

## **The right way to talk to God** ★★★★★

By Tom Holladay

It’s an odd thing, but for some reason, a lot of us have a hard time being ourselves when we’re talking to God. Instead of just talking normally to him, we come up with all kinds of strategies to avoid being ourselves.

**Some people take the cool approach.** They’re afraid to be real with God, so they try to joke around by calling him “The Big Guy in the sky.” They sort of snicker at him, like they think that’s going to make points with God.

**Other people try false humility.** They approach God with this attitude: “O God, I’m just a worm. I know you don’t want to talk to me.” They think that’s going to get God’s attention.

**Some of us opt for formality.** We pepper our prayers with a bunch of “thee’s” and “thou’s.” It’s talking to God, folks -- it’s not an IRS form. You don’t have to cross your “t’s” and dot your “i’s” and get everything on the right line.

Jesus said, “Let’s make it simple.” In Matthew 6:6 (NIV) he tells us, “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what’s done in secret will reward you.” In other words: Just talk to God.

One translation says, “When you pray, go into your closet and talk to God.” We have the wrong focus. We think if we organize our closet we’ll simplify things; Jesus says simplify by going into your closet and talking to God. That’s where it really starts.

I was reading this week about one closet manufacturer who actually has the gall to say about their products, “Our business isn’t about wooden poles and shelves and drawers. It’s really a lifestyle.”

No, it’s a closet. That’s all it really is. It’s just a closet.

I understand why they’re saying that. They’re tapping into something all of us think: “If I could just get my closets organized, life would be OK. That’s all I really need to do. If I could just get my garage cleaned out, I’ll be a fulfilled, complete person.” Your marriage is falling apart, your finances are going nowhere, you don’t know where your kids are but you’re thinking, “It will all be OK if I can just get my shoes color-coordinated.”

Jesus asks, “Do you want to make things simpler?” If you do, then don’t start on the outside. Start on the inside. Think about how you talk to God. Do you talk to him honestly? Are you able to just be yourself? I like the way Matthew 6:6 reads in The Message translation. Jesus said, *“Here’s what I want you to do. Find a quiet secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God and you will begin to sense his grace.”* I need that. We all need this in our lives. So Jesus says learn to talk to God as yourself. Everything will simplify if we’re honest in our prayers. Not just our prayers will be simpler -- everything will be simpler. If I don’t have to put on masks when I’m talking to God, I’ll be able to see more clearly what’s happening in life. If I don’t have to put on a mask in front of God and fake it, I don’t have to fake it in front of you anymore. That’s how life gets simpler.

**How do you talk to God honestly?** You talk to him about what you’re thinking. You don’t talk to him about what you think you *should* be thinking -- you talk to him about what you’re *really* thinking. I know what some of you are thinking right now: “God doesn’t want to know what I am thinking!” God already knows what you’re thinking and he just wants you to talk to him honestly, as ugly as it may seem to you. That’s how life begins to change.

How do you talk to God honestly? You go to God and just talk to him like you would to anybody else. You don’t use fancy words that you don’t use any other time. You don’t use a tone of voice that you don’t use any other time. “O most gracious holy heavenly Father. ...” Sometimes I think we pray to impress God, like he’s going to look down from heaven and think, “Wow! That’s the greatest prayer I’ve ever heard. Send that prayer up. I want to frame it and put it next to the original copy of ‘Footprints’ so that everybody can see the greatest prayer that’s ever been prayed.”

That’s not how God feels. Jesus told a story once about a couple of guys in a church. One was a religious guy, the other was a tax man who stole money from people. The religious guy stood up and prayed, “God, thank you that I’m not like that guy over there. He steals money from people. I’m more holy than he is.” The guy that was stealing money said, “God, be merciful to me. I’m a sinner.” Jesus asked the crowd that day, “Which prayer do you think God heard?” He heard the one where the guy was just being himself.

Honesty starts on the inside and works its way out to make your life simpler. Be honest when you talk to God. Be simple in the way that you speak.



**Tom Holladay** is an executive and teaching pastor at [Saddleback Church](#). Tom is the author of [The Relationship Principles of Jesus](#) and the co-author of [Foundations](#) with Kay Warren.

Copyright © 2010 Tom Holladay