



Learning to Love Obscurity

Many leaders start out well, living and growing in Christ in obscurity. They consider it their “backside of the wilderness” experience, to be endured, until the time of their revealing arrives. Their hearts know their calling to obscurity is of God, and they are willing to go through this time “until” their time in the sun arrives and they can finally arise to prominence and influence. This time of obscurity is viewed as the price to be paid for ultimate personal fame.

The question is: Will you remain there, when the multitudes of “well meaners” start clamoring “The world must have the revelatory manna you can provide them! Let us promote you publicly! This thing can be big!”? The desire for greatness, the desire to “be known,” the desire to “hit it big,” is such a trap. We’ll take some time here to expose it for what it is.

My study of Church movements, revivals, and refreshings, is that they end up being more about man, than about Christ, and more resemble a “bowel *movement*” than a representation of Christ. I know that is a gross metaphor, but heh, just scan over Church history - Constantine marrying the Church to the State, the rise of the Institutional Church, The Crusades, The Inquisition, Missions that look more like human abuse than the love of God (visualize missionaries arriving on jungle islands, forcing the savages to repent, be clothed, be raped, or becomes slaves, or worse yet killed for rejection of the Gospel...). Not a pretty picture.

The Reformation is a lesson in improvement, but leaving sooo much garbage still floating in the cesspool of what has become Jesus’ Church. Such things as anti-Semitism, harsh legalism, Church equals a place rather than a people, pulpits, pews, stained glass, emphasis on religious titles, hierarchical leadership structures, Church politics, etc.

God needs no man or woman to build Him a House Church Movement. He’s not constipated and needing man to help Him out with some form of human engineered laxative. He’s always been happy living outside the camp, hidden in the Father, working and praying in the secret place, building His underground Church. It is men who cannot endure obscurity. It is men who start out well, talk of being hidden in Christ, and letting it be simply all about Jesus, who over time, little by little, allow themselves to become self impressed, feeling the importance of their place in what God is doing, and allowing others to promote them, laud them, and lift them up. Even Jesus, the Lord of Glory, absolutely refused to allow men to do this to Him. At every point where men sought to take Him and promote Him as King, he rebuked them, hid Himself from them, and stole away into the wilderness to pray and work with His disciples, leaving them an example that not one of them ever forgot. While great crowds gathered around Him He didn’t seek large crowds or encourage His disciples to promote big meetings. They just happened because He had such glory about Him. It isn’t that large gatherings are necessarily bad, but when men long

for them, do anything to create them, enjoy the perks of personal fame and fortune from them, and learn to find their security and significance from such things, SOMETHING is clearly wrong.

We don't see even one of the first apostles allow any kind of House Church Movement to develop around them, as key note speakers. They apparently allowed no one to go ahead of them and promote big meetings for them. While I can't prove it, I'm certain Paul would not have created a web presence to promote himself and his letters, with the intent to build a large and influential ministry. If he had created a web presence it would have been with the simple intent of lifting Jesus up, and making available the revelation God had given him, and his willingness to serve the body. The difference between a web presence to serve, and a web presence to develop personal ambition, may admittedly be a fine line and hard to discern, but the heart knows, and it's in the heart that Jesus is either Lord or our self promoter. They spoke privately, quietly, humbly, and with a huge awareness that allowing even a little of the leaven of self significance to creep into the ministry God had called them to, would lead the people away from Jesus and to themselves. They had a sensitive spiritual sense about these matters. They would have none of it.

In all of early Church history we don't hear of Timothy or Titus or Epaphroditus promoting thousands to come out to hear Paul, or Peter, or John, in one of their local coliseums, temples, or public arenas. How did they avoid this happening? Was it just the fear of persecution that hindered this happening? I don't think so. I think I know how they did it. I think God spoke to my heart as to how they avoided this.

I think there came several days and several folks, who approached Paul, and said something like the following, "Brother Paul, look man, there is no question God is with you in a big big way. You hang out in private, with little tiny groups of people, imparting the most exquisite of mysteries ever spoken by man, when, if you would let us, we could build massive rallies, conventions, and seminars, and take your message to huge audiences. You are God's man for this hour Paul. Let us make this thing happen bro.!" I can just see Paul narrow his eyes at them, look around the room of "headnodders," oblivious to the fact that all of Church history pivots around his answer to this question, but knowing they must be answered, looks into their eyes, with the room hushed, excited that they are about to hear of their opportunity to hook into this giant of a man and his ministry, finally develop a consistent income, get that new toga they'd been eyeing at the public market, and trade in their sandals for a new horse. Paul turns and sits down, smiles at these brothers, and gently takes them back over the supremacy of Christ, being hidden in Him, letting all the glory be focused on Him, and in a word tells them "NO! it just isn't going to happen. I'm not going to build any movement around my revelation. It isn't the revelation that has the glory...it is Jesus. Let Him create a movement if He desires. I'm not about to step in front of Him and become the first apostle to lead the people away from Him and to myself. No way!" Crestfallen, they look at one another, dumbfounded that he "just doesn't get it," and yet they feel the deep resolve he has about the matter, and know they must drop it for now.

