Celebrating the Life of Antony

Back in August, I wrote a Booknote on the church father Athanasius. In this note, I want to give a brief synopsis of Athanasius's writing, *The Life of Antony*.

Those who think the early monastic monks have nothing to teach us have not read *The Life of Antony*. It is a small book with a big message for ministers.

Antony, who lived in third-century Egypt, is considered the "Father of Monasticism." He was sitting in church one day when he heard Matthew 19:21 read: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven."

Antony, coming from a wealthy home, took this command of Christ literally and went home, sold his possessions, and gave the money to the poor.

He then felt called by God to a life of solitude, prayer, fasting, and conflict with the demonic realm for thirty-five years. As you might imagine, this was an intensely difficult period of his life. He subsisted on bread, salt, and water. To sleep, he lay on the ground.

After thirty-five years practicing the ascetic life, he entered his public ministry for the next forty-five years. He emerged from the desert with a pure heart and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness many conversions and healings under his ministry. Many thousands came to him for spiritual counsel during this period.

Reading this book has inspired me to take a long look at what place solitude, prayer, and fasting have in my life. I hope you will do the same.

*Dr. Barth Smith is Professor of Practical Theology in the School of Christian Ministry and Formation. He has served the students and staff of MNU and pastored the same church -- for over 30 years!*