

When You Feel Like No One Sees You

The Lord accepts, loves and approves of you in every season of life, even the uncelebrated ones.

Have you ever felt overlooked? Have you ever moved or entered a new environment where no one knew who you were, what you could do or what dreams ignited your soul? Have you ever crossed the threshold into another season of life, where you shifted from recognition to anonymity, from standing as a leader to sitting as a learner again? Have you resigned or retired from a position and transitioned from being sought out to left out, celebrated to celebrating others?

Hidden dreams. Hidden giftings. All of us are acquainted with chapters in life when our visible fruitfulness is pruned back, our previously praiseworthy strengths become dormant and our abilities are unnoticed by the watching world. Like a flower whose budding glory is covered up by wet leaves, we sense the weight of hiddenness in our hearts and whisper, "I have so much more to give and be."

But there is One who can see the beauty of that covered, smothered flower: God Himself. And mysteriously, His delight in that beauty is not diminished by its leafy camouflage. Neither would His pleasure be amplified by the flower's visibility. Good news indeed for the hidden.

Whether hidden through anticipated transition or unexplainable loss, we can spend years feeling that the greatest part of us is submerged in the unseen, as though others can see only the tip of the iceberg of who we really are.

Scientists inform us that only one-eighth to one-tenth of an iceberg is visible. At least 90 percent is submerged in the unseen. Because of their enormous mass, with that proportion,

icebergs are virtually indestructible. Ten percent visible plus 90 percent unseen equals an indestructible life.

The most influential life in all of history reflected this iceberg equation. Ninety percent of Jesus' life on earth was spent in obscurity. Only 10 percent of His earthly life was spent in the public eye. And all of His life was, and still is, absolutely indestructible.

Hidden: A Sacred Place

Our sincere prayers to "be like Jesus" generally are not equated in our hearts with, "God, please grant me the privilege of spending 90 percent of my life unapplauded and underestimated in anonymity!" No. Our enthusiastic intentions to "be like Jesus" include exemption clauses for Jesus' hidden years, temptations and crucifixion. We will pass on those, thank you.

What we are interested in, however, is Jesus' character and authority. But these qualities are not isolated entities. They come with Jesus' life, 90 percent of which was lived in quiet obscurity. "What would Jesus do?" we ask sincerely. Well, for starters, He embraced a life of hiddenness.

Why? Why would Father God wrap the glory of heaven in plain paper, announce the birth of His precious Son with a full angelic choir and then hide this priceless gift for three decades?

We certainly would not have permitted the Son of God to live in anonymity for 90 percent of His life. Every breath would have been monitored by the brightest minds in medical research. Every movement would have been captured by the media and analyzed by psychologists. Every word would have been weighed by theologians and recorded by historians.

Hidden? No way! However, with Jesus' life (and our own), it is critical that we not mistake unseen for unimportant. Consider human conception. God knits us together in the dark warmth of

the womb. Unseen? Yes. Unimportant? Not remotely. These months are quite literally formative. When this hidden phase of development is prematurely interrupted, the results can be tragic.

Or consider the growth of a plant. Before a gardener can enjoy a plant's fruit, she must tenderly and strategically attend to its root. So a plant's birth begins with its burial. The gardener commits a generally unremarkable seed to the silence of the soil. All that is to come rests greatly upon the seed's ability to develop roots in unseen places.

As with a child in the womb and a seed in the ground, God's unanticipated move of hiding Jesus granted Him protected, undisturbed room to be and become. From God's perspective, anonymous seasons are sacred spaces. They are quite literally formative; to be rested in, not rushed through—and most definitely never to be regretted. Unapplauded but not unproductive: Hidden years are the surprising birthplace of true spiritual greatness.

From Nazareth, With Love

“‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked” (John 1:46, NIV).

If you asked devout Judean Jews in Jesus' day what they thought of Nazareth, you would probably have received a collection of less than favorable adjectives including “small,” “insignificant” and “spiritually suspect.” Yet this is where God sent His Son for His first three hidden decades of life.

The citizens of Nazareth hopefully held a higher opinion of their region, but even they did not expect a prophet to come from Jesus' family. Looking back, we may be able to recall former classmates who demonstrated some special ability or annoyingly consistent excellence that made them seem destined for greatness. Evidently the good folks in Nazareth never

nominated Jesus for this award.

During His public years, when Jesus returned home, the people were stunned. Throughout almost three decades it had never occurred to this small community that Jesus might be made of prophetic (let alone Messianic) material. In response to Jesus' amazing ministry, they said:

“‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn't this the carpenter's son?’ ... And they took offense at Him” (Matt. 13:54-57).

So Jesus grew up as a relatively uncelebrated boy from an unroyal family in the unrespected town of an unliked region. Bad news if you are planning on running for office; good news if your job description is embracing hiddenness.

Are We There Yet?

