

# Centred Discussion Guide



## Part 3: Centred In Secret

### INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome. Start your time together with hospitality. Please turn off your phones and give real attention. You may start with one or two of these questions:

- Do you prefer visibility or anonymity?
- When online do you tend towards visibility or anonymity? Why?
- What did you notice in the sermon?

Please start with prayer! Our first core value is “everything starts with prayer”.

# THE MORE WE HIDE SOMETHING THE MORE POWER IT HAS OVER US

What if the more you attempt to bury something, the more secret you make it, the more power it has over your heart and mind? Research suggests this could be true:

***“Secrets cause the brain to kind of fight with itself...  
Holding secrets in keeps the stress ever-present.”***

Eagleman, D. (2011). *Incognito: the secret lives of brains*. Pantheon Books.

***“Secrecy is associated with negative health outcomes...  
Depression, anxiety, and poor physical health.”***

Slepian, M. L., & Moulton-Tetlock, E. (2019). Confiding secrets and well-being. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(4), 472–484.

## ***Ephesians 5:11-14***

***Have nothing to do with the useless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.***

- What do you think, feel, or wonder about this?
- Have you seen examples of the negative power of secrets? In spiritual life?
- How can the Christian Church help to heal the shame people feel?

## A SECRET'S POWER IS BROKEN WHEN IT IS SHARED

Evil thrives when people live in fear and secrecy. Abuse and secrecy go together. The only way to break the power of a secret is to break it by sharing it! So one of our most powerful gifts is the practice of *confession and forgiveness*. This is a simple thing where we tell another Christian what is troubling us (especially anything which we are guilty or ashamed of) and they tell us in Jesus name that we are forgiven. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about it this way:

***In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. When we confess to another Christians we are no longer alone with the evil for we have cast off the sin and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from us... If a Christian confesses to a brother or sister, he will never be alone again, anywhere. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together. p. 112-113***

- How do you feel confessing and speaking forgiveness?
- What would it take for you to feel safe to try this spiritual practice?

# **CENTRED LIFE STARTS IN SECRET (BUT NEVER STAYS THERE!)**

Jesus reverses everything! He suggests a different kind of secret. Not one where bad things are hidden, but where kind, generous, good things are kept deep in our heart. Instead of scary secrets kept in the dark, Jesus introduces us to full life with him, where he knows our heart better than anyone else. He is welcomed into our 'inner room' with joy. A life that is centred on Jesus does not start in public because it's not about what you do, but about what he has done first for you on the cross.

There are three kinds of 'secret' that Jesus invites us into: secret giving, secret prayer, and secret fasting. Read each one and discuss

- how they can 'centre' us on Christ
- why doing them 'in secret' matters so much

## **Secret Giving**

**Matthew 6:1-4**

***Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you have no reward from your Father in heaven... But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.***

## **Secret Prayer**

**Matthew 6:5-6**

***When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in secret. Then your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.***

## **Secret Fasting**

**Matthew 6:16-18**

***And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.***

Just a note here that if you struggle with the word 'reward' here - this is not about doing something to get something back. One writer says: 'The real reward is nothing more than God himself!'

## FINISH: IDEAS FOR THIS COMING WEEK

You've reached the end of this discussion! If it was too short for your group, the you could talk in pairs and do the personal audit at the end. Otherwise, finish in prayer, and consider some of the 'homework' here to try this week.

- Do something kind, giving or helping - and keep it secret!
- Remove all mobile devices from the bedroom. Start each day with a short prayer before you talk to anyone else or consume any media.

## PERSONAL AUDIT

***"Activism that does not draw from a rich interior (secret) life with God is empty."***

- ***Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality***

Do this on your own, in pairs in your group,  
or meet a prayer partner or friend to discuss these questions...

- What is the joy of my heart?
- Am I too focussed on the 'public' and the 'outwards' or am I paying attention to the 'secret place' in my heart where Christ speaks?
- Am I starting from the centre in prayer with God, from a place of listening? Or am I constantly engaged in doing, acting, and outward work?
- If I never stop and am still, why? What's going on for me? Am I running?
- Do I need to do confession and forgiveness with someone?
- Am I praying for three minutes and then thinking everything I hear should be 'acted on'. Am I prepared to sit with Jesus for the sake of it without coming away with something to do?