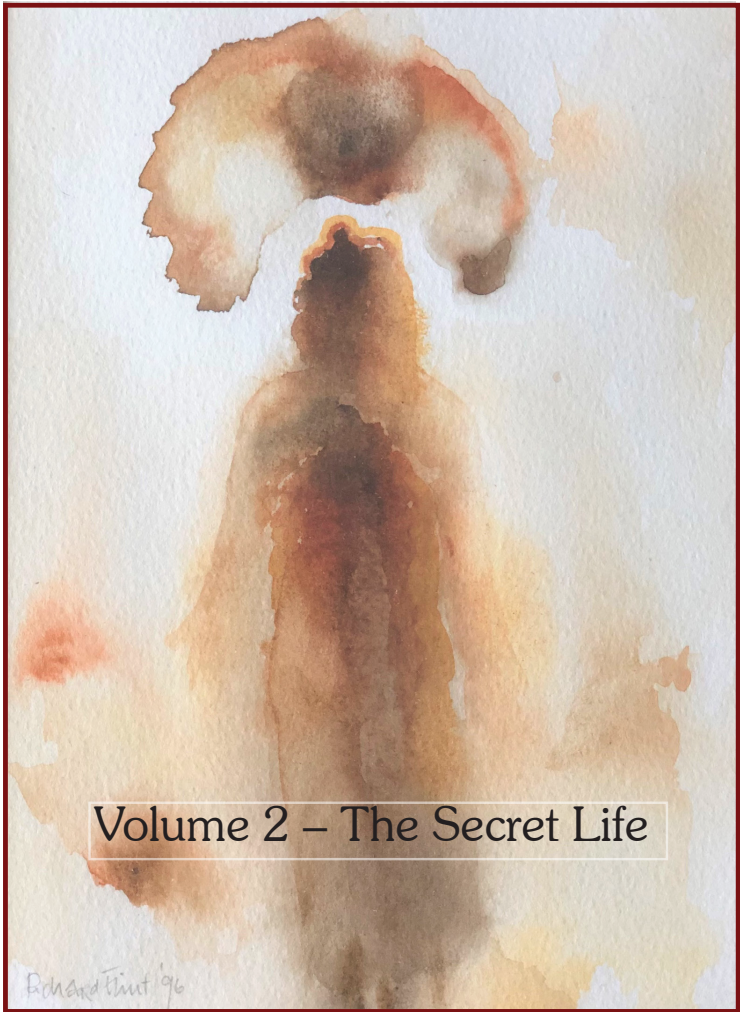


# Back to the Future

Rebuilding the Tabernacle of David



Volume 2 – The Secret Life

Richard Flint '96

Richard Flint

**Back to the Future**

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Richard Flint

The cover picture is taken from  
an original watercolour painting by the author  
called 'The Forming of Man'

Published and Printed; February 2025

by Barratt Ministries Publications

M14,5QH. UK

ISBN 978-1-7392723-7-1

# Back to the Future

RICHARD FLINT

Book 2

The Disciple's Secret

Life:

Prayer, Fasting and

Almsgiving



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# Introduction

David makes a very profound observation in Psalm 51,

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 51:6

David seems to have understood that the most important place for a man to know truth was in their heart or inward part and so, like a stick of Blackpool rock, no matter where we are broken our identity and our internal message to the world would remain the same. Indeed, it is only when we are broken that our true identity shows itself. There is one word which captures this thought and this word is integrity.

Integrity is determined by an internal integral

reality. Moreover, there needs to be an integral reality at the heart of all true disciples and this reality is Christ and his presence. Through the indwelling His Spirit He is at work within the heart of who we are so that we are increasingly becoming an integrated whole. To repeat the old adage, you know a true Christian not by how they act, but by how they react. Scratch the surface and what do you see? To have integrity means that an individual is marked by an essential consistency in their words and their actions. Indeed, a consistency that can only flow from an inner thought life that has been renewed and a heart that has been purified. This is the true truth in the inward parts that the Lord so desires and it is the second part of the verse that helps us understand how we will achieve this:

...and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 51:6b

This is encouraging, because David also understands that for an individual to enjoy truth in the inward parts, they need to know that it will be the fruit of a journey that they will be taking with God, it's that journey again. This journey will be a very exclusive journey. In fact, there are only two on this journey, you and God. No one else is invited. Just you and God in a hidden place working together on the hidden aspect of what makes you, making you

to know wisdom.

Indeed, as David discovered for himself the place where this became a reality in His own life was the secret place that he enjoyed with the Almighty. A reality that he described beautifully in his psalms.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Psalm 91:1-2

Moreover, of interest to us, in Psalm 31 David describes this meeting place with the Lord God in the following terms,

Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

Psalm 31:20

And hidden behind the word translated as 'pavilion' is our old friend the sukkah. The sukkah a shelter from a world of pride, and the one place where our own can be dealt with.<sup>1</sup> And, just like the closet it is a place full of secrets. Indeed, the secrets we keep just between Father and ourselves. A place to enjoy and explore His presence, a place within which we are prepared to be effective carriers of His presence as we journey from the flesh into the Spirit. A place that is ours alone to sit in the Father's

presence and to commune with our God. To spend precious time unravelling the complexities of our lives, hearts and circumstances and allowing Him to be Lord and to sit on the throne of our lives. An essential part of which will be to challenge the ever present blind spots of pride in our hearts. This is the closet experience for the true disciple.

- The Closet Experience

...enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.  
Matthew 6:6

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle (sukkah) of David  
Amos 9:11a

The use of the term 'sukkah' for tabernacle in the Hebrew in this scripture in Amos, and indeed in Psalms, does require some attention. This is a word that describes the flimsy tent like structure that was used during the feast of tabernacles to remind the children of Israel of their journey through the desert having escaped by the hand of God from Egypt. As we reflect upon our own closet experience this will provide us with a helpful as it is part of the underpinning prophetic scripture in Amos that we are actively exploring with regards to the ongoing work

of the Lord in our own day. A work through which we believe the Lord is in the process of rebuilding the spiritual reality of the church and preparing a people who are being made ready for His return. Therefore, the fact that the prophet through the Holy Spirit has used this unusual term 'sukkah' to describe this end time Davidic tabernacle is both interesting and we believe very significant. For it describes the very quality of the structure that is to be built not just for the corporate gathered expression of the body of Christ that will dwell within it but more importantly here for each individual disciple as it describes the intimate space within which Father desires to spend His time with us. In these difficult and confusing days both the corporate and personal 'sukkah' are in desperate need to be rebuilt and re-established at the centre of our discipleship journey.

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle ('sukkah')  
of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches  
thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it  
as in the days of old

Amos 9:11

Indeed, an important aspect of the Lord's rebuilding purposes is to reinvigorate the closet experience for the believer. To raise it up as the place of true communion between the believer and Father God, to close the breaches, and to repair the ruins of what passes for a relationship with God in these

dark days. So that the light of the Lord may shine out like a lighthouse leading people to the safe haven of His Cross. The closet will also need to become the place to sustain us as the path becomes increasingly spiritually arid and hard to walk. This is the place we need to come to in order that we can drink the living waters for it is here and only here that we find the fountain of life.

There is a need to replace the obligation of religion and the 'quiet time' mentality to reconstitute the closet as the place for relationship, a place for communication and a place for transformation and change. A place where a loving Father God talks to His children. A communication that comes from one heart into the midst of the other, the heart is our Ark of our new covenant of love where His presence resides and His words to us are;

...there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee <sup>2</sup>

Exodus 25:22a

As we have said, the 'sukkah' was a feature of the feast of tabernacles which was inaugurated to celebrate and to keep alive the cultural memory of the story of the Exodus for the children of Israel. <sup>3</sup> It was a yearly reminder of this time in their history. A time where they travelled across the unforgiving wilderness of Sin for forty years. A journey that took them from their wonderful liberation from Egypt

as the Red Sea was parted and where they walked free from bondage and slavery. To experience the providential care of Jehovah, their God, and to understand increasingly more about Him and to come to know themselves as they made their way towards the Promised Land.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Deuteronomy 8:2

Spiritually speaking, this is also our journey. We have each been liberated from our own individual place of slavery and bondage to the world, which in type is our Egypt. We are also then called to make our own desert journey towards the land of promise. This is our journey, a journey from flesh into the spirit, a journey of true discipleship.

And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

Exodus 16:10

There is an interesting moment of revelation that is captured in this verse. The children of Israel are

described here as turning together and looking at the way that lay before them with new eyes. The wilderness has not changed, it is still the same harsh reality, but now as they looked towards it they saw something new. They now saw that this was the way that they would find the glory of God, to find and understand the character of the living God and in this they would find their own destiny. This was the way of the cloud and the Lord God was leading them forward into the wilderness and into His providential care.

