

at specific times of the day, and reflect on your thoughts. You might discover friends in different time zones who will anchor you in unceasing prayer.

3. Purchase or print a calendar for the next twelve months. Or just use your online calendar to plan ahead for personal rhythm. Mark down days that you intend to keep for your personal Sabbath. See if you can calendar one day per month for a time of personal retreat, spiritual growth, and reflection.
4. With your closest and most life-giving friends, plan a long weekend filled with fun, leisure, and the opportunity to share deeply. Trust me, if you plan well, this could easily turn into an annual event.
5. Ask your pastor or a leader in your church to consider teaching a class or series on the liturgical calendar and its benefits. Because I was not raised in a liturgical tradition, I've found it fascinating to understand the meaning of the colors used in the church, the variety of songs sung, the different prayers designated for certain seasons, and more. What's even more important is to have repeated opportunities each year to sense the rhythm of the church year and gain fresh insights.

THE WAY OF HIDDENNESS

Choosing Obscurity to Cultivate Life

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Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

—Colossians 3:4

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS

It is stunning to realize that we know so little of Jesus' life. We have a record of a mere thirty-six months of His adult life and two brief birth narratives. Matthew and Luke gave us only a glimpse into His early life. When you compile all four gospel accounts, only four brief chapters offer any information whatsoever about the early years of Jesus' life. In those short accounts we read about His birth, and only Luke's gives us one other insight into the formative years of Jesus' life: the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus leaving His parents after a religious festival and returning alone to the temple courts where He engaged in astonishing encounters with the teachers of the Law (Luke 2:41–52).

Most of what we know about Jesus is what He did after He had already lived thirty years—well into midlife because of the shorter life expectancy in the first century AD. We base our entire faith and religion on those thirty-six months. Alicia Britt Chole wrote of these years, "When we state our desire to 'be like Jesus,' we are not referring to Jesus' anonymous years. 'I want to walk like Jesus walked and

live like Jesus lived' is generally *not* equated in our hearts with, 'I want to live 90 percent of my life in absolute obscurity!'"¹⁵

It makes me wonder when Jesus told the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price—unnoticed, unrecognized, unobserved perhaps—that He was talking with some personal experience on the subject (Matt. 13:44–46). As God's pearl of heaven, Jesus' worth, value, and esteem were not recognized—perhaps ever throughout His entire earthly life. However, once we awaken to His worth in our own lives, we truly know Him to be worth exceedingly more than we could ever imagine. His life motivates us to change our perspective on life, including the value of the other things that can get in the way or even take the place of the Pearl of Heaven.

Jesus is the treasure of God cloaked in human skin and sinew, veiled so that no one would or could recognize His deity. His God-ness hidden. His glory obscured. His power muted. His praise silenced for decades. His life unknown, unnoticed, and unregarded. It's unthinkable. But that is what God did.

All of this helps us come to the conclusion that God is not opposed to living in anonymity or obscurity, or even enduring hidden years and decades. These times, too, are in His hands, just as the psalmist confessed (Ps. 31:15).

Jews everywhere had it wrong as they expected God's Messiah to enter our plight with pomp and circumstance. We can make the same mistake today. God's Messiah did not come in light, splendor, and power. He was born in a small remote village that was frowned upon by the elite, as if nothing good could ever come from a stinking stable in Bethlehem. They were wrong. We might be wrong as

well. God chooses His way over culture's ways, His way over political ways, and even His way over established religion's ways. Jesus lived an obscure, anonymous life, and there's something in that for us to learn.

Nothing else was recorded from age twelve until Jesus showed up on the world scene at age thirty. Other than Luke's story of Jesus going to the temple, we have absolutely nothing to inform us of Jesus' times of going through puberty and learning to become a man. The records are silent on His obscure, anonymous, and hidden life.

Archaeologists have recently unearthed remains of a Jewish home in Nazareth, the town where Jesus was raised. At the time of Jesus' childhood, Nazareth most likely had only fifty homes within its four-acre plot. It was small, not well traveled, and obscure. Even later in Jesus' adult life, Nazareth was discounted as an important place.¹⁶ Nathaniel, one of the disciples, upon being invited to go and meet Jesus, exclaimed, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46 NIV).

