



THE SECRET LIFE

of a disciple

Radical Christianity Series Volume 4

MAURICE BARRATT

**THE
SECRET
LIFE
OF A DISCIPLE**

IN THIS SERIES BY BY MAURICE BARRATT

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Radical Christianity Series Volume 1

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by
MAURICE BARRATT

Radical Christianity Series Volume 3



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THE SECRET LIFE OF A DISCIPLE

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Introduction

When I set myself sometimes to consider the diverse agitations of men, and the troubles and dangers to which they expose themselves ... I see that all their misfortunes come from only one thing, that they know not how to dwell in peace in a room.

Blaise Pascal

This is the 4th book that I have written in the Radical Christianity Series based on Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel chapters 5,6 and 7. I am now up to Chapter 6, and this is the part of the Sermon that should have the most effect on our practical Christian lifestyle.

Chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel was in one way an introduction or preparation in that it sets out the character of a disciple – the Beatitudes. It then shows that we do not naturally have this character in our make up, because it is the very opposite to the one that we were born with – the character of Adam. Matthew 6 is the part of Jesus' message that will begin to bring about change in a disciple's life – if they will practice what is demanded.

When I stopped **believing** the words of Jesus in this chapter and started to **practice** them over 37 years ago, I began to change out of all recognition. I was the one who

was most surprised, because for 20 years previously I had been trying to change myself, and it had not worked.

At this present time of writing I am teaching the Sermon on the Mount in house groups on a weekly basis in different towns around the UK. I have been doing this for 22 years and a general pattern has emerged. I have observed that when I come to Chapter 6 and start to teach about the secret life of a Christian, it is the turning point for many of the people who attend. If they start to practice the things that I will share in this book, their whole life begins to take on a new meaning and they begin to change in character as well as action.

A few of the groups have suggested that they have a break at this point and promised to come back to it in a few months' time, but up to now not one of them has come back to me and continued with the teaching. I believe that the cost has been too great for them

The price of change

This middle part of Jesus' sermon is the part that will separate those who want nice teaching from those who will pay the price to be changed – those who will be useful to God to show his glory and not their own.

Chapter 6 is the 'meat' of Jesus' sermon. Chapter 5 exposes the hypocrisy in God's people, but this chapter goes a layer deeper and exposes the roots of all sin in the heart – covetousness.

This book will cover the first few verses of chapter 6 –the secret life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Part I

Life Through Death

Chapter 1

Principle and Process

Only those who believe are obedient; only those who are obedient believe.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

God requires truth in the inward parts

King David

My last book in this series, "Fulfilling the Law", shows how Jesus exposes our secret life – the lusts, anger and pride that lie hidden in the hearts of Christians – hidden from our colleagues at work, our friends at church, our wives and husbands, and even, sadly, hidden from ourselves. The bible calls our secret life "the old man", "the flesh", or "the nature of Adam".

So many Christians have accepted God's forgiveness, but fail to realise that grace is the power to live a holy life and that they must **grow in grace**. Forgiveness will not make them like God in character, even though they are now children of God. They are in the light, but they do not walk in the light. They continue to walk in the old nature and cover their deceived hearts with outward works:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin

1 John 1:7

Our character is formed by experience and by obedience or disobedience. We are all born with a personality, but character has to be formed. So it is that when we become followers of Jesus we have to grow in the character of Christ, for it will not happen automatically. Christ's character has to be formed in us by our trials and our obedience. We have to make the decision to walk in Christ's character as revealed in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26), or the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).

Avoiding a double life

What can a Christian do if they do not want to live a double life, if they want their inward and outward life to be the same, if they want to be transparent and **void of offence towards God and man?**

There are always answers if we are willing to be honest. God will always meet a heart that wants truth and is willing to buy it with **gold tried in the fire**. In volume 1 of this series, I covered the subject of the two natures, and proved that they must both be acknowledged.¹ All Christians have a choice to walk in the new nature of Christ. This book will cover how we can change our walk from the old nature to the new nature.

As always with the Christian life, and even salvation itself, it is a process – we are still awaiting the

redemption of our bodies to complete our salvation.² There is a process that has to be entered into before our life can manifest the character, or glory, of God, and the first stage is our acceptance of a principle and a process.

Only death brings life

The principle is that **only death can bring life.**

This principle operates throughout God's creation. The term "the circle of life" has been used by New Age propaganda to support reincarnation in films such as "The Lion King". But to Christians, the principle of death through life only shows God's character and the very way in which he redeemed us by his death and resurrection. We have no excuse for neglecting these principles in our own life. We must apply God's principles to our own situation. Jesus said about himself that the death of his flesh would result in resurrection life being manifest.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit

John 12:24

A person will never walk in the newness of the nature of Christ until the old life of Adam has been crucified. In Matthew chapter 16 Jesus said a statement that is often applied as a 'salvation message' to non-Christians, but it is taken out of context for it is prefixed by the words,

And Jesus said **to his disciples** ... whosoever will save his life will lose it: and whoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it

verse 25

So often we twist the scriptures so that the hard sayings of Jesus are directed away from us to some other category of people – usually non-Christians – to save ourselves from the pain of being exposed, and by doing so we avoid the change that would result from obedience to the challenge.

Losing my life

What does Jesus mean when he says "whoever will lose **his life**"? It simply means losing the life that I would like to live in the flesh with all its pleasure and benefits. Not a "sinful life", but the life that pleases me. What I would like to do with my life – even for God. However, if I am willing to lose this self-life, then **the life of Christ** will live in my mortal body. The life of Christ can only be manifest if the old life dies. There is absolutely no possible way for the two lives to co-exist. Jesus' statement is uncompromising as always. We must accept this principle. It is one life or the other, and they are both 'Christian lives'. You can be a Christian and live your life without giving up self. The fact that we can gain the whole world and lose our soul should be a tremendous challenge to Christians in the West, because we have so much that we **can** gain in this world. How many Christians are greedy for the possessions of this world – the very things that will be burned up before we enter eternity?

This is not to do with losing **eternal** life, for that is by grace through faith, and not works. It is losing **my self-life** that Jesus is talking about. Salvation comes entirely by grace through faith, but the life of Christ manifested in our mortal flesh is by works. What is obedience if it is not works – action rather than thought?

Many Christians live their lives in the world of their minds, and they believe – but there is no action because there is no faith. Faith is not ‘the power of believing’, it is the proof, manifestation and evidence of a belief.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen

Hebrews 11:1

But wilt you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:20

Spiritual adultery

If I call myself a Christian then I am potentially the bride of Christ. I am betrothed to him and I am awaiting the marriage. This is clearly taught in the bible.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2

God’s word also shows us that to love our own life is to have another lover apart from Christ. In so doing

we commit spiritual adultery (James 4:4). Paul gives an amazing illustration in Romans 7:1-6 (printed in full at the end of this chapter) to show that we can not be a true disciple if we do not count the **self-life**, the worldly life, the old life, dead. He uses marriage as a parallel, because, as he says, we all understand the laws of marriage.

If a married man dies then his wife is free to marry another man. The law of the land states, and all Christians would agree, that the death of a married man frees his wife to remarry. If the married woman has a sexual relationship with a male friend while her husband lives then she is called an adulteress. If however, her husband dies she could have the relationship in marriage to this very same man and would not be committing adultery. This means that the criteria for whether she commits adultery is not the sexual act, but whether her husband is alive or dead.

Count the self life dead

Paul uses this fact and applies it to our relationship with Christ, to whom we are betrothed. He says that we have to count our self life, the old life of self-righteous living, dead, or we can never have the life of Christ. To have the two lives is to commit adultery, and as sexual relationships produce fruit – children – in the flesh, so it is in the spirit. When we were ‘married’ to the self-life, we brought forth fruit unto death, but when we count that life dead and we *mortify the deeds of the flesh* then we are free to have a fruitful relationship with Christ. This results in the fruit of the spirit – the character of Christ.⁴

Once we accept that our old life – the Adamic nature – will have to die, and we have to consider it dead, nailed to the cross, in order to live, then we will be ready to go to the next stage of the process – **our obedience to practice a *new* secret life.**

Notes

1. See *Will The Real Christians Please Stand Up*, chapter 14, *The Two Natures*
2. Read Paul's explanation of the redemption, not only of the Christians, but of all God's creation, in Romans 8:18-25.
3. Romans 7:1-6
Don't you know, brethren, how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman which has a husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.

Chapter 2

Obedience to the Secret Life

Habit is overcome by habit

Thomas à Kempis

Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly

Matthew 6:4

My worth to God in public is what I am in private

Oswald Chambers

The only antidote to the secret life of pride, lust and hypocrisy in our hearts is another secret life. We can turn over a new leaf and change an outward life of decadence to an outwardly respectable life, but this has nothing to do with the life of Christ. Many religious people have attained an outwardly respectable life through strength of will or outward discipline. Even atheists and agnostics have achieved this change but it has nothing whatsoever to do with **Christ in us, the hope of glory.**

The secret life of our hearts can only be changed by another secret life. My sole purpose for writing this book is to challenge Christians, who have eternal life awaiting them, to be **changed into the same image** of Christ, so that they can be of use to God whilst they are still on planet earth. God is still looking for people **after his own heart, who will fulfil all his will.**

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 6 Jesus tells his disciples to do 3 things in secret, and we will look at them in depth as this book progresses. I am convinced that a person will never change in their hearts until they are obedient to these 3 things. They are things that every man, woman, old person, or a child can do. Obedience and faith are the keys. They are:-

1. Secret Almsgiving

2. Secret Prayer

3. Secret Fasting

If we as Christians want to be holy like our Father in heaven, then why should there be a problem? I have stood in many a large, full church, and asked the congregation how many of them would like to be holy. They always raise their hands to affirm this desire. I then ask how many of them believe that God would like them to be holy, and again they all raise their hands in acceptance. Now I ask them the simple question: If **you** want to be holy, and **God** wants you to be holy, why aren't you holy? What went wrong? They are always surprised that simple honesty and logic has exposed them.

Woolly thinking

I have found that Christians generally have never used such logic and have very 'woolly' and 'grey' thinking, just like the humanistic thoughts of this world where nothing is clear-cut. Denominational doctrines are rarely based on logic, but on isolated proof texts and opinions. How many 'Statements of Faith' are direct quotations from the word of God? They are usually implications drawn from scripture, assumed doctrines and biased statements of their denominational persuasion.

We can not make ourselves holy in heart by efforts of our own will. Our will can change our actions, but it can never change our hearts and motives. Until we have given God the legal right to change our hearts, we have only 2 options: either we will stay the same, or we will change our outward actions by will-power and become hypocrites. Now, if our own efforts and willpower can not make us holy, then what is the answer? Well, I believe that there is a simple answer. The key is for us to understand that legality is an important part of the spiritual realm.

How do angels and devils fight?

Have you ever thought how angels and devils fight – and surely this is the real battle?¹ A devil cannot shoot an angel, a bomb can not destroy a demon, so how do they win or lose a battle? I believe their fight is with legal rights and that we humans are in the middle. I have a series of 40 one hour talks on intercession and

have spoken much on the subject of spiritual warfare in churches and on the radio and video, but I will give one illustration to make the point.

As evangelical Christians we would say that the people who do not know Jesus Christ as their personal saviour are ruled by the devil and that he is their god. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says that Satan is *the god of this world*. If Satan is their god, why then does he not possess them all today and get them to kill themselves and enter a lost eternity straight away? Surely that is what he wants. They serve him, so why does he not have the power to do this? The answer is that Satan can not do anything at all without a legal right from God – the judge of all the earth. This is the reason why he spends so much time tempting people to break God’s laws. When a person rebels against a law of God, Satan, the accuser, challenges God for the right to that life, and they lose God’s protection. Even wicked people have an amount of protection from God. When a person dabbles with the occult, visits a medium or fortune teller, or watches occult-inspired movies, then they give Satan a legal foothold in their life.

The same principle

This principle is also true with God. A Christian can say they want to be holy until they are blue in the face, but until they do something from their own free will and prove this belief by their obedient action, God will not change a person’s heart. God will not go against our free will, and we have to prove by our actions, not our words, that we mean business. God will then change us **despite**

our old nature, and we will be the people that are most surprised by our new motives and desires.

