

3rd Sunday of Lent - Behind Closed Doors With the Father

by Michael Flowers

Michael Flowers emphasizes the importance of private prayer and communion with God, encouraging believers to seek His kingdom first amidst life's distractions and anxieties.

Duration: 21:56

Scripture: Psalm 76:1, Psalm 78:22, Matthew 6:5-13, Matthew 6:16-18

Topics: "Lent"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being in the presence of God through prayer. He encourages listeners to close the door on distractions and anxieties and simply rest in God's love and trust. The sermon is based on Matthew chapter six, where Jesus addresses the practices of Christian community, including alms giving, prayer, and fasting. The speaker warns against being like hypocrites or pagans in prayer and emphasizes the need to seek God and prioritize communion with Him above all else.

Transcript

If you're following along in the scriptures today, you might want to turn to Matthew chapter 6. And if you're looking at your cell phone, I'll assume that you're reading your Bible. Moving through chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses three practices of Christian community. Almsgiving, which we spoke about the last couple of weeks, prayer, and fasting.

Jesus assumes that all Christian communities will practice these disciplines and wants to address both disorders and pure ways of engagement. So verse 5 begins, when you pray. And that phrase is, throughout this passage, is repeated three times.

It's a beautiful thing. It's a privilege, right? We can hear the good news in these words today. But Jesus is giving a warning.

He says, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. So he's going to deal with the hypocrites, which are typically the Jewish community of whom he's a part. And then he's going to deal with the pagans.

So he covers everybody. Of course, hypocrisy is universal. Don't be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray.

They love to pray, dot, dot, dot, to be seen by others. That's the gist of the prayer, is to be seen by others. Get a life, right? Get a life.

Such attention is their reward. That's all they get. The impulse to be seen exposes a blurred vision of oneself and one's God.

We have a blurred vision of who we are and who God is. For sure, this prayer originates from a deep need, a deep need, which is fulfilled by the approval of others. The father's love, his approval, acceptance alone is not in view.

So Jesus wants to draw us alone with the father. He says, but when you pray the second time here, 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, your father will reward you.

Can you imagine? And then it says, and when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans. They think they will be heard because, OK, here's the key of their view of God. They think God can be manipulated.

They think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your heavenly father knows what you need before you ask. Your heavenly father knows what you need before you ask.

And so Jesus is saying that prayer is fundamentally communication between a safe, secure, fully loved and accepted child and the heavenly father. You say again, Jesus is saying that prayer is fundamentally communication, fellowship between a safe, secure, fully loved and accepted child. And her heavenly father.

And so if we know the father already knows what we need beforehand, why should we ask? I mean, why prayer? He already knows. He cares. What's the heart of prayer then? What is the heart of prayer? What is the heart behind the asking? Unlike the many pagan gods who might be manipulated and appeased by impressive words, the father's love is perfect and complete without them.

He longs for us. Jesus is trying to show us in his relationship with his father. He longs for us.

He loves us deeply. He would ask that we would come and ask him what he already knows. Isn't that amazing? Because he just wants to be with us.

Now, there are many other reasons for prayer, but I think fundamentally God loves our company through Jesus Christ, his son. Through Jesus Christ, we've been made sons and daughters and been restored to the father's favor. Reconcile to the father.

It's a beautiful thing. That's the gospel. And our own sense of need may not be what we actually need.

Anyway, often I'm caught up in petitions that really aren't the point. Apart from all the many sources of anxiety, which often populate my prayer, perhaps the true need is to simply be in his presence. Shut the door and just be there.

Wordless, speechless. You know, when a couple gets to that place, when they really love each other and they trusted each other for a long time, they really don't have to say a lot. They can just sit there and just sort of know and rest in the love of the other.

It's a beautiful thing just to be in the presence of love, trust, security. Prayer is closing the door on all of our distractions. He says, close the door, close the door.

That's a big phrase. Close the door. You walk out of here today and you start getting distracted or anxious or fearful or whatever it may be.

Close the door. The chapter ends with addressing our distorted way of striving through life. Anxious.

Fearful of lack. What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear for the pagans? Here they are again. Those poor pagans for the pagans run after these things.

Who are the pagans? Those who are hooked in the bondage of sin and death and have no sense of being loved by the one true heavenly father. Even heretical attempts at distorting God's heavenly fatherhood as mere misogynistic patriarchy. He repeats, your heavenly father knows that you need them.

