

Call to Obedience #484  
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## The Solitary Place

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*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed...But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth" (Mark 1:35-38).*

For Jesus to go to other towns, which was to accomplish the purpose of His life, He had to frequently visit a solitary place. There is no evidence that any man of God can finish the course that is set before him without spending much time in a solitary place.

Take the great saints of the Bible that make up much of our history:

1. Abraham planted trees as a place to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 21:33).

2. Isaac had the habit of meditating in the fields (Gen. 24:63).

3. Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending to heaven in a solitary place (Gen. 28:12).

4. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness (Acts 7:30) prior to his call at the burning bush and 40 days alone with God twice on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:18; 34:28).

5. The prophets spent more time in the company of God than in the company of men.

6. Paul started his ministry with three years of solitude in the Arabian desert (Gal. 1:17-18). All the other apostles likewise were friends of a solitary place.

7. There are also the great ones since Pentecost, such as Augustine and Luther, John Fletcher and John Wesley, etc. for whom their solitary places were their palaces of refreshment.

We have to remind ourselves that Adam and Eve were created on the 6th day. The first day on which they saw the sun rise was a day of rest! Before Jesus began His ministry, He spent 40 days in a solitary place (Mark 1:13). And the last words of Jesus to His disciples at His ascension were not "go ye..." but "tarry ye..." (Luke 24:49). The age-old admonition of the psalmist is: *Be*

*still, and know that I am God...* (Ps. 46:10). It is as true today as ever that God cannot be known without us meeting with Him in a solitary place. Man must be taught by God directly. Man must know God intimately in his heart or he does not know Him at all.

We put too much emphasis on intelligence, God is looking for hearts. God cannot be known intellectually. Our intelligence puts boundaries around everything. It measures, it questions, it weighs, it describes, it defines and it debates. The fact is—if we have a God who can be defined, it is not the God of the Bible. We can only attempt to describe God using analogies such as we find in the Revelation: *He is like, He is like, He is like* (Rev. 1:15; 2:18; 4:3). In other words: He is a little bit like that, but not that, and He is a little bit like the other but still not that. Then what or who is He? We find a little bit of Him in the sun spreading its morning glory upon the crystal sea; we find a little bit of Him in crashing thunder such as that which sent Martin Luther scurrying into a monastery, or we see a little bit of Him in a pair of young, high-altitude, eagles playing recklessly in the upper currents of the sky. If we spend time in our solitary place, we find ourselves ever discovering more of Him. Our wonder and awe continue to grow indefinitely ever allowing us to accommodate more of His glory (Ex. 34:29-30). We will never be able to capture this God of the Bible in a definition. If apologetics does not lead us from our intelligence to the supernatural, it is a waste of our time. Indeed, once we meet Him, we still have to sit at His feet so that we might know Him and the power of His resurrection (Rev. 3:20; Phil. 3:10).

In this manner, we go from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). God's glory cannot stop exploding. It is not static, but dynamic in its very nature. We cannot stick God's glory into a theology book, a creed, a Sunday school class or a lecture. Yet, this is the way so many of us try to get to know God. We then bypass meeting with Him in a solitary place and only end up knowing more *about* Him, without becoming more *like* Him. This is the way tens of thousands of pastors have learned about God in their theological institutions, secondhand. Yes, this is better than nothing, but it is far from what is needed to bring living waters to parched souls to prepare them to "go into the next towns" in Jesus' words. All the while, the God who created us is ever yearning, every day, to reveal Himself to us firsthand in a solitary place, to teach us directly. There is no substitute for this.

This indeed is the petition of Jesus in His high priestly prayer concerning us: *And this is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and*

*Jesus Christ whom You have sent* (John 17:3). The Greek word for “know” here is *ginosko*. This word means “to know by experience” in an intimate way, and is used in Eph. 3:19, Phil. 3:10, and 1 John 2:3-4. Jesus wants us to experience God. If we do not experience Him by the witness of the Holy Spirit, we do not know Him. Have you ever wondered why Jesus said that we should all be taught by God (John 6:45)? What does He mean by this? He means that secondhand knowledge of God is woefully inadequate. It is the Holy Spirit Himself who wants to lead us into all truth.

Now, the first thing we need to do during our quiet time in a solitary place is to unclutter our mind. If we have a cluttered mind, we have no room for deep thoughts and we are prevented from coming to soul rest. Here is a quote from A.W. Tozer, written in 1960 in *Of God and Men*, before mobile phones and the Internet:

*We Christians must simplify our lives or lose untold treasures on earth and in eternity. Modern civilization is so complex as to make the devotional life all but impossible. It wears us out by multiplying distractions and beats us down by destroying our solitude, where otherwise we might drink and renew our strength before going out to face the world again.*

*“The thoughtful soul to solitude retires,” said the poet of other and quieter times; but where is the solitude to which we can retire today? Science, which has provided men with certain material comforts, has robbed them of their souls by surrounding them with a world hostile to their existence. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still” is a wise and healing counsel, but how can it be followed in this day of the newspaper, the telephone, the radio and the television? These modern playthings, like pet tiger cubs, have grown so large and dangerous that they threaten to devour us all. What was intended to be a blessing has become a positive curse. No spot is now safe from the world’s intrusion. One way the civilized world destroys men is preventing them from thinking their own thoughts.*

By our modern technologies and gadgets, we are easily brainwashed and then live only by the pre-digested thoughts of others. Again, we must know God personally. We must not build our lives on the personal opinions of others about God unless they are walking with God. Again, every one of us must lean on Jesus’ breast as John did: *...And they shall all be taught by God...* (John 6:45). The reasons why we have hundreds of denominations is because we have hundreds of opinions about God. All those who are taught by the Holy Spirit become one and constitute the real Church of Jesus Christ: the bride

without spot or blemish. Can you see the case growing for us to come apart and find a solitary place to *ginosko*, know God? For most of us, the need is not to read more but to tarry more. Remember, until the 15th century A.D., there was no printed literature to rely on. Men knew God by meeting with Him in a solitary place. Books and sermons are no substitute for meeting with Him alone.

In a solitary place you get to know God as Moses knew God, face-to-face (Ex. 33:11). In your solitary place, you will be refined and purified from all dross. There, you will learn to see yourself as you need to see yourself. Healing will take place in your inner man, problems will be solved, questions will be answered, misunderstandings will be cleared up, attitudes will be adjusted and brought back into the spirit of Christ. In your solitary place, your conversation between you and your lover is marvelously enriching, and everything is open and nothing has to be protected. It is there where windows of possibilities are opened and real preparation takes place for you to finish your mission.

You say: "I see the need for all of this, but I just cannot make the time." You can make the time to change your lifestyle when your child is hurt, can't you? Once you are desperate enough, you will make the time. If you absolutely cannot work it into your daily schedule, you can do what Jesus did: He rose early to go into a mountain to pray. Then you say: "But I don't know how to get my mind to be quiet so that I can listen." Please refer to CTO 368 which I recently published: "And Jacob Was Left Alone." Desperation coupled with discipline, my friend, gets you to the entrance of your solitary place. Be persistent, be disciplined and be patient. Then you will find that your solitary place is the best thing on this side of heaven. All of us have been created and re-created to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). This will happen in your solitary place and you will begin to grow and bear fruit: some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred-fold. The solitary place, consider it. It is the first step towards the Mount of Transfiguration.

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