

The Value of Loneliness

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.

—Matthew 14:23

Loneliness isn't for nothing. If you are in a situation of enforced solitude, there is a reason. God does not send the thorn in the flesh for nothing. Moreover, it is not punishment. Don't say, "Oh, I am getting my dues!" Wrong!

God got even at the cross. The thorn in the flesh is preparation. We all need preparation in some way. Part of my own preparation has been learning to cope with loneliness.

There is loneliness in leadership. Every church leader knows the pain of having to make unpopular decisions, the pain of not getting very close to those you minister to, the pain of treating everybody the same. The loneliness of leadership is part of the job.

But there are advantages to loneliness. For example, you have time to pray; you may never have such time again. One reason for enforced solitude is that God wants you all to Himself. He loves your company, and you could be lamenting the very thing that He has designed in order to have your company.

This is your moment to develop two things: (1) to become an intercessor, where you can start praying for people, and (2) to get to know God with an intimacy beyond anything that you dreamed possible.

Another value of loneliness is to make you sympathetic toward others. That is one of the main purposes of any trial. As Paul put it, "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort" (2 Cor. 1:7). It produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings. You will be able to sympathize, and you

will be able to identify with another person. Pray you will never forget what it was like, should this thorn be withdrawn from your flesh.

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