

Alone with God...When You're Never Alone

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Big Idea: *The discipline of imitating and abiding in Christ multiplies our little into much.*

Main Scriptures: *Mark 1:35; John 15:4; Mark 6:30-44*

Hiding behind a locked door, I dial the number... "Mom, you're never going to believe what happened..." I roll into the long-winded story of the latest shenanigans of one of my children, unfolding the drama that is my life as a stay-at-home, homeschooling mother of five. This week's story: potty training two kids at the same time while attempting to make sourdough (WHO DO I THINK I AM!?!) and begin a homeschool routine after a month off. I'll spare you the details, though I can say we went through 7 pairs of underwear in 2 hours. I've become a poop expert; at this point, I'm pretty sure I could qualify to become a doula, and the strategies would transfer. Or maybe a cheerleader, "When I say push, you say poop, "Push!" "Poop!" "Push!" "Poop!" The stories are endless, and the results are the same: she laughs, I laugh – sometimes while simultaneously crying; she reminds me of the truth, often prays over me, and sends me back into the ring that is the circus called my life. I exit my wasteland, my secret place (the bathroom), and I am greeted with the chaos that ensued as the result of my absence, but I never regret the time I took to retreat.

It is common for me to check in with her throughout the day, either through text or a follow-up call, to let her know how the rest of the day is going. Because we communed in the morning, she is on my mind, and her words often lift me up throughout the remaining parts of the day. I love my Mom; she delights in me and makes me feel seen. I love our friendship, and I also realize not all mother-daughter relationships are like ours, but it could be anyone, a friend, a spouse, a sibling, no matter who it is – we all have that person we unpack with... But what if it was God? What if we carved out that very first part of our day, before the crazy got going, and just talked with God, sat with Him, listened to Him, cried with Him if needed, or I don't know, maybe even laughed? How much more would He be on our minds during our days? Would we talk to Him more in the hard parts of the day and share a giggle in the spontaneous joy? Would we depend on Him to provide in our lack? How can we learn to commune and abide with Him in our hearts...even when we aren't alone? Because, let's face it – motherhood is a lot of things, but rarely are we alone, lonely maybe, but not alone. (Even as I write this, behind what I thought was a locked door...I have been interrupted more than a dozen times by curious inquiries, demands of my attention, and a wide spectrum of emotions escaping out of mouths into constant sound.) Relationships take intentionality, so how can we expect to be successful in the greatest call we've ever been given if we don't carve out intentional time to be with the One who called us?

Have We Lost the Discipline of Imitation?

I looked in the rearview mirror and saw my 2-year-old watching me intently. I had put my sunglasses down on my chin for some reason, and she had carefully placed hers in the same position. We both looked ridiculous; I started to laugh, and then she laughed. Kids are masterful at imitating. However, what is not so funny is when I hear a harsh tone come out of one of my children's mouths, reflecting something they've heard me say in a moment of anger. How scary

for us as parents; they are always watching – ready to practice what we practice. So, what are we practicing?

I was sitting in training for a homeschool writing class, and the instructor was speaking on this very subject. He was suggesting that all the great writers started out with the discipline of imitating other great writers. He went on to say that we have lost this discipline and further lost this practice in our attempt to make everyone feel like their voice matters most; in the name of individuality, we have sacrificed great writing. I felt the Holy Spirit so clearly prompt my heart to camp out on this basic truth – as it relates to us spiritually. Imitating Christ is a discipline, perhaps one we have lost in our culture of click bate and scrolling, consumed with "me-ism" and comparison of the wrong things, desperate to be unique in a world that idolizes individuality. So, I asked the Lord to show me where He wanted me to begin to imitate Him. He put His finger right on the one thing I hoped He would skip over, "Give me your sleep," the thought dropped right smack dab in the middle of my heart. "Please Lord, not that one," I pleaded.

I believe he wanted me to focus my attention here because I had been in a very long season of lack. One of those very tangible lacks was lack of sleep, four years to be exact. Our now 5-year-old was diagnosed with Autism last year, and along with that has come extreme sleep disturbances. His body just won't let him sleep, and each evening, as night fell, our hell began. Throw in a newborn in there as well, the adoption of our four kids, and answering the call to homeschool, I was in a perpetual state of what the experts call 'Compassion Fatigue' a term used to describe "the physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people" or simply put – pouring from an empty cup. I tried to convince myself my sleeping in was justified and even necessary. After all, how was I supposed to function without it? However, as the days turned into months, turned into years, I was quickly becoming a version of myself that I didn't recognize or even like.

