

Getting Real What's in Your Closet?

by Francis Chan

Francis Chan's sermon calls for genuine honesty in confession and the importance of confronting hidden sins before God.

Duration: 43:54

Scripture: Psalm 51:1

Topics: "True Repentance", "Genuine Forgiveness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the power of confession and true repentance before God and others, using the example of a powerful prayer meeting where people came forward with honesty and received prayer. The speaker urges the congregation to lay bare their sins before God, acknowledging the need for genuine forgiveness and restoration. The focus is on being completely honest, seeking forgiveness based on God's unfailing love and compassion, and experiencing true freedom by confessing sins without excuses.

Transcript

Last, about two weeks ago, I was speaking for this church that does these prayer meetings in the morning, like these 14 days straight of prayer where they start at 5 a.m., and there'll be thousands of people there. But while the service starts at 5 a.m., the people get there around 3 a.m. This is down in Anaheim. Thousands of people showing up.

You know, I get there around 4.30 or so, and the place is just screaming, you know, and singing, and just thousands of people, you know, and there's overflow rooms, people holding their babies, you know, grandmas in there, just worshipping God with all their hearts, and there's just nothing like it. And I was there on the 10th, 11th, and 12th day, you know, of this prayer time, and it was so cool. But on the last day that I spoke, the pastor asked me to give an invitation, kind of lead into this time where we would invite people who were alcoholics, people who were addicted to drugs, people who were addicted to pornography, people who had been living double lives, people who were lying, inviting them that if they needed prayer to come forward.

And afterwards, he and I talked, and we were both just floored because we were there sitting there for the next hour and a half praying with people. Not counseling, just praying. Just come up, tell me what's going on in your life, and then let me pray for you.

And we got these lines going down the aisle just waiting for us to pray. And the coolest thing was there was so much honesty. These people that were singing with all their hearts came forward and said, you know what? What a lie.

What a lie I've been living for the last few years. People who were leaders in the church that were admitting to hating their wives, pornography, whatever it was, just saying, you know what? This is the real me, and I've never really told anyone, and I gotta just let it go. And I was pretty floored by the whole experience.

And as I was driving home, I thought about us. I thought about this room. And I thought, you know what? I bet you every single weekend, there are many of you that come in here and you never deal with the real issue.

You sing some songs, sing with all your heart, throw a few bucks in the plate, listen to a good sermon and go home. And meanwhile, there's a major issue in your life that you neglect. And I thought, wow, I bet you another weekend's gonna pass.

Where people come in with major things that no one knows about, you know about it, but you'll still kind of play the game. You'll do a few little religious things and you'll skirt the real issue. And I was thinking about how I just don't want another weekend like that.

It was so cool to see these people just cleansed of the real issues and walking away free from all of that. And I just began praying, God, would that happen here? Because otherwise, if we don't do that, if we don't get real about these things, let's just call it a day and go home. Because what's the point in doing a few little religious things if we're not dealing with the true issues in our life and the things that we're hiding? It'd be like this.

Imagine this stage is your living room, okay? And what I have in this box is, I got a bunch of horse manure. I got it from the Bridal Path area. And let me just put this nice big pile of horse manure.

Okay, so this is your living room, okay? It's right in the middle of the floors. Imagine people coming over and there's a bunch of horse manure in your living room. And this is what you're doing.

Imagine this. Hold on, this is fine over here. You're cleaning the windows, you're just dusting everything off, vacuuming around here, and just walking around the pile and you're looking around and go, perfect.

Think how stupid that would be, right? What you need to do is grab a shovel, see? And I feel like that's what happens in church. It's happening in churches all across America this morning, all around the world. People are doing this, singing some songs, throwing a few bucks in the plate, listening to a sermon, nodding their head, learning a few more theological truths.

Meanwhile, there's this big load of crap in your life and you're not even dealing with it. And you'll go home and you'll leave it there, come back the next week, dust around the edges, deal with these little peripheral issues, and you don't deal with it. And I thought, you know, Lord, I don't want that.

