

☞ WEEK 1 ☞

MODELING MATURITY



How could we have known God would use Indonesian believers to model for us a mature walk with Christ in the disciplines of the faith that we had casually read in our Bibles, but had not taken seriously enough? As we observed the faithful lives of these dedicated Christians, God was training us for a more authentic walk with Him and for more effective ministry...

*“Let us therefore draw near with confidence
to the throne of grace...”
Hebrews 4:16*

☞ DAY 1 ☞

NETWORK OF PRAYER

☞ BEGIN WITH PRAYER ☞

Father, I want more of You. I am not satisfied to remain where I am spiritually. I want to know You and the power of Your resurrection life flowing through me. I realize that for Your life to flow through mine unhindered, transformation of my mind and heart will need to take place. So today, I give you permission to change me. Give me courage and strength not to flinch when changes occur, but to follow You with a heart abandoned to Your purposes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MEMORY
VERSE

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

Have you ever felt like your relationship with Christ is on autopilot and that you're at a plateau? You know the Scriptures fairly well, you're living a life of following Christ and yet you desire to go deeper with Him. Sometimes it isn't until God changes your surroundings or plucks you out of a situation that you see Him and His Word in a fresh new way. He brings someone or something into your life to model a higher level of spiritual maturity. In the most surprising way, that's what He did for David and I.

As I began writing this Bible Study, every day I heard the call to prayer from a nearby mosque. You see, we moved to Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, in 2003. And it was there that God took us to a new level in our walk with Him by teaching us to keep the secrets of Jesus.

Read Matthew 6:1-4.

Who is speaking in this passage? (See Matthew 4:23 and Matthew 5:1.)

Which warning begins this chapter?

Circle the words “secret” and “reward” each time you find it in these verses.

What challenge did Jesus give his disciples in verse 2?

Why did He ask them to keep this secret according to verse 4?

During this time in His ministry Jesus was gaining popularity among the people. Multitudes of them from all over Israel had gathered to hear this teacher from Galilee. It was an unprecedented event. They waited to see what this prophet-teacher had to say. But what He did shocked them. He did not preach on all the old familiar themes. This was new and different from what the Seminary professors and church leaders had been teaching.

In the middle of His sermon to them, He spoke directly to the core of their hearts. He challenged the spirit of religion, the deeply-ingrained pride in them all. He challenged them to give alms to the poor and to give them in secret so no honor would come to them on earth. He was beginning to teach them to worship in spirit and in truth.

Read Matthew 6:5-6.

Circle the words “secret” and “reward” each time you find it in these verses.

What challenge did Jesus give his disciples in verses 5 and 6?

Why did He ask them to keep this secret according to verse 6?

Which group of people did Jesus denounce in verses 2 and 5?

Up to that time, most Jews prayed in public. It must have become a prime method for displaying one’s spiritual depth and devotion to God to others less spiritually mature. Jesus came down hard on those who used praying to garner praise.

Read Matthew 6:16-18.

Circle the words “secret” and “reward” each time you find it in these verses.

What challenge did Jesus give his disciples in verses 16 and 17?

Why did He ask them to keep this secret according to verse 18?

Have you ever tried fasting? Since it is one of the tougher disciplines of the faith, the Jews of Jesus’ day used it as spiritual leverage to boost their standing with each other. Jesus would have none of that. His words pierced through their sham.

Jesus challenges His disciples, including you and me, to give, to pray, and to fast in secret. Keeping these secrets will begin to form God’s character in you. Some of

those character traits are humility (dealing with our pride), discretion (not giving ammunition to the opposition), spiritual perception (recognizing a counterfeit), wisdom (to store treasure in heaven), and intimacy with Him (drawing us into a close fellowship). And these are just the beginning.

Until God took us to Indonesia, we were unaware those traits were underdeveloped in us. But because He loves us and wants the best for us, God began to work on these issues in our lives. It started with an unexpected invitation from David's company to make the move to Indonesia.

When David first told me the news I couldn't believe it! My mind began spinning. Would God ask us to leave our children and grandchildren (my grandchildren came to my house every Wednesday morning for a special play time) and move on the other side of the world? Could we leave our growing ministry in the States and the new translations of our materials into other languages? Why would God do that?


We began to pray for God's direction and for two months felt like our prayers were hitting a glass ceiling. Neither of us received an answer or direction as we prayed. We have learned over the years never to move on a "yellow light," but to wait until we have a clear "green" or "red" answer from the Lord. The deadline for a decision about the move was drawing near and we still didn't have an answer. The company offered to send us to Indonesia for a short visit to help us with the decision and while in Jakarta, one morning the Lord spoke through His Word.

David had suggested we read aloud from the book of Psalms to each other on the last morning of our trip. We desperately wanted to hear from God. We began with familiar Psalms and it was my turn to read Psalm 139. Verses 9 and 10 leapt off the page, "*If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast.*" We both instantly knew we were moving across the ocean to Indonesia!

Before we made the move, we made another trip to Jakarta. Only a few days before we left for the trip, I received an email about a huge network of believers who had been praying for the transformation of Indonesia. For twelve years this powerful network of intercessors has been fasting and praying for Indonesia, taking literally the promise of II Chronicles 7:14, "*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*"

The network was holding a week-long conference in Jakarta during the time we were to be in the city. I was curious how a huge prayer gathering could take place in the largest Muslim country in the world. We faxed in our registration for the conference with anticipation.

We walked into the conference and were met by a lovely English-speaking tour guide. "You must be from Houston," she said. We were in shock. No one knew us. How could she know we were from Houston? Later we were to find out that the Indonesian prayer network had been praying for the city of Houston in America as a gift in exchange for the prayers Houstonians had been praying for the nation of Indonesia. They had specifically been praying that God would send Houstonians who had ministries needed in Indonesia to move to their country!