Many years ago, when I stopped trying to be a Christian and started to practice the Sermon on the Mount instead of just believing it, I began to change out of all proportion, as my wife and father would testify. The process is still going on, and I am still surprised how God is changing my motives and desires without my conscious knowledge. It is only when I look back that I see the growth over a period of time. Just as in the natural realm, there is no such thing as instant growth. Growth has to be measured in relation to the passing of time.

Notes

1. See Daniel chapter 10. Daniel prayed fasted and sought God, and the battle went on in the heavenly realm unbeknown to Daniel. His intercession gave power to the angel Michael. Note Daniel was seeking God's face and not fighting the devil or praying against him. This is a great secret of intercession – to appeal to the judge of all the earth who has all power, and not to fight the devil.

Chapter 3

Principles of the Secret Life

Take heed that you don't do your alms to be seen of men, otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven ... when you do alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret will himself reward you openly.

from Matthew 6:1-4

The first principle that we can learn from this passage in chapter 6 is that **it is dangerous to do good deeds with the wrong motive**. God is always looking at the hearts of men and not their actions. The heart is what matters to God and the motive is always more important than the act. Jesus says, **Take heed**. We would say "watch out", or "be careful". It is a warning, and Jesus tells us the consequence of having wrong motives – hypocrisy. The Pharisees did all the correct and good acts required of them in the law, but their motives were flawed and Jesus always exposed them. He did not feel sorry for

them – he was ruthless in his condemnation. Expressions such as **brood of vipers, children of the devil, whited sepulchres, full of dead men’s bones**, were used to describe these good-living members of God’s chosen race (see Matthew 23:33, John 8:44, Matthew 23:27).

I believe the reason that we must do these 3 things in secret is so that we can prove our motive to ourselves and to God. God will not change us because we think we want to change, or because it is our duty. Our motives must be correct, and this leads us on to the next principle.

We all have to choose

There are only two possible motives for any acts that we do. We either do them for the praise and glory of men, or we do them for the praise and glory of God. Either way we get a reward for our good deeds. It really is that simple. If I do not do something for the praise of God, then I do it for the praise of man. There is no other possibility. I can not do both at once. God will not share his glory with man. We can not have the praise of God and the praise of men at the same time. That is why Jesus gave another warning:

Woe to you – cursed are you – when all men speak well of you. That’s what they did to the false prophets.

Luke 6:26

One of the signs of a false prophet is popularity and the praise and attention of men.

If I do a good deed, and my heart is deceitful, and I need the praise and acknowledgement of men, then I will

do my good deeds before men, and sure enough, they will always acknowledge my good works – I will have my reward. But if I do good deeds in secret and only God knows about these deeds, then I deprive myself of any praise from men, and Jesus says that God will reward me, not in secret, but openly. In other words, the life of Christ will be manifest to all. I believe this is **the life of Jesus that will be manifest in my mortal flesh**. However, it is conditional on my proving that I do not want the praise of men, and this can only be accomplished by the secret acts that we are going to look at.

Not if, but when

There is a further principle that we can learn: **Almsgiving, prayers and fasting are not Christian practices**. They are religious duties that all religions practice. Hindus, Muslims, witches, as well as Jews and Christians, all believe in, and practice, almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Jesus does not say, **If** you pray, or **If** you fast or give alms, for he knows that all good religious people will do these things. Jesus is interested not in the good action but in a good motive – why we do it. Therefore, he says **when** you fast, pray or give alms. He asks us to do them, but not in a religious or dutiful way, but with a heart of obedience to prove our love and motives.

We do these things not to be good Christians, but to please our Father in heaven, and we do them in secret to show that the praise of men is not what we desire. True Christians seek the pleasure of their Father in heaven. In these verses Jesus constantly compares what we do for the praise of men on earth with what will please

our Father in heaven. As soon as we forget these three practices we revert back to hypocrisy and duty and lose the life of Jesus Christ. We become just like the good-living Pharisees who crucified Christ.

Part 2

Almsgiving In Secret

Chapter 4

Almsgiving

When you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Matt 6:3

He that has pity upon the poor lends to the LORD; and that which he has given will he pay him again.

Proverbs 19:7

Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

John Wesley

The first act that Jesus tells us to do in secret is almsgiving. Almsgiving is simply giving to the poor, those who can not repay the kindness. The word alms is not used very much in the bible, but in Luke's gospel, where the Sermon on the Mount is spread over many chapters, these words of Jesus are recorded:

Fear not little flock, for it is the father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms.

Luke 12:32-33

The Acts of the Apostles records that the first Gentile to receive Christ was a man called Cornelius. He was a Roman soldier but he gave **alms, fasted and prayed**. These three acts came up as a memorial to God and Peter was sent to show him the way of salvation (see Acts 10).

Almsgiving is giving money rather than giving our time or goods. It is a narrow discipline. In Matthew 19:16-22, the rich young ruler was told to **sell** what he had and give to the poor. Jesus could easily have said, "give your **goods** away to the poor", but he was quite specific, just as in the passage from Luke: **Sell what you have and give alms**.

The motive is always more important than the act to God, but nevertheless we still need to be quite specific about the way we give as Christians. Let me therefore explain what almsgiving is not.

1. It is not the giving of tithes

The act of giving one tenth of a person's income dates back to before the law of Moses to the time when Abraham, **as a spontaneous act**, gave tithes to Melchizedeck, God's priest in Salem (Genesis 14:20). Later, it was instituted in the Law of Moses as a way of providing for the priesthood, the family of Aaron and the Levites who had no possession in the land of Israel. In the third year, the surplus had to go to the widows, orphans and the poor.

When you have made an end of tithing all the tithes of your increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and has given it unto the Levite, the stranger,

the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within
your gates, and be filled

Deuteronomy 26:12

Christians now believe in the **priesthood of all believers**, so who should the tithe be given now?

Some churches demand that their congregations continue with this legal requirement, and many Christians feel under bondage. A study of tithing is not within the scope of this book, but the New Testament says nothing about tithing in either Jesus' teaching or the teaching of the apostles.

Often the evangelical leaders who demand tithes don't say anything about keeping the Sabbath, which is actually one of the Ten Commandments, and also predates the law. The Sabbath was instituted by God himself at creation. So there is a great inconsistency on many of these issues. Tithing is outside the bounds of almsgiving because, as all who demand that we should tithe teach, **it has its rewards**. They are perfectly correct in this respect, for the Old Testament says that if a man tithes then God will bless him, and if he does not he will be under God's curse!

The problem is that if we are taught to give to God so that we will receive more back again, although it may be true that "we cannot out-give God", we are teaching covetousness. It is just the same as an old lady who will **give away** £1 to the national lottery fund each week because she hopes for £8,000,000 in return. The hope of return is built into the motive for giving and it can breed covetousness or even the notion that **gain is godliness** (I Timothy 6:5).

2. It is not gifts or freewill offerings

Almsgiving is not giving money for missions. Again this has its rewards, and rightly so, for if I give money to an evangelist and he goes to Africa and ten thousand people give their lives to Christ, then I am a part of that evangelism, and I share in the blessing of the results. It is only fair that my investment should bring a reward. The same applies if I give my freewill offering to a church for new carpet or central heating. I will sit in a warm church and walk on the carpet. I have a vested interest when I give - and again I say, rightly so. There is nothing wrong with giving a tithe or a freewill offering and having the rewards, but herein is the problem. How do I know my true motive, if that is the only giving I do?

So Jesus suggests that I do things in secret to people who may even waste what I give them, and I do it regularly, so that it becomes a habit and not a 'good deed'. This will prove to God that my motive is to please him, by obedience, and he will then reward me openly. In my book **Salt and Light** I pointed out that

**God blesses the wicked and the good, and sends his
rain on the righteous and the unrighteous**

Matthew 5:45

Almsgiving proves whether we want to be religious, or whether we want to be like God. There is a big difference.

I remember first hearing about almsgiving from my father when he was teaching through the Sermon on

the Mount in 1975. It was the first time I had ever heard a sermon specifically on almsgiving (and I have never heard one since that time). It really did expose me for I realised how extremely selfish I was. I know some people have a natural tendency to feel sorry for those in need and those experiencing difficulties and can not but help them. I was naturally the opposite. I would go to the other side of the road so as not to have to face a needy person, just as the priest and the Levite did to the Good Samaritan.

I have been working on this weakness ever since that time and I am still a long way from where my conscience tells me I should be. I thank God that, as I teach through the Sermon on the Mount, my motives and actions are slowly changing. Our ministry, at this present time of writing, is building a bible school in India, an orphanage in Nigeria for the orphans of those martyred in the north of the country, and an orphanage in Uganda where there are 1.9 million orphans because of the plague of AIDS.

I realise that even building an orphanage could be for the wrong motive, and I am constantly trying to do personal things in secret. I still find it very hard to do good things without getting the credit for them, and knowing I will never get the credit this side of heaven because no one knows what I have done.

Mrs. Jones and Albert

Everyone likes the praise of men, and this is the challenge of secret giving. Let me give a simple illustration of a person who decides that they must start to give alms. They remember that there is a widow in

their street who is very poor. They knock on her door and give her an envelope with £20 in it and say, "Mrs. Jones, I am from the local church and we love you and want to help you. Each week I am going to come and give you an envelope like this one to show the love of God." I am sure Mrs Jones will close the door and say, "Just look at that, Albert!" (Albert is the dog), "those people really are real Christians, if I were ever to go to a church it would be theirs".

They have given alms but they have received their reward. Mrs. Jones and Albert have acknowledged and praised them and so they have lost the reward of their heavenly Father. This person should have put the envelope through the door as they were passing the house, and no one could have rewarded them. Mrs. Jones would have said to Albert, "Just look at that, someone loves us after all", and she would have a chance to thank God. God also has a chance to reward the giver for their secret act. God can and will reward them because of their obedience to hide the act, work on their motives and start the real work of Christianity – a change of heart.

Unassuming righteousness

It is worthwhile commenting on Jesus' statement in verse 3 of Matthew 6: **When you do give alms do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.** This is a strange statement when we try and understand it in a practical sense, because the same brain works both left and right hands! I believe Jesus was saying that our giving to the poor has to be so natural and so

often that we are not even aware of the good deeds we are doing.

The first time anyone gives alms it is impossible for them not to feel good about it, knowing they have pleased God and man. If, however, it becomes a habit so that they do it automatically, it becomes natural to them and is what I call ‘unassuming righteousness’. I believe this is what Jesus meant and I believe that the righteousness that is hidden from ourselves is the only true righteousness that is acceptable to God.

I believe the great sin of the western Church is not that they haven’t achieved the likeness of Christ, but that they will not acknowledge their lack and will not start on the process of refinement. I challenge all readers of this book to start to practice this secret discipline of almsgiving.

Part 3
Prayer In Secret

Chapter 5

Principles of Prayer

When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men. Be assured they have their reward.

Matthew 6:5

The second discipline Jesus asks us to do in secret is to pray to our heavenly Father. I will talk about principles that apply to secret prayer in this chapter, and in the next chapter the practical applications of prayer.

Let us remember that Jesus says, "**When** you pray" and not "**If** you pray". He expects that Christians, like all good religious people, will pray in public, and maybe for the praise of men, and receive their rewards – men's praise and acceptance. Public prayers are not wrong, they are necessary and we should attend public prayer meetings, but God can not reward us if our motives are not pure, and we can never be sure of our motives.

God's word tells us that our hearts **are deceitful and desperately wicked above all things and only God knows them.** That is why we are instructed to also pray

in private and please our heavenly Father. This will prove our motives and allow us to receive the reward from God that we so badly need – a change of heart.

Jesus gives us a wonderful example of the two possible motives of the heart when we pray. He tells a story in Luke 18:10-14. The introduction to the story tells us a great deal, for he says that **he spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.** It is a strange fact that these two parts of the statement cannot exist on their own. You would imagine that you could be self-righteous without despising others, or that you could despise others without elevating yourself. but in fact, if we are self-righteous we will despise others. If we despise anyone on the face of this earth, it is because we are self-righteous. The bible explains that our righteousness is as filthy rags to God, so to despise other people is to trust in our own righteousness.

Two men praying

In Jesus' parable the first man who prayed was a Pharisee – a good-living man who gave alms and tithes, and who prayed and fasted. His prayer was, **God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican,** and he told God of his good deeds. I must emphasise that he was a good man and I am sure he did the things he professed to do.