Such was the early life of Jesus. Luke said, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52 NIV). Jesus' spiritual formation, His growth and maturity, His living in the wonderful and immense favor of God and also of people happened with almost complete anonymity. In those hidden years, all thirty of them, the tender soul of God was shaped and formed. Such a hidden life seems like a waste in this day and age. But learning to embrace obscure seasons and hidden years yields a richness in our lives that frees us from the demands to be applauded and to be elevated to a status we may not even want because it would disrupt the quality of an anonymous life.

The fact that Jesus grew in wisdom as well as physical stature within the town limits of Nazareth can be life-giving to parents today who perhaps feel they have to expose their children to violin, trampoline, and karate lessons in order for the children to become well-rounded and "normal." I remember trying and trying to get one of our sons into the well-regarded "gifted and talented" program at his elementary school. His scores on a plethora of tests did not qualify him to gain entrance into having the best teachers, the best resources, the best of everything. We feared that he would miss out, be less than his peers. Yet now, years later, we see him rising above his peers because he paid the price of sheer work and determination to make good grades despite not going through the elite program.

A documentary that swept the world in 2010 compared the early childhood lives of four different babies raised in four different cultures around the world. All the parents loved their respective children but raised them in ways shaped by their different cultures. It appeared to me that the most contented child was the one raised in a third-world village, without electricity, television, and soccer leagues—something like Nazareth perhaps.¹⁷



The weeks, months, and years of menial work taught Jesus responsibility. The cutting and sanding of a bench became a source of pride and accomplishment. As we know later in Jesus' life, when He was referred to as a "carpenter" (Mark 6:3), the word used meant much more than a furniture maker. Mark's word choice

reveals that Jesus was a highly skilled and trained craftsman, like an engineer or perhaps a designer of fine woodworks used in public buildings.

The fruit of those long, hidden years grew in His soul like a fine leather glove fitting a hand. He learned to be Himself and own His true identity by accepting and loving Himself. Psychologist Walter Trobisch wrote, "It is an established fact that nobody is born with the ability to love himself." Trobisch continues, "Self-love is either acquired or it is non-existent."¹⁸ Real and healthy love is never gained through accomplishment, performance, or fulfilling tasks, however great they may be. These are the lessons learned by living with anonymity instead of fame, of living in obscurity rather than trying to be in the limelight all the time.

It's interesting that human beings require the longest maturation time of all living mammals. A dog is weaned and ready to be on its own in a matter of weeks. So it is with a cat. A horse takes longer, a bear even longer; but human beings, we take years. Sociologists tell us that eighteen years of age is the normal time for some form of leaving the nest of home. Eighteen years of being formed, shaped, and instilled with values, ways, and traditions that help us through life. Our sense of identity and security is grounded in these important years, and nothing replaces them. Yet while we may feel that some of our upbringing actually malformed or hurt us, we know that true change in our transformation process does not happen quickly. Old habits and old ways die hard, and this is true in the spiritual life as well.

The ability to accept that our hidden, anonymous years are God ordained takes the pressure off. We can lay down the burden

of always trying to make something happen, and we can focus on smelling the roses of today. The secret of the hidden years is allowing God to reveal our beauty, worth, and purpose in His time. And we have to remember that His time is usually not our time.

In the Jesus life, living in anonymity does not pertain to covering up shameful acts or hurtful memories. Embracing our hidden years is God's way of growing and developing His people to be like Jesus. What was good and right for Jesus is good and right for those who follow Him. We learn to accept the fact that anonymous and obscure seasons are one of God's ways of helping us live the Jesus life. Hidden spaces are sacred spaces. They should not be discounted but embraced!