WE HAVE
LEARNED OVER THE
YEARS NEVER TO
MOVE ON A
"YELLOW LIGHT,"
BUT TO WAIT
UNTIL WE HAVE A
CLEAR "GREEN" OR
"RED" ANSWER
FROM THE LORD.

We were privileged to meet the humble leader of the prayer network. He was not at all surprised to see us at the conference. I told him, “I think you prayed us here!”

We began to sense that God was getting ready to challenge us like never before. We were off on a new adventure!

At the first session of the conference where over eight thousand of these powerful intercessors were gathered, the praise and worship time was amazing. These precious believers sang with whole-hearted abandon about the glory of God’s greatness. I had seldom heard such bold, heart-felt singing from so many believers in one place. When the last note of the music faded, a speaker quietly approached the microphone. “All those of you who have fasted for forty days in preparation for this week, please come forward. You have earned the right to open our prayer conference.”


I thought to myself, “That’s a bold way to start. What if no one comes forward? How many people would really fast for forty days?” I looked around, expecting to find one or two brave souls who had actually fasted for the full length of time. But to my shock, hundreds of people (very thin people, I might add), streamed to the front of the auditorium. Some knelt down, some stood, and some stretched out on the floor at the base of the stage. Together, they began to pray aloud. It was orderly and calm, but these prayer intercessors meant business.

As the intercessors prayed, electricity went through the whole meeting. We felt the almost tangible presence of God, sensing His nearness and power in a way we had never known before that time. The prayer warriors cried out to God, asking Him to work His wonders to heal Indonesia, and bringing about complete transformation of the nation that so desperately needs Him. No one hurried them as they “made their requests known unto God.” The rest of us sat in awe as we eavesdropped on a divine conversation.

These very humble, powerful believers had my attention. I was sold. I had to find out, “What was the secret of these passionate believers? How did the church leaders talk all these people into fasting and praying so fervently?” Growing up in America had tinted my thinking to believe that Western nations were to be the ones sending Christians to spread God’s kingdom, but I quickly learned that my thinking had to adjust to reality. Western Christians have much to learn from our passionate brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

When we settled in Jakarta, I began talking to some of the prayer intercessors. I opened my home each week for prayer, inviting a group of dedicated women of many nationalities to come. We prayed and fasted and I began to search the Scriptures to learn more. The search led me to Matthew chapter six, where I found the heart of Jesus’ teaching on the subjects that had riveted my attention: giving, praying, and fasting. These were the very activities that consumed the lives of the Indonesian believers.

As we began to absorb the message of these verses, we realized we had much to learn. Our move to Indonesia was to be a great exchange. One of the reasons God sent us was to have our Bible study materials translated into Indonesian language and to train national leaders to use them. There are relatively few Bible studies



GROWING UP IN
AMERICA HAD
TINTED MY
THINKING TO
BELIEVE THAT
WESTERN
NATIONS WERE
TO BE THE ONES
SENDING
CHRISTIANS TO
SPREAD GOD’S
KINGDOM, BUT I
QUICKLY
LEARNED THAT
MY THINKING
HAD TO ADJUST
TO REALITY.

available in the Indonesian language for thousands of believers. We have seen God work through dedicated Christians to translate not only the book, *Wisdom for Mothers* into Indonesian, but He made it possible to film the video series with a beautiful Indonesian Bible teacher who trained with me for two years.

But the other half of the exchange is what God would teach us from our Asian brothers and sisters in Christ. We didn't know that God would use the Indonesian believers to model for us a mature walk with Christ in the disciplines of the faith that we had casually read in our Bibles, but had not taken seriously enough. As we observed the faithful lives of these dedicated Christians, God was training us for a more authentic walk with Him and for more effective ministry.

When we did research for this book, we could not have known that God was preparing us even then not only to personally grow in Him, but also to be ready to respond in Indonesia's hour of need during the greatest natural disaster in more than a century.

As I'm sure you remember, on December 26, 2004, Indonesia became front page, headline news when a huge 9.0 earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused a tsunami that rushed onto the shores of Indonesia and other nearby nations. Then on the day after Easter 2005, only three months later, a massive 8.7 earthquake once again rocked Sumatra and nearby islands.

We may never understand God's viewpoint of those historic, devastating days until we get to heaven, but one thing is clear: as the world rushed support to the victims, borders that had once been tightly closed against all foreigners (especially Christians) were suddenly swung open wide.

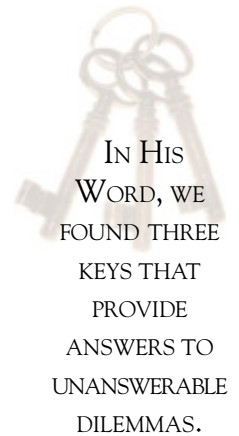
When we watched the terrible scenes on our television, as you did during those days, our hearts cried out, "What can we do?" Almost immediately, it began to dawn on us that God had already shown us what to do.

First, He had taught us by the example of the godly prayer warriors in the prayer network of Indonesia. They had modeled exactly how to prepare for a crisis and how to respond to it. They had been sacrificially giving, praying, and fasting for years, and had humble hearts ready to respond immediately, appropriately, and in love and sensitivity when the waves receded from the shores.

Secondly, God also showed us how to respond to a crisis through His Word. The principles we had been studying could be applied to either physical disasters like the ones we experienced in Indonesia or to anyone's personal disaster—divorce, death, a prodigal child, or they could be applied to any number of other problems both great and small in families or in nations. In His Word, we found three keys that provide answers to unanswerable dilemmas.

The secrets of Jesus are simple yet profound. When we come against an impenetrable wall—either in a human heart, a church, a city or a nation—there is but one plan that will gain the victory: we must keep the secrets of Jesus. We are to give, to pray, and to fast "under the radar," in secrecy. Those who are willing and know best how to practice these disciplines outlined by our Lord are best equipped to gain the victory.

You may be preparing yourself even now to go on a mission to one of the nations in the "10-40" window where you must be prepared for spiritual battles as



you bring the gospel to those yet unreached.