Without wanting to be over-critical, I find that this is a very common type of prayer on a Sunday morning in evangelical churches when they have an open time

of prayer: "God, I thank you that you lifted me out of the miry clay and put my feet on the rock and I do not steal, cheat, get drunk and womanise like I used to. I am seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Again, this is all true and I am not criticising the prayer per se, but I am saying that we can not know the motives behind this type of prayer.

It is interesting to carefully look at what Jesus said about this first man. **He stood and prayed thus with himself.** Maybe he thought he was praying to God, but putting the word "God" before a sentence does not make it a prayer to God. Jesus says he was really praying for his own ears and the ears of those around him.

The second man that Jesus talks about in the story is a weak man, a publican. He was ashamed to look up to God. He bowed his head, smote his breast, and said: **Be merciful to me a sinner.** Jesus said that this "sinner" was justified, that is, made righteous in God's sight, more than the Pharisee. The key to righteousness was not the prayer, but the motives of the heart. Unless we are honest in our prayer, we do not attract God's attention or his favour.

Lack of integrity

How many times will a minister walk on to the platform and say, "Oh God, we feel your mighty presence this morning", when in reality he has perhaps just had a violent argument with his wife on the way to the Church, or maybe a deacon has had strong words with him in the vestry a few seconds before he walked on the platform? His congregation has also been in the world all week

listening to filthy conversations and observing ungodly conduct. The reason that they have come to church is to be washed and refreshed.

The minister may think that he is acting in faith and encouragement, but without honesty, faith and encouragement are impotent. Maybe if he said, "God, I have had a difficult week and I have just upset my wife. I want to confess my worldliness before I start this meeting and come before your throne". Not only would he please God but he would give hope to his congregation who also have had a hard week, but believe that their minister always lives in "the glory".

It is always easier to be honest in private rather than in public, and this is another good reason to go into our closet. If we are to be real with God, sometimes it is best that our minister, wife and children are not present whilst the "dirty washing" is brought out. Truth is fundamental in any relationship and how much more so with the Almighty God.

Chapter 6

What Is Prayer?

Prayer is simply a request, an entreaty, a desire or a petition. Years ago we used the word in our natural language. For example, "Pray help me across the road" meant "Please can you help me". Because prayer is a request it excludes two things that we perhaps associate with prayer.

1. Praise and thanksgiving

We should always give thanks to God, but that is not prayer. It accompanies prayer. If my children want a favour from me they would do well to remind me what a good father I am before they ask for the favour. Paul says to the believers in Philippi that they should accompany their prayers **with** thanksgiving.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Philippians 4:6

2. Demands

There are no scriptures in the bible that say we can demand anything from God. We must always request, plead, or intercede. God does not have to do anything in response to our actions or prayers. He is God, and if he **has** to do something because we have exercised faith or met certain requirements, then he is not God. We would be in control and not God. Whoever has control is God. God **is**, and he does not **have** to do anything in response to us. If he does respond, it is because of love, or to fulfil his purposes, but not of necessity.

Christianity is about giving up rights, not claiming them. There is not one scripture that allows for this mistaken doctrine of demanding that God keep his promises. There are no formulas in the bible that will allow us to use God to grant our wishes. Formulas, mantras and spells are to do with the occult and not Christianity. There are no formulas in love, and our relationship is one of Father and children. Children can not demand anything from their parents. They can only request and remind their parents of their promises

Why is prayer so difficult?

Do people run into their closet every morning to spend hours with God? A phone call, something on the news, a family argument all very easily divert people from a disciplined prayer life in secret. Why is prayer in secret so difficult? It doesn't seem reasonable.

I believe prayer is the most difficult of disciplines because **it is resisted the most**. Prayer in secret develops a relationship with God. The work of the devil is to separate men from God. Jesus came to reconcile men to God by the cross. This means that we now have access to God himself and we have the relationship that God always wanted with his creation. The problem is that although the cross allowed us permission for access to the throne of grace, a relationship is more than access or acquaintance. Relationship has to be developed by using our access. The devil wants us to develop our relationship with **our beliefs about God** - our doctrines - and in so doing miss a personal relationship with God himself. We do not need a secret prayer life to learn Greek, Hebrew and church doctrine. We do not need a secret prayer life to understand church growth methods and people management. We do, however, need a personal secret prayer life to live a holy life and become like the person we claim we are following.

The devil's fear

The devil resists secret prayer so much because it is his greatest fear. People who **know God**, as opposed to **knowing about God**, are a threat to the kingdoms of this world. The devil can not offer a man who is intimate with God the distractions of fame, status, or wealth. Such a man becomes like God in character and is humble and meek. He despises the world and its tinsel. We become like the people we mix intimately with, and a man who spends time in the closet with God becomes like God; the process is quite simple, there is no other

way to lead a holy life. All other means are hypocrisy and an outward simulation that will easily deceive those of like mind, but will never deceive a true "prayer closet" disciple.

Lack of prayer exposes our carnality

Why do we find it so easy to talk about the things that interest us with our friends or the people we love? We can talk for hours about our careers or our hobbies and pursuits, our families and our gossip. Why do we find it easy to read a newspaper, or magazines about cars, fashion, or home? Why is it easy to watch breakfast TV or listen to radio - Christian or otherwise? It is because it is not resisted by the devil. In fact he encourages us with thoughts like "I need my relaxation, I need to know what goes on in the world if I am to be an effective witness. I need to be able to relate to what is happening around me in society."

Contrast this with the difficulty of reading God's word for one hour, or praying in secret for one hour. It is far harder to pray in secret for one hour than to watch a Christian preach a sermon on television.

The resistance from the devil is ferocious, because he knows that preaching often tells us **about** God, but a relationship makes us **like** God; and so it exposes our carnality and hypocrisy. We like to be intimate with people we love, so it only shows that our professed love for God must be in our emotions and minds and not in our hearts. If we loved God as much as we think we do then our greatest delight would be to spend time on our own with him.

When a boy sees a girl who he finds attractive, the first thing he wants to do is to separate her from the crowd and from her friends. He says things like, “Shall we go for a walk?”, or “Can I take you for a meal?”, because he wants to know her more intimately and he knows that this can not happen in a crowded place. How is it that Christians think that they can develop a relationship with God in church meetings? Fellowship is good of course, but you can only get to know the real God in secret. Real relationship is always a secret thing. The essence and heart of a true marriage is what happens in the secret place, not what is presented in public. What happens in secret should be kept secret; if the intimate details become public, then what was beautiful now changes into something sordid and pornographic.

Chapter 7

Private Prayer Isn't Teachable

It came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

Luke 11:1

The bible does not teach us how to pray in secret. There are lots of public prayers for our example and Jesus tells us the type of prayer to pray in church, the Lord's Prayer. There is nothing personal in it. It is all in the plural: **our** Father, **our** daily bread, **our** trespasses, and not, **my** Father, **my** trespasses. It is an example for corporate prayer.

But private prayer cannot be learned. Why am I so certain of that? Because a personal relationship needs to be intimate, and what will work for one person will not work for another. God treats us all differently because he made us all different. The bible says several times that God is not a respecter of persons, but the context of these scriptures is always to do with his judgement of his

people, not with equality or relationship. For example, I have two sons and I love them equally, but in matters of discipline and conduct I have to be more or less aggressive or diplomatic depending on which child I am addressing. So it is with God, he treats us according to how he made us because we each have a unique personal and individual relationship with him.

If a boy wants to win the favour of a girl who attracts him, he cannot read a book for help. Relationship is to do with chemistry and spirit, and not rules and formulas. Does he read Shakespeare to the girl, or buy her flowers, or just hold her hand and walk in silence for an hour? Things that will affect one girl will be a real turn-off for another. He would be wise to forget the formulas and examples of others and just get to know what this individual person likes and dislikes. She will be different from every other girl on the planet.

The only way to know God is to forget public-type praying and get to know God in private. All the ecclesiastical talk and expressions do not count in an intimate relationship. In public we may shout and raise our voice, but why on earth would we do that if God is the only one listening? Why would we use a different tone of voice in public from the one we use in private? Why would we use Christian phrases in private when we do not use them in our normal conversations to those we love? Surely we should be ourselves before God in secret?

Prayer is proportional to relationship

I believe that time spent with God in secret is directly proportional to our relationship and knowledge of him.

It is the same with any relationship. I know couples who have a great relationship with each other when they are with other people, but when they are on their own they fight like cat and dog. If they are not happy on their own together, their public relationship is a farce. So it is with a Christian. If a person only praises and talks about God in church and in worship, but they do not really want to be on their own with God, then their Christianity is false and they are living a lie. Unfortunately, my observation is that this is the majority of the believers – including those in ministry.

Men are God's methods

I have preached in churches all over the world. Often, after the meeting is over and I am at the home of the minister, he will talk avidly about his church and his plans and his hobbies, but rarely does he want to talk about God or even the things that I have challenged his church about. His ministry is more important than God. He would never believe it, but to me it is obvious when I look at his life. He is so busy **working for God** that he has little time to spend **with God**. Because of this imbalance, he thinks the kingdom needs more money to expand, more famous people to attract the crowds, and better organisation. This is a sure sign that he spends more time at church growth seminars than alone with God, where he would realise that men are looking for methods, but God is looking for holy men. Men are God's methods. One man, Moses, delivered a whole nation, but he spent 40 years in the desert with God and became the meekest man on the earth. Arrogant

Egypt did not do this for Moses. God's methods do not change with history or culture. He is still looking for men to stand in the gap, and, as always, they are very rare. Great men are great pray-ers, as were Daniel, Moses, Abraham, Jesus, Paul, John Wesley, E.M. Bounds, and Charles Finney.

Secret Prayer –communication

Prayer has to be two-way communication. If I pray to the wall, I will not receive any answer or attention. Private prayer is not just to request from God, for he knows my needs before I ask. I do not pray requests because God does not know them, but to confess them. On the other hand, I do not know what God requires of me in a personal way unless he speaks personally to me. I can know the revealed will of God for every Christian from the bible, but I can never know God's personal will unless he speaks personally to me. Makes of car and towns in which to live in the UK are not mentioned in the bible, so I need to hear personally for my individual needs. I must find and know the personal mind of God.

Have you ever thought to ask God how he is feeling? God has feelings, and they can change from anger, to pity, to frustration. Is he grieving today over the AIDS orphans in the world, or is he rejoicing over a repentant sinner? It is imperative for Christians to know the mind of Christ if they are to be a part of God's plans rather than hinder them. I live in Manchester – a pro gay city. Does God want to bring a revival in my town? Does he want me to fast and

pray for this, or is it time for God's judgement and should I pray for this?

There came a time when God told Jeremeiah not to pray any more for Israel because the time had come for judgement and their captivity in Babylon. If Jeremiah had prayed for revival he would have been praying against God's will. Thank God he had an intimate relationship with God and knew God's mind.

Therefore, pray not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear you

Jeremiah 7:16).

Therefore, pray not for this people, neither lift up a cry nor prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble

Jeremiah 11:14.

...Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good

Jeremiah 14:11

God doesn't always hear us

Many Christians seem to think that God always hears our prayers, but this is not true. We would not have to ask God to incline his ear if he were always listening.

I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech

Psalms 17:6

We have to get God's attention. **Vain repetition** will not get God's attention any more than endless mumbling would make me pay attention to my own child. Let me give you a few of many instances when God will not listen. In Psalm 66:18, David said, **If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.** He doesn't say God will not answer, he is saying God will not even consider it.

Peter in his first epistle writes about a possible situation in a marriage that all Christian men should take to heart and live accordingly.

Husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto your wife as the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers are not hindered

1 Peter 3:7

We are now going to look at the practical aspects of private prayer, but let me close this chapter by saying that there is no greater, quicker, more sure way to know God intimately than spending time with him in secret. We so often deceive ourselves by working and studying hard as a substitute for spending time alone with God. He is far more interested in our worth than our work.

Part 4
Prayer in Practice

Chapter 8

Discipline is the Key

He who does not enjoy solitude will not love freedom

Arthur Schopenhauer

I want to help those people who realise that a disciplined prayer life in secret is imperative to an intimate and fruitful relationship with God. As I have emphasised throughout this series, discipline is not the end – it is only the means whereby we can eventually be free. A person can not justifiably claim to be free unless he can prove that he was once bound.