Likewise, we each need to turn and look afresh at our own lives and recognise that although the path may at time be hard and narrow, His presence is leading ever onwards, so that we will be moving increasingly into his glory, the character and nature of Christ<sup>4</sup>. And the place of shelter along the way for us, as it was for the children of Israel, is the 'sukkah'. A flimsy fragile structure that is us<sup>5</sup>, but within which He desires to have a regular meeting place where we can find daily shelter in Him. A place within which he can help us to know this wisdom; this is our hidden part and this is His secret place and here we will find His wisdom.

In Hebrew the word 'sukkah' is written from right to left thus: סכה

This provides us with a helpful word picture of the idea of sheltering within the 'sukkah' and meeting the Lord there. Let us take each Hebrew letter in turn. First of all let us consider the letter samekh, ס. The picture here is of security, for as we enter the shelter

of our sukkah we can know that we are enfolded by His love and that on every side we are surrounded by him. The shape with its small lip also suggest that our time within the sukkah will always lead us forward into His purposes for our life.

The second letter, which is kaf, כ provides us with a picture that suggests whenever we enter this shelter we will find His presence waiting for us. We are told that, by His Spirit, He is with us until the end of the age<sup>6</sup> and that He will never leave us nor forsake us<sup>7</sup>. He is faithful to be there, however, the reality is that we too seldom are willing to take time to join Him.

Lastly, we have the Hebrew letter hey ה and this time the picture is one that reassures us that as we enter this space we are spiritually covered, here we come under the shadow of the Almighty.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Psalm 91:1-2

The small gap in the Hebrew letter can be identified as a small window through which we can look out at the wilderness way ahead and from here we can look with eyes of faith and to see the cloud of His glory lying ahead of us and leading us on into his purposes.

Within scripture we can find other graphic

metaphors that might help us understand how important our secret life with the Father is within our own particular closet.

- The Womb

In Lamentations 3 we read the following:

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

Lamentations 3:22-26

The actual metaphor is obscured here. In verse 22 we are told that the Lord's compassions never fail and the Hebrew word that is translated 'compassions' can also be translated as 'wombs' as it is on four occasions in scripture.<sup>8</sup> The most telling of these references is in Isaiah 46 where we read the following,

Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and

will deliver you.  
Isaiah 46:2-3

The idea expressed here is that for the Israel of God he will continue to carry them as though they were still within the womb, even into old age, and will, in due spiritual time, be delivered as of out of the womb. As we saw in Genesis 2, Father God originally formed the first Adam out of clay and for us the forming work goes on within our spiritual womb as the second Adam is being formed in us.

Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 43:7

This wonderful transformation is the work that Father desires to do for each one of us as we spend time in the closet with Him.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

The good news from the scripture in Lamentations is that our womb will not fail us for,

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ  
Philippians 1:6

If we remain and abide in him, then we will come through to full term in Him. It is His work and He is performing it. And, the place for this work to be performed is within our closet as we give Father access to our heart.

- The Chrysalis or Cocoon

Another important metaphor that describes the setting for this transformative process can be found in the teaching of Paul <sup>9</sup>.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

The key word for us here is the word 'changed', we each have the capacity in God to be changed from the person and character we started out with when we came to Christ into the very image of Christ. Moreover, with this we also acquire a new nature that replaces our old nature. The scriptural context

is the occasion when Moses had spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai in the presence of God and when he returned to the camp of the children of Israel his face was shining with the glory of the Lord.

And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.  
Exodus 34:35

Spending time in the presence of God physically changed Moses and, therefore, Paul is saying that for each one of us the impact of spending time looking into the face of God in our closet will have an even more dramatic effect. It will not be our physical appearance that is changed but more importantly our heart and nature, as Paul describes it.

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.<sup>10</sup>

2 Corinthians 3:2-3

Therefore, what connotations does the word 'changed' have for us, what is the metaphorical picture being painted here? The Greek word translated 'changed' is the word 'metamorpheo' from which we derive the term 'metamorphosis',

which is the process that all insects and one insect in particular, the butterfly, goes through. This is a description of the miraculous events that take place within the cocoon or chrysalis. What starts as a relatively ugly bug is transform into one of the most beautiful creatures within God's creative order. The process is quite remarkable. The original caterpillar is dissolved within the chrysalis and is reconstituted as a butterfly which emerges in due time to fill the air with its beauty.

What a wonderful picture this is of our special spiritual chrysalis, the closet experience with Father within which, through reflecting on His son through His word and then allowing this to impact our lives, we 'are changed into the same image' day by day from one level of glory or Christ like character to the next. A process that will only end when we emerge as manifest sons of God with Christ as our King in His Millennial reign.<sup>11</sup>

### A Changing Room

A third metaphor can found by inference within the teaching of the writer of the book of Hebrews, where we read:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our

faith...

Hebrews 12: 1-2a

Each of us has a race to run, a spiritual race of faith. However, in order to be at our best for this race there is a need for some preparation. Anyone contemplating running the London marathon will not just turn up on the day and expect to be in the right physical and mental condition to complete the twenty six or so miles. They will have to have prepared for it in the months prior to the actual race day.

For us the race starts the day we are saved, from then on each day is an opportunity to set our eyes on the Lord and to begin to experience Jesus, our coach, calling us forward into His purposes. His purposes being to please the team boss who is the Father and we are also assisted by the team physio, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can recognise this closet experience as being likened to a training/changing room. A space within which we are able to work on laying aside every weight that we need to work off so that our race will be more effective. Paul teaches that we need to consistently put off the old man and to put on the new man.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after

God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

We, therefore, do need a changing room where this transformation can take place. A spiritual space within which we can take off our old worldly clothes and replace them with our new garments of salvation. In this way, we are made ready for the race to come. A place where we are able to allow the coach to train us to think differently and to develop the mind of our coach, who has already run the race and knows how to reach the finish line. For as Paul also teaches we do run for a prize.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

1 Corinthians 9: 24-25

What we all need to strive for is a mastery over the flesh such that we increasingly are able to run the race, our race, in the spirit. This requires us to be temperate in all things.

What does the word temperate mean here? The Greek term used here is one that is drawn directly from the language of the athletic world of the time and it means that the individual concerned has control of their diet such that they do not consume

anything that will be deleterious to their ability to be the best athlete they can be. In spiritual terms, they have a mastery over their own flesh and in all things they are able to impose the will of the spirit to enable them to be the most effective disciple of Christ as they can be. And this mastery is the fruit of time spent with the coach in the training/changing room.

By this we will all receive the prize, which are the welcoming arms of the Lord as he stands on the other side of the winner's tape, because we can all win the race that is set before us as we set our sights on Him on a daily basis.

## The Bridal Closet

The fourth and final scriptural metaphor can be found in Joel, where we find the only other place where the term 'closet' is used in the King James translation of the Bible.

Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

Joel 2:16

The context for this verse is an end time prophetic one that is anticipating events that are also foretold elsewhere in scripture, such as in John 14.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

John 14:1-3

This prophecy can be identified in Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5.

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5: 4-27

And, also in 1 Thessalonians 4.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

The essential idea that is referenced here in each of these scriptures is that when the Lord Jesus returns, He is returning as the bridegroom for His bride, whom He will then take home to His Father's house.<sup>12</sup> For our present concerns this does provide us with another way of understanding the purpose and importance of the closet experience for the true disciple. Namely, it is the means through which we will be prepared to be part of the bride.

The term 'glorious,' by which the bridal church is defined in Ephesians 5, as we saw when exploring the chrysalis metaphor in 2 Corinthians 3, is concerned with the demonstration of the character and nature of Christ. The end time bride will undoubtedly be a glorious expression of His church. Moreover, by definition, therefore, it will be a gathering of individuals who understand the importance of spending time in the bridal chamber or closet and being prepared for this great day.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:2

This verse takes us beyond the Millennial reign of Christ and to the new heaven and new earth of the eternal state. However, it is interesting that the new Jerusalem is described here as a bride adorned

for her husband and in the description given of this city in Revelation 21 we can see what form this adornment will take; a combination of gold and precious stones. It is thought-provoking, therefore, when one notices the quality of a disciple's work that will survive through the fire of the judgement seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

Is there a connection here between the preparation and fruit of a disciple, with the preparation of the bride and ultimately with the built structure of New Jerusalem itself? <sup>13</sup> This is indeed quite a thought.

However, the key for each of us working out our salvation in the here and now, is the work that we allow Father to do in the closet. Indeed, to ensure that the work we do for Him will survive the fire we do need to be careful of our motivation and heart attitude. Whichever metaphor we might find helpful we must be careful that we do maintain a balanced and healthy picture of our God. At times the work

that he challenges us to do will be difficult and challenging and at times we will be approaching Him and our calling with much fear and trembling. For Father God is a jealous God.