He says it again right there. Your heavenly father knows that you need them. The mission of Jesus was to show us the father.

Heavenly patriarchy brings freedom to the captives, but seek first his kingdom, the father's kingdom. Seek first his kingdom, says Jesus, and his righteousness. And all these things will be given to you as well.

It doesn't say don't seek all those things. It says seek first his kingdom. A lot of times we read that as Jesus being a bit irresponsible with real life.

No, he's saying live a prioritized life. Prioritize all of these things under God's reign. First of all, seek God, then attend in communion with him to the issues of life.

That's how you do it. He makes it very simple. And so he knows you need them.

But do we know that we need him far more than we need those things? That's the big question for us always. We have to slow down. The only time you're going to really get in touch with that is to go in your closet, shut the door and realize, wow, look what I've been missing.

Perspective in the presence of the Lord. Perspective comes. We're insane without the presence of God.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins, right? Deadly insane apart from the presence of God. I like that Psalm 76, I believe, or Psalm 78. You know, I was like a brute beast.

I'm just pulling this out of my memory, so forgive me. But I was like a brute beast for you. Why do the unrighteous prosper? The psalmist asks.

And he says, and then I came into the house of the Lord and I realized therein. Perspective changes when we seek first the kingdom of God. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

I love that phrase. The anxiety of the future. It worries about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. That's Jesus saying that. And so Jesus is saying prioritize your life or your life will be disordered and filled with anxiety.

If you do not seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, you will be anxious. Jesus is not saying never plan or think about the future. He's not saying that.

Short and long term planning is essential. We know this. He's saying take no anxious thought about tomorrow.

He's saying don't let anxiety influence your decision making. And how do you get rid of anxiety when it builds up in all of us on a daily basis, really? It's coming at you. We all know this.

We feel it. We fight it. And it's the fight of faith really is come into silence and solitude with God.

And get rid of the anxiety. That's the only way to get rid of it. Jesus is saying seek first his kingdom and all these things will come and let's fall into place.

So in light of knowing that we are beloved children of a loving father who already knows our true need. Reconciliation actually with God in one another humanity. He says that we should pray like this.

And I'm going to just cover one line of the words prayer today. Our father. Our father.

Prayer in secret is never alone. Because he's our father. Bonhoeffer says this in life together.

And there's a chapter in life together. If you don't read anything out of that, if you can get a hold of the day alone, that chapter. I reread it a couple of times this week and I just thought, wow, what a spiritual master.

Wow. This is like reading the church fathers. Bonhoeffer says this.

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community because you will use the community in place of the one true God. Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Any comments on that? Get a couple of paragraphs there.

I want you to go get the books. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. There is no isolated spirituality, but there is no community without communion with the father.

So there is no true Christian community without Christian community. Those who make up Christian community being involved in their own sense of silence and solitude and shutting the door. Because when you come out and pass through that door into this into community and into the world, you're going to be a new person.

It's like some people take a shower once a year, whether they need it or not. Right. It's kind of like prayer life for certain people.

Right. I pray once a year whether I need it or not. But man, that kind of spirituality stinks.

It really does. There's an odor about that. And that's why daily we have the daily rhythms of prayer going in.

It's coming under the fount of grace and being cleansed and clean through confession. And thus, silence and solitude is the soil condition for receiving the word implanted. Silence and solitude, getting to that place.

And I'm not talking about unreasonable time here. I'm talking maybe grab 10 minutes, 15 minutes or more. But encounter the word implanted.

Encounter the word implanted. And that's not an emotional experience. You don't have to feel anything to encounter the word implanted.

Your emotions should never validate your prayer life. Read the Psalms again. And so we are going through sacred space.

It's a little book that teaches us to take a small passage of Scripture out of the Gospels, basically. And before we read that, it takes us through a preparatory time. The first is the presence of God.

So you shut the door and you begin to breathe the presence of God. It's like breathing heavenly air. And you just breathe that in and then you realize, yeah, thank you.

I'm not in the presence of my anxiety now. I'm in the presence of God. Oh, it's such a difference, isn't it? Yeah.

And then it takes you through a few other short little exercises just to center yourself so that when you read over the word, you can receive the word implanted. Rather than just reading it, zipping it, closing it, and didn't get anything out of it, right? You ever had devotions like that? Yeah. It can happen if we don't take the time.