Prove you are sane

I remember many years ago a man, trying to prove a point, challenged me to prove that I was sane. He told me I couldn't prove it, whereas he on the other hand had a certificate from the government to attest to his sanity. He had been interned in a lunatic asylum and certified as insane. After he had proved to the authorities that he could live a normal balanced life he was given a certificate to prove his sanity. I realised that because I had not been

in an asylum, I could not substantiate my claim that I was sane no matter how much I believed it to be true. Many Christians claim to be free, but because they have never been 'bound' by discipline, and so they could be deceived. Their 'freedom' could be just independence or sheer lack of discipline.

Some Christians have told me that they feel I am putting them under bondage and making prayer a legalistic requirement, "Can't I pray when I feel like it?", they say. The answer is yes, of course you can pray whenever you feel like it, the problem is that without the discipline, most Christians **don't** feel like going into their closet very often for intercourse with God. Their argument becomes an excuse for why they don't pray very often. The bible says that we should **pray without ceasing** (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and that **men ought always to pray and not to faint** (Luke 18:1). A person can only be a walking prayer, 24 hours a day, when they have mastered the discipline of prayer in secret. The same goes for any other difficult activity that we want to master in life. All learning comes through repetition and discipline, and prayer is no different. E. M. Bounds says that "prayer is man's work and the hardest thing any human can do". It is not for weak people and old ladies. Sad to say, the average prayer meeting in the western world is overwhelmingly populated by women.

It is difficult to have a meaningful relationship on a casual basis. How could a man court a woman with a view to marriage, if she would only see him when she felt like it? "When I feel like it I will ring you" – no commitment, no encouragement. A relationship will only grow and flourish when commitment and effort are put

into the equation; what an insult it is to God that we will talk to him when we feel like it! When Christ becomes one with us and his thoughts are our thoughts, and when we have the mind of Christ we become a walking prayer – in constant communion. However, until we discipline ourselves in the prayer closet this will remain a dream, or we will believe that this lifestyle is just for super-spiritual people who are chosen by God for such a close walk. Every believer has been called to this intimate relationship where God personally talks to and guides them in every area of their lives. I believe God wants to be a friend to all his children as he was to Abraham, and to share his plans and secrets with them so that they can fulfil his perfect will for them.

Chapter 9

Where, When and Why?

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

I John 1:3-4

Prayer is man's work

E.M. Bounds

In this chapter I will look at the practical aspects of a secret prayer life. Spiritual disciplines always have practical applications, and involve our ordinary common sense and reason.

1. Where do we pray?

Is there an optimum place that I can find to have my private prayer time with God and fulfil what I am

commanded to do? Jesus tells us that the closet is the best place. This is a private place where we feel alone with God. He says "Shut the door". Today it means, turn your mobile phone off and be out of earshot of the television. It has to be a place of solitude. Not everyone has a spare room in their house for this purpose, but if we mean business we will find a specific place somewhere.

I know a pastor who uses a shed at the bottom of his garden. He put heating in it and it is his closet. Another lady I know who had a non-believing husband who did not understand her need to be alone with God, used her bathroom. She slowly took more and more time in this 'closet' until her husband accepted the fact that she was always in it "for ages" and was not offended. In fact God filled her with the Holy Ghost in her secret undisturbed place one morning, quite unexpectedly.

Jesus our example

Jesus is always our example, and although he had a perfect communion with his Father, he still needed a place of intimacy and solitude. We find that he **rose up a great while before day and went into a solitary place and prayed** (Mark 1:35).

Another time Jesus suggested that he and the disciples **come apart and rest a while** from their busy lives. They couldn't do this because the crowds followed them to the other side of the lake and into a private desert place. He had compassion on them, seeing them **as sheep without a shepherd**, so he taught the multitudes and then fed them supernaturally. Jesus realised that he would never have his time of prayer unless he took drastic action so

he told his disciples to go to the other side of the lake by boat, on their own. He then sent the crowds away. Mark's Gospel records that Jesus went into a mountain to pray. He then had to get to the other side of the lake to join his disciples so he walked on the water and would have passed by the disciples.

There is no reason that I can think of for Jesus to break the law of gravity and walk on water other than the desperate need to be on his own with his Father in secret. In all the miracles that Jesus did I find benefits to humanity – healing, restoration, or needs being met. This is the only miracle where there seems to be no benefit except to enable Jesus to pray to his Father in secret. The fact that he did a miracle proves how highly he valued his personal prayer time (see Mark 6:31-51).

Peter is another example of a disciple who made private prayer a priority. Peter on one of his missionary journeys came near to a city. The first thing he did was to go up on a housetop to pray. It says it was the sixth hour. This is the hottest part of the day. Only "mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun". Who else would go onto the rooftop at midday in Israel? Only a mad dog or a man desperate to be alone with his Maker would do this. Peter knew that he would be undisturbed at this time of the day and he would be alone. God gave him a dramatic vision, which resulted in the gospel spreading to the Gentiles (see Acts chapter 10).

2. When should I Pray?

We can of course pray at any time, but is there a best time or preferred time? I believe there is, especially if

we want to form a disciplined habit. I believe that first thing in the morning is by far the best time. Here are my reasons.

First things first

If as a Christian I say that God is first in my life and then I pray at night before I go to sleep, I have in reality put God last in each day. I will have eaten my meals for physical sustenance, done my daily work, and had my relaxation. When I have finished all **I want to do** with my day and my life, and then I pray, I have in fact put God last in my life. Talk is cheap and I should be able to demonstrate my beliefs, so why not put God before anything, every day, and become a doer rather than a believer? I am sure that after a few hours of sleep most people have lost the cares and worries of the last day and their minds are more free to hear God, rather than the myriad voices of husband, wife, children or media. People who find it hard to concentrate are really saying that their mind wanders, so why don't they meet with God before their minds are filled with the cares of the day?

When I started, many years ago, to be disciplined in this area I would, after getting dressed and making a cup of coffee, go into my closet before I even talked to my wife or children. I spent the beginning of the day with God. It would have been much more difficult if I had talked to my wife, maybe entered some futile argument, and lost my peace of mind before I entered the closet.

I have no doubt that if I had read my mail or the morning newspapers that many of the **cares of this**

world and the deceitfulness of riches would have entered my carnal mind and crowded it, making it more difficult to commune with God. Whenever unusual circumstances did break this routine I found it so much more difficult to concentrate a few hours after my day had started.

The stillness of the night

Another good time to have a personal and intimate time with God is in the middle of the night. In biblical terminology it is "a great while before day".

The world is much more peaceful at night. For example, a friend is not going to call to see me 'on the off chance', the phone will not ring with some 'telesales nonsense' and so our disposition is more relaxed, and our mindset is completely different from in the day. This makes it conducive to quietness and meditation. Communing with God on an intimate level becomes easier.

3. How long should I pray for?

Asking how long I should pray for is like asking "how long is a piece of string", but the purpose of this teaching is to develop the discipline so that we have a continuous awareness and presence of God, so that we **pray without ceasing** and our whole life becomes a living prayer. His thoughts are our thoughts and our thoughts are his thoughts. That is the aim, but it will not happen automatically and without prior discipline. Let me reiterate what I have stated many times in these

studies, that discipline is only the means to freedom. It must never be the end in itself. So from the point of discipline we can set down helps.

Little by little

I would suggest that ten minutes of daily, first-thing, concentrated prayer is much better than one-hour of mind-wandering "vain repetitions". The first thing is to develop the habit; the length of time comes later. We will never develop a meaningful relationship with God or anyone else on ten minutes a day for twenty years. It has to develop, but 'slow and sure' is the best way. I have found that many Christians set themselves an hour each day to pray, but because they have not started slowly, they practice it for maybe a week, and it 'half kills them', and this puts them off for life. They never try again for fear of failure, and end up calling all discipline 'legalism'.

To me it is very sad that no one has told them that relationships grow little by little, and that **we change from glory to glory**. There is no instant maturity; it is a slow painful process. Even Jesus **the captain of our salvation was perfected through suffering** (Hebrews 2:10).

4. Why Pray in Secret?

I believe that the primary purpose of private prayer is not petition or to empower me, but to develop my relationship with God.¹ Private prayer is an intimate practice which enables a person to know God above their doctrines and denomination. Sadly, I have found

that many Christians know much **about** God, but very little of God himself. They know their bibles very well, but do not know the author of the bible half as well. Their view of God is based on their doctrines and not on their personal experience. Knowledge is not experience, and it is a poor substitute for it. The purpose of the closet is to experience the real God. God made Adam so that he could have a relationship with him that was based on love. Where in the scripture does it say that that the angels or cherubim love God? They certainly worship God, but so will the devil one day bow down and worship God along with Hitler and Saddam Hussein. All the wicked of the earth who hate God will also bow the knee and worship – but they will never love God. These heavenly creatures obey or disobey, proving they have a free will, but to love is another dimension beyond free will, and I believe that this is why God made man in his own image: for a love relationship.

Because man was made in God's image, God realised that it was **not good for man to be alone**. In other words, man needed a loving relationship, and so after the animal kingdom was not acceptable to Adam, God brought woman to him, not as a replacement for relationship with God but the very opposite – so that man could understand how God yearns for relationship with his creation (see Genesis 2:18-23).

God walked in the garden and communed personally with Adam and Eve. Because of sin God exiled himself and walked no more on the earth. Later he asked Moses to **build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them**. God always wants to dwell with and have a personal relationship with his creation. The end of all

things will be when God creates a new earth and will dwell with his new creation on this new earth for ever.

Jesus' prayer in the upper room after the last supper was all about the purpose of his redemption – to give men back the communion with God that Adam lost. Read the following verses from John 17 slowly and digest them. Surely it will change the way and the attitude of your private prayers.

That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory that you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them, as you have loved me.

John 17:21-23

Notes

1. Of course petition and many other types of prayer can be used in secret, but this book is not about types of prayer but prayer itself, to develop a relationship with God as a friend, not as a supplier of all our needs. The ultimate of all prayer is intercession, but this is always dependent on our relationship with him. He shares his secrets with his friends. (*Should I hide from Abraham the things that I will do?*) Intercession is dependent on relationship. Petition is not dependant on relationship for any one can pray to God for their needs, even the worst sinners. Jesus healed and answered many prayers for people who did not even follow him, but this subject is for another book.

Chapter 10

The Lord's Prayer

After this manner therefore pray: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your 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 yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Matthew 6:9:13

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

Luke 11:1

There have been hundreds of books written and thousands of sermons preached about the Lord's Prayer. I am only interested in this prayer in the context of in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the context of the first part of chapter 6, the secret life of a disciple. Jesus tells us to do 3 things in secret – give alms, pray and fast.

I have argued that prayer in private is necessary for

a relationship with God and cannot be taught, so why does Jesus say, **after this manner pray** and then give us an example prayer? It is because he is giving us a prayer to pray in public and not for the closet. He is letting us know that although it is imperative that we pray in private, public prayer is not wrong, it is also necessary. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer that I prayed every day of my school life in assembly as a public prayer.

The Church has always recognised that this is a public prayer for the ears of the world and the Church. I will make some general remarks about the whole prayer before I look at each phrase.

1. It is not personal

All of the Lord's Prayer is written in the plural form: **Our** father, give us **our** daily bread, forgive us **our** trespasses. It does not say **my** Father, **my** trespasses, or **my** daily bread. It is not at all intimate, it is general and it is a corporate prayer for all people of all races and cultures. In other words, it is the prayer of the church, not the prayer of an individual. Of course it is not wrong to pray this prayer in private and personalise it, but I am looking at this prayer in the context of the whole of Jesus' sermon, and this prayer is in the section dealing with the secret life of a disciple.

2. It is educational

It is important to realise that it is impossible for anyone to pray in public and not realise that they are being listened to, not only by God but also by other

people. We will always pray differently in public, and if we do not then there is something wrong with our personal relationship with God. I talk completely differently to my wife when we are alone compared to when we are in public. On the one hand, if I talked to her in public as I do in private, I would be betraying our intimate relationship, and on the other hand if I only say to my wife in secret the same things that I say in public then I reckon that I should begin to question how intimate my relationship really is. So it is with all relationships, including the one we have with God.