OPPOSING FORCES TO LIVING IN OBSCURITY

Today's technology allows anyone to become famous. Consider these statistics:

- Today 96 percent of Generation Y has joined a social network.
- Social media has overtaken porn as the number one activity on the web.
- One out of eight couples married in the United States last year met via social media.
- The following mediums took these many years to reach 50 million users: radio (38 years), TV (13 years), Internet (4 years), iPod (3 years). Facebook added 100 million users in fewer than 9 months. iPhone applications hit 1 billion in 9 months.

- If Facebook were a country, it would be the fourth largest in the world between the United States and Indonesia.¹⁹

Parents in Colorado faked a flying-saucer scenario for their young son who supposedly was kidnapped by aliens. Millions of Americans were glued to their televisions to see what was going to happen.

A woman had octuplets and grabbed the next tier of fame by appearing on entertainment shows and being interviewed by some of the most respected newscasters in the world.

A glamorously dressed couple crashed a White House state dinner. Somehow they had gone through several layers of protection from the Secret Service, Marine Guards, and the White House's social secretary who managed the guest list. Within moments, this couple uploaded pictures of themselves standing next to the president of the United States and the prime minister of India.

Fifteen minutes of fame can propel a previously unknown person into book deals, television appearances, and the glamorous lifestyle of the rich and famous.

Our culture shapes us into believing that people who live anonymous, obscure lives must be missing out. If there were anything interesting in their lives, surely they would have been "discovered." The condition of being unknown—whether in athletics, music, business, politics, or even in church—seems like a total waste of one's life. Leaving a legacy of obscurity and anonymity seems so inefficient in our perpetual quest for recognition.

GRANDEUR, GREATNESS, AND GLORY

The temptation to be famous is as old as Satan's cunning enticement of Jesus, when he promised grandeur, greatness, and glory if Jesus would only bow to him. Matthew's account of the temptation (4:3-9) records a threefold temptation: Jesus was challenged to meet His own needs first (turn rocks into bread), perform a spectacular stunt (jump from the spire of the temple), and do something powerful (rule over kingdoms and relish their splendor).

The temptation of grandeur, greatness, and glory is fueled by a culture bent and obsessed on exploiting the heart and exposing the soul. I live in Colorado where the regal Rocky Mountains are the pride and joy for those of us fortunate to live here. More than fifty of the peaks are over 14,000 feet in elevation. Die-hards make it their goal to climb all the "14ers." Pikes Peak, at 14,110 feet, dominates the landscape around Colorado Springs, and you can see it as soon as you leave the Denver smog to head toward our retreat. About seventy-five miles away, Mt. Princeton stands at 14,197 feet outside the cozy mountain town of Buena Vista.

The 14ers are famous. I have a T-shirt with all of their names painted on the back. But what about the mountains that are a mere 13,000 feet high? What about the ones that didn't quite make the list of mountains to be conquered? Is their glory not as great? How about us? What if we don't meet the standards, pad the resume, inflate our egos by self-promotion? Will we miss out?

I've come to realize that people are like these mountains in my state. Some are better known. Some are the objects of songs, poems, and legends. We quote pastors, authors, politicians, and athletes when they are well-known and in the news. Yet how many of these

famous people could have ascended to the pinnacle of their careers and successes were it not for the other teammates, colleagues, and ordinary, not-quite-as-successful people who made it possible?

For every great athlete, there are relatives and friends who support him or her. For every best-selling recording star, there are lesser-known musicians and singers who provide backup, making the artist sound better. For every gifted leader, there is a gifted staff that works behind the scenes. There is always a vice-somebody who stands in the corner while the president gets the accolades. There is always an assistant who remains assisting rather than assuming a position with more demands, more pressure, and more running on empty.

Living in obscurity runs countercultural in a world that is hyped by the thirst for fame. Paul's words to the followers of Jesus in Rome help us here:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity...

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best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Rom. 12:1-2)

God works in us and is intent to develop the Jesus life—and “well-formed maturity”—in us through the obscure times in our lives. Our culture will shout to us and taunt us to believe that the hidden and anonymous seasons of our lives are wasted. However, no time is wasted in the Jesus life.

So what happens within us when we embrace obscurity?

