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The Secret Place

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Series: Prayer: God's "Secret" Weapon

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Our gracious and loving God,

We fall down before thee this morning, Father, in our spirits, and worship. From the hurry and the pressure of getting ready and rushing to church, we now pause and ask You to quiet our hearts. Make our spirits sensitive to Your word and cause us, Father, to receive from Your word truth that will literally transform the way that our thought processes work, and cause us to make choices that will allow Your spirit in us to change us.

Some of us, Father, have gone too long needing change. Some of us have resisted change. Some of us just don't seem to understand what change is. But what we really want, Father, deep in our hearts, is to be conformed to the image of Your precious Son, and we realize that that requires change.

So the purpose, Father, by getting together this morning, is for You to speak to us and then for You to give to us hearts, softened by Your spirit, ready to be transformed. May the rest of our lives be different, even because of today.

We ask You, Father, to put Your hand of comfort upon those who are grieving, those whose hearts are uncertain, those who are lonely; and we pray that they might receive the comfort Your Spirit gives. And now, Father, we surrender ourselves and this time to You. Speak to us, we pray.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

I think the scripture really makes it clear, and looking at the life of Jesus I think it becomes doubly clear. Over and over He would slip away and go away to be by Himself to pray. It wasn't that He didn't want to be with the disciples. He did. And He was nearly all of the time. But there were those times when He rather wanted to be with His Father, and He wanted to be alone with His Father. That's not strange, is it? I mean, They had things to talk about, things only a Father and a Son can talk about. Things too

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personal, too intimate to be broadcast to the world at large.

Occasionally He would take Peter, James, and John with Him. He was mentoring them. And because He was, He not only wanted to tell them how to pray, He wanted to show them how to pray; and He did. For the most part, it didn't seem that they appropriated what He was showing them—at least not until after the resurrection. So most of the time He simply slipped away, quietly slipped away, for a time of fellowship with His dearest friend, His Father. Beloved, that's what prayer is: it's one-to-one time with the dearest friend you'll ever have. It's heart-to-heart time with the one who has made Himself available to you and responsible for your life. It's a time to listen; it's a time to share the adoration you have for Him. It's a time to whisper in humility the burdens of your soul, handing them over to Him as you do; it's the time to bring in the needs of your heart and the needs of those you love to seek His mind and appropriate His will. It's the most precious, the most priceless, the most profitable thing you will ever do, spiritually.

Why is it, then, so few of us ever seem to come to realize just how special prayer can be? So few of us, it seems, seem to care. Oh, many of us are willing to “pray”, as we call it, superficially. But this process of entering into God's secret chamber, falling down on our faces before His incredible throne, and allowing our hearts to become one with His heart: that's not what most of us call prayer.

We admire those that pray like that, don't we? And our excuse is that these are specially called “prayer warriors”; that's the word we like to use. The only problem is there's no basis for that in Scripture. We're all supposed to be prayer warriors. In fact, we are told specifically that all of us as believers are to pray without ceasing. In other words, we're commanded by God to make talking with God and walking with God the highlight of our very existence.

But according to Jesus' teaching, and according to Jesus' preaching, before you can walk the walk and talk the talk, lest you come apart, you have to learn to go apart and pray. Not just for a few minutes. Not just long enough to give God a laundry list, but long enough to just stay in His presence until His life becomes your life and His will becomes your desire—your only desire. As we learned last week, even if it means praying, “Lord,

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whatever it takes”.

So we continue, this morning, in our journey down the dusty paths on the roads that Jesus walked as He sought to communicate and demonstrate what living on Earth on your way to Heaven was all about. It's all about spending enough time in the presence of eternity that you know what to do with time. It's all about spending enough time in the presence of that which is of the spirit that you know how to deal with the matters of the flesh. It's all about being so in touch with God that we're only preoccupied with who we are in Christ, not who we are in the eyes of others.

Beloved, when you pray, when you really learn to pray, all of life changes direction. All of life changes purpose. All of life becomes a Spirit-filled adventure that begins and ends in your time alone with God. And it is that time alone with God that we'll be looking at once again this morning as we follow our Lord through the secret recesses of this subject we call prayer.