Some of you are called to be ministers, teachers, intercessors, or missionaries, seeking the ground of hearts, homes and nations to be surrendered to Christ. You want to go deeper with the Lord yourself, and perhaps you have been praying for a more effective ministry, but you need new tools to energize your kingdom work.

Perhaps, instead, you are struggling to come up for air from your own tidal wave of grief from personal hurt. Your husband who promised to love and cherish you 'til death parted you, is very much alive and is now absent from your life. Maybe one of your children is rebelling against all you and your husband carefully taught them. You stay up sleepless nights analyzing where you could have done something to prevent this family disaster.

On the other hand, financial burdens may have weighed you down. Things haven't turned out like you thought they would. Your friends are living in houses and taking vacations that are still just a dream for you.

Maybe you are simply watching and waiting for God to reveal His plan for your future. You are still single while you watch your friends not only marry, but start to raise their families. You wonder if your turn will ever come. Your personal "tsunami" is one of confusion and doubt, not knowing which way to turn.

What "tsunami" are you struggling with today?

What is your goal during this study? How would you like to see God work?

From what you have read today, what are the key principles you might apply to your situation?

If any of the scenarios above describe where you are, we think God has crossed your path with ours to lead you to discover some sacred truths about a godly response to your world. There IS something you can do! Jesus outlined His strategy for his followers. While others will not be able to tell you are accomplishing anything as you keep the secrets of Jesus, you will be on the front line of the battle with weapons in your hand that are mighty. Your reward has been promised by God Himself. And that's a great place to start!

Lord Jesus, I am desperate for You. I want to see victory where there is now defeat. I ask You to teach and to train me to do battle for the sake of Your kingdom. Please teach me through Your Word, through godly counsel, and during my prayers how to take back the ground that the Enemy has stolen. I admit to feeling inadequate and ill-prepared for this kind of battle. I am often distracted and disengaged from this most important work. Oh Lord, show me the way. I offer my life to You and commit myself today to enroll in Your classroom for the next 6 weeks. This I pray in Your blessed, precious name. Amen.

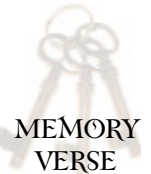
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 5:3

☞ DAY 2 ☞

HUMILITY

☞ BEGIN WITH PRAYER ☞

Precious Jesus, I bow before You today. My heart kneels in adoration and worship. You alone are worthy of my praise. Lord, I humble my heart, asking You to teach and train me with Your Word. Consecrate this time of study and open the eyes of my heart. I pray this in Your holy name. Amen.



MEMORY VERSE

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.
II Chronicles 7:14*

As our prayer teams in the U.S., Russia, Korea, and Indonesia prayed, God began to teach us that to take the ground of hearts, homes, and nations we would need some mighty spiritual weapons. And to wield those weapons, we would need mighty warriors. Mighty warriors are the result of training and discipline. The spiritual disciplines Jesus outlined for us in Matthew 6 were revolutionary even to the most seasoned of our intercessors.

If you take His instruction seriously, His words rock your world. Not only are you to give, but you are to give secretly, so you will not receive credit or public recognition. Not only are you to pray, you are to pray in secret. Not only are you to fast—did He say FAST?—you are to fast in secret. All honor and glory go directly to God as you follow Him in obedience to these divine commands.

As you learn to keep the three secrets, one of the first character traits God works on is humility. Pride cannot stand when you serve Christ without receiving credit. You will be tested. Does it hurt your feelings not to be recognized for your hard work and good deeds? Are you willing to give behind the scenes when no one applauds?

Read the following passages and write out God’s attitude toward the proud and haughty, the result of pride, and the reward of humility.

Leviticus 26:19

*I will break down your stubborn **pride** and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.*

God’s attitude toward the proud and haughty is-
The result of pride is-

Daniel 5:20

*But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with **pride**, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.*

God's attitude toward the proud and haughty is-

The result of pride is-

Daniel 4:37

*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in **pride** he is able to humble.*

God's attitude toward the proud and haughty is-

The result of pride is-

Proverbs 29:23

*A man's **pride** brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.*

The result of pride is-

The reward of humility is-

Isaiah 2:11

*The eyes of the **arrogant** man will be humbled and the **pride** of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*

God's attitude toward the proud and haughty is-

The result of pride is-

Isaiah 23:9

*The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the **pride** of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth.*

God's attitude toward the proud and haughty is-

The result of pride is-

Proverbs 11:2

*When **pride** comes, then comes disgrace, but with **humility** comes wisdom.*

The result of pride is-

The reward of humility is-

We began to see how much we had to learn about humility from the first days David and I spent in Indonesia. The leader of the massive prayer network is almost invisible. He models, trains, assists, and then leaves the work in the hands of

capable believers to go start new work. He works behind the scenes. You will probably never know his name.

This first reason to keep Jesus' secrets gives us an opportunity to humble ourselves and to serve Him when no one else is watching. He tells us to engage in secret giving, secret praying, and secret fasting—three powerful spiritual disciplines that will challenge our worst internal enemy—our pride.

To help us understand more about the character trait of humility, let's step back and put Matthew 6 into perspective. This chapter is nestled between two other powerful chapters, and the three of these form the famous Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

What is the first word in verses 3-11?

What are these verses called?

Jesus starts His Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 on a positive note. He tells His followers how to be “blessed” by listing many traits of humility. He says that a truly blessed life is one filled with qualities such as meekness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and even persecution for the sake of righteousness.

Read Matthew 5:13-20.

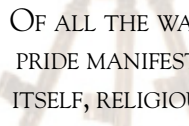
What down to earth examples did Jesus use to describe His disciples in verses 13-16?

How did Jesus challenge their old thinking patterns in Matthew 5:17-20?

