

**Into
the
Secret
Place**

Matthew 6:6

Stephen Phifer

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the prayer warriors in my family: my Father and Mother, J.D. and Ruth Phifer, my brother, the late Dr. James D. Phifer, my daughters and their husbands, Matt and Nicole Huett, and Manny and Jenifer Foret, and my wife Freeda whose prayers are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

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BOOK ONE

Exposition

Biblical and Historical Foundations



INTRODUCTION

The Call to Pray

The call of God comes to us in spiritual sounds, inaudible to the human ear, but insistent deep in the human heart. We hear this call when we stare at that horizon where the sea and sky dance together in the wind. It comes to us clearly when we ascend some precipice of note to gaze at distant lands shrouded in mist. In the quiet of the late-night hours, we hear it in our dreams or in those sleepless times when our minds will not be still. We sense the call in the fellowship of those we love and trust, in moments so soon to pass, and never to be relived.

In biblical terms, this is a witness born deep in our flawed human spirit, a connection with the Holy Spirit of God. It is a deep conviction that we belong to Him, though we are separated from Him. Hear the words of the Apostle Paul:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:12-17, NKJV)

“His Spirit bears witness with our spirit.” This is the call to pray. For those without a biblical worldview, this call can lead them to all sorts of misguided pursuits. These are born in the soul—the mind and heart where ideas and feelings boil together in the heat of circumstance—but they are executed in the body to momentary pleasure and eventual pain. Many believe the lie that there is no spirit within them, no capacity to know God, and no destiny beyond the here and now. Others resist such foolishness with spiritualities born of cultural lies presenting false gods and fruitless hopes, wasting their spiritual energy in post-modern paganism.

There is a better way, a way born in ancient truth, proven by experience and by the close presence of the Divine, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jehovah of Old Testament saints, the Heavenly Father of New Testament disciples, the Risen Christ of our historical church fathers, the Living Word of the Reformers, and The Faithful God of our own parents.

For us, too, there is a way to clearly hear the call and to answer it. This call is the deep desire to have an on-going fellowship with our Maker. It is true that sin has separated us from God, but God has always had a plan. In the Old Covenant, sin demanded a thick curtain called the veil to stand between a holy God and a sinful humanity. The Gospel of Christ is Good News precisely because this heavy veil was torn from the top to the bottom when Jesus cried, *“It is finished!”* from Calvary’s cross¹. His innocent death paid the price for all our sins, opening to us the *“new and living way”* to hear and answer the call to pray. Hear the words of the Hebrew Correspondent:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22, NKJV)

Noun and Verb

The Call to Pray involves both the noun, *“prayer,”* and the verb, *“to pray.”* We must understand what prayer is, and we must actually pray. For most of us,

¹ John 19:30, NKJV

prayer has been reduced to petitions, a means of asking God for things. This is only a small part of the whole reality of prayer. What is it, then?

Prayer is fellowship with God. In this time of fellowship we read and listen to His Word. We hear His voice in His creation and in the words of others. We wait in His holy presence. We praise Him with our own words and with the ancient words of those who came before us. We worship Him with hearts made clean by His own blood. And we rehearse again and again the revelation of who God is as revealed in Scripture.

Prayer is so much more than petitioning! It takes on many forms and engages our entire human self in these many processes. *Into the Secret Place*, is a careful biblical, historical, and practical exposition of the noun, and is a collection of inspirational essays to encourage you to pray. *7 Days of Prayer* is a set of personal services to aid you as you pray.

Hearing and Obeying the Call

It can accurately be said that life is all about hearing and obeying the call to pray. Before we commit our lives to Jesus, we hear everywhere His call to follow Him. Creation beckons us. If enigmas, the unanswerable questions of life, confuse us, they also point the way to One whose ways are higher than our ways. The peace of those who follow Him astounds and attracts us.

When we become a part of His Kingdom, we hear this call to daily time with the Father. Along the way, as we walk with God, we hear a specific call to the way or ways He has chosen for us to serve Him. Weekly, we hear the call to fellowship with others who are following Him.

At this point, a marvelous thing happens for us. The very truths that we have encountered, confessed, and responded to when we obeyed the call to pray every day are reinforced in the public meeting. In this way, private prayer and public prayer feed each other! We hear and obey the call to pray every day and every week.

An Amazing Promise

Jesus walked this earth as a man who prayed. It is interesting to note that with all the wonderful things Jesus did, His disciples asked Him to teach them to

pray. They did not ask that He teach them to heal the sick, or scatter demons, or raise the dead, or turn water to wine, or to walk on water or even to still the storm. They said, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*”² And He did.

We will take a careful look at the teachings of Jesus on prayer and at the subsequent teaching of the disciples. By way of introduction, one promise needs emphasis here for it lies at the heart of this book. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us a prayer to pray and a promise to believe. Hear the words of Jesus:

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:6, NKJV)

In these few words, Jesus promises that the power of heaven will impact our everyday lives. Note these important truths:

There is a place to pray called, “*The Secret Place.*” This *removes* from us any performance before anyone else—we have a private audience with God!

God the Father is there. Not only does He occupy the Throne of Majesty in the Heavenly Zion, He is there with us in the Secret Place!

The Father is paying attention to us. The book of Revelation indicates that the prayers of the saints are collected in the presence of God in golden bowls.³ God records and remembers what He sees and hears in the Secret Place of Prayer.

God the Father rewards openly what happens and what is said in the Secret Place.

The Christ-follower who longs for a life that counts here on earth and in eternity must answer the call of Jesus to the Secret Place. Here is where victories are won. This is the place where God becomes known to us. ***“This the power station where the might of the Holy Spirit is gained.”***

2 Luke 11:1, NIV

3 Rev. 5:8

Backstory

Into the Secret Place tells two stories: the biblical and historical story of private prayer and the story of my struggle with private worship. The exposition of the truth about prayer is taken from my doctoral thesis *Experiment in Prayer: The Convergence of Fixed and Extemporaneous Prayers in the Lives of Believers at Word of Life International Church, Springfield, VA*. This work completed the Doctor of Worship Studies degree for me at The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies in 2004. The *7 Days of Prayer* prayer book is a recent revision of *The Book of Private Worship* I compiled for my thesis. The introductory chapters place this research into my life story, and the concluding chapters continue my story in the years since 2004. Included in this section are inspirational essays from my writing ministry website and selected material from my first book, *Worship that Pleases God: The Passion and Reason of True Worship* (Trafford Publishers, 2005).

The Story Goes On!

Your story and mine are still being told! God is still calling us to pray, and as we do, we can live lives that are pleasing to the Lord and are of great benefit to those who know us!

— Stephen Phifer