I don't want another weekend where people come in here and just do the church thing without getting real before God. Can you smell it? Yeah, it's good, see, it's real. It's real.

I'll close it. Where do I get it? Just from horses. You guys have some over there, right? Yeah, you guys, go see Andy and Lori.

And they'll get you some. All right, you guys. It's the first time I've been asked that.

I've been praying, I've been praying. You guys, this has been such a great weekend so far. This may have been my favorite weekend of the year at Cornerstone so far.

Because I've been praying for this. I've been praying that we would walk away unburdened this morning. That people would get real.

And this may have been the most real I've seen our church is this weekend. And I love it, I love it. People just coming forward and saying, you know what? Here's the real me that I've been lying about.

You have the perfect picture of this with King David. See, King David, remember the story of King David? He's the king of Israel. He's their spiritual leader, he's their political leader.

And then he commits adultery with Bathsheba. And then he has her husband murdered, killed. So that he can cover it all up.

So here's a guy who's committed adultery and committed murder. And then he just keeps on doing his priestly duties as though nothing's happened. He keeps on doing the religious things.

He keeps on leading the people and someone finally confronts him. And he tries to pretend like he didn't do it and finally he deals with the issue. And I love it because in Psalm 51, it's so simple.

He just lays it out. And you guys, if I could sum up Psalm 51 in 20 seconds, it's this. David admits his sin, asks for forgiveness, and walks away rejoicing.

That's it. He just admitted what he was doing. He admitted his sin.

He asked God to forgive him. God forgives him. He walks away rejoicing.

That's it. You guys, that's all I want to happen this morning. Okay? No counseling, no psychology, no nothing else.

Just come up here. Here's what I've done. God forgive me.

Okay, you're forgiven. Walk away and rejoice. That's it.

It seems so easy. It seems so simple. But it's not.

And the reason why it's not because we're so used to lying. We're so used to when we talk to other people, we make ourselves sound better than we are. We try to make our sin not really sin, blame it on someone else, make it not so bad, and we hide things.

And so then we start doing that with God. We're so used to lying about who we really are that even when we pray, we try to make our sins sound better than they are, even before God, which is so dumb. You know? And we don't even realize it.

And it's, you know, we say this like, yeah, just admit the guilt. It's like, well, that's not easy to do nowadays because we're such liars. Just confess to God and ask for forgiveness.

Well, that's not so easy to do because sometimes we don't believe He'll really forgive us. Walk away rejoicing. Well, we can't because I don't believe I'm completely forgiven.

I don't believe God wants me to rejoice yet. I don't feel right rejoicing it. And yet David says, no, here's the pattern.

Lay it out. And I know that some of you come in and you're not feeling peace this Christmas season. In fact, you rarely feel peace when you come into this room and worship God.

And I want you to feel that. I want us to deal with the real issues and not skirt around it and dust the other areas of the room. Let's get to the heart of the issue.

I love Psalm 51. We're not gonna go through Galatians. I'm gonna go through Galatians this week because I thought, you know, let's just take a break for this week and let's just clean house.

Psalm 51 is so beautiful. David says in Psalm 51 verse one, he says, have mercy. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.

According to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

So David's appealing to God and saying, would you forgive me? He goes, because I know my sin. I acknowledge it. He goes, my sin is always before me.

He goes, I know what I've done wrong. I know everything I've done wrong. It's right there.

He goes, it's always before me. See, the truth is, there are so many lies in this room. There are so many things that are hidden that no one else knows about, but you know what you've done.

It's always before you. Like David says, my sin's always before me. It's always right there in my face.

I try to pretend it's not there. I lie to other people about it, but I know it's there. My sin, it's always right there before me.

I'm gonna ask you a very simple question that I want everyone to answer in their own mind. What are you lying about this morning? Think about it. What are the things you know about God knows about and possibly no one else in this room or on this earth knows about? And think, have you really just confessed it to God in its rawest form? Not prettying it up, but just laying it out there.

