

How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

Week 6 - Silence and Solitude

April 21, 2024

I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of confession this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: We live in a noisy, busy world. So many of our schedules are filled to the brim with activity after activity, and in those moments where our activities finally slow down, we often fill those moments with our phones and media. Our bodies are constantly moving. Our brains...constantly thinking. And we have this deep need to slow down. Henri Nouwen said in 1981, “Over the last few decades, we have been inundated by a torrent of words: words softly whispered, loudly proclaimed, or angrily screamed; words spoke, recited, or sung; words on records, in books, on walls, or in the sky; words in many sounds, many colors, or many forms; words to be heard, read, seen, or glanced at; words which flicker off and on, move slowly, dance, jump or wiggle. Words, words, words! There was a time not too long ago without radios and televisions, stop signs, yield signs, merge signs, bumper stickers, and ever-present announcements indicating price-increases or special sales.”¹ He said this in 1981! I wonder what he would say today!

Listen, I know we are all so busy, and there is very little margin in our schedules. Between work, school, extracurricular activities, and even church, there is very little time for anything else. But our spiritual formation cannot be made in a microwave. Our lives are a part of the slow work of God, and time and quiet are necessary ingredients to our becoming like Jesus. That’s why the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude are such important practices for us—especially in our world today. The Scriptures point to our finding God in the quiet. Habakkuk 2:20 says, “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” In 1 Kings 19:12 meets Elijah not in the powerful wind or earthquake or fire, but in a gentle whisper. The Lord meets us in the quiet place. Jesus models this for us as well in Luke 5:16, we read, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” And even in the end times, we see God revealing himself through silence in

¹Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1981), 57.

Revelation 8:1, "When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." We must eliminate the noise in our lives, so we can hear God more clearly.

- B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: Why is silence and solitude so uncomfortable for us today? What are some ways that you can eliminate noise in your lives?

III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

- A. What comes to mind for you when you hear the phrase "wasting time with God?" Does the idea of "wasting time" have a positive or a negative connotation in your mind? Based on today's message, how would you define (or re-phrase) the idea of "wasting time with God?"
- B. Read Luke 4:42-44. In the preceding verses, Jesus has been teaching the synagogues, casting out demons, and healing people of their sicknesses. Why do you think it was so important for Him to go to "desolate" places? How do you picture Jesus spending this time? What do you think Jesus was doing in these desolate places?
- C. Do you have a regular time of solitude? A regular time of silence? What are some of the things that make it so difficult for us to have quiet time with God?
- D. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Spend some time talking about this picture of God taking great delight in His people. What comes to mind when you read this? What does "great delight" look like? What does it sound like? What comes to mind when Zephaniah talks about God singing over His people?
- E. Solitude helps us grow in our intimacy with God. The Bible repeatedly refers to Abraham as being "a friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:21-23). What does it mean to be in friendship with God? Is it helpful to think of solitude as a way of cultivating deeper friendship with God? What does James 4:4 say about friendship with the world?
- F. Read Habakkuk 2:20. In your opinion, what is the link between our silence and God being in His holy temple?
- G. One practical suggestion is to practice 1-2 minutes of silence at various points in your day. Try this with your group. Set a timer for two minutes using someone's phone. Ask everyone to simply sit together in silence before the Lord. When the time is up, spend some time talking about what you noticed. Was it awkward? If so, why? Were you distracted? Did you notice how frantic your mind was during the silence? Do you think we naturally fill up the silence because we're afraid of silence? Take some time to talk about this together.

H. Over the next week, would you commit to finding a half hour to spend with God with no agenda? Perhaps next week, you'll have a story to share about how God enriched your life through this mustard seed of intentionality.

I. Close with some prayer time together.

IV. Invitation for the Week: Walk through the practice of Breath Prayer at least 5 times this week. Share about your experiences within the context of one of your communities (with your spouse, family, roommates, or group of friends).

A. Breath Prayer (***Invitation Video Provided***)

1. Breath prayer “reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breath him in all day long.”²
2. You’ll notice that many of our practices we have walked through begin with a focus on our breathing. That focus helps us to slow our minds and create an open disposition.
3. Breath prayer can help us to practice silence. It’s simple. If silence is new for you, begin with ten minutes. Setting a timer can help a beginner who is tempted to keep watching the clock. It lets you forget the time and settle into the quiet. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God and as your mind wanders, attend to a specific phrase.
4. As you breath in focus on a name of God, and as you breath out express a desire of your heart.
5. Here are some examples of these breath prayers:
 - a) Breathe in “Abba.” Breathe out “I belong to you.”
 - b) Breathe in, “Holy Spirit.” Breathe out, “Fall on me.”
 - c) Breathe in, “Holy One.” Breathe out, “Keep me true.”
 - d) Breathe in, “Lord.” Breathe out, “Here I am.”
 - e) Breathe in, “Jesus.” Breathe out, “Have mercy on me.”
 - f) Breathe in, “Breath of Life.” Breathe out, “breathe on me.”
 - g) Or perhaps use a one phrase from Scripture that is meaningful to you, like...
Breathe in, “Less of me.” Breathe out, “More of you.”
6. After ten minutes, reflect on what it was like for you to simply be still enough to slow your mind. Try this multiple times throughout the day—when you are surrounded with fear, overwhelmed with anxiety, or maybe even just bored. Allow this prayer to bring you back to the center.

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 233.