Public prayer should always be instructive, motivational and educational. Public prayer is for the public's ears as well as for God's, and the Lord's Prayer has all these corporate qualities.

3. It is all about the future

It is for all the world to know that we as Christians are not living for this life alone, but are longing and praying for the coming kingdom of Christ. All Christians' aspirations should be for the future, as was the desire of Jesus when he walked this earth: **for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame.** This prayer is all about the future kingdom.

I have argued in a previous volume in this series that the beatitudes will only be fulfilled completely when Jesus comes again and sets up his kingdom on earth. This prayer is the cry of the church for the kingdom of God to come on earth. It is corporate intercession to God from his people for the millennial dispensation, when the earth will finally be at rest, and Christ and his bride,

the church, will reign in righteousness and peace. This prayer is all about his coming kingdom and not about establishing the empire-building of the church before the return of the King. In chapter 12 of this book we will be looking at the kingdom of God more closely.

Our Father

This prayer starts by addressing God, our Father. We know that it is through Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross that we have access to God, and so we pray in the name of Jesus, but we are told to address “Our Father” when praying. I believe that the father should have the greater honour. Jesus did nothing on earth unless the Father showed him. He did nothing of himself or for himself, and we should follow this pattern, even in prayer. We are appealing not to our brother and co-heir Jesus, but to his Father and our Father in heaven.

The Holy Ghost, the Son and the Father are all equal (one) in unity and character, but the bible clearly tells us that they are not equal in authority, and that God is the head (authority) over Christ, and Christ is the head (authority) over the church. The Holy Ghost reveals Christ and Christ reveals the Father. Our prayers are helped by the Holy Ghost and acceptable because of the Son, but our requests are to **our Father which is in heaven**. I can find no scripture as an example or instruction for us to address the Holy Ghost in our prayers.

Chapter 11

Hallowed Be Your Name

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.

Exodus 20:2

Neither shall you profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD, which hallow you.

Leviticus 22:32

To "hallow" something means to treat it as holy. To be holy is to be separate or different. So to hallow God's name simply means: may God's name be revered and honoured as different from any other. Jesus in this part of the prayer is only quoting from the law of Moses:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain

Exodus 20:7

Leviticus also repeats this command:

Neither shall you profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD, which hallow you
Leviticus 22:32

If we do not hallow God's name then we profane it, which means that we have no respect for it and treat it as having no value or as being the same as any other name. Most people think that "taking the Lord's name in vain" means using the name of Jesus or God as a swear word, as in "For Christ's sake shut up!", or "God almighty, when will you ever learn!"

I may surprise you, but I have no problem at all with non-Christians using God's name in vain. Why should they revere my God's name any more than I should revere Allah, or Krishna? The command to hallow God's name is addressed to those who are God's chosen people, those who call him Father. The Ten Commandments were addressed to the Israelites only, and I believe the Sermon on the Mount is for Christians, and not for those people who are not the family of God.

Name denotes character

The other operative part of this sentence in the Lord's Prayer is "your name", and here, I believe, is the part that most people misunderstand. Jesus is not meaning God's title as "Jehovah" or "Almighty God", but his character and reputation. When we say someone "has a good name" we do not mean that it sounds pleasant or that it

is popular. We are meaning that the name is synonymous with integrity, reliability or other good character traits in that person. Simply put, a good name means a good character.

When a policeman says "Halt in the name of the law!", it is not a personal command. The policeman may have a dubious character, but he represents the law of the land and the whole judicial system is behind his words. I cannot use those words unless I represent the law. If I do then it is misrepresentation. I take "the law's name" in vain. This very thing happened in the Acts of the Apostles when the sons of Sceva used the name of Jesus when they had no right to use it. They used the 'name formula', **and applied it correctly**, but the name was used **without the character** and authority of God and it had disastrous results (see Acts 19:13-16).

Bringing God's name into disrepute

As another example, a man could purchase goods in my good name, but if I did not send him, then my name may get the goods, but the man would be stealing and misrepresenting me. A further example would be if my father was an upstanding and respected person in the community and I, his son, became a villain. People would say I had "dragged my father's good name through the mud". I am a son of my father and so I have a legitimate right to use the family name, but if my character does not match the good name, I am bringing my father's name into disrepute, and profaning it.

The implications are obvious. As a child of God through faith I have a right to use the name of God, but if

my life does not show the character of God, I bring God's name into disrepute. In other words, I do not hallow his name, even though I use it correctly in my words.

Jacob the twister

In the bible a name denotes the character of a person. For example, the name Jacob means "twister" and he was certainly true to his character, for he twisted everyone including his brother out of his blessing and birthright. When God changed his character he also changed his name to Israel, which means "a prince with God". Abram and Sarai as they grew in faith and obedience had their names changed to Abraham and Sarah. Eli's grandson was called Ichabod to denote that the glory had departed from Israel – the ark of the covenant had gone to their enemies.

Jesus said that we must hallow God's name, so how do we practically do this in the light of what I have just stated? People who call themselves children of God and show the character of God in their lifestyle are respecting and hallowing God's good name. But when we use God's name, that is, call ourselves the family of God, and then show another or different character, we profane his holy name.

For the remainder of this chapter I want to show how easy it is to profane God's name, not by our speech but by our actions. I will use illustrations that are all to do with lifestyle and not with speech.

Example 1

Again, you shall say to the children of Israel, Any of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that dwell in Israel,

that gives any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he has given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, **and to profane my holy name.**

This death penalty was not for blaspheming God's name in words, but for blaspheming God's character by offering their children to devils through Molech. The character of God is to give and save life, and not to murder.

This was in Old Testament history, but a present day parallel is surely abortion. To kill an unborn child and to "pass them through the fire", an incinerator, is to my mind no different. I am not criticising people who do not follow God, for they cannot bring his name into disrepute. I am saying that for a Christian, abortion is not an option, unless to save life, because it shows the opposite of God's character and is profanity in its true sense.

Example 2

Take the rod ... and **speak to the rock** ... Moses said to them, Hear now, you rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? ...and **he smote the rock twice**: and the water came out abundantly ... and the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, Because you believed me not, **to sanctify** me in the eyes of the children of Israel, you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them

from Numbers 20:7-12

Here, Moses was punished because he showed anger when representing God to the people, when God was not angry with them. God said, **Speak to the rock** and provide water. Moses disobeyed and in anger **struck the rock twice**. He did not hallow God's name – God's character. If God had been angry, then Moses would have been revealing God's character in what he did, but instead he showed his Adamic nature when speaking on God's behalf.

God loved Moses, and in Psalm 106:33 it says that God punished Moses **for Israel's sake**, because it was imperative that Israel should know how God felt; Moses had misrepresented this and hadn't sanctified God's name, in fact he had profaned it. That was his sin and that is why God had to severely punish Moses. To misrepresent God to a whole nation is not a light thing. It is the ultimate profanity. Is not this what Satan did to Eve in the Garden of Eden?

Example 3

As for you, O house of Israel, the Lord GOD says; Every one go and serve his idols, if you will not hearken unto me: **but pollute my holy name no more** with your gifts, and with your idols.

Ezekiel 20:39.

In this example the profanity was spiritual adultery. The children of Israel were bringing gifts and sacrifices to God as though they loved him and yet they also had other idols that they worshipped. God called this profanity. They did not hallow God's name, but treated him as **one of the gods**.

It is all too easy to criticise Israel and wonder how they could possibly do this. I can tell you it was very easy indeed. Today millions of Christians do the same and are just as blind as Israel, if not more blind. James in his epistle says that if we say we love God and also love the world – which means **the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life**, then we commit spiritual adultery and we profane God's name (see James 4:4). To love anything alongside God is **inordinate affection**. Unless we forsake all for the love of God we can not be a disciple, and in the measure that we love this world's fashion, culture, food, drink, politics, family and friends, this is the measure in which we do not hallow God's name (see Luke 14:26).

Example 4

**A man and his father will go in unto the same maid,
to profane my holy name.**

Amos 2:7

This example is of sexual immorality, and any unnatural sexual practice in a Christian will profane the name of God.

Example 5

This last example is from the New Testament and is challenging for it does not seem such an important point and yet Paul says the same thing – that it does not hallow God's name. He says that it blasphemes God's word.

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, **that the word of God be not blasphemed.**

Titus 2:3-5

Put in simple terms, if a Christian woman does not live a holy life, keep the home, take care of household affairs, or love and obey her own husband, then she is reversing God's order. She does not honour God's character and she does not hallow his holy name.

The fear of God is the key

When we say, "Our Father which is in heaven", we imply that we are God's children, and therefore we must prove our profession by having the same character as our Father. If as a Christian I do not show **God's** character, and not just my character, then I bring discredit to God's character and do not hallow his name.

It is not a light thing to say that God is my Father – that I have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. I believe that the fear of God, which is so sadly lacking in our churches today, is the beginning of obeying the command to keep his name holy. Only a holy fear of God can accomplish in us what is required of us.

Chapter 12

Your Kingdom - Your Will

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

Matthew 6:10

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

Jesus said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return ...

Luke 19:12

When we pray this line in the Lord's Prayer we are asking for God's kingdom to come on this present earth, but this "kingdom of God" has been a snare to God's people since Jesus came to earth. The Jews – God's people – did not recognise Jesus, and crucified him

as a blasphemer. The Jews were looking for a political Messiah to sit on the throne of David and destroy their enemies. Jesus did not fulfil these prophecies and so in their eyes he was an impostor.

The disciples of Jesus believed that Jesus would be a political Messiah. James and John, through their mother, asked Jesus if they could have a position in his kingdom when he established it.

And he said unto her, what do you want? She said unto him, Grant that my two sons may sit, the one on your right hand, and the other on the left, in your kingdom

Matthew 20:21

Peter rebuked Jesus for thinking about suffering in Jerusalem instead of becoming king.

From that time forth Jesus began to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan

Matthew 16:21

Not the end!

When the disciples realised that Jesus' death was not the end, that he had risen from the dead, they believed that he would now fulfil their dreams and the prophecies

of the Old Testament. One of the first questions the early Church asked Jesus when he had risen from the dead was:

Will you now restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Acts 1:6

The kingdom will certainly come to this earth, but the problem for God's people is in knowing the times and the seasons. At this present time we have a great part of the church believing that the Christians should bring the kingdom in during this church age. I challenge this, and I firmly believe that both history and the bible show that until Jesus is king on this earth, the kingdom will not come to earth. Of course Jesus is king of our lives and he reigns there, but he does not reign on earth, in fact Satan at this time is the god of this world.

In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them

2 Corinthians 4:4

When will the kingdom come?

God's kingdom can never be brought about until the god of this world is bound, and the scripture shows us that this has not happened yet. The book of Revelation tells us:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his

hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled ... And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years

Revelation 20:1-4

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

Until this time the kingdom does not come with observation:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

Luke 17:20

The Kingdom is within a person and we must pray fervently that the kingdom and the king will come to this earth and God's will is established on earth. This is not an excuse to just wait passively. The kingdom must be established in our own hearts and lives, and this kingdom lifestyle is sadly missing in much of modern Christianity. Christ must reign in our hearts.¹

Your will be done on earth

God's will must be done in the church and in our lives, but it can never be done over all the earth until **the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea**. This is another scripture that many Christians believe is for this present age and they try to accomplish this by "Christianizing the world". Europe, for centuries, was called Christendom – the kingdom of Christ – but it failed miserably. It now has a pagan name – Europe, from the Greek legend of Europa – and has pagan values. The name of God is not even mentioned in the European Constitution. The kingdom cannot come until the king returns.

We have no mandate to win the world for Jesus, to take cities for Christ, or to "win souls". This is not what the Great Commission says. What it does say is that we are to **preach the gospel** – to **tell** the whole world the good news that Jesus died and can give them eternal life and that the kingdom of God can come to them. We also should promise them the physical kingdom where they can reign with Christ on earth when he returns. We should also **make disciples of all nations**. When Jesus returns his will is going to be established just as it is in heaven, and we should fervently pray for this. It should be the heart cry of the church.

