

# “Come Out of the Closet!”

by Rev. Shane Rowe

**20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit <sup>is</sup> is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:20-26)**

This month, we discuss the need for every believer to do more than just pray and believe that God will answer. We need to demonstrate our faith through corresponding actions. In other words, if you believe, then act like it!

## ENTER IN

In Matthew 6:6, Jesus tells us that when we pray, we should enter into our closet and pray in secret. The word used here for “closet” is *Tameion* – an inner chamber or secret room. Jesus was speaking to His followers here about more than just prayer. He was talking about pride and exhibitionism.

In Matthew 6:5, Jesus had just discussed the “hypocrites” who loved to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners. These folks wanted people to see them pray! They wanted to show how spiritual and holy they were. Unfortunately, the term Jesus applied to them is “hypocrites”. They acted one way in public, but behaved quite differently in private. He said that these folks “have their reward”. In other words, they got the attention they wanted from men, but lost God’s attention when they behaved this way.

Conversely, or on the flip side, Jesus said that people who didn’t behave like the “hypocrites” and instead took care of their business in private, would be rewarded OPENLY by God. This portion of scripture is where we get the term, “Prayer Closet”. Some have taken this literally and actually go into their closets to pray. Others, have realized that Jesus meant to get away from the limelight/crowds and take some “You and God” time.

Now, even though Jesus was referring to being “anti-hypocrite” in our spiritual behavior, I believe He was showing us the best, but not only, way to go before the Father. In a secluded, or secret place, we are free from distraction and free to speak openly with God without worrying about what someone else might think. This concept refers to our daily prayer life, outside of church. In church, our prayers are typically more “corporate” in nature. Rather than dealing with our personal needs, we pray for the needs of the group or others.

While we may discuss different forms of prayer in future teachings, that is not the focus of this one.

## DON’T GET STUCK INSIDE

I am concerned with a problem here that plagues all of us- at one time or another. *The problem* – sometimes we get stuck in the closet and forget, or neglect, to come out and do our part in the prayer process. We forget to add “works” to our faith.

I can’t begin to tell you how many times I have come across individuals and/or groups that are praying for something with strong faith but won’t do anything to help the process or move forward. They believe, but they are waiting on God to do it all miraculously for them. They just sit

there waiting. Oddly enough, they can't seem to understand why nothing ever seems to change or why they never seem to get the answers they are believing for.

**While there are, no doubt, times that we can do nothing to help ourselves, or others, most of the time, we can, with God's help, participate in the process of receiving our answer. In fact, whenever possible, we should.**

*In our key scripture above, we see two examples of acting in faith – Abraham and Rahab.*

God spoke to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son on an altar to God. This was the son God had promised Abraham and the one, he believed, would be the start of the nation God promised to grow out of Abraham. While we don't know exactly what Abraham believed would happen when he got to the altar (would God provide a new son to take his place or would God provide another sacrifice when he arrived?), we do know that, when God spoke to Abraham and gave instruction, he "acted" in obedience. He didn't just sit in his tent and wait for the whole story to unfold. Nor did he wait on a response that made more sense to him or that gave him a better/easier option. He obeyed and started working to fulfill the will and direction of God. All the while, he continued to believe that God was in control and WOULD fulfill the promises He made to him. When he acted on his faith, he saw it "completed" and God provided another sacrifice and raised up a nation through Isaac!

Rahab didn't hear from God directly like Abraham. She was told by others (the Israeli spies she protected) that she would be spared from the destruction God was bringing to her land. She wasn't even a true Israelite. She apparently had heard about their God through the grapevine and wanted to help the spies to save her life. She didn't even pray directly to God. She asked the spies for their help! Nonetheless, when she did as they told her and put out the sign they instructed her to, everyone in her house was spared and she became a part of Israel from that day on! Her actions of hiding and helping the spies escape and following their instructions directly affected the outcome of her desire/prayer. If she had avoided helping the spies or following their instruction, she and her family would have been destroyed. She would not have seen her faith "completed" or her desire/prayer answered! To further demonstrate how important this was to God, she was mentioned alongside Abraham, "the Father of Faith" when God was instructing the believers, through his servant, on the importance of adding works to faith!

