

THE VALUE OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE IN LIFE AND MINISTRY

Mark 1:32-39 has been one of the most influential passages in my life in the formation of my understanding of the call to leadership. If you're a leader I'd urge you to read, consider and apply these verses to your life and ministry.

32 That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate/lonely place, and there he prayed.

36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,

37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."

38 And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

An outline of the text:

v. 32-34 Evening Ministry: Preaching and Deliverance

v. 35-36 Morning Solitude

v. 37 The Pressure of the Demands and Expectations of People in Need

v. 38-39 Afternoon Ministry: Preaching and Deliverance

THE ROLE OF THE SECRET PLACE IN THE LIFE OF A LEADER

Couched between two separate accounts of Jesus' incredible labor-intensive miracle-saturated ministry to the multitudes we find this provocative sentence: "...rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a *desolate/lonely place*, and there he prayed."

In this verse Mark tells us how Jesus functioned as a leader and as a son. He tells us that His rigorous *engagement* was consistently intermingled with repeated *withdrawal*; that His *involvement* in people's lives was often interrupted by a deliberate retreat to *isolation*; that

behind the scenes of the narrative of *action, labor* and *service* was a secret place of *stillness, quiet, focus* and *solitude*.

THE PRESSURE OF THE DEMANDS OF PEOPLE IN NEED

Take note of the phrase in verse 37: “*Everyone is looking for you.*” Hear the urgency and desperation in the disciple’s voices. They were essentially saying that there was no time for solitude and ‘rest’ due to the heightened demands placed upon them because of the needs of the people. This is where the leader lives: in constant proximity to a current crisis and pressing need (whether actual or perceived). How Jesus *prepares* for this pressure and how He *responds* is powerful.

It’s important to understand that Jesus neither ignores the demands nor forsakes the secret place. He affirms the legitimacy of both. Rather than scoffing at one or the other (as we carnal leaders do from time to time), from the secret place Jesus launched daily into self sacrificing service to the needy. He was invested into both intimacy *and* impact. Can’t you just feel the commitment and passion in verse 38 when he responds to the disciples saying: “*Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out?*”

Jesus’ leadership philosophy is unique for two reasons: (1) He didn’t let the demands of the people in need take priority over His need to experience present tense intimacy with His Father and (2) He understood His intimate relationship with His Father to be the ‘seminary’ in which He was equipped to meet the needs of the people. Most leaders don’t live this way. They let the voice of the many crowd out the voice of the One who matters most. And in so doing they serve those in need out of a place of internal confusion and disarray. They attempt to meet needs that only Jesus can meet. And they attempt to have their own needs inappropriately met in the process when only *Jesus* can meet their needs.

There are three lessons to learn here: (1) We can’t meet the most meaningful needs of people – only Jesus can. (2) Ministry can’t meet the most meaningful needs that we have – only Jesus can. And (3) the place of solitude is indispensable in the life of the leader.

LOVING AND LEADING WITH LONGEVITY IN VIEW

These verses teach us that what sustained Jesus as He impacted the lives of those who called Him “Savior of the world” in public was His intimacy with the One who called Him “Beloved Son”

in private. This was the source of Jesus effectiveness as a leader as it strengthened Him to labor with longevity and intensity in view (something few leaders do).

Most leaders don't model their lives and ministries after the pattern established here in Mark. Most leaders allow the demands of the people, programs and policies to dictate and govern their lifestyles. And in time, the rigors of this need-oriented leadership model is too much to bear. And they cave in. The statistics reflect this without question.

Longevity, effectiveness and depth of impact in public ministry hinges largely on our commitment to solitude with the Father as Beloved sons. To lose this and yet retain a lifestyle pattern of rigorous service and ministry is to make one of the greatest mistakes a leader can make.

Some want to surrender intimacy for the sake of impact. Others want to surrender impact for the sake of intimacy. Both of these are driven by insecurity and undermine the freedom that is offered through the Gospel-centered call to leadership. Jesus sought both. But impact wasn't an idol, and intimacy wasn't a chore. His labor was one of love, and His love was one of labor. And all who wish to be a "good and faithful servant" leader must obtain the same vision and values.

APPLICATION

If deliberate God-centered solitude is not an integral part of your life, check yourself before you wreck yourself. We can't meet the demands of ministry in public if we don't receive the affirmation of our Father in secret. If deliberate solitude isn't a value and a priority in your life, you need to make it one. The fall-out rate is just too high not to.