I wonder if Jesus ever experienced this thing for which we now have a label. I truly believe that in his humanity, He did experience fatigue. However, I doubt He used it as an excuse to check out emotionally as I have habitually done. Scripture is pretty clear that often, on His way to take His fatigue to the Father, He was interrupted with more opportunities to lean into compassion for the people who fatigued Him. He relied on His connection with His Father, which He had cultivated in the desolate places, to sustain Him and pour out of Him onto the people who so desperately sought Him.

Frequenting the Desolate Places

I decided if I was going to imitate Christ, I needed to study His life more closely, so I went to the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Through this process, I was led to so many Scriptures that reveal how Jesus frequently (*Greek meaning: to exist*) went away to desolate wastelands, to the wilderness to pray. According to the original Greek, His very existence encompassed getting alone to talk with His Father. The Bible says he would rise up early in the morning before anyone was awake and steal away to be with His Father. He invited his disciples to do this also (Mark 1:35), and I knew this invitation was being extended to me as well.

So, unenthusiastically, I gave Him the one thing I knew He had been asking of me for years: I trusted Him with my fatigue, gave Him my sleep, and began to frequent the desolate places. For me, this looked like intentionally setting an alarm, and while it was still dark, as Jesus would often do, rise up and go be with the Lord - alone. I want to spend time in the Scriptures, to pray, to talk to Him as a friend or like I do my Mom most mornings, and to give Him the very first part

of my day. To trust that in this simple act of obedience, He would be my sustenance throughout the day, even if sleep evaded me. It was a journey to allow this first encounter each morning to tune my heart to Him and keep me in constant communication with Him throughout the day, not just in a one-and-done 15-minute interaction, but to truly abide.

When Getting Alone Transforms into Abiding

Abide: to remain in, to stay, to wait. We can't remain in what we have never committed to. Christ promises that if we remain in Him, he will remain in us. (John 15:4) The command for us to abide is followed with a promise that He will also abide in us. When we do not make room for God and remain in Him each day, we forfeit this promise and, with it, the production of good fruit in our lives. How can we expect to show up in our calling as mothers to feed our children spiritually with good fruit if we sever ourselves from the source of it all, the vine, Christ Jesus? No wonder we lack and are fatigued – our fleshly efforts are futile! Yet, when we make time to get alone, we learn how to abide, and when we abide, we get opportunities to see God take our lack and multiply it to feed the needy in exuberant abundance.

Loaves and Fish

Jesus and his disciples' efforts to get alone were constantly being intercepted by people who needed Him. Sound familiar, moms? How often do the needs of the little people in our lives interrupt our attempts to get alone? If you're like me, sometimes you find yourself annoyed with the interruption, but most of the time, you have compassion. This is a characteristic of Jesus. We find the popular story of the feeding of the 5,000, with the five loaves and two fish, right on the heels of Jesus and His disciples trying to go away to the desolate place for some alone time. (Mark 6:30-44) But rather than leaning into that fatigue and ignoring their needs or being annoyed, the passage says He had compassion on them. He fed them, He healed them, and He provided.

Sometimes, our attempts to get alone with God will be interrupted, and we can either look at these interruptions as an annoyance – impeding our time with God or an opportunity to remain with Him in compassion. Now, any good parent will stop what they are doing and feed and provide for their children. But what about their spiritual needs? We cannot expect to give out of abundance when our fruit is rotting, and we are cut off from the vine. I don't know about you, but I've had some stinky, dried-up, and shriveled fruit attracting the fruit flies in my life when I choose comfort and convenience over Christ. However, when we obediently practice abiding, we get to hand over our measly loaves and fish and watch Him multiply what we could never supply on our own. Jesus knew the importance of staying connected to His Father daily and how it was vital to his calling and ministry here on earth.

What if we took our cues from Christ and rose up when it was still dark outside? What if we took time to steal away often in quiet aloneness – to pray, listen, seek, and abide? Would our calling as mothers take on new meaning? What if we began to see it as it truly is – the greatest ministry we will ever be a part of? Would we find more contentment and joy in our daily routines - that outside of the vine feel mundane and burdensome? Would we see our relationships flourish and our countenance lifted as our hope is renewed in the only One who can multiply our little into much? This is what this discipline is teaching me, and the journey isn't perfect, but it's a worthwhile one. The more I practice, the easier it becomes to surrender and trust my lack into the hands of the One who can turn it into something capable of feeding others.