See, a lot of times we don't get forgiven. We don't get cleansed because we go about it all wrong. We treat God like another human being.

And we lie to each other. We have our little ways of confessing to each other. Sometimes we wanna, we come to God and we want him to forgive us, but we almost appeal to him based upon our own goodness.

Like we say to God, God, you know I've been trying hard and I just blew it this one time, so you should forgive me. Or we do the thing where we let some time pass. You ever do that? You sin and you don't wanna approach God right away.

So you let some time pass and pursue him during that time and do other good works during that time. And so that two weeks later, you can then confess something that happened a couple of weeks ago, because you realize I've done a lot of good things, so now maybe he'll forgive me. Didn't we do that with our parents? Where you tell them a year later, hey, I did this a year ago.

Like, oh, are they gonna punish you now? You know, or you say, well, you know what, all through high school I was actually on drugs. And you know, and it's like, but now you notice I've been good, and they're like, oh, okay, well, who cares about what you did back then? We kind of do that with God, we let some time pass. We commit this crime and we're like, well, I don't wanna just stand before God, I wanna prove myself somehow.

But you understand what you're doing when you do these things, is you're appealing to God for forgiveness based upon your own goodness, or your own good works. See, that's not what David, see, that's the biggest mistake you can make, is say, God, forgive me because I really am sorry. Look, I'm crying.

Look, look, all this time's passed and I've been depressed this whole time, so forgive me. Well, we're looking at ourselves, and what David does is, what does he say? He goes, have mercy on me, oh God, according to what? Your unfailing love. Think about this, this is huge.

When he appeals to God for forgiveness, he doesn't say, forgive me because I'm not that bad. He goes, forgive me because you are so loving. It's in your character, your love doesn't fail.

And he appeals to God based upon God's goodness. And based upon God's love. Or he says, God, your love never fails.

I mean, you demonstrate, like the Bible says, God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. See, we have that picture of the cross where when we were at our worst, God says, I still love you. And I'm gonna demonstrate this and I'm gonna have my son pay for your crimes.

And so we ought to look at that and realize, wow, God is a loving God. And when we sin, we come before him and say, God, I know you're loving and I know your love doesn't fail. And that's why I'm asking you to forgive me, not because I'm good, but because you're so good.

Because it's in your nature to love. And he continues in that verse where he says, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. See, this isn't about him, is it? This is about God being this loving God, this compassionate God and saying, God, because you are so good, so loving and you care about me so much, would you forgive me? I love that.

Do you believe that God loves you more than anyone else on this planet? Think about this. Do you believe there's this being in heaven? Think about the people on this earth that love you so much. Maybe some of you are like, oh man, I don't experience a whole lot of love.

But some of you maybe have people that you just know love you. And do you really believe that God of the universe loves you so much more than that? That he has this unfailing love, this great compassion for you? Think about this. Do you realize that God loves you and wants restoration in this relationship more than you do? This is something I never really thought about.

Don't you understand? Don't you see from scripture that God loves you more than you do, than you love him? And that God wants this, you know, this lack of peace you feel because of the sin and you're like, oh man, I wanna be right with God. I wanna be right with God. Well, guess who wants that even more? God wants this relationship reconciled.

And for so much of my Christian life, I didn't think about that, yet that was the obvious. Of course God loves me more. Look at what he did.

He's the one that went after me. He wants this relationship restored. I mean, those of you who are parents, those of you who are parents and love your kids, when that relationship isn't right, and they may feel some lack of peace because that relationship isn't right, who feels a bigger lack of peace? You do, don't you? You want that relationship restored.

You love that child of yours. It's not just them fighting to gain the restoration of this relationship. You can't stand it when your relationship with your kids isn't right.

How do you think the father feels? The perfect father who saw us in our sin and saw that there was this wall between us and him. He sends his son to die so that there'd be restoration. He wants this more than you do.