Jesus tells them their identity: true believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But when He begins verse 17, His tone changes and He begins to talk to them about the Law and the Prophets. He says He came not to abolish but to fulfill all the requirements of the Law. Then He makes a shocking statement to first century Jewish ears: *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

The scribes and Pharisees kept the law more closely than anyone else...or so they said. Yet Jesus says His followers' righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Those listening that day probably could not imagine how that would be possible! The Pharisees were the most “righteous” people they knew...people who made a career out of being “right” with the Law of God.

But Jesus tells His followers they will be in a place of special blessing from God if they are “poor in spirit,” humbling themselves before God. In that day, that would have sounded like the opposite of their church leaders, for the scribes and



OF ALL THE WAYS
PRIDE MANIFESTS
ITSELF, RELIGIOUS
PRIDE IS PROBABLY
THE MOST
DAMAGING AND
DANGEROUS TO
THE CAUSE OF
CHRIST.

Pharisees certainly wanted everyone to know that they were “rich” in spirit. They loved to do righteous acts so that people would notice their piety and show them special honor; but Jesus was not pleased with this kind of religious “show” (Matthew 23:1-12).

Does “poor in spirit” sound like the opposite of leaders of our churches? Does it sound like the opposite of us? If we want to minister to a hurting world, we must be willing to humble ourselves, lay down our pride and do it in secret. No name in the program. No place of special honor. No applause. Of all the ways pride manifests itself, religious pride is probably the most damaging and dangerous to the cause of Christ.

If we want to see victory where there is now defeat, we will have to couple our public ministry with a whole other life lived in secret. Praying, fasting, and giving sacrificially must characterize our private life.

Very carefully, Jesus explains that He is not throwing out the baby with the proverbial bath water. The Law would be kept. But it would be kept by Him. He clearly tells them it is His job to fulfill the law. No man could do that, not even their very righteous religious leaders, so there was no reason for boasting. It was in His ability to keep the law in which one should take pride.

So as Jesus opens chapter 6, He issues a strong warning against practicing righteous acts for the purpose of impressing others. The words “beware” or “be careful” in 6:1 are translated from the Greek word “prosecho” which means “to turn your mind to, to be attentive, to devote thought and effort to.”¹

When Jesus starts a discourse with the words “turn your mind and pay attention,” it is time to get out our notebooks, have pen in hand, and prepare to enter into His classroom. To our hearts Jesus begins His address, “Pay attention! Devote some thought and effort into *not* doing your acts of righteousness before men....”

Once He has issued this warning against public displays of righteousness, Jesus shares secrets of His kingdom. These secrets are not for those who wish to use the kingdom for their own purposes to promote themselves. On the contrary, they are for those who are poor in spirit, ready to step into the shadows and allow Jesus to be central.

The idea of secret obedience, instead of a public display of piety, is one of Jesus’ strongest teachings throughout the gospels.

Read Matthew 23:25-28 to discover Jesus’ warning to the pious religious leaders.

Which two names did Jesus call these leaders of the church?

What illustration from the kitchen did Jesus use to describe the hypocritical Pharisees?

What illustration from the graveyard did Jesus use to describe the Pharisees?

What was on the outside of the Pharisees?

What was on the inside of the Pharisees?

Do you find it strange that Jesus has such compassion on prostitutes and thieves (tax collectors) but such strong words of condemnation for people who went to church all the time? His words are hard to read. They are like a laser cutting into our hearts, cutting away the façade of our pride when we use our position in the kingdom to exalt ourselves.

To keep the secrets of Jesus, we must begin from the starting place Jesus has given us. The starting place is becoming “poor in spirit.” We cannot begin to understand the kingdom of God if we insist on being “the king!” If we use our own good deeds to exalt our position among other believers, we have missed the most basic principle of the kingdom. Instead, we must bring our hearts to Jesus today, asking Him to reveal those areas He desires to heal and cleanse of our pride.

It is possible to harbor religious pride and not even be aware of it! In your zeal to further God’s kingdom, you might be tempted to be prideful as you serve those around you. Allow God to search your heart to uncover prideful attitudes or actions. Even though they may be unknown to you, they will damage your effectiveness in ministry.

Jesus gives us secrets to keep as medicine for our sick hearts, that we might become salt for a world craving healing and light to dispel the darkness. If we humble ourselves as He instructs, we will have taken the first step of preparation toward keeping the secrets of Jesus.

Lord, I surrender. I choose to stop fighting Your plan and now release myself into Your hand. Teach me the meaning of walking “poor in spirit” in a fresh new way. Take the ground of my heart, and cleanse me of pride. Change me, Lord. I humble myself before You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Notes

1. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, #4337, “prosecho”, <http://bible.lifeway.com/crossmain.asp>.

*“There is a time for everything...
a time to be silent and a time to speak...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7*

“See that you don’t tell this to anyone...” Mark 1:43

DISCRETION

☞ BEGIN WITH PRAYER ☞



MEMORY VERSE

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

Lord Jesus, I ask you to purify my tongue. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. Lord, take words out of my mouth when I need to keep silent. Teach me the discipline of silence when it serves Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Read the following verses from Proverbs and in each one, note which character trait is often paired with discretion.

Proverbs 1:4

...for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young.

Proverbs 2:11

Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Proverbs 5:2

...that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

Proverbs 8:12

I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.

Proverbs 11:22

Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.

According to these verses, what is the benefit of using discretion in your speech?

Some women really have trouble keeping secrets. But God’s kingdom secrets are meant to be kept. While often we openly share testimonies of God’s miraculous

work and power, there are some times when we should use discretion in sharing. Discretion is a character trait necessary for the follower of Christ who is entrusted with a mission within enemy territory.

Read Judges 13:1-5, 24-25.

What is the name of the special child born to Manoah and his wife?

What was his mission according to verse 5?

How is that similar to the mission you have been given?

What was to be the specific mark of God's hand on his life?

Read Numbers 6:2-8.

What was the law concerning Nazarites?

Read Judges 13:5 again. When was Samson's Nazarite vow to begin? When did God say it would end?

