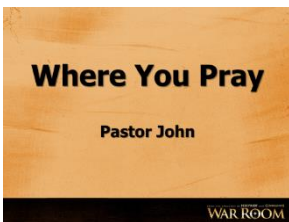


## Where You Pray

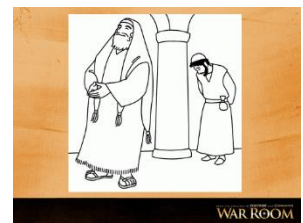
January 15, 2017

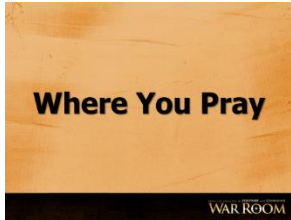
### MATTHEW 6:5-8

*<sup>5</sup> When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward. <sup>6</sup> When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you. <sup>7</sup> When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. <sup>8</sup> Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.*



Last week we began our prayer series by looking at the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector from Luke 18. I think this teaching also provides us some insight into this week's focus: *where you pray*. In large part, where we pray has to do with both the focus of our prayers and with our ability to focus during our prayers. If you recall, for the Pharisee, he wanted to stand up front and for everyone to see that he was praying. It was much more than a prayer between God and a man. On the other hand, we have the prayer of the tax collector. He stands off in the corner. He will not even look up to heaven because of the guilt of his sin. It is a simple prayer between a man and his God.

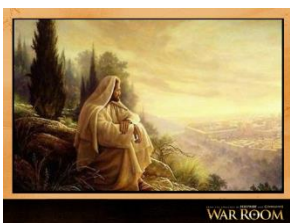




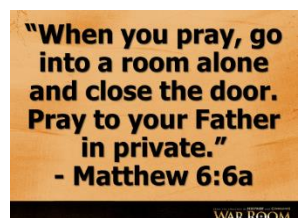
Last week, during the children's message at the 11:00 service, we talked a little bit about *how* we pray. I was instructed that I should fold my hands, close my eyes, and bow my head.

Destiny was a very good teacher! Although we do not find these or any other specific instructions in scripture concerning the 'one' correct prayer posture, doing these things does help us give reverence to God. In many cultures, it has always been a cultural sign of respect to bow to one in authority. Praying in this posture also has the added benefit of helping us focus in on the object of our prayers: God. When we bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands, we are removing distraction and temptation. We are choosing to shut out the world. This is akin to Miss Clara's 'war room' in the movie. Even though she lived alone in the house, she still chose to enter the small closet, to close the door, and to focus in on God. For each of us, the 'where' we pray should be equally important.

In the Bible, Jesus modeled a prayer life that included 'shutting the door'. In the gospels, we have many examples of Jesus going off by Himself or going on a little further to find private space to pray to God. In each case, Jesus was creating a space where He could be alone with God. Jesus was creating a place where He could find personal intimacy with God. We too need to find this place.



Our key verse today, the first half of verse six from our passage, reads, "*When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private*". We are instructed to specifically be intentional about where we pray.



We are told to go into a room alone, to close the door, and to pray to our Father. There are three key reasons we need to find a quiet and private place to pray to our Father. When we choose to find a quiet and private place when we pray, we are able to remove distractions and concerns, we are able to focus on God, and we are able to make God and our relationship with God the priority.



The first reason to find a quiet and private place to pray is that here we are able to remove distractions and concerns.

This is illustrated in the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee sought a public and attention-grabbing place to pray. He wanted the focus to be on himself. His focus was far from God. The Pharisee's concern was those watching him pray. His mind was full of distractions and earthly concerns. The tax collector stood off in a private place, bowed his head, prayed privately to his God. He separated himself from the crowd. The focus for the tax collector was on God alone.

You and I are surrounded by numerous distractions and things that can easily draw our attention. When we find a private place – whether a closet, a quiet space in the basement, an early morning seat at the dining room table, a chair out in the shed, wherever – then we are better able to shut off the world and its distractions. We can focus on God. When there is no one else around to impress or to worry about, all of our attention can be on God. Time and surroundings are also things we need to consider. For example, if I were to try and pray at the dining room table at noon or about 5:30, I would have a hard time praying. Others sitting there eating a meal might be a distraction. If I were to tote my cell phone out with me to the couch early in the morning, the

buzz and dings might cause my focus to shift as well. By intentionally creating time and space to spend in quiet and private prayer, we are choosing to focus on God alone. Even in our modern tech-savvy culture, we are told how we should all put down our phones while driving, at dinner, in theaters, in church, and when engaged in quality time with others. When you silence the ringer or eliminate the noise in order to focus on the face in front of you, it's an illustration of the other person's worth. Is God worthy of your time and focus?