This morning's lesson is entitled "The Secret Place". We've looked in the past few weeks at the need to pray and at the essence of prayer, and now we begin our search at looking at how to pray. It will be a long journey, and if we're to look at how to pray, we must begin by looking at Jesus' unusual command in Matthew, chapter six. It begins with a look at a trinity of spiritual duties which have a common thread of secrecy that bind them together. It would turn out to be the three great disciplines of the Christian faith; but it would also turn out to be, unfortunately, three things that we as Christians would often do, either subtly or overtly, to receive the acclaim of men. Because of that, Jesus made something incredibly clear at the outset. He said, unless you're doing them in such a way that others do not even know about it, you are, in effect, not pleasing God at all. In fact, the reward that God has stored up for these spiritual duties, will be completely gone in eternity.

That's what He said! That's serious business! Let's read what He said. We'll read the whole passage of Matthew chapter six.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues

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and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

(Matthew 6:1-19)

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There used to be a television show many many years ago—I'm going to really date myself, because only about twenty of you in here will even know what I'm talking about. I don't remember how the story of the game went, but there was a secret word, and you had to find the secret word. Anyway, in case you haven't figured out yet this morning, the secret word is "secret". It's the pivot on which the whole passage turns. Over and over it appears. In the context of these three activities, it appears. And in each case, what we've learned is the reward accrued in glory for these three activities would be proportionate to whether or not it was done in "secret" — whatever that means. So I guess we better find out what that means.

The Greek word *kurfh* and its derivatives are used more than a dozen times in the New Testament, and each usage helps us, I think, a little bit more to understand what the Lord was driving at. These are just a few of them.

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.

His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.

For there is no man that doeth any thing *in secret*, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.

For neither did his brethren believe in him.

But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were *in secret*.

(John 7:1-5,10)

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them *in secret*.

(Ephesians 5:11,12)

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a *secret* place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.

(Luke 11:33)

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept *secret* since the world began,

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But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

(Romans 16:25,26)

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?

For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept *secret*, but that it should come abroad.

(Mark 4:21,22)

And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but *secretly* for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

(John 19:38)

I think by now you get a picture of what that word means. It's a simple word, it means "that which is hidden from view" or "that which is concealed or held back until the appointed time". The idea was that anything done "secretly" would not be known to others until the appointed time. In the case of Mark 4:22, it just wasn't time yet. In Luke 11:33, the issue is something is being hidden that shouldn't be. But the meaning was clear. If something is done in "secret", no one knows about it. Agreed? Okay.

Now in this passage, Jesus takes great pains to take the three great disciplines of the spiritual man: giving, praying, and fasting, and groups them together as one to teach a very important lesson. In other words, verses one through eighteen of Matthew 6, are one passage with three applications, and the principle is the same.

The principle thought is this: there can be two motivations for anything you do in the Christian life.

1- You can do it, consciously or unconsciously, to be seen of men and then therefore accrue glory to yourself. Maybe you're just sharing God's glory, but you want a little bit of it.

2- You can do it totally in "secret" when nobody but God knows, and all the glory has to go to God.

That's your two options. Now it sounds simplistic, but you think about it. He also goes on to say that because of that principle, the reward you get for doing these things can only be received in one place: either in heaven or on earth. You can't get them both places. That's the issue. When you accept glory on earth, expect

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none in heaven. In fact, verse one says if you do these things to be seen of men you have what? Less reward in heaven? No, read the passage. No reward in heaven.

That's what it says. None. So your giving, your praying, and your fasting, according to Jesus, are to be done "in secret". So secretly—this is the key—that in the case of giving, your left hand doesn't know what your right hand gave. That's pretty secret. That's absolute.

Verse 16 takes the principle of fasting and applies it as the same thing. It says you mustn't walk around with a frown on your face, hoping that others will see the frown and say, "I'll bet he's fasting. Hot dog, what a spiritual giant!" You don't want them to think because you haven't eaten, that's why you look so bad. Instead, you're supposed to wash your face and comb your hair, put a smile on your face and live in such a way that the last thing anyone would guess was that you're fasting. That's what Jesus said. In other words, the minute you broadcast you're fasting, you lose your reward. And if you do it subtly—you don't have to tell them, you just hope they find out—you're in double trouble. You've not only stolen the glory of God, you're a hypocrite. No reward.

That's what Jesus said, and that's the secret sandwich: when you give and when you fast. Now inside the sandwich in verses 5-13, Jesus says, "I want to tell you where to pray and how to pray". And I guess we could spend the rest of our lives on this one passage—we won't have that much time, and some of you may think we're going to do that anyway—but this morning, we want to begin the process of peeling back the layers of the magnificence of this passage and trying to determine what it is Jesus is teaching us about prayer.