Whenever there is a true revival there seems to be a fresh emphasis of the return of Christ. I fear that much of the church does not really want Christ to return because it will spoil much of their carnal, materialistic, self-centred, empire-building plans. As an alternative to

God's kingdom, they are building their own kingdom on earth, which is none other than the counterfeit kingdom of Babylon. The whole modern ethos of "church growth" and "kingdom now" is "Let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered." Sadly, it is the very ethos of the system of Babylon:

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth

Genesis 11:4

Notes

1. *Manifesto for a Revolution: the kingdom of God on earth* by Alex Robertson (Barratt Ministries Publications, 2001) covers this subject in depth and will give a clear understanding of what the kingdom is all about.

Chapter 13

Daily Bread

Give us this day our daily bread

Matthew 6:11

Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or What shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matthew 6:31

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Matthew 4:4

This short verse in the prayer seems very straightforward and obvious at first glance. Surely it is a request that God supply our daily bread – in other words our basic requirements for life? I trust that I have shown that this prayer is not a personal prayer but a corporate prayer of the church, so I must be consistent and prove the same for this part of the prayer. I can do this if I look at other scriptures from the same sermon.

First, let me say that I do not believe it is wrong to pray for personal needs. We can ask God to provide a vehicle or a holiday or almost any need **except** for the basics of life – food and clothes. This is because we insult God as our father if we do, and show that we really do not believe that he is our father. Jesus says in this same sermon, "Take no thought – do not be anxious – for food and clothing, O you of little faith".

Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(Matthew 6:25-31).

A good father

I am a father and my children will never have to beg me to feed and clothe them. They may have to ask for special computer games and privileges, but it is unthinkable that my children would doubt for one moment that I would give them the basics of food and clothes. So it is with our heavenly Father, we can be confident that he will supply food and clothes.

To me it is obvious that Jesus is asking the church to pray for **spiritual** bread. Jesus himself claimed to be the **bread that came down from heaven**. Read in John 6

how Jesus explains that it he is resurrection bread. When we feed on Jesus we are eating eternal life and he **will raise us up at the last day**. Let us pray each day for spiritual bread – more of Christ, that we may grow into his perfect image.

Chapter 14

Forgive Us - Forgive Them

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Matthew 6:12

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 6:14-15

It may be infinitely worse to refuse to forgive than to murder, because the latter may be an impulse of a moment of heat, whereas the former is a cold and deliberate choice of the heart.

George MacDonald

I will again stress that in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, this line of the prayer is also for the church; it is a corporate asking for forgiveness. It is the same as when Solomon asks for the forgiveness of God's people

in 2 Chronicles 7, and God answers with the well-known statement “If my people ...”. The people who are called by God’s name have, as a body of people, much to ask for forgiveness. We have butchered thousands of Muslims in the name of Jesus and called it “holy war”. We have blasphemed his name by living for power and glory when it all belongs to God. We have not shown the character of our God in our church business. Our bigotry against those who are also called by the name of Christ but who have differing doctrines and opinions is embarrassing, and has only shown that because we do not love one another we are not really his disciples. The world are confused. The church should not be afraid to confess its faults, for in confession is forgiveness.

The line in the Lord’s Prayer says, **Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us.** This means that we have to forgive all who have resisted and persecuted the people of God, past and present. At this time in history a Christian is martyred every few minutes, but we have no enemies, for we love them all, and as Jesus said “they know not what they do”. The church can only win by surrender, not attack. There are no holy wars, only holy forgiveness.

After the amen

After Jesus has finished his sample prayer, for the Church he picks up on only one line – the one about forgiveness – and now he makes it personal. He says:

if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly
Father will also forgive you: but if don’t forgive not

men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive
your trespasses

Matthew 6:14-15

This part is personal and we must personally practise it. One of the biggest hindrances to the revival of true Christian lifestyle in the Church is disunity, and there will never be unity without forgiveness. This applies in a home, in a ministry or in the body of Christ. The church was birthed in unity, and only true unity fulfils the condition for a renewal of the Acts of the Apostles in action today in society.

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were
all **with one accord** in one placeAnd they were
all filled with the Holy Ghost

from Acts 2:1-4

Conditional forgiveness

There is a frightening implication in Jesus' statement that if we do not forgive we will not be forgiven. It is not an isolated scripture or concept. Mark 11:26 quotes the same and Luke 6:37 gives the principle that when we judge, God will judge us. If we will not forgive, God will not forgive us. This principle applies to Christians, that is, those who are in the light and therefore have no excuse. For those who do not know the right way, God's forgiveness is universal and unconditional when they come to Christ, but those who claim to be in the light are obligated to walk in that same light, and this is where the condition comes in.

If **we say** that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we are lying and do not tell the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin

1 John 1:6-7

When our salvation depends on God forgiving us, where will it leave us if we do not forgive? You will answer that question according to your doctrinal persuasion. I cannot enter the debate of Calvinism versus Arminianism, but suffice to say that whatever you believe it is a very serious situation if we do not forgive. Jesus makes it very plain that for God to forgive us is conditional on our forgiving others.

Not weakness but rebellion

The reason we have no excuse for unforgiveness is that unforgiveness is not weakness – it is rebellion. Let me show the difference. Let us suppose that someone has really hurt me, someone I love very deeply, and the pain is unbearable. This is quite acceptable and a fact of life, it is common to man and nobody escapes being hurt. But God tells us that we must forgive, so I make a great effort and say to God, "I forgive that person and ask that you will bless them unreservedly". I feel God's peace (it is impossible to be at peace if you have unforgiveness in your heart), and am pleased that I have obeyed him. The following day as I awake, I feel all the old hatred, resentment and bitterness for that person coming back, but by midday I am obedient and say the forgiveness prayer again.

If this happens repeatedly then I am a weak person. Maybe it will take many months or even years to be fully at peace and no longer have to forgive them. This situation is acceptable to God. Wounds take time to heal, and deep wounds take longer to heal than scratches. What is not acceptable, and is in fact rebellion, is when a person says, "I will not forgive, whatever you say".

The cost of the truth

I can remember teaching this series at a friend's church outside my home city of Manchester. After this particular study a lady came up to me after I had finished my talk and was enjoying a cup of coffee. She was obviously quite irate and explained that she had no intention whatsoever of forgiving the man who had molested her daughter. She told me she could easily kill him if she found him. She spent five minutes justifying her hatred and unforgiveness.

I explained to her again the difference between weakness and rebellion, in case she had misunderstood my sermon, but it made no difference to her attitude and she would not say a prayer of forgiveness. She stormed out of the church, and my pastor friend has told me that she has never been back to his church. This is rebellion, and God can not forgive it because when we are rebellious, and not weak, we align ourselves with Satan – for he is rebellion personified. Satan is not weak and can never be forgiven. He is rebellious by his very character, and all who are rebellious are destined for the lake of fire with him. Since Jesus has already died to take away the sin of the world, sin does not separate us

from God. Refusal to accept the free gift of forgiveness is rebellion against God's love, and that is what will ultimately separate people from God.

Suggested reading on this subject:

The Lost Art of Forgiveness by Johann Christoph Arnold (Plough Publishing House). If you have problems with forgiveness, these stories will change your thinking if anything will.

Chapter 15

The Hour of Temptation

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:13

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into many temptations, knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James 1: 2-4

Asking God not to lead us into times of testing might seem a prayer that we will feel happy with. We don't look any more deeply at it – but if we did we might find something that we do not like, something that will “war against the flesh”.

If we considered it for a moment we would realise that throughout the bible God has tested his own people as a nation and individually, and for good reasons. For those who know the scriptures, many examples will spring to mind. **God tempted Abraham**

to sacrifice his only son (Genesis 22:1). God was surely testing Joseph as he went through his many trials. Maybe Jesus is an example that everyone will accept: Jesus was **driven by God's Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil**. Jesus was sinless, and so the testing was nothing to do with sin, but with maturity and experience.

Knowledge or wisdom?

Only tests and trials bring maturity in any area. For example, patience is something we all know about. The problem is that the knowledge of patience and how it works in a person's life will not give us patience. We will need **the experience** of being offended or disappointed, along with the passage of time, to produce in us the **practice** of patience. This is wisdom – the application of knowledge. Even Jesus could not practice patience without the resistance and time needed to exercise it, and so the bible says,

The captain of our salvation was perfected (matured)
through sufferings

Hebrews 2:10

Let me quote a few scriptures which show us that trials and tests are not only necessary but beneficial to Christians.

James starts his epistle with a strange exhortation which seems to contradict what Jesus says in the line of the Lord's Prayer we are looking at, "Lead us not into temptation":

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into **many temptations**; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing

James 1:2-4

David in Psalm 139:23 asks God to test him. **Search me, Oh God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.** The most powerful scripture I can use is the one that tells us that Jesus was **led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted** (Matthew 4:1).

When Jesus, in the following chapter of Matthew, asks us to pray that we are **not led** into temptation, we either have a direct contradiction or else we need some kind of revelation and explanation. I believe that in line with what I have already proposed (that the whole prayer is a heart cry of the church for the coming kingdom) I can explain quite easily from scripture that the line about escaping temptation is consistent with this proposal.

My hour is not yet come

I believe that the temptation that Jesus asks us to pray that we escape is a specific temptation or trial that is to come on the whole earth just before he brings in his kingdom.

In the gospel of John Jesus often said, **My hour is not yet come.** What hour was he talking about? It is not reasonable, when looking at the context in John, to believe that it was a literal 60 minutes of time. However, it was obviously a **specific period of time.** We do not have to speculate about this, for as Jesus' hour came

nearer, the bible becomes more specific and tells us that it is the specific short but intense trials and tests of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross – the hour of temptation. Here are the quotes about this "hour" from John's gospel:

Jesus said unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? **My hour is not yet come.**

John 2:4

Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because **his hour was not yet come.**

John 7:30

Jesus answered them, saying, **the hour is come**, that the Son of man should be glorified.

John 12:23

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from **this hour: but for this cause I came unto this hour.**

John 12:27

Now before the feast of the Passover, when **Jesus knew that his hour was come** that he should depart out of this world unto the Father.

John 13:1

These words Jesus spoke, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, **the hour is come**; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify thee

John 17:1

The deliverance of childbirth

These scriptures clearly show that Jesus' hour of temptation was a specific, intense and ultimate trial and suffering before the joy and glory to be revealed through the resurrection. This is similar to the pain and deliverance of childbirth. The bible often uses the illustration of childbirth because the church has one day to be delivered and manifested as the new creation of God with their new spiritual bodies.

A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world

John 16:21

There will be no doubt in any Christian's mind that the world will go through great pain and tribulation before the heavens and the earth will pass away. The debate has always been, "Will the church pass through this time, or will they be resurrected before it happens?" I can not enter into this subject here as it is outside the scope of this book, but I do want to show that the prayer that Jesus asks the church to pray is about this time of tribulation.

Letter to Philadelphia

The letter to the church in Philadelphia, a church that had no recriminations from Jesus, was told that because

they kept God's word with patience, then God would keep them from **the hour of temptation** that would come upon the whole earth.

Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee **from the hour of temptation**, which shall come upon the entire world, to try them that dwell upon the earth

Revelation 3:10

This, I believe, is what we are requesting in the Lord's Prayer. The kingdom can not come until this happens and so the request is that we will be kept from the awful tribulation – the hour of temptation that will "try the earth".

Jesus also confirms this in Luke 21. When the disciples asked Jesus about his coming and the end of the world, Jesus spends much time going chronologically through events that will lead up to the end. Jesus foretells the events to his disciples and then tells them a parable with a warning that "that day" will come as a snare upon the whole earth. He warns that it will be very easy to be caught out and to be unaware. He says that it will come without warning. Here are the 3 verses of warning at the end of the chapter:

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all of those that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always, **that you may be accounted worthy**

**to escape all these things that shall come to pass,
and to stand before the Son of man**

Luke 21:34-36¹

Surely in the light of these scriptures, when we ask that God will not lead us into temptation, we are not asking that the necessary trials of life which bring the **peaceable fruits of righteousness** are removed, but rather that the bride of Christ will be worthy to escape this final tribulation and to stand before Christ as a bride who is fit to reign over the earth. **The meek will inherit the earth**, and meekness only comes from trials and testing, not from knowledge and doctrines.

Moses became **the meekest man on earth** because of his 40 years of testing in the wilderness!