**In a quiet and private place to pray, we are able to:**

**1) Remove distractions and concerns.**

**2) Focus on God.**

WAR ROOM

The second reason to find our quiet and private time and place when we go to God in prayer is that we are able to shift our focus off of ourselves and others and then to focus fully onto God. When we 'shut the door' we can become "a little less self-conscious and a little more God-conscious". In private prayer, we can simply concentrate on God alone. We are better able to speak to God when God is our sole focus. We also can hear God better. When we intentionally find quiet and private alone time with God, we allow the Holy Spirit more of a chance to reveal who we are, who God is, and how to walk in the light of His Word. When we focus on God alone and when we allow our minds to clear of all the distractions and concerns of life, then we are more likely to connect deeply with God. This happens best when we are in a quiet, secluded place. It is here that we can forget ourselves and focus fully on God and our relationship with God.

**In a quiet and private place to pray, we are able to:**

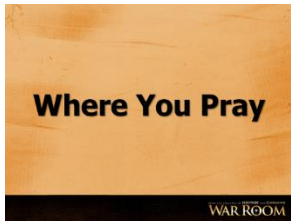
**1) Remove distractions and concerns.**

**2) Focus on God.**

**3) Make God the priority.**

WAR ROOM

The third reason we need to find a quiet and private place to pray is that we are then able to make God the priority. When there is no one and nothing else around, we are able to fully concentrate on God and His will for our life. When we enter



into a quiet and private place, it is easier to be honest and open with God. We can pour out the things on our minds and in our hearts when there is no one else to hear or to judge.

In this quiet, private place, we are also more likely to hear God speak. We are also able to submit to God's voice and guidance better when that is all we are concentrating on. Again, Jesus set the example for us.

Jesus spoke of God dwelling in the 'secret place' and Jesus himself often found this secret place. The Word speaks not only of God "seeing in secret", but also speaks of God being in the secret. Though God is everywhere, we are more inviting and aware of His presence in the secret place. It is in quiet prayer that we discover our mind is actually scattered and divided in the first place. When we become aware of His presence and beg God to eliminate our double-mindedness and give us an undivided heart, it helps to know Him, to honor Him, and to surrender to His will above all else.



In the movie *War Room*, we get a glimpse of Miss Clara's quiet and private place to pray. It is a space that is her "most favorite room in the house". It is a three foot by six foot

closet. As a simple closet, it would not be anybody's favorite room in any house. But Miss Clara has transformed this room. It has been her quiet and private space for many years. In this clip from the movie, we gain a sense of why this is her favorite room in the entire house. Please watch. [Play video.]

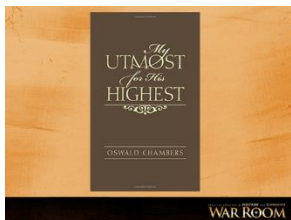
Miss Clara has transformed this room. It is a place of prayer. It is a room that has transformed many lives as well. Through faithful and honest and obedient

prayer, Miss Clara has won many victories. Her prayers have brought much glory to God. Later in the movie, when a couple is looking at the house, the man opens the door to the now empty closet and walks in. He walks out and then back in again. Then he stands at the doorway, staring into the closet. When Elizabeth asks if everything is alright, he says, "Yes" but continues to stand at the door. She then asks, "What it is then"? The man, a retired pastor, says, "This room has been bathed in prayer". He can sense the power of prayer that has been 'baked in' over Miss Clara's years and years of praying. It is a powerful scene and a great testimony to Elizabeth about the power of prayer.

