

The Inner Room and the Closed Door

by Samuel Chadwick

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the necessity of finding a private space for prayer and the importance of concentration and devotion in communicating with God.

Scripture: Psalm 27:5, Psalm 91:1, Matthew 6:6, Mark 1:35, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 4:16, James 5:16, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Private Prayer", "Intercession"

Description

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the importance of finding a secret place for prayer, despite the challenges of lack of privacy and distractions. He suggests that the secret place can be any secluded corner or inner sanctuary where one can be alone with God. Chadwick discusses the need for concentration and discipline in prayer, focusing on adoring God's character and attributes. He highlights the significance of using the Bible as a prayer book and engaging in intercession for others in the secret place, where God, our Father, hears and responds.

Transcript

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee" (Matthew 6:6).

There are two difficulties awaiting us at the threshold of this command. One is that many have no inner chamber. There is no place in their lives for privacy. They have no room that is not shared, and if they could find room, they have no leisure. The closed door may neither shut out nor shut in. The wireless has made us familiar with the fact that neither bolted doors nor shuttered windows can secure privacy. Thought is more subtle than sound, and Satan is more cunning than the wireless expert. The saints who have been practiced in private prayer bear witness to the adversaries that keep watch at the door of the soul's inner chamber.

Where Shall We Find The Secret Place?

My aim is not to instruct, but to suggest. Manuals of devotion have usually been to me depressing rather than helpful. They are either too mechanical or too exacting. They discourage rather than inspire. I want to write quite frankly, and in the first person. All my life I have wanted to learn to pray. In my zeal I have experimented and explored in likely and unlikely ways and schools of prayer, and without pose or pride I want in meekness and humility to tell you what I have learned. I speak for myself. I judge no man's

method, criticize no man's counsel, challenge no man's experience. I speak with utmost simplicity, and you must judge what I say.

Let us begin with the difficulty of privacy. There are tens of thousands of Christ's disciples who have no room to which they can retire for private prayer. They live with other people, sleep with other people, work with other people. They cannot escape from people. Is not this a reason why the door of the house of God should never be closed? One Monday morning a penitent sinner stopped me in the main street of the town where I had preached on the Sunday. There were three nonconformist churches near at hand, but they were locked and bolted, back and front, and we had to go to the parish church to find a place where there was privacy for prayer. The door of the church should always be open. Even that does not meet the need of the soul. The secret place of prayer should be part of the daily life, a part of the daily dwelling place.

Some place must be found that shall be a trysting place with God. A hungry heart will find a way. In the open air or in some secluded corner, some inner sanctuary will be found. If this advantage is impossible, the soul must make an open space into which it can withdraw, even in the presence of others, and be alone with God; but the "inner chamber" is an unspeakable boon. Happily, God wills that men should pray everywhere, but the place of His glory is in the solitudes, where He hides us in the cleft of the rock, and talks with man face to face as a man talketh with his friend.

How Can We Secure The Closed Door?

How is it possible to keep the world from coming in and the mind from straying out? Concentration on any subject is a severe strain upon the mind, and nowhere is it so difficult as in the place and practice of private prayer. An enemy is there to raise bogies, excite conscience, jog memory, and direct invaders of the sacred hour. Some simple device will usually secure the secret place from intrusion. General Gordon pinned a white handkerchief at the opening of his tent. I hang a card outside the door when I wish to be alone. That is simple enough, but though it may keep people out, it is useless against the distractions of the mind, and a body may just as well be roaming at large as be shut in with a wandering mind. How can the door be so shut as to keep out the things that divert and distract?

Attention is an act of the will. Concentration is sustained attention upon a specific object. The will can be disciplined and the power of concentration developed. An educated mind is trained to attention, discrimination, and concentration. By patience the soul is won, and by discipline the mind is trained. God is in secret. Let the first act be to affirm the fact of the Holy presence. Call every faculty of mind and body to remembrance, recognition, and realization of the God that is in secret and seeth in secret. Hold the mind to this fact. Tolerate no distraction, allow no diversion, indulge no dissipation. Every faculty must be alert. Of the apostles in the holy mount it is said they were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake they saw His glory. Dreaming is not meditation. Dozing is not thinking. Moping is not praying. Prayer in the secret place unvaryingly demands that every faculty should be at its best.

Our Lord gave His disciples a form and order of prayer, and it does not begin with either song or supplication, but with the contemplation of God:

Our Father,

Which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

It is in this way all the great prayers of the Bible begin. That is how I find it helpful to begin. I think in adoring love and wonder of His character and attributes, of His majesty and might, of His grace and glory. Musing kindles the fire, and the flame becomes "a wall of fire round about," which keeps beasts and intruders as a safe distance. That is why I so often find that prayer in the secret place begins with the Doxology, and abounds in glory and thanksgiving. It is there the transfigured Lord is seen.

The Word of God In The Holy Presence

I never take any book but the Bible into the secret place. It is my prayer book. I seek no external aids to devotion, such as the cross or crucifix. I have no altar but the one within the veil. Other minds have other ways. Most people have some devotional classic, but I do not take even my hymn book. I will write more fully on the devotional use of the Bible, and at present I will content myself with saying that I feed upon it by searching its truth, appropriating its affirmations, and turning its psalms and prayers into personal thanksgiving and supplication. Questions of criticism, textual or otherwise, do not enter into my mind in the secret place, any more than questions of chemical analysis trouble me when I eat my dinner. The Word is more to me than my necessary food. It thrills and moves me with tremendous power.

The Word of God instructs us how to pray. The posture of the body must be determined by conditions of health and comfort. Normally, to kneel is reverent and helpful. One of my friends tells me that he sits, and close by him he places a vacant chair. The habit should be to kneel, but conditions of health and soul will dictate their own posture. It is fitting that we should "kneel before the Lord our Maker." Prayer is more than asking, but even our asking should be instructed under the direction of the Holy Spirit. I find it good to rehearse and review my daily life in the Holy Presence. It is there I make my plans. God keeps the pattern of earthly things in the holy mount. Thomas Champness talked with God about his work and his evangelists every morning from five to six. God guides with His eye, and eyes speak best in the place of secret communion. It is there we are assured of His will and are made to understand His way.

It is the place of intercession. That is the place where we can talk freely with God about other people. The family, the church, the business, the friendships, the state, the world, are all subjects of earnest and believing private prayer. Class leaders should go, over the classbook name by name; the Sunday school superintendent over the teachers' roll, and the teacher over the class register in the same way, name by name. Keep a prayer list of subjects for intercession, and always have a list of people for whom you pray. It is not necessary to tell anyone else the things you tell to God. The Father is in secret, He sees in secret, He hears in secret; leave it to Him to make it known.

The God in secret is our Father. Prayer is filial; we pray as sons and daughters in the Father's house. He knows our need better than we can tell, Him, and He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think; therefore ask in confidence, nothing doubting. It is in the secret place we learn that silence is the best speech and listening is the best part of praying. Those who speak are; heard, and those who listen hear. Of Jesus it is said, "And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35).

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