For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Deuteronomy 4:24

And, as such He jealously desires that He can spend this precious time with us. So that He can consume, by His refining fire, the 'stuff' in our lives that is either weighing us down or getting in the way and preventing us from walking in our true potential. And these are the same daily realities that He desires to use to work in us truth in the inward parts. So that, as we walk through whatever the daily realities throw at us, we will be walking through them in Him and with Him by the Holy Spirit, our comforter and advocate. And as we read in 1 Timothy each of us has the same destination, the fruit of our time spent alone with Father and his Word in the Spirit.

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned

1 Timothy 1:5

To this end, He has provided three secret spiritual

disciplines; secret prayer, secret fasting and secret almsgiving. Indeed, each of these will play their part in refining and preparing our inward part. We find them in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 and we shall be exploring each of them in turn, starting with the secret life of prayer.

## Notes

1 See also Psalm 18:2

2 See Exodus 25: 22a

3 See Leviticus 23:41-43

4 2 Corinthians 3:18

5 See 2 Corinthians 5:1-6

6 Matthew 28:20

7 Hebrews 13:5 (Deuteronomy 31:6)

8 Genesis 49:25, Proverbs 30:16, Isaiah 46:3 and Ezekiel 20:26

9 See also Romans 12:2

10 This a prophetic fulfilment of Ezekiel 36:25-27, see also Jeremiah 31:31-34.

11 Romans 8:18, 19

12 See John 14:2; This is the rapture and there will then be the marriage feast of the lamb and the Lord will return with His bride to deal with the Antichrist and to rescue the true Israel at the culmination of the Great Tribulation and before He begins His Millennial reign as king of kings. Our focus here is not the eschatological timetable and we are merely stating our present understanding of the order of the events that are still to come.

13 See Revelation 21:19-21 where the New Jerusalem is described as being built with precious stones in its walls and streets made of gold.

## Chapter 1

# The Secret Life of Prayer

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:5-6

**F**ather wants time alone with you and me. Importantly, it does need to be understood that we, as disciples, are encouraged by Jesus to use the term father or in Aramaic 'Abba' as the term by which the Lord God should be addressed within the closet and more generally. This is where our journey into discipleship begins with Abba Father, and each day there is a new beginning.

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not. They are new  
every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.  
Lamentations 6:2-3

As we have seen in the introduction, the word translated as compassions in the Hebrew has a poetic root meaning of a womb. This picture wonderfully captures for us metaphorically the secure place where the Father's creative compassion is expressed and experienced. A symbolic picture of the place Father desires for us to discover for ourselves; a place where truth can develop in our inward parts, as a child develops in the womb. Indeed, a place where we can truly develop as a child of God. Moreover, where, as we are encouraged by the apostle John to understand and recognise, we have all that we need to become a mature sons of God.

But as many as received him, to them gave he

power to become the sons of God, even to them  
that believe on his name

John 1:12

This is our closet, and the time we spend here is with Abba Father, our prayers are with Father and our relationship is with the Abba Father. However, the access has been wrought by the obedience of the Son<sup>1</sup> and is presented to us gift wrapped as we are sealed in the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> However, it does need to be clearly stated once again that the fundamental relationship is with Abba Father. Just as Jesus had a dynamic relationship with His Father, His Father is now our Father, and He desires nothing less than the same for us.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 14:21

How do these words of Jesus to His disciples on the night he was betrayed speak to us today? We each do need to realise that when the Lord addresses His disciples here concerning His commandments he is talking directly to us. Indeed, this is the guidance and the challenges He desires to provide for us; so that we can live the life he has given us to live in Him and to, consequently,

bear fruit. Moreover, the fruit will develop, grow and ripen through our obedience to this guidance. Indeed, an obedience that will be demonstrated in and through the choices we make. Choices that He will be placing before us on a daily basis.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. <sup>3</sup>

Ephesians 2:10

As Paul exhorts the church here, we are each a masterpiece being painted by the master and like all artists He has His own style. Moreover, He has His chosen a medium, or means of creativity for each of us, and this will be delivered in a 'language'<sup>4</sup> we will understand. As we have learned with the experience of David at the threshing floor of Nachon when He does step into our reality He is to be obediently followed as he leads us along the path He has laid for us.

The key is to discern what He is saying through what He does

Our path is the brush He uses. A path of ups and downs, a path that will be personally designed to enable each us to truly see what is in our hearts and therefore allow father to mould and make us in to the image of his son. A path that is reflected in the journey taken by the children of Israel through the

wilderness.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Deuteronomy 8:2

When he challenges us to keep these commandments we are also reminded of the original garden, where the first Adam was given responsibility to keep and guard his garden. The same is true for us, except, as we saw above, the garden for us is our heart. This is a helpful metaphor. For surely our ultimate desire is to be fruitful in Him? To be a fruitful garden.

Our heart is the garden

Therefore, we have to make sure the soil of our lives is rich and receptive to His seeds of life that He desires to sow through His word into our hearts. To this end, we need to be weed free, both from the annual weeds that blow in on the wind and the perennials which may lie deep in the soil looking to reappear season by season.

This is the work of the Father who is our gardener. He is our Abinadab, our willing Father. This is the work of our Father who loves us in

His Son to such an extent that he is willing to do what He can with what we make available to Him. Fundamentally, as Jesus encouraged His original disciples, He desires to manifest Himself and His Son in each of us. Therefore, it is important that we move beyond just doing our religious duty, having our five-minute quiet time and feeling that we have done our bit for God. We need to realise that the closet experience is a relationship with a living God and a transformed heart, life and lifestyle. Therefore, let us approach Jesus' teaching concerning the secret disciplines of a disciple from this perspective and look to build a 'sukkah' that will provide spiritual shelter on a daily basis as we travel through our own particular wilderness with the Lord.

The teaching of the Lord in Matthew 6 is clear. When you pray, and you enter into that special time with Father. It is to be a designated time because there is a 'when' attached, it is not an 'if' or a 'maybe' but a 'when' ...when thou prayest...

The assumption that the Lord is working on here is that His disciples will be people who have a prayer life. There would have been the corporate religious prayer in which the Jews of the Lord's own day would have participated as part of the religious liturgy of the Sabbath worship in the synagogue. As well as this there would have been an expectation within the teaching of the rabbinic elders <sup>5</sup> that a Jewish man should pray three times a day <sup>6</sup>, a

practise we see with Daniel, and women just once. However, these would be formal readings of given prayers such as the Amidar. <sup>7</sup> But what the Lord is doing here is something truly radical for the first century ears. In the Lord's Prayer he has already encouraged the disciples to use His own familiar term of Abba when addressing God in prayer when he gives them the Lord's Prayer. <sup>8</sup> Here is telling them to develop the practise of spending time alone and conversationally communing with Abba, again just as He does. Prayer now has become a conversation. <sup>9</sup>

He is introducing His disciples personally to His Father, and He still is

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

Matthew 11:28-29a

Come unto me and I will show you my Father  
Come unto me and my Father will transform  
you into a son like me

The work the Father desires to do in our heart will take time and on our part it will take discipline, but the rewards will be eternal. All habits whether good or bad need to be established over time. This good habit of regularly spending time with

Father will need to be firmly established within our lives and to become part our spiritual lifestyle or worship.

This is why Paul challenges the disciples in Ephesus to actually redeem the time. To literally buy it back from the world and to release it for the Lord and for His purposes.<sup>10</sup> To close the door and shut out all other distractions and to enter His presence. What this might mean in practise is for each of us to work out and the specific details beyond this are not important. It might not even be a physical enclosed space, walking my dog at times works very well for me.

However, what is important is that Father wants to develop with you and me a secret relationship, such that the things you say to each other in this secret place are the things which will then bear fruit outside of the secret place. This is the reward that Jesus talks about, 'for thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly'.

As we will see when exploring the other secret disciplines, the secret is in the secret. The fact that we have given Father this special place in our lives means that His ears are attentive to the prayers that are said in this place. Interestingly, the words above, 'His ears are attentive to the prayers that are said in this place' are chosen with great care, for they remind us of another time when the Lord God spoke them to King Solomon. His voice rang out prophetically as the newly built Temple in 10th

century BC Jerusalem was inaugurated.

Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place.

2 Kings 7:15

This is an important picture for us. Just as God's attention was grabbed by prayers that were said in this earthly temple or tabernacle, likewise He says the same applies now for us; we are His living temples. Indeed, in spiritual terms we are now a representation of this temple, as we have already recognised, and as such if we are willing to give ourselves sacrificially to this time and to this place, and, as it were, to enter our own Holy of Holies on a daily basis, then we will find God's presence and we will find Him attentive to our prayers. Indeed, in the next verse there is a wonderful promise to each one of us.

