

Silence + Solitude: Part 1

WHAT AND WHY?



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Read this Overview Together

Silence & Solitude are closely related to each other. In silence, we cut out the noise and learn to listen to God. In solitude, we intentionally withdraw from others and make space to be with God. We need both silence and solitude to form us into a people with inner quiet and hearts tuned to the voice of God.

As we engage in these practices, we must remember that silence and solitude are not ends in themselves. Our goal in cutting the noise and creating spaces of silence and solitude is to be with God. Our hope is to hear from God in the silence and to be with him in the solitude. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, writes, "Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening. Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence."

We start with silence and solitude because they serve as containers for all the other spiritual practices. Through them, we make space to engage with God in practices like prayer and Scripture reading. Before we engage in other practices, we need to actually stop doing, be quiet, and prepare our hearts and minds to listen to God.

Silence and solitude also help us see ourselves more clearly and expose the "false selves" that have been formed through our unbelief, hurt, pain and confusion in our daily lives and the world around us. In silence and solitude, we come to see our God-given identity more clearly.

Jesus pursued solitude and silence in his ministry. He needed it to help Him know His own identity and what His Father had called him to do. In Luke 5:15-16, we read, "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (NIV) Even as his ministry was in high demand, Jesus "often withdrew" into solitude and prayer. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus leave the crowds and go to mountaintops and isolated places to be with His Father.

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After his identity is affirmed by His Father at His baptism, Jesus is sent by the Spirit into solitude in the wilderness for forty days (Matthew 3:13--4:11). Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes in the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, "In solitude, Jesus did battle with the intoxicating possibilities of achieving his kingdom and identity in the power of the self. He faced down the self Satan offered and instead chose his true identity as the beloved Son. Throughout his three years of ministry Jesus returned again and again to solitude, where the rush of attention and the accolades of the crowds could be put into their proper perspective. Solitude with God was a way Jesus remained in touch with his true identity in God." In order to be people who understand our own identity and rest secure in our Father, we must pursue silence and solitude so that we can hear the voice of God.

QUESTIONS FOR MC DISCUSSION

1. Have you had any experience with intentional silence & solitude in order to engage with God? What has that experience been like for you? It's okay if you haven't! This is a great time to start.
2. We see Jesus intentionally withdraw and practice silence & solitude during his earthly ministry. Read Luke 5:15-16 together again and reflect on why this would be important for Him. (If you want to look at more passages, see: Matthew 14:13; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12-13.)
3. How do you normally hear from God?
4. In general, is it hard for you to be alone? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel when you think about spending dedicated time alone and in silence listening to God?
6. Why pursue silence and solitude? What do you hope might happen through this experience?

Take time to discuss the upcoming "Individual Practice" as a group and if there's anything you need to do to support each other in being able to engage with these practices.

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INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

Embrace Your Alone Time

Make the most of your existing alone time during the week. We all have short windows during the day when we're already alone. Often, we fill these moments with other things (often good things!) such as reading a book, watching a show, or listening to the news or a podcast. It may be your morning commute, a time of daily exercise, your children's nap time, or the evening hour before bed. Whether at home, in the car, or on a walk or run, use a portion of this existing alone time to be with God. Turn off any distractions and embrace this time as an opportunity to be with God. You might aim for fifteen minutes as a starting point, but if you have a longer chunk of time available, go for it! You might also try it more than once.

Offer this time to God and listen to Him. When your mind goes down a rabbit trail, acknowledge it and come back to a centering prayer; a prayer that tunes your heart to hear from God. You can create your own centering prayer or use some of the examples below. Choose one that resonates with where you are in the moment. Using God's promises in Scripture are a great place to start. If you feel anxious or unsettled, acknowledge that to God and come back to your centering prayer. Remember, you're not trying to accomplish something. This isn't a pass/fail practice. Your only aim is to be with Jesus.

When you finish, take time to note how you feel. Did God press any truth into your heart more clearly? It's okay if you didn't hear or sense anything.

Examples of centering prayers: (if you know your highest Enneagram type, reference that, otherwise use whichever one resonates with you)

Ones: Father, you alone are good and just.

Twos: Father, you care about my needs.

Threes: Father, I belong to you.

Fours: Father, I am broken but loved.

Fives: Father, you are with me in all things.

Sixes: Father, the future is in your hands.

Sevens: Father, I am safe in you.

Eights: Father, you are full of mercy.

Nines: Father, you see me.

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DNA GROUP or PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together. Reflect together on when you embraced your time alone (commute, workout, etc.) and how that went. Let the conversation go wherever God leads, but here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. How did it feel to embrace your time alone and not fill it with other noise?
2. What was hard about the time? Why do you think it was hard?
3. Were you surprised by anything?
4. If you used a "centering prayer," what was the prayer you chose and why was it particularly helpful for you?
5. Did God remind you of anything during that time or did you hear His voice more clearly in that moment? It's okay if you didn't.
6. Are you encouraged by this experience or discouraged? Explain.