First of all, He says when you pray, not if, when. You remember from a couple of weeks ago, we took these passages and realized there is an assumption here that we pray. Jesus said "when you pray, the one thing I don't want you to do...", and He pulls out this word that He uses consistently in the New Testament when He's addressing the scribes and the Pharisees. It's called hypocrite. It means to "play act". It's the same word used of an actor on a stage. Jesus said, God can't stand that. In Matthew, chapter 23, He says this is what a hypocrite is. Maybe we ought to look at that and apply it to prayer.

He says a hypocrite is someone who:

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According to that passage, a hypocrite is someone who:

1- Doesn't practice what he preaches. I hate this. I'm going to go past it fast. In other words, it's somebody that stands up on Sunday morning in Sunday school and tells you what to do but doesn't do it himself. Never mind (verse 3-4).

2- Does spiritual things for show (verse 5).

3- Sits in prominent places to be seen. Now I think it's clear, some of us sit in prominent places because we can't see. Are you there? Okay (verse 6).

4- Loves to add titles to his name (verse 7).

5- Loves to do religious duties while overlooking real people's needs (verse 13, 14).

6- Seeks "followers"; then leads them astray (verse 15).

7- Focuses on activities, rather than character (verse 23).

8- Calls attention to the sins of others, not to their own (verse 24).

9- Concentrates on looking spiritual, rather than being spiritual (verses 25-28).

10- Loves to compare his spirituality with others (verses 29-32).

These are the marks of a hypocrite, and Jesus said when you pray, whatever you do, don't be a hypocrite. The bottom line is, if you're seeking to elevate yourself, satisfy yourself, or justify yourself, and you're using prayer as a vehicle or any activity designed to elevate God and humble yourself, you're in trouble. Not only are you not praying for the right reason, you're using prayers as a means to call attention to yourself. You're in hot water twice the temperature.

That's what Jesus is saying. Now He builds on the foundation. He says when you pray, don't be a hypocrite, and then He just gives you a little definition. He says hypocrites love for other people to know they pray. He said they go out to the most highly trafficked corner in the city, and they'll stand on the corner, looking pious, and pray. Or they stand up in church where all their fellow believers are congregated together, and they pray with great fervor, using beautiful words.

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Jesus says, “Guess what? They got their reward.” They wanted recognition. They got it. They haven’t prayed; they’ve performed. That which calls attention to the pray...er is not prayer. And that which calls attention to the prayer itself is not prayer. Prayer doesn’t ever call attention to itself or yourself. It is a “secret” discipline. It is something that is designed to be known only to you and God. When someone else is made aware of it, it ceases to have the same power, and it ceases to produce the same reward. And when you intentionally or knowingly pray in such a way that others will know you’re praying, you’re demonstrating a kind of hypocrisy that not only robs you of your reward, but it assures you of divine discipline, because God said, “Don’t do that”. Okay.

As Jesus in the scripture tells us what not to do, He almost always tells what to do to take its place. And what we’re not to do is pray hypocritically to draw attention to ourselves. What are we to do? Well, Jesus said, listen, “When you pray, enter into thy closet”. One translator words it, “Enter into thy secret chamber”, implying that even the location of the room might be a secret, I don’t know. Still another says, “Go into a room by yourself”. That word “closet” may present some confusion in our society. It doesn’t mean hide among the clothes necessarily, but that might work. It means, “When you pray, find a place no one knows about that’s private, and slip into that place”.

Your secret place may be a rock near a stream, somewhere not too far away. It may be on a hillside. It may be a room in your own house that you set aside, or maybe a spot in your back yard. It may be a place in your office where you go when everyone’s gone. That’s not really the issue. The kind of place is the issue. It ought to be a place where you won’t be noticed; you won’t be interrupted; you won’t be recognized as praying. That represents a problem for some. It requires creativity. But the key is the principle. When you pray, go somewhere where you are not a spectacle that calls attention to yourself or your supposed spirituality. Go into the closet, whatever that means for you—you’ll know what it is.

Then Jesus gets more specific. He not only says, “Enter your closet”, but “and when you have shut the door...” I love that. That makes an exclamation point to the word “secret”. Don’t just find a place to go, but once you’re there, do what it takes to see that no one is watching and no one is listening. Shut the door! And when you have shut the door, then you can pray. The privacy that seems to surround this whole issue of prayer! Now it’s secrecy, not in the

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exclusive context like you're hiding something from somebody. It's secrecy in the private context; you're maintaining intimacy.

