

The Indispensability of Solitude

Over the last two months, we've been chasing down an important question: **Is it possible to be more passionate, more energized, and more productive for the Kingdom...a year from now?**

In tracking down this question, we have come to grips with the reality that in God's economy of life and leadership the game plan is not simply to survive or to find a modicum of sustainability, but rather to embrace and live in a rhythm that is RENEWABLE.

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From there, I introduced **three spiritual practices** that God is using in my life to move me closer to this renewable rhythm. (BTW, a spiritual practice is any endeavor that is pursued with the expressed purpose of creating space to live more intimately with God).

Last month, we talked about **Sabbath**. Today we talk about SOLITUDE.

To get us going, let me tee up a working definition: **Solitude is the practice of being absent from people and things for an extended time so that I can be present with God.**

Stating the obvious, we live in a world of noise—noise that comes at us from all directions. Some of it unpreventable. Some of it self-imposed. A vast majority of it distracting. And so much of it soul-numbing. Traffic horns that announce impatience. Flat-screens that decorate the walls of public spaces with never-ending news feeds. Podcasts that echo endlessly in our ears. You get the point.

And in the middle of all these moving parts, God's gift, His antidote to the buzz and chaos of life, is solitude.

Of the many things that I am learning about solitude, perhaps none is as important as this: **In solitude I find it extremely hard to be dishonest with God.** That is, any serious attempt to spend extended time with God is ultimately going to lead down the pathway of deep personal reflection—getting down to the issues in my heart that most of the time I opt to avoid.

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Let's take that a step further. I hadn't been to the Los Angeles Zoo for years (make that decades!), but now that I have grandkids, I'm a regular. Upon arriving at the zoo, my grandkids will begin calling out what animals they want to see. After hearing their requests, I quickly find the 'campus map' that identifies the location of the Asian elephants, the Masai giraffes, and the Sumatran tigers. And thankfully and most importantly, the map notifies me of one vital slice of info: "YOU ARE HERE".

You are here. That's exactly what happens in solitude. You discover where you are. You get your spiritual bearings. I like to think about it as 'game film' time. Time to study the nooks and nuances of my life. Why did I react with such intense anger in that situation? Why did that seemingly small circumstance illicit such deep sadness? Why do I find it so important to always have my ideas prevail when participating in a team setting?

Solitude has a way of lifting the lid on the stuff below the surface. Henri Nouwen in his must-read book, ***The Way of the Heart***, puts it this way: *In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: 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.*

In a time of solitude, I find two questions that help me to anchor my conversation with God. *What do You want to say to me about You? What do you want to say to me about me?* And then I listen.

And I listen some more—for that still small Voice.

Last month, I made you a guarantee about Sabbath-keeping. Today I make you a guarantee about the practice of solitude. Here it is: **If you want to make serious strides in allowing God to transform your life, then solitude must find its way into the matrix of your life.** It simply is an essential part of building a renewable rhythm to life and leadership.