

## Let's Cultivate Simplicity and Solitude

by

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We Christians must simplify our lives or lose untold treasures on earth and in eternity.

Modern civilization is so complex as to make the devotional life all but impossible. It wears us out by multiplying distractions and beats us down by destroying our solitude, where otherwise we might drink and renew our strength before going out to face the world again.

"The thoughtful soul to solitude retires," said the poet of other and quieter times; but where is the solitude to which we can retire today? Science, which has provided men with certain material comforts, has robbed them of their souls by surrounding them with a world hostile to their existence. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still" is a wise and healing counsel, but how can it be followed in this day of the newspaper, the telephone, the radio and the television? These modern playthings, like pet tiger cubs, have grown so large and dangerous that they threaten to devour us all. What was intended to be a blessing has become a positive curse. No spot is now safe from the world's intrusion.

One way the civilized world destroys men is by preventing them from thinking their own thoughts.

Our "vastly improved methods of communication" of which the shortsighted boast so loudly now enable a few men in strategic centers to feed into millions of minds alien thought-stuff, ready-made and predigested. A little effortless assimilation of these borrowed ideas and the average man has done all the thinking he will or can do. This subtle brainwashing goes on day after day and year after year to the eternal injury of the populace – a populace, incidentally, which is willing to pay big money to have the job done, the reason being, I suppose, that it relieves them of the arduous and often frightening task of reaching independent decisions for which they must take responsibility.

There was a time, not too long ago, when a man's home was his castle, a sure retreat to which he might return for quietness and solitude. There "the rains of heaven may blow in, but the king himself cannot enter without permission," said the proud British, and made good on their boast. That was home indeed. It was of such a sacred place, the poet sang:

*"O, when I am safe in my sylvan home, I tread on the pride of Greece and Rome; And when I am stretched beneath the pines, Where the evening star so holy shines, I laugh at the lore and the pride of man, At the sophist schools and the learned clan; For what are they all, in their high conceit, When man in the bush with God may meet?"* - Ralph Waldo Emerson.

While it is scarcely within the scope of the present piece, I cannot refrain from remarking that the most ominous sign of the coming destruction of our country is the passing of the American home. Americans live no longer in homes, but in theatres. The members of many families hardly know each other, and the face of some popular TV star is to many wives as familiar as that of their husbands. Let no one smile. Rather should we weep at the portent. It will do no good to wrap ourselves in the Stars and Stripes for protection. No nation can long endure whose people have sold themselves for bread

and circuses. Our fathers sleep soundly, and the harsh bedlam of commercialized noise that engulfs us like something from Dante's Inferno cannot disturb their slumber. They left us a goodly heritage. To preserve that heritage we must have a national character as strong as theirs. And this can be developed only in the Christian home.

The need for solitude and quietness was never greater than it is today. What the world will do about it is their problem. Apparently the masses want it the way it is. The majority of Christians are so completely conformed to this present age that they, too, want things the way they are. They may be annoyed a bit by the clamor and by the goldfish bowl existence they live, but apparently they are not annoyed enough to do anything about it. However, there are a few of God's children who have had enough. They want to relearn the ways of solitude and simplicity and gain the infinite riches of the interior life. They want to discover the blessedness of what Dr. Max Reich called "spiritual aloneness." To such I offer a brief paragraph of counsel.

Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelopes you. Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds and come out of your closet determined not to hear them. Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think. Reduce your interests to a few. Don't try to know what will be of no service to you. Avoid the digest type of mind – short bits of unrelated facts, cute stories and bright sayings. Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work. Practice candor, childlike honesty, humility. Pray for a single eye. Read less, but read more of what is important to your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration.

All the above is contingent upon a right relation to God through Christ and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Lacking these, nothing will help us; granted these, the discipline recommended will go far to neutralize the evil effects of externalism and to make us acquainted with God and our own souls.

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