For now I have chosen and sanctified this house,  
that

My name may be there forever; and My eyes and  
My heart will be there perpetually.

2 Kings 7:16

We are chosen, and we are being sanctified through this time and this place. And further, through this process of sanctification our eternal seal is made secure and we will be perpetually

living out of His presence. The term 'perpetually' in the original Hebrew actually has a root meaning 'to be hot'; therefore, through this daily connection with God we will maintain our spiritual heat. This will either mean that we will be on fire for the Lord or alternatively we will be enjoying the refiner's heat, burning up the dross of our lives. For this our reward.

Scripture also provides us with another helpful picture of an individual enjoying the benefit of this level of communion with God as we saw in chapter 2 above.

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Exodus 33:9-11a

There are two points that we would want to focus upon here, firstly, when someone communes with God in their secret place others will notice. We won't all have a cloud of glory descending to greet us, for us the glory will be shown in the fruit of our lives. The time with the Lord will transform who we are, our essential character, from one degree

of glory to another and this will be noticeable for those who encounter us in the daily round. This secret life will have dynamic consequences on both who we are and the effect this has on those around us. For we will find that the dialogue we have had in secret will have an impact out in the open. And as we do begin to see the hand of the Lord at work in us and working through us, then Father will then begin to teach us about a new dynamic that is also at work in and through us.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

This new dynamic is faith, and as we read in Paul's teaching in Romans 12, God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.<sup>11</sup> The Greek term used here for 'measure' is metron from which we derive the metric measuring system and the term carries a meaning of a 'determined extent, portion measured off, measure or limit'. We have been given the right amount of faith and it is a limited, pre-determined portion that has been measured off by Father to meet the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God <sup>12</sup>for our lives.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to

every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

It will be worth spending some time reflecting on how this measure of faith can be utilised within the secret place. This does require us to realise that the experience of the closet does need to be more than coming before the Father merely with a prayer list. This is not to say that Father isn't interested in the personal issues, people and situations that appear on the list. The key for the exchanges between Father and ourselves within the closet is that we are in faith. What does this mean? Our time with the Father has to be in the spirit, to communicate with Him who is spirit we also need in the spirit with Him.

For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.<sup>13</sup>

Galatians 5:5

Our time in the closet is the true expression of our true worship

Moreover, our communication with the Father in word, or on a level that at times will be deeper than this, will be in and through the Holy Spirit, He is our mediator, advocate or paraclete.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

The Greek word translated 'helpeth' here actually carries a meaning 'to take hold of something along with someone else' or more simply to help to carry the burden. This is very helpful here because it paints an important picture for us of two people carrying a load together. And this is a picture of the dynamic of spiritual prayer that we need to practise in the closet.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30

Never enter the secret space assuming that you know what the conversation is going to be focused on. It needs to begin with a humble request to Father that his will is done not ours.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13

What does He want to talk about, what personal issues, people and situations does He want work on. He is God. However, when we have spent time with Him communicating about the things He is concerned about in this particular moment then, when we leave this space, we have the faithful expectation that we are going to see Him move on whatever we have been focusing on; the personal issues, the people or the situations. We will be in faith for them and will be looking for opportunities to be fruitful in them. Again as we are lead of the Holy Spirit and now are confident or in faith;<sup>14</sup> we are walking into the world with a focus on His will for the personal issues, the people and the situations we have to walk through and walk with. We are now walking in faith.

Walking in faith is walking in a God given, Godly expectation

It is in the secret place that Father teaches us how to fully utilise this measure of faith for His own ends, such that we will fulfil God's will for our lives. Paul helps us understand the process here in Ephesians 2.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus  
unto good works, which God hath before ordained  
that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

We are his workmanship, literally we are a work of creation, created in Christ Jesus, and literally we are being made habitable, like the earth when it was without form and void in the beginning, and was prepared to receive life and to be an expression of this life. Like the earth we are also, through the Lord and by the Spirit, are being made habitable for the very life of God and to a living walking expression of it. We can here the flutter of the dove's wings again here. Through this particular verse Paul is making an intentional connection between the creative work of the Lord God in the original creation and, now, applying it to us as part of his new created order.<sup>15</sup>

All things were made by him; and without him  
was not anything made that was made. In him  
was life; and the life was the light of men

John 1:3-4

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new  
creature: old things are passed away; behold,  
all things are become new

2 Corinthians 5:17

Indeed, all things were made by Him and all things in us still do need to be re-made by Him so that we are truly habitable for Father by His Spirit. Just like on the sixth day of creation the Lord God is still forming man.

Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 43 7

We are his workmanship and we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works as the Father wills and it is here that we will be challenged to exercise our measure of faith. In this we will be stretched and our faith will be stretched, however, through this we will grow in our faith and it will begin to bear the fruit for which it was intended.

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

Philippians 2:15

He does desire to shine in and through us, and this is demonstrated in the good works He has predetermined for us to walk in, literally the good works He has predetermined for us to walk in.

<sup>16</sup> However, we also do need to understand that these works sometimes are doing us good even

though at the time they may be painful.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Hebrews 12:9

No one says this will be easy and there will be times for just holding on to the word of life, Jesus, and holding on to the words of the Word of life.<sup>17</sup> These are the 'events dear boy events'<sup>18</sup> that if we are not careful would blow us off course and the events that will keep us honest before our God. But at these times, and for all times, we do have the secret place, the womb of God, to return to where we are transformed or even metamorphosed like a butterfly within our meeting place with Father.

And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Exodus 33:11

The second point is a reflection upon the quality of the relationship that we see here demonstrated between Moses and the Lord God, described here as a face to face friendship. This is echoed in the words of Jesus.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant

knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

John 15:15

The root word for friendship here means to pasture. This can be understood in one of two ways either, in this special place, you and God are chewing the cud together, so to speak. Like ruminating cattle working through the same issues together and growing together through the process. The other way to understand this metaphor is to reflect on the pastoral care of a shepherd.

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

John 10:14-16

We are the other sheep and it is in the closet that we will hear the voice of the good shepherd and be lead to the variety of different areas of pasture that He has for us. Sometimes, He will lead us to feed in the valleys of life and to learn difficult lessons about ourselves as we grapple we difficult situations that we will encounter. The

good news is that the water of life flows best in the valley bottom.

This so important because the walk of a true disciple is not always going to be enjoying the high pastures of the mountain tops, it is not all about physical blessing and prosperity in this life. Our calling in this life is to become mature in every aspect of our character and nature, and at times this means there will be challenges. However, what Father is looking for in us is how we meet these challenges. He wants us to see Him and His purposes in everything that befalls us and, like David, to ask the right questions in these valley experiences. A question such as 'why is this happening' needs to be followed by 'Father, what do you want me to learn here? We need to realise that the water of life flows is in the valley!

The good news is that He has fully provided for us in terms of the nourishment we require along the way. What is our food as enter into this secret place? What does Father provide for us to be nourished with on a daily basis, as we wander through what at times can seem like a wilderness. Like the children of Israel who were provided manna we have been richly provided for even in the most desolate places in which we will be lead.

I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna

in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

John 6:48-51

Jesus is our spiritual food that will sustain us through all situations and enable us to grow within all situations; that is to grow in Him. The means through which we take in this sustenance is through consuming Him in faith through the sacrament of the communion and through consuming Him as the living word. Within the secret place we need to take His word as our focus for prayer and faith.

Indeed, the challenge at times, as we have already said, will be for us to hold, forth the word of life. Has the Lord really said this to me? Can I really trust that the promise I have received will come true? Our minds are so often beset by doubts and anxiety and this is common to all.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful...

1 Corinthians 10:13a

The key is that Father desires that we develop

our faith muscle and to be able to overcome these doubts with an inner determination and resolution that lies in His strength and His faith in us.

...that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him...

Philippians 3:8b-10a

Do you know that Christ has faith in you!

However, we will only be able to hold forth to the word of life if the word of life is a truth in our inward parts. The word of life needs to be written on our hearts. A crucial aspect of our secret life of prayer is that we take the word of life into this space with us. This is because the truth that we desire to embed in our inward parts is to be found in one place only and this is the word of God, scripture. Jesus challenges us to not just be hearers of the word but doers also, so that the whole fabric of our life is built on Him, the Rock. However, this does need to start by us hearing and as we are told in Romans:

...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Romans 10:17

Indeed, we will only hear, in our heart, as we spend time not just reading the word but developing our ability to meditate upon it. To take our time with scriptural truth so that it has time to move from our minds to our heart, such that the truth will be established in our inward parts. It needs time to be digested, and just like physical food it needs time to become part of us, and to change us. And also like food, if our intake of spiritual food is combined with an active outworking it will then be transformed within us into spiritual muscle, which is faith.

