

"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"

MATT 6:5-6

When Jesus speaks of going into a secret closet to seek the Father, He is talking about something much greater than a physical closet. The Old Testament tells us God divided His people into two categories: "Those who sought Me - and those who sought Me not!" And God has two kinds of children today as well - those who regularly seek Him in their secret closet of prayer, and those who do not.

When God became angry with Israel over their idolatry, Moses pitched his prayer tent outside the camp. Scripture says that afterward *"it came to pass, that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp"* (EX 33:7). In the midst of all the idolatry taking place in Israel, there was still a people of God who took time and effort to seek the Lord with all their hearts! This seeking remnant emerged from among the idolatrous millions in Israel. They knew they had to go outside the camp, lest they too fall into the apostasy sweeping over the people.

Centuries later, the people under King Asa understood why God blessed and prospered them and kept them at peace with all their enemies: *"Because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered."* (2.CHR 14:7).

At one point during Asa's reign, an army of one million Ethiopians came against Israel. *"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said...O*

The Power of the Secret Closet!

Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa...and the Ethiopians fled...they were destroyed before the Lord." (verses 11-13). When Asa was attacked, he fell on his face and turned to God in prayer - and God answered with victory!

Shortly after that triumph, however, Azariah the prophet came to Asa and said: *"The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you"* (15:2). In other words: "If you stop seeking after God - if you stop yearning after Him and calling on His name in all you do - he will forsake you!"

Azariah knew that because of God's great deliverances, the king would be tempted to become proud and turn to the flesh. Indeed, every time Israel sought the Lord after that, God blessed them: *"When (Israel) in their trouble did turn unto the Lord the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them"* (Verse 4).

The people knew where their power and victory had been found - in seeking God with their whole heart! *"And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and will all their soul...For they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about"* (2.CHR 15:12+15).

Israel enjoyed rest when they sought God in prayer! That doesn't mean they didn't have any

problems. But because they fell on their faces and cried out to God, turning to Him in total dependence, He always delivered them and gave them order and strength.

It is written of King Uzziah, *"As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper... And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong"* (2.CHR 26:5+15). Because Uzziah sought God, the Lord strengthened him and brought order to his kingdom. But in his prosperity, this king quit seeking God. Pride crept in and his heart was lifted up. Uzziah turned to the arm of the flesh - and he ended up a leper, dying in shame!

Jeremiah prophesied that all shepherds who refuse to seek God in prayer will likewise fail: *"For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered"* (JER 10:21).

Only a Handful of Pastors Today Truly Seek God in Prayer!

Indeed, the scene Jeremiah described is exactly what we are seeing today in the church of Jesus Christ. Many shepherds have become lazy and neglectful. They see their calling as only a job - a paycheck! They lean on the arm of their flesh, turning to books and commentaries for their sermons instead of seeking to know God's heart through prayer. They have lost all power to feed and keep the sheep in order - and the sheep are being scattered!

The unity that once kept churches strong is now being broken up.

Christians are starving for the gospel, running from one place to another just to find a little crumb to satisfy their heart's longing.

Jeremiah said of his day: *"My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken"* (10:20a). The cords he spoke of - the binding power of God that kept unity among the people - had been obliterated. *"My children are gone forth of me, and they are not"* (verse 20b). The flock was gone - scattered! *"There is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains"* (Verse 20c). There was such uncleanness among the priesthood, no one dared to go near the holy things of God. No priest was worthy to touch the holy curtains!

Perhaps you sit under the kind of shepherd Jeremiah describes. Maybe your pastor started out bold, dedicated to prayer, and God blessed and prospered him. There was unity in the church, because prayer creates unity. But now all is in ruin - God has had to turn His face away - because He has had to say of all lazy shepherds and Christians, "They no longer seek Me!" The Lord draws a sharp distinction between these kind of believers and those who seek Him in prayer. Now I want to address those who seek after God:

The Power of the Secret Closet Comes, First of All, in Having a Secret Closet!

Do you have a closet of prayer? I don't mean an actual clothes closet (though that could do) but, rather - do you have a habit of shutting yourself in with God?

To have a "secret closet" means simply to be shut in with God anywhere, anytime - giving quality, chosen time to yearn after Him, seek Him and call on His name.

"Prayer closet" means "prayer habit." Do you have a daily practice of getting alone with God? That is what the prayer closet is all about - practice. It is about disciplining yourself to come before God - to answer when the Spirit's wooing calls you. It means having a heart that says, "I must get alone with God - I must talk with my Father today!"

Sometimes my secret closet is my car, when I'm alone. It is often my study at home. It is also a little country road in Pennsylvania, where I sometimes retreat to be with the Lord. It is walking the streets in New York City. A few weeks ago it was a Florida beach, where I walked for hours, shut in with God.

The kind of prayer I'm talking about has to do with intimacy with God - aloneness with Him! Jesus warned against hypocrisy in prayer. He drew a dramatic distinction between those who seek God in the secret closet, and those who pray so they can be seen by others as holy!