And so when you pray and ask for forgiveness, don't feel like you gotta earn it based upon your goodness. No, that would be the worst thing you could do. You gotta come before God and say, God, it's in your very nature.

You're the most loving being who exists. You're the most forgiving being who exists. You care about me and love me more than anyone else.

You want this relationship restored, don't you? So I need your forgiveness again. And you appeal to God based upon his goodness, not your own. Don't you, those of you who've ever had someone work for you like an employee of yours, don't you hate it when they make excuses? Isn't that the worst? They go, well, you know, the reason why I didn't get that done is because, and you're just like, oh, it just makes you more angry, doesn't it? Excuses, excuses, excuses are your own kids.

Don't you hate that? It's like, well, this is why I, you know, opened the door because I thought, you know what? I don't wanna hear that. But isn't it music to your ears when an employee comes to you and says, I have no excuse. I am totally sorry.

That was so wrong. Don't you just immediately go, that's cool. Man, you're just so much quicker to forgive or the kid that comes and says, no, you know what? I broke your rules.

Punish me. I know. I know.

I am so sorry. And you just see, you know what? They're genuinely sorry. Because we hate excuses.

And that's what I love about this confession of David. David, when it comes before God, he doesn't have these excuses that we're so used to using. Like, well, God, you put in context put me in this situation.

He knew how tempted I was gonna be. God, you know what? You gave me these parents and then they were addicted to this stuff. They screwed me up.

What did you expect from me? Or God, I was going through a really hard time and I just wanted some comfort. I mean, when I'm going through these trials, you can't expect me to live this perfect life. And we come to God with all these excuses, all these excuses and all these good things we've done.

And David does none of that. What does he say? He says in verse four, he goes, against you, you only have I sinned and I've done what's evil in your sight. He goes, and you are proved right when you speak and you are justified when you judge.

He goes, you know what? What I did was evil. And if you were to judge me right now, you'd be perfectly righteous in doing that. You are perfectly justified in judging me right now because what I did was just flat out evil.

And then he goes, surely, I love this, verse five, surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. See, David doesn't blame anything on his upbringing. He doesn't say anything about this genetic disposition that he had.

He doesn't talk about this rough background that he had. He doesn't talk about the trials of the past and he just goes, you know what, Lord? It's me. I'm a stinker.

I'm a stinkin' sinner. I was born in sin. He goes, it was from the time my mother conceived me.

I was a bad embryo. You know, I was just from start to end. It's no one else's fault.

It's in me. I'm sick. I've got this sin in me.

It is so evil and I've done some evil things in your sight and you should just judge me, okay? Because I'm sick, I'm evil. I've done these horrible, horrible things. He goes, but you're good and you're compassionate and your love never fails.

So forgive me. Is that how you approach God? Is that how you appeal for forgiveness? I love this picture. And then in verse six, he says, surely you desire truth in the inner parts.

You teach me wisdom in the inmost place. He says, God, you just want the truth. So let me lay it out to you.

Let me not pretty it up. Let me not make any excuses. Let me not blame.

Here's the truth. Here's what we're gonna do. I'm gonna give you a few minutes to be honest, completely honest before God.

What's the point in lying anyways? But you'd be surprised how often we lie, even in our prayers, because it's habit. How often we try to make our sin not so bad because we say that to everyone else. I've been praying that you could come before God this morning and just lay it out with no excuses.

Just say, God, here's what I did. This was sinful. That was sick.

That was evil. That was a flat out lie. God, I hate this person.

That hatred is so wrong. You tell me it's sin, but I hate them. I just do.

I have hatred for this person. And it's against you that I'm sinning because you created that person. Just lay it out.

I've got bitterness toward this person. I've been staring on the internet at these women that you created, at these men that you've created, right on the verge of having an affair. I had an affair.

You know about it. The way I've been treating my kids. I've abused your children.

These are your kids. And I just, I did that to your kid. I sinned against you, God.

That was your kid. Do you understand this? This is, and when David says it's against you that I've sinned. You remember when Ananias lied to Peter? The apostle, Ananias and his father lied to Peter.

