

Welcome to My Closet

I. Introduction.

- A. I'd like to welcome everyone today.
- B. Last two weeks, Bret did a study on growing as a community in prayer. It was a kick-off to our vision: prayer and growing as a community.
- C. Today continue in that discussion of prayer.
- D. Regulars might be wondering the stage and why do I look so casual. Not a new fashion statement for those teaching and preaching on Sunday mornings. But present a picture for us - how we normally pray.
- E. No slides to look at the Scripture. I will have the lights off later to see a more intimate picture. My intent is not just to show a picture. I'm going to be inviting you to participate along the way.
- F. Some may feel that this teaching is too simplistic. But being a community of prayer, starts by becoming individuals of prayer.
- G. Let's look at our main text: **Matthew 6:5-6 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**
- H. Pray.

II. What Do I Look Like?

- A. Concern about how I'm dressed today. Sweatpants and a t-shirt is not the Sunday morning speaking attire. But let me ask you - **how does God see us?**
 - 1. In **Luke 19:1-10** Jesus was passing through Jericho, rich chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, wanted to see Jesus, was so short he had to climb a tree to see over the crowds.
 - a. **Are tax collectors popular?** No!
 - b. Jesus passes by, he looks up at Zacchaeus and says Zacchaeus, you need to hurry up and come down. Jesus was going to stay at his place today.
 - c. **How did other people see Zacchaeus?** That he was a sinner. Good people like Jesus should stay away from wicked people like Zacchaeus.
 - d. **How did Jesus see Zacchaeus?** He was a son of Abraham and one who was lost! Contrast.
 - 2. Let's find another tax collector - **Luke 18:10-14** a Pharisee and a tax collector who go up to the temple to pray.
 - a. Pharisee prays - God, I'm glad I'm not like the

- robbers, people doing evil, adulterers, and even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give 10% of everything I get.
- b. Tax collector beats himself, prays from a distance: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.
 - c. **Who does God approve of?** Jesus said the tax collector went home more justified before God; he humbled himself before God.
3. **James 2:1** tells us that **we, who are believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, must not show favoritism.** Rich person comes in a gold ring and very nice clothes. Poor man with filthy old clothes. **Do we favor the one over the other? What does God do? What does God see?**
 4. **1 Samuel 16:1** God speaks to Samuel to anoint one of Jesse of Bethlehem's sons as king. First son - Samuel thinks: this is the one. God says no. **The Lord does not look at what people look at, because people look at the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.**
 5. David later says in When we go to prayer, we follow what **Psalms 139:23** says - **Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**
 6. In my prayer closet, it does not matter what I look like, what matters is that God sees what is in me, my thoughts, what I do wrong, my hurts and habits. (We'll come back to these later.)
 7. Let's pause now, **is there anything that you know God sees that is keeping you away from the closet? Are you willing to let it go? [pause]**

III. **Let's go to the closet.**

- A. **Ooh, I forgot, you might be asking, why a closet?**
- B. King James Version - that's the version I read from as a child. The Greek word means storeroom or inner room. The New International Version, which we read earlier, says to go into your room and close the door, where people are not watching you. This is the main point - avoid the show and get away from people. We want answers from God, not people.
- C. **Does it have to be a room?**
 1. **Mark 1:35** **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.**
 2. **Luke 5:16** **But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.**
 3. One of those lonely places is mentioned in the next chapter,

walk back and forth at night on a basketball court. The Bible speaks of bowing down, being prostrate or completely lying down on our faces.