Hypocrites are actors - people who act holy to receive the praises of others. Jesus said there are many such actors in His church: *"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"* (MATT 6:5).

Our flesh loves to be applauded and complimented. But God can't use our flesh - that is, our sinful nature - because our flesh can't be remodeled or sanctified. When we're born again, God does away with our flesh; He makes us new creatures in His Spirit. Our flesh has to be totally cast off and left to die!

Yet the flesh can be seen at work in us when we do things for God but can't understand why others don't appreciate it. Our flesh wants our trumpet blown! "They (Hypocrites) love to pray" - or so they want you to believe! They pray in church, they go to prayer meetings - but they have no prayer habit! They do not shut themselves up in prayer, alone with their Father.

I remember hearing about one pastor's reputation as a man of prayer. People told me, "He prays eight hours a day." I thought, "Wow! He must be some preacher. I'd like to meet him!" I did meet this man - and I sensed nothing different about him whatsoever. Then it dawned on me: If he was spending eight hours a day in prayer, people would have known it simply by the changes in his

character. But there were no changes! Obviously, they knew about his long vigils only because he had told them - he had blown his own trumpet!

Beloved, God does not hear even a word of the prayers of hypocrites - because those prayers were never meant for His ears! And Jesus says they have no reward from the Father! Yet in this message, I am not just talking about hypocrites - but about good, honest, believing Christians.

I am truly shocked at how few believers do not practice a wonderful, daily communion with the Lord. The vast majority pray only in church and at meals, with perhaps a few quick words to God before going to bed. They have no habit of prayer - that is, until a crisis strikes, and then they are quick to bow their heads!

I can't help but feel a holy anger rise up in me when someone says, "Brother Dave, you have to pray because it's your job. It's your calling as a preacher. But I'm not in the ministry - I'm not called to that."

No! The habit of daily drawing near to God is meant for every one of us! The reason so many Christians don't have power in their lives is because they don't have a prayer life. They pray maybe once a week, or whenever they feel like it.

Beloved, there is absolutely no power in haphazard, on-again-off-again praying! *"Thy Father...seeth in secret"* (MATT 6:6). God sees in secret - into the very depths of your heart! He sees your lack of interest. He sees you giving plenty of time to things you think are necessary - to friends, to wasting hours in front of a TV. And He sees you coming to Him as an afterthought - or only out of conviction or self-condemnation!

The Secret Closet is Any Place Where a Child of God Shuts Out the World - and Shuts Himself in Alone With God, to Seek Him and Pray!

Jesus clearly said, *"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray"* (MATT 6:6). In other words, when you go into your closed, don't start praying until you shut the door!

This means, don't talk to your Father with a cluttered mind. Shut out all the thoughts that keep you

drifting away from Him. Be awake, focused, not wasting words, not thinking of something else. You can let your mind wander when you talk with friends, or when you're on the job or in school. But when you come into the presence of the King, the Bible says, "He sees in secret!"

Many people pray for long hours, yet they are powerless in their daily walk. They wonder why answers do not come, why they don't have victory. It is because they pray with their closet door wide open! They leave open the door of distractions - and God does not answer halfhearted, insincere prayers!

Do you go into the secret closet and pray haphazardly for hours, scattergun-style - never directing focused prayers, never hitting the target of God's ear, because you don't know what you want or need?

Don't be deceived - it takes concentrated effort to pray! When you go into your secret closet, shut the door and take the telephone off the hook! Any child of God who seeks his heart to seek the Father is going to face what I call "satanic interruptions." The devil will come to interrupt you - to get your mind onto anything except your heavenly Father.

Beloved, this discipline is absolutely imperative. If we are to meet with God and be heard by Him, then we have to be where He is - in secret! **"They Father which is in secret shall reward thee"** (MATT 6:6). God has invited you to come boldly to his throne of grace - and it is behind closed doors!

God's throne room is not like the federal courthouse in downtown Manhattan. I went to that court once, and I wondered how the judge kept his mind on the cases at hand. Court stenographers came and went, lawyers walked around talking - at times it was bedlam. Every so often the judge had to slam down his gavel and shout, "Silence!"

But there is no such calamity in God's presence. There are no endless lines of people waiting to appear, no distracting souls walking about. When you walk into God's throne room and shut the door behind you, it's just you and the Father. You are alone in His

presence - and you are His only concern!

I must ask you: Do you act in your heavenly Father's presence in ways you would never dare to act before your mayor or governor or president? Let's say you were to ask the president for an hour of his time. Then, when you walked into his office, you sat there with your mind wandering, perhaps watching someone play tennis outside. How long do you think you'd last in his presence?

When you go in to seek your Father in prayer, shut the door so that nothing and no one can enter in - no pride, no distractions! Shut it literally, shut it spiritually - and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!

A Prayer Closet Also Implies Quality Time!

In the Old Testament, people couldn't approach the altar with a lamb that was blemished or blind or lame. They had to bring their very best to the Lord.