And Peter goes, you didn't lie to me. You lied to the Holy Spirit. See, when you come in this room and you lie and you lie to me and go, oh, good sermon.

You're not lying to me. And when you come in this room and you pretend like nothing bad's going on in your life, you're not lying to the person next to you. You're not lying to me.

You're lying to God. It's against God that you're sinning. It's against his children that you're sinning.

It's against his son that you're sinning. It's his son that you hate. It's his daughter that you abused.

So don't lie about it. Don't pretty it up. And praying that you would just have some time where you would just say to God, God, here's who I really am.

I'm gonna have Diana come out and just kind of play softly on the piano while you pray. And I wanna put some verses on the screen. It's the next three verses in Psalm 51 because when you confess, I want you to say these things to God afterwards.

Cleanse me. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I'll be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquity.

It's very bold. David, once he says everything honestly and says, God, I know you're a good God. So now just wash me whiter than snow.

Don't start with the little compromises in your life. Lay out the dirtiest secrets just before the Lord. That's it.

Just confess it. Say, God, here's what I did. It was evil because I am evil.

And I know this is wrong. I've always known it was wrong. Please cleanse me now.

Wash me whiter than snow. Just spend some time right now confessing to God. There's something so powerful about honesty, something so freeing about just confessing and laying something out.

But something else that affects me when I confess to God, it's weird when I really get honest with God, it opens my eyes to how often I lie to people. How often I try to make myself sound better than I am. We've all done that.

You know I talked about those people who are church leaders and yet we're hiding things. And I remember back when I was a youth pastor, I'd get up in front of people and talk and there's this whole other side of my life that I lied about and hid. And what a sick feeling it was.

I remember just never really having peace, never having peace at all. Then I was faking it. So everything just spills out and I was like, alright, I lied.

The Bible tells us we need to confess our sins to God, but it also says in James 5, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you can be healed. There's something about not just saying it to God, but now God's saying, okay, be honest with other human beings. Tell them your sin.

Confess your sins to each other. Then pray for each other so that you can be healed. I don't know if you believe in prayer.

I mean really believe in prayer. But what we're going to do is we're going to have some of the leaders come up. Those guys that were the community group leaders and pastors, elders, you guys would come forward right now and just kind of line the front of the stage.

What we're going to do is we're going to have a time of confession and prayer. A time when you get real with another human being and you just say, look, this isn't counseling time, okay? This is prayer time. I'm not saying counseling is bad.

I'm just saying it's not for right now. Right now, you come forward and say, look, here's the deal. I've been addicted to pornography.

Pray for me. And you come believing in the power of that prayer. Believing that something supernatural happens when they lay their hands on you and pray for you.

Believe that God, because he commanded it, that you do it in obedience and there would be power for you to overcome whatever sin is in your life. It's great that you confess it, but don't you want it out of your life as well? The Bible says, well, then confess to each other. Pray for each other.

And let me say something to you guys that are up front right now. That passage in James 5, it says the prayer of a righteous man, a righteous, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Okay, we're as elders entrusting you to pray for these people because we're trusting that you've been made right before God and that your prayers are effective because you're righteous, those of you who are on the stage.

And so if there are things that you guys are hiding, don't ruin this time. We want your prayers to be powerful and effective. And so as people come forward, if you feel like you need to confess to someone else up here to get yourself right, so that you can actually pray powerfully for the people that come forward, I encourage you to do that first.

Because I don't want us to just play a game up here. You know, let's just go home if we're going to do that. You see this, we're so tempted every day in so many different ways.

My wife's going to sing a song. And then we're all collectively going to sing a couple songs at any time during this time. I'm going to ask you that have been stuck in your sins to do something really brave.

And that's come forward and just tell someone up here and let them pray for you. And the thing I prayed for is that there'd be revival, that people would get honest. Because the truth is, is whatever you came in here that you may feel sometimes like you're the only one.

