

STAY IN THE CLOSET, 3

Matthew 6:6

1. Something about fasting and prayer emphasis... Sensed that God wanted us to start this year with a new fervor to pray individually... Because we must be a praying church and a praying church only happens when there are praying people...

a. And our focus has been on the words of Christ Himself regarding personal prayer... This teaching comes out of the Sermon on the Mount... Matthew 6:5-6, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

b. Jesus said that your prayer life needs to be marked with spending time in the closet [staying in the closet]... Jesus was stressing here the importance of setting aside time to get alone with God every day, free from distractions...

c. And there He said, “Pray to your Father”, emphasizing the privilege of prayer... In the secret place of prayer is where we commune with God, Friend to friend; where we enjoy the depths of love that He shares with us and we with Him; where we as His children can climb up in His lap and talk to Him about any matter of concern and receive from Him the direction and help in handling those... Reason we have such a depth of intimacy is because Jesus Himself has given us access with His own blood into the throne room of grace... And He serves as Our High Priest, our Intercessor... He prays for us... Prayer is a privilege; not something we’ve GOT to do, but something we GET to do...

2. Jesus not only refers here to the place of prayer and the privilege of prayer, but He also said that about prayer that when you pray in secret, your Father Who sees you in the secret place will REWARD YOU OPENLY... With that promise He emphasizes the power of prayer...

a. Prayer moves God to reward in public what you pray in private... What you talk to Him about inside the closet affects what's going on outside the closet...

b. Many great examples of prayer giants in church history... [pic] But I actually had the opportunity of visiting the home of John Wesley, known for spending at least 2 hours a day in prayer... Adjacent to his bedroom was his prayer room... Described as “the power house of Methodism”... In the latter years of his life when he was unable to travel as much he spent time in prayer for the work and fueled its effectiveness on his knees in the prayer closet... Open reward (thousands of converts, churches planted, pastors raised up, etc) from secret prayer...

c. Power of secret personal prayer happens in many ways, but a close study of the word, “reward”, gives insight into what Jesus was promising regarding how God would respond to our prayers... Deal with the word, reward, various meanings of it...

3. Self-Developing Power

a. Jesus said that the Father would reward YOU openly... One expression of this action is that of paying wages for labor or receiving compensation for a particular effort... Same word used throughout the NT to refer to the receiving of eternal rewards for what we do for Christ... From this reference we accept that one's personal praying helps one personally...

b. Not even talking here about specific answers to prayer, but the personal improvement that the action of praying provides... The first objective of prayer is not that I get God to do what I want, but that God gets me to become what He wants... Prayer is about me lining up with His will and character...

Prayer will give me a heart like God's heart; it will make me sensitive to other's needs; it will make me hurt over the things that God hurts over, rejoice over what He delights in; love what He loves and hate what He hates... Prayer will open my eyes and sharpen my senses to what God is up to... Prayer changes me... Prayer will keep me out of temptation... Prayer will prepare me with the armor of God...

c. In another time years ago William Carey was in the business of cobbling shoes; yet he was a man of great prayer and did so to the extent that he was criticized for spending so much time in prayer that he neglected his business. He replied that supplication, thanksgiving, and intercession were much more important in his life than laying up treasures on earth. "Prayer is my real business!" he said. "Cobbling shoes is a sideline; it just helps me pay expenses." And it was out of that life of prayer that God developed him into a man of might faith who became the pioneer missionary

mightily used by God in India, Burma, and the East Indies.

d. Good place to remind you that there are hindrances to prayer that we must avoid... [Matthew 6:14-15] Jesus said that unforgiveness will keep us from touching heaven; if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you... [John 9:31] Disobedience will keep God from hearing you; "God does not hear sinners(lawbreakers)..." [Psalm 66:18] Hanging on to know sin will keep you from connecting with God in prayer, for if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me... [James 1:6-7] When you pray, you are to ask in faith and not doubt because the one who doubts says James will not receive anything from the Lord... Selfishness is a heart attitude that will impeded effective praying... James[4:3] again points out that some do not receive because they pray not for self development but for selfish desires...

d. First reward of prayer is power it has on me for good...

4. Fruit-Producing Power

a. This word “reward” also has the meaning of bearing fruit... Same word used in Revelation [22:2] to describe the tree of life yielding its fruit every month... Prayer keeps you alive spiritually and the more you do so and the more fervent you are in doing so the more yielding of fruit you will see...

b. Don't ever give up praying about a matter... Yielding fruit takes time and sometimes fruit from prayer takes time as well... You keep asking and seeking and knocking until God gives the answer...

Rhoda Fritz testimony or David Brainerd Story... D Brainerd was missionary to the Native Americans in 1700's... Physically weak, suffered tuberculosis, but he knew how to pray and would do so entire days in the woods, praying for way to reach the Indians... On one occasion he spent days in prayer desiring for God to empower him so greatly that the people would not even be able to stand before him... Lord's answer: provided him with an interpreter who was so drunk that he could hardly stand at all... Power of God was so great on him that

preaching even through that drunk interpreter many of those Native Americans were saved...

5. Situation-Changing Power

a. This word also carries the meaning “to cause to happen” in particular the fulfillment of a vow... [Matthew 5:33] Jesus used this same word in context of talking about fulfilling oaths to the Lord...

b. When you pray, you need to stand on the promises that God hears and sees and will respond and somehow, someday show up to take over the situation... God's response to prayer is His fulfilling His promise to do so... Elijah prayed and no rain fell; he prayed again and it began to rain... and James [15:17ff] uses him as our example emphasizing that the “Prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective...”

c. Prayer always affects the spiritual atmosphere around us... It will energize the angels of God to bring that answer and bind the forces of darkness from

hindering... And often prayer will even change situations in the natural as the Father rewards openly in fulfilling His promises...

c. Matt Sessoms' testimony or Beverly Biggers' testimony...

6. Eternal-Affecting Power

a. Several places in the Scriptures this word is also used to mean giving an account for prior conduct... [Luke 16:2] Jesus so used it to describe the role of the steward... And we will one day give account to the Lord for the way we have lived, but as it relates to prayer the Father will reveal the record and reward that record openly...

b. There is an eternal dimension to every believer's legitimate prayer... John saw in Revelation[5:8] golden bowls full of incense, which he recognized as the prayers of the saints... [Revelation 8:3-4] And later in the book he sees those prayers offered unto the Lord just prior to the final outpouring of judgment upon this planet... That picture tells us that no

prayer is ever wasted... God is keeping record and retaining and will answer the heart cry of every saint when He brings final judgment upon sin...

Close with prayer... situation changed, fruit borne, personal change