

Where do you live?

Now I'm not talking about where you reside; where you hang your coat at night; but more along the line of where do you dwell?

I have to be honest and say that I occasionally dwell in a place that isn't too nice. It is a personal darkness that could best be described with words like depressed, dark and lonesome. When I dwell there my mind plays these tapes that tell me I am no good, that nobody likes me; that my life is meaningless.

The interesting thing about that place is that it feels familiar, almost comfortable. Sometimes it even involves sitting in a comfortable spot on the sofa, medicating myself with a bag of potato chips and watching reruns on TV.

Dwelling in that place is no good for me; but I still move in from time to time.

How about you?

Where do you live? Is there a comfortable place in the darkness where you dwell from time to time?

Let me put this in a way that is familiar this time of the year. How many of you made resolutions to eliminate something from your life in 2012? How is that going for you?

The truth is it is difficult to move out of those habits that we have learned to dwell in. We tend to fall back into comfortable old habits and patterns because that is how we are used to living.

The key to establishing new habits or patterns in our life often comes with learning to dwell/to live somewhere new; somewhere that is going to be a little uncomfortable at first but in the end is a place of new life.

So as we begin the New Year are you ready to think about where you live/dwell? Are you willing to leave behind the dark places that we often inhabit for some new digs that promise good results?

I think the disciples were dwelling in a dark place after Jesus told them that one of them would betray him. They had finished the Passover and were headed out of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knew that in a short time he would be arrested and that his disciples would scatter. So as they walked along Jesus saw branches that has been pruned and were lying on the ground.

In an agrarian culture it was this familiar image of pruned branches scattered on the ground that Jesus used to convey a very special lesson to his disciples and to us:

John 15:1-7 MSG

Did you catch what Jesus was saying? 'Live in me,' 'make yourselves at home with me and my words;' other translations use the word dwell or remain. But the message that Jesus was trying to get across to his disciples was this: when you dwell in me there is life; when you dwell apart from Jesus you lose your source of life.

Why did Jesus need to emphasize this point to the disciples? Jesus knew what was coming. The disciples would become disheartened, discouraged, even depressed; some of them even would go back to the comfortable life they once knew as fishermen. Without that one-on-one connection with Jesus he knew that their faith would be challenged. So Jesus used the image of the vine and the branches to reinforce the message: where you dwell [where you are at home] [where you live and draw your life from] determines the fruitfulness [or the lack thereof] of your life.

Isn't that true of us? You and I know how hard it is to dwell/live in a place that gives us the abundant life that Jesus promises. We think it would be so much easier to live that abundant life if only we could see Jesus. Well do you remember what Jesus said to doubting Thomas after the resurrection? "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

You see, each of us have to daily choose where we are going to live. We have to make choices each day as to where we are going to draw nourishment for our life. And based on the choices we make we can find ourselves living the abundant, fruitful life that Jesus promises us or we can feel like the pile of life-less branches that have been pruned and cast aside.

Even Jesus understood the importance of where he was living/dwelling [where he was drawing the nourishment for his life and learning how to walk in step with God]. If we go back to John 5 Jesus says: v. 19-20

Jesus lived/dwelt continually in the presence of the Father. Jesus was abiding in the example that God the Father set for Jesus; that empowered Jesus to daily live and do the will of God. And how did Jesus know the will of God? Jesus recognized the activity of God and followed the Father's example. Jesus could recognize the activity of God because Jesus spent time with the Father. And not just in heaven but on the earth- Jesus read scripture and prayed; Jesus cultivated an intimate relationship with God- Jesus dwelt/lived in constant contact with the Father.

And if it was important for Jesus to live/dwell in such an intimate relationship with His Father; how much more important is it for us to be living/dwelling in an intimate relationship with Jesus!

So how do we learn to live or dwell in Jesus so that we can experience the kind of intimate love relationship through which God reveals his will, his ways and his work? Well, the answer is really simple; it's all in this daily workbook which is at the heart of the Experiencing God adventure.

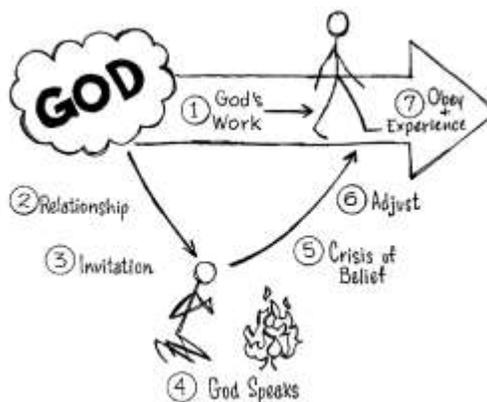
Twenty years ago I took my first journey through the Experiencing God study with members of my church. We all found it to be an insightful and challenging experience to do the daily reading, to examine the scripture lessons together and to learn how we could recognize the activity of God around us and join in God's work.

And I think that idea of joining in with what God is doing- literally knowing and doing the will of God- will be the most profound lesson for you over the next few weeks.

People are always asking me; 'How do I know the will of God for my life?' Well I think this study will teach you some profound lessons about how to Experience God and most importantly to know and live the will of God.

Take a quick look with me at this diagram of the Seven Realities that we're going to be studying so that we can learn how to know and do the will of God in our daily life. If/when you get your book this diagram is on the inside back cover.

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.



5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey Him, and He accomplishes His work through you.

Just as Jesus daily dwelt/lived in an intimate relationship with his heavenly Father and thereby did the will of God; you and I as we remain/dwell/live in a daily, intimate

relationship with Jesus will be able to recognize and join in on what God is doing around us. [check out last Sunday's sermon]

Over the next several weeks together we are going to learn to recognize the activity of God and discover that as we radically adjust our life to join God in what God is doing around us; that we will Experience God in a whole new way that will powerfully and eternally transform our life and lives of others around us.

So what happens if a bunch of disciples of Jesus suddenly begin asking how can I join in with what God is doing around me? First, people's lives are going to be changed-yours and others. I guarantee you that if you spend the time each day to dwell/live in God's Word you are going to see a gradual change in your daily life. And as your life changes so will the lives of others around you because you will make yourself available to what God is already doing in the life of people around you.

Secondly, I think you will develop an intimacy with God as you spend time in the Bible and reflect on the daily lessons and share the stories in your small groups.

What else happens? You will find yourself obeying the word of God.

And if we obey the Word of God, that will translate into our loving others and thus fulfilling the mission of God in our world.

So where do you want to dwell? Do you want dwell in that intimate relationship with Jesus from which you draw the life-giving; fruitful life that Jesus promises to those who remain grafted into the vine? Then I invite you to join the journey of learning how to know and do the will of God as together we experience God.