

The Lure of the Monastic  
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I became a Christian when I was a child – I was only seven years old. I gave my life to preaching ministry when I was fourteen. Almost immediately, I began to study the process of becoming more and more “spiritual” – what did it mean for me to give my life to God and Christ? It was a question that filled my adolescent years.

Early on in the journey, I had heard about a type of “Catholic” that I had never experienced – the monastic priest, the cloistered nun, the hermit isolated on the mountaintop, the guru who sat above others who would dispense “spiritual” wisdom. People who had withdrawn from the world to pursue their spiritual life – and nurture it without hindrance.

When I was young, I never understood how one would give up the “world” and withdraw. Why would someone give up the pleasures of this technologically advanced culture in which we live? How could one abandon social interaction with others and be completely alone? Why would an individual sequester themselves in a monastery or a convent in order to be closer to God? These were questions I could not answer...about a lifestyle I could not fathom.

And now, having journeyed in the Christian way for nearly 45 years, I think I understand. It has come to me this desire to withdraw – this desire to hide away from the world and simply be with God. There are moments I now perceive where life would be so much easier if I were a monk, in a secluded monastery on the outskirts of society.

*Abandoning the Annoying* – I find that as I live my life, drive among the people on cell-phones, shop behind people with 22 items in the 15 items or less line that I get very annoyed with people. When I am surrounded by people who don’t seem to follow the rules that I must follow – I get frustrated and annoyed. What’s even worse, is I think I should be the exemption to the rules everyone else must follow. And I long for the monastery (and being alone) so no one else would interrupt my way.

*Ignoring the Intrusive* – I remember the day when people would call and you would pick up the rotary dial phone and they would speak to you – or you wouldn’t answer it and they couldn’t even leave a message. Now with pagers, cell phones, Instagram, twitter, facebook, text messages, voicemail people are always connected – and people can intrude on your day, any day, every day at any time. And after the 12<sup>th</sup> call, the 22<sup>nd</sup> text message and 4<sup>th</sup> voicemail of the day, the monastery whispers to me – what bliss it would be to live in a cloistered environment without anyone able to intrude!

*Shunning the Sinful* – As I write this, *50 Shades of Grey*, the movie has become wildly popular. As a modern American male, in a sex-saturated society, there are so many times I long for the solitude and the simplicity of the monastery. I envision a place where there are no Victoria's Secret ads, no Budwiser (let alone Carl's Jr.) advertisements to entice to licentiousness, no inducements to act immorally or with debauchery. To be in an environment where there is not visual temptation to succumb to sin sounds simply divine.

*Rejecting the Relational* – In the 50 some odd years of my existence on this earth (not just as a Christian, but as a living and breathing human) I have discovered relationships are not easy. In fact, they are downright difficult at times. They are messy and problematic; sources of incredible joys and indescribable pains; contentious and conflicting; consoling and comforting; inspiring, encouraging, demanding, emotional, frustrating and everything in between. There are moments when the solitude of the hermit or the cloistered environment of the convent seems really desirable. Just to be alone seems like it would be one step next to heaven.

And so looking upon the circumstances of life, I find I now understand the impulse, the draw, the lure of the monastic life. To escape the temptations and annoyances of the world. To avoid the painful and problematic situations with people that often arise. To rid oneself of the modern technology just to spend some quiet time with God. All of this sounds really, really good.

But is it?

The other thing I have discovered in my spiritual journey is one that is simple: Christ has not called me to be a Christian by myself and to live morally all alone on the mountain top or to study to my heart's content in the quiet solitude of the monastery or library. He has called me to be Christian in the real world.

In the real world where temptations arise and surround our senses, Christ has called me to live ethically, morally, purely. He has called me to be holy as He is holy, when everything around me screams unholiness. Jesus (according to the scripture) was in every tempted like I am today – and he was without sin. Jesus wants me to live in holiness toward him.

In the real world where interruptions occur, people are demanding, problems arise and inconveniences happen, Christ has called me to live with a singular focus to honor him in my everything (even in the interruptions). Jesus lived with interruptions (remember the woman who touched the hem of his robe and he stopped). Jesus wants me to live in communion with him even when others are clamoring for my attention.

In the real world where people can sometimes be annoying, Christ has called me to demonstrate love, compassion, grace and understanding. Even to those who might rightly be called my enemies, Jesus has the audacity to say that I am to respond to their hostility with love and mercy. Certainly he did so and Jesus wants me to experience the growth of rubbing my life with others – and learning grace in the process.

While there are moments when I think the monastery, the convent, the mountain top would be wonderful and fantastic, I know that is not the real world where I live day to day.

True, the Sabbath command in the Scripture calls me to have moments where I am alone with God, experiencing a spiritual high, encountering the divine Spirit and listening to the voice of Christ. But the real world awaits.

The world where I must strive to hear Jesus above the din and the noise of my life.  
The world where I must reject the temptations that surround me.  
The world where I must embrace the most difficult of persons with grace.  
The world where I must embrace the most wonderful persons with patience.  
The world where I must respond to the inconveniences and interruptions with wisdom.

Yes, the monastery might be nice.  
Yet, that is not where I live...and its not where I have been called.

It might be good for some, but not for me.  
I want to be right where God wants me to be – to honor him in the moral choices of my life; to share him in the relationships of my experience and to respond to him in the course of my day. I want the Christian life – not just the monastic life.

Perhaps you will join me in simply learning to be “Christian” in the totality of your life – that is my quest today! I hope that it is yours as well!