

The Spiritual Disciplines

Secrecy & Sacrifice

To Consider: A little girl cries out, "Daddy, Daddy! Watch this!" as she makes her first attempt at riding her bike without training wheels. She wants to know that her efforts are worthy of her father's attention. No one else's attention will do; it is her father's attention she longs for. We all love to be loved!

Everyone has a longing to be valued by others. When this longing is met, we feel significant because others view us as helpful or useful. This in turn builds healthy self-esteem in us. Indeed, we know that without a measure of self-esteem we can become psychologically or socially handicapped. In fact, when someone draws undue attention to themselves, it could be that the person has not been sufficiently esteemed by others. This generates more need for attention, often sought in unconventional or unruly ways, which creates even more social distance, resulting in losing the very thing we long for...to be esteemed by others. So goes the cycle of emotional bondage. The Disciplines of secrecy and sacrifice free us from the approval game. They connect us with our heavenly Father who provides unique and abiding approval that far exceeds what humans can offer.

Secrecy

The discipline of secrecy involves *a conscious decision not to reveal our good qualities or good deeds in order that we might draw attention to God and away from ourselves.*

1. *Secrecy frees us from the "approval game," which can quickly turn into the "fame game."* The very moment we do things for the approval of others, no matter how seemingly selfless our acts may be, we lose the approval of God. Why? Because our motive is to bring glory and attention to ourselves, thus robbing God of what is rightfully his. Jesus warns "Beware of practicing *your righteousness* before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (**Mt 6:1**).

*To Consider: Note Jesus did not say "beware of practicing your **un**righteousness before other people..." Why is it that the things we do in secret are not the things for which we seek approval from others?*

2. Read **Mt 6:1-6; 16-18** (NIV/NASB). Note the text says "your Father, who sees *what is done* in secret." [Note: The ESV ignores the definite article in the dative τῷ which modifies κρυπτῷ. Thus the NIV/NASB is likely a better rendering]. It's not that God secretly sees, but that God sees "what is done" in secret. The implication? What goes on in public may not be recognized by God, and certainly not rewarded, when motivated by self-adulation. Hence, the discipline of secrecy "enables us to place our public relations department entirely in the hands of God" (Dallas Willard).
3. Read **Pr 16:3; Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; 3:23**. What do these passages say about our motivations and how could these texts help us avoid the "approval game?"
4. Read **Jn 7:1-9**. Jesus refused to be put on public display. Is it possible John is telling us that those who seek to elevate prominent leaders before the public do so because of unbelief (cf. **Jn. 7:5**)? Put differently, a sign of unbelief is when the limelight conceals or obscures what God may be doing secretly. Jesus' time had "not yet come." Of course, Jesus did go to Judea and eventually became prominent, but not in the way his brothers expected (**Jn 7:6-10**). So too with the discipline of secrecy. It affords us the opportunity to see surprising and often unexpected results.

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5. Secrecy is the main ingredient of humility (**Jm 4:10; 1 Pt 5:6**). Without secrecy it's impossible to be humble. Likewise, all those who are genuinely humble practice the discipline of secrecy.
6. Most importantly, *secrecy is a tacit yet wonderfully tangible expression of our deep and abiding trust in God*. Secrecy redirects all our attention to God as we trust him to be the sole provider for our needs and our longings. Consider the following...

Before RZIM was formed, I [Ravi Zacharias] was a professor at Nyack, the Alliance seminary, and I had just spoken for Billy Graham in Amsterdam in 1983. I was flying back from there and I thought to myself, Apologetics... How desperately it is needed. All of my evangelism, as I heard it then, was geared to the unhappy pagan, as it were. And I thought, What about the happy pagan? What about the person who has questions and feels no need? What about that type of person? They are more lost in a sense, and desperately in need of finding the Savior.

I wanted to start an organization and I said to Margie, I wish we had \$50,000 to get a ministry like this going. She sat back in her seat and chuckled and said, "That's a lot of money." I was a seminary professor. I said, "If God were to bring that in, I would build an organization to reach the thinker and train men and women to do Christian apologetics all over the globe and to do it well." That was in August. I came back and resigned. I gave one year's notice, really believing that the Lord was leading us. She was uneasy with this. I was uneasy too, and we made one agreement: **We would not tell anybody what we were thinking.**

In November of that year, two months after that, I was speaking in Ohio to three hundred laymen, and after my last message I made this comment: "As you are driving back to the airport, would one of you in each car pray for God's leading in my life? I am seeking Him and his wisdom in a certain matter. I cannot tell you what it is, just pray for us." They did not even know that I had resigned from the seminary, effective one year after that. I went back to my room and picked up our bags. Margie and I were walking out, and there was a man standing there. He said, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I don't know what it is you are seeking God for, but I went back to my room and got on my knees and said, 'God, what is it that that young couple is seeking wisdom for? Is there a role you want me to play?'" The man said, "I have no idea what it is you are seeking wisdom for, but I just got off my knees with God impressing me to give you a check for \$50,000."

