

The Private Life of Jesus

Written by Bill Perkins

I have a reoccurring dream in which I'm running as hard as I can. Sometimes I'm running barefoot across an open field of green grass in the country. Or, on an asphalt street through a crowded neighborhood. Often I'm playing football and trying to outrun defenders.

What makes this dream troubling isn't where I'm running but how. Because while I'm running hard, I'm running slowly—like I'm running on soft sand and struggle to lift my feet.

When I wake, I feel weak. I don't mean physically, but as a man. And that's how I often feel when I think about prayer. I want to enjoy prayer like a fleet-footed runner enjoying a race. But when I pray I'm often slowed by the weight of my laziness and the buzz of distractions. And then I feel guilty because I haven't prayed long enough, or often enough, or with enough fervency.

I think many people, including the disciples have experienced such feelings. Remember in Gethsemane when Peter, James and John repeatedly fell asleep while Jesus prayed. And this after the Lord urged Peter to “watch and pray” (Mark 14:38). No wonder they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1).

The disciples not only saw Jesus slip away and pray, they heard him pray throughout the day. Both the way he prayed and the effects of his prayers stood in contrast with what the disciples had seen in other religious leaders. Watching the Pharisees pray would have been like watching a troupe of clowns perform for each other in front of a mirror.

The Private Prayers of Jesus

The prayers of Jesus were authentic and personal. Even when he prayed publicly his words expressed a familiarity with God. And he often prayed when alone. Jesus prayed to worship and receive comfort, insight, guidance and strength from his Father. As I've read through the four Gospels I've noted:

- He would often slip away to the wilderness and pray (Luke 5:16).
- He prayed in the morning before a busy day of ministry (Mark 1:35).
- He walked to a mountain to pray after feeding the 5,000 and before walking on water (Mark 6:45).
- He prayed all night before calling his disciples (Luke 6:12-16).
- Jesus prayed alone before asking his disciples, “Who do men say I am?” (Luke 9:18).
- Jesus was praying alone before the disciples asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).
- In Gethsemane, before his arrest, Jesus prayed alone with Peter, James and John close by (Mark 14:32-52).

Solitude Erases Distractions

Solitude isn't something we westerner's seek. While we may occasionally get away from other people, we're seldom free of distracting sounds and images. It seems we're addicted to the constant stimulation of cell phones, radios, the Internet and TV. Sometimes we get away so we can spend time in solitude *with our toys*.

Jesus must have battled distractions as people swarmed around him soaking in his wisdom and seeking his touch. As his fame spread he became like a modern-day celebrity followed by adoring crowds. Yet, somehow Jesus managed to slip away to a quiet place to pray--even before and after his busiest days.

Adapted from The *Jesus Experiment* by Bill Perkins