

# The Secret

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## Living “in Christ”

There are always situations and circumstances that are outside of our control. When it comes to our faith (our lived relationship with God in Jesus Christ), we can always decide whether or not our faith is fully integrated into our lives, or if it is merely “on occasion”. When we live lives of “occasional faith”, we find ourselves divided within ourselves and it is difficult to have strength or an attitude of abundance in all circumstances. Paul knows the secret of the attitude of abundance, he lives “in Christ” at all times, by orienting his thinking on those things that are consistent with his Christianity; those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, or worthy of praise.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever found yourself living an “occasional faith”? That is, have you ever caught yourself changing how you acted and spoke around certain people/situations?
2. Have you ever felt like Jesus was an “intruder” into certain areas of your life? In other words, have you ever found yourself putting God on a shelf and telling Him to “stay”? Why do you think you did that? If you haven’t, how have you navigated around that temptation?
3. Saint Paul (and the early Christians) lived in a world where almost any form of entertainment was approved of and “normal”. How do you think our culture is similar or dissimilar to theirs?
4. Have you ever been annoyed by the Church’s commentary on media? Do you think that the Church in our age has gone too far in condemning certain kinds of ways people pass the time? Or do you believe that the Church is wise in counseling a certain maturity and caution in Her concern? Why?
5. Do you know anyone in your life who has an “attitude of abundance”? Describe them. What are some of their characteristics that you would like to have in your own life?
6. Have you ever noticed a change in your behavior when you changed your thinking (and what you “fed yourself” with)? Tell us about it.
7. What might be an obstacle to you to thinking on that which is true, good, beautiful, etc...? What are some things that might make it difficult to change?

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## God in Real Life

1. There is a psychological principal called the “Law of Exposure”. This “law” states that we are influenced by those things to which we expose ourselves. We know this from

our personal experience (“I didn’t know that I wanted a juicy hamburger until I saw a juicy hamburger on TV...”). And still, we try to convince ourselves that we can expose ourselves to anything that is “out there” and it won’t really affect our thinking. Practice the discipline this week of being aware of the “Law of Exposure” and act on it. Make the determination that you will eliminate those things (to the degree that you are able) that numb you to God and all good things...and to focus on those things that help you become more aware and rooted in Jesus.

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## Be Transformed

The Bible is filled with examples of beauty and transformed thinking:

- A. In the Book of Ezra, the scribe writes that "Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel" (Ezra 7:10 NLT). He filled his mind with God’s law so that he could *live out* God’s law.
- B. In Psalm 49, the author writes about what he will think upon. In times of trouble and confusion, he will turn his mind to a proverb or a parable. He thinks on something that he knows to be true. This shapes his attitude.
- C. In 1 Samuel 16, the young David plays the harp and sings for King Saul. Saul had sunk into a real depression and he was soothed by music. There are times when good music truly lifts our spirits and heals.
- D. Catechism 2501 states: “Created ‘in the image of God,’ man also expresses the truth of his relationship with God the Creator by the beauty of his artistic works. Indeed, art is a distinctively human form of expression; beyond the search for the necessities of life which is common to all living creatures, art is a freely given superabundance of the human being’s inner riches. Arising from talent given by the Creator and from man’s own effort, art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing. To the extent that it is inspired by truth and love of beings, art bears a certain likeness to God’s activity in what he has created. Like any other human activity, art is not an absolute end in itself, but is ordered to and ennobled by the ultimate end of man.”

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## To the Heart

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

“The fine arts, but above all sacred art, of their nature are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands. Their dedication to the increase of God’s praise and of his glory is more complete, the more exclusively they are devoted to turning men’s minds devoutly toward God” Ways to praise God.” (CCC 2513)