It doesn't mean you never pray in public. Not at all. It does mean that praying in public has specific purposes, and you must realize its dangers, and never let it become a substitute for what takes place in the secret place.

It doesn't mean you never pray as a group. Scripture gives illustrations of that. But even group prayer must be measured against this yardstick. Often the most profitable thing is for a group to gather together and agree on what to pray for, then go off and pray separately or in small groups, so the temptation to focus on what others think rather than on who God is will not overtake you.

That doesn't mean you don't pray as you drive to work, as you wait for your client, as you wash the dishes, as you vacuum the floor. Not at all. In fact, we're going to do a lesson, hopefully, down the road on what it means to "pray without ceasing". Prayer is to be your constant, consistent way of life. But even that should not be a substitute for the quiet place, for the secret place.

There are many examples in scripture of blessing your meals, but that ought to be done in such a way that you're not calling attention to what you're doing, but rather that those who are involved in the blessing are focusing on God and those around you not involved are not either impressed or disgusted by your display of spirituality. Don't use prayer to call attention to itself. That's what Jesus is saying. Let what God does as a result of your prayer call attention to Him.

The key is, prayer is a private matter between you and God, and was never intended to be a vehicle by which you demonstrate your spirituality. And even if your motives are pure, the temptation to lose your concentration and perspective are compounded when you pray any other way. I guess that means there's really two principles involved here. Let's go over them very quickly. Principle number one is the need for you and God to be alone so you can shut out all foreign intrusions, anything that would detract or deter you from focusing on who Jesus is. These would include wondering how you sound to other people who are listening. Have you ever done that? Sure you have. You get in a group and you pray and the guy next to you prays first, and I mean, the words just flow. And all of a sudden you feel very self-conscious and you say "D-d-d-dear Lord". Another would be the distraction to come

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from wondering what the other person just prayed, or the person across the room. That really is hard for me because I can't hear the person across the room. But you don't want to pray the same thing, I mean after all, that would just take up God's time, so you want to say something special. So you try to listen to what everybody else has said instead of praying what's on your heart. And other distractions come from the moving or talking or weeping of those around you. If your surroundings are not stripped of things that would normally divert you: the telephone, your computer, this unfinished work, or whatever it might be, your mind really isn't free to focus on God.

So the first issue then is the holiness of God demands that we shut out anything that would deter us or distract us, so we can be alone with God. He needs to be our sole focus. The secret place needs to be a quiet place, doesn't it? A place where the only noise will be the sound of things that would call attention to Him. A rushing brook, or a waterfall, the sounds of birds in the trees might well be blessings. But other sounds, man-made sounds, serve only to remind us of things that distract us. So that's issue number one: we need to be free from distractions, and that's what the secret place is all about.

The second principle, and I think it's the one Jesus was really majoring on in this passage, is that the glory of God was never meant to be shared. So nothing must be done in your prayer life that would interfere with our beholding His glory; that's issue number one. Issue number two is that nothing must be done that would share His glory. And that's the reason it's so important that when you pray, you go into the closet and shut the door. You don't call attention to you, and you don't call attention to the fact that you're praying. God wants to do something by having you alone in His presence.

You remember how Moses went up on the mountain to be alone with God to receive the word of God. He went alone, and he spent so much time in the presence of God, beholding the glory of God, he returned to Earth so engulfed in the glory of God that those about him could scarcely look on his face. His very countenance had been changed.

And, Beloved, that's what happens when you spend the quality of time and the quantity of time in the presence of God that He desires. You literally have your countenance changed. It's not

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something you do. You're not even aware it's happened. People are drawn to you. People are moved by your discernment, even by your rebuke. But you're unaware. God Is so dominant in your life, and you're so transparent in your walk that miracles are taking place, lives are being changed, and you don't even know it.

And it isn't because people know you pray. They only know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and they're not necessarily aware of anything you do or have done. You become invisible. As the scripture says, "He must increase; we must decrease". That's the key.

