

The Secret of the Lord

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The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant. Psalm 25:14 RAV

Recently a friend of mine died. He was in many ways very different from me. Our backgrounds were dissimilar, but throughout the years we had been thrown together in so many situations that common bonds of love and affection had been forged that allowed us to be comfortable in each other's presence.

On hearing of his death I went into my study and sat in the darkened room. I didn't want others around me at this time. I wanted to be alone with my memories.

Looking back over those years, I recalled when he once sought me out in the field adjoining a convention site. As so often before, we sat together to talk. Suddenly, he said, 'Bryn, we've come a long way together, and although I know we're very different, I feel you're my friend. I want to share some things with you that I've never told others.'

With that, he opened to me the secret hopes and desires in his life. We shared as friend to friend.

How privileged I felt, yet how humbling to hear his secrets. But then this is how it is with the Lord: it is to those who have become his closest friends, to those worshipping souls that he opens up his secrets.

No example of this intimacy is clearer than that enjoyed between Enoch and God. God shared with him the secrets of his purposes, knowing that every disclosure was 'safe' with his friend. It was with Enoch that God shared his plan to have Jesus come a second time to earth—even before the first coming: 'Enoch ... prophesied... "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones, to judge everyone" ' (Jude 14).

Their fellowship was so wonderful and fulfilling to God, he felt such compatibility with the heart of Enoch that one day, while they walked together, God decided to extend the journey on into heaven and Enoch never returned. 'Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away' (Genesis 5:24).

Such deep friendships are not the result of occasional meetings; they develop gradually out of the sharing of life. Doing things together and going places together make us feel secure with each other. As the friendship deepens, trust develops to the point where we feel free to open up to each other the intimate details of our lives. It comes through having proven each other's integrity and drawn on each other's strength and loyalty in some of life's most difficult moments.

Significantly, it was only after three years with his disciples that Jesus called them his friends.

'You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you' (John 15:14-15). They were friends by virtue of the commitment they had shown, the experiences of life together they had enjoyed.

True friends don't require speech to enjoy their friendship. Presence is sufficient. They seem to anticipate each other's thoughts, instinctively knowing what pleases or disturbs each

other. It is in those quiet, contemplative seasons of adoration of his Person, of worshipful delight in the majesty and love of God, that he chooses to disclose to us, his friends, the secrets of his counsel and covenant.

'The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them'
(Psalm 25:14).

These quiet whispers of the Spirit are God's secrets. They are not meant to be shouted abroad, but held, believed, rejoiced in and talked over again in the secret place. There are things that I hold in the quietness of my heart that God spoke to me many years ago—promises, direction, glimpses of the future that were not meant to be laid on others, but have continued to urge me forward, excite my heart and deepen my worship.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew what it was to have such whisperings of the Spirit and to hold them to herself: 'Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19).

These shared intimacies don't take place in the crowd. God knows it requires stillness, where he can speak without our restless hearts interrupting. That is why he calls us into the secret place alone.

I once went alone to an idyllic spot down by a river, where it was so peaceful and quiet away from the crowds. I lay in the grass, my back warmed by the earth that had drunk from the sun shining down through the trees. Apart from the occasional bee buzzing in the clover, the air was still. It carried the sound of running waters tumbling over stones as they raced towards the waterfall below. I thought of his voice which, like the sound of many waters, had so frequently broken through the clamour of all around and hushed my restless soul.

Silence is not the world emptied of sound. It is to have your world filled with the stillness and hush of his presence. Speech would be an unwelcome intruder in the God-filled secret place. It is not that you have run out of things to say to him. It is simply that, at this moment, silence is your most eloquent form of speech.

Like a river, our worship can tumble or run still. It isn't that some people worship this way and others that way, according to their personality. That would mean worship was governed by our natural temperament. No, it is 'spirit and truth'. People's moods change-sometimes mellow, reflective, sober; at other times happy, extravagant, joyful. But every mood is an opportunity to express our worship. We worship him, not according to a stereotyped personality pattern, but in the spontaneity of the Spirit in every wholesome mood of life.

Sometimes, after listening to the car radio or a tape for some hours during a long journey, I switch it off and suddenly realise the silence again. It is often here in the worship-filled silence that God's secrets are shared with us.

This silence is not the emptiness of soul but the stillness of the inner being. Gone now are the rushing thoughts, the clashing senses, the active mind urging us to do something, the protesting priorities clamouring for attention. Here in his presence we have come to rest.

'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth' (Psalm 46:10). Stillness does not come easy in the contemporary world, where we are trained to assert ourselves to tackle our responsibilities. To efficient and diligent persons the thought of leaving the situation, of not *doing something*, is anathema. But with God, to be still is a great strength.

Moses discovered this in the great exodus of Israel from Egypt: 'Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to *be still*"' (Exodus 14:13-14).

It is in such times of seeming inactivity that we realise God is most active on our behalf. When we are the most quiet, his is the only sound to be heard-whispering the secret counsels of his heart and mind to us.

Possibly the question we most need to ask ourselves is not, 'Can we trust God with our secret longings and desires?' but, 'Can he trust us with his?'