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.  
James 1:3-4

**We need to be exercised in Christ so that we become spiritually fit and not spiritually fat!**

We need to be people of the word, and, again as we have already stated, this has to go beyond some sense of religious observance, a mentality which is prevalent today, that the idea of the obligatory 'quiet time' feeds into. The word of God is His special gift to us.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,  
for instruction in righteousness

2 Timothy 3:16

Father God has high expectations of the potential impact that His word can have on an individual who is hungry for change, hungry and thirsty for righteousness in their own lives and for truth in their inward parts. Paul clearly shares this high value for the word of God. Every single word is literally carrying the very breath of God. It is, therefore, profitable for teaching, and as we will see later, the word can be our teacher.

We need to understand that as we are in the spirit with Father and His word then the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, will be able to fulfil His calling to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgement. The Holy Spirit carries the power of conviction. And if responded to then He and the word, literally, restores us to an upright state of being, there is something powerfully restorative in the word of God. It also, again taking the Greek word literally, delivers a training such as a child would need to receive which can be defined as: 'the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment) It also includes the training and care of the body'<sup>19</sup>

This is the word of God, and it is the word of life

and within the secret place of prayer it needs to do its work. However, in order for it to fulfil its capacity to teach, to be corrective, to be restorative and to nurture we all need an active ingredient; the yeast in our dough, the Holy Spirit.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak

John 16:13

The Holy Spirit through His indwelling presence plays another crucial role in the closet. The Greek term translated her as 'guide', literally means a scout who knows the territory and will lead you to the destination safely. The Holy Spirit is actively at work bringing the word of God to life for us, opening our spiritual eyes to its truth and enabling the power of the word to impact us, to teach us, to correct us, to restore us and to nurture us. He is the active ingredient. This what John means when he writes:

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

1 John 2:27

The Holy Spirit is the indwelling anointing which

takes hold of the word of God and applies it into our hearts and by this truth is established in our inward parts. This is wonderfully described by Paul in Romans 8 where we read:

...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ <sup>20</sup>  
Romans 8:13b-17b

This is why, when truly understood, the secret place of prayer is so important. It is the effective coming together of a disciple with the whole Godhead, the Father, the Son who is the word and the Holy Spirit, how wonderful is this? What a blessing and what an opportunity for each one of us. Let us use it to the uttermost!

In the closet we meet with the whole Godhead

And there is one further, very important aspect of the role of the Holy Spirit, that again, we do need to understand, as we have seen above, the Holy Spirit is a type of the Best Man to the Bridegroom.

<sup>21</sup> And, as such, the total focus of the Holy Spirit is to serve the purposes of the Son and the Father to prepare the bride and make her ready for His Son. Indeed, in terms of our prayer life the Holy Spirit has a role here in guiding our prayers.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:27

We, therefore, need to realise that the secret place of prayer is the place where our preparation will take place. We also need to realise how important this preparation is. Indeed, this importance is captured by Paul's impassioned plea in 2 Corinthians 11:2 in which he expresses the Father's heart to each one of us.

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

In Joel we have already read the following:

...let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. <sup>22</sup>

Joel 2:6

The word translated closet here as we have seen is the Hebrew word 'chuppah' which is actually the dais on which Jewish marriage vows are taken today. The picture for us is very important one particularly for the church today, by the use of this term of closet in his teaching Jesus might have been making an allusion to this verse? If He is then he wants us to understand that this special place is the place within which we are prepared to be part of His bride and prepared for His return.

However, to finish we do need to focus on the main element of the secret place, which is prayer. What is the prayer that needs to occur here? Do we bring a prayer list of all the things, situations and people we would want God to help us with? Do we approach the secret place as a kind of spiritual cash point? Where we ask God for whatever we think we want and because we have said the prayer then he is obligated to respond to our request? Doesn't Jesus say as much in his teaching concerning prayer in the Sermon on the Mount?

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then,

being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him  
Matthew 7:7-11

Do we just have to ask anything and it will be given? Is this what Jesus is saying here? As with understanding all scripture it is vitally important to read a text within its context. Therefore, what is the context for what Jesus says here? This passage comes within a specific teaching challenging the hypocrisy of religious judgementalism. The imagery is very familiar to us.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?  
Matthew 7:3

This is the context for the words that follow. The type of prayer that will always be answered in the affirmative by Father in the secret place is the prayer which gives Him permission to sort out our hard hearts. For only He can actually change our hearts and this is what he longs to do for each one of us. Self cannot change self. Therefore, in order that, we can change from the ugly harsh and critical individuals we too often are and to be so transformed within, so that we have truth in the inward part, such that we develop:

...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22b-23

To be fruitful in Him through His Spirit and to increasingly be a living reflection of the nature and character of His dear Son, Jesus Christ. This is the path that He is looking for all true disciples to tread and sadly as Jesus continues to prophecy:

...narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:14b

We will now move on to the second secret discipline, fasting, and we will be able to recognise here how this is complementary to the first and as such supports the ongoing refining work that Father desires to do in the heart of a true disciple.

## Notes

1 Romans 5:19

2 Ephesians 1:14

3 Ephesians 2:10

4 Clearly, we are not necessarily talking about the spoken word here. The Lord knows us and knows how to communicate effectively to us, so that we hear Him.

5 A dominant praxis that originates in the time of the exile.

6 Traditionally, three prayers are recited daily: Shacharit or Shaharit (שחרית), from the Hebrew shachar or shahar (שחר) "morning light," Mincha or Minha (מנחה), the afternoon prayers named for the flour offering that accompanied sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem, Arvit (ערביח) or Maariv (מערפ), from "nightfall."

7 A set of eighteen blessings recited standing each day, usually in the morning.

8 The prayer itself does seem to be plural in focus, such as to be intercessionally by a gathered group of believers, but the term of address, Abba, is a crucial and radical innovation for the individual as well.

9 The verb to pray literally means to ask, it originally was not a religious term.

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 5:16

11 Romans 12:3

12 Romans 12:2

13 Galatians 5: 5

14 The definition of faith in Hebrews 11 describes it as having substance, elsewhere this same Greek term is translated as having confidence.

15 2 Corinthians 5:18

16 These thoughts are developed further in volume 3

17 See Philippians 2:16

18 A quote which is reputed to have been made by Harold MacMillan in response to a journalist when asked what is most likely to blow governments off course.

19 See the Blue Letter Bible resource; <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3809&t=KJV>

20 Romans 8:13b-17a

21 Within the Jewish marriage culture the best man is called the mattan and is a type of the role the Holy Spirit has with regards preparing the bride

20 Romans 8:13b-17a

21 Within the Jewish marriage culture the best man is called the mattan and is a type of the role the Holy Spirit has with regards preparing the bride

22 Joel 2:16c

## Chapter 2

# The Secret Life of Fasting

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

unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:16-18

The first point to make here is that the expectation of the Lord was that the disciples, as observant Jews, would have been people who practised fasting. The traditional time for Jews to fast was on the Day of Atonement and on five other occasions during the year.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this is similar to the Anglo/Catholic time of Lent, a time of religious driven cultural community observance. However, Jesus cannot be referring to these particular times of fasting here, because how could they have been practised in secret. For everybody would have been fasting at the same time.

Jesus, therefore, must be referring to a different time and perhaps even a different type of fasting here. Perhaps even, a fast that has a different motivation and purpose than merely religious practise. Therefore, what is this fasting that the Lord is referring to here? And more profoundly why does God value the fact that His disciples are willing to forego food for a period of time? Indeed, what might be the spiritual purpose of fasting? As well as this why does this need to be done in secret? These are important questions for us to answer here.

Before we do, however, it might be helpful if we were to turn the spot light on ourselves with regards to fasting; what about us? Do we fast? Jesus assumes that we do, if His words speak directly to us. In modern day evangelical/charismatic Christianity fasting seems to be seen as an optional extra for those who are keen enough to bother to do it, which is probably not very often. Moreover, this is usually only when we are in crisis mode and desperate to try anything to twist God's arm, so to speak. Indeed, perhaps we do need to re-evaluate fasting for our own times and for our own lives and to rediscover it as an important spiritual discipline and one for which we do have a clear understanding of its value in our lives and as part of our walk before the Lord?

Indeed, a spiritual discipline for which Father is looking to provide a reward. For this is one of three secret disciplines that Jesus teaches us that should be part of the normal life style of one of His followers. Fasting is not merely an optional extra that we can try if we want. After all, who would suggest that we only have to try praying if we feel the urge? And just like with Jesus' teaching on prayer in the closet, fasting carries the very same rubric: it is to be done in secret, it is purely between the individual and God the Father and God the Father will reward those who practise this <sup>1</sup> discipline openly. We clearly, therefore, have to reassess how we approach fasting and be renewed in our thinking with regards to our use and practice of this discipline in our lives.