You think you're the only alcoholic in this room? I think you're the only one that did drugs this week. You think you're the only one that's cheated on your spouse? You think you're the only one that's abused your kids? You think you're the only one that divorced and you knew it was wrong? I'm not belittling those sins. Those are those are huge offenses in the sight of God.

And there's more. There's more hatred in this room. Absolute lies in this room.

You're not the only one. And I'm praying that we all come clean. One of the happiest guys in the world this week was Barry Bonds, right? Because the list came out.

He's like, yeah, see, I'm not the only one. What if a list came out here? And God just threw the list out. You guys, let's lay it all out this morning.

Listen to the words of this song. Come forward, ask for prayer. Let's confess our sins to one another.

Pray for one another. And let's walk away forgiven this morning. Wanting forgiveness.

So insecure. There's gotta be life for me. There's gotta be hope.

There's gotta be life for me. I want to be free. Free of guilt and free of shame.

Someone to finally clear my name. I want to live. I want to live and to believe.

I'm free from sin and free from death. Before I give up my last breath. I want to live.

I want to finally, finally breathe. I see the grace to turn to. It set me free.

You broke the chains that whispered forgiveness. Oh, what a sound. You gave your life for me.

You gave me hope. You gave your life for me. And now I'm free.

Free of guilt and free of shame. By the power of your name. I'm gonna live.

I'm gonna live and to believe. I'm free from sin and free from death. The moment you gave your last breath.

I'm gonna live. I'm gonna finally, finally be free. I know there is life for me.

I know there is hope. I know there is life for me. I know there is life for me.

I know there is hope. I know there is life for me. Because I'm free.

Free of guilt and free of shame. By the power of your name. I'm gonna live.

I'm gonna live and to believe. I'm free from sin and free from death. The moment you gave your last breath.

I'm gonna live. Because I'm finally, finally free. And my prayer for you guys, you know, the whole time up here, I'm like, God, this is so good.

This is so good. Keep this going. Keep it happening.

My prayer is that now you could really believe that you're forgiven. I mean, really believe it. Like that it's completely done.

And it's completely done away with and you're completely pure because you were completely honest. See, because sometimes I would do this. I would confess to God and even weep.

But I'd still feel a little dirty. I'd still not feel the total joy. And yet when you read this Psalm, you know, David says, restore to me that joy of my salvation.

I want all that joy back. He says, open my mouth up so that I can declare praise now. And I couldn't completely let go and just praise God.

Like there was still like I wanted to wallow in it longer, even though God didn't want me to. And the reason why I didn't walk away completely forgiven and feeling completely free is because I hadn't taken my eyes off of myself. I learned this in reading this passage is that for much of my life, even after I'd confess, I'd still think about myself and I'd question myself and go, man, was I sincere? Am I really going to change? Is this sin really gone for good? And I would just doubt.

And it's because I was thinking about myself. And what I'm asking you to do is take your eyes off of yourself right now. Take your eyes off of yourself, because if you keep your eyes on yourself, you'll never feel forgiven.

You'll never believe that you're truly forgiven. Put your eyes on God right now. Remember, we're appealing to him based upon him.

We're appealing for forgiveness based upon his love. Think about this being in heaven who has forgiven you, who wanted this, who, you know, the singing was not music to his ears. This rumbling of confession you heard from the front, God's going, oh, this is so good.

This is so good. I've been wanting to be restored with these people for so long, and they're finally confessing. And now I can forgive them and the relationship can be right again.

Believe in the goodness of God and his unfailing love. So that right now, like David says, open my mouth up so I can sing praise to you now. That's what we're going to do.

We're not going to walk out of here and be sad to show God how bad we feel. We're going to rejoice right now. We're going to celebrate.

We're going to worship because that's what God, that's what people who believe they are forgiven do. They say, God, you know what? It's been done on the cross. I'm not going to wallow in it longer like that's going to add anything.

But because I have so much faith in your goodness, I'm actually going to rejoice right now. I'm going to sing about your forgiveness. Let's do that.

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