



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting

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INTIMACY WITH GOD

How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you have an “intimate” relationship with Him? This is God’s goal for your prayer life. He longs to establish an intimate relationship with you.

Because of His love, He has saved you through His Son, Jesus Christ. He has opened the door to His presence. He desires that you get alone and get with Him. He wants you to know Him. He longs to work in every area of your heart and life. He desires to cultivate a unique personal relationship with you—a relationship like no other in your life.

God longs for you to pursue an intimate relationship with Him. This is perhaps the hardest lesson that I’ve had to learn. For most of my walk with God, I judged my relationship with Him by what I did for Him. I call this the “activity” trap. The more I did for God, the closer I thought I was to God. You know, if my schedule was filled with activities for the Lord, it must mean that I am pleasing Him. Yet, He desires intimacy before activity. He is concerned first about what I am before Him and what I do for Him second. Activity has never been and never will be an acceptable substitute for intimacy with God.

God began changing me concerning this as I read **Revelation 2** one night. I was preparing a series of messages on the seven churches. As I was reading about the church of Ephesus, God convicted me in a way that I can’t describe with words. Jesus listed all the amazing activities of the church at Ephesus (2:1-3). Then Jesus declares

this stunning indictment, “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (**Revelation 2:4**). As I read that text, it felt as if a knife went through my heart. I had to put my Bible down and get on my knees. All I could do is weep and say, “Lord, that’s me. Lord, that’s me.” That night God began the process of teaching me the necessity of intimacy with Him.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on intimacy with God. It is about cultivating this with God through prayer life. We will be looking at what it means to develop intimacy with God and practical steps on how to cultivate it in your relationship with Him. I do not write this as an expert. I still struggle with this issue. I’m just one struggler attempting to encourage and help you with the insights that God has given me through this struggle.

What Is Intimacy With God?

Intimacy with God has two basic aspects. On the one hand, it is growing in your knowledge and experience of God. On the other hand, it is you yielding more and more of yourself to Him so that He can change you and heal you. Intimacy consists of you getting to know God in a deeper way and surrendering to God so that He can do His work in your life.

These two aspects work off of each other. The more you grow in your understanding and experience of Him, the more you will surrender to Him and receive His powerful working in your

Dr. Kevin Meador, 595 Stratton Road, Decatur, MS 39327 (601) 635-2180

Email: prayercloset_1998@yahoo.com

OUR WEB PAGES: www.prayerclosetministries.org - www.kingdompraying.com

life. The deeper He works in your life, the greater your desire to know Him and His ways.

God desires that you grow in your understanding of who He is and His ways. He longs for you to pursue a growing knowledge of His character and purposes. At a conference, I was sharing with a young lady the necessity of deepening her understanding of God through the Word and prayer. As I was sharing this with her, she stopped me and said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. This is all that I really need to know." It is wonderful to know that God is love. It is one of His many characteristics. Yet, there is so much more to God than this. He is the great and mighty God! He yearns for you to grow in your understanding of Him and His ways. He desires that you experience Him in deeper and varied ways.

At the same time, God wants to change you. You need to grow in your understanding of God. However, God does not need to grow in His understanding of you; He knows you intimately and perfectly. Yet, what God desires is to change every area of your life. God knows what needs to be transformed in your life. He longs to show you what must be surrendered, what needs to be healed, and what needs to be repented of and cleaned out. He wants you to surrender to Him so that you can experience His loving and merciful transformation. God wants to shape and mold you according to His good and gracious plan for your life.

A good way of understanding intimacy is to compare it to access. When you trusted in Jesus Christ, you received access into the presence of God. Jesus Christ provided you the opportunity to enter God's presence, "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (**Ephesians 2:18**). Because of Jesus, you can have the confidence that God receives you, hears you, and answers you, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him" (**Ephesians 3:12**). The opportunity enter God's presence and to talk with Him is your privilege and right as a child of God, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh" (**Hebrews 10:19-20**).

Every believer has access into God's presence. Yet, not every believer experiences intimacy with God. Access is the open door into God's presence. Intimacy is taking advantage of this access or the open door to God's presence. It is entering God's presence, spending quality time with Him. Intimacy is to follow access. The privilege of prayer should lead the pursuit of intimacy with God.

As a believer, you are provided with the opportunity to know and experience God. Intimacy is taking advantage of this opportunity.

Why Should I Pursue Intimacy With God?

As a believer, you have access to God. Now that you have access, you should pursue intimacy with Him. The Bible offers numerous motivations for pursuing this intimacy. *First, salvation involves intimacy with God.* Jesus declares in **John 17:3**, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Jesus connects eternal life with **knowing** God and Himself. The word "know" in the text refers to more than an intellectual understanding of who God is. It refers to an intimate knowledge of God and His Son, Jesus. It is the personal encounter with God and the experience of Him in daily life. Jesus describes eternal life as a growing, intimate relationship with God. Salvation is not just for the forgiveness of sins. It is not just securing you a place in heaven. It is not just escaping eternal damnation in hell. These are the results of salvation. Salvation is entering into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus and repentance of sin. This relationship is to grow and mature as you walk with God. You were saved for the purpose of relationship. Your salvation is for the purpose of knowing and growing in the knowledge of your God. This should stir you to pursue intimacy with the God who has saved you.

Next, you should pursue intimacy with God because of the analogy of a father and child. God has revealed Himself to us in a variety of ways. Yet, what a glorious revelation that God is our Father! The Word of God declares that God is the Father of all who trust in Jesus, "For you are all

sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:26**). God is your Father. He longs to have the most intimate relationship of any that you could ever have. He has revealed Himself as a loving Father in order to teach you this. He has shown you that you are His child because He yearns for you to trust Him, love Him, and depend on Him as a child would. The analogy of a father and child as a picture of your relationship to God speaks volumes. Through this analogy, He is calling you to intimacy. Intimacy is the Father's calling for your life.

