

July 17, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Devotion: Time alone with God”

Mark 1:29-39 NLT

29 After Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they went over to Simon and Andrew's home, and James and John were with them. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. 31 He went to her bedside, and as he took her by the hand and helped her to sit up, the fever suddenly left, and she got up and prepared a meal for them.

32 That evening at sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. 33 And a huge crowd of people from all over Capernaum gathered outside the door to watch. 34 So Jesus healed great numbers of sick people who had many different kinds of diseases, and he ordered many demons to come out of their victims. But because they knew who he was, he refused to allow the demons to speak.

35 The next morning Jesus awoke long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray. 36 Later Simon and the others went out to find him. 37 They said, "Everyone is asking for you."

38 But he replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came." 39 So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and expelling demons from many people.

God loves you just as you are, but loves you too much to keep you just as you are. God wants to change you for the better. He wants you to be like Jesus. Why should you want to be like Jesus? Jesus is everything you want others to be and what you want to be too: (Gal 5:22-23) loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. For God to begin this work in us we must first be forgiven of the sin that separates us from fully knowing God. Jesus alone can forgive sin and reconcile us to God that we might know Him forever and that the image of God may be regained by us. Those who accept Jesus are made new. They have new thoughts, a new will, new desires. (Eph 4:23-24 NLT) “Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness--righteous, holy, and true.”

Accepting Jesus is not the end but the beginning of a life-long process of change. (Phil 1:6 NLT) And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.

God is doing this work of change in us – transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. But there are certain things we can do, you may call them disciplines. The disciplines do not change us, but they can be used by God to bring change. When you do cement work you first build a form, then the cement can be poured into the form. The disciplines are like the form that God can then pour His changing power into.

Last week I mentioned five disciplines that are essential for your spiritual growth—growth in Christlikeness: Devotion, worship, discipleship/fellowship, witness and service.

In Mark 1: 29 we notice that Jesus and His disciples were coming from a public worship service. If public worship was important to Jesus, it should become a part of our lifestyle too. Public worship is important, if we want to grow in Christlikeness and to be mature in Christ: “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.” (Heb 10:25 NLT)

We should assemble for prayer, praise, and preaching.

So after worship, what did Jesus do next? Go out for a big meal, then home to take a nap? No! According to Mark, Jesus entered into ministry (service). He went to Peter and Peter’s brother, Andrew’s house with James and John where He healed Simon’s mother-in-law of a serious fever. Then word got out that Jesus was in town, and so people began to flock at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He even drove out demons. His day was filled with worship, fellowship and discipleship - teaching (preaching), witnessing and compassionate ministry to many people (Mark 1:39).

But what Jesus did next may surprise you! The next day (Mark 1:35 NIV) “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

After a time of public worship and compassion-filled ministry, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had His private devotions. Why? Several possibilities! (I’ll share two!)

I. Jesus Needed Time Alone with the Father for Personal Renewal

- A. His disciples and other people made demands of Him (questions, personal problems, inter-personal tensions, etc. – aren’t these the same kind of things you experience?).
- B. Let’s not forget, Jesus was fully human and fully God. Jesus was not immune from the demands of life. Could it be He was just emotionally drained and spent as we get?
- C. Notice: After Simon and his companions realized He was gone, they went on a search for Jesus. We don’t know how long they searched but when they found Him they said, “Jesus, everyone is looking for you!”
- D. All these people (His disciples, the sick, even His enemies) made demands on Jesus, and had expectations for Jesus, and it drained Jesus entirely, maybe spiritually.
- E. I believe that’s why, while it was still dark, way before dawn, Jesus got up and went out to a secluded spot for private worship, time alone with God, personal devotion, and for personal renewal.
- F. Now listen to me: the life of discipleship of Jesus is demanding and it is draining. God has called us to minister to people, some of them very draining people. He wants us to love people, even the difficult ones. What are we to do? Be like Jesus. Spend time alone with God in personal devotions, “for they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Why?

II. Jesus Needed Time Alone with the Father for Divine Direction

A. Notice with me Mark 1:38-39. When they had found Jesus, what was Jesus' first response to them? (But he replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came." So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and expelling demons from many people.)

B. Jesus was not only restored and renewed emotionally and spiritually, Jesus emerged from His time alone with God with a clearer sense of God's direction on His life—a new vision for what God the Father wanted Jesus to do.

C. I can only guess that Simon and the others were baffled by the new direction in Jesus' ministry. "What? You mean we're not going back to Capernaum? Man, that crowd back there is ready to follow You and they could finance our whole ministry back there!"

D. Jesus said, in essence, "You know, I've been alone with the The Father. I have My marching orders. Sometimes, the Father's will is unexpected and surprising. It is interesting that although Jesus centered His ministry in Capernaum, the people of that city did not follow him. Jesus pronounced a curse on the city for its unbelief (Matt 11:23-24), predicting its ruin (Luke 10:15).

E. We need daily directions from the Lord. That's why we need daily devotions. (A personal observation: my entire ministry comes out of my devotional time!)

F. Gordon MacDonald, in *The Life God Blesses*, writes: "I spent time alone with God devotionally in order to pursue order and vitality in my interior world, so that the convictions and actions of my life are rooted in my soul and not in the external world around me."

G. Let me tell you why "devotions" are so important: personal devotions are what prepare us for everything else. Prayer, meditation, Bible reading, study, and putting yourself in a place where God can grace you is the best part of the day.

H. My vision for this congregation is that every person will understand the value of a vital walk with Christ, and urge one another on to growth in this vital area of our spiritual journey.

I. So, here are the five steps toward a meaningful devotional life:

1. Choose to ask the Lord Jesus to empower you to develop the necessary discipline. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. Choose a place (where you can be alone without distractions).
3. Choose a time. Jesus loved the morning. Maybe you're a night owl. Find the time that's best for you. How much time should you take? As much as you need? It's about the quality of your time with God not the length of time. You need enough time to speak with Him through prayer and praise. And you will need enough time to listen to what God has to say. Which brings me to the next thing...
4. Choose an aid: Bring a Bible, a devotional book and a note book or journal. God speaks through His word and uses Christina books. Learn to listen to God. It is not about reading large portions of Scripture. Read until a verse has your attention. Then meditate on it. Use your journal to write your thoughts down or prayer requests. But here is the final step.
5. Do it!