

Organizing Your Prayer Closet

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father . . ." (Matthew 6:6).

A word that stands out to me when reading Matthew 6:6 is the word *closet*. When thinking about prayer and how to strengthen my prayer life, I compared organizing a literal closet in my home to organizing the private, personal prayer life. Cleaning out my literal closet involves cleaning out cobwebs, throwing away things that do not fit or work, and organizing the contents. Likewise, there are times in the Christian's life when he or she should take a good look at the prayer closet, throwing out what is not working, and clearing out spiritual cobwebs.

#1 – Find or create a prayer closet

If none of the rooms in my home had closets, I would find it necessary to have closets built. If you have never created a prayer closet, now is the time to begin. You cannot organize something you have not started. First, consider where your prayer closet will be. A prayer closet is a place where you can have private, personal prayer time with God. Some places to consider: a literal closet, your bedroom, or your car. Are there other places in your house where you can go to be alone with God? You might have more than one prayer closet. My favorite place to pray is in my bedroom, but there have been times when driving my car that I have made that a prayer closet as well. Most important, create your closet or if you already have one established, find it so the organizing can begin.

#2 – Take everything out of your closet

There have been times when my closets were so full that it seemed difficult to see the closet for all the "stuff" that was in it. The best way to clean and organize these closets was to take everything out first. If you have a prayer closet, now is the time to take a look at what is in it. How do you pray? When do you pray? Are there hindrances to prayer in your prayer closet?

If praying whenever and wherever (no established prayer closet) is not working well, throw that out. If praying late at night makes you fall asleep before you are finished praying, throw that out. If silent prayer makes it too easy for your mind to wonder, consider throwing that out. This lesson is a good time to evaluate what exactly is in your prayer closet.

#3 – Timing

Before cleaning out a literal closet, timing is important. It would not be wise to begin cleaning (taking everything out) right before going to bed or a few minutes before leaving for an appointment or a church service. Tiredness or having my mind on what I need to do in the next few minutes is distracting. Thus, there are better times than others to work on a closet.

Are there better times than others to pray? While looking at the contents of your prayer closet, ask yourself these questions: "When do I pray? Do I have a regular prayer life (same time of the day)? Would praying at approximately the same time every day help with procrastination?" Just as the Old Testament Israelites brought their best to sacrifice to God, are you bringing your best to your prayer closet? Are you bringing a tired body and a cluttered mind? Would another time of the day be better?

Ask the Lord to help you to determine the best time for you to pray. Do not become discouraged if you have failed in this area. God will help you if you ask. Once you find what works best for you, do it!

#4 – Preparation

Before beginning a literal cleaning and organizing project, there are a few preparations that I need to make. There are cleaning supplies that need to be gathered. I might need to put on work clothes. Sometimes I need to mentally prepare myself as well.

When I was a child, knowing how to clean did not come naturally. I had to be taught by my mother how to clean and organize a home. Jesus' disciples' request in Luke 11:1 lets us know that we need to be taught how to pray: "Lord, teach us to pray." How do you learn how to pray? It is important that parents teach their children at a young age how to pray at mealtime, at bedtime, and for scrapes and cuts. As children get older, it is important that they pay attention to Sunday school lessons, preached messages, and family devotions. These are opportunities to learn more about prayer. Other ways to learn how to pray are to read good, spiritual books on prayer and also talk to people who have the gift

of prayer.

Before praying, check your attitude. Are you coming to prayer with a humble attitude or do you have a proud attitude as the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12? Are you praying only because you know you should or because you want to? Do you have a thankful heart or do you look at your prayer closet as a supply closet, a place to get whatever you need? Your attitude will determine whether or not your time in your prayer closet is pleasing to God.

For me, writing a list of things to do while working in a literal closet is the most efficient way to get things accomplished. Likewise, I have created a prayer journal that I often take with me to my prayer closet. In this journal are lists of prayer requests of unsaved friends and loved ones, names of people who are sick, and special burdens I am concerned about. By reading through this list before praying (and sometimes while praying), I can remember many needs that I would otherwise forget.

#5 – Shut the Door

When cleaning and organizing my literal closet, one of the greatest hindrances is interruptions. The phone might ring or I might hear the ding of a text message. When my children were younger, they liked to make a mess or whatever I was trying to straighten up. There were times when it was necessary to literally shut the door.

When Jesus told us how to pray, He said "shut the door." How do you shut the door of your prayer closet? You might literally shut the door if it is in your bedroom or closet. But more importantly is that you shut the doors in your mind. In other words, close out all thoughts unrelated to prayer.

Something to consider: are there certain types of entertainment (such as, music, books, social media, texting) that make shutting the door more difficult? Consider praying earlier in the day before too many things enter into your mind that crowd out the attitude of prayer.

#6 – A Purpose

Before cleaning out a literal closet, I must have a goal or purpose. Why am I working in this closet? What do I hope to see accomplished? Usually, it is to organize the closet's contents for use later on. Then I can more easily find what I need.

Once you have organized your prayer closet for the purpose of finding what works and what does not, you need to think about the goal of having personal, private prayers. The answer to the question "Why am I in this closet?" is to pray, but "What or who should I pray for?" God plainly answers this in His Word. He told us to pray for:

- **One Another:** ". . . pray one for another" (James 5:16). Do not pray self-centered prayers—prayers only for things you need. Pray for the needs and burdens of friends, family, and people in your congregation.
- **Your Enemies:** "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). *Despitefully* means "insult, accuse falsely, threaten." Jesus said to pray for these people. You are to pray for people who treat you badly and make fun of you.
- **God's Will:** "After this manner therefore pray ye . . . Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). Ask God for direction concerning the many choices you have to make in life. Ask Him to help you to understand His will and to make a way for you to do His will.
- **All Men and Those in Authority:** "I exhort therefore, that . . . prayers . . . be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority . . ." (1 Timothy 2:1-2). In your daily prayers, it is good to pray for your pastor, your Sunday school teacher, your school teachers, your boss, and the leaders of your country.

When I have finished cleaning and organizing a literal closet, I like to take a few minutes to look around and appreciate what has been accomplished. Is there anything else that needs to be taken care of? Did I miss something? In the same manner of thinking, consider spending a few minutes of quiet time in your closet after you are finished praying. What did it feel like to have actually talked to the One Who created the Universe? Is there something God wants to say to you? He often speaks in a still, small voice, so listen carefully and quietly. He wants to talk to you as you spend time in your prayer closet.

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