And that doesn't mean that a lot of our devotions won't be dry. Those are effective devotions. A lot of people quit because they're dry.

That's when not to quit. That's when to press in. That's what Lent is trying to train us in.

Now, in *The Day Alone*, Bonhoeffer covers three things which are very similar to Sacred Space. He has three little sections called Scripture, Meditation, Prayer, and Intercession. And you begin with Scripture, Meditation.

And that isn't like reading *The Daily Office* necessarily. That's public worship, hearing the word of God in public prayer. And it's a lot of reading and it's a lot of Scripture.

That's not necessarily the best form of private Scripture meditation, in my experience. It's letting one little passage or one word sometimes, or a sentence or a phrase, just focusing in on that and letting the word implanted grip your heart. And you know when it happens.

And then you begin to pray, Our Father. You begin to worship Him and describe your needs. And then, intercession, Bonhoeffer says, is so critical for a Christian community that all of us, not just the pastor, but all of us, I'm going to send you a list of names.

And I want you to get familiar with everybody through prayer, praying for one another. And just print it off or have it some way pulled up on your cell phone or whatever you use for your devotions. And spend some time praying for, specifically, for one another.

And then you say, I don't know what to pray for. That means you don't know your community. Get to know your community.

Get to know their needs. Get to know their struggles. And let's be honest with one another about those so that we can be prayed for, right? It's a beautiful thing.

And Bonhoeffer says that's the downfall of Christian community when that's not happening. We are supported by the prayers of one another. And you just read Paul again.

And throughout his letters, he's constantly saying, Pray for me, pray for me. The big apostle is saying, No, pray for me because I'm praying for you. And I would say, Pray for me and I'll pray for you.

It's that reciprocal prayer. Pray for one another. Mutual, back and forth.

Now I'm going to end with a story by D.L. Moody. You may know this. It's a really common story.

And it really gripped me as I was thinking about intercession. D.L. Moody was an incredible evangelist in American history. He had a list of a hundred of his non-believing friends that he had written down.

And he had a hundred non-believing friends. It's amazing. And every day he would pray for those hundred people to come to know Christ.

And at his funeral, by the time he died, 96 of them had come to Christ. And by the end of his funeral, the other four had come to Christ. Isn't that amazing? I just want to encourage you that your prayers matter.

There's a lot of things that matter, but your prayers matter. And don't base your prayers on how you feel and how effective they might be. That's not for you to judge.

You have no ability to know that. The times and the seasons are in the Father's hands, you know. There's just a lot of things that we don't have to know.

Just be obedient. Not begrudgingly obedient, but lovingly obedient. Serve the Lord with gladness.

Pray to him with gladness. Knowing that he knows all of our needs before we ask him. That's our Heavenly Father, right? The Father, all I can say is, and I'm not in touch with what I'm about to say as much as I want to be.

I'm growing in this. But the Father loves you more than you can ever imagine. And you've got to know that to come to him.

You've got to know that and ask him, I want to know that. Because Paul's praying, I want to know you. I want to know you in the fellowship of your sufferings.

We need that cry coming from the basis that I am loved. More than I love myself, I am loved by God. And we create this beautiful friendship with the Lord.

I don't call you slaves any longer, Jesus said. I call you friends. Abraham was a friend of God.

And through Jesus Christ we can all be friends. Because he's reconciled us to the Father. That's what's so beautiful about the gospel.

And I'm so thankful that Paul tells us in Romans 8 that we don't know how to pray. Isn't that great? I went up to it. Prayer warriors know they don't know how to pray.

I don't know how to pray. But the Spirit prays and intercedes inside of us with groanings too deep for words. Prayer is the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Bringing us before the one mediator before God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ who is our great high priest. And all of our prayers go through him.

Whoever lives to make intercession for the saints. It's a beautiful thing, isn't it? So we don't have to know how to pray. We don't have to be good at it.

I'm not good at it. I don't think we'll ever be good at it. We just need to do it.

But do it out of this basis of knowing that our heavenly Father already knows. And he loves to be with you. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Let's stand together and we will recite the Nicene Creed.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28628.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-flowers/3rd-sunday-of-lent-behind-closed-doors-with-the-father/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net