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In Praise of a Hidden Life

Tuesday, January 18, 2011 | Written by Lenya Heitzig

I like hidden things. I like secret compartments in roll-top desks, ivy-covered doors in garden walls, root systems under trees, ancient treasures scattered on the ocean floor, catacombs etched beneath massive cities, lockets bearing tiny photos, money belts, and secret doors in paneled libraries.

In summer, I am reminded of the hidden life of flowers and plants -- out of sight during the winter, they gather energy to push toward the sun in vibrant boldness as if to say, "Here I am, behold my lovely face!"

Lately, our culture seems to have become very *face* conscious. We tend to show it all and tell it all. I'm okay with that -- up to a point. In fact, my favorite new TV show, *Person of Interest*, is about exposing and preventing hidden, harmful plans. Its two main characters, Reese, a presumed-dead ex-CIA agent, teams up with Finch, a brilliant billionaire who created a software that identifies innocent people about to be involved in a crime. Brains and brawn combine to rescue the good and make sure the bad get what's coming to them. They do this by way of an oober-sophisticated software called "the machine." The *machine* can pretty much see everyone and everything, everywhere.

This makes for good TV, but it leaves me with a queasy feeling, because in our current-day society, it's more fact than fiction.

I do my part playing into the public life in all the usual ways. I use a cell phone, credit/debit cards, social media and such. There are obvious pros and cons to the transparency that comes from technology, and while it's certainly here to stay, it's our responsibility to manage it. We usually ease into the transparency of technology, but before we know it, we are linked, pinned, face-booked, and friended on a dozen different levels.

So, we've got the public life covered, but what about the hidden life?

It's interesting to see how often the Bible leads and encourages us to cultivate a hidden life with Christ. When I first put my faith in God, this extraordinary new dimension to my ordinary life captivated me. I knew, as a believer, I was supposed to have a "relationship" with God, but I was confused. What did that really mean? What did it look like? Weren't *relationships* between two people who talked to each other, and sat down for lunch every now and then? Even though I didn't know "how" to have a relationship with the Lord, I knew I wanted one.

As I regularly read my Bible, I slowly began to develop an expectation of receiving something personal from God. Sometimes a small part of Scripture would pop off the page in relevance to my life, or I would find myself in tears, as on the day I first read about Jesus raising Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter from the dead. He didn't stand back and grandly pronounce her to life; instead, He lifted her small, lifeless hand and said, "Talitha, cumi," which means *Little lamb, arise*. What gentleness and power! What tender love! I was beginning to know this Jesus.

I wanted, somehow, to capture this blossoming (shall I say it?) *relationship* with God. So I started the simplest practice, one I maintain to this day. I began keeping a notebook with my Bible, and I would write down a Scripture when it spoke to me. Or sometimes, I would write my prayers. Other times, I spilled out a hurt that I couldn't share with anyone else. I was forming my bond to Him through reading about His character and relationships with the people in the Bible, and memorializing it in my journal.

Early on in this exciting journey of discovery, the Lord gave me a guiding verse to bring me into closer and deeper communion with Him:

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:2-3)

I began to treasure this hidden life and discovered that I was not a religious person; I was simply a devoted believer. Intimacy with Jesus zaps the religion right out of belief.

The wonderful truth is that when we get alone with God, we emerge with all the benefits of intimacy without the pain of loneliness. Yet this relationship can only be cultivated and deepened in private. In that "alone togetherness," we are able to see God through the lens of His Word -- the way He prefers to be known. "Be still," He tells us, "and know that I am God."

Be still. Not so easy these days, is it? It's becoming particularly challenging to be still and focused in our current day and age of multiple distractions. I know there are people who download the Bible on their various devices, but for the purpose of developing my hidden life, I leave the computer on my desk, and read the Word in an actual, hold-in-my-hands book. I take up a spiral-bound notebook and a pen, and as I copy a Scripture, or I write a prayer, I have a head-to-hand-to-heart connection. It is only when we quietly seek Him that He can reveal the hidden stubbornness and conceit that separates us from Him. And as He works us through those obstacles, and finally has our attention, He begins to teach us, expound His word, and direct our individual path.

As God would have it, the result of a hidden life with Christ ultimately manifests Christ in every aspect of our outward life. Whatever the method, getting alone with Him in an attitude of hungry anticipation, with distractions out of reach, is the key to a tryst of the soul and a lovely hidden life.