I ask you - what kind of time do you bring into your closet? Is it your best time, your wide-awake time? Or, rather: Do you come to God weary and tired after a busy day, dragging yourself into His presence with heavy eyelids? If your mind begins to wander because you're tired, simply be honest about it. Say, "Jesus, I'm too tired to pray tonight. I'm going to bed, and when I wake up I'll give You a better hour."

Do you come to Him in the morning, to pray about holy things - but your mind is on the car that needs to be washed that day? Beloved, your mind and heart have to be where your lips are! Isaiah spoke of the kind of **"burnt offerings and sacrifices... accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer"** (ISA 56:7). Those who bring acceptable sacrifices, God says, are those who **"join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord"** (verse 6).

Dear saint, this is the only acceptable sacrifice to be made at God's altar! It is not a lame, halfhearted, sleepy-eyed sacrifice - a last-minute obligatory offering. No - it comes from a heart that is

consumed with love for Jesus, one that constantly cries out, "God, I come to You today to know You. I want to be led, corrected and instructed by You. I want to learn obedience, to understand Your ways. I want more of You!"

Those who bring such sacrifices, the Lord says, **"I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer"** (verse 7). He will hear our prayers - and He will bring us to a place of holiness, joy and power!

The Secret Closet Is a Place Where We Come With All Our Heart!

"Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (PSA 119:2)

Once you have established a habit (a prayer closet) and have shut out all distractions, God desires for you to seek Him with all your heart: **"But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul"** (DEUT 4:29).

These were Moses' dying words to Israel. He knew that great trials and tribulations were ahead for the people - and he was giving them the key to victory:

"In the latter days...when thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee...if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them" (verses 30-31)

Moses warned, "No matter what you're going through, don't murmur or complain. Don't turn to man or to the flesh. Turn to the Lord, and seek Him in prayer! He promises that if you'll just seek Him with all your heart, He will see you through."

Being in the closet means coming before God for only one purpose: to pour yourself out! It means that everything in you reaches out to God - all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Sometimes you can do this without a word. All that matters to your heavenly Father is that you come to Him with your all!

Jesus Promised a Reward: Order to Your Life

Jesus said that when we go to our secret closet - shutting out all distractions and opening ourselves totally to God - our Father will reward us openly. *"Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"* (MATT 6:6).

There are many rewards that come to us from the power of the secret closet. But there is one reward in particular the Holy Spirit has revealed to me - and I want you to know it!

The Bible says of Jehoshaphat, *"He sought the Lord with all his heart"* (2.CHR 22:9) - and because he sought God, he enjoyed thirty-five years of order in his kingdom. He had power with God and power over all Israel's enemies. Even when attacks came from all sides, God quickly thwarted them - because the people began to seek the Lord immediately. There was always order, never chaos or confusion. Why? Because they sought the Lord!

But then Jehoshaphat's son Ahaziah came to power - and he didn't seek the Lord. Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, and *"so the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom"* (verse 9). Ahaziah had no power to keep order, as his father had - because he was prayerless!

Dear saint, your kingdom is your home. And if you don't have a prayer closet - a daily habit of seeking God - then you have no power to bring order to your household. The devil can bring chaos to it all - to your job, your family, your relationships! You see,

the power of the secret closet is power over all confusion and disorder - in your life, your family, your job, your church!

There Is a Good Word for Everyone who Is Determined to Seek the Lord!

God promises that if you will seek Him continually with all your heart, you will always have plenty of spiritual food:

"And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me" (ISA 65:10)

Yet those who do not seek God will be empty, famished, dry - wandering about, looking for a shepherd, hungry and never satisfied. The Bible says they *"shall be hungry... thirsty... ashamed"* (verse 13). *"(But) my servants shall eat...drink...rejoice...sing for joy"* (verses 13-14). Those who are shut in with God - pouring out their soul to Him, seeking Him in everything - will have power, authority, spiritual strength, food for soul and mind. They will be led by God into a place of spiritual rest and fullness!

Yes, there is power to be found in seeking God - power to understand all that happens in your life: *"They that seek the Lord understand all things"* (PROV 28:5). Keep seeking, praying - and God will give you an understanding of what you are facing. *"Your heart shall live (who) seek God"* (PSA 69:32).

Psalms 91 is many believers' favorite passage of Scripture. What

great promises are found here! The entire psalm is a revelation of the delivering, keeping power that comes from living in an attitude of seeking God. The person who lives in this habitation of prayer will have power over all demonic snares, all fear, all sickness and plague - power to prevail and bring forth results in prayer!

But there is a condition for all this. It is found in verse 1: *"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."* "Dwell" means "to live". Do you live in your prayer closet - in the secret place of the Most High? Is it your home at any time of the day?

You may wonder, "Does this mean I need to be shut in with God all the time?" In a manner of speaking, yes! Paul said we are to pray without ceasing. And David said, *"Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually"* (1.CHR 16:11).

Dear saint, in your every waking hour, let your mind be stayed on God. Commune with Him. Yearn after Him at all times. All through the day, in everything, call upon Him in your spirit - and you will know His power and order in your every step! Amen!

David Wilkerson 29-03-1992

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