

CHAPTER ONE

The Secret of Saying “Yes”

Chris and DeeAnn Abke were feeling overwhelmed by a looming financial challenge. In desperation, they took some time late one evening—after settling their kids into bed—to seek the Lord’s help. As they sat together on their living room couch, making their petitions known to God, suddenly an audible voice began to speak, “If you need help, call 9-1-1. If you need help, call 9-1-1.”

They heard the voice say this about four or five times, and then it stopped. Mystified, Chris and DeeAnn just looked at each other.

The voice seemed to be coming from the garage, so they cautiously opened the door and flipped on the garage lights, not sure what they would find. Everything was in its place except for a small toy ambulance, belonging to their son, that lay by itself in the center of the garage floor.

Chris picked up the ambulance, pushed a button next to its emergency lights, and the voice began to speak, “If you need help, call 9-1-1.” As they wondered aloud how the toy had activated of its own accord, suddenly the Holy Spirit seemed to nudge Chris with these words, “If you need help, call 9-1-1—Psalm 91:1.” Going back to the Scriptures, the verse had an entirely new meaning to them as they read it together: “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

Chris and DeeAnn understood this as a divine invitation to renewed devotion in their secret place relationship with Him. If they would seek first the intimacy of abiding in the presence of the Almighty, the Lord would direct the supply of their financial needs.

I share my friends’ story with you because I’m persuaded the power of heaven is unlocked when we devote ourselves to the secret place of the Most High. The purpose of this book,

therefore, is to stoke the embers of your personal prayer life. May you say “Yes!” to a daily, fervent pursuit of Jesus in the secret place. *My prayer is that, with each chapter, you’ll gain growing momentum to pursue the greatest pearl of human existence—a personal, passionate, vibrant relationship with your Creator.*

One of the best kept secrets of our faith is the blessedness of cultivating a secret life with God. Imagine the sheer delight of it even now. You’re tucked away in a quiet nook; the door is shut; you’re curled in a comfortable position; the living word of God is laid open before you; Jesus Himself is standing at your side; the Holy Spirit is gently washing your heart; as you meditate on His gracious words your love is awakened; your spirit is ignited; your mind is renewed; you talk to Him, and He talks to you; you speak the language of friendship.

Ahhh, it doesn’t get any better than this!

But there are adversaries and hindrances. Hell will tempt, discourage, and lie to you about the delight and power of the secret place. The world will constantly try to distract and squeeze out your secret place time. Even the church sometimes depletes our energy for the secret place by getting us busy with other programs and activities.

Furthermore, few are the saints whose secret life in God is so compelling that it kindles others with a desire to follow their example.

Like many believers, I’ve been frustrated by the difference between what I *want* to do and what I *actually* do. On the one hand, I’ve had strong convictions about the importance of the secret place; on the other hand, I’ve struggled to maintain it as a consistent lifestyle. At times I’ve felt almost powerless to change my priorities concerning prayer.

We watch ourselves return persistently to the sources which are no source. For example, when wanting to be revitalized from a draining day, we’ll turn on a film as though its distractions will renew us—only to be left empty for the

umpteenth time. Or, we’ll watch a YouTube sermon in the hope the preacher’s walk will infuse us with fresh energy for the journey. But deep down we know that sermons and teachings, although edifying, can’t replace the carrying power we find when we sit at His feet and hear His word for ourselves.

How do we find new momentum in the secret place? Not by beating up on ourselves, but by lifting our eyes to the hope set before us. My goal in this book is to share some secrets—lessons I’ve learned mostly by doing it wrong first—to empower you to reach for the upward call of God in Christ.

When we learn to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, we’re positioned to discover the key to true kingdom fruitfulness. *Reproductive power is unlocked in the shadow of the Almighty.*

A great Bible example of this truth is found in the life of Cornelius, the first Gentile believer. Cornelius was a God-fearing Gentile who was devoted to prayer. His piety was described in the Book of Acts in four ways: he gave generously to the poor; he lived a holy lifestyle; he fasted; and he adhered to secret prayer. Because of those four pursuits, God filled Cornelius and his household with the Holy Spirit and made them the firstfruits of all Gentile believers.

It’s as though God said, “Cornelius, your priority for secret prayer is an example I can reproduce in the nations. That’s why I chose you to be the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit. I’m going to take your devotion to the secret place and export it to every nation on earth.” What a powerful endorsement of Cornelius’s hidden life with God. He became the catalyst for the redemption of the nations. I think he must stand in awe, in the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1), at the way his faithful witness has shaken world history.

There’s no telling the eruption of fruitfulness that can come from a life devoted to secret prayer in the shadow of the Most High.

You have a holy call to be a blessing to your family,

neighborhood, church, and city. As you devote yourself to your secret place, God will birth something in you that will spread, in His time, to the four corners of your sphere. It's a remarkable secret: *God's call burning in your breast will be uncontainable and unstoppable as you devote yourself to the fiery passion of intimate communion with the Lover of your soul.*

Won't you join me in pressing forward into new dimensions of kingdom power and glory? The face of Christianity is changed, generation to generation, by those who discover the power of the secret place. I pray that, with the reading of each page, you'll say *Yes* to the secret of the centuries.

What is that secret? someone might ask.

The secret place *is* the secret.