2. For today we will sit down - it will be easier to continue our discussion on prayer.

VI. How do I start praying?

- A. **How do I start to pray?** Most people in our culture have heard of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus teaches this to his disciples when they ask him how to pray. We recite this prayer sometimes in a lot of churches. I'm sure this prayer will be discussed more in-depth later in the year, but it will help us to jumpstart our praying.
- B. **Matthew 6:9 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ..."**
- C. We are confronted with several things immediately as we start to pray. First is our relationship in praying.
 1. Jesus says "our Father." **Christians have the same Father as Jesus? Do you know God as Father?**
 2. When Jesus rose from the dead, he speaks to Mary at the tomb in **John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" If you don't know him or are uncomfortable with him as Father, you can ask him now, we're in the closet - God, show me how you are my Father. Show me the love that you have as a Father.**
 3. Now **listen... [pause]** Part of praying is listening for God's response. **Is he bringing something to mind about being your father?** You can tell him thanks in response.
 4. What if you already know him as a Father? You might ask him to reveal something else of himself. In the Bible we read about God's names and attributes. We can ask Jesus to show us more of himself.
 5. We can respond to what he shows us - **Psalm 118:28-29**
Thou art my God, and I will praise thee:
Thou art my God, I will exalt thee.
O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good:
For his mercy endureth for ever.
- D. A second thing that we are confronted with in the first part of the Lord's Prayer is that God's name is holy; and God is holy. **How does that affect my praying?**
 1. In the book of **Isaiah, chapter 6**, Isaiah has a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne. There were these seraphim beings flying around calling out: **Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.**
 2. Isaiah's response is "woe is me." He saw God's holiness

- and his own ungodliness.
3. Remember **Exodus 3:5** when Moses was approaching a burning bush and God spoke to him to remove his shoes, because he was on holy ground.
 4. Earlier I had said that we enter the closet with my thoughts, what I do wrong, and my hurts and habits. Not a comfortable place to be in with the holy God, creator of the entire universe. Here is where we are confronted with our passions, lusts, pride, and sin. **What does that confrontation do to us?**
 - a. God doesn't leave us there in our wickedness with no hope. **1 John 1:9** tells us that **if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** God makes us holy. This is part of prayer. God talks to us to show us our sin, then offers his forgiveness.
 - b. It humbles us and shows us our dependence on God.
 - c. It helps us to show the same grace toward others. As we allow God to deal with our wickedness, we pray for God's grace for other people's wickedness. We pray for forgiveness for others and ourselves.
 5. Let's do that while we are in the closet. First ask for forgiveness for us, **listen... [pause] pray**. Now should we be talking to God about forgiveness for someone else, **listen ... [pause], pray**.

VII. Now while we're here in the closet, and we've prayed through some of our own problems, what else might we have a conversation with God about?

- A. **Do I pray for general or specific?** I pray for the whole world to be saved through Christ. **Will that prayer get answered?** No. It is not consistent with the Bible.
- B. I pray for family members, maybe that some will come to know Jesus. I pray for my wife that she might be all that God created her to be. I pray for those who have needs that I know about in church, at work, or whom I meet everyday.
- C. I talk to God about specific work problems. I am a software engineer and I do ask God for answers.
- D. I pray for our national leaders and national issues. I may disagree with what some of them do, but I am responsible to pray for them.
- E. Let's pray again while we are in the closet. I'd like to pray for Jeannine who has been dealing with some difficult health concerns. **Listen... [pause], then pray.**
- F. One of the things we continue to come back to is ask God in how to pray for situations. We should not assume that what we think is always what God wants to do.

- G. I want to pray and see things happen. One of the changes happens as I continue to pray and listen. God starts talking to me about what he wants to do. It may change my specific prayers about things. I then learn to pray according to his will.

VIII. Finished in the closet.

- A. What happens as a result of taking time to pray and communicate with our Father and Jesus his Son?
 1. We develop a rest in what is going on around us.
 2. We become thankful for what God has revealed about himself and what he has answered.
 3. We are changed. Remember the first story we talked about with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector? **What was his response from spending time with Jesus? Luke 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.**
- B. Now we go out, but with maybe a different perspective than when I started going into the closet. I may have understood something new about God or myself. I may have left an anxiety about a situation in God's hands. I might not have gotten anything specific, but I know that he hears me and loves me enough to lead me through the things I am praying about.
- C. **Matthew 6:6** what we have done in secret, we will start seeing God reward openly.

IX. Communion - The Communication Continues.

- A. **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,
²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."
²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."
²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- B. We just finished discussing an intimacy with God in prayer. We will continue that with our communion.
- C. Communion is open to all who know Christ, not just members in this church. If you do not know Jesus, it's real easy to resolve. Talk to him in prayer, confess your sin, and ask for his forgiveness and him to come into your life. Then communion becomes another part of your relationship with him, like prayer.
- D. Before we take communion, is there anything that would cause us to not want to come before God without getting resolved. Is there anything with someone else that should get resolved by prayer and forgiveness so there is a peace in taking communion? Let's take the time to **listen... [pause] and pray.**

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X. Closing Scripture/Benediction

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.