

SECRET PRAYER

Secret prayer has the sanction of lofty examples. Isaac went out into the fields to meditate at eventide. In his chamber, Daniel knelt upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before the Lord his God. Jesus saw the devotion of Nathaniel under the figtree. Peter was at prayer on the housetop when he received his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus withdrew from the multitude and from the presence of the disciples, and retired to the mountains, or to the desert to pray. Sometimes He spent the whole night in prayer. How often did Olivet witness the devotions of the Man of Sorrows the last rays of the setting sun, as they fell upon the mountain, revealed Jesus on its summit, kneeling and when the morning dawned He was still there, his locks wet with the dews of the night.

Secret prayer is a test of sincerity. Public worship may be attended from various motives, good or bad. But private devotion, secret prayer—what can induce it but the motives pure and lofty, the desire heaven-inspired and heaven aspiring, the thirst after righteousness, the love of God! Who that loves not God or desires not to love Him, can have any business with Him in private or will seek a private interview? The hypocrite may pray in public, and he may pray in his family. Here others see him. But he will not pray in secret. If he attempt it, he will soon abandon it, for he expects from it neither profit nor pleasure. There is hope for a man as long as he is mindful of his secret devotions. He may have left his love, and the things which remain may be ready to die. But the fact that he still feels after God in secret places, if happily he may find Him, is evidence, first of his own sincerity; secondly, that the Spirit of divine grace is with him, and drawing him to the fountain of life.

The closet removes all the external restraints to devotion. The sentiments of the public service are suited to the general sympathy; and this measure of emotion is not transcended, except in cases of overwhelming power and overflowing feeling, when the impetuous tide breaks through all restraints. But there are no restraints whatever in the closet. There, no feeling need be suppressed. The tear may flow. The passion of penitence may be indulged. The agony of prayer may be exercised. There are none to be annoyed, none to pass the harsh judgment, none to ascribe your feeling to weakness or hypocrisy. In that lone place there is no ear but God's to hear. And are there not confessions to be made which no ear but his should hear? In that lone place there is no eye but God's to see. And who but God can understand and sympathize with your secret sorrows? He is thy father—thy father in heaven. „Cast all your care upon him, for he careth

for you." And this is the promise of Jesus: „Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." A father loves his sick and sorrowful child most. So Jesus has an especial love and sympathy for him that has no helper. „As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted."

The closet is favorable to devotion. It not only removes hindrances, but it furnishes helps. It shuts out things visible. We leave the dusty and crowded thoroughfare of the world, and turn aside to rest a little in the sweet shade of the tree of life—to drink of the spring that gushes from the rock to commune with God and think of heaven. The world is not there, pride is not there, passion is not there. Eternity is there, God is there, Jesus is there, the Holy Spirit is there, angels are there. We feel as Jacob felt as he lay down to sleep on the rocky knoll, and awoke in the midst of hovering angels. „And he said, surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Secret prayer prepares for all public services. The Christian comes forth from his closet refreshed with grace, filled with the Spirit, his graces shining, like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount of communion; active to labor, patient to suffer, ready to serve his generation, and prepared to finish his course with joy.

„The Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." His blessing shall rest manifestly upon you. It will appear in your experience, and in the daily walks of life. It will be manifest to yourself, and visible to others. The Spirit of Jesus shall be with you and in you. It will appear in your voice, in your very looks, and in all your conversation. God will give you the necks of your enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. You shall run and not weary, walk and not faint, and mount up with wings like an eagle.—*Selected.*

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