

<a href="#">A 2Epiphany</a>	<p><b>Intimate Ally</b></p> <p>John 1.35-46</p> <p>by Tim Isbell</p>	<p>Preached 1/13/2008</p>
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Thesis: Soul satisfaction is available from only one source; it requires the soaking in of scripture, silence, solitude, and prayer.

## God designed us for soul satisfaction.

We cannot live long-term with dissatisfied souls. If we don't find soul satisfaction in God and his goodness, we will take it into our own hands and look elsewhere. That's why a dissatisfied soul makes sin look good.

Dallas Willard wrote, "Soul satisfaction and transformation is possible if we are willing to do one thing. And that is to rearrange our lives around the practices Jesus engaged in to receive life and power from the Father." These Christian practices are the path to a satisfied soul. There are lists of them, sometimes grouped into practices of abstinence and of engagement. Some are delightful from the start; others are an acquired taste. Some are universals; some are specific for you/me.

### I've found four practices especially helpful in developing a satisfied soul.

#### **1. Solitude (a practice of abstinence)**

For a time, withdraw from people, relationships, and demands. Do this for 15-30 minutes a day, or consider a half-day a week, or a 1-2-night retreat once a year. It's a time to get alone with God and let him free us from bondage to things and what people think about us. Solitude feels inefficient, like an enormous waste of time. We seek a profound experience with God, but such experiences are rare. However, we need to withdraw from people to re-engage with them, serve them, bless them, and affirm them.

Solitude is also essential for Bible study, prayer, and private worship.

#### **2. Silence, in the presence of others (a practice of abstinence)**

Silence prepares us to hear God's voice and receive revelation and guidance.

When we choose not to exercise our right to speak, our minds and hearts stop formulating how to answer, explain, justify, or promote ourselves. We are free to just "be" in the presence of another and respond to their initiative. It is a good practice with people; it is an excellent practice with God. God is the initiator in our lives; we are the responders.

*Dallas Willard was teaching a philosophy class at USC when a friend was sitting in. Near the end, a student made a condescending comment. Dallas Willard's response: "Well, this is probably a good place to end for today. I'll see you all in class next week."*

*Later, Dallas' friend asked, "What were you doing? Why didn't you cut that student off at the knees?"*

*Willard: "I'm practicing the discipline of not having the last word."*

### **3. Prayer (a practice of engagement)**

It's not reciting a list. It's spending a few minutes with an intimate ally.

### **4. Reading/reflecting on scripture (A practice of engagement)**

I mean more than just reading and studying. I mean reading and reflecting with an open heart for God to speak.

## **A personal example**

I'm a bit shy about this. However, I trust it's okay to share a deeper glimpse into my private life with God. It's not a prescription for how your prayer life should be. If you are a mom of preschoolers, you probably can't do what I'm about to describe. If you are the husband of a Christian wife, one of the most precious gifts you can give her is some time to be alone with God. You'll discover that it's one of the best things you can give your marriage, too. Few of us learn this in the first decades of marriage.

In each season of life, we do what we can to spend time alone with God. So take from my sharing what helps you; discard the rest.

### **Last Wednesday, God woke me early.**

After about a 30-minutes, I couldn't get back to sleep. When I awake thinking about people or projects, I've learned that God is awakening me to pray about these. Other times, God seems to be shaking the covers, saying, "Tim, get up, let's take a walk." I've come to interpret these as invitations to spend some time with my intimate ally.

So that morning, I got up. It was cold, so I put on some long underwear. It was too dark to walk the creek, so I read [daily lectionary scriptures](#), including Isaiah 43 – 46. As I read/reflect, a couple of recurring themes struck me...

#### ***First/Last/only, no other.***

*Isaiah 43:10-11 (NLT) ... understand that I alone am God. There is no other God— there never has been, and there never will be. I, yes I, am the Lord, and there is no other Savior.*

*Isaiah 44:6-8 (NLT) ... "I am the First and the Last; there is no other God. Who is like me? Let him step forward and prove to you his power. Let him do as I have done since ancient times when I established a people and explained its future. Do not tremble; do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim my purposes for you long ago? You are my witnesses—is there any other God? No! There is no other Rock—not one!"*

*Isaiah 45:20-23 (NLT) What fools they are who carry around their wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save! ... For there is no other God but me, a righteous God and Savior... Every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess allegiance to me."*

*First/Last/only, no other...*

***Then I noticed another theme: I called you by name.***

*Isaiah 43:1-2 (NLT) but now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine."<sup>2</sup> When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.*

*Isaiah 48:10 (NLT)<sup>10</sup> I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.*

***In the passage, God says three things:***

- 1. I alone am God; there is no other.*
- 2. I called you by name.*
- 3. I can satisfy your soul.*

***Then I remembered the lection reading for Sunday, today: John 1.***

*Same three takeaways!*

***By then, the sun was rising, so I headed for the creek.***

My circuit takes 40 minutes. I spent it talking with God about the passage and enjoying the beauty in the cold.