THE HIDDEN LIFE GOD SHAPES

When we read the Bible, we meet many characters whose lives and hearts were shaped not by the limelight or through fame and fortune but by living out ordinary, if not hidden, lives.

Consider the years of hiddenness Joseph endured in Pharaoh's prison (Gen. 39). Forsaken by his siblings and wrongfully accused by the wife of a government official, Joseph was sent to prison for years. Though gifted and popular, Joseph was incarcerated, and we might assume that those years were wasted for him. But that was not the case. Prison bars morphed what might have been character flaws of arrogance and self-conceit into strength, endurance, and fortitude—qualities that helped Joseph become a great leader. Surely in this time, the faith of Joseph deepened and his trust was anchored in the sovereignty of God. Joseph was later freed and reunited with the brothers who had betrayed him, and that was when Joseph offered one of the most important truths we can anchor our lives to in times of unwanted hiddenness. He told his brothers, “You intended to harm me [force me into the obscurity of a prison and even have me

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killed], but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20 NIV).

Also consider Moses. Raised in a privileged status by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses knew nothing of a hidden life when he was young. Yet later as an adult, Moses committed murder, causing him to flee into obscurity. Moses was in the wilderness when he heard God's name for the very first time in the midst of the inextinguishable burning bush (Ex. 2—3). He was on the *backside* of a mountain, in a secluded place—perhaps a requirement for God to manifest His true self to Moses and to us. Without the fanfare of human companions and in the midst of nothing but wilderness and a herd of bleating sheep, the ground became holy and transforming for Moses.

Consider David when he was a young shepherd who simply wandered as the last born of his father's sons, moving his sheep from pasture to pasture to allow them to feed on the green grass while his soul feasted by still waters and in solitude. There in obscurity he wrote the most beloved poems and prayers used by lovers of God everywhere. He was inspired and imagined the lush pastures, the quiet, still waters, the healing balm of nature when he was alone. Obscurity taught David something that ruling a kingdom never could. The sweetness of his alone times shaped his heart, molded his character, and formed his thoughts. There his aloneness was assuaged by the presence of Another. His heart was touched. His soul was nourished, and he gained perspective on how life really is and needs to be. David knew what we need to know: Solitude and stillness create the pathway that leads to knowing God and knowing our true selves.

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Elijah fled into the desert after a mighty feat on Mount Carmel, where he accomplished a spiritual wonder and the prophets of Baal were killed (1 Kings 18). Immediately after this act, Elijah ran for his life and entered a desert experience. Here he heard the "gentle whisper" of God that spoke to him. He did not hear this in activity, spiritual feats, the astounding works of miraculous fire, or wind and earthquakes, but in a place of obscurity.

When the apostle Paul was converted after persecuting and murdering many followers of Jesus, he went into the desert of Arabia for *three years*. In that secluded sandy desert, Paul's soul was shaped and reshaped. He emerged from this hidden time transformed and with his heart now set on a mission. Everything changed for Paul through this experience.

Stillness leads to knowledge, which reveals God. It's that simple, yet our loud and fast-moving culture would fear the stillness that makes the soul come alive and aware.

ISOLATION, WILDERNESS, AND HIDDENNESS OFFER LIFE-CHANGING LESSONS

Words such as *obscurity*, *wilderness*, and *desert* may at first conjure up unappealing meanings for us. But what we learn is that being hidden, having an extended time in wilderness, or living an obscure life can have transforming value for us. Rather than fearing such times or rejecting such seasons of life as ineffective, we can learn how utterly life altering they can be.

God uses times of what may be to us unwanted isolation to accomplish what only living in obscurity can do. God uses obscurity to shape and mold us for greater things that we are clearly not aware of in the midst of such a season.

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Modern stories remind us of God's using seasons of life to shape the minds of great leaders. Nelson Mandela spent years in a South African prison and Alexander Solzhenitsyn in Russian labor camps. Their writings have influenced the thinking of thousands and helped reform governments. Their lessons were learned behind bars and in obscurity.