The world in which we live in the West is one of consumerism and materialism? It is all about knowing what I want, what I really, really want, the Spice Girls being the prophetic voice of the nineties that they were. As Christians we fall too easily under this way of thinking; a way of thinking that is too readily expressed within our own church culture, which is itself too often person centred rather than God centred? Might the active and faith filled practise of fasting enable us to challenge this distorted mentality both in our own lives and even within church world? Indeed, perhaps this might even be its purpose, a means by which we can challenge a worldly distortion that lies within the self-life of all of us? And as we reflect on Uzzah and the stumbling cart we might begin to get a sense that fasting could be a useful tool to help us in the challenges we all face as disciples; to help us to effectively die to this self-life and be free to walk in the spirit? After all, simply said, when you stop eating and drinking there is only one outcome.

To help us here we will initially be exploring Isaiah 58 which will provide us with some valuable insight into the importance of fasting for the disciple, before looking at the example of fasting set by the experience of the Lord Jesus, Himself.

...ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow

down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Isaiah 58:4-5

Let us first of all address the question of the purpose of fasting. Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 58 is a challenge to the faithless religious observance of fasting in his own day. However, as with all scriptural prophecy it has multiple, cyclical applications and does speak down the generations to us as well. Fasting is more than just keeping your religious service record up to date. There does need to be faith attached, we do need to believe that our actions do come before a living God and by fasting this is a means by which our issues and our voice might 'be heard on high'. And this is why faith is important here.

Fasting in essence is a means by which an individual is seeking to communicate to God and to specifically communicate to Him that they desire His active involvement in their life in a specific area.

And as we have already seen, when we were exploring prayer, the word is clear about the importance of the presence of faith in those who are seeking God. Faith is the spiritual currency in God's spiritual economy.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

Therefore, for our voice to be heard on high through our fasting, our voice must be full of faith and expectancy that Father is indeed a rewarder, our rewarder, as we diligently seek Him through fasting. However, the key for us has to be our motivation and our attitude. In our fasting, as in all aspects of our walk with the Lord, we do need to walk humbly before our God. He is God.

However, as we saw with the secret prayer, the purpose for the fasting is important, for Father's focus is to see His son, His nature and His character, being developed in us. Therefore, what are the rewards for which we should be fasting? The rewards of fasting are the impact it will have on the issues for which we are fasting and praying, such as we see described by the prophet here.

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 ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Isaiah 58: 6-7

Firstly, it is important that we understand the

impact the fast will also have on us, on our character and on our walk before the Lord as true disciples. By fasting we are challenging our most basic and strongest internal physical drive, hunger. We are directly confronting our bodies and asserting our will over them. Our will and the choices we make are, at any one moment, the essence of who we are. We have already mentioned that a Christian can be recognised, not by how they act, but by how they react. In that moment in which we respond to our toe being stubbed what is the word comes to our mind and then out of our mouths?

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

Psalm 15:1-2

The truth that is spoken in our hearts will be the truth that comes out of our mouths

As we established through the insight of David in Psalm 51.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 51:6

Father wants each one of us to have truth in the inward parts and fasting is very helpful in this process

of refining our hearts, whereby in those moments we will increasingly be able to respond out of a pure heart. Fasting helps us to refine our will and thereby to increasingly and naturally help us to make progress toward Christ likeness. A reality of nature and character which will then be demonstrated in those moments of toe stubbing challenge and within which we can therefore radiate something of the Lord even in those moments to those around us who might be looking on.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;  
And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and  
hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice  
to God for a sweet smelling savour.

Ephesians 5:1-2

The key is not choice making but being that choice! Father is at work within us to transform our choice making essence, our will, such that it is tuned into those things that give Him pleasure. Therefore, secret fasting is an important spiritual discipline through which this will occur over time within us and within our hearts. As long as we allow it to have the impact in our hearts that it needs to have, for this we need to walk obediently and honestly before our God.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and  
to do of his good pleasure.

## Philippians 2:13

In Chapter 3 above we explored the importance of dying to self as it was figuratively expressed through the story of the death of Uzzah as he put his hand out to steady the Ark of the Covenant on its journey from Gibeah to Jerusalem. Fasting is literally an activity by which we are actually starting the physical process of dying in our bodies by denying the body sustenance. Therefore, there is clearly a connection here for us between active, faith filled secret fasting and the walk of self-denial and the process of sanctification in our lives.

In Isaiah, we are given helpful insight as to areas of our lives within which fasting might support the work of sanctification, and to help us to find and walk in freedom in these areas.

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 ye break every yoke?

Isaiah 58:6

As we apply this scripture to ourselves and our walk before the Lord we might recognise that there may be chains that bind us to the past, chains that have come from our past lives and which still impact us in the here and now. We may be carrying heavy burdens of guilt and shame that are attached to our

hearts and our memories that are related to these past sins. From this verse we can clearly see that fasting can play some part in our release from this weight from the past that is exerting itself in the present and affecting our walk. For Jesus, through the cross, has made a way through which we can exchange the yokes that bind us with His yoke which brings liberty and freedom.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.  
Matthew 11:28-30

These deep issues do need to be worked out and worked through in our lives. At times there may be an ongoing need for healing and deliverance in these areas. However, we do need to be careful that we do not use such ministry as a simple quick fix for issues that need to be worked out with fear and trembling before the Lord instead through our journey of discipleship. The Cross has done it all, and it is indeed a finished work. Indeed, a work that needs to be applied to our life and to the ongoing issues so that we can come to a wonderful place of freedom, a place of new revelation concerning our freedom in Christ and faith in the work of the Cross. We, therefore, need to be able to come to the place

where our will is truly under control and under His Lordship. Fasting is therefore an important discipline that can and will make a difference.

For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Romans 6:10-13

In turning to the Lord's experience of fasting, we will be able to recognise for ourselves three important areas that active faith filled fasting will help us to overcome. For fasting is not just useful in terms of the restorative purposes of God, but is also important for His purposes to prepare us for effective service in Him both in the here and now and in what is to come. For this we will be exploring Jesus' experience of fasting at the beginning of His ministry.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

Matthew 4:1-2

The first point that needs to be made is that fasting needs to be Spirit led. It is a time of testing when we are led into our own particular wilderness, the secret place of our inner life and where the Lord allows us to see what is really there. Father is in control of this transformational process and at the right Kairos time He will guide us by His Spirit to begin a fast. We, therefore, need to wait on him and to listen for His prompting and to not be motivated by the need to please others or our religious flesh life.

...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13b-14

Indeed, this fasting in the spirit is not born of religious observance, it is, instead, part of our journey; this journey of true discipleship with which we are by now hopefully very familiar. As we are progressing in the Lord there will be times, the right time for us in the Lord God's Kairos timing. This will be a God given opportunity for us to take time out to journey into an area of wilderness in our lives in order for Father to challenge us in a particular area in our life. It will either be an opportunity to test how far we have truly progressed in this area or it will be an opportunity to open our eyes to a new issue of

the heart that does need some work. The experience of the children of Israel in their own wilderness, as described in Deuteronomy, is a helpful picture for us here.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Deuteronomy 8:2

We can identify in this verse the different elements we have just described. They were led into the wilderness for a specific purpose. The purpose being that they would be both humbled and proved, both of which would allow them to have an honest appraisal of where they actually were on their journey and to see whether love and obedience for their God and His purposes flowed out of their hearts. It will be the same with us.

It took them forty years and it took Jesus forty days, but for both the process, as represented by the number forty, it was a work of completion.<sup>2</sup> A work that would produce maturity and a preparedness for what was to come. For the children of Israel what was to come would be the Promised Land, for Jesus it was his earthly ministry and sacrificial death and for us it is to be the bride prepared and made ready and to be trained to reign with Jesus

in the Millennium. A promise that comes directly from the Lord, and from the teaching in Chapter 5 we understand now that our overcoming is the Lord through His Spirit overcoming the ongoing effect of the world in our lives and in our hearts.

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations

Revelation 2:26

## Satan is a created tool of the Almighty

We also need to realise that the devil is a servant of God in the Father's purposes for our sanctification. There is not a duality of opposing powers here. Satan or the devil <sup>3</sup> is used by God in our lives. For a true perspective of these spiritual realities let us turn to Luke 10.

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Luke 10:17-20

As Jesus discovered for Himself Satan will come alongside speak lies, make accusations and condemn. He might also attempt to kill, steal and destroy. However, he is not able to prevent the Lord building his ekklesia, of which we are part and therefore be encouraged.

...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>4</sup>

Matthew 16:18

Satan cannot prevent the Lord from building Jesus into us and building us into his ekklesia

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5

The ongoing work of Father in our lives does need to be tested, to keep us on our toes and to keep us honest before God and before ourselves; the devil is perfectly placed to do just that.

