

THE SECRET PLACE

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There are two aspects to spiritual self-care – the inner life and the outer life.

We begin with the inner life.

This is about you in the secret place with God. Years ago, I discovered God had a secret place for me, where he wanted me show up regularly for deep communion with him and connection with my own soul or my inner spiritual self. At first this took on a particular shape –a regular time, place and lasting a certain length of time.

This discipline was difficult as it usually takes me quite a long time to shut out external and internal distractions. It soon began to pay off. I found the Lord wanted me to focus much more on being with him and opening up to his presence rather than following a certain set of spiritual activities. But these also soon began to take shape. Listening to God rather than just talking to him was one major discovery. Reading the Bible became more focussed on finding life in his words more than merely listing the do's and don'ts and noting the pointers for life and living that we come across in almost every Bible passage. I found writing down what I was learning, discovering and sensing God was saying, extremely enriching. Some people call this spiritual journaling.

Turning to the outer life

I found that my times in the secret place began to spill over into my wider life when the regular stuff of life takes over. The sense of the presence of God and my general God-awareness seemed to stay with me after my secret times with God, extending even to those busy moments when I was not especially focussing on him. My prayer life seemed to become more of a permanent, moment-by-moment experience.

A London radio news station has this slogan: “LBC – the news for 20 minutes, every 20 minutes”. In other words, non-stop news. Smith Wigglesworth, one of the early Pentecostal pioneers, was once asked, “How long do you pray each day?” He replied, “I never spend more than 20 minutes in prayer, but I seldom go 20 minutes without praying.”

This is one of the many spiritual benefits that come to us when we are faithful in the secret place. There, we receive inner transformation, healing for our souls. There we hear the secrets of God which guide us in the public place. There, we connect with his character and nature, with his very heart. Then, we go from that secret place strengthened in our inner person and face the demands of living for God and following his desires in our daily life. Hearing comes before obeying, but it always leads to obeying, if we allow God to have his way.

Tips from those who have walked with God over time

At a recent meeting with my staff at Kensington Temple, I asked them to share what they had learned about maintaining their spiritual self-care.



Beverly said she focussed on personal reflection, meditating on the Lord and listening to him. She said that helped strengthen her. Also she has recently found much spiritual joy and focus by sharing her faith with others. She does this sensitively but openly, almost every day on her bus rides to work. She said, “It challenges you as well and forces you to stay on point.”



Marko said, for him, it was a matter of disciplining the mind. He referred to the “monastic” disciplines of the spiritual life which he found helpful. Also he spoke on the importance of having daily devotions together with your spouse and enjoying meaningful family meals together. He often spends moments in prayer during the day, as well as the regular morning and evening prayer times. Silent prayer and frequent night vigils are especially meaningful for him.

Karen shared that for her, spirituality was more about cultivating the presence of God than other priorities. Constant worship was a way of remaining in God’s presence, whether listening to praise music while she worked, or quietly singing to the Lord whenever she had the opportunity. She also passed on a very helpful tip. She encourages people to have a special place reserved in their home for time with God, and plan their time so that they can keep a daily appointment with God.



Jonathan mentioned that he and his family set aside times of fasting from social media and television in order to spend quality time with God and each other. This means, for them, going out on long walks as a family, taking communion together regularly, and allowing the family frequently to drift into conversations about God and spiritual things.

Scott highlighted the importance of guarding our rhythms and building daily discipline. This includes building in healthy margins into our daily routines and responsibilities to give time for reflection. He suggested that we identify areas that need external input and counsel. He advised us to avoid legalistic structures and formats that create a mind-set that spiritual self-care and worship are objectives to complete, rather than states of being to cultivate.



Ben, who found that the Covid19 lockdown gave him more time to himself than usual, said that his focus has been on using this extra time to read more – both intensively and extensively. Such reading has enriched him spiritually.