

Discovering The Practice of Solitude & Silence

Training Objective: That the Christian would regularly spend quiet time to be still and come into the presence of God in a personal and intimate way.

I. What

Solitude is not about doing something, it is about being – being in the quiet presence of God. It is not about producing something, it is about becoming something – becoming intimate with God.¹

“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”– Psalm 46:10

II. Why

- A. **We were created with a need for Solitude.** “*Be still and know that I am God.*” Psalm 46:10a, “*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him...*” Psalm 37:7a (NIV)
- B. **God desires to be close to us.** “*The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet You with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly...*” Zephaniah 3:17-18 (NKJV)
- C. **God created us to long for Him.** “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*” Psalm 42:1-2 (NIV)
- D. **Times of solitude create opportunities to dwell on the things of God, instead of the things of the world.** “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” Romans 12:2 (NKJV)
 “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*”
 Philippians 4:8 (NKJV)
- E. **God desires to transform our souls as we stay spiritually connected. As we connect or abide with God, we gradually begin to act more like Christ.** “Our task is to do the connecting, while God does the perfecting.”² “*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. If anyone does not abide, is cast out as a branch and is withered;*” John 15:5-6
- F. **Jesus, Himself, set the example of seeking solitude with the Father.** Jesus needed times of solitude as He prepared for His ministry, before He selected His disciples, when He heard of the death of John the Baptist, during the active years of His work, and as He prepared to face the end of His earthly life. We can follow His example and spend time in God’s presence seeking strength, perspective, and direction. “*Now, in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*” Mark 1:35

- G. **It is of utmost importance.** *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”*
Philippians 3:7-9

III. How-Preparation

It is important to have a plan, before we begin to practice the habit of solitude. It should be a simple commitment, not another obligation that weighs us down on the guilt scale. You can plan an individual Solitude Experience or one with a friend, or small group that concludes the quiet time with discussion. There is no better way to give a new disciple a hunger for solitude than to help them experience it. There is no better way to help them experience it than to plan an experience together.

These practical suggestions can help us take one hour (or more) out of our routine to pray, listen to God, and meditate on His Word, so that we can be refreshed in our knowledge of Him and renewed in our relationship with Him.

- A. **Pray first.** Ask God to create a desire in you to “get alone with Him” regularly.
- B. **Ask for prayer.** Share with close friends or family members your desire to learn to practice the habit of solitude, and ask for their prayers for you.
- C. **Schedule the time.**
- Choose a date and time when you can block off 1-2 hours without interruption.
 - Remember to allow time for travel, if necessary.
 - Put it on the calendar, and treat your times of solitude as any other important appointment.
- D. **Choose a place.** Jesus chose a variety of places and times. Getting alone with God does not require a special environment. You may choose:
- Your living room, or backyard.
 - Somewhere further from home...in the Durango area, you may find a secret spot of your own in the mountains or desert.
 - Choose a place that is safe, quiet and comfortable.
 - If you take a partner, make sure they understand the goal of silence in the presence of God.
 - If you go away from home alone, make sure someone knows where you are and how long you expect to be gone.
- E. **Consider what you need to take with you for your physical needs.** You may need:
- A chair or blanket
 - Appropriate clothes
 - Water
 - Food (unless you are fasting). A light lunch, or snack.
 - Remember that being uncomfortable can be a serious distraction. Be prepared.

F. Gather materials you want to take.

- Take your Bible, journal, pens and pencils, and Kleenex.
- Take a notepad to jot down those distracting thoughts that interfere with your focus.
- Decide on any other material or books you want to take. A guide can be very helpful to focus your thoughts on a series of meditations, but this time isn't for studying or catching up on reading.
- It could be helpful to decide in advance which Scripture passage you want to use to encourage the best use of your time with God.
- Some people find that quiet background music helps them focus on God and eliminate intruding noises. Consider worship music or instrumental music that will allow you to listen to the Father.
- If time is critical, take an alarm that will keep you from "clock watching".

IV. How – Practice

The following general guidelines will provide an outline for us once we are ready to start. A specific guide with passages and room for reflection is discussed at the end of this section.

A. Relax in a comfortable environment.**B. Turn off your phone or cell phone.****C. Set alarm, if necessary. Start music, if desired.****D. Begin prayerfully quieting your mind and heart.** Henri Nouwen said, "It is hard to be silent...with my mouth, but even more, silent with my heart."

- Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
- Ask God to help you tune out all distractions, including thoughts, interruptions, and noises.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guard you against any concerns, worries, and intruding thoughts that might interfere with this time.
- Begin to focus on God, and who He is, leaving the daily life behind. Thank Him and praise Him for His love, in your heart, aloud, or in song. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* Phil. 4:6

E. Read one of the Scripture passages you have selected. Read silently or aloud softly, considering each word. Try to visualize what the passage is saying, placing yourself in that picture. Bring your senses into the scene. Imagine the smells, sensations, sounds, and tastes.**F. Prayerfully and quickly dismiss any distractions.** Our own mind will fill with the cares and concerns of day to day life, but this time is for the Lord alone, so cast them on Him, because He cares. *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* I Peter 5:7**G. Reflect on your insights about the passages you have read.**

- Feel free to express your thoughts and feelings according to your gifts and creative abilities, by journaling, sketching or drawing, or composing a poem or song.
 - These records are private correspondences between God and you.
 - Be honest, simple, and direct.
 - Do not worry about grammar, style or vocabulary, but express your heart to the Lord.
- G. Repeat these steps (reading, reflecting, and recording)** for as many verses as you would like to use. **Caution:** God will never tell you anything that is contrary to His word. Any insight you receive from God, through the Holy Spirit, must be in complete agreement with the Bible. Seek counsel from the Body of Christ, if this time should reveal some past hurt or significant issue in your life, or you experience any doubt, fear, or concern.
- J. End with genuine thanksgiving to God for the time He spent with you.**
- K. Ask God to help you take what He has shown you today and make it a real part of your life and relationships.** Quietly conclude your time with God.
- L. A specific guide is available as a sample.** There are guides that will lead us step by step through a solitude experience. I found them very helpful. There is a CD or cassette tape version of the written guides that will verbally lead you through a time of solitude with the Lord.

This copied sample (hard copy only), entitled *Make My Heart Your Home*³, will give you an opportunity to begin to experience the joy of intimacy with God, then you may want to personalize your own time as the Lord leads.

“I remember the days of old, I meditate on all Your works, I muse on the work of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O Lord; My spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, Lest I be like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; In You I take shelter. Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.” Psalm 143:5-10

¹ Soul Construction: Solitude /Saddleback Equipping Series ©2002 Saddleback Church

² Spiritual Disciplines Solitude & Silence Bible Studies – Jan Johnson

³ Soul Construction: Solitude Tool – *Make My Heart Your Home*

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