Therefore, when tempted or tested in any way by the devil, see it for what it is and respond accordingly.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

Moreover, in that moment, we need to actively choose to come under the shadow of the Most High, take a stand against what the devil is trying to get you do and watch him disappear. Yield to the will of Father and choose to turn away from the will of the devil. As Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 10, where we read:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

The narrative of the temptation of Jesus is useful here because the temptations do come within the context of a fast and as such will prove to be illustrative of the challenges we might also face during our own times of fasting. Jesus himself is tempted by the devil three times in the wilderness, each temptation is a challenge to an important foundational aspect of His ministry, and this even before it has truly begun. There is a truth here as well, that we do need to be aware of for ourselves, particularly when we are on the verge of stepping out in to the faith realm and in to a new God birthed vision.

On the one hand, we need to realise that this is a time of great vulnerability and to be prepared for

the enemy to try to undermine and defeat us at this early stage. However, on other hand we also need to understand that Father is allowing us to be challenged, after all He is God. He is allowing us to be tempted so that He can prove to us that we are ready and prove to us that He is faithful, because He has made us ready. Or, on the other hand, to prove to us that more work is required and to keep us honest and in the truth. Indeed, at these times, we need to recognise that we are not ready and, like David, we need to stop the journey, park up the presence and seek the Lord afresh.

Essentially, Jesus was tempted in three areas, his understanding of Himself, His understanding of His Father and His understanding of the calling on His life. And broadly speaking, these will also be areas in which we can expect to be probed, challenged and at times outright attacked. For Jesus, the faithfulness of His Father was the one prevailing truth that was vitally important to him in each of the temptations.

This would need to be His foundation and security from which He would be able to face all that the world would be throwing at Him. For Jesus would need to depend on Father for all things at all times, and to not look to His own finite resources but rest in the Father's infinite resources. For Jesus is choosing to walk in obedience to His father, as He:

...took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. <sup>5</sup>

Philippines 2:7

This truth, Jesus' total dependency on the Father, is clearly a lesson that had been well learnt by Jesus.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 5:19

Indeed, this was also the work that the Father was doing on the journey from Gibeah to Jerusalem, as the Ark came to the threshing floor of Nachon and we were taken through the death experience of Uzzah, it was here that David learnt the importance of walking in fear and obedience. Let us remind ourselves what the name Uzzah actually means, it means strength, and it represents for us responding to situations in our own strength and not relying on the Lord's providential care and provision. However, the way for us is not based on our strength, instead it will be a way marked by weakness. This was a lesson Paul had to learn. Grace is the key factor for all of us, at all times and in all situations.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for

my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

The Lord will always have a way, even a way where there is no way, but it always has to be His way.

It is all about walking humbly before our God and as Abraham experienced we are never too old to walk this walk.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.  
Genesis 17:1

Therefore, as Jesus' temptations were a challenge to His dependency upon His Father, we can expect to go through similar trials and challenges to our true dependency on Him. This is particularly true when we are physically and emotionally stretched and vulnerable during fasting.

The path of true Sonship  
is dependency on the Father

And as we reflect upon the experience, teaching

and example of Jesus, we need to understand that active faith filled secret fasting must be experienced by anyone who is serious about walking as one of the Lord's disciples. It must be regarded as a formative spiritual discipline, and not merely an optional one. As we saw in the Garden, the Lord God is the former of man and Father desires to form an approximation of His son in each one of us. When we reflect on the experience of David as he moved God's presence within the Ark of the Covenant we are reminded again of the name of the father of the driving team, Abinadab, a name which means in the Hebrew 'the father is willing'. The same thought is found in Philippians 2, where we read.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13

It is Father who is at work within us if we make ourselves available to Him to be able to do the work He desires to do. And the work He desires to do is to work on our decision making capabilities, our thought life, such that our will is increasingly brought into line with His will such that we are increasingly able to do of his good pleasure. And through active faith filled secret fasting we give Him this access and its concomitant permission to both refine and prepare us for His purposes both here and beyond.

## Through choice we change and with change we can choose

For Isaiah goes on to reflect on the impact that fasting will have on us.

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.

Isaiah 58:8-9a

Our righteousness will go before us in those difficult moments as we become a reflection of the glory of the Lord. Three other benefits are described here;

- When cracks appear it is His light which will flood out from within us.
- Our restoration will happen quickly
- In all situations the Lord by His Spirit will be an ever present presence and voice, speaking in and through us.

Paul makes a similar exhortation,

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world

### Philippians 2:15

Indeed, in the same passage in Isaiah, we also have a prophetic reference to the spiritual connection between prayer and fasting and the fruit it will bear beyond us in the lives of others, such as we will see described through the alms doing in the next chapter, where we read:

And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Isaiah 58:11

Through our time spent in the secret place of prayer and fasting there will be a new dynamic of the Lord's daily leading through His Spirit and we will have the capacity to be that inexhaustible fountain of living water we explored above and for those around us we will be a source of life and restoration for their body, soul, and spirit.

There is also a prophetically challenging episode in the life of David that potentially speaks to us here. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and the resultant child was dying and it is in the midst of this sin driven tragedy that we find the heartbroken king, and let us listen to his words and thoughtfully apply them to our own lives.

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?

2 Samuel 12:22

We each need to take away from this a sense of the urgency for the times in which we live. To fast while there is still time! To fast while there is still time for it to be effective and to bear the fruit in our own lives and in the lives of others that it can, because our voice has been heard on high.

## Notes

1. 3 Tishrei =September/October—the Fast of Gedaliah, 10 Tishrei=September/October —Yom Kippur, 10 Tevet=December/January—Asarah B'Tevet, 13 Adar=February/March—the Fast of Esther, 17 Tammuz=June/July—Shivah Asar B'Tammuz, 9 Av= July/August—Tisha B'Av
2. The number 40 in biblical numerology is the number that represents maturity and completion
3. The devil is a name for Satan that actually describes his function, the accuser, within and as a part of God's creative order and within and as a part of God's purposes for Israel and the church
4. See Matthew 16:18b
5. Philippians 2:7b

Chapter 3

# The Secret Life of Alms Giving

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of

your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:1-4

**T**he first point we would want to make is that almsgiving is not the same as tithing, or giving money more generally within church world. The reason for this is similar to our reasoning above when considering the teaching on fasting. For almsgiving to be a secret between an individual and God then it will need to be giving of a different order and at times not always about an exchange of money. This said, we do recognise that the giving of alms is specifically related to the giving of money. We would not want to argue that this is not what Jesus had in mind when he originally gave this teaching. Alms giving is clearly to be understood as an opportunity on a regular basis to be lead of the Spirit and to hear the direct leading of the Lord to reach out in mercy to those we might encounter with a gift of money. It is important that we are attentive in this as, in all things, to His leading. And, to be expectant that there will be opportunities for us to be able to respond actively to the needs of

others and this in secret. When these opportunities do come our way we do need to be obedient to this unction and to simply give. It is also important that we are not there to second guess what the person might use the money for, this has nothing to do with us. To simply give whatever the Lord impresses on us to give and to also give it with a blessing.

To do this in secret is important because by denying ourselves any reward of human acclamation for what we do starves our self-love and self-pride. For at these times our self-life will be crying out from within us for self-gratification. We all thrive on the compliments of others, particularly from those we look up to and who matter to us. We are always looking to impress and to show the world how wonderful we would like to be seen as. This is well understood by Jesus.

...do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Matthew 6:2

The secret act of alms giving does not provide for such public acclamation, it does not in any way feed this, no one will know what we have done; only Father. Therefore, in this way our heart will be challenged by this discipline. Indeed, the question we will face will be; is merely pleasing Father enough for us? Can we really keep control of our tongues and not tell anyone,

not even our spouses?

Be encouraged the more we are exercised in this discipline, the quieter the demands our self-life will make of us and the greater will be our capacity to serve the Lord in obedience and in the moment as our hearts are trained and refined by this discipline. We will find a greater freedom in Him to step out in Him and into His will. Indeed, lessons that are learned here will then have an impact in other and more dramatic acts of Father lead giving. Why, because we will be able to see more clearly the work of the Father that lies before us.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

A key aspect of this discipline is for each of us to develop an ear to recognise the still small voice of Father as we are making our way through the day. He will have His own special way of communicating directly to each of us and this will be unique to each of us. As Jesus often challenged those who were listening to Him, he who has ears to hear let him hear, do we have ears to hear the voice of Father. Through the secret discipline of almsgiving, this will be an important development process for each of us.

As we do practise almsgiving we are demonstrating something which comes directly out of the very heart of the Lord God. The Greek word translated as alms

here has a root meaning of 'mercy' and this root provides for us a key to help our understanding of the third of the secret spiritual disciplines; the secret of the secret of giving of alms. Throughout scripture the character of God is described as one that is characterised by mercy, for our God is a merciful God.