I asked for some personal help.

- Help me trust you today in everything, especially in matters of soul satisfaction, growing your church, and giving life today.
- Help me to choose RFC/S (short for Robin (my wife), Family, Church over Sin)
- Holy Spirit, please help me affirm, bless, serve, and point others to you today.

I prayed about the world and national affairs.

- Be present in the New Hampshire primary and help us choose a good next president.
- Israel/Palestine - realized I'm in no position to give God advice on that so I just told him I trusted him, and asked him to help people in these places come into a full and saving relationship w/ him. And I prayed for their courage, wisdom, and willingness to forgive.

I prayed for the meetings of the day and the people.

I talked with God about the people in my life.

I asked for his presence and guidance in ministries around the church.

I thanked God for waking me for the brisk, chilly walk, the coyote, and life for the day.

***I returned home needing another 6 min, so I walked the Circle (1/3 mile).***

God reminded me of the contrast of walking the circle 2.5 years ago when I was recovering from a heart attack and surgery. When I couldn't make it all the way around, I was afraid to go downhill for fear I couldn't make it back up. God reminded me how he eventually built my strength to make the 1/3 mile circle, kicking a golf ball. Remembering how this intimate ally woke me early to do 2 miles in 40 minutes on a cold morning. And I can do it without chest pain!

I told God I really don't want to return to kicking a golf ball, but then realized that he was walking with me the last time, which made it tolerable. Indeed, there is some fondness in remembering how he carried me along in those days.

***I took a shower and prepared to head for the office.***

But I knew it would be a long day. My last meeting would end at about 10 pm. Before leaving home, I asked Robin, my other close ally, to pray for me. Particularly, I asked her to pray for

- Stamina for a long day.
- Relational graciousness with everyone I'd meet.

Late at night, when I came home, Robin asked how my day had gone.

Two days later was a similar day for her: several appointments in the morning and a Youth party in the evening. It was a role reversal. At the end of that day, we stayed up late as she told me about her excellent day.

There's something special about starting my day with solitude, silence, scripture, and prayer. I don't have this much time most days, but I need to find some time, even if it's only 30 minutes every day. Part of that is asking God to accompany me through the day, to speak life into it, to breathe his new life into it.

## **Last story, Gordon MacDonald and the NYC Bus Drivers**

*(I'm not sure which of Gordon MacDonald's books I got this story from, but probably The Life God Blesses.)*

Gail & Gordon MacDonald lived in NYC for a few years. They lived on Roosevelt Island. They made many friends, including several men/women who were Roosevelt Island bus drivers.

Occasionally, Gordon/Gail would invite the drivers to breakfast. The ones who came were usually Christ-followers, so the camaraderie was strong.

"You have an interesting job, Gordon," one driver said. "You travel a lot, seem to know a lot of people, and always appear to enjoy yourself."

"I couldn't be happier."

"Well, your job is a lot better than ours. You help people. All we do is drive these buses up and down the island. What a life!"

For the next few minutes, the conversation took other directions, and then I said, "I have an idea for all of you."

“What’s that?”

“Look, I believe that God will make any job interesting if we believe he wants to use us. Here’s my suggestion. Tomorrow morning, before anyone gets on your buses, close the door, face all the empty seats, pray a few moments, then loudly say, ‘In the name of Jesus, I declare this bus a sanctuary for the rest of my shift. And I declare that all the people who enter this sanctuary will experience the love of Christ through me, whether they realize it or not.’”

The drivers looked blank. NYC buses as sanctuaries? Then someone said, “I could do that.” And others added, “Me, too.”

For the next few weeks, every time Gordon/Gail climbed on a bus driven by one of the drivers, they’d lean over and whisper, “Are you driving a bus or a sanctuary today?”

A few months later, one of the drivers met Gordon for an early breakfast, and they had a chance to talk. “Do you know that you changed my life?”

“How’s that?”

“Remember the sanctuary-bus stuff? I’ve been doing it. It has made a huge difference in how I do my job.”

Then, the driver began sharing anecdotes about how this has impacted passengers.

### **Soul satisfaction is available.**

We will only find it as we become intimate allies with God. Invariably means soaking in scripture. And it takes times of silence, solitude, and interactive prayer. Maybe not every day, but a few days a week.

### **Prayer time ...**

*(This is a good sermon to wrap up with a time of reading a short scripture and inviting the congregation to reflect on it for a minute or two. Then close in prayer.)*

<b>Other resources:</b>
Click on the link for the <a href="#">Google Presentation</a> . (Similar to PowerPoint)