Solitude: The Furnace of Transformation

Let's be honest: the demands of leadership can feel as unrelenting as ocean waves pounding the shore. Sometimes those waves hit so hard and so often that you wonder if you can keep showing up—if it might be easier to toss in the towel.

If you've felt that way, you're not alone. Every leader has stood in that honest place—more than once.

So how do you stay in the game? From one traveler to another, let me offer something that has reshaped my life and leadership in quiet, profound ways.

The Gift We Rarely Pursue

Over the past several years, the practice of **solitude** has become one of the most significant means God has used to keep me grounded, engaged, and ready for the demands of leadership. Not simply once, but again and again. It has changed me—and is still changing me.

Solitude is the intentional step away from people and things so that you can step toward the presence of God. Simple to define…far harder to practice.

We live in a world of noise—much of it unavoidable, much of it self-inflicted, nearly all of it distracting. Traffic. Screens. Notifications. News cycles. The constant hum of "more." And in the midst of it, God offers a quiet, countercultural gift: **solitude.** It's His antidote to the soul-numbing drone of life.

Why Solitude Matters

One of the greatest values of solitude is this humbling reminder: **I am not nearly as important as I think I am.**

In the beauty—and sometimes the discomfort—of quiet, I'm able to "right-size" my life. I'm reminded that God is the center, not me. That the more I am emptied of myself, the greater the space for Him to fill me with Himself.

Henri Nouwen calls solitude the "furnace of transformation." In that furnace, he writes, all the scaffolding falls away: *"…no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract…just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing."*

It's there, in that unfiltered place, that God does His deepest work.

A Weekly Return to What Matters Most

Solitude recenters me. It becomes a sacred space for taking spiritual inventory—for opening the books of my life and honestly evaluating the state of my soul.

Where is my heart trending?
Is grace growing in me?
Is a root of bitterness silently forming?

Am I becoming more kind…or more calcified?

I often compare it to marriage. I talk with Pattie every day, of course. But it's our uninterrupted, extended time together that draws our relationship deeper. Solitude works the same way with God. Those intentionally carved-out moments move us from routine connection to intimate communion.

A Place for Mid-Course Corrections

In solitude, I review the "game film" of my life—my attitudes, relationships, leadership decisions, and hidden motives. I come face-to-face with truth. The obvious starts to soften, and the subtle stuff—the small compromises, the quiet resentments, the unnoticed pride—comes into clearer view.

And my conversations with God? They shift.
Less edited. More honest.
Less performance. More presence.
Less duty. More enjoyment.

Solitude Is Not Escapism

Some assume solitude means running from reality. I see it differently.

Solitude is stepping away for a moment so you can return more fully engaged—wiser, clearer, gentler, stronger.

When I return from solitude, I notice the shift:
My soul feels rested.
My perspective sharpened.
My judgment softened.
My compassion rises.
My smile is easier.
My old self loosens its grip, and the new self comes forward with fresh strength.

Finding Your Place of Quiet

When I seek solitude, I look for places detached from noise and familiar scenery—a park bench, a prayer garden, a quiet stretch of beach, even the front seat of my car overlooking the foothills.

Living near the Angeles National Forest, many of my solitude moments happen on its trails. In minutes, I move from the noise of the valley to the hush of God's creation. Those places have become holy ground for me.

You Must Plan for It

Solitude doesn't happen automatically. You must plan it. Protect it. Build it into your weekly rhythm. And over time, it becomes something you genuinely crave—a treasured space where God whispers again, *"Be still and know that I am God."*

Wendell Berry captured it with poetic clarity:
"Best of any song is bird song in the quiet, but first you must have the quiet."

He's right. First, you must have the quiet.

And when you step into that quiet, you'll find a Father who has been waiting for you all along—lights on, arms

open, ready to transform the interior life from which all true leadership flows.

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