Somewhere, somehow, in the thick of those long, undocumented years, Jesus awakened to His divine nature and calling. He realized and accepted that He was the Son of God, eternally existent as God and yet temporally present as a man. More than a prophet and more than a king, Jesus was with Father God in the beginning, created all that is, and was now on earth to offer His sinless life as an atoning sacrifice.

Every day following this awakening, Jesus might have wondered, Is today the day? Imagine Jesus, with God's divine power and calling bursting within Him, waking up each morning, turning to Father God in prayer and asking, “Are we there yet?!”

Day after day, year after year, Father God simply replied: “No, My Son. We are not there yet. Today is not the day.”

During these uncelebrated years, Jesus submitted to a seemingly delayed destiny. A God-sized mission pulsed in His heart, but He was not free to explain, proclaim or actively pursue it. Onlookers saw only the tip of the iceberg of who Jesus truly was, and they could have never imagined the

indestructible greatness growing just beneath the surface of Jesus' unapplauded life.

What would that experience build in someone? What does it build in us? What grows in that underestimated gap between God's calling and others' perceptions; between our true capabilities and our current realities? Most of us struggle if our dreams are delayed one year, let alone 20! We find God's pauses perplexing. They seem to be a waste of our potential. When those pauses extend beyond what we can explain (like three days), we often spiral into self-doubt or second-guessing.

But in anonymous seasons we must hold tightly to the truth that no doubt strengthened Jesus throughout His hidden years: Father God is neither care-less nor cause-less with how He spends our lives. When He calls a soul simultaneously to greatness and obscurity, the fruit—if we wait for it—can change the world.

The First Fruit of Hiddenness

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" (Matt. 3:13). Finally, after years of disciplined waiting, Father God has an unusual answer for Jesus' usual question. "So ... are we there yet, Father?" Jesus might have offered as He concluded His morning prayers.

"Actually, we are," replied Father God.

"We are? We are ... there?!" Jesus asked.

"In a word: yes. Today is the day, Son. Leave Your tools on the table. I've made an appointment for You with a holy man in camel's hair."

There.

Where is there for you? What do you think it will feel like? There, for Jesus, was a miraculous but misunderstood journey

toward a splintered, bloodied cross.

Leaving His hometown, Jesus' steps must have been filled with thought. On the other side He would encounter Cousin John, an odd but strangely endearing, organic fellow. Sincere souls by the hundreds were drawn to John's raw, unedited call to repentance.

Imagine how Jesus must have felt when He arrived at the Jordan, saw the crowds and heard John yell out, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him" (Luke 3:4). After waiting 30 years, most of us would have exploded with tearful emotion: "Here I am! I have finally come. God sent me to bring you new life!"

But not Jesus. Instead, He calmly navigated His way through the people and waded into the Jordan toward John. No parade. No drum roll. Not even an explanation. Only John knew the truth about the sinless One standing before him.

How could He do that? Especially after waiting for decades, how could He not immediately let the people know who He really was and all that was in His heart?

Jesus' anonymous season had prepared Him for this moment. The choices He made in the Jordan River are reflections of choices He made before the Jordan River. Something in surrendering to hiddenness strengthened Jesus not to make a name for Himself. Something in embracing that prolonged season of obscurity enabled Him to appear to be less in order to be able to do more.

Hidden years, when heeded, empower a soul to patiently trust God with their press releases. Waiting actually grants us the strength to wait a little longer and not rush God's plans for our lives.

God's Words for the Hidden

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being

torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove (Mark 1:10).

With a prayer in His heart, Jesus broke through the surface and saw the Holy Spirit descend from a tear in the heavens “in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:22).

Imagine! The curtains were drawn. The blessing had been given. Now Father God had something He wanted to say.

Perhaps you, like me, have never heard an audible voice from God. But if your ears were going to hear God’s voice only once, what would you want Him to say?

Would you want Him to explain pain or answer a burning question? Would you prefer clear direction or insight into the future? Jesus and John could certainly have benefited from all of the above. But evidently there was something they both needed to hear even more:

“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:17).

A wise friend once noted that God spoke these words before Jesus had ever done anything for which we call Him Savior. True. God sounded His affirmation over Jesus’ life before Jesus ever preached one sermon or enlightened one mind; before Jesus ever healed one body or saved one soul.

These loving words were spoken over Jesus’ hidden years. God declared His full acceptance and pride over what Jesus had become through His anonymous season. In unseen places over underestimated years, Jesus had been making unrecorded, unapplauded choices that had prepared Him for everything to come. And Father God—who values the seen and unseen alike—was very, very pleased.

Through Jesus, we inherit this affirmation from above, for God is still shouting these words of love over us even before we

are recognized or celebrated, before we make the grade or make the news or even make dinner. Before we get that promotion or even get out of bed, Father God is already shouting. Not because of any stunning accomplishment but because of who we are: Through Jesus, we are His!

May God's affirmation from above echo today in your soul: "I love you My child, My friend. With you I am well pleased."

Is there anything else in the whole wide world that our souls truly need to hear?

Read a companion devotional.

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