For you and I, it can be a challenge to carve out time each day to spend our quiet and private time with God. We must make it a priority. Many years ago, when I first felt called to establish a time and place to enter into a quiet and private time alone each day with God, it was hard to get started. I realized that with three young children in the house, I must find a space when they were not needing my time and attention. When I looked at my teaching and coaching responsibilities, my commitments to church, and the time needed to be a husband and father, I quickly realized the early morning was the only time I could establish. At first, it was hard to get up a half hour early to pray. Once school started, there was the morning practices once or twice a week. When I had to be at school at 6:15, that meant getting up really early. Gradually I came to love my quiet time. Soon I found myself also reading the Upper Room and then a devotional, in addition to praying. Then one year I started a devotional that had a journaling component to it. I enjoyed thinking and writing about the Word and how it applied to my life. In not too many years, I found that my quiet and private time required an hour and a half each morning so that I could

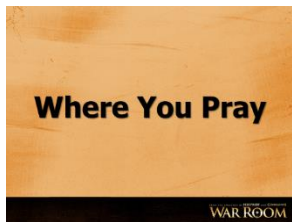
pray and read and pray and journal. It is a time I dearly love and now guard fiercely. It is often the most meaningful part of my day. At first, in those early months, it was hard to remain steadfast and consistent. But God worked in and through this time to help me connect to Him in ways I never would have without this sacred time each morning.

To do this day in and day out is not without its challenges. Yes, there are times when it is harder than others, like those early morning practices were. Over the years, I have found that mission trips are one of the hardest times to continue to carve out this time. On a typical trip we are up until 11:30 or midnight each day. This is not my normal bed time. Then the next day usually begins at 6:30 or 7:00. It gets hard, after a few days, to get up at 5:00 so I can have my quiet and private time with God to start my day. And then there is the challenge of finding a quiet and private space. We commonly sleep on the Fellowship Hall floor or in a Sunday school classroom. So on mission trips I have found myself in a closet, hunkered down on the floor at the end of a dark hallway, and in a few other less than ideal places. Yet is such a special and important time of my day that I make sure to preserve this practice. I cannot imagine starting my day any other way.



In his daily devotional book, "My Utmost for His Highest", Oswald Chambers offers us the following insight on the importance of daily quiet and private time with God: *"Unless you learn to open the door of your life completely and let God in from your first waking moment of each new day, you will be working on the wrong level throughout the day. But if you will swing the door of your life fully open and*

*'pray to your Father who is in the secret place,' every public thing in your life will be marked with the lasting imprint of the presence of God."*



"Shutting the door" and spending time alone with God is a practice we all need. Shutting distracting doors in our mind so that we can solely focus on God is a discipline we must each embrace. Ultimately, when we shut out the world, we swing wide the entryway and we welcome the work that only God can do in our lives. It is a work we all need in our lives.

If you do not practice the discipline of daily and private prayer, I challenge you to try it out in the week ahead. To help you do this, I encourage you to pick up a copy of the *Upper Room* - it is located in the book and card rack at the back of the sanctuary. If you have tried reading the *Upper Room* and do not find it meaningful, I have also run off a few copies from Oswald Chamber's book for this week. These copies are on the counter in front of the cards. I encourage you to pick up a devotional to begin your quiet and private time each day. It will help you focus your mind on God. Read the Word and ponder it. Then spend some time in prayer. Your time can be in the morning. Or maybe it is at night, when the house gets quiet, just before you go to sleep. Maybe it is at lunch. The office or your classroom gets quiet and you can carve out a time to be with God. Whenever it is, find a time and place to get personal with God. It is a time that you too will come to guard and protect. As Miss Clara observed, "I see in you a warrior that needs to be awakened." Let us pray.



## **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How has your prayer life developed as your faith matured? How can it grow further?
- 2) What sacrifices might God be calling you to make to develop your own quiet and private prayer time each day?
- 3) When would your 'ideal' time be to pray? Where would it be? How can you make this happen so that prayer is an important part of your day?

"Miss Clara's Closet" Video Summary – Miss Clara opens the door to her closet and says, "This is where I do my fighting. I call it my war room". Elizabeth walks in and looks at all the papers on the walls. She asks, "So you wrote prayers for each area of your life?" She is quite astounded and very impressed. Miss Clara responds, "Yes, it is my prayer strategy. I have found that it is God's job to do the heavy lifting. My job is to seek him, trust him, stand on his word." Elizabeth stutters out, "I just don't have time..." Miss Clara's response to this is: "but you do have time to fight losing battles with your husband?" Elizabeth is quite convicted. Miss Clara asks for "just one hour a week – I can teach you the right way to fight..." As Elizabeth prepares to leave that day, Miss Clara offers her this encouragement: "I see in you a warrior that needs to be awakened."