In the 1970s missionaries were thrown out of Ethiopia during the Communist regime. Church leaders were imprisoned and churches shut down. Yet church historians now know that the real, explosive growth of the church happened precisely in what appeared to be the darkest time. Christians began to meet in house churches, and thousands were added to their numbers. After the Communist regime fell, the church rose out of the darkness strong and massive. What appeared to be the death sentence was actually the breath of air igniting the entire country to turn to God through Jesus Christ.

In recent decades, Eugene Peterson has written dozens of books. He is a popular speaker at conferences, and his translation of the Bible into our everyday, vernacular language, *The Message*, has made him one of the most influential Christian thinkers in the world today. Yet Peterson did not always live a recognized life. He grew up in Kalispell, Montana, not in the suburbs of some sprawling megacity where fame and notoriety lie around every corner. He lived in the obscurity of the Montana wilderness. He was the son of a butcher and, as a young boy, learned his father's trade. Feeling the call into ministry, Peterson spent more than twenty years pastoring a relatively small church in Maryland. There he pastored people from cradle to grave, married couples, buried friends, and attended elder meetings.

Yet something else happened while Peterson lived his ordinary life as a pastor. He began to write out of a need to help people understand the ways of God. Being in a smaller church provided the setting to formulate his thinking, shape his language, and sense a great need for people everywhere. There the idea of translating the Bible into everyday language that real men and women speak was birthed in him. What resulted was *The Message*—one of the most popular versions of the Bible in contemporary times.

Pastors may live in obscure locations, but no pastor or public figure lives a truly anonymous life. My twenty-five years in the pastorate have seasoned my soul to learn ways of being obscure—especially when I pastored large churches in small towns where everyone seemed to know who I was. To help me find my grounding and to enjoy nature more, our family began to camp. We loved to go into national forests and get lost among the tall oaks and whispering pines. At night we knew only the fox or the hooting owl. Those experiences have become the most memorable for our sons. We all gained more in those forests than we realized at the time.

After I left the pastorate, my family moved to Colorado, where our friends and donors helped us purchase a thirty-five-acre working ranch. It was our vision to begin a small and intimate retreat in the midst of God's beautiful world, a place where people could come to do the much-needed work of the soul. The big red barn on this property was once the home to cows and llamas, pigs and goats. But our vision required this old barn to be transformed into a place to retreat. The leaders who come, some of whom are well-known and widely recognized, retreat to this barn and spill out their lives—sometimes

in the wake of an affair, getting fired, being betrayed by a staff member, or the death of a dream. There in that hidden, old red barn I have seen pride melt, brokenness assuaged, betrayed hearts find one another once more, and those who felt dead when they arrived at the retreat come to life again. It truly is amazing to have witnessed the transformation of men and women.

But often I would drive home and think, *No one will ever really know what I have done today. No one will ever know who I have been with today. No one will ever see the results of my day's work.* I'd go home to my wife and not be able to share with her because of my promise of confidentiality to our guests. My work in obscurity somehow seems to cultivate a secret desire within me for people to know what I've really done. In that barn I have had to lay down my pride, crucify my smugness, and fillet open my heart of arrogance in the midst of piles of cow manure. Somehow it became appropriate and often funny for me to look around and say, "Has my life come down to this, to my workplace being a barn and my pulpit a manger?"

Anonymity is not a bad circumstance. Obscurity is not something we should run from. Isolation is not a disease. These three realities are tools of truth that God uses to shape the souls of every one of His sons and daughters.

LIFE LESSONS FROM ANONYMITY

What benefit is there in long seasons of anonymity? There is perhaps no greater list of virtues of these benefits than those from the apostle Paul when he described the fruit of the Spirit—the manifestations of the Spirit working in someone:

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But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. (Gal. 5:22-23)

The fruit Paul listed is not instantly grown then microwaved in some kind of church-made gadget. No, this kind of fruit is cultivated by doing repeated tasks in loving relationships, guided by people in the know who are older, wiser, and more mature. An exuberance or joy about life is not instantly gained. We learn exuberance by trial and error, seasons of sadness, evaluating our regrets, and lamenting the important things we might have lost along the way. We recognize that a "basic holiness that permeates things and people" is not just a doctrinal statement we commit to memory. Seasons of serving as a vice president or a team member rather than the chair offer time for us to grow character and develop a solid integrity. They teach us to learn by watching rather than by having burnouts in our careers because we were promoted before we were really ready for the responsibility. We become our true selves in such seasons, and again, this realization runs counter to our culture, which demands we get "there" quickly.

