

cal-lus

(kal'

uhs) n.

[L., var

of cal-

lum, ha

skin] a

hardened

thickened

place on

the skin.



TWENTY YEARS of living in Southern California—San Diego, to be precise—were sufficient to develop a rather thick defense mechanism against that overpopulated, clamorous, claustrophobic community. One was obliged either to embrace the culture with unbridled enthusiasm, becoming a true believer and lifestyle advocate, or to develop a protective callus against such things as gridlock traffic; your house stacked in such close proximity to the next that one could reach over to answer the neighbor's ringing telephone; and obnoxious manners on the freeway, in the line at DMV, and in the checkout of the local grocery.

Fourteen years of living in the tranquility of the Midwest countryside have been sufficient to remove that hardened crust. Linda and I now choose to live where callus is not necessary: where the sounds are not of bickering humans, but of chattering birds and squirrels; where screeching tires have been replaced by snorting deer; where the rain is not laced with exhaust fumes.

Oh, to be sure, we have paid a price for our decision. We now are more vulnerable whenever we are out in society. Since there are still some things that must be acquired with hard cash in a store—a store often located in the big city of Des Moines—these moments suffered

without benefit of the layer of callus can be trying, painful, even panic-inducing. Even while still within the boundaries of our land, the sound of the occasional stray voice from our closest neighbor (almost a mile away) that wafts near upon a northern breeze on a quiet day, seems alien—even unnaturally amplified and strange.

Yet even with these liabilities, the decision to live here was right for us, since flesh removed of callus can also be flesh softened to the things of God. The built-up callus that permits one to live in populated society today is the same hardened crust that often deadens the touch of God upon one's soul.

Satan's Roar

The adversary is noisy.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

(1 Peter 5:8)

The roar of Satan is most often heard in the clattering cacophony of modern "civilization." He gives full voice to anything that might interrupt our communion with God. Believe it, Satan and his minions are hard at work, night and day, to drown out with noise the quiet voice of God. From the blare of the thunderous Dolby 5.1 Surround home theatre to the ringing of the nauseatingly ubiquitous cell phone; from the whining traffic of the freeway to the pre-worship nattering in

the pews; from the sounds of commerce to the roar of construction we are bombarded by Satan's noise. To be sure, none of these things are inherently satanic. But they are convenient, earth-bound implements put to use by supernatural evil. And all can insulate us from God's voice.

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

(Psalm 46:10-11 kjv)

The abiding Spirit enters us at the moment of conversion and immediately begins the softening process. He begins to work on whatever callus is there that might insulate us from communion with the Father. He systematically chips away at our anger, impatience, self-centeredness and greed, softening the heart as He steadily shapes and molds us into Christ's image. But because we still live in the world, because we must survive in a land that hates what we now represent, we keep replacing the callus the Spirit has removed.

It's a risky business, letting one's callus soften. The world today is better suited to those wearing a tough suit of armor, and it can be a brutal environment for someone more tuned to the lilt of God's voice on an evening breeze. But when He speaks in the wind rustling the trees, when the crickets and cicadas sing His praise in the heavy summer dusk, He expects us to listen.

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
(1 Kings 19:11-13 niv)

The Stillness of God's Presence

Our God has many voices; He has the right to use any of his choosing. More often than not, however, He speaks in the quietness, the softly-spoken language of the heart. God need not shout; *real* power speaks softly. So when we wish to hear what He has to say, it is best to come away from the din of this world, to a quiet place of hushed reverence.

More than the quiet nature of the locale, it is our own heart that must be softened and still for this holy communion. We begin the conversation by permitting the resident Spirit to take charge, to break through our built-up callus so that there might be a free-flowing exchange with the Father. Save for the sanctifying blood of Christ, we need nothing to stand between us, nothing to insulate us from His wrath. For He has no wrath for us, but only compassion, affection, and grace.

Thus prepared, we step out of the abusive noise of the world and into the stillness of God's presence. There not only are we comforted, forgiven, and renewed, we are energized and equipped to reenter the world *for Him*.

Sweet Privilege

The believer enjoys a sweet privilege of knowing God intimately. It is the privilege forfeited by our parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden. They chose a passing earthly delight over the eternal delight of communion with the Lord.

As believers, every day we are given the opportunity to make a similar (if not so cosmic) choice. We can embrace the things of this world, building up our callus, and thus risking insulation from God Himself. Or we can dare to remove the hardened callus, letting the Spirit soften our heart to the things of God.

When, in the morning stillness He moves, and the world falls silent in anticipation before Him, God seeks those who have dared to remove their protective shell, those who have opened themselves completely to His tender touch. dsf

Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me, than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the all for the All: so after having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not He; and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world. Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my Father, as my God: I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. I found no small pain in this exercise, and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily. I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God.

When we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least willfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God is rendered as it were natural to us.
(Brother Lawrence)