

How Jesus Kept an Open Heaven Over His Life

“When you are able to create a lonely place in the middle of your actions and concerns, your successes and failures slowly can lose some of their power over you.”—Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*

Jesus would regularly separate Himself from the crowds, and even from the disciples, to go off to lonely, quiet places to pray. It was in the place of solitude where Jesus met with His Father in deepest intimacy so that the everyday work of the kingdom could unfold as God desired. Whenever I allow myself to follow His example, I often come away recognizing that my worth to God is not the same as my usefulness to Him. This is crucial to my well-being, for I am better able to see myself through my Father’s eyes rather than allowing myself to strive for acceptance and value based on my ministry activity.

In silence, He cares for my soul in a way that I can be attentive to in the moment. When I am in the midst of everyday activity, I can usually only look back reflectively to notice His involvement in my life. Over the past few years, I have been praying, meditating and actively moving toward God’s transformative activity in my life moment by moment.

Stopping to pay attention and pray in the midst of busyness as well as in the quiet, reflective moments has allowed me to practice His presence and welcome His nearness and care in everything ... from the most mundane task or thought to the moments when I feel the most pleasure or the most accomplished. He is there—always. He has promised to be. I have started to be keenly aware that God’s life in me can only be reflected by how I live out His kingdom life in the world. The health of this activity is directly related to my life of prayer.

So much of my time is a torrent of frenzied activity and urgency. My expectations of myself far exceed the expectations of God. He simply calls me to live like Jesus.

I challenge myself to live out Jesus on steroids—an impossibility that is actually counterproductive and paradoxical. Jesus lived simply in a way that demonstrated the intricate dance between activity and holiness—doing and being. Solitude—being still with God alone ... is the way I can be more attentive to His presence in the midst of all of life. Yet, if I never stop long enough to have seasons when I can feel the gaze of God upon me, I can't make course-corrections or learn how to feel His pleasure with me when I am in stressful or busy situations.

One story in Scripture that punctuates all of this for me is when Jesus healed the man sitting by the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus, we must surmise from His own narrative in Scripture, chose, at the direction of the Father, one person to heal. One. Out of the many who were anxiously, hopefully waiting for healing, Jesus asked one man if he wished to get well ... and didn't use the waters of the pool to do so. Then, with dozens more sick and ailing all around Him, Jesus moved on without healing any others. Why? Because He wasn't interested in garnering points with the population for His amazing healing powers through healing as many people as He possibly could. His focus was on glorifying God through obediently healing the one He had been instructed to heal.

The challenge for me—and for all of us—is to seek God, as Jesus often did, in the silent moments of solitude so that we may be able to better hear His voice when He instructs us throughout our day. Perhaps, as Nouwen stated, we will then be able to create those “lonely places” even in the midst of busyness and distractions where our “successes and failures” fade away into the obedient kingdom activity of Jesus.

I have several important spiritual goals for this New Year.

Here are three of them that apply to this blog:

1. To be more aware of God's continual nearness, no matter what activity I may be engaged in or what time of day it is ... and to continually recognize that everything is not dependent upon me, but upon Him
2. To recognize and internalize that simply to be in His presence, without "doing" anything ... is enough
3. To spend more time in silence and solitude listening to the "still, small voice" of God and enjoying His company

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