And the key to that happening is you and God in the secret place...alone. When you pray, enter into the secret place and shut the door, and having shut out the world, pray. Pray! Pray the night through, if need be. Pray until the sun sets, if need be. Pray until the light of God's will breaks through and you have the answers you long for. But don't set a timer and limit God by the clock. Sometimes we have no choice; I know that. But there ought to be some time when God has no boundaries, no limit to His ability to get our attention. That means you take "days away" or "hours away" with just you and God in the secret place. Remain there until the conviction, the discernment, the direction finally breaks through. If left to us, and certainly if left to Satan, we will leave the presence of God just before He gets through to us. I love Hebrews 10:36:

Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:36)

And I think many times we "do the will of God" by going into the presence of God and laying our griefs or our concerns in front of Him and feeling that we prayed. And Satan can't stop us from doing that. But if he can either divert us or confuse us or make us impatient so that we jump up and go our way, he's really won a victory. Don't you see, Beloved, prayer isn't just dumping on God. Prayer is staying before God until the all the business that needs to be transacted is finished, and sometimes that takes time. I know: time is something we don't have, right? How many of you would vote on that: time is something we don't have? We're fools. The eternal creator God who formed the universe and framed the heavens has time to spend with us. We don't have time to spend with Him?

Serious business. We're not just studying this morning on the

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secrecy of prayer, though that's the main thrust of the lesson. I think it's time, at this early stage in the study of prayer, for some of us to make some real decisions about setting aside a time and a place and making a commitment, or renewing our commitment, that on a regular daily basis, we're going to go into the prayer closet, wherever that might be, shut the door, and after we shut the door we're going to stay there until we and God have had the time together we need to have.

I think the second commitment some of us need to make that goes even beyond that, is an agreement with God that, on a reasonably regular basis, we're going to go away up into a mountain, if you will, as Jesus did, and leave the constraints of time behind, and stay on our knees before God until He actually breaks through, and we really have been so bathed in His presence, without the constraints of time, that we really have His mind. Jesus spent a lot of time in the secret place; may we do the same. Now for some of you here this morning, that's a done deal; it's an established practice, you've been doing it for years. But for most of us, particularly men, and please forgive me, men; but for men in particular, it doesn't often happen. If I were to take a vote this morning on whether or not it ought to be a priority in our lives, I bet at least 90% of you would vote yes. But if I were to ask you how many of you regularly spend that time, what a difference the outcome would be.

It doesn't make sense, does it? We would vote that the most vital thing we can do to become spiritual and to have the mind of Christ is this, but we will tell you we don't have time to do this. I'm going to ask you a question this morning. I'm going to ask you to consider making a commitment, or renewing a commitment, before we go any further in this study. I think that some of us, at least, need to drive a new stake in the ground and make a vow or promise—and there's a difference between the two. If you don't know the difference between the two, maybe you'll want to make a promise. A promise to God that the quiet time in the secret place is going to be regular and real from this point forward in your life, until the end of your life. Let's look at the key ingredients:

1- A place

The place is important. Not where, but that there is a place. Unless you have a familiar place, we often forget to go there. It may be a spot in the yard, as we said, or a place at the park, or a room

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in your house, or a corner of your office, maybe at some place you pass on your daily walk. It may be more than one place. Jesus went “up into a mountain to pray” often, the Scripture said, but He also spent so much time in the garden that Judas knew how to find Him. There can be more than one place, but pick a place, call it your secret place. That’s a start.

2- A time

I think this is important. It’s been hard for me. You have a time when you’re expected to be at work though, don’t you? A time when you are expected to have meals ready, a time when you are expected to be at church...and I shouldn’t say that, but you’re supposed to be here at a certain time, and you come kind of around that time, don’t you? A time to be at Bible study. So many people try to say, “Well, that’s legalism”. No, Beloved, that’s discipline. If it isn’t legalism for you to be at work at 8:00 on Monday morning, then why is it legalism for you to be on your knees before God at 6:30 on Monday morning? It doesn’t preclude you having other prayer times, but you’ve made an appointment with God, and when you make an appointment you’re much more likely to be there, aren’t you? Some say they’d just rather “see how it works out”, but it usually doesn’t. Set a time. You say it’s nearly impossible. Good! God loves the impossible. It may have to be after everyone else is asleep; it may have to be before everyone else wakes up. It may have to be in place of your lunch...gasp! Let’s scratch that. How important is it? That’s the question. If you had a meeting with the president or the mayor or the governor, you’d find a way, wouldn’t you? But the God of eternity is 10 million times more important than they. So the issue is, make time. Jesus did, and we’re no busier than He was.