Before Samson's birth, an angel of the Lord instructed Samson's mother about the son she would bear. He was to have a special mission that required a special lifestyle. The lifestyle of dedication and consecration to God would begin at his conception and would continue throughout his life. Even his mother's womb was to be a holy place, pure and prepared for a man of God to come forth into his mission.

For Samson, one of the stipulations of being a Nazarite was never to cut his hair as a sign of submission to God and God's plan for his life. His long hair was a constant reminder to Samson that his strength was not his own, but was a gift from God for a specific purpose. He was not to drink wine to remind him that God's Spirit alone was the only "spirit" he needed. He was not to cut his hair to remind him that every hair on his head was numbered by the God who was his strength.

Read Judges 14:5, 6, 19; Judges 15:14.

What happened to Samson when the “Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily?”

God specially gifted Samson with supernatural, physical strength and set him apart from before his birth to use that strength for a special purpose: to begin the deliverance of God’s people from their enemies. The strength to subdue his enemies came from his secret obedience to God, keeping his Nazarite vow. He was given a mission behind enemy lines.

What is the mission God created you to do? How has He created you in a unique way, with unique circumstances to do something in the kingdom that has your name on it?

If you do not yet know the answer to those questions, then ASK God! There is a reason and purpose you were born in your home country at the time and place designed by God to bring about His purpose. You look the way you do, can do the things you do, and have been placed in your circumstances because He wants to advance His kingdom through you.

Perhaps God has positioned you “behind enemy lines” with your family, your workplace, or your ministry. Or maybe you are in enemy territory, destined to bring the kingdom light into a dark place. God has designed you with this mission in mind for His glory and His alone. To give Him the glory He is due, you will need to learn to keep His secrets.

Samson is an example of the devastation of a life on mission derailed by revealing what he should have concealed.

Read Judges 16:4-21.

Who are the characters in this story?


What did you learn from the familiar story today that you had not seen before?

How did Samson flirt with disobedience before divulging the secret of his strength?

What do you learn from verse 16 that is the key to his downfall?

Why do you think his body was so strong, but his will so weak?

Copy verse 22. How are you encouraged by this verse of hope?



WHAT IS THE
MISSION GOD
CREATED YOU TO DO?
HOW HAS HE
CREATED YOU IN
A UNIQUE WAY,
WITH UNIQUE
CIRCUMSTANCES TO
DO SOMETHING IN
THE KINGDOM THAT
HAS YOUR NAME
ON IT?

Delilah weaves a web for Samson, and she isn't subtle. She tells him plainly the plan of his enemies to overpower him. He must be on his guard. He needs to exercise discretion about the divine source of his strength. But Samson is weak. He uses the strength and manliness God gave him to entice women and allow himself to be enticed by them. His greatest strength—his physical body—has become his greatest weakness. Because he is not submissive to God's will for him concerning women, he is vulnerable to abdicate the very reason for his existence.

Delilah is able to wear down Samson until he tells her the secret of his great strength. By giving away the secret, he loses his strength—both spiritual and physical—and eventually his life. He forfeits the ability to continue the mission God had given him of delivering His people from their enemies.

Samson went from bold savior, his destiny, to blind slave. Disclosing the secret of his strength to overcome his enemies brought bondage. Not only did he lose the opportunity to continue the mission God had called him to do, but by disclosing the secret, he actually gave ammunition to the opposition (Judges 16).

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself commands individuals to keep secrets.
Read Mark 1:43-44.

Does Jesus' instruction to the leper seem strange? What do we usually do when we see God at work?

Why does Jesus instruct him not to tell about the wonderful thing that had just happened?

Read Mark 1:45.

When the healed leper began to spread the news, what happened to Jesus' ministry?

UNDER THE RADAR

Jesus' ministry thrilled the people, but riled the religious leaders. He was bringing in an invisible kingdom in the spirit realm that was displacing the "rulers, authorities, and powers of darkness." He brought in the kingdom of light. To be able to work among the people in freedom, He wanted to keep ammunition from the opposition as long as possible. When the leper told of his healing, Jesus could no longer minister in public.

The religious authorities remind me of a group of junior high girls. They hated

Jesus because He took away their territory. But unlike innocent girls, they got vicious. Jesus taught that the true kingdom comes when God takes control over someone's heart and mind. He preached against internal sins like heart-murder and heart-adultery. This was revolutionary preaching. If the people began to seriously follow this teaching, it would destroy the "kingdom" set up by the religious establishment's rule and authority. They would no longer be needed to interpret the law for everyone else. The people themselves would know the law, because it would be in their hearts. They would lose their following.

Jesus even attacked the way the pious leaders worshipped. They were accustomed to reverence by the people for their open and public piety, but Jesus preached practicing faith works in private. While a true worshipper of God delights in time alone with the Master and finds joy serving in secret as an act of devotion to Christ, the idea of such a humble approach incensed the false teachers. How could they carry on leadership of the people if no one saw how religious and pious they were? How could they prove they deserved to be honored and fawned over by the masses that were, in their eyes, less holy and less worthy?

Jesus cut through to their hearts. And they didn't like it.

Now Jesus had stirred up the Enemy. He knew His ultimate enemy was not the men who fought against Him, but was Satan himself, masterminding the attacks against His mission. On His way down the mountain after delivering His powerful sermon, the leprous man approached Him with faith enough to ask Jesus for healing. In a simple exchange of few words, the man was miraculously, instantly healed. Satan lost his battle for the territory of the life of that man. Jesus knew it would draw fire.

"See that you tell no one," Jesus commanded, "except to tell the priests...as a testimony to them." Jesus practiced what He preached. He wanted the healing kept secret. His intention was to keep the ammunition away from the opposition.