Paul did not allow this kind of talk to generate around him. He refused it. He recognized it for what it was...a distraction from the True Focus on Christ. He wouldn't have it. How am I so sure these kinds of dialogues took place? Simple, just look at Church History and our modern Church, and you will see the wreckage of the Church led by such glory seekers. This is the stuff of fallen humanity, afraid that Jesus alone won't be enough for them.

I recently read back over the biography of a great teacher of Church history, by the name of Sadhu Sundar Singh. He was a humble brother from India, whom Christ gave great

revelations and power to. While he remained an obscure figure in His kingdom, touching small gatherings and individuals here and there, he was physically and spiritually healthy, and left a clear fragrance of Christ everywhere he went. But, as the nature of man would be, some Westerners grabbed a hold of him, and convinced him to let them market him. They paid his way around the world, in a worldwide speaking tour. Gatherings of thousands waited to hear from him, and hung on every word he spoke. Previously, he was accustomed to spending great lengths of time in prayer and meditation before the Lord, from Whom the revelations he taught came, but now, driven by the ambitions of man, he humbly succumbed to their pressure to let them promote him, and after a year of this constant rush of ministry, he was exhausted; physically and spiritually sick, and canceled his final meetings and went back to India, and hid himself in obscurity...such obscurity that somebody got word he had died, and it was in all the papers throughout the world. He only emerged from obscurity to let them know he was still alive, but would not allow them to reattach themselves to him and his ministry. His health returned. He continued his quiet and simple sharing of Christ, and died in obscurity. His life tells it all, yet we refuse to learn from him.

Hiddenness is just about the most difficult mountain a powerfully gifted man will face. The inner desire we all share, for significance, is so crafty, so compelling, and so dangerous, that if we do not resist its emergence at every point it will eclipse Jesus and cause men to follow men, instead of following Christ. It cannot be humbly shrugged off, it cannot be delicately sidestepped, it MUST be hit head on, with a resounding NO!!! I will not allow anyone to lift me up and make this thing become about me. I am and always will be a NOBODY, compared to the majesty of Christ. I'm happy being a nobody, I want to be a nobody, I have settled I will always be a nobody, and at even the hint of me being otherwise I will shut it down, go hide out in the mountains for a few years if necessary, until men forget about me again, and only come back out when God says they've learned to live without me, and emerge to only reveal Jesus.

Listen to Paul describe his "nothingness" in an of himself:

2 Cor 12:11 (NKJV) I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am ***nothing***.

1 Cor 1:28 (NKJV) and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which ***are not***, to bring to ***nothing*** the things that are,...

2 Cor 6:10 (NKJV) as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as ***having nothing***, and yet possessing all things.

Gal 6:3 (NKJV) For if anyone thinks himself to be ***something***, when he is ***nothing***, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

When you finally arrive at "Nothingness" you can change your title, like Paul did, to one who was truly a "Nothing" in the Roman culture. You can call yourself a "***Slave***." Rom.1:1

Would to God we could find some men today, who have the level of revelation Paul had, and who steadfastly refuse the glory he must have refused. There can be no question, given the nature of man, that such a scenario must have taken place in private. Paul undoubtedly fought this demon many times throughout his ministry. Nobody was allowed to make Paul a big shot. There were no Churches entitled "Saint Paul's Cathedral," in Paul's day. He allowed no movement to develop around him, his revelation, or his personality. For him, it was either going to be all about Jesus or it wasn't going to be

anything at all. GOD GIVE US THESE KIND OF MEN AGAIN!!!

Many start out in obscurity, because they aren't known yet. They preach obscurity as an insulation against their own sense of inadequacy and fear of failure, as well as because in the recesses of their heart they know it is God's best way for them. Then, as time goes by, and they become "known," slowly but surely they allow themselves to be drawn away from the "first things" they once believed and preached, regarding obscurity, and allow themselves to become big shots, market themselves intensely, and just plain get full of themselves.

The internal emotional clamor, that goes on in our brains, for increased significance, can only be tamed by the humility that is in Christ, if we will submit ourselves to Him. I'm convinced it takes something of a hardened militancy of spirit to resist the temptations to self glory. I believe we see such a militancy in Jesus and Paul in such verses as the following:

John 2:24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

John 5:31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. 32 There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. 33 You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Both of these men held themselves in a place of tight control over the desires of men to promote them and lift them up, and Paul allowed the Spirit to control his inner desires of the flesh for the praise of men.