3- Praise

Learn to begin by approaching God, in awe of who He is. Get a book on the qualities of the nature of God: just the scriptures, or any explanation, and before you say a word to God, go into His presence and worship Him for who He is. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart to the Lord. If nobody’s in there but you, the fact that you can’t carry a tune won’t matter. It’ll be sweet music in the ears of God. But take one aspect of His nature—we’re going to study that in a few weeks—how to take one aspect of His nature and just worship your way through into His presence. And then you’re ready to

pray. Then you're praying.

4- Take the Word with you.

Don't ever go approaching God for a protracted amount of time without His word. You say "why not"? How can He speak to you if you took the headphones off? He speaks through His Word. You can't separate prayer from the Scripture. We're going to look in a later study on how to pray through the Word. But take your Bible into the secret place. It has the secrets of the kingdom.

5- Keep a prayer list.

Unless you're incredibly brilliant, make a prayer list. We're going to look at some ways to do that in the future, too. We're going to give you a sample prayer list if some of you maybe don't have one. Many of you do. But if you're like me, and even if you're not like me, don't depend on your memory. I have to tie string on my finger to remember to get the prayer list out. Maybe you're not that bad, but you need to write down every person you want to pray for on a regular basis, and Scripture to claim on their behalf. It's amazing how many people don't keep a prayer list, but they wouldn't think of starting the day without their to-do list or the grocery list. It's more important to be sure you don't forget the potatoes?

6- Accountability

This may seem like a contradiction to the "secret" place, but it's not. You don't tell them what or how you pray, and you don't necessarily violate the secrecy of your prayer, but if you need to, you become accountable to somebody to check up on you to see if you're being faithful.

7- Prayer Partners

Again, prayer partners don't need to violate your secrecy. They may not be in there with you when you pray. Jesus seemed to take the disciples, and then moved a way away from them. But they shared their hearts together. This is somebody whose heart is at one with yours. It may be your mate. It may be someone else. But somebody that you can open up to that can pray for you, and you can pray for them, and you can agree together to pray for others. If you don't have a prayer partner, maybe one of the first things you need to pray for is a prayer partner.

8- The Secret

Then finally, there's the secret itself. Agree with God not to promote or publicize or talk about your prayer life. It's between you and God. Some of what happens in the secret place you're not even going to share with your prayer partner. You're not going to share God's glory. Shut the door. That's the key. And give God the only key. I'm going to close by giving you a contract that some of you may want to consider making with God. Pray about it. And oh, yes, keep it a secret...if you do.

It's very simple; it simply says this: Dear God, I hereby recognize afresh my need to have a regular time and place to be alone with you each day. By your grace, I want to set aside the following time: fill it in. And the following place: fill it in. There may be variables but at least start there to be on time together. You may want to omit this next paragraph: even if I have to skip a meal, Lord, to be there, I understand what an honor it is to have the Creator God available to meet with me. I will honor that opportunity by being faithful. I also hereby pledge to thee my desire to keep my time with you a well-kept secret. I won't use prayer as a means to publicize my spirituality, but will humble myself at the thought that you would take pleasure in meeting with me.

Dear God,

I hereby recognize afresh my need to have a regular time and place to be alone with you. By your grace, I want to set aside the following time each day: _____ to be our time together at the following place: _____.

Even if I have to skip a meal to be there, I understand what an honor it is to have the Creator God available to meet with me. I will honor that opportunity by being faithful.

I also hereby pledge to thee my desire to keep my time with you a well-kept secret. I will not use prayer as a means to publicize my spirituality, but rather will humble myself at the very thought that you would take pleasure in meeting with me.

In Jesus' Name

(signed) _____

(date) _____

The Secret Place

And if you choose to, tear it out, put it in your Bible or in some secret place, so that you'll never forget the secret place again.

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God,

Some of us this morning need to really make a new commitment to You before we go any further in studying how to pray that we're going to be there to pray. Jesus has told us to find a secret place and when we've found it, to shut the door, and then to pray. By Your grace, Father, would You not give us rest until we've made that commitment.

For some, it may be a vow. You've told us in Your word, "better it is not to vow than to vow and not keep it". For some it will be a promise. Whatever it might be, Father, we just pray that we would, if we really mean business about growing into Your likeness, that we will make this commitment, or renew this commitment, or just praise You that we've already made that commitment, and pray that others will do the same. How we love You, how we worship You, how we praise You, that You are so available to meet with the likes of us. By Your grace, may we become increasingly available to meet with You.

In Jesus name we ask it,

Amen.

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