

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 6 - Silence and Solitude

April 21, 2024

#### Additional Teaching Notes

Solitude and silence go together so perfectly that they are considered together. Those who seek a deeper relationship with God must seek out the recreating stillness of solitude.

## SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

### 1. Silence

Donald Whitney says in his book *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, "The Discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Sometimes silence is observed in order to read, write, pray, and so on. Though there is no outward speaking, there are internal dialogues with self and with God."

Adele Calhoun says "It is difficult to find silence in an age of technology and information. Silence challenges our cultural addiction to amusement, words, music, advertising, noise, alarms and voices .... both silence and waiting make us uncomfortable. They seem so unproductive. We can't tell if we are doing anything in them. So when we come upon silence, we fill it."

She goes on to say "We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (via Calhoun, p. 111)

Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. The period of solitude may

last only a few minutes or for days. Solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction – free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is a container discipline for the practice of the other spiritual disciplines. Solitude is the practice of being absent from other people and other things so that you can be present with God. In solitude, we rest from our attempts to recreate the world in our image. In solitude, we say to God, “I am here to be changed into whatever you like.” In solitude, we learn to “wait on the Lord.”

## STEPS INTO SOLITUDE

Take advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill our day. Early in the morning before the family awakens. When traffic comes to a halt. Take short walks. Slip outside just before bed and enjoy the silent night.

Find places outside the home: a park, a church sanctuary kept unlocked, a retreat center. It helps when we find some time / place where we are not in competition with social contact, noise, or stimulation.

Attempt to gain control over your words and make them few and full.

Four times a year withdraw for three to four hours for the purpose of reorienting your life goals. What do you want to have accomplished one year from now? Ten years from now? Keep a journal of what comes to mind during these times. Ask God to show you new alternatives for the future.

Write in journals. Read your Bible. Go for a walk. Decompress from life. Read other books.

Whatever you do - find time for daily silence and solitude. Think about these three words: noise, hurry, crowds. Wouldn't it be nice to take a

break from these things? Develop places that become a refuge for you when seeking solitude and silence.

## REASONS FOR SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Follow Jesus' Example. Jesus inaugurated his ministry by spending forty days alone in the desert (MT 4:1- 11). Before he chose the twelve he spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12). After John the Baptist's death, he "withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart" (Matthew 14:13). After feeding the five thousand Jesus "went up into the hills by himself..." (MT 14:23). In other times of his life, Jesus spent time alone (Mark 1:35; Mark 6:31; Luke 4:42; Luke 5:16; Matthew 17:1-9; Matthew 26:36-46).

To Hear the Voice of God Better. As we contemplate Scripture and inquire of God, busyness and noise tend to drown out any insight we may receive.

To Express Worship To God. The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a God-focused stillness and hush. Habakkuk 2:20 says, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

To Express Faith in God. The simple act of silence before the Lord, as opposed to coming to Him in a wordy fret, can be a demonstration of faith in Him. Psalm 62:1,2 "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken."

To Seek the Salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:25-28 "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him." In what circumstances do you seek God's deliverance?

To Be Physically and Spiritually restored. We all need to restore the resources of the inward and outward person. Mark 6:31 "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

To Regain A Spiritual Perspective. There's no better way to step back and get a more balanced, less worldly perspective on matters than through the Disciplines of silence and solitude.

To Seek the Will of God. "After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." (1 Kings 19:12)

To Learn Control of the Tongue. The Bible says that the religion of the person with no tongue control is worthless. James 1:19 "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." "It is a good discipline to wonder in each new situation if people wouldn't be better served by our silence than by our words." -Henri J. M. Nouwen, "The Way of the Heart"

## FRUIT OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Being attentive to the voice of Jesus.

Having freedom from negative habits of speech (deception, gossip, impulsive chatter, small talk, impression management, the need to express your opinion or critique.)

Freedom from addictions to noise or sound (radio, TV, phone, etc.); the need to be occupied and stimulated.

Receiving quiet from the chaos and noise in your life.

Growing in self-awareness as the silence invites the subconscious to move into deeper levels of knowing.

Developing increased listening skills.

Moving away from letting the world squeeze you into its mold (Romans 12:2).

## EXERCISE

If silence is new to you, begin with ten minutes. Setting a timer can help a novice who keeps watching the clock. As you become quiet what do you hear: voices, traffic, your breath, wind, your heart, distracting thoughts? Let the noise go. Continue to let the quiet deepen. Be with God. After ten minutes reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still enough to hear the backgrounds.