Everyone wants the servant of God to be "nice" and "gentle," and not given to firmness of spirit, and one who is "sensitive" to the desires of the body for the call on his life and the ministry God has given him, but if he is to be the man of God he was called to be he must continually stay on top of the inclination of the flesh to follow the desires of man rather than the desires of Christ. This shouldn't necessitate meanness of spirit, but it does require a resoluteness seldom seen among men. There must be an attitude of heart that says something like: "Sure, I'd love to be worshiped and adored by people. Of course I'd like to feel significant from the things I do and the perceptions of the masses, but I will not pursue any such things, nor will I allow others to draw me into the pursuit of these things. I am a servant of Christ, tethered tightly to His heart, unwilling to follow my own will or the will of anyone else for me, no matter how tempting and how self glorifying it could become."

People often wonder why I don't travel and speak more than I do. They feel I'm wasting the call of God on my life. In their minds I need to be "out there," feeding the body and building my ministry. On one hand I appreciate their appreciation for the gifts of God evident in my life, but, if I'm to be a true servant of Christ I MUST wait until I have clear marching orders from Him, otherwise I succumb to the very things that take the focus off Christ, and turn myself into a follower of my own significance, while telling myself it is for Christ and His body.

This nonsense has been the story of Church history, rubber stamping their own will with Jesus' name. So much of what is passed off as being "the will of God" is nothing more than men stamping Jesus' name to their own desires for fame and glory. It helps them raise the funds they desire for the projects that will exalt them and their will.

Nothing is more painful than waiting for His clear leading. I find it tremendously painful to have a desire to strengthen the body of Christ at large, with the things God has put in my life, but to do so without a full knowing that it is in His timing and at His direction is simply to add to the stuff of Church history that is needing such reformation. God helping me I won't do it.

My flesh doesn't love obscurity and never will. In fact, to be very honest with you, it hates obscurity. It loves being needed. It longs for the praises of men. It is an exhilarating feeling to preach a message that feels like it came from outside of me, into and through me, and into the hearts of my listeners, and have them be sooo impressed and appreciative. I both love it and fear it like the plague. It took Moses 40 years on the backside of the wilderness to overcome his desire for personal greatness. If it takes each of us a few more years then so be it. It is simply too important that it be "ALL" about Jesus, for me to mess around with making my ministry happen. I'm learning to enjoy simple acts of ministry. Writing this short article for you, writing a loving email to my daughter, doing some projects around our property that bless my wife, making time for a troubled brother to come over in the evening and just pour out his woes to me and spend time praying with him. Being kind to a mortgage client who is "sooo not ready to buy a house yet," but just needs some simple kindness to help her prepare to purchase in a year or two. Little things...not the stuff of world shaking ministry, in which people are impressed and I make the big bucks from, but I'm convinced if I can learn to love a simple life of following His gentle leading, and leaving the where's and when's to Him, I may not contribute any more to the junk the Church needs to be reformed from, and maybe, just maybe, I'll go to sleep, become alive in Christ alone, and forget that Tom Sparks ever existed. Woohoo, wouldn't that be a blessing to the world?

JESUS APPROVED



Listen to some really important verses. These are verses we start our ministries based on, but over time we tend to stray from them:

1Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? ***You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***

1Corinthians 7:23 ***You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.***

1Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or ***whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.***

Colossians 3:17 And ***whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,*** giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Romans 14:7 For ***none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord,*** and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Now, measure your life, your motives, your ministry, the way you promote or market yourself, or the way you allow others to do this for you. Can you truly say "It's all about the Lord, for His glory alone, led by Him"?

I don't have the freedom to do just whatever I want, so as to enhance my own image and ministry. I'm owned by Christ. I'm only free to do with my life what He leads and what He wants from my life.

These must not be just "first acts" of our ministry, but rather, they must be the complete and final modus operandi for everything that proceeds from our lives. We must frequently revisit these verses and honestly ask ourselves, "Do these verses still describe me? Or, have I gotten out ahead of Christ, rubber stamped His name on my desires, and am really doing my own will for my own glory?" Such critical evaluations...

Obscurity...a pleasant word to you, or a dreaded one? Only when we can truly echo John are we safe for Kingdom ministry:

John 3:30 **He must increase, but I must decrease.**

God help us to have the same heart as the Greeks who came to Philip one day:

John 12:20 Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. 21 So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, **"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."**

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of seeing men in the place of Jesus. I'm tired of reading in the newspaper about their adulteries, their homosexuality, the abuse they've brought on their families, their addiction to ministry, their mega Churches, their big programs, the huge salaries they make, the expensive cars they drive, their flamboyant theatrics on stage, their wild pontifications from behind safe pulpits. I want to see Jesus. If you can't step out of the way, and let me see Him then frankly I couldn't care less how many movements you've started, how many books you've written, how powerfully you preach. If I can't see Jesus then I'm not even slightly interested. God help His Church return to the convictions of Christ and the apostles, who would not do their own will or let people promote them out of obscurity. They loved obscurity because they loved God, and they wanted God to be seen. This just seems right...