I thought to myself, this is unbelievable. I mean, I have never received anything like that in my life. I looked at him and said, "Sir, I don't even know you." He said, "I'm going to trust you." I said, "You know, that is a lot of money to take from a stranger. I cannot do it. But if you tell me where you live, I will fly in sometime in the next two months to see you. We can talk, and then if it is still on your heart, we can move forward with that." He said, "You're a busy man. I have a plane. Tell me where you live; I'll fly in to see you." And he flew to New York where we lived, to White Plains. My wife and I shared with him the vision to reach the thinker and he had tears in his eyes. He said, "I'm not an educated man, but I know how to make money and God has blessed me. You stay faithful and you stay honorable. I'll take care of you. I'll support your ministry because God has his hand on your life and you are reaching a segment of society that needs to be reached." That was 1983. In January, we called together fifty friends, and this ministry was born in August of 1984.

Ravi Zacharias, (from "Just Thinking" <http://www.rzim.org/publications/jttran.php?seqid=106>)

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Sacrifice

1. Sacrifice teaches us to forsake self-reliance or our own resources and trust in God's ability to make us secure. Biblically, sacrifice is not "giving when it costs us something." Sacrifice involves "spending" ourselves for the sake of God's kingdom. It's an intentional abandoning of whatever it is that makes us comfortable, including our very lives if necessary, for the purpose of advancing God's purposes in this world (**2 Cor 11:21b-29; Heb 12:2**).
2. Sacrifice could mean giving up the security of a relationship (**Gen 22:9-10; Lk 14:26**).
3. Sacrifice can mean forfeiting everything we have, including our financial security (**Lk 19:8-10; 21:1-4; Philip 3:7-8**; see also **Deut 8:11-18**). At the very least it means giving, even though it may hurt to do so (**2 Sam 24:24; 2 Cor 8:3; Heb 13:16**).
4. Sacrifice may involve giving your time, your emotional well-being, your sleep, your career progression, or even temporarily compromising your family's well being (**Lk 14:26**, Note: The expression "hate" *μισέω* can mean "to love less highly").
5. Just as in the Old Testament, sacrifice and worship go hand in hand (**Ps 54:6; Heb 13:15**). Indeed, sacrifice is an expression of worship (**Rom 12:1**) and God expects us to offer our whole selves to him ("bodies" = our physical existence as a concrete expression of our entire being). Whenever we sacrifice we are worshipping God and vice versa. Note **Rom 12:1** says it is "to God" that our sacrifice is directed. Thus, whenever our sacrifices are intended for anyone/anything else, our "acts of righteousness" become mere religious posturing and fail as authentic worship (see **Mk 7:11-13** for an example of "righteous" pretension).

*To Consider: Contrary to much thinking in contemporary Christianity, worship takes place in us, not in a building or at an arena (cf., **Jn 4:19-24**). Since it is true that every believer individually and all believers collectively are an expression of God's temple (**1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16**), then naturally God wants you to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice."*

Reflection/Direction/Decision

- Why do you do what you do? Because of the consequences/results? Or, do you find yourself doing things because of approval, admiration, or applause from others?
- Explain the connection between wanting to be noticed in public and unbelief (cf., **Jn 7:1-9**)? How can secrecy deepen your faith in God?
- How can secrecy help you redirect your disappointment when others are given credit for your work, don't notice your efforts or say "Thank you?"
- Explain to someone else how secrecy works together with sacrifice?
- How might secrecy help you avoid emotional bondage to others?
- What precisely have you sacrificed (read, "given until it hurt") lately?
- What will you sacrifice for the sake of advancing God's kingdom? [Note: The question is not "What are you willing to sacrifice?"]

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- Since worship occurs in us and not in a building, exactly how does worship and sacrifice look *in* you?
- How might the knowledge that you're the temple of God's Spirit change your perspective on the local church building?