

Solitary and Silent Prayer - Message Mate and Study Questions

6th July 2025

Our personal practice of prayer is based on the example of Jesus (Mark 1:35) and his teaching in Matthew 6:6: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

In silence and solitude a number of questions arise:

- Who am I when I am in my 'secret place'?
- How do I live out my relationship with God when no-one is looking?
- How do I, and how can I pray on my own?

In planning your 'quiet time' with God consider 1. A special time; 2. A special place (or chair); 3. A silent place. In your solitude think about the loving 'Gaze of God' on you. Often, we confuse the gaze of God as the 'Glare of God'. This is mistaken. The glare is most usually our own self-critic and its source is likely to be the 'accuser of the brethren'. As you come into the Gaze of God ask yourself "How are things between me and God?": "Am I in the gaze or the glare today"? Use Richard Foster's prayer that he prays when he begins solitude with God.

"By the authority of Almighty God I surround myself with the light of Christ. I cover myself with the blood of Christ, and I seal myself with the cross of Christ. All dark and evil spirits must now leave. No influence is allowed to come near me but that it is first filtered through the light of Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray. Amen."

Centring your thoughts on short passages of scripture can help. For example 'The Lord is my shepherd': 'I am the light of the world': 'Our Father, hallowed be your name'.

Strengthening habits for your prayer time include:

- Keeping a journal about your life in God and what he is showing you;
- Bible reading and study
- Books of written prayers – ie. *Be Thou my vision: a liturgy for Daily Worship*
- Prayer while walking on your own.

Many people beat themselves up about their prayer habits when they compare themselves to the great Christians of the past. Consider these two questions for your encouragement.

When does prayer begin? When does prayer end?

The boundaries of prayer are not finite or clearly identified. As we grow in our relationship to God in awareness that we are living under his gaze all day, **we become prayerful people** rather than **people who pray prayers**. We carry out Paul's instruction to 'Pray continually' (1 Thess.5:17). We are aware that God is 'whom we live, and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

Experiencing God and being seen by Him in the secret place helps us to be more consistent when we are out in the public space and observable by people. We can be less self-absorbed and more focussed on putting the needs of others ahead of our own.

Jesus has opened up a living way into the presence of God through his own body and blood. The tent of meeting with God has its door through Jesus. We can enter in prayer because of Jesus's perfect life, his death and resurrection and his sitting at the right hand of the Father where he prays for us. Let us 'shape up' our secret life before God, following Jesus's example of solitary prayer.

Study Questions.

1. Read the following passages:

Exodus 33:7-11

Hebrews 10:19-23

Mark 1:35

Matthew 6:5-6

What do you think they teach us about our prayer life when we are on our own?

2. What sort of things might stop us from developing regular habits of individual prayer and bible reading? What might prevent these hinderances from getting in the way of prayer?
3. Is the idea of God's gaze a helpful thought for you? Why might we mistake His loving Gaze as a Glare? What is the source of The Glare and what are examples of negative self-talk that might provoke The Glare?
4. What ideas or activities might help us develop positive habits in our regular individual prayer-life?
5. Discuss the two important questions: When does prayer begin? When does prayer end? How might answers to those questions encourage our prayer lives?
6. What is the difference between being 'prayerful people' and 'people who pray'?
7. Is there a clash between the public me and the private me? How might my life praying to God 'in secret' line up with my behaviour when people can see me?
8. What is God showing you today through this study? What will you do with what you have learned?