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious,  
longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,  
Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and  
transgression and sin...

Exodus 34:6-7

This description of His character is found as Moses is enveloped within a cloud of the Lord God's glory on Mount Sinai. As the presence of God passes before Moses the very name and nature of the Lord God is revealed to him. Therefore, we can understand that almsgiving is an active and practical demonstration of this mercy that flows out of our heart and is, in turn, an expression of the heart of our God. A gift of mercy from us to the world that God so loves. As stated this is giving that has typically been defined by the transfer of money. However, is this the full story?

Indeed, in Acts 3 we find Peter and John perhaps redefining alms giving for us?

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus

Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Acts 3:6

Anyone can give money to the poor and needy? However, only a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ can reach out into this hurting world with the Father's mercy. Reaching into the real poverty of our world, which is spiritual poverty. Reaching into the pain of a hurting world with the Father's healing nature. A nature that was fully manifested in the earthly ministry of His son, Jesus Christ. A nature that desires to heal the pain of the fall experienced in the body, soul and the spirit of a lost humanity. A nature that He desires to be made manifest in and through His body, and specifically in those who carry His presence with them and make it available to the world through which they are travelling.

A principle that is captured by Paul when he wrote the following:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Indeed, a savour that will need to find its expression at times and in His Kairos time in words and action.

The key element for us to consider, as we return to the passage in Acts 2, is expressed by Peter when he says, '...but such as I have give I thee.' Indeed, what is it that do we have that can make such a difference? It is nothing about us and it was nothing about Peter, he had nothing except Jesus. It was and is all about Jesus Christ of Nazareth and His savour within us. It is what we have of Him that counts. This is why the first two secret disciplines are so important, because it is the work that the Father does in the secret place of our closet that prepares us to be in the right place, at the right time to be an effective and fruitful expression of his dear Son in the Holy Spirit.

To be in the moment in the Father, in Christ and to be the Spirit.

Once again, we do need to recognise that it is the whole of the Godhead working through us to be actively in faith in the moment. To make available His mercy when it is required and when it counts. This is such a moment that we have described in the story in Acts.

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John,

said, Look on us.  
Acts 3:2-3

As Peter and John wander pass this beggar on the way to the Temple, a path they have trodden so often. Indeed, how often had the Lord Himself passed this beggar? However, this time it was different, this time it was Kairos time for them and for the beggar. They hear the familiar cry asking for some change and in this moment there is something different, something new; they are gripped by faith. And as they look intently at this lame man, they make a simple request, Look on us. Was this simply to make eye contact with them? To look in their eyes and to see what? To see the love and mercy of the one who had guided them to have this spiritual encounter, Father God. To look on them and sense the savour of Christ. As they look at each other, as they share their humanity, Father reaches out to this man through Peter with His mercy and meets him in his damaged human fragility and heals him.

In this moment Peter and John may have been moved by compassion by this man's poverty and destitution, we are not told what their motivation might have been. However, what is clearly moving them to respond as they walk pass him this time is something they see in the faith realm, something of substance, something that they had the evidence for in their hearts. What they saw here is the same as what Jesus always looked for.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 5:19

Indeed, as Peter and John looked into the eyes of the beggar they recognised the hand of the Father at work on this man. This in turn, seems, to have released the faith they needed to be able to respond in the moment and to speak the words of healing and faith. Moreover, as they asked in faith and in the name of the Lord, the Father then moved to respond and to provide the working of this healing miracle through His Holy Spirit. After all what does Jesus encourage His disciples to expect?

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

John 14:12

Obedience can carry its own consequences as this story goes on to demonstrate.

Jesus has said that his disciples should expect to see the miraculous as part of their evangelism as they began to step out into the gospel. <sup>1</sup> Peter goes on to use this healing as a platform from

which to proclaim the Gospel to the onlookers. The results were both impressive as we are told that about five thousand souls were saved that day and problematic as Peter and John ended up in prison. However, the presence of the healed man at their trial the next day proved decisive for them and they were released.

During the trial that followed this miracle Peter does say something interesting, when challenged by the High Priest, he describes the healing simply as a, good deed.

If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.  
Acts 4:9

This does bring to mind a verse we have encountered before from Ephesians.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.  
Ephesians 2:10

Do we have here also a description of dynamic secret almsgiving? Indeed, a type of almsgiving that is potentially available to all who are willing to walk the walk of true discipleship developing ears to hear the still small voice and to step out in faith filled words and action? A description of

a wonderful daily reality. A reality in God that is available to each one of us as we step through our front doors into the world. If we have been prepared and made ready to be lead of the Lord, to be available, to respond in faith, and to do the kind of good deeds we have seen Peter and John do at the gate Beautiful. To respond not just to the needs that present themselves, but, more decisively, to respond to those needs where we can see in faith that Father is already at work. Works that have been preordained for us to walk in, by Him. There are some today that are walking this walk, why not all of us? Would we not then have something to praise God for?

The key for us is to walk the walk of true discipleship, to walk in fear and obedience, practising the secret disciplines and to walk in the good works of righteousness that Father provides. The elephant in the room in our redefining of alms giving as alms doing is the aspect of secrecy here. How would such works ever be secret? The temptation would always be to give testimony to God's goodness, but how often is this a pretence to let everyone know how spiritual and dynamic we are? However, if we were to keep these events between us and Father, and obviously the person for whom the mercy was demonstrated, then the glory would only ever go to Father.

For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will

not give my glory unto another.

Isaiah 48:11

For God will not share His glory, not even with us. And there is a precedence in scripture for the keeping secret of a miraculous work of the Lord or at least this is what He requested here:

And he charged them that they should tell no man...

Mark 7:34

And again in Mark 9, where we read:

And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.

Mark 9:9

For us, motivation in all things is key. Remember, there will be a time for our deeds done in the body to be revealed judged and rewarded according to their motivation.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3: 12-13

To be able to hear His voice and to follow His leading is such an important aspect of this secret discipline. The journey into discipleship is also a journey into sonship and as scripture says:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:14

This discipline is also a means through which we can develop our capacity to be obedient in the way in which we are led. It will enable us to hear His voice and leading more effectively and to then respond actively to what we hear, no matter how challenging we might find this. Once again, the challenges that we will encounter in this process will be to the most sensitive areas of our self-life as we are being encouraged to open our wallets or purses for the Lord. As we do develop a greater capacity to hear and respond to the leading of the Lord it may be that when we are ready we might find ourselves walking through our own beautiful gate into the more dynamic realm of the type of acts of mercy we have seen in Acts 3. Indeed, we do have Peter to encourage us here.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.

Acts 10:34

God is no respecter of persons, which means that it is not about the person, but it is about Him. It is about Him being able to manifest Himself through an individual who has been made ready and prepared. We are merely the vessel and the glory comes from Him and returns back to Him.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Corinthians 4:6

Father does desire that through our fragile clay pots He might be able to shine in us and work through us for His glory, and as Peter continues in Acts 10.

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Acts 10:5

This potential applies to everyone in every place in every nation, the two conditions that have to be met are fearing God and working righteousness, if these are met then you and your works are acceptable and you will be fruitful. David in Psalm 15 brings right back to the

tabernacle of David as the place out of which such a ministry of working righteousness should flow, where he writes:

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

Psalm 15:1-2

We notice also that such fruitfulness, as we have seen, comes from a reality of love and mercy that has been worked into the heart of the individual, and as a consequence of this are working righteousness and walking uprightly. Moreover, we are being left alone in these things. As we saw in chapter 5 of the previous book, a way is being prepared in the wilderness. The Lord is preparing a tabernacle that is outside of the camp for us they dwell in the Tabernacle of David to which we will now be turning our attention.

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. <sup>2</sup>

Hebrews 13:12

The final point is to return to the context for our walk, carrying the presence. His presence will always lead us to Jerusalem and to the tabernacle of David.

This expression of life in the body is so important, Father doesn't want to create a 'Lone Ranger' in us, for here lies a path to self-pride and self-righteousness. He wants us to function at the heart of His Son's body, the ekklesia. To find there all the edification, and exhortation, and comfort in one another that we need; as well as all the aggravation, irritation and annoyance. Indeed, these are the very realities that will be important to help us grow, as we take our lives and our issues into the secret place of the Most High. Emerging prepared and made ready to serve our God both here and beyond.

The secret life of the disciple can be likened to the place where a raw piece of stone or rock has been quarried and is being prepared by a master stonemason. This stone, you and me, is being prepared to take its place within the structure of a building. The work on the individual stone is important in its own right, but the stone will only come into its full potential as it finds its place in the building for which it is being prepared. A process of building that we will be looking at next.

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises

of him who hath called you out of darkness into his  
marvellous light

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

### **Notes**

1 Mark 16: 20

2 Hebrews 13: 12-14