:30-31**, NKJV)

- v. The prayer of the righteous man is powerful and effective. Read **James 5:16-18**.

1. It wasn't the length of Elijah's prayer; it was the *righteous life* of the person who offered the prayers that made those prayers powerful in their effect.
2. This is one more passage affirming that God listens to the prayers *of the righteous*!

- e. Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa writing on effective prayer, c. 198 AD:

- i. *"That we may not be as far from the ears of God as we are from His precepts, the memory of His precepts paves for our prayers a way unto heaven; of which precepts the chief is, that we go not up unto God's altar before we compose whatever of discord or offence we have contracted with our brethren. For what sort of deed is it to approach the peace of God without peace? the remission of debts while you retain them? How will he appease his Father who is angry with his brother, when from the beginning 'all anger' is forbidden us?"*
- ii. *"For even Joseph, when dismissing his brethren for the purpose of fetching their father, said, 'And be not angry in the way.' (**Genesis 45:24**) He warned us, to be sure, at that time (for elsewhere our Discipline is called 'the Way'), that when, set in 'the way' of prayer, we go not unto the Father with anger. After that, the Lord, amplifying the Law, openly adds the prohibition of anger against a brother to that of murder. Not even by an evil word does He permit it to be vented. Ever if we must be angry, our anger must not be maintained beyond sunset, as the apostle admonishes. *But how rash is it either to pass a day without prayer, while you refuse to make satisfaction to your brother; or else, by perseverance in anger, to lose your prayer?*"*
- iii. (Source: Tertullian, *On Prayer*, chapter 11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 685)

#### IV. Conclusions and Take-Aways

- a. Husbands, live in a considerate, understanding and respectful way toward your wives.
  - i. Remember that Peter was a married man, who is speaking as one of us.
  - ii. See our wives as co-heirs of salvation and treat them accordingly.
  - iii. Embrace what Paul said regarding how husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church. Husbands are to love their wives as their own flesh. Nourish them and cherish them.
  - iv. If we don't treat our wives in a considerate and respectful way, this will hinder our prayers.
- b. In order to have effective prayers, we must be living righteous lives.
  - i. The Lord listens to the prayers of the righteous!
  - ii. That involves what we do, what we say, and what we don't do.
  - iii. It includes helping those in need (and giving alms to help the poor).