Jesus was gathering enemies as quickly as He was gathering disciples. When He began to set people free from demonic possession and oppression, everyone had to take sides. He was either in league with Satan, meaning He was a blasphemer, or He was the Son of God. No one could dismiss His miracles, so each had to declare what he truly believed. This sharp division, drawing the line in the sand, galvanized Jesus' opposition. While the teachers of the law could not agree with each other on many things, they were of one mind about one thing: they hated Jesus and everything He stood for. They wanted to be rid of Him.

Everywhere Jesus went, the religious leaders lost power. These power-hungry, domineering, legalistic men had been using their position as "God's spokesmen" as a platform for gaining personal power and influence. But Jesus was overturning their proverbial tables. He was taking the glory. He had the hearts of the people. The winds of spiritual war were brewing.

And Jesus' mission had just begun.

To keep the forces of evil at bay and to give Himself time to complete his assignment from the Father, Jesus commanded many of those He healed and set free to keep it a secret... for a while. If He could continue working without drawing undue attention of Pharisees and Sadducees, the kingdom could extend "under

the radar.” But each time someone shared after Jesus specifically asked them not to, it stoked the fire of persecution for Jesus and His followers.

ADVANCEMENT OF THE SECRET KINGDOM

So how does this idea relate to women today? We have to learn to keep kingdom secrets. We can help Christian workers living overseas by keeping ammunition away from the opposition. Although you will never hear it on the news, God’s kingdom is expanding even in dangerous places in the world. Dedicated disciples of Jesus are taking the gospel to unreached people groups in creative ways. The work is being done in secret, under the radar, so the captives can be set free one life at a time without attracting the attention of authorities who despise the name of Jesus.

The enemies of Jesus are operating today terrorizing the world, persecuting the Bride of Christ, killing pastors, and burning churches. Because I have lived overseas, I know this personally. It is not information from a history book or hearsay from research in a dusty library. It is simply reality in many parts of our world today.

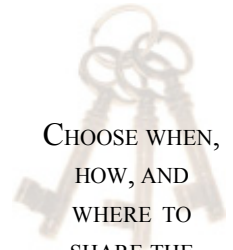
I know first hand what it’s like to live in a place where I had to be careful about I said in a public restaurant. Christians there learn to speak in code about bringing the good news to those who are dying without it. I recently visited a country where the whereabouts of believers were constantly monitored, phones were tapped, and church services recorded and censored. A 20-story building in the city was filled with office workers whose sole responsibility was to read emails and listen in on phone conversations. Even cell phones were not completely safe. This is all happening today.

The kingdom is advancing. You will be encouraged to know many are coming to salvation in Christ Jesus by His blood alone. The underground Church is active and alive, and because of persecution, it is healthier than ever. But they need your prayers and your support. And sometimes, they even need your silence, protecting their work.

When you receive a prayer update from a country closed to the gospel, I encourage you to stop and fervently pray for them but then delete the message or throw away the paper. Be careful about sharing the names and locations of the work of the kingdom in enemy territory. Emails have to be viewed as if they were a postcard for all to read. A simple forwarded message could mean trouble for those on the mission field.

In some respects, Western Christians are the ones with a great disadvantage. While religious freedom exists, it is still fairly easy to be sloppy and lazy in our faith when it goes unchallenged. The sharp edge is dulled by lack of practice in swinging the Sword of the Word and holding up the shield of faith for dear life.

For some of you, however, religious freedom is a relative term. You may live in a country where you may freely share your faith, but you may live in a home where it is not so free. If you openly tell your family about what God has done, you will be met with scoffing, mocking, and ridicule. Learn to use discretion. Don’t “throw your pearls before swine.” Choose when, how, and where to share the good news of Jesus when it will make the most impact and tear down walls of opposition to



CHOOSE WHEN,
HOW, AND
WHERE TO
SHARE THE
GOOD NEWS OF
JESUS WHEN IT
WILL MAKE THE
MOST IMPACT
AND TEAR
DOWN WALLS
OF OPPOSITION
TO THE GOSPEL
INSTEAD
OF BUILDING
THEM UP.

the gospel instead of building them up. How will you know how to do that? You will need to pray in secret, fast in secret, and be ready to give in secret to soften the soil of hard hearts.

Do you recognize the opposition around you in your culture or perhaps in your family? When talking of spiritual things, do you have discernment to know when to speak and when to remain silent, so that you do not stir up additional opposition to God's truth?

Within our local churches or even Bible study groups, circumstances and situations may arise where discretion of an issue is of utmost importance. Reputations, marriages, families, friendships, and even churches can be divided over issues that should have been kept only between the involved parties. The Enemy uses every opportunity to divide; don't allow a conflict to grow because a confidence has been compromised. If you find yourself involved in such a situation, do not allow talk to continue that is harmful to the Body of Christ!

By keeping the secrets of Jesus, we can bring back the sharpness of our faith-walk. We give, pray, and fast to consecrate ourselves and to sharpen the edge of our conviction, so we might live and share the good news with razor sharp accuracy.

Lord Jesus, I pray that You would give me the gift of discretion. Father, teach me to keep quiet when I need to keep quiet, and to shout from the mountaintops when it glorifies Your name.

Lord, I pray now for those who are working behind the lines, sacrificing to share Your love. Lord, protect them and their work. Shield them from harm. I ask that a hedge of Your divine protection would be built around them and their family. Lord, blind the eyes of those who would thwart the penetration of the gospel.

We entrust all Your servants around the world into Your hands, praying that in them and through them Your kingdom would come, and Your will would be done. I have so much to learn from them, Lord. I humble myself before Your holy, most precious name. Amen.

*“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed,
or hidden that will not be made known.”*

Luke 12:2

☞ DAY 4 ☞

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

☞ BEGIN WITH PRAYER ☞

Lord Jesus, open the eyes of my heart that I may discern good from evil and light from darkness. Sharpen my spiritual senses that I may not be deceived, but that I might know the Truth that can set me free. I pray this knowing that you want me to know the Truth more than I want it for myself. In Jesus' name. Amen.