Third, Jesus commands believers to get alone and get with your Father. In **Matthew 6**, Jesus reveals the Father's desire, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (**Matthew 6:6**). Jesus is teaching that the Father wants you to get alone with Him, "go into your room, and when you have shut the door." He also wants you to focus on Him and spend time with Him, "pray to your Father who is in secret." It is the Father's will that you spend quality time with Him. This is His **passionate desire**. This command reveals your Father's heart: He longs to cultivate an intimate relationship with You. He yearns to have a relationship with You that can compare to no other in your life. **Matthew 6:6** is the Father's invitation to intimacy.

Your Father's desire to change you should motivate you to pursue intimacy. God loves you. He wants to change your life. He desires to mold you and shape you according to His purpose. This is His continual work in your life, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 1:6**). God's work of changing you takes place as you spend time with Him. When you pray and dig into His Word, God will unleash His purpose and power in your life. You cannot experience real change in your life if you are not pursuing intimacy with God. As you seek Him, He touches you and transforms your life.

The final motivation for seeking intimacy is God's care for you. God cares for you. He wants you to share your life with Him, including your cares and burdens. Listen to the heart of God,

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (**1 Peter 5:7**). Casting all your care on Him means committing your burdens and cares to Him. It is rolling them off of your shoulders into His mighty hand. This calls for intimacy. You will not be able to commit your problems to the Lord if you are not growing in intimacy with God. You will struggle to pour your heart out to the Lord if you are not spending consistent, quality time with Your Father. God's care for you should fill your heart with desire to pursue intimacy with Him.

The Enemies of Intimacy

In order to deepen your relationship, you will face a variety of enemies to intimacy. These enemies are overwhelming obstacles to a genuine, maturing relationship to God. These enemies are:

Enemy #1: Hypocrisy

In **Matthew 6**, Jesus warns us against this enemy of intimacy, "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 street, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (**Matthew 6:5**). The Pharisees prayed for a show. They did not pray from a sincere heart. They were not truly seeking God. There was no intimacy with God. This hypocrisy can invade your prayer life. It happens when you are not honest and authentic with God. You pray but it is not from the heart. You talk with God, but you do not share your heart with Him. You enter and leave His presence without committing your true feelings and concerns to Him. This will prevent you from having the kind of intimacy that God wants to share with you.

Enemy #2: Shallowness

Jesus also warns us about this enemy of intimacy by saying, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words" (**Matthew 6:7**). Shallow praying never leads to intimacy. Shallow praying is simply going through the motions of prayer. It is using the same old clichés and trite sayings and calling it prayer. The Father desires that you speak to Him from the heart. He wants to have a conversation

with you. He is not interested in you repeating the same phrases and sentences that you always have. Intimacy with God requires putting away clichés and trite sayings and speaking honestly and thoughtfully with God.

Enemy #3: Lack of Repentance

An unwillingness to deal with sin hampers a believer from experiencing intimacy with God, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear" (**Psalm 66:18**). God is holy; He hates sin. If you are going to pursue intimacy, then you must be willing to deal with sin. This includes confessing sin and rooting sinful habits out of your life. If you are not diligent to do these things, it will hinder you from developing a vital and rich relationship to God.

Enemy # 4: Low Self-Esteem

Some believers do not feel worthy of a deep and intimate relationship. They do not feel that God can love them and desire this kind of relationship with them. Their feelings of unworthiness limit their relationship to God. It has to be remembered that the righteousness of Jesus makes us worthy to be in a relationship with God. We are not in a right relationship with God because of who we are or what we have done. We are in a right relationship with God and have access into His presence because we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ . . . for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (**Galatians 2:16**).

Enemy #5: Unhealthy Dependence on Others

Intimacy with God is hindered when a believer depends on others more than on God. God longs to be the One to whom you run, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (**Proverbs 18:10**). God desires that you turn to Him before you turn to others. He longs to be the One you cry out to in all the circumstances of your life. When you depend more on others than on God, it will hold you back from experiencing a deeper relationship with God. It can limit your experience of God's faithfulness and love.

Enemy #6: Complacency

If you are not willing to work at your relationship with God, you will not experience intimacy with Him. In a relationship, you have to work at the relationship. There must be diligence and commitment to the other person. You must spend time with the other person. There has to be a sharing of your hearts and lives. The same is true in your relationship with God. If your relationship with Him is going to grow and mature, you must commit yourself to seeking Him. There has to be a willingness on your part to open yourself to God and share your heart and life with Him, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (**Revelation 3:20**).

Practical Steps For Pursuing Intimacy With God

In this section, I would like to offer some practical steps that you can take to pursue greater intimacy with God. These are suggestions that you can use to help you cultivate your relationship with God. As you read through these, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in the steps that you need to take for your relationship with God. He may guide you to use these or He may help you develop steps from these. The key issue is to take practical steps to prepare yourself to for greater intimacy with God.

- *Express your desire to God.* Share with God your passionate desire to know Him more intimately. Declare your longing for Him to work in your life in a deeper more powerful way. Plead **Psalm 42:1-2**, **Psalm 63:1**, and **Psalm 84:2**, asking Him to grant you greater intimacy with Him. Use these verses to express your longing for Him and His work in your life.
- *Pray that God will reveal Himself to you in fresh and new ways.* Ask God to increase your understanding of His character and His ways. Plead with Him to teach you about Himself and His will. Claim the promise of **Hebrews 8:10-12**. Ask that you will be delivered from the sin of the ignorance of God and His ways (**Hosea 4:1**).