For faith to be "completed" it would indicate that prayer, hope or desire was not enough to bring the answer. We must act according to our faith! If we believe God can and will do something, then we need to act like it!

**SAY, "I'M COMING OUT!"**

What all this means to us is that praying and believing God for the answer is not all we should be doing. We need to be acting on, or in response to, our faith!

Too many times I've seen believers take a need to God in prayer and just sit down and wait on God to do it all and hand it to them. **Now, while it is true that God is the one who answers our prayers, we need to be ready to do whatever part is required of US to see our faith completed.**

*Let me give you a few examples of what I'm talking about:*

- A church may need a new Youth Pastor, Worship Pastor, singers, musicians, teachers or other helpers. They go to the Lord in prayer and truly believe that God will provide the answer. However, they just sit and wait. All the while they are still praying and believing, but they continue to do nothing but wait. The longer they wait, the worse the need becomes. The longer they wait, the more they begin to question God and doubt starts to creep in. They have struggled to stay focused and believe. Finally, after much waiting and struggling with doubt, someone comes to church that seems to fit what they

think the answer could be. They jump at the chance to put this person in the role they want to fill, often with little to no consideration for the person and/or his background. At first, it seems they have their answer. Later, however, they have a mess. Sometimes, it even destroys the church and hinders the work God had planned for them. What could/should they have done differently? They should have acted on their faith! They could have started actively searching/recruiting to fill the position. They could have gone looking for the person God wanted and acted like He was going to answer their prayer. They could have set the wheels in motion and started developing a plan/program for the new position. They could have set up a plan for interviewing and prayerfully considering applicants and developed requirements they needed to have existing in the person they chose. They could have appointed a temporary person to the position to keep moving forward until they found God's person for the job. Instead, they just did nothing! I have seen churches lose their young people, choirs, existing musicians, and others because they didn't move forward in faith!

- **A man needs a new job.** He is unemployed. He has debts and needs. He prays and believes God for a new job. He asks others to believe with him. They do! However, he does nothing but sit and wait for God to drop the job in his lap. He doesn't work on his resume. He doesn't apply for any jobs, unless someone comes to him with it. He doesn't do anything to prepare himself for a new job. He just waits in his "prayer closet" for the answer to come to him. Before long, he's in collections on his debts and has to ask the church for help just to eat and keep the lights on! Before long, he is filled with questions and doubt. He becomes a burden to everyone around him and he starts to seek for ways to ease his suffering. A little while later, he is out of church, deep in sin, and soon to be arrested if he doesn't change his ways. What could/should he have done? He could have gone out looking for that job he was believing for. He could have started taking courses at the unemployment agency to help him in his search or to train him for a new career. He could have availed himself of temporary employment options until the full-time work arrived. He could have applied for assistance programs from the government to help meet his needs until he found his new job. He could have gone out every day, in faith, looking for his new job! Instead, he just sat and waited! His life was worse in the end than it was to start with because he added no actions to his faith!
- **A young lady wants to be a recording artist.** She even feels called to a musical ministry. She prays and believes God will give her opportunity to fulfill His call on her life. Then she waits. She doesn't train or offer her services to the church. She just waits. She sees others, less talented and committed than herself, getting to do what she wants to do. Still, she waits. Before long, she starts to doubt her calling and dream. She figures she must have missed God and just gives up or, worse yet, takes her gift to the bars and clubs and starts singing fleshly music instead of godly! What could/should she have done? She could have made herself available to the church Worship Pastor for any role he saw fit. She could have started training to perfect and strengthen her gift for the time she finally gets to use it. She could have gone to music conferences and classes and signed up for talent shows/searches. She could have started visiting a nursing home or found some other beginning work to do until she entered the fullness of her call. She could have recorded herself on a home tape recorder and passed out the tapes freely to anyone who would listen. Instead, she did nothing and got nothing!
- **A young man wants a wife.** He prays and believes God for her. Then he sits at home and waits for her to show up on his doorstep. She never comes. Still he waits. Before long, he is searching the Internet and video stores for something to "ease his pain". Very quickly, he finds himself addicted to pornography and gets so involved that any "real" woman could never live up to his new-found standards, much less meet his newly discovered "needs". What could/should he have done? He could have made himself available! He could have gone where the women were. He could have joined a Christian singles group. He could have tried dating! Instead, he just sat around and then eventually replaced his real wife with a "virtual" one and became in bondage to his flesh.