MEMORY VERSE

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

How does a bank teach its tellers to spot a counterfeit? They study the real thing hour upon hour until a counterfeit stands out starkly against what they know to be the genuine article. In the same way, there are counterfeits to the gospel truth but when we keep Jesus' secrets, our perception and discernment about spiritual issues grows sharper. We can tell the truth from a lie.

God has powerful secrets of the kingdom to unfold to you but Satan always has a counterfeit for whatever God does. He has dark secrets of his own we must learn to recognize. When we keep the secrets of Jesus, we find our spiritual perception, or “radar,” becomes more tuned in to God's spirit. We are more able to discern the difference between the truth and a lie, the light from the dark. However, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

Read II Corinthians 11:14.

Why is it difficult sometimes to discern Satan's schemes?

Read II Thessalonians 2:1-10.

What activities of Satan will be evident when the Antichrist comes on the scene, according to verse 9?

Read Exodus 7:8-13.


How did Pharaoh's magicians duplicate God's miracle?

Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and he counterfeits God's power in “secret arts” or “black magic.” The word translated magician from Hebrew literally means, “horoscopist.”² The word translated secret arts means “magical

enchantment, sometimes using fire.”³ Pharaoh’s magicians had their own secrets, but the power to perform their secret arts was obviously not supplied by God. It was a counterfeit powered by the Enemy.

According to Exodus 7:12, how did God prove that His power reigns over all?

My mother says, “Satan always overplays his hand. Just give him enough time, and he will go too far so you will know it is him.” When you have been secretly praying, giving, and fasting, you become sensitive to both God’s Spirit, and also to Satan’s tricks. When someone you love is in trouble, acting in bizarre, uncharacteristic behavior patterns, pray that God will uncover all of Satan’s strategies so you will know how to pray. While we don’t want to start witch-hunting, finding a “devil under every bush,” we are probably deceived more than we realize by the demonic forces at work around us destroying hearts, homes, and our nation. When we realize the Enemy is working to oppose God’s plan, it is time to get out the weapons of prayer and fasting.



SATAN ALWAYS
OVERPLAYS HIS
HAND. JUST GIVE
HIM ENOUGH TIME,
AND HE WILL GO
TOO FAR SO YOU
WILL KNOW IT
IS HIM.

HIDDEN SIN

Hidden sin is another one of Satan’s secrets. He wants your sins and mine hidden from God’s cleansing, healing, holy light.

Read Deuteronomy 13:6-8.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

Read Deuteronomy 27:15.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

Read Deuteronomy 27:24.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

Read II Kings 17:6-9.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

Read Psalm 101:5.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

Read Proverbs 17:23.

What secret sin was forbidden in this passage?

God's Word has a blistering rebuke against sin committed in secret. The story of King David's sin with Bathsheba is a classic example of the devastating repercussions of sins kept secret.

Read II Samuel 11.

According to the facts in verse 1, why do you think David was vulnerable to falling into sin?

What was David's secret sin?

What did he do to try to cover his sin?

How many people paid the price for his sin according to verse 24 and II Samuel 12:15 and 19?

King David committed a secret sin. He took Bathsheba, the wife of one of his fighting men, and committed adultery with her while her husband, Uriah, was fighting David's battles. But David couldn't get away with it. Bathsheba conceived, and in order to cover up their sin, David committed another terrible sin. He ordered Uriah's murder at the front lines.

Read II Samuel 12:1-12.

How did Nathan confront David in a brilliant manner to reveal the sin and convict the sinner?

Copy verse 12.

Read II Samuel 12: 13-14.

What was David's response when Nathan rebuked him?

While David and Bathsheba sinned in secret, the consequences of their sin became very public. David repented in deep sorrow and contrition, but the penalty of his sin took a heavy toll on himself, Bathsheba, their child, and the entire nation of Israel. The baby Bathsheba had conceived soon died (II Samuel 12:18), and one of David's other sons committed abominable adultery with his father's concubines in the plain sight of the nation (II Samuel 16:22).

Secret sin carries a terrible toll. It breeds hypocrisy, and Jesus issues a strong

word of caution: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs” (Luke 12:1-3).

What counterfeit have you believed? Are there any sins lurking just below the surface of your conscience that you have swept under the rug, and now they are tearing you apart?

Sin needs only one remedy: Bring it to Jesus. Bring it to the Light; He will cleanse and forgive as you fully confess your sin. Your sins and mine deserve the death penalty, and they received it! Christ’s death on the cross was the sin sacrifice necessary to pay it in full. You may have to suffer some consequences of your sin, but Jesus’ blood shed for you has set you free from the ultimate death penalty. Now, you must forgive yourself as He has forgiven you. Allow Him to dispel the darkness.

Has someone sinned in secret against you? Have you discovered something about your husband that is tearing you apart? Has your child been caught breaking the law? Have you been betrayed?

If you suspect a hidden sin is taking place in the life of your husband or child, pray for God to give you the insight on discovering the sin. Ask Him to reveal it to you in a way that such proof is undeniable. It is also imperative that you pray for the Lord to prepare your heart to receive the truth and to give you the plan on how to deal with it when the light shines into those dark, ugly recesses. Remember, your response to the unveiling of truth is where God receives glory when you allow Him to take over your thoughts, actions, and words as you confront the issue.

Take a few moments right now to allow the Lord to shine His light into the darkness of your heart. Ask Him to heal what He has revealed. Turn to Him and allow His Spirit to lead you and your family from darkness into the light.

Journal your thoughts.