The power and the glory

The last line of this example prayer for the church says: **For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.** It is a total surrender of all that the church have held onto and fought for over the centuries – **the kingdom, the power and the glory.** These 3 things have ruined the bride of Christ throughout history, for the church has always sought for them, and in doing so has usurped these 3 things from their rightful owner, God himself. The prayer is addressed to God – **Our Father**, and so the kingdom, the power and glory are God's. They do not belong to the church, and I believe at this time in history they do not yet belong to Christ. Although Jesus has paid the price for all 3 and they are his by right, he is still waiting at the right hand of

God until he is instructed to set up the kingdom on earth, to subdue his enemies under his feet and to manifest the full glory and power of God.

After he has reigned in power and glory in the kingdom for a thousand years, he will hand the kingdom the power and the glory back to God, **that God may be all in all** throughout eternity.

Then comes the end, when **he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God**, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet ... and when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

from 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

Ethos of Babylon

All denominations have "made a name for themselves so they are not scattered" which is the very ethos and spirit of Babylon. Paul says we are carnal when we say we are of Paul or Apollos, which must also include Calvin, Luther, Assemblies of God, Baptist and "Uncle Tom Cobbley and all". In essence these statements prove that **we** are trying to build the kingdom. God's pilgrims never try and make a name or an empire, for their kingdom is not of this world. They are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God.

So the kingdom is God's; the power and the glory are also always God's, and are best displayed in weak, disfigured and broken vessels.²

Let me close this section on prayer with the reminder that, as we finish this prayer and heart cry of the church for the King to return and the kingdom to be set up on this earth, we must totally surrender all rights to the glory, the kingdom and the power. We must realise that God has only let us use **his** power for **his** glory and for **his** kingdom.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Notes

1. See also Peter 2:9, which is in the context of the end time judgement of the world.
2. See 2 Corinthians 12:9, Isaiah 53, 2 Corinthians 4:7. In Mark 14:3 the precious alabaster box had to be broken to let out something more precious, which would not only fill the box but pervade the whole area where it was released.

Part 5

Fasting In Secret

Chapter 16

Principles of Fasting

Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?

Isaiah 58:6-7

When you fast, don't be as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. I say unto you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; that you appear not unto men to fast, but unto your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly.

Matthew 6:16-18

We are now up to the 3rd discipline that Jesus asks his disciples to do in secret – fasting. The principles are exactly the same as with the first 2 (almsgiving and

prayer). If our motive for fasting is pride, that is, to be noticed and praised by men, then we will obtain our reward. Men will praise and revere us and we will be satisfied that we are getting our just recognition. If, however, we fast in secret to please God and deny the praise and respect of men, then God will respect us and will reward us openly. I believe these three disciplines practised with the right motive give God the right that he needs to change us despite ourselves.

For example, if Christians could control their anger themselves they would have done so in the first few months after coming to know Christ. If after 10 years they still have a problem with anger then it is obvious that they cannot control it and they need help. I believe many Christians stay in their 'Adamic nature', because they will not do these 3 things that every Christian can practice. Until Christians are obedient to Jesus' instructions they are walking in rebellion and God will not change the things in their heart that they have no power over. This applies to any area in our secret life that we experience difficulty, such as lust, covetousness, selfishness, jealousy, pride – it is a long list if you look at the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21.

What is fasting?

I will now look at what fasting is and why we should practice fasting in many areas of our life with examples from the bible. The following chapter will deal purely with the practical aspects of fasting.

Fasting is abstinence from food. When we have our first meal of the day after sleeping all night we call it

'breakfast'; we break our fast. People have said they are fasting from television during Lent, or from chocolate and sweets for a period, or from other activities that are pleasing to the flesh, but these are not fasting in the true sense. They are practising self-denial, which of course is a very good thing, but really we are only fasting when we abstain from food.

Why is fasting so powerful and so much more difficult than other forms of self-denial? The answer is very simple. If I deny myself the pleasure of watching television or eating rich food, it will not alter my life. I will not die if I do not watch television or go to a football match. I will not wither away if I do not read a newspaper or fashion magazine, but when I do not eat then I am actually starting to die. A person would survive only 50-60 days without food and so if they do not eat for 5 days then they have gone 10 per cent of the way toward starving themselves to death.

Body and spirit

The human body and the human spirit are inseparable in this life, for one will always affect the other. Sad news to your spirit will make your body heavy, and good news to your spirit will give your body energy that you did not realise you had; fear or excitement – both spiritual things – can make a person's body release drugs such as adrenaline; and so on. Therefore, when I deprive my body of food then I am also depriving my spirit; I am humbling my **self**. I know of no greater, more efficient way of humbling my self, that is, my old nature, than to abstain from food. Drinks such as tea, coffee, and soft

drinks all have an amount of nourishment in them and I find that to fast on drinks only, bears no comparison with fasting in the true sense – on water alone.

Fasting for power

I would now like to expose two misconceptions about fasting. The first is that fasting is a way to obtain power from God. To believe that fasting releases power is to believe that God is a force that can be harnessed. All we have to do is apply the formula and we will get the results. Formulas will work with everything in God's universe that does not have personality and free will. Electricity, gravity, aerodynamics will always be governed by fixed laws and so we can use or abuse them accordingly with formulas.

But God and man are not forces, because they have a free will and personality and therefore cannot be manipulated according to formulas. We can entreat or plead with God, but we can never force God to do anything. I know from experience that I can not have a relationship with my wife on the basis of formulas. What I say today to my wife to get a certain response may not work tomorrow, and I have to constantly adjust to her feelings and situations to keep the relationship alive. God's character does not change, but his feelings and situations do and we must never, never treat God as a formula – a dead statue with powers. He is the living God.

If God **has** to respond to anything that I do, then I am in control, not God. The idea that God has to respond to my actions or a dictate is not true. God

indeed may respond to me, but it is because he chooses or wants to, **not because he is forced to**. God is a law unto himself and he makes rules for us to keep, not for himself. I cannot find where anyone fasted for power in the bible, and Jesus or the apostles did not teach that we should. Fasting is basically to humble ourselves – that is, the very opposite of power-seeking.

Not a Christian practice

The second misconception is that fasting has any merit of itself for a Christian. All religions use the discipline of fasting. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Animists, as well as Witches and Satanists, all teach and practice fasting. There is no benefit for a Christian in the act of fasting. With Jehovah, the Christian God, it is never the outward act that is important, but the inward attitude. This is why Jesus tells us to fast in secret – to prove to ourselves, and to God, that our motive for fasting is not to get the praise and recognition of men or to obtain power from God. As with almsgiving and prayer, Jesus does not say “**If** you fast ...”, for he expects that all people of all faiths will practice this, he just says “**When** you fast don’t do it as the hypocrites do, to be seen of men.

Chapter 17

Biblical Examples

They said to Jesus, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but yours eat and drink? And he said to them, Can you make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.

Luke 5:33-35

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting.

Psalms 35:13

When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.

Psalms 69:10

I have shown in the last chapter that when we humble our bodies by fasting we also humble our spirits. This is the only biblical reason that I can find for fasting – to humble our spirits before God. See the above quotes

from the Psalms of David. Of course we can humble ourselves for many different purposes, but here are 10 biblical reasons to humble ourselves before God. This is not a complete list, just examples for us to understand the application, to see the variety of reasons for which God's people fasted, and as an encouragement in our times of need.

1. For repentance

If you return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines ... and they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and **fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD**

from 1 Samuel 7:3-6

When we have been caught out or exposed in our sin, or our backslidings, then it is relatively easy to apologise and say we are sorry, but fasting is a way to prove our apologies are not just words – actions always speak louder. God saw that Israel were willing to put effort into their repentance and we should do the same. If we are sorry then we should prove it by actions!

2. With mourning

When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men

arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, **and fasted seven days.**

1 Samuel 31:11-13

When a person is really grieving in their spirit then it has the same effect in their body – the desire for food diminishes. This is a reversal of what happens when bodily deprivation affects our spirit. Under great pain of spirit our bodies are automatically humbled. When Job's 3 friends saw his terrible anguish, they caught what his spirit was going through. They felt no physical pain, but they fasted 7 days with him.

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place to come to mourn with him and to comfort him ... and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great

from Job 1

3. For God's protection

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and

for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. **So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.**

Ezra 8:21-23

God had instructed Cyrus to send the treasures of Israel back with the remnant of the captives to build the temple in Jerusalem. Ezra told Cyrus that God would look after them and now that the time had come he could hardly ask for soldiers to protect them for the dangerous journey, so they fasted and humbled themselves and entreated God to protect them and God did. They all arrived safely in Jerusalem.

Queen Esther

Go gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat or drink for three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish

Esther 4:16

This well-known story tells how God protected all the exiled Jews, who were to be destroyed on one day. Esther, with her maidens, humbled herself with fasting, and God was entreated for them.

4. With intercession

I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, **with fasting**, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession

Daniel 9:3

Daniel, by revelation, had understood that the 70 years of judgement which God had determined on his people had come to an end. He started to intercede for God to restore his people, but his prayers were also accompanied by physical acts of humility – fasting.

5. To entreat God

And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; **and David fasted**, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth ...And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died ... Then David arose from the earth, washed, and anointed himself ...And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

from 2 Samuel 12:15-22

This is an interesting episode in David's life. God's justice demanded that as David had committed adultery and murder (both adultery and murder required capital punishment in Moses law), "life for life" should apply

(see Exodus 21:23, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21). David knew the law, but nevertheless entreated God, knowing him to be a person with compassion and not a legal formula. When the child died he accepted that God was just, and carried on with his life. The price had been paid. David did not fast to force God or demand from him; it was to humble himself, that perhaps God would be entreated. In this case, justice had to be done, and David accepted it without question. We would do well to observe and do the same in our own circumstances.

6. To avert God's judgement

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not

Jonah 3:5-10

This is an amazing incident. Jonah was the only prophet that God called to go to the heathen and personally prophesy their destruction with no room for repentance and restoration. He just had to pronounce God's judgement; that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown. The people of Nineveh actually fulfilled all the requirements that God demanded of his own people when they were backslidden (see 2 Chronicles 7:14). Their fasting and intercession averted God's judgement.

7. For special needs

Then came the disciples to Jesus privately, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for truly I say unto you, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. However, **this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting**

Matthew 17:21

The disciples found that they could not cast this demon out by prayer, and it puzzled them. Jesus had sent them out (Matthew 10) and told them to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out devils. They had returned with great joy and were amazed that the devils were subject unto them. What was the problem with **this** boy and **this** devil? Jesus said "**this kind**" does not come out without prayer **and fasting**.

This statement of Jesus shows us that all evil spirits are not equal in power, and I suppose this is obvious.

A devil in one person would hardly be as powerful as a devil controlling a whole city, with perhaps millions of devils under his command (see Daniel 10). The disciples had come across a powerful devil and it needed a life built on prayer and fasting to take authority over it and command it to leave.

I do not think that Jesus was saying that when we come across a difficult case then we should go away to fast and pray and then return with power to cast it out. Of course this would not be wrong, but the point is that when an emergency arises there is often no time to go and come again. A person may be dead the next day. A situation may have become impossible to deal with if immediate action is not forthcoming. Jesus was surely saying that we need to be prepared beforehand for these unexpected situations by living a life of disciplined prayer and fasting. The disciples of Jesus did not fast until after he had risen from the dead, and so were not in a position to help this poor man and his child (see Luke 5:33-35).

8. For guidance

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, **and fasted**, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away

Acts 13:1-4

I do not believe that the early church would ever have partnered Saul and Barnabas together. Saul was such a radical and Barnabas a **son of consolation**. I do not believe that the church was looking for a partnership to send out on missionary journeys, they were just doing the natural thing, **ministering to the Lord**, and the Holy Ghost took over and asked them to separate the ones that he had chosen – Saul and Barnabas.

What results would we have in the modern church if we would let the Holy Ghost choose our missionaries and leaders, rather than committees choosing them on carnal criteria of abilities and qualifications?

9. Ordaining Elders

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had **prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed

Acts 14:21-23

In the early church the congregations chose deacons (Acts 6:3), but the apostles ordained the elders and bishops.

