



The Outer Leaf

Live Oaks
Community Church

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"Leading edge news and views of the ministries of Live Oaks Community Church"

Solitude For The New Year...

A few weeks ago I spoke about the spiritual discipline of "Solitude." If you remember, solitude generally means to remove yourself to a secluded place absent of others and human activity. However, it is also true that you can experience solitude in a crowd if your heart and mind are focused within, removed from all that is around you. Solitude is the most fundamental and foundational spiritual discipline that a new believer or disciple must learn. We all must take regular time away from all other people to listen to God, His word, and our heart to stay focused in life!

After demonstrating Christ's example in regularly practicing solitude and discussing some of the particulars of this spiritual discipline, a light came on for at least a few in our congregation...

One young adult approached me after the message and declared, "That sermon was specifically for me!" Surprised and excited with his enthusiasm I asked the obvious question – "Why?" He began to share how he was attending other church services in addition to our own, going to bible studies, and attending as many Christian concerts as he could trying to get closer to God. Yet, he was not getting to the intimacy with God that he desired. As he listened to this message on "solitude" he realized that he had been filling his life with Christian activities and the fruit of other peoples walk with the Lord, but not fellowshiping with the Lord Himself.

Though his Christian activities were not bad, nevertheless, they were a substitute for what he really needed. He needed to spend time alone with the Lord, discovering for himself that he is never ever really alone. He needed to reconnect with the "still small voice" of the Lord in a world full of distractions that compete to drown it out.

You and I need the same reconnection, renewal, refinement, and redirection in our dynamic walk with Jesus that

solitude on a regular basis brings. As you renew your faith upon hearing Christ speak and experience His presence in solitude, you have a renewed clarity about what is important in your life, what must be done, and a new confidence in your ability to do God's will successfully! At the same time, you position yourself to receive the blessings God wants to give, because you have sought first His kingdom and His righteousness – now the promise that "all these things will be given to you as well" will be fulfilled by God. (Matthew 6:33)



Jesus regularly practiced solitude in His busy life – and therefore had the ability and wisdom He needed when He needed it. In preparing for 2008 will you take some special time in solitude with the Lord and His word? Will you set aside longer times than you normally do to evaluate and rework your life goals and actively listen for the Lord until you hear Him speak? From the example of Christ and others in the NT, practicing solitude as a disciple brings great benefits... staying in the center of God's will for your life – progress toward the maturity in Christ God in-

tends – greater sensitivity and compassion for others – a mouth more apt to speak life and faith instead of death and doubt – richer experience of your world and others in it – deeper, fuller, and more intimate experience of God's presence, power, thoughts, and love – hearing the Lord speak! Jesus regularly trained with solitude throughout His life and ministry – will you too in 2008?

Lord bless,

Pastor Kelley

Friday Fragments

By Dan Wolgemuth, President Youth For Christ

Have you ever walked past an open fire that wasn't yours? I mean you didn't build it, you aren't tending it, you weren't involved in providing the necessary fuel to ignite or sustain it... but you walked by it, and when you did, you instantly felt the heat that it produced. You may or may not have acknowledged it, and you may or may not have paused and wandered closer... but regardless, **you felt the heat.**



For those of us that claim the name of Christ, and desire to follow Him faithfully, this image should be inspirational. In fact, it is the way that Jesus lived His life on earth. His actions, His interaction, and His insights provided warmth not only to those that were huddled around the fire of His life, but to passers by as well. In fact, it was often those on the periphery that were attracted the most magnetically to the heartbeat of Jesus. **They felt the heat before they embraced the fire.**

I've begun to systematically confront the notion in my mind that my job as a Christian in our society is to somehow scorch the evil right out of our culture. I used to think of myself as a flamethrower. Today I have a different picture. One that's not only more inviting to others, but frankly, one that generates significantly more heat than the old model. I want my life to be a bonfire of grace and love. I want the flames to generate warmth, not only for friends and family, but for strangers and skeptics. I want my life to warm hearts as a part of the process of the Spirit igniting them. I want the brokenness, disappointment, challenges and joys of my own life to provide ample kindling for the kind of fire that attracts and engages.

I want to be a beautiful bonfire of grace, humility and love... and I believe that it's there that warmth captivates the rigid, lifeless and cold heart. Perhaps most often, to people who just happen to cross my path, who just happen to wander past the fire.

This is why I remind you to keep using the gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. Now let it grow, as a small flame grows into a fire. God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control. ~ 2 Timothy 1:6, 7 (New Century)

Warmth, then fire. Happy New Year!



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