- **Finally, a boy wants his friend to come to Christ.** He prays and believes God for his friend to be saved. Then, he waits. He doesn't talk about his faith or otherwise discuss religion with him. He never invites him to church. He never takes him to a concert or youth rally. He doesn't want to risk offending him. He just waits on God to somehow reach him and tries to live a "good life" in front of him. His friend dies tragically a few months later without ever knowing Christ as Savior. He didn't even know who this Christ was. What could/should he have done? He could have lived a Christian life before him and given credit to God for every good thing in his life. He could have invited him to church, concerts, and youth rallies to spend time with him as a friend. He could have opened up and witnessed to him about the difference Christ has made in his life and shared with him that God can do the same for him if he wants Him to. He could have acted on his faith and made himself available for God to use in the process of answering his prayer. Instead, he did nothing and, barring a last minute miracle, lost his friend for eternity.

**In case you missed it, the common thing in all of these stories is the inaction of the believers to their faith.** Instead of going out of their "prayer closets" and acting like they believed God was going to do what they had believed him to, they just sat down and waited on God to do it all and hand it to them. If Abraham and Rahab followed the examples of these folks, imagine what would have happened to them! We might be referring to some guy named Steve as the "Father of Faith" and Rahab and her family would all be dead.

While I don't have time to discuss them here, try taking a look at the miracles Jesus performed during his earthly ministry. Most of the time, there was some action required of the believer to receive their miracle! Why? Only God knows for sure, but I believe it was to help the believers learn to "walk by faith, and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). **Our actions not only demonstrate our beliefs, but they help us in the renewing/changing of our minds and in making the flesh become obedient to the spirit. In other words, they aid us in becoming "one" with the will and mind of God, as revealed to our spirits by His Holy Spirit, like Christ was.** The more we align ourselves to His will, the easier it becomes to live an abundant life and be able to focus on meeting the needs of others, rather than constantly on our own.

## IN CLOSING

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that, without faith, it is impossible to please God. Now, if "faith without works is dead" then adding works to our faith must make it "alive". **Adding works to our faith demonstrates, to God and us, that we truly believe that He is real and a rewarder of those who diligently (or seriously) seek Him.** The Bible is chock full of examples of the mighty miracles and everyday needs that God provided to those who pleased Him, by their faith. If we want to receive the blessings of God, we need to live lives that are pleasing to him- lives that are full of faith and works that correspond to it.

I believe it is vitally important that we begin to do our part and begin to actively look for, prepare for, and receive those things for which we are believing. **How do we know which works to do?** 1) Use the natural wisdom and knowledge God has given you. 2) Listen for the voice of heavenly Wisdom- the Holy Spirit. God has equipped us with basic wisdom (common sense) that will get us started and lead us to seek the higher (God-given) wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. In our examples above, most of the folks could have saved themselves a lot of trouble just by using their own common sense! Imagine how quickly they could have received their answers if they took the extra step of actually asking God to guide them by His Holy Spirit! Just like Christ told believers the steps to take to receive their miracles in the New Testament, His Spirit- the Holy Spirit will direct us today, if we'll just ask and listen for it!

The scripture says it best, "Faith without works is DEAD." If we want to have abundant life and walk in the fulfillment of the promise of victory and blessing, let's try walking out of our closets and putting some legs on our faith! **Your answer is waiting, just outside the door.**

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