If only the church in this present age would dedicate themselves to this lifestyle of prayer and fasting, we would see the Acts of the Apostles in action again

instead of the world's watered-down methods, which produce man-made Christians.

10. In family life

Defraud not one another, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to **fasting and prayer**; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

1 Corinthians 7:5

In this context Paul is not talking about fasting but about the sexual relationship between husband and wife. He is saying that they must not count their bodies their own because marriage makes them one flesh, and in relationship there is equality. He says that if both a man and his wife agree to abstain from sexual activity for a while to seek God by fasting and prayer, then this is acceptable so long as it does not cause frustration on either side. I wonder how many married couples seek God together in this way? God's ways will always strengthen and secure a marriage, and when the divorce rate amongst Christians is the same as in the rest of society, this should be a challenge and a consideration to all married readers.

All these examples should motivate us to practice fasting on a regular basis to continually humble ourselves before God, that we may be ready to do his will in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Chapter 18

Practical Fasting

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.

John 15:7

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Mark 8:38

The above verse from Mark 8 is very challenging if we look at it closely. Christians are not ashamed to be called Christians, or to say they believe that Jesus was the Son of God. It is **his words**, the practical instructions that Jesus gives his disciples, that Christians are often ashamed of. It is all too easy to love Jesus, but hate what he says. Jesus exposes us in John 14:15 by saying,

If you love me, keep my commandments (instructions), and Why call me Lord if you don't do the things I ask you? (Luke 6:46). It is Jesus' **words** that will stumble most Christians. It is the things that he

asks us to do that cause the problems. From Matthew 6 we see that Jesus expects every disciple to fast in secret. It is just the normal Christian lifestyle.

God has to do it

If we could change our own motives and the secret desires of our hearts then we would have done so early on in our walk with God and we would have no more problems with our secret life. The fact that we all, after many years of following Jesus, still have trouble with our Adamic nature prove that we need help outside of ourselves. I believe that when we are obedient to the things that God asks of us, (and the things that he asks us to do are very possible) then it gives God the right to change us despite ourselves.

God has given us a free will and he will not override it unless we give him permission. I believe that words alone will not accomplish this and that we have to also act, to prove and establish that our words are not empty wishes, or holy daydreams. Actions turn daydreams into vision and reality.

Let me repeat what has been stated in other chapters: that special times set aside for private and corporate fasting for special needs is part of the lifestyle of a disciple, but this does not justify the exclusion of a regular disciplined fasting lifestyle. Here are a few simple, practical helps and advice in developing a consistent lifestyle of fasting.

1. Attitude and appearance

Jesus tells us to appear as though we are not fasting. In other words, we should do it joyfully and not as a duty.

Our attitude makes so much difference to God. He is not looking for duty, he is looking for us to prove our love, and there is a vast difference between the two.

2. Motives

Our motives should be to please God, to prove our love, to deny self and humble our flesh and spirit. However, many Christians have come up to me at the end of a teaching session on fasting and told me that they have stopped fasting because they believed that their motives for fasting were not the correct ones. They felt condemned for doing the right thing but with the wrong motive.

For example, one lady who was well overweight told me that when she fasted she feared she was only doing it because she desperately wanted to lose weight. I told her that she was being deceived. Of course a fat person wants to lose weight, and no-one could fast and pretend that the weight loss is not desirable. This is a bonus. Fasting is a very healthy and beneficial thing to do, as any medical doctor would confirm, as it detoxifies the body. Here is a principle that should help anyone with a problem about their motives. When Jesus asks us to do anything then we must always be obedient **whatever our motives are**, and then whilst we are walking in obedience we must ask God to work on and purify our motives. Disobedience is never an option.

Help yourself

I can well remember the first time I started to fast. I found it so hard that even the thought of missing a

meal made me feel hungry, and so I "set myself up" and missed my breakfast before going to a Sunday morning meeting. I was trapped in church until around one o'clock in the afternoon. I sat in church, my tummy rumbling, thinking about food and I didn't even hear the sermon. I was thinking to myself, "This is no good! What is the use of fasting if it makes me miss the sermon?"

These thoughts seemed reasonable to me, but I was being deceived. What would it matter if I missed the next four Sunday morning sermons if I developed a discipline for life (which is what I actually did)? I have now mastered the discipline and do not find a problem with the action or with my motive. (As a matter of interest, most Christians do not need more sermons – they have heard enough to last them a lifetime. What they need is to obey to what they have already heard and been told. Change comes from obeying the word, not listening to it.

3. How long should I fast for?

I believe that any discipline is best achieved by small increments, little by little. Habit is overcome by habit. I believe that missing one meal each week is a good start. It is not how much that we do that matters, it is the regular discipline, week in, week out, that is important, until it becomes unassuming. The maximum I suggest is one twenty-four hour fast in a week. After a while we become unaware of any good or obedient act we are performing and it just becomes our own chosen lifestyle. Real holiness is always unassuming and hidden from oneself. Jesus says that people will **see our good**

works and glorify, not us, but **our Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:14).

Corporate fasting and fasting for special needs are of course all part of the whole picture, but I am dealing here with a lifestyle that can be maintained throughout our lives, just as we would pray habitually each day in order to keep our relationship with God healthy.

4. I need help

Sometimes missing even one meal a week can be a large hurdle to jump for some people and so it is wise to seek help. Why not ask a friend to fast with you for moral support until it becomes a habit? Who would clean their teeth every day if their parents had not stood over them until it became automatic. Why not ask your wife or children to ask you, on the day of the week that you have chosen, if you have remembered? Children have a great way of humbling their parents in points of discipline and take great delight in catching them out!

Another help is to have an aim. Have a need, not a greed. Why not ask God to use your fasting for someone else's needs as an act of intercession, instead of for yourself. This is true fasting (see Isaiah 58).

5. What about feelings?

I remember when I first fasted on water for a few days. I had never felt so unspiritual in my whole life! I had expected that I would be feeling really close to God and my mind would be sharp and quickened. The opposite happened, for my mind was dull, and I couldn't even read

my bible or pray. I could only **feel** sorry for myself. I wondered what had happened.

No one had prepared me for the fact that the first beatitude was working in me; I was experiencing poverty of spirit – the very entrance to the character of God. I had expected, in my pride, to **feel** great. I have since learnt the obvious truth that we are not to live on our feelings but on faith. The two are not related. Often when we are going through trials and we feel the lowest, God is working the most in our character to accomplish long-suffering, patience and the **peaceable fruits of righteousness**. These are hard lessons to learn, but regular fasting is a great leveller of our fickle emotions.

5. What about legalism?

We have to ask the question: Is all this discipline not bondage and legalism? Why can't I just be "free in the Lord" and fast when I feel prompted? The answer is very simple. **True freedom only comes out of discipline**. The aim of discipline is not discipline, but freedom. Discipline is the means and freedom is the consequence.

This is self-evident if we look at any area of life. As an international gymnast I practised every day to be able to stand on my hands at will – it took about two years. Now, without any practice, I am free to do this whenever I want to. At 72 years of age I am not sure that my muscles would hold me up for very long, but the balance, which is in the brain and not the muscles, will be with me for life, because my discipline mastered the act.

No great athlete, politician or musician has ever achieved their status by accident or because of their

impulses or feelings. Every one of them will tell you of the many hours, days and years spent in effort and discipline to master their area of expertise. The principle is universal, and a great man of God is always one who has **striven for the mastery**.

Ready for battle

No one would be asked to go into a battle without first being trained and proved. The discipline of training is so that at a moment's notice a soldier is ready and fit to fight. How can God ask someone to suddenly fast for a need if they are not disciplined in this area? How can they stand in the gap when an emergency arises?

Let me share a testimony with you as an example of this principle. Whilst ministering in Hounslow, London many years ago when Joanna and I were musicians as well as teachers, we met a girl outside the church. We had just set up our equipment for a concert in the evening. She obviously had problems in her life and so we gave her a free album and asked her to come to the evening concert. She came, and after the meeting talked to Joanna, who invited her to come and see us at our home in Manchester sometime.

We forgot about the incident until she turned up on our doorstep a few weeks later with all her worldly belongings in a bag. She lived with us and we started to talk with her and to help her to overcome some of her difficulties. Over a period of a few months we began to see a great change in her. The rebellion and insecurity diminished and she said that she felt it was

time to stand on her own feet and so returned to her birthplace, Limerick in Eire.

The devil will kill me

Months later we received a letter that shocked and moved us. She told us that the devil had come into her again and told her that he was going to kill her. She did not want this and so in her twisted thinking she decided to deprive the devil and kill herself. She tried many times but to no avail. She believed that the devil was stopping her committing suicide so that he could kill her, and she became really desperate. She put her fingers in an electric socket to electrocute herself but she was thrown across the room into the opposite wall with no apparent damage. Then she took a massive overdose of pills that should have killed her but someone found her and she had her stomach pumped out.

These attempts were not a cry for help – she really wanted to kill herself – so she took her brother's shotgun, went into a lonely field and shot herself. The bullet went through her body and out of the other side. She lay in the field bleeding to death, but God had other plans, and a farmer heard the shot, found her and rushed her to hospital. They operated on her to see what damage the bullet had done, and she wrote the letter explaining what had happened from her hospital bed a couple of days later.

Paying the price

We cried when we read her letter and realised the fact that if, even after being under our care and ministry, she

was still trying to kill herself, she would surely succeed if God did not intervene dramatically in her life. Joanna immediately suggested that we had to help her and we decided to fast on water from that moment for 3 days and pay the price for her. She was trapped and could no longer help herself. We asked God if he would put our sacrifice to her account and save her life. After 3 days I did something that I had never done before that time or since. We prayed over a handkerchief and sent it to her and asked that she place it on her body.

God answers prayer

A miracle happened and in a couple of days she was back in our house in Manchester, and God began to show us the roots of all her problems and the leeway that the devil had in her life. This is not the place to go into the details, but suffice to say that many years later she is in her right mind and has changed beyond all recognition, a living proof of the power and love of God.

Start the training now

If we at Barratt Ministries had not been disciplined in fasting we could never, at a moment's notice, have been able to intervene in this situation.

If Christians will discipline themselves to a secret life of almsgiving, prayer and fasting, then God can and will use them as intercessors to **stand in the gap** when emergencies arise. Let me encourage you to start the training today that you may be of use to God in the coming years in these last of the last days. God is looking

for men and women of character, not chocolate soldiers
who will melt under the heat.

Chapter 19

Cornelius

But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:20

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion ... a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always ... and Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour ... and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

from Acts 10:30-35

To conclude this book, and as an illustration of the three disciplines that Jesus tells us to do in secret, there is a wonderful incident in Acts 10. Salvation is by faith and not by works, but as James says, faith without works is not faith at all, and sometimes our works are acts of faith. This was true of Cornelius. He was not one of God's chosen. He was a Roman centurion, but by faith he did the works that proved his faith in God, and because of

these works of faith, God brought salvation to him by extraordinary means. He was the first Gentile to receive the Gospel. Read for yourself how his praying, fasting and almsgiving moved God to bring Peter to his house to show him the way of salvation.

I find it amazing that someone who did not know the law and its requirements, did, by faith, the things that God expected of his chosen people; and Peter, who had always believed that salvation was only for the Jews, came to this conclusion:

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him

Acts 10:34-35

Dramatic consequences

The Holy Ghost fell on the centurion's household and they were all baptised in water. These acts of Cornelius were the beginning of revival to the Gentiles and their importance cannot be over estimated; what a challenge when a person outside the kingdom moves God as Cornelius did with his prayer, almsgiving and fasting. We must never, never underestimate the power that obedience to God's word brings about in a person's life; it will move mountains. Be determined at all cost to be a disciple of the living God, with the knowledge that we will all have to stand before Jesus to account for deeds done in our flesh.

I believe that these three disciplines are the key to God changing our secret life, and I believe that a Christian who will not be obedient in these areas will never

progress in their relationship with God. Relationship with God depends not on belief but on obedience.

~ ~ ~ ~

The next book in the series will go a level deeper and look at the root of all evil – covetousness. Covetousness is a condition of the heart, and until Christians start to be obedient God will never expose the secrets of their heart and so real change will not come about. The alternative to change is to cover up what is going on in the heart. All hypocrisy is to cover up covetousness in the heart and the next book in the series will deal with this, as we look at the second half of Matthew 6.

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