

YOUR SECRET WORLD

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BRIAN GOODWIN

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Your Secret World
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CONTENTS

1. You Have a Secret World	11
2. A Smile Isn't Always a Mirror of Your Heart	19
3. An Affair of the Heart	35
4. Reach Across the Years – Meet Caleb	57
5. Soul Searching	87
6. Double Agent of the Soul	97
7. Soul Survival	131
8. Guilt: Torturer of the Soul	161
9. Enjoy the Journey	177
10. A Mind to Work	199
11. Love is in the Mind	219
12. Strong Love	241
13. Write Your Own Love Agenda	261
14. Heart to Heart	281
Thank You	285

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Shhh...

You have a secret world.

Every person has one.

No one knows what happens in your secret world. Others will never know, unless you invite them into it. It's your world and yours alone.

It's a good world. In it you can climb mountains, dream dreams and travel wherever you want to go. It's where happiness lies. But, then, so does unhappiness.

Your secret world is being altered, added to, enriched or distorted every day. But it's your territory and you have the ability to control what happens in it.

Be warned: enemies will try to capture it and make it serve their purposes.

You can learn strategies that will protect your secret world. They can also give you confidence and joy as you live the kind of life you want to live.

That's what this book is all about...

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CHAPTER ONE



YOU HAVE A SECRET WORLD

Secrets. They're intriguing.

I, Spy

"I work for the government." The handsome gentleman on the other side of the table in the swank restaurant looked like the Asian equivalent of James Bond. Suave. Polite. Sartorially-dressed. He fitted in well with the elegant restaurant.

Before the meal I had been told by our host that the man who made the statement was actually a spy. I had never met a spy before and, naturally, was curious. (Spies don't go around advertising themselves.) Interested, I asked, "What kind of work do you do for the government?" Eventually he gave the barebones of his story. Caught red-handed spying in a neighbouring Asian country, my new friend had been thrown into jail several years before until some diplomatic fancy footwork saw him released. He had become a Christian a short time previous to our conversation. His life had been changed, but his secrets were still his. No one, except his spy-master, would ever know them. They wouldn't be secrets if they were public knowledge.

A secret can be defined as "something that is or is kept secret, hidden, or concealed." A spy's assignment is to ferret out hidden military or commercial information.

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New Zealand, though home to a small population, has its own Security Intelligence Service. Its purpose and method is given as identifying threats... setting objectives... collecting information... investigating and analysing information... assessing and reporting information... and reassessing threats. This is public knowledge, obtained from its website. But *how* they go about pursuing these objectives is secret. Usually *top* secret. They do more than spy on others though. They say that is not their main business. Their main job is to protect the interests of New Zealand. Most of their work is done secretly. It has to be that way.

At Vauxhall Cross, on the banks of the Thames River, London, stands an imposing building which serves as the headquarters of the British Secret Intelligence Service, popularly known as MI6. You can see the building. It's prominent. It's imposing. But you don't know what goes on at its heart. It's a world of secrets, codes and espionage. It's a secret world. MI6 doesn't reveal much of what goes on there. Sir John Sawers, chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, says that "secrecy is not a dirty word." It's not a cover-up; it's necessary if Britain is to be safe and secure, he contends.

Secrets have a time and place.

We, too, have a world of secrets. People can see us, but don't know what goes on inside that private world.

People who nose out secrets are admired by some and despised by others. They're spurned by the people whose secrets they manage to extract by cunning. Think Kim Philby. Think Mata Hari. Think WikiLeaks.

A closed book

You're not an international spy but you do have a world that is known to you alone. And you carry it everywhere you go.

You've heard people say "My life's an open book." People who

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claim this may be sincere, but they are not facing reality. No one's life is a totally open book.

What do we mean by this talk of a personal "secret world"? Jesus spoke about it with these words:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind
and with all your strength.¹

No one really knows whether we even love the Lord our God, let alone with all our heart. And how can we love him with all our soul? (What does that mean, exactly?) And how can we love him with not just part but with our entire mind? On top of that, how can we love him with our *strength*?

No one can know with certainty whether any of us loves God at all. Even if you knew me well, you wouldn't know whether I did. And if I knew you well, I wouldn't know if you did, either. Love for God develops inside of us and is unknown to others. They may try to guess whether we love God or not, but they can't *know*. That's because it's our world. It goes on inside what the Bible calls our "inner being."²

The boulder on the beach

The statement by Jesus to the teacher of Old Testament, just quoted, deserves our concentrated attention, because he also said that it is

1 Mark 12.30. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical references are from *The New International Version*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, 1984.

