

## A Silent Retreat

A few years ago I began a new discipline of quarterly Personal Prayer Retreats. Through a friend I found a Catholic Retreat Center in Wexford, PA, where for a donation pastors were welcomed to enjoy their facilities to spend time in a private prayer retreat. Since donations fit my budget I signed up. The day I arrived they welcomed me warmly, howbeit in whispered voices. The director clarified that I was welcome to stay on one condition; “That you speak to no one but God while here.” She explained that I had arrived in the midst of their annual Retreat of Silence where there were ten other people dedicating the week to prayer alone. So I was introduced to three days of holy silence. Wow! What a wonderful experience! I came away craving for more and was forever addicted to “Jesus Alone” prayer retreats.

For the past nine years I have tried to maintain the discipline of a Personal Prayer Retreat at least three times a year. All too often I fail because I find myself addicted to my ministry instead of to my Savior. Over the past three years I have attended the College of Prayer at Beulah Beach as part of that discipline. But I find it too much talk and teaching for my tastes, so I beg out of many meetings to meet with Jesus alone. They are gracious enough to ignore my absence at all the meetings knowing I have a higher appointment. These times at Beulah Beach have enabled me to meet with brothers and sisters of like mind, to learn their prayer disciplines, and to share our prayer experiences together. It has been a life-changing experience.

My present church ministry began by explaining my prayer disciplines to the congregation and how these times with God benefit them. Therefore, they were to expect that three times a year I would not be available to them, but I would be gone for 2-3 days of intense seeking after God. The Governing Board has acknowledged and approved this priority on prayer and has gladly paid for reasonable expenses related to such visits with God.

When we hired our youth pastor we required the same of him. The Board mandated him to spend an extra few days at the New Pastors Orientation in Colorado Springs to get alone with God to fast and pray for a vision for our youth ministries, and paid all the associated expenses. Was it worth it? Yes, Paul returned from his mountain experience like Moses with face glowing with the presence of God, and his notebook filled with a complete vision of God’s marching orders for the youth program! Now Paul is addicted to retreating with God alone. He also keeps me accountable. When necessary we graciously get on each other’s cases for missing this prayer discipline. The other day he gently rebuked me for missing my time alone with God saying, “It’s not that you are too busy. You’ve just prioritized other things as more important than prayer.” Oooo... that hurt! But *“faithful are the wounds of a friend.”* He’s right! It’s time to get alone with God.