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We learn to see things differently in times of being hidden. We open ourselves up to the sacredness of other people's souls and learn to value, protect, and nourish life in every form and in every way possible. We learn loyal commitments through giving up when we should not have and letting go of something or someone when we should never have. We find that "marshaling our energies wisely" is good when we burn out too fast, fade too quickly, or give up before we reach the finish line. We learn to endure. We learn patience. We grow this sacred stuff within, and that is the righteousness the Bible speaks of.



Henri Nouwen said,

Hiddenness is an essential quality of the spiritual life. Solitude, silence, ordinary tasks, being with people without great agendas, sleeping, eating, working, playing ... all of that without being different from others, that is the life that Jesus lived and the life he asks us to live.²⁰

We are called not only to live by the great teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, to obey the great commandments that Jesus gave, to remember the needy, and to extend the grace and compassion of God to them. We are also called to live a hidden life, a life of obscurity. Jesus calls us to the very life He lived in this way. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, He taught everyone to do life the way He was

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doing life, and He was specific and practical in how He fleshed this out. As you read the words of Jesus, circle or mark the specific areas where He encouraged living the way of anonymity:

Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding. When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—"playactors" I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

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The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. (Matt. 6:1-8)

I have to admit something to you here. Reading these words endears me to Jesus. I'm drawn to Him because He nails it on the head for us. He points out how ludicrous our culture and life can be when we try to make our lives—even our spiritual lives—something to be noticed.

As a not-for-profit Christian ministry, we've applied for dozens of grants to help us in our work. While I was writing this very chapter, we were delighted to receive word from one family foundation that they are giving us a grant to help us with our retreat center! However, one of the stipulations to receiving the grant stood out to me. The foundation wants us to agree that we never reveal or share their names regarding this gift. This is what they requested:

Please acknowledge that our participation in this project will be treated confidentially and that you will not use plaques, memorials, press releases, or any public documents to disclose our involvement. When discussing the project with third parties, we

ask that you simply refer to us as interested friends of the ministry.

LEARNING TO LIVE IN OBSCURITY

Here are some ideas to seed your thinking and help spark your creativity about establishing your own ways of learning to live with obscurity as Jesus did.

1. Do a postmortem²¹ on a season of obscurity, wilderness, and anonymity that you've experienced in the past. Ask yourself the three questions following this paragraph. Journal your responses, and get together with a few of your friends, asking them to do the same; then share your experiences. See what common ground might surface among you for insights, lessons, and encouragement.
 - a. What do you think God was up to in your season of obscurity?
 - b. What lessons did you gain from this time?
 - c. What honest feelings surfaced in this time about God, yourself, friends, and your faith?
2. A sabbatical is an extended time of being unplugged and unavailable and ceasing from your routine and normal life. It can be a week, a month, a quarter of a year, or longer. If you were to plan your own sabbatical right now, what would you see yourself doing and not doing?

- Where would you be? What resources would you take with you? Could you make this happen in the next phase of your life? Why or why not?
3. Read Shelley Trebesch's *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* with your group or class, and plan a time to share your insights and observations.
 4. What are some creative ways that you can be secluded for a while? Take a week and unplug yourself from technology and people, and be alone with God. Or consider a twenty-four-hour silent retreat with a few friends, but be careful to remain totally silent during the time. At the end come together and share your insights and feelings about the experience. Try it for longer and see what happens.
 5. Interview someone you know who has experienced an extended time of wilderness and anonymity. Ask the person what he or she learned. Find out what the person found valuable and what he or she regretted. What did the person learn about God after that time?
 6. Read a biography of someone who has written about an experience of isolation. See what insights you can glean from the person's experience and how his or her story can inform your own.²²