2 Ephesians 3.16.

the *most important* of all the laws given by God up till the time when our Lord stepped out of heaven onto our speck of dust, Earth. There were a lot of laws handed down, but this one from Deuteronomy 6.5 is the most important. There is, Jesus says, “no greater commandment.”

Why is it that we usually quote this commandment just in passing?

Why do we throw it into a sermon or Bible study as some kind of aside? It’s not supplementary to other matters; it’s critical. Love for God goes on inside of us, unseen and unseeable by others.

An open secret

Jesus, too, had a secret world. He let us in on it. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” he invited, “for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”³ This is the only time he actually spells out his inner character. *Gentle and humble in heart*. Mind you, that claim was easy to verify. Everything he did and said showed that he really was gentle and humble in his heart. He demonstrated day-by-day what he was like deep down. He didn’t pretend he was something he wasn’t. He didn’t need to.

Jesus set a new standard for his followers. He himself set the pace. His words still give us something noble to aim for. But this requires a willingness to change.

The change God requires, is the day-by-day change into the likeness of his Son.

All of us who have had that veil removed [which happened when we made Christ Lord of our lives] can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord – who is the Spirit –

3 Matthew 11.29.

makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.⁴

That happens – or ought to happen – now.

Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.⁵

The Father is so pleased with his Son that he’s peopling heaven with millions just like him. “We are already God’s children,” writes Jesus’ long-time disciple John, “but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.”⁶ Our change into Christ-likeness goes on right now and will be completed when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to snatch his people up into heaven.⁷ God has planned amazing things for those who have received him as their Lord.

Meanwhile, we change. The change goes on in our “inner being.” Max Lucado talks about his own experience of change. As a younger man he was, to use his own description, a *slob*. This is how he puts it:

Life is too short to match your socks; just buy longer pants!

Then I got married.

Denalyn was so patient. She said she didn’t mind my habits... if I didn’t mind sleeping outside. Since I did, I began to change.

4 2 Corinthians 3.18, NLT.

5 Romans 8.29.

6 1 John 3.2, NLT.

7 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18.

I enrolled in a twelve-step programme for slobbs... A physical therapist helped me to discover the muscles used for hanging shirts and placing toilet paper on the holder... I was a new man. I could go three days without throwing a sock behind the couch.

But then came the moment of truth. Denalyn went out of town for a week. Initially I reverted to the old man. I figured I'd be a slob for six days and clean on the seventh. But something strange happened, a curious discomfort. I couldn't relax with dirty dishes in the sink. When I saw an empty potato-chip sack on the floor I – hang onto your hat – bent over and picked it up! I actually put my bath towel back on the rack. What had happened to me?

Simple. I'd been exposed to a higher standard...⁸

For the Christian, Christ is the standard.

Follow your heart

Change starts in the heart but we know that “the *heart is deceitful* above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”⁹ Even a prophet, in this case Jeremiah, knew that he could fool himself when it comes to matters of the heart. So can we. Honesty, openness, and sometimes brokenness, is needed for us to move more and more toward Christ-likeness.

Change begins with the decision to break with the past.

Greg Boyle works with the gangs in the south of Los Angeles. As part of his ministry to gang members he has started five different

8 Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, (Dallas, Word Publishing, 1996) p.116f.

9 Jeremiah 17.9.

businesses in order to provide work opportunities for those wanting to break with the old life. (These businesses go by the name of Homeboy Industries and carry the slogan “Jobs not Jails.”) His book *Tattoos on the Heart* contains some of his experiences. One of them records a conversation with a gang member called Omar. Greg was on his way to conduct a funeral but Omar wanted to talk. But Doyle informs him, “Gotta go.”

Omar stays seated and is uncharacteristically pensive.

“Hey, G,” he says. “Can I ask ya a question?”

“Sure, *mijo*,” I say, “Anything.”

“How many times have you buried... you know, killed because of gangbanging?”

“Seventy-five, son.” (This was some years ago. If he asked today, it would be more than twice that number)...

“Seventy-five?” He shakes his head in disbelief, his voice a bare hush now. “I mean ... when’s it gonna end?”

I reach down to Omar and go to shake his hand. We connect and I pull him to his feet. I hold his hand with both of mine and zero in on his eyes.

“*Mijo*, it will end,” I say, “the minute... you decide.”

The moistening of his eyes surprises me. He grabs my hands in his.

“Well,” he says, “then, I decide.”

“Omar,” I tell him, “it has always been as simple as that.”¹⁰

Change requires a decision to break with the past. It also requires the choosing of a new way of living, one in which God is given first place. Are you ready for that?

10 Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, (Free Press/ Simon and Schuster Inc., New York, NY, 2010) p. 110.