Create in our family a clean heart, O God. I ask You to search us and try us and see if there is any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. Uncover secret sins in my heart and the hearts of those I love. Expose them to Your holy light, O God. Give us the grace to face them and to turn completely from them. Renew us, Lord Jesus by Your name, Your Word, and Your power. I cry out to You and thank You for hearing me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Notes

“Chartom”- Number 2748, Strong’s

“Lahat”- Number 3858, Strong’s

*“I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the Lord,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.”
(Isaiah 45:3)*

☞ DAY 5 ☞

VULNERABLE FOR INTIMACY

☞ BEGIN WITH PRAYER ☞

Lord, I sit in silence to hear Your voice. I long to know more of You and Your kingdom's secrets. Unwrap the mystery of Your Word for me, that I might walk in Your Truth. Thank You, Lord, for Your Word, for it is truly the lamp to my feet and the light to my path. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

Sometimes our family has secrets, information no one else needs to know. It's private information, just for our family circle. Recently, two of our married daughters discovered they were pregnant with due dates only eight days apart. It was a wonderful secret just for the inner circle of the family until they were ready to share their news.

By giving us secrets to keep, Jesus is saying, “I am whispering something to you. I'm telling you something private and personal, just for our family.” If we will keep the secrets of Jesus, we will find the character quality of being vulnerable and open to an intimacy with our Heavenly Father that can only come with prayer, fasting, and sacrificial, selfless giving in secret.

Jesus often taught in parables, speaking in “code” to His followers. That way, the secret message of the kingdom was hidden, only to be discovered by honest seekers. If you really want to know Jesus intimately, you must seek the kingdom and search for Him, because He keeps His riches stored in secret places.

Copy Isaiah 45:3.

What is hidden in the secret places according to this verse?

Authentic worshippers of Jesus will find Him in the secret places. When you are willing to step out of the limelight and serve Him in secret, you will discover the wealth of experiencing Him deeply and profoundly. Most people are not willing

to stop, get quiet, and wait for Him in that secret place. But if you are, you will discover the richness of intimate fellowship with Christ.

Read Jesus' parables in Matthew 13:1-12.

In the parable of the sower, which person is not able to hear the secrets at all?

Which one hears the secrets of the kingdom but doesn't allow them to take root?

Which heart hears the secrets from the Word of God but bears no fruit because the secrets are choked out by double-mindedness?

Who hears the secrets and bears one hundred times what was sown?

Jesus told a large crowd this important story about a farmer who sowed the seed but afterwards, His disciples were confused and asked Jesus why He spoke in parables. *"He replied, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance'"* (Matthew 13:11-13).

If you press into the secrets of Jesus, leaning in to hear His gentle voice, you will be given the gift of a revelation of Him in an intimate, satisfying relationship. If you keep pressing in, you will be given more. As we practice a lifestyle of serving and learning, of yearning for more of Him, the treasures of the kingdom are unwrapped and unlocked.

Not only will you have an intimate relationship with Christ here on earth, but there is another great benefit in keeping the secrets of Jesus. He promises that if you give, pray, and fast in secret, you will receive rewards from your Father in heaven.

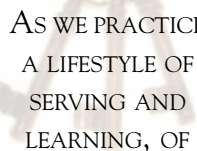
You may feel unworthy of a reward of any kind in heaven. Here on earth we seek financial and vocational rewards, but pursuing heavenly rewards somehow seems distasteful and inappropriate. We obviously need to be taught by the Holy Spirit on the subject of rewards God longs to bestow upon us.

Read Jeremiah 17:10.

What do you learn about God's reward system in this verse?

Read Matthew 16:27.

What do you learn about God's reward system in this verse?



AS WE PRACTICE
A LIFESTYLE OF
SERVING AND
LEARNING, OF
YEARNING FOR
MORE OF HIM,
THE TREASURES
OF THE KINGDOM
ARE UNWRAPPED
AND UNLOCKED.

Jesus is going to reward us when He comes again. What questions does this bring to your mind?

The idea of standing before Jesus to receive rewards for our earthly deeds is frightening to many of us. Will He judge our misdeeds and balance them on a scale against our good deeds? Is that how we are accepted into heaven? If we are allowed into heaven based solely on our acceptance of Christ's death in payment for our sins, then why are the deeds of giving, praying, and fasting still rewarded? What does God's reward system look like?

To begin answering these questions, read again our focal passage in Matthew 6:1-18.

What do you learn about God's reward system in these verses?

Jesus tells us in these verses how to gain reward from the Father and how to lose it. The phrase "received their reward in full" is often repeated in these verses. The Greek word for reward is *misthos*, meaning "dues paid for work" or "fruit naturally resulting from toils and endeavors."¹

Jesus describes those who practice their righteous deeds before men as having already received their reward. They work to receive payment on earth, doing good deeds in exchange for applause of men. When they receive those accolades, they've been paid in full. They won't have reward in heaven, because they have received all the "pay" they will ever receive. They chose to receive their reward here on earth rather than in heaven.

Read Matthew 6:19-21, 24.

What do you think it means to "lay up treasures on earth?"

What is your personal greatest temptation for hoarding earthly treasures?

What reward awaits us if we do not store treasures on earth?

What investment into the eternal kingdom can you make this week in secret, storing up heavenly treasure?

Jesus teaches us the wisdom of choosing to wait for heavenly reward. He also promises that His rewards are certain.

Read Matthew 10:42.

What reward is promised in this verse?

For those who walk on a higher plane, who will keep the secret disciplines of the faith—giving, praying, and fasting—there is a great reward waiting. It will be awarded in heaven by Jesus Himself. Jesus is watching your life and mine to catch us doing something right! He longs to reward us as we “lay up treasures in heaven.” I can only imagine the rewards awaiting some of the believers around the world who have faithfully kept the secrets of Jesus!

Lord Jesus, I want to draw near to You to hear Your still, small voice. Sharpen my spiritual senses that I might move at the smallest nudge of Your Spirit. Lord, I'm just beginning to understand what it means to give, pray, and fast in secret. Thank you for Your patient guidance and Your tender instruction. I love you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Notes:

¹ Matthew 13:10-13

² Matthew 13:1-9, and 18-23

¹ Misthos, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, #3408 <http://bible.lifeway.com/crossmain.asp>.

² I Thessalonians 2:13-14, 19